

RAO BULLETIN

1 May 2021

PDF Edition



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

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Military Exchange Access

Update 04: Approved for Half a Million+ DoD/USCG Civilians

More than half a million Defense Department and Coast Guard civilian employees with a Common Access Card will be able to shop in military exchange stores by mid-May, according to a new Department of Defense directive. The directive extends in-store and online exchange shopping privileges to appropriated fund and non-appropriated fund civilian employees who work in the U.S., and in U.S. territories and possessions, according to the memorandum signed by Virginia Penrod, acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. It was effective 12 APR, and within 30 days, these shoppers will be allowed in Army and Air Force Exchange Service stores, Navy Exchange stores, and Marine Corps exchanges.

According to the latest estimates available, this will bring about 575,000 new customers into military exchanges in the U.S. The new policy also provides online exchange shopping access for others, to include retired DoD and Coast Guard civilian employees. The details:

- Retired civilian employees of DoD and the Coast Guard won't get in-store exchange shopping privileges, but they will get limited online shopping privileges for exchanges and for other online Category C Morale, Welfare and Recreation activities. One example of a Category C MWR program is the American Forces Travel program, an official DoD site for travel discounts on airfare, flights, hotels, car rentals, travel packages and cruises.
- Family members won't be allowed to shop in these on-base discount department stores, or in the online stores, but the authorized shoppers can make purchases for themselves and their dependents.
- Honorably discharged military veterans will get limited online shopping privileges at Category C MWR activities; these veterans have been allowed to shop online in exchanges since that benefit was launched in 2017.
- Those extended shopping benefits for online military exchanges and online Category C activities are effective 180 days after the directive, in mid-October for all the populations: DoD and Coast Guard civilian employees, honorably discharged veterans and retired DoD and Coast Guard civilians.
- The shopping privileges for all groups exclude purchases of tobacco products, alcoholic beverage products and military uniform items.
- The civilian employees will use their Common Access Card for the benefit. According to the directive, employees who are not issued CACs can show their locally issued proof of civilian employment for exchange access, only at the location where they are employed. Otherwise, access to the stores is not linked to employees' work assignments.
- Verification for online shopping for all the groups will be done through the Defense Manpower Data Center, and those systems, processes and records are being updated.

- The Coast Guard is ensure that its MWR organizations, exchange system and the supporting entities put procedures in place for the access; and is coordinating with DMDC for the authentication process.

DoD civilians stationed outside the U.S. have exchange shopping privileges. DoD officials have been deliberating this policy change for about three years. Last October, a DoD official said the proposal to open the exchanges to civilians was close to being approved, and that it was expected to bring about 575,000 new eligible customers into exchanges. There are about 796,000 DoD civilians in the U.S., but about 221,000 of those employees already have exchange benefits resulting from another beneficiary category such as retiree or military spouse, said Berry Patrick, who works in the DoD Office of Morale, Welfare and Recreation and Nonappropriated Fund Policy, during a virtual conference of the American Logistics Association.

There are about 7,000 Coast Guard civilians, according to a Coast Guard website. Coast Guard exchanges already allow Coast Guard civilians to shop in their exchanges. In 2019, the Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard’s parent organization, opened up Coast Guard exchanges to the more than 200,000 civilian employees of the department. These new shopping privileges don’t apply to commissaries. This policy reverses a statement by a DoD spokeswoman in January, who told Military Times “DoD is not pursuing military exchange access for DoD civilian employees at this time.” “Access is granted for the convenience of the DoD and Coast Guard civilian employees,” the directive states. DoD civilians are on the base every day, Patrick noted in his briefing to the American Logistics Association last October.

But the expansion is also expected to help boost the military resale system and MWR programs, which have faced a number of obstacles over recent years. Based on projections of buying patterns, Patrick said, DoD officials estimate exchange sales could increase by about \$287 million a year, with a potential increase of \$48 million in profits going back to support the services’ MWR programs. One indicator of the popularity of the benefit among DoD employees was the situation in March, 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic, when DoD gave base commanders temporary authority to give commissary and exchange privileges to DoD civilians and contractor employees considered mission critical. Many people misinterpreted that to mean that every DoD mission-critical civilian employee automatically got those privileges, and DoD officials were getting phone calls from those potential customers, Patrick said.

But it was up to each installation, and some commanders gave the privileges while others didn’t, for various reasons such as concern about the strains on the supply chain’s ability to provide enough products for the stores. This is the latest of several expansions of the pool of those eligible to shop in exchanges over the last several years. In January, 2020, on-base shopping benefits at commissaries and exchanges and the use of certain MWR activities were launched for about 4.1 million veterans. The new benefits were authorized by law for all veterans with VA service-connected disability ratings; Purple Heart recipients; veterans who are former prisoners of war; and primary family caregivers of eligible veterans under the VA caregiver program. That followed the 2017 online exchange shopping benefit offered to honorably discharged veterans, a pool of about 15 million potential shoppers. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | April 14, 2021 ++]

Tricare/CHAMPUS Fraud

Update 24: Three Years in Prison for Chiropractic's Multi-million Dollar Schemes

San Diego, CA - Irvine resident **Joserodel Zavala Candelario** was sentenced in federal court 12 APR to 36 months in federal custody for his participation in two huge health care fraud schemes, and for concealing income he received from those multi-million dollar schemes. According to court documents, Candelario was a chiropractor licensed by the State of California Board of Chiropractic Examiners. He was the owner of Candelario Chiropractic, a Professional Corporation, and R.I.S.E. Medical Center, a Professional Corporation, dba R.I.S.E. Wellness Center ("RISE Wellness"), which operated at multiple locations in the Southern District of California, including at 5030 Bonita Road, Suite B, in Bonita and at 3231 Waring Road, Suite N, in Oceanside.

On January 21, 2020, the defendant pleaded guilty to a three-count superseding information, charging Conspiracy in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 371, Conspiracy to Commit Health Care Fraud in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1349, and False Statement on Tax Return in violation of 26 U.S.C. § 7206(1). Separately, the defendant has been charged and has pleaded guilty in San Diego Superior Court case SCD281328 to Concealing an Event Affecting an Insurance Claim, in a violation of California Penal Code 550(b)(3). The government's sentencing papers reflect that, between approximately 2012 and July 2016, Candelario carried out a scheme to defraud Medicare and TRICARE out of millions of dollars by using physical therapy codes to bill for supposed physical therapy services performed on patients by individuals who were not licensed to provide physical therapy, including chiropractors, massage therapists, physical therapy aides, and an acupuncturist. As a result, patients who thought they were receiving medical treatment were instead receiving substandard care, all so Candelario could bill Medicare and TRICARE.

Candelario and his co-conspirators told patients that RISE Wellness offered an "integrated" approach to wellness, to convince patients to accept physical therapy, acupuncture, chiropractic, and diagnostic services at RISE Wellness, in order to fraudulently bill for non-covered services provided by unauthorized individuals, and collect as much money as possible from health care benefit programs. Candelario specifically targeted TRICARE beneficiaries as patients, despite knowing that TRICARE did not cover many of the services rendered by providers at RISE Wellness. The main page for RISE Wellness's website made this goal plain. It featured a photograph of an individual in a military uniform, saluting, with the message, "Supporting spinal health . . . You've only got one spine. Take great care of it with supportive chiropractic care," even though TRICARE, the DoD health care program for uniformed service members, did not cover chiropractic treatment.

Once patients came in the door, the defendant pushed his staff to conduct diagnostic tests on every patient, regardless of medical necessity, to increase billing and payment, and he also demanded that staff meet quotas for the minimum number of diagnostic tests, and recommendations for durable medical equipment, or DME, massages and other services, regardless of whether specific patients needed the items and services. He also imposed quotas for the minimum number of patients with specific types of insurance coverage at RISE Wellness, e.g., "60 Tricare patients per day," regardless of whether those patients needed treatments.

For example, on June 6, 2014, Candelario instructed a staff member, "I need you to do 5 axonii [diagnostic tests] a day no matter what from now on." The following month, on July 7, 2014, Candelario texted, "OK team you are receiving 2 new diagnostic testing devices this month. I need 20 patients to be tested on each one this month no matter What [sic]." Defendant then, knowing that TRICARE and Medicare

did not pay for chiropractic, acupuncture, massages, and other services, mischaracterized those services as physical therapy in bills submitted to TRICARE and Medicare. To increase billing and payment, the defendant pushed the schedulers to cram in as many as 50 patients per day for each provider. He complained when staff fell short of this goal, noting, on June 11, 2015, certain “front desk issues” including: “No [one] has called any patients to fill empty slots in provider schedules or grab patients in lobbies to put into provider schedules.”

Candelario fired or marginalized staff who disagreed with his efforts to prescribe, recommend, provide, or bill in a manner primarily intended to increase the billing and payment to RISE Wellness, and contrary to Medicare and Tricare rules and the medical need of the patients. On October 1, 2015, Candelario instructed that the chiropractors were “not allowed to treat” patients unless they first prescribed X-rays and three other diagnostic tests, plus DME. Eventually, on October 19, 2015, Candelario informed a co-conspirator, “I am finding it very difficult what needs we have [to retain the PA] moving forward.” About a week later, the PA was fired. If a patient failed to show up for an appointment, Candelario directed staff to bill the health care benefit program for the visit, even though no visit had occurred and no service had been provided. For example, on March 9, 2015, Candelario wrote, about late reimbursements, that “the only solution is to start billing the missed appointments like i asked following the system.”

It was part of the scheme that, using the mean and manners described above, and others, the co-conspirators submitted and caused to be submitted at least \$7,260,327.20 in false and fraudulent bills to TRICARE and Medicare. Of those fraudulent bills, TRICARE paid a total of \$3,450,596.43 and Medicare paid \$37,843.04.

In addition, between March 2012 and November 2015, Candelario carried on an unlawful cross-referral scheme, in which he would receive new Workers’ Compensation (“WC”) patients for RISE Wellness. In return for new patients, Candelario agreed to meet a quota for the “value” of ancillary services and DME he was expected to prescribe for each patient sent to him by co-conspirators, with a “value” -- such as \$30-\$50 per MRI referral -- set by those conspirators. As part of the scheme, Candelario, who could function as a WC primary care provider, dictated the same treatment plan for all WC patients, regardless of their individual medical needs, so he could fraudulently bill WC insurers. The defendant admitted that he violated his duty of honest services to his patients. He received approximately 529 new WC patients as a result of the scheme, and he submitted approximately \$6,605,364 in bills to insurers for services rendered to those patients. Of those billed amounts, he was paid \$771,000 by WC insurers

In addition to fleecing taxpayer-funded government programs out of millions of dollars, Candelario failed to pay his fair share of taxes on the funds he fraudulently took, resulting in \$505,000 in tax losses just for tax year 2013. Judge Bashant credited the rehabilitative efforts the defendant has made since his conviction to improve his circumstances. Statements in sentencing papers and in court reflect that the defendant has been teaching as an adjunct instructor at West Coast University, Canyon College, Santa Ana College, Orange Coast College, and National University, in such topics as human anatomy, human physiology, biology, Medical Ethics and Medical Billing. But in aggravation, the Court noted that Candelario “put profits over the medical needs of patients,” which warranted punishment.

The defendant requested a delay of the self-surrender date until after grades are due to be submitted for the current school term he is teaching. The defendant is scheduled to self-surrender on or before 14 JUL at noon. A hearing to address forfeiture and restitution will be held on May 19 at 2 p.m. The United States is seeking restitution of \$3,450,596.43 to TRICARE, \$37,843.04 to Medicare, and a personal money

judgment of \$1,300,899.63. [Source: DoJ So. District of California | U.S. Attorney's Office| April 13, 2021 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse

Reported 16 thru 30 APR 2021

KABUL, Afghanistan -- Six former employees of a U.S. government contractor have been charged with fraudulently recruiting unqualified linguists to work alongside U.S. troops in Afghanistan, putting American forces at greater risk while lining their own pockets, U.S. officials said this week. The former recruiters — identified as **Mezghan Anwari, Abdul Latifi, Mahjoba Raofi, Laila Anwari, Rafi Anwari** and **Zarghona Alizai** — are accused of endangering American troops and military operations in Afghanistan, the Justice Department said in a statement Thursday. The group knowingly recruited linguists who lacked even minimum language proficiency in Dari or Pashto, two of the main languages spoken in Afghanistan, fraudulently making it seem that they were competent so that they would be hired, the statement said.

The grand jury indictment, which was filed 21 APR in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, “alleges serious crimes that threatened to put American troops at greater risk in a combat zone,” Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John Sopko said. The accused, who sometimes arranged for more qualified linguists to stand in during oral proficiency tests for the unskilled candidates they had recruited — and sometimes stepped in themselves to impersonate the recruits — were paid bonuses worth several thousand dollars depending on how far their candidates got in the recruitment process, the statement said. They have been charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and between two and six counts of fraud each and face up to 20 years in prison for each count. They’re due to appear in court 5 MAY.

“The defendants in this case allegedly engaged in an expansive conspiracy to enrich themselves at the expense of American soldiers and military operations in Afghanistan,” Acting Assistant Attorney General Nicholas L. McQuaid, of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division, said in the statement. “We are committed to holding accountable those who undermine the integrity of the procurement process and potentially jeopardize the United States’ mission overseas.” The recruiters worked a decade ago for an Arlington, Va. based contractor that had a contract worth more than \$700 million to provide military operations support services, the indictment said. The indictment didn’t specify if the unqualified linguists were ever sent to Afghanistan. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Phillip Walter Wellman | April 23, 2021 ++]

GTMO Prison

Update 15: Biden's Move On Afghanistan Raises Questions

President Biden’s decision to fully withdraw from Afghanistan is raising questions about what, if any, effect that will have on the future of the Guantanamo Bay detention center. At least two prisoners who have been challenging their detention have already updated their complaints to include Biden’s withdrawal as a reason they should be released. But the war on terrorism will continue even after the last U.S. service

member leaves Afghanistan. And the congressional war authorization that has also been used as the legal justification for indefinite detention at Guantanamo does not appear to be going anywhere anytime soon.

“I think the short answer is that we just don’t know,” Steve Vladeck, a University of Texas law professor, said of the withdrawal’s effect on Guantanamo. “It clearly provides the remaining Guantanamo detainees with a new ground on which to challenge the legal basis for their continuing military detention, and one that is not necessarily foreclosed by existing precedent,” he added in an email. “But it’s not at all clear that courts will be sympathetic to those arguments, not just because they haven’t been to date, but because the Executive Branch is likely to argue that the conflict with al Qaeda isn’t ending just because we’re leaving Afghanistan.”

Forty men remain detained at the facility opened by former President George W. Bush after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Six have been cleared for transfer, and seven have been charged in the military commission system, including the five 9/11 suspects. The Biden administration is in the midst of reviewing the facility with the intention of closing it, but it remains to be seen whether that effort will be successful. Former President Obama also sought to shutter the facility, signing an executive order on his second day in office to close it within a year. But his plan relied on transferring detainees to U.S. prisons, something Congress blocked him from doing with a law that remains on the books banning transfers to the United States.

Amid the administration’s review, Biden is facing pressure to fulfill his promise to close the facility. Twenty-four Senate Democrats penned a letter to Biden in mid-APR saying he could close the facility with sufficient political will and swift action. “After years of indefinite detention without charge or trial; a history of torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment; and multiple attempts at a thoroughly failed and discredited military commission process, it is past time to close Guantanamo’s detention facility and end indefinite detention,” read the letter, which was organized by Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-VT).

When Biden announced earlier this month he was ordering a full withdrawal from Afghanistan by Sept. 11, he declared, “It’s time to end the forever war.” Alli McCracken Jarrar, North American campaigner for Amnesty International, argued that if Biden is serious about ending the “forever war,” he will shutter one of its vestiges. “I hope that he can align his timeline to withdraw from Afghanistan with his plan to close Guantanamo,” she said. “It would be wonderful to see the whole detention camp shut down and the men transferred out by Sept. 11. And I think that would make a lot of groups feel happy and would really be a positive sign that he’s committed to his human rights obligations.”

This past week, lawyers for two Guantanamo detainees filed motions seeking their clients’ release citing the withdrawal. The motions were first reported by The New York Times.

- Lawyers for Khalid Qassim, a 44-year-old Yemeni man who has been held without trial at Guantanamo for nearly 19 years, are seeking to update his existing habeas corpus lawsuit to include the argument that Biden’s announcement of an “end to the involvement of United States troops in active combat in Afghanistan” means “there can no longer be any legal basis under the [authorization for the use of military force] or otherwise for Qassim’s detention by the United States.”
- Lawyers for Asadullah Haroon Gul, an approximately 40-year-old Afghan captured by Afghan forces in 2007, similarly argued in a motion seeking their client’s immediate release that the

withdrawal takes away any basis to continue holding him. “The law is clear: Asadullah gets to go home now, regardless of whether, as the government incorrectly contends, he was part of or substantially supported Al Qaeda,” they wrote in the motion.

But while U.S. troops are withdrawing from Afghanistan, the top U.S. commander in the Middle East, Gen. Frank McKenzie, spent the past week assuring that lawmakers the military would maintain the ability to conduct counterterrorism strikes in Afghanistan even if that is harder to do with troops stationed elsewhere. “It's going to be extremely difficult to do. But it is not impossible to do it,” McKenzie said at a House hearing. Additionally, while the White House has said Biden is open to a rewritten authorization for the use of military force (AUMF) and some lawmakers are working to do that, those efforts face an uphill climb, and the existing 2001 AUMF is expected to stay on the books. That authorization underlies ongoing U.S. military counterterrorism operations throughout the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere.

“The real reform, as has always been clear, would have to come from Congress,” Vladeck, the law professor, said of the future of Guantanamo. When Obama declared an end to U.S. combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014 and pledged to bring all troops home by the end of his term, a Yemeni prisoner challenged his detention on the basis that the president said the conflict was over. But a federal judge ruled in 2015 the detention was still legal because fighting was ongoing regardless of what Obama said. “A court cannot look to political speeches alone to determine factual and legal realities merely because doing so would be easier than looking at all of the relevant evidence,” Judge Royce Lamberth of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia wrote at the time. “The government may not always say what it means or means what it says.” [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | April 25, 2021 ++]

Afghan War

Update 06: Report Finds Cost More Than \$2T and 240,000 Lives

When you add up the cost of Defense and State Department funds sunk into Operations Enduring Freedom and Resolute Support, then throw in the cost of caring for the conflicts’ veterans and the interest on the money borrowed to cover it all, you’re looking at over \$2 trillion, according to a report released 16 APR. The Costs of War Project detailed its most recent estimates, finding that most of the money came out of \$933 billion in DoD overseas contingency funding. The rest includes: \$443 billion in DoD base budget increases to support the war; \$296 billion to care for veterans; \$59 billion in State overseas contingency funds; and \$530 to cover the interest on the money borrowed to fund 20 years of deployments.

Those funds do not, however, include the amount the United States government is obligated to spend on lifetime care for American veterans of this war, nor does it include future interest payments on money borrowed to fund the war. “The DoD spending, at over \$900 billion in Afghanistan, is the tip of the iceberg,” Neta Crawford, the project’s lead researcher, said in the release. “The costs of the Afghanistan war include its escalation into Pakistan, millions of refugees and displaced persons, the toll in lives of combatants and non-combatants, and the need to care for America’s veterans.”

The Costs of War Project also estimates that 241,000 people have died because of the war in Afghanistan, which includes more than 2,400 American service members and least 71,344 civilians; 78,314 Afghan military and police; and 84,191 opposition fighters. These figures do not include deaths caused by disease, loss of access to food, water, infrastructure, and/or other indirect consequences of the war. The

data is compiled from DoD reporting and budgeting documents starting in 2001. “We report these estimates so that the American people will have a better understanding of the scale of the effort and its consequences,” she added. “The American people also lost some transparency here. A more comprehensive accounting is yet to be completed. It would include not just money that may or may not have been well spent, but the count of those wounded, those who lost limbs, and the tremendous psychological toll of decades of war on combatants and noncombatants and their families.”

President Joe Biden announced on 14 APR that the U.S. would begin drawing down its remaining 2,500 troops from Afghanistan on 1 MAY, with a 11 SEP deadline for full withdrawal. The Biden administration’s surprise announcement of an unconditional troop withdrawal from Afghanistan by Sept. 11 appears to strip the Taliban and the Afghan government of considerable leverage and could ramp up pressure on them to reach a peace deal. The Taliban and Afghan government can no longer hold the U.S. hostage — the Taliban with escalating violence and the Afghan president by dragging his feet on a power-sharing deal with the insurgents that doesn’t include him as president — because Washington made it clear that U.S. troops are leaving, no matter what. Still, there are growing fears that Afghanistan will collapse into worsening chaos, brutal civil war, or even a takeover by the Taliban once the Americans are gone — opening a new chapter in the constant war that has lasted for decades.

In leaving, Washington has calculated that it can [manage its chief security interest](#) — ensuring Afghanistan doesn’t become a base for terror attacks on the United States — from a distance. Still, it is hoping to leave a country with a chance at peace. The U.S. is pressing the Taliban and the Afghan government to reach a peace agreement during an April 24 to May 4 conference in Turkey. At the moment, it’s not certain that the Taliban will attend. Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the U.S.-based Wilson Center said that it’s “hard to imagine any scenario under which peace would break out post-Sept. 11 in Afghanistan.” “The best hope is that the peace process won’t be dead,” he said. [Source: MilitaryTimes & AP| Meghann Myers & Kathy Gannon | April 17, 2021 ++]

WWI National Memorial

Update 15: First Colors Ceremony



Soldiers of Company D, 1st Battalion, 165th Infantry Regiment, the Army's famous "Fighting 69th" Irish regiment, move into position to replace French troops near Benomenil, France, March 1, 1918.

The nation's capital has national memorials commemorating the sacrifices of service men and women who died in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Until this year, there hasn't been a national memorial commemorating World War I. On 16 APR, during a "first colors" ceremony, the U.S. flag was raised for the first time over the newly-constructed National World War I Memorial in Washington, D.C. Nearly 4.7 million Americans served in uniform during WWI, with more than 2 million of those deploying overseas. By war's end, 204,000 of those who deployed had been wounded, and nearly 117,000 had been killed.

"The Great War [touched] almost every American family at the time," President Joe Biden said during a recorded presentation before the raising of the flag. "For too long, that nationwide service has not been fully commemorated here in the nation's capital. This memorial finally will offer a chance for people to visit and reflect and to remember. More than 100 years has passed since WWI ended, but the legacy and courage of those Doughboys sailing off to war, and the values they fought to defend, still live in our nation today." The new memorial features sculptures, fountains and quotes which pay tribute to those who served in World War I. It shares a space with an existing memorial dedicated to General of the Armies John Joseph "Black Jack" Pershing, who served as commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I. The site is a short walk east of the White House.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley said the site is a testament to the strength of the American people, and that it honors the bravery and sacrifice made by service members during what was known as "the Great War," which he characterized as a war of stalemate, trenches and attrition. "It is our duty to remember what they fought for and why they fought," Milley said. "Thought to be the war to end all wars, those who lived it experienced unimaginable carnage. And by the end of the conflict, it ripped apart four empires and killed more than 22 million people, and it set the conditions for World War II, 20 years later — which was the most destructive war in human history." World War I ended 102 years ago, but the effects of that conflict are still felt today, Milley said. "It was one of the most significant events to fundamentally shape the modern world," he said.

At the memorial, the 3d U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) raised the American flag for the first time over the site, while a bugler from the U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," played "To the Colors" on a bugle once owned by Pershing himself. As an added tribute, there was a flyover by two F-22 Raptor aircraft from the 94th Fighter Squadron, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia. Refer to https://cdn.dvidshub.net/media/video/2104/DOD_108287390/DOD_108287390-1280x720-2765k.mp4 for a 80 minute video of the First Color Ceremony. [Source: DOD News | C. Todd Lopez | April 16, 2021 ++]

DoD Vaccination Program

Update 02: Online COVID-19 Vaccination Scheduling Tool Lunched

If you're searching for an appointment to get your COVID-19 vaccination through the military, check out this new online vaccine scheduling tool launched by the Defense Health Agency. The Defense Health Agency Appointing Portal — dubbed DAP— at <https://www.tricare.mil/DAP> is accessible from outside the Defense Department network on any computer, tablet or smartphone. It's used to book appointments for those eligible, at a participating military hospital, clinic, or vaccination site. You don't need to be enrolled at a military hospital or clinic to book an appointment.

Not every military treatment facility is using DAP; some are using other portals. Click on <https://www.tricare.mil/HealthWellness/HealthyLiving/Coronavirus/COVID-Vaccine-Locations> to find out whether your MTF is using DAP or another method for making appointments. You can search by state for the military vaccination locations and their signup methods, whether it's by phone, DAP, walk-in, or other online portals such as Tricare Online or MHS Genesis. You'll see that vaccination sites are being held at various locations, from MTFs to base theaters to fitness centers. For a link to your local MTF's scheduling site, visit www.tricare.mil/DAP. With DAP, you don't need an account or a Common Access Card as you do with other portals like Tricare Online or MHS Genesis, which are also being used to schedule appointments in some areas.

DAP is used only for booking COVID-19 appointments, and isn't connected to your medical record. You'll need to provide your name, DoD ID number, date of birth, and phone number. You'll also be asked whether it's the first or second dose requirement, and first dose manufacturer if you're looking for a second dose appointment. There's no charge for the vaccination. You'll get an appointment confirmation after booking. You can also use DAP to cancel or reschedule your vaccination appointment. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | April 14, 2021 ++]

Navy Fleet Size

Update 22: Navy Chief Aiming for 355-Ship Fleet Despite Calls for Larger Force



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday wants a bigger fleet, but his force level goal falls well short of what some in the Defense Department are aiming for. There are currently just under 300 ships in the Navy's manned battle force. The Pentagon's latest shipbuilding plan, released in December in the final weeks of the Trump administration, called for growing the fleet to 316 ships by 2026, 355 by the early 2030s, and 400 by the early 2040s. "Recently I was asked by a member of Congress what my North Star is with respect to numbers right now," Gilday said 27 APR during a webinar hosted by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. "That's 355. I still think that's a really good target."

A 355-ship fleet had been the service's stated goal for a number of years, and is the force level that Congress has called for in legislation. However, the Future Naval Force Study conducted last year — which was championed by former Defense Secretary Mark Esper and helped shape the long-term shipbuilding plan — called for a number "far above" that, Gilday acknowledged. But given the budget constraints that are expected in coming years, the Navy must grow the fleet at an "affordable rate," he said. The Biden administration's budget outline released 9 APR, called for \$715 billion for the Pentagon in

fiscal year 2022, he noted. That is about 1.6 percent higher than the amount appropriated by Congress for 2021. The White House has yet to release separate toplines for each military service. A more detailed budget request is expected in May or June.

The military's budget will be "lucky to actually keep pace with inflation," Gilday said. "What that will make most challenging, I think, is the fact that given the rise in personnel costs, given the rise in operations and maintenance costs, which typically rise at a rate higher than inflation, it will ... potentially put a squeeze on the shipbuilding budget," he said. Gilday said he's taking a "realist approach" to the Navy's investment strategy, and won't sacrifice readiness and capability in order to boost capacity. "We need a fleet that's more ready and more capable and more lethal, more than we need a bigger fleet that's less ready and less capable and less lethal," he said.

Readiness is Gilday's top priority. That includes investments in manpower and training. If the Navy gets into a fight with an adversary, the fleet and its commanders will only perform at the level to which they have been trained and prepared for battle, he said. New capabilities that will require funding include hypersonic weapons, directed energy systems and improved networking for joint all-domain command-and-control, he noted.

Gilday also wants to bring a large number of robotic platforms into the fleet in addition to the 355-ship goal for manned vessels. "It's an important part of the future," Gilday said. "We can't afford to field the Navy like we did in the previous century," he added. Manned-unmanned teaming — which eventually will lead to a more autonomous fleet — is where the service is headed. By the mid- to late-2030s, up to a third of the service's surface and subsurface fleet could be unmanned. Additionally, about 40 to 60 percent of future air wings could be comprised of robotic aircraft, he projected. [Source: National Defense | Jon Harper | April 27, 2021 ++]

Army Manning Levels

Update 03: Army Chief Says the Force Is Still Too Small

Ending the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan won't be of much use to Army planners sweating the size of the force, as fiscal constraints loom large over the service in the coming years. The Army's end-strength growth, once expected to top 500,000 active-duty soldiers, has slowed to a crawl in recent years and currently sits at roughly 485,000 troops. "This is the same size Army that we had on 9/11, and when I take a look at what the requirements are, when I take a look at what historically we needed, and now that we're in a time of great power competition, I'm very, very concerned about the size of the Army," Chief of Staff Gen. James C. McConville said during a 27 APR discussion at the Center for a New American Security.

Much of the strain on the Army's size comes from the combatant commands, where soldiers make up the bulk of military personnel deployed across the world. But the impending withdrawal from Afghanistan, in U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility, won't make much of a difference. "The number of troops in Afghanistan is really not a significant amount," McConville said when asked how the withdrawal would factor into end-strength woes. Growing the Army also doesn't appear to be happening in the current fiscal environment, unless the service cuts into readiness and modernization funding.

“The [Army] secretary and I both agree that we can’t do the things, as far as readiness and when it comes to modernization, if we were to grow the Army to the level that we think would reduce the stress of deployments for our troops,” McConville said. “What we’re trying to do is produce the best Army we can with the resources that we’re going to get.” President Joe Biden’s fiscal 2022 budget request asks for \$715 billion for the Defense Department. The Army’s top line has not yet been revealed, but defense officials have said they’re bracing for a possible budget cut.

Even flat budgets have required Army leaders to fund their key modernization initiatives, like long-range fires, by culling lower priority programs and shifting around billions of dollars. The Army has carried that process out for the past few years, but leaders have run out of fat to trim, according to acting Secretary of the Army John Whitley. “We’ve rebuilt readiness. We’re in a good state with readiness, but that is fragile, and it could be reversed,” said Whitley. “We’re in a good place moving out on modernization, but that requires consistent, sustained funding to see through and deliver products to our soldiers.” If the budget declines, Whitley noted, the current operations tempo would have to give. “There’s a tremendous amount of risk in the Army’s budget today,” Whitley added. “The simple fact is, we took risk in the budget to get to where we are today, so there’s not a lot of excess that can be used.”

The Army accounts for about 25 percent of the Defense Department’s budget and about 35 percent of the active-duty end strength of the department. “But we’re over 50 percent of the current operating tempo of the Department of Defense,” Whitley said. “We’re two-thirds of the readiness demands and the readiness priorities for warfighting of the Department of Defense.” “The Army cannot sustain that level of commitment and operating tempo and readiness for such a wide range of things in a declining budget environment — and that’s the simple math,” Whitley said. [Source: ArmyTimes | Kyle Rempfer | 27 April 2021 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials

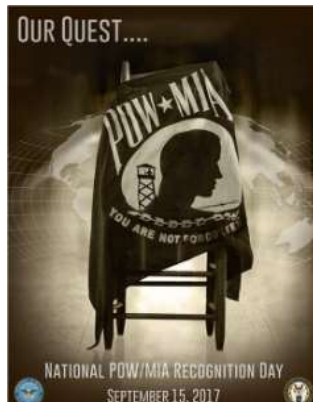
Reported 16 thru 30 APR 2021 | Eleven

“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 Air Forces 2nd Lt. Ernest N. Vienneau, 25**, was a pilot assigned to the 340th Bombardment Squadron, 97th Bombardment Group, 15th Air Force, based out of Amendola, Italy. On Nov. 6, 1944, the bomber on which he was serving as co-pilot came under heavy anti-aircraft fire while on a mission over Maribor, Yugoslavia, in present-day Slovenia. During the barrage, a piece of flak penetrated the cockpit and struck Vienneau in the head, mortally wounding him. Interment services are pending. [Read about Vienneau.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. William H. Melville, 20**, of Minneapolis, was a pilot assigned to the 36th Fighter Squadron, 8th Fighter Group. On Oct. 28, 1943, he was on a combat mission over the island of New Guinea, Australian Territory of Papua, when his aircraft and two others disappeared after encountering severe weather. Search and recovery efforts in the days following were unable to find any of the aircraft. Melville will be buried July 16, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Melville.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Philip T. Hoogacker, 23**, was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment. He was reported missing in action on July 27, 1950, after his unit was attacked near Anui, South Korea. He was last seen after receiving first aid for a minor shrapnel wound. DPAA historians believe Hoogacker was captured by the Korean People's Army and forcibly marched to Seoul and then on to Pyongyang, where he died as a prisoner of war. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hoogacker.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas J. Valentine**, 22, of Cassville, Wisconsin, was a member of Battery B, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 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. Valentine will be buried in his hometown in May 2021. Read about Valentine.

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Kenneth E. Doernenburg, 23**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. 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 Doernenburg. Interment services are pending. [Read about Doernenburg.](#)

-- **Navy Patternmaker 1st Class Stanislaw F. Drwall, 25**, 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 Drwall. Interment services are pending. Read about Drwall.

-- **Navy Radioman 3rd Class Charles A. Montgomery, 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 Montgomery. Interment services are pending. Read about Montgomery.

-- **Navy Radioman 3rd Class Theodore Q. Jensen, 22**, of Delta, Utah, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. 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 Jensen. He will be buried on June 2, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Jensen.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Walter C. Stein, 20**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. 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 Stein. Interment services are pending. [Read about Stein.](#)

-- **Navy Ship's Cook 3rd Class Robert Goodwin, 20**, of Wichita, Kansas, 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 Goodwin. Goodwin will be buried on May 14, 2021, in Topeka, Kansas. Read about Goodwin.

-- **Navy Water Tender 1st Class Charles E. Hudson, 39**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. 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 Hudson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hudson.](#)

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



VA Central Login

Use New VA.gov Site for Accessing Benefits

Veterans and their families may begin accessing their Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits and services on the new and user-friendly <https://va.gov> website starting 30 APR. Users will be able to access information about VA benefits and services through a single site rather than through multiple locations. All benefits-related features previously located in the [eBenefits](#) web portal will be available on VA.gov. Veterans are encouraged to start logging into the site using their current Digital Service (DS) Logon or creating a new account using ID.me.

“VA.gov offers Veterans an enhanced site in terms of usability and security with the implementation of two-factor authentication,” said Acting VA Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. “The most frequently used features are now readily accessible on one website to include the ability to file a disability claim, check the status of a claim or change direct deposit and payment history.” The eBenefits site will remain functional through March 31, 2022, to give Veterans an opportunity to complete claims started on the platform. Thereafter, VA.gov becomes the single source solution to access VA benefit and service information online.

U.S. Digital Service worked with thousands of Veterans to test the new and improved VA.gov. The department wanted to ensure Veterans deemed the site functional before migrating Veterans’ data. Learn more about the new login site by clicking <https://va.gov>. [Source: VA Press Release | April 29, 2021 ++]

Covid-19 Funeral Cost

Update 01: Call FEMA – NOT VA

VA’s National Cemetery Scheduling Office and VA national cemeteries have received many calls from family members and funeral homes asking how they can apply for the Funeral Expense Reimbursement Program that covers funeral expenses when a loved one’s death was related to COVID-19. This new program, which began on April 12, 2021, is run entirely by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). VA has no role in creating or tracking claims for this reimbursement program. Visit this FEMA website: <https://www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance/faq> to learn more about the program and how to apply. Before getting started:

- Gather the documents FEMA requires before you call FEMA to apply. Family members must provide documentation to establish a claim. You do NOT need any paperwork from VA.

- The only way to apply is by calling FEMA’s toll-free number 844-684-6333 | TTY: 800-462-7585 M-F 09-2100 EST. There is no way to apply online.
- Only the person who covered the funeral expenses can call FEMA’s toll-free number, not a third party like a funeral home director or cemetery representative.
- FEMA only wants documents showing the costs you incurred. If your loved one was interred in a VA national cemetery, there was no cost to you for those things associated with the cemetery, such as the headstone or marker, the gravesite or columbarium niche, the grave liner, and assorted fees for opening and closing the grave, mounting the headstone, etc. All these items were part of the Veteran’s burial benefit with VA.
- FEMA’s program can be used to reimburse a family for funeral-related expenses that VA doesn’t cover, such as the cost of the casket or urn, clergy fees and funeral home fees. FEMA’s website has more details.

The Veterans Benefits Administration also pays a burial allowance to the families in certain circumstances, whether or not the Veteran is interred in a VA cemetery. To learn more about this VA benefit and who qualifies, click here: <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance>. Please be patient with FEMA’s call center, as it is currently dealing with a very high volume of calls. If you get a busy signal, try again later. There is no deadline for submitting claims. Finally, be prepared before calling FEMA’s toll-free number. FEMA’s website provides all of the details on what you need to do: <https://www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance/faq>.

Beware of Scams

FEMA has issued a “Fraud Alert” on its website, noting reports of scammers contacting mourners and offering to register them for funeral assistance. If you are concerned about fraud, keep these points in mind as you navigate the process:

- FEMA will not contact anyone until that individual has reached out to FEMA or applied for assistance. If you’re contacted by an individual claiming to be from FEMA and have not reached out, hang up and call the FEMA Helpline (800-621-3362) or the National Center for Fraud Hotline (866-720-5721).
- A third party cannot apply for burial assistance on your behalf. You must call FEMA (844-684-6333) between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. Eastern on a weekday to begin the application process; do not provide personal information to anyone offering assistance outside of FEMA.
- Unlike other benefits programs, you can register for this assistance only via telephone. Beware of emails or online forms requesting your data in exchange for aid. You may be asked to submit documents via an online portal at gov after the initial phone call, but you’ll also be able to do so via fax or regular mail.
- FEMA received more than 1 million calls shortly after the program’s launch, CBS News reported, and warns that high call volume could continue and callers could receive a busy signal. The agency maintains a list of answers to frequently asked questions about the benefit at this link.

[Source: Vantage Point & MOAA Newsletter | Kevin Lilley | April 21 & 27, 2021 ++]

VA Caregiver Program

Update 71: Those Rejected for Financial Aid Could Get New Appeal Chances

Caregivers of seriously wounded veterans who were previously denied benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs may get a new chance to appeal that decision under a court ruling issued this week. The move has the potential to award tens of thousands of dollars to some families that have struggled to act as full-time caregivers to veterans, but payouts are still likely months or years away, depending on whether VA officials opt to appeal the ruling.

The case centers on Jeremy Beaudette, a Marine Corps veteran who left legally blind and suffering from traumatic brain injury after multiple combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was rated as 100 percent disabled by VA officials because of those wounds. But when his wife, Maya, applied for benefits through VA's caregiver program — which awards up to \$2,300 a month in stipends and additional support services to full-time caregivers of injured veterans — she was rejected. Multiple appeals to department officials were also denied. Lawyers from Public Counsel's Center for Veterans' Advancement and Paul Hastings LLP argued the family should have had the opportunity to appeal that ruling outside that system to the Board of Veterans' Appeals, which handles other benefits disputes. But VA officials have long maintained that step is unnecessary, because the program already has several levels of review. They argued that addition of a new appeal will further complicate system, resulting in more confusion and frustration.

This week, the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims disagreed with that stance. A panel of judges on the court ordered those cases be allowed to go before the BVA, and that department officials spend the next 45 days working with the outside attorneys to develop a full list of applicants from the last 10 years who may be owed another chance at appeal. Since the caregiver program was launched in 2010, more than 400,000 applications have been submitted. Currently about 20,000 veterans are enrolled. It's unclear how many of the remainder may have been rejected and exhausted their internal appeals, but now could benefit from the new court ruling.

In a statement, VA spokesman Terrence Hayes said the court's decision "is a complex ruling with far-reaching implications. The department is diligently considering next steps." If VA officials opt not to appeal, families could start being informed of their new application review options in early summer. Attorneys said veterans affected by the change will be contacted by VA officials about their new appeal rights and procedures, and will not have to reach out to the legal teams on their own. But if VA does appeal the ruling, it could stretch the case for several more years. Attorneys for the plaintiffs said they hope that doesn't happen. "This decision will allow veterans and caregivers to finally voice the inconsistencies and errors they have experienced with the caregiver program," says Amanda Pertusati, supervising staff attorney at Public Counsel. "Veterans and caregivers will no longer feel helpless and hopeless, having to navigate within a framework that repeatedly insulates inaccuracies without proper due process."

The case has been closely watched by outside advocates, who say the long-term effects of the ruling could mean more options for families who feel they were unfairly rejected from the program but also potentially slower appeals timelines. "Our primary interest now and always is what is in the best interest of our nation's military and veteran caregivers," said Steve Schwab, CEO of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. "We've long advocated for standardization, consistency, and clear communication across the VA around the [caregivers program]. The foundation is committed to working with the VA and our [veterans service

organization] partners to better understand this decision and the implications it could have on the community we serve.”

If veterans win appeals cases before the Board of Veterans’ Appeals, those decisions could mean not only future payouts for families but also retroactive pay. Individual financial settlements would depend on the applicants’ initial date of filing and changes in their disability status, among other factors. Until last fall, the VA caregiver program was only open to veterans who were injured on duty after Sept. 11, 2001. Congress expanded the group to include veterans who served before May 1975 last October, and the program is set to expand again to veterans of all eras in the next few years. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 22, 2021 ++]

VA Research

Update 05: Implant That Could Allow Paralyzed Veterans to Walk Again



Five years ago, Marine Lance Cpl. Joshua Burch became the first paralyzed service member to walk to his own promotion ceremony, wearing an exoskeleton that helped him walk and stand to receive his corporal chevrons. Now medically retired, Burch, 26, hopes again to be a trailblazer -- the first Department of Veterans Affairs patient to regain function in his lower body -- to include taking steps -- courtesy of an electrical implant in his spine that is designed to stimulate his body's sensorimotor networks. "Even thinking about walking is crazy. I look at this as a stepping-stone to a future where others like me can walk. I look at my participation in this research as a way of helping people out," Burch said during an interview in March with Military.com.

Researchers at Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia, have launched a study to determine whether epidural stimulators can help paralyzed veterans recover motor activity and/or control over their "inner systems" -- their cardiovascular and bladder functions, for example. While epidural stimulators have shown some degree of success with limb paralysis in research elsewhere, this is the first such study at the VA, explained Dr. Ashraf Gorgey, chief of spinal cord injury research at the Richmond hospital. Gorgey said the study has several goals: to see how well an epidural stimulator made by Medtronic for pain management can work on spinal cord injuries and to demonstrate the promise of the technology, which can be implanted with minimum surgery. "With this study, we might get companies like Medtronic and Boston Scientific to start creating something more specific for spinal cord injuries," he said. "We also want to show that you don't need invasive surgery to use this device. We use just a needle under fluoroscopy,

and through the needle, we thread the leads in. On the same day Josh had his surgery, he was down in this room working out on the mat."

Gorgey plans to implant the epidural stimulators in 20 veterans, who will then take part in a year of intensive physical rehabilitation therapy and training. Gorgey and Burch say that with any success, Burch may be able to take steps on his own within that period, going from strengthening his legs in an exoskeleton to walking across a floor with a walker. "In Josh's circumstance, the signal that's coming from his brain through his spinal cord is interrupted. So now we are going to replace this signal with external signals that help trigger a step in movement. By using the exoskeleton, we can train him to ... hopefully stand up and walk again," Gorgey explained.

Burch lost much of the use of his hands and all use of his legs in a September 2015 accident in Guam. He actually doesn't know what happened. He remembers being in a hotel room talking to his sergeant in the afternoon and waking up the next day on the ground outside the hotel, unable to move. At 21, he had fractured his seventh cervical vertebrae, the lowest bone in his neck. Burch underwent several surgeries in Hawaii before he was transferred to McGuire's Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center, where he met Gorgey and first learned about exoskeletons. Fit, in good health and eager to push his broken body to its limits, he was the perfect candidate for using an Ekso GT, a lower-body, battery-powered exoskeleton, Gorgey said then.

"A person with a spinal cord injury who has the ability to stand and walk is a breathtaking thing," Gorgey told *Military Times* in 2016. "Not only are there obvious physical and psychological benefits, but the physiological impact is huge. The act of walking can prevent so many other health issues associated with long-term paralysis, including heart disease, diabetes, muscular atrophy, bone loss." The first time Burch used the Ekso GT, he took 256 steps along a hospital hallway. Gorgey had to rein him in a bit, concerned Burch would injure himself. "He definitely did not want to stop," Gorgey said. The second time Burch used the exoskeleton, he clocked 486 steps. He also wore it later that afternoon to his promotion ceremony.

Now, the retired Marine hopes his new implant -- he received a temporary one 8 MAR to see how well he tolerated it, then got his permanent implant 2 APR -- will let him one day take steps at the hospital and around his apartment free of the exoskeleton. "That's what I'm working toward," he said. Burch has reason to be hopeful: In 2018, in similar research conducted at the University of Louisville in Kentucky and the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, three people -- Jeffrey Marquis, 35; Kelly Thomas, 24; and Jered Chinnock, 29 -- were able to walk after receiving the same implants. Marquis eventually graduated to walking with balance poles, and Thomas now walks unassisted.

Claudia Angeli, one of the scientists at the Kentucky Spinal Cord Injury Research Center at the University of Louisville, has been studying epidural stimulators for spinal cord injuries since 2009. Her past research focused on motor restoration. Currently, she is looking at controlling the systems of the body that regulate blood pressure and bladder control. Rare individuals are able to achieve "full overground ambulation," Angeli said. But nearly everyone who has received an implant in her research has been able to take a few steps at a time during therapy, she added. "In humans, spinal injuries are all different, so we find that the parameters are very individualized," Angeli explained. "We are working hard to improve the technology. A lot of potential exists for it to interact with the healthy spinal cord below the injury. It allows restoration of some of the functions that were there before the injury."

The VA study was made possible by a \$3.7 million grant from the Defense Department under the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program. Dr. Robert Trainer, a pain management specialist familiar with the Medtronic devices, does the implantation while Gorgey oversees the program and manages the veterans' post-operative physical therapy. Burch says he already has seen a benefit from his implant: a decrease in involuntary movements in his legs known as spasticity that he hopes will help improve his therapy at the VA and the gym near his home. That immediate change following the implant bolstered confidence in his decision to enroll in the research, he added.

When he is not at the VA -- he spends 90 minutes there three times a week -- Burch works with his brother, Travis, also a former Marine, renovating and flipping houses in Portsmouth, and he plays on two wheelchair rugby teams. He credits the sport, once known as murderball, and his teammates on the Oscar Mike Militia, an all-veterans team, for his recovery to date. "The first tournament I ever went to, I had my mom with me because I couldn't really do anything. And my teammates were like, 'You gonna bring your mommy to every tournament?' I was like, 'OK, I need to learn to be independent,'" Burch said.

Gorgey said he is excited to see how the combination of the epidural implant and use of an exoskeleton works to improve muscle quality, cardiovascular health and bladder function in the veteran participants. "We have a whole team that has worked very hard to get to this point," he said. Burch says he will apply the same quiet strength he relied on to get through Marine Corps basic training, through military occupational specialty training as an aircraft rescue and firefighting specialist and through the dark days following his accident to get the most out of the research. "And if I don't walk? I'm going to be happy for the research that comes from the study," he said. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | April 25, 2021 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse

Reported 16 thru 30 APR 2021

Texas — The owner of a for-profit trade school has been convicted of bilking the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs of \$72 million and of misleading student veterans, announced Acting U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Texas Prerak Shah. After approximately seven hours of deliberation, a federal jury on 15 APR found **Jonathan Dean Davis**, the 43 year-old owner of Retail Ready Career Center, guilty of seven counts of wire fraud and four counts of money laundering.

- “Mr. Davis lied to multiple government agencies in order to swindle veterans out of their hard-won GI Bill benefits. While graduates of Retail Ready were just scraping by, Mr. Davis was living the high life,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Prerak Shah. “We are grateful to the jury for their time in helping us bring this defendant to justice. To undermine the VA is to insult the incredible sacrifices made by U.S. military veterans.”
- “Owners of schools that are entrusted with the education of our nation’s veterans will be held accountable if they defraud the post-911 GI Bill program or veteran students,” stated VA OIG Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey Breen. “Today’s guilty verdict was reached under the leadership of the U.S. Attorney’s Office, and as a result of the extensive work of special agents of the VA Office of Inspector General, the FBI, and the United States Postal Inspection Service.”

According to evidence presented at trial, Mr. Davis marketed Retail Ready's six-week HVAC training course to veterans whose tuition and fees would be covered by the Veteran's Educational Assistance Act of 2008, also known as the post-9/11 GI Bill. The defendant, who was essentially broke at the time of the crime, realized that he could charge \$18,000 to \$21,000 per student for the six-week course, if only he could get approval from the VA to accept GI Bill payments for tuition – which required prior approvals from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC). These agencies required applicants to certify that they were not personally facing any criminal or civil actions, and to prove that their schools were established educational institutions in stable financial condition. Knowing he could not meet these requirements, Mr. Davis repeatedly lied and concealed information from these agencies.

“Several decisions lie ahead that will ultimately make the difference if I succeed or if I fail. More gut-wrenching conversations, more humiliating experiences, more lying is in order,” Mr. Davis wrote in an electronic journal he kept on his computer, which was recovered by federal agents during a search of Retail Ready. The journal became a key piece of evidence at trial. Mr. Davis assured the TWC that he was not subject to any civil actions, when, in fact, he was facing numerous civil judgments over unpaid debts. He also told the TWC that he was not facing any criminal charges, when, in fact, he had a pending felony charge for theft of services. Chronicling his arrest in his journal, Mr. Davis wrote, “I was arrested on December 20th, last Friday night (a week ago) for a warrant that had been hanging around since April apparently. I didn't know that I had one but it was for Theft of services for a bad check I had written in June or July of 2012 to the Doubletree for \$25,000.00, which makes the charge a felony ... The more complicated and damaging aspect is that having a felony arrest doesn't do well with trying to apply for a school certificate.”

Mr. Davis told the TVC that Retail Ready had been operating as a school for two years, when, in fact, the company had only existed for a few months and had never trained any students. He claimed that Retail Ready was fully prepared to train veterans, when, in fact, the company lacked a building and basic supplies. He even lied to an independent accountant about the school's financial condition, and then submitted false financial statements to both the TWC and the TVC. “I lied to the accountant that I am using for my audit service, I told him that I don't have anything in the company name other than a lease and I left out having Jay being an employee and that I've had a bank account with expenses out of it because it is a disaster and wouldn't project a very good picture,” Mr. Davis wrote in his journal. Eventually, based upon Mr. Davis' lies to the TWC and TVC, the VA accepted Retail Ready's application, allowing Mr. Davis to charge veterans' tuition and fees to the VA under the GI Bill.

In 2014, he began recruiting student veterans, promising to prepare them for lucrative careers in the heating and air conditioning industry. Upon entering the workforce, however, many of these veterans discovered that Retail Ready had failed to teach them many of the basic skills necessary for entry-level technician jobs. Several veterans testified at trial that they had relied on the Retail Ready's fraudulently obtained VA endorsement and were sorely disappointed about their post- Retail Ready career prospects and pay. They were also shocked to learn of the rate at which Retail Ready's six-week course had drained their GI Bill benefits, testifying that they felt “used,” “taken advantage of,” “deceived,” and “bamboozled.”

Even as his veteran graduates struggled to make ends meet, Retail Ready collected more than \$72 million in GI Bill benefits from the VA. Using the proceeds of his fraud, Mr. Davis purchased a \$2.2 million home in Dallas, a \$428,000 Lamborghini, a \$280,000 Ferrari, and a \$260,000 Bentley, among

other things. He now faces up to 180 years in federal prison. His sentencing hearing has been set for 15 SEP. [Source: DoJ Northern District of New York | U.S. Attorney's Office | March 29, 2021 ++]

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Lansing, MI -- Another suspect in a scheme to defraud the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Michigan Department of Treasury out of nearly half a million dollars has been formally charged, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel announced 22 APR. The Attorney General's enforcement operation was conducted in close collaboration with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General. **Sophia J. Quill**, 60, was arraigned in front of Judge Mark A. McConnell of the Wayne County 18th District Court over Zoom 21 APR. The charges include:

- One count of Conducting a Criminal Enterprise, a felony punishable by up to 20 years' imprisonment, \$100,000 fine and forfeiture of proceeds and items used during the crime;
- Four counts of False Pretenses \$50,000-\$100,000, a felony punishable by 15 years' imprisonment, \$25,000 fine or three times the value of the money or property involved, whichever is greater;
- Two counts of False Pretenses \$20,000-\$50,000, a felony punishable by 15 years' imprisonment, \$15,000 fine or three times the value of the money or property involved, whichever is greater; and
- Two counts of False Pretenses \$1,000-\$20,000, a felony punishable by 5 years' imprisonment, \$10,000 fine or three times the value of the money or property involved, whichever is greater.

She is charged as a Fourth Habitual Offender, meaning Quill is facing a maximum term of life imprisonment if convicted of any of the charges. Quill and her co-conspirator Melissa Flores, who was arraigned last year, allegedly created aliases and obtained or created fraudulent documents to make it appear that they were heirs to various individuals who died. Between 2013 and 2019, it is alleged that Quill and Flores defrauded the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) out of more than \$430,000 and the Michigan Department of Treasury out of more than \$40,000. Quill's son Steven Decker, who was also arraigned last year, allegedly received proceeds from the scheme and used some of the money to conceal property used to conduct the fraud.

Quill was not arraigned in Michigan last year with her co-defendants because she is out of state and COVID-19 made extradition from Florida difficult. However, the Wayne County District Court was recently able to coordinate Quill's remote arraignment. Judge McConnell set bond at \$10,000 cash/surety and ordered that Quill have no contact with co-defendant Flores. A Probable Cause Conference is scheduled for 29 APR and a Preliminary Examination is scheduled for 6 MAY, both over Zoom. [Source: Michigan.gov | Dept. of Attorney General | April 22, 2021 ++]

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Newark, NJ — Five individuals have been charged and two others have pleaded guilty in New Jersey for their roles in massive durable medical equipment and genetic cancer screening kickback fraud schemes, Acting U.S. Attorney Rachael A. Honig announced 22 APR.

Thomas Farese, 78, of Delray Beach, Florida; **Pat Truglia**, 53, of Parkland, Florida; **Domenic J. Gatto Jr.**, 46, of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida; and **Nicholas Defonte**, 72, and **Christopher Cirri**, 63, both of Toms River, New Jersey, are each charged by complaint with conspiracy to commit health care fraud. Two additional individuals pleaded guilty today by videoconference before U.S. District Judge Kevin McNulty: **Brian Herbstman**, 46, of Jackson, New Jersey, pleaded guilty to an information charging him with conspiracy to commit health care fraud and to violate the Anti-Kickback Statute; and Sean **Hogan**, 48, Old

Bridge, New Jersey, pleaded guilty to an information charging him with conspiracy to engage in money laundering. Sentencing for both is scheduled for Aug. 31, 2021.

According to documents filed in these cases and statements made in court each of the defendants played a role in defrauding health care benefit programs by offering, paying, soliciting, and receiving kickbacks and bribes in exchange for completed doctors' orders for durable medical equipment (DME), namely orthotic braces:

- Farese, Truglia, Gatto, and their conspirators had financial interests in multiple DME companies, which paid kickbacks to suppliers of DME orders, including Cirri, Defonte, and Truglia. In exchange for DME orders, the DME companies fraudulently billed Medicare, TRICARE, CHAMPVA, and other health care benefit programs. The defendants concealed their ownership of the DME companies by using straw owners, who were falsely reported to Medicare as the owners of the companies.
- Truglia, Cirri, Defonte, and their conspirators owned and operated multiple call centers through which they obtained DME orders for beneficiaries of Medicare and other federal health care programs. The call centers paid illegal kickbacks and bribes to telemedicine companies to obtain DME orders for these beneficiaries. The telemedicine companies then paid physicians to write medically unnecessary DME orders. The orders were provided to DME supply companies owned by Farese, Truglia, Gatto, and others in exchange for bribes. The DME supply companies provided the braces to beneficiaries and fraudulently billed the health care programs.
- Herbstman and his conspirators had financial interests in multiple DME companies. The DME companies paid kickbacks to suppliers in exchange for DME orders, which the DME companies fraudulently billed to Medicare, TRICARE, CHAMPVA, and other health care benefit programs.
- Hogan and his conspirators agreed to launder the proceeds of the health care fraud conspiracy. From March 2018 to October 2019, Hogan and others withdrew approximately \$1.16 million in ill-gotten gains.
- Herbstman and his conspirators had business relationships with call centers through which they obtained patient referrals for genetic cancer screening tests. Herbstman provided these patient referrals to others in exchange for kickbacks and bribes from companies that performed the tests and fraudulently billed them to health care programs.

The defendants caused losses to Medicare, TRICARE, and CHAMPVA of approximately \$93 million. The charge of conspiracy to commit health care fraud is punishable by a maximum potential penalty of 10 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000, or twice the gross profit or loss caused by the offense, whichever is greater. The charges of conspiracy to violate the federal Anti-Kickback Statute and conspiracy to commit health care fraud, to which Herbstman pleaded guilty, are punishable by a maximum potential penalty of five years in prison and a fine of \$250,000, or twice the gross profit or loss caused by the offense, whichever is greater. The charge of conspiracy to transact in criminal proceeds, to which Hogan pleaded guilty, is punishable by a maximum potential penalty of 10 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000 or twice the gross profit or loss caused by the offense, whichever is greater. The charges and allegations contained in the complaints are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. [Source: DoJ District of New Jersey | U.S. Attorney's Office | April 22, 2021 ++]

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Camden, NJ — The president and CEO of a commercial diving school on 28 APR admitted fraudulently obtaining funding from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for the school and its students, Acting U.S. Attorney Rachael A. Honig announced. **Tamara Brown**, 57, of Haddon Heights, New Jersey, pleaded guilty by videoconference before U.S. District Judge Joseph H. Rodriguez to an information charging her with one count of wire fraud.

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court: From January 2012 through July 2018, Brown owned a private, for-profit commercial diving school, which offered educational programs in commercial diving and underwater welding and salvage. As a for-profit institution, the diving school was required to be accredited through an approved accreditation body to be eligible to receive tuition funds from the DOE’s Higher Education Act’s programs. The VA also relies upon the accreditation in evaluating the eligibility of veteran students to receive student aid funding. Given that more than 80 percent of the diving school’s students received financial assistance from the Department of Education, the school stood to lose its largest source of tuition funding for its students if it lost its accreditation.

Prior to 2012, the diving school had been properly accredited. However, when renewing the diving school’s accreditation that year, Brown submitted fraudulent information to the accrediting authority. For example, Brown reported rates of employment of the school’s graduates of between 81 to 84 percent, when the employment rates were closer to 50 to 60 percent, significantly lower than the rate required to maintain accreditation. Brown also provided fraudulent information pertaining to the school’s holding of “advisory board” meetings required for accreditation to ensure that the school’s curriculum would educate students to meet the current demands of the industry and prospective employers. In the school’s accreditation application, Brown reported holding advisory board meetings on various dates and also submitted what purported to be minutes of nine such board meetings. The diving school did not have a formal advisory board and did not regularly conduct meetings as required. Brown submitted wholly fabricated meeting minutes for at least six of the nine dates listed in the school’s accreditation application and, therefore, did not satisfy the minimum accreditation requirements. The diving school nonetheless continued to regularly receive DOE funds via wire transfers, including a wire transfer which occurred on Jan. 18, 2017.

The wire fraud charge to which Brown pleaded guilty carries a maximum potential penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, or twice the gross gain or loss resulting from the offense. Under the terms of the plea agreement, Brown must pay restitution of \$1.1 million. Sentencing is scheduled for Aug. 30, 2021. [Source: DoJ District of New Jersey | U.S. Attorney’s Office | April 28, 2021 ++]

* Vets *



Vet Benefits Legislation

Update 07: Did You Know?

Each year over 300 bills are submitted in Congress that are related to various veteran benefits. After many committee meetings, rewrites and compromises only a hand full are approved and sent to the President to sign. Most don't impact the general veteran population e.g. naming a National Highway stretch after a Medal of Honor recipient or issuing a postage stamp about a famous World War II battle. But some have major impact. The recent Blue Water Navy Veterans Act comes to mind. Passed into law last January, it has generated over 500 million dollars in VA compensation benefits to those Navy vets who served off the coast of Vietnam and the DMZ in Korea (12 miles) during the Nam War, and were exposed to Agent Orange.

HR 7105 was recently signed into law as part of the NDAA and is hundreds of pages long. Many are not aware of certain provisions of that legislation.

- Veterans will once again be able to submit Disability Benefit Questionnaires from PRIVATE Doctors to support their claims for service-connected compensation. The VA had banned that for a while.
- The Vietnam War Era has been extended back to 11/1/55, which means certain peacetime veterans who served from that date up to 1961 may now be able to qualify for Non-Service Connected pension.
- Vocational Rehabilitation benefits for disabled vets used to have a 12 year limit of use after the VA rating. For those disabled vets who were discharged after 1/1/13, they will now have no time limit.
- Child care for veterans who use the VA hospitals or clinics will now be available.
- Widows and widowers who's spouse died of their service-connected condition, etc. can now remarry at age 55 and still keep their DIC benefits. The age was 57.
- Veterans filing claims for Military Sexual Trauma can choose whether they are examined by a male or female doctor.
- Homeless programs and vouchers at the VA may be extended to those veterans who received an "Other than Honorable" discharge.

- **IMPORTANT:** this law also added three new presumptive conditions to the list of Agent Orange related problems for those who serviced in Vietnam (boots on the ground), off the coast (within 12 miles) or near the DMZ in Korea during certain dated. They are **BLADDER CANCER, HYOPHTHOIDSIM AND PARKINSONISM** (have symptoms but full blown Parkinson's disease has not yet been diagnosed. If you know of a Vietnam vet who died of any of these conditions, and there is a surviving spouse, they may qualify for benefits.

As with any new law, the VA must first prepare regulations, then guidelines and policy mandates before all these take effect. But if you think you may be affected by any of the above, be sure to reach out to your VA hospital, clinic or the VA benefits department. They can be reached at 1-800-827-1000. [Source: American Legion IL District 9 | Raymond P. Toczec | April 2021 ++]

Military Retirement Pay Taxation

Update 05: More News on Efforts to Exempt from State Tax



North Carolina. MOAA members in North Carolina are strategically maneuvering to advance legislation that would exempt military pension from state income tax. Col. Ihor “Iggy” Husar, USAR (Ret), first vice president of MOAA’s North Carolina Council of Chapters, said all 15 state chapters are tracking two bills that would eliminate military pension from state income tax. He has led efforts to connect chapter members to the lawmakers in their districts to build more meaningful connections in hopes of passing the legislation. North Carolina House Bill 83 and its companion, Senate Bill 12, target tax exemptions for only military members. Other tax exemption bills in the state are broader, calling for tax exemptions for additional federal employees, and some state employees.

Some veterans in North Carolina already are exempt from taxes on their retirement benefits, qualifying under the so-called “Bailey exclusion.” The exclusion applies to any military retirement benefits (along with many other government-related plans) received by retirees with more than five years of creditable service as of Aug. 12, 1989, according to the tax office. If passed into law, the full exemption would mean a revenue loss of about \$32 million for the state, according to the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research. However, Husar said he believes the exemption would be counterbalanced by an influx of veterans who would choose to retire in North Carolina and would pay other taxes and boost the local economy through spending.

Utah -- Veterans in Utah will be exempt from paying taxes on military retired pay beginning in the 2021 tax year, under a bill signed March 11 by Gov. Spencer Cox. The new law will provide an average annual tax savings of about \$1,315 or about \$23.8 million, according to the state’s budget office, and also exempts tax on the Survivor Benefit Plan. Another exemption in the law will include some Social Security payments, but military retirees can claim only one new income exemption per tax return. Retirees with multiple sources of income will be allowed to exempt military retirement payments from the total income when filing taxes. Lt. Col. David Houston, USMC (Ret), president of Utah’s Color Country Chapter, said MOAA members worked with other veterans groups to advocate for the bill in meetings with lawmakers. Houston said the change would be a big victory for the state, as it borders other states that offer exemptions.

Vermont -- An exemption on military pensions is among several items covered by a wide-ranging tax bill passed by the Vermont House chamber last week. The bill started in the Senate with a narrow focus, but when it reached the House, legislators added several amendments, including a military retiree tax exemption. Under the proposed bill, military retirees would be able to exempt the first \$10,000 of their retirement pay from state income. Vermont Rep. Lisa Hango said the exemption would level the playing field for Vermont, which is bordered on three sides by states that offer full tax exemptions for military retirees. Vermont is striving to be a place military retirees choose to live after their time in uniform, she said.

Rhode Island -- A bill that would lessen the tax burden of military retirees in Rhode Island reached the state’s Senate Judiciary Committee, where it will be held for further study. Senate Bill 0159 would exclude the first \$25,000 of military retirement income from state taxation for all those age 60 and older. If passed, the change would take effect in the 2022 tax year.

[Source: MOAA Mewsletter | Amanda Dolasinski | April 20, 2021 ++]

American Vet’s Recollections

Louis Graziano at WWII German Surrender



World War II Veteran Luciano “Louis” Graziano is the last known living witness to the German surrender, which ended hostilities in Europe in WWII. Graziano landed on D-Day in the 3rd wave on Omaha Beach and was later in the Battle of the Bulge. He is the author of his book titled, “A Patriot’s Memoirs of World War II.” Watch as he tells the story and what he witnessed in the 35 minute video at <https://www.americanveteranscenter.org/2020/05/louis-graziano-last-living-witness-to-the-german-surrender-world-war-ii>. [Source: American Veterans Center | May 14, 2020 ++]

Vet Treatment Courts

Update 32: A Second Chance at the Minnesota Legislature



One very bad day in a good man's life, a veteran grabbed a knife and tried to goad Ramsey County sheriff's deputies into ending his pain. His story could have ended in a jail cell or in a grave. But Ramsey County, Minnesota, sometimes offers veterans facing jail time an alternative: Get treatment, get therapy, get weekly

drug tests, get working on the issues that landed you in trouble in the first place. "I am the luckiest guy. The most fortunate guy," said Jeff, a retired Army major; a husband and father; and a graduate of Ramsey County's veterans treatment court.

He came into the program bruised by the less-lethal rounds the deputies used to subdue him, wracked by pain from the wear and tear of 24 years of military service, and haunted by post-traumatic stress, nightmares and undiagnosed mental illness. "I would not have made it," said Jeff, who now volunteers as a mentor to other veterans in the program. He asked that his full name not be used. "They saved my life."

There are veterans in pain in every county in Minnesota. Not every county has the resources to set up a veterans courts of its own. The Minnesota Legislature could change that. The Veterans Restorative Justice Act would expand the veterans court program to the whole state, offering a second chance to veterans who qualify and who are willing to put in the work. The bill passed the Minnesota Senate unanimously last year. This year, it passed the House. They just can't seem to pass it into law. The idea has the support of Republicans and Democrats, prosecutors and public defenders, veterans' groups and victims' rights advocates.

But a ferocious debate over who should qualify for that second chance sank the bill in 2020 and could deadlock it again this year. After early bipartisan support for the legislation last year, a group of lawmakers balked, concerned that a diversion program could act as a get-out-of-jail-free card for violent offenders and domestic abusers. This year, the Republican-led Senate passed one version of the Veterans Restorative Justice Act. The DFL-led House passed another. The differences between the bills would have to be hammered out by the conference committee rushing to pass a raft of veterans and military affairs bills through the Legislature before the session ends in a few weeks.

Sen. Jason Rarick (R-Pine City), who sponsored the Senate version, pushed for changes that would exclude more violent offenders and give victims and prosecutors more discretion over who gets a second chance. "Veterans who come back and have experienced things through their service that most of us, we can't even fathom ... we need to offer them services to help," Rarick said. "I think this is one step in being able to help."

There are 16 county veterans courts in a state with 87 counties. Ramsey County's has been operating for nearly a decade. "It's not a get-out-of-jail-free card," said Donn Lindstrom, a Navy veteran who coordinates the mentor program at the Ramsey County veterans court. Not every veteran makes the most of this second chance. Some wash out and end up serving significant prison time. But around 90% make it through the program and less than 1% reoffend. "Veteran treatment courts save lives," he said. "Twenty-two veterans a day die by suicide [nationally]. So the more that we can help them, the better off the community as a whole is going to be."

Rep. Sandra Feist (DFL-New Brighton) sponsored the Veterans Restorative Justice bill in the House this year. "This isn't just something nice that we're doing for veterans," she said. "When people engage in the rehabilitative path, they are having multiple meetings per week, they are being forced to confront their past, they are being forced to seek the treatment they need. It is a much harder path" than just sitting in a jail cell. Instead of sitting in a jail cell, Jeff spent time in an inpatient treatment program, followed by weekly court appearances, drug tests, counseling sessions and peer support meetings. But he came out the other side feeling better than he had in years.

Watching the bill go nowhere last year was hard on him. Now he worries that passing the Senate version might actually be worse than doing nothing. The violent offenders the Senate bill would disqualify, he said, would include someone who had threatened sheriff's deputies with a weapon. Someone like him. "I'm a firm believer in 'no veteran left behind,'" he wrote in a recent letter to members of the American Legion.

"Make no mistake; if the Senate VRJA version passes ... veterans — just like me — will be left behind."
[Source: Star Tribune | Jennifer Brooks | April 25, 2021 ++]

Vet Fraud & Abuse

Reported 16thru 30 APR 2021



Newport News, Va. -- A Portsmouth woman pleaded guilty 19 APR to wire fraud and aggravated identity theft in connection with a scheme to defraud veterans. “This defendant has been brought to justice for orchestrating numerous fraudulent schemes against veterans who honorably served their country,” said Raj Parekh, Acting U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. “For those who steal, misappropriate, and divert funds that belong to our country’s veterans, this case sends a strong message that you will be prosecuted and held accountable for your inexcusable conduct.”

According to court documents, **Rita Copeland**, 59, operated an entity known as “Veteran Services of the Commonwealth.” Copeland purported to provide caregiving, contracting, and rental assistance services to various veterans from 2016 through 2020. Copeland caused a number of victims to apply for Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) grants through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Such grant payments are to be used for certain designated improvements to the residences of veterans. Copeland failed to perform all of the promised work and used a portion of these payments to her own benefit, contrary to the designated purposes of the funds.

Copeland also diverted the income and retirement fund payments of another veteran to a bank account that she had opened. In addition, Copeland fraudulently obtained and diverted loan funds and used the credit and debit cards of this elderly victim. Finally, Copeland engaged in a rental fraud scheme, purporting to link veterans and others with landlords, but then diverting rental and security deposit payments to her own benefit. Copeland pleaded guilty to one count of wire fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft, and she is scheduled to be sentenced on 27 AUG. She faces a maximum penalty of 20 years for wire fraud and a mandatory consecutive term of two years for aggravated identity theft. Actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after taking into account the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Combating elder abuse and financial fraud targeted at seniors is a key priority of the Department of Justice. Elder abuse is an intentional or negligent act by any person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to an older adult. It is a term used to describe five subtypes of elder abuse: physical abuse, financial fraud, scams and exploitation, caregiver neglect and abandonment, psychological abuse, and sexual abuse. Elder abuse is a serious crime against some of our nation’s most vulnerable citizens, affecting at least 10 percent of older Americans every year. Related court documents and information on this case are located

on the website of the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia or on PACER by searching for Case No. 4:20-cr-63. [Source: DOJ Eastern Dist. of VA Affairs | U.S. Attorney's Office | April 19 2021 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure Legislation

Update 14: Toxic Wounds Are Wounds | Jon Stewart



Comedian Jon Stewart has had enough of veterans dying from rare cancers after being denied preventive care by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Nearly two decades after the start of the war on violent extremism, the comedian who helped pass legislation to help 9/11 first responders is now putting his fame behind a bipartisan bill that removes the burden of proof sick veterans who were exposed to toxins in war zones face. Stewart described to the Washington Examiner in detail the chemicals found in the lungs of service members and the horrid ailments they now suffer in calling for support for a bill co-sponsored by New York Democratic Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand and Florida Republican Sen. Marco Rubio.

- “We knew at the beginning of the war on terror that toxic exposure was going to be an enormous issue, and so to plead ignorance on it is not acceptable,” Stewart said.
- “Toxic wounds are wounds,” he added. “The VA has to address it in the same intentional and kind of comprehensive manner that it might address physical wounds or a traumatic brain injury.”
- Declassified toxicological studies from a secret base in Karshi-Khanabad, Uzbekistan, known as “K2,” revealed soldiers lived on a mountain of toxins, including jet fuels, depleted uranium, and the remnants of chemical weapons. Longitudinal studies of 9/11 first responders prove the link between the illnesses suffered and exposure to toxic materials.

Stewart, who held a press conference alongside lawmakers when the "Warfighter Act of 2021" was introduced on 13 APR, said post-9/11 veterans should not have to continue fighting for care. “It's an age-old tactic of delaying and denying,” he said. “Whether it's done from ignorance or incompetence or malevolence, you know, it doesn't really matter. The result is the same.” Stewart said veterans' lung biopsies have revealed jet fuel, mercury, metals, plastics, and any number of things burned each night on U.S. military bases worldwide and breathed in by unknowing soldiers and airmen.

In the decades since many have returned, veterans are denied preventive screenings that could detect cancers related to toxic exposure. In recent years, Congress and former President Donald Trump ordered the Department of Defense and the VA to conduct more studies. Those studies have been inconclusive, and veterans are still denied care. They also take a substantial amount of time, further slowing any longer-term help for affected veterans. The DOD said 26 APR that Secretary Lloyd Austin supports efforts to get

burn pit victims the help they need and has worked with VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Both leaders take this very seriously and want to do whatever we can to make sure that those veterans who have been, and are, and sadly will be, affected by exposure to burn pit residue and fumes and chemicals are properly treated and looked after,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said.

Kirby referred a follow-up question on what could be done now to staffers, who said a September 2020 study of 27 respiratory health conditions by the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine had not revealed a service connection. “None of them met the criteria for ‘sufficient evidence for an association’ (relationship) with burn pit exposure,” the statement said, quoting the report. DOD directed service members to an online registry established in 2014. In a separate response, the Department of Veterans Affairs listed research it supports on airborne hazards exposures and better efforts to train clinicians to treat it but did not address the care issue. “Secretaries Austin and McDonough could fix this with the stroke of a pen if only they’d err on the side of the veteran,” Stronghold Freedom Foundation’s Mark Jackson said.

The former K2 veteran said another friend with exposure died of glioblastoma, a rare form of brain cancer, last week, and more may die waiting for the legislation to pass. Often, he said, lawmakers are reticent to move legislation forward that could carry a big price tag, even when it comes to helping sick veterans. “McDonough, in particular, could simply mandate the care,” he said. “It is profoundly frustrating to hear anything other than their unequivocal support.”

Stewart says 80% of burn pit claims are being denied by the VA. “It’s the same pattern in every war,” he said. “They go over, and then there’s a toxic exposure issue, and those soldiers come home, and they spend the next 20 to 30 years, sometimes 40 or sometimes 50, fighting with their own government. First to prove that they’re sick, second to get it tied to the exposures that they suffered in the military.” Stewart argued it’s time to stop looking for the limited DOD evidence to prove the toxic exposures are service-related. “It’s enough waiting. It’s enough putting it off,” he said. “Those studies are never coming through because the information from DOD for the study is incomplete. So, you’re penalizing the veterans for information that DOD either doesn’t have or won’t provide.”

Stewart believes there is now momentum to get legislation to the president’s desk. The Senate will have a hearing on 29 APR (watch at <https://vva.org/category/vva-testimony>) related to the bill, and next week the House will do the same for a companion bill. “It’s an eminently fixable problem,” Stewart said of the bill, which, by granting a presumption of exposure, automatically allows service members to get the pre-screenings and tests they need to detect cancers and other ailments early. What should not happen, the comedian turned activist said, is another bill that falls short.

“The concern you always have with Congress is they will do a half-measure under the guise of caution,” he said. “The only thing I would say is the downside of presumption is that maybe somewhere an individual, a man, or a woman who signed up to defend this country gets their cancer or their sarcoidosis or their pulmonary disease treated by the VA when it might not have definitively been caused by their exposure to a burn pit. Like, that’s the only downside to this.” He added: “Do not let them plead poverty because this is the true and total cost of war, and you don’t get to skimp on the back end.” [Source: Washington Examiner | Abraham Mahshie | April 27, 2021 ++]

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Mario Tonelli | Death March & Hell Ship Survivor



On November 27, 1937, in its final football game of the season, Notre Dame found itself tied 6-6 late in the fourth quarter against Southern California. The 9th ranked Fighting Irish desperately needed a spark. Its fullback, Mario “Motts” Tonelli, delivered. Taking a handoff from deep in Irish territory, the 5’11, 210-pounder took off down the field, weaving for 77 yards before being tackled yards away from pay dirt. Seconds later Tonelli took advantage of the momentum, scoring the game-winning touchdown as exuberant fans roared. Tonelli admitted after the game that he didn’t “remember that run. I don’t know just what I was thinking about, except just to run.”

But there was one fan that day who certainly remembered the running back, one who would remind Tonelli of it nearly five years later on the other side of the world and on opposite sides of World War II. After graduating from Notre Dame, Tonelli made the leap to the NFL, signing a contract in 1940 with the Chicago Cardinals. However, as war loomed Tonelli felt the call of duty to serve his nation and enlisted in the U.S. Army following the end of the Cardinals 1940-41 season. On December 7, 1941, the Fighting Irish alum found himself stationed at Clark Field on Luzon, the main island of the Philippines. The following day, with Japanese bombs littering the area around Clark field, it dawned on Tonelli that what he thought would be a one-year tour of service was going to be prolonged into an interminable hell.

“Unable to reach his anti-aircraft gun, [Tonelli] grabbed a nearby Springfield rifle and fired fruitlessly into the horde of enemy aircraft until the Japanese planes departed,” the National Museum of the Army writes. “Soon after the initial assault, Tonelli joined the rest of the American and Filipino forces in their withdrawal into the Bataan Peninsula.” Retreating into the jungle, Tonelli and his comrades continued their fight against Japanese forces despite a rapidly dwindling supply of food, medicine, and ammunition. On April 9, 1942, with no choice but to capitulate, some 9,700 Americans and their 66,300 Filipino allies surrendered to the Japanese. The already weakened or sick Allied soldiers were forced to trek 60-plus miles with little food or water, enduring what was later termed the Bataan Death March.

“[The] Japanese executed anyone who broke formation or couldn’t keep up and casually butchered others,” according to historian Peter Duffy. “Men were left where they fell, sometimes to be run over by Japanese vehicles. During breaks, most prisoners were forced to sit in the hot sun. “The best estimates,” Duffy continued, “suggest that approximately 500 Americans and 2,500 Filipinos died” during the march. Among those who survived long enough to reach the ad hoc Japanese prison, Camp O’Donnell, was Tonelli,

who, along with his fellow soldiers, were subsequently stripped of all valuables. For Tonelli, that meant giving up his gold Notre Dame class ring.

Moments later a Japanese officer approached the former NFL-er and asked, in perfect English, “Did any of my men take anything from you?” “Yes, he took my Notre Dame ring,” a puzzled Tonelli responded. The Japanese soldier told the bewildered Tonelli that he had attended the University of Southern California and knew all about Tonelli’s game winning play against the Trojans, according to the National Museum of the Army. “I know how much this ring means to you,” the officer told Tonelli before handing him back his ring. “So I wanted to get it back to you.” Without telling the American his name, the officer turned and walked away.

Fed moldy rice and little else over the next seven weeks at Camp O’Donnell, prisoners battled dysentery, diphtheria, elephantiasis, and other ailments. Some 1,500 Americans and 26,000 Filipinos died, according to Duffy. A subsequent move to Cabanatuan and then Mindanao ensued, where a starving Tonelli and his fellow prisoners were forced into slave labor in a rice paddy. It was during this time that Tonelli contracted a parasite, leaving him with relentless abdominal pain that piled onto his already-acute hunger pangs. In the summer of 1944, Tonelli was placed aboard a Japanese “hell ship,” where he remained in dark, cramped quarters for 62 days while en route to Japan. “Nothing was worse than a World War II Japanese POW camp — except a trip on a prisoner transport ship,” historian David Aquila wrote. An estimated 50,000 Allied POWs boarded hell ships during the war. Gregory Michno, author of “Death on the Hellships,” wrote that of that number, 21,000 didn’t survive — more fatalities than the U.S. Marines sustained during the entire Pacific War.

Tonelli felt certain during the voyage that he would never see the sun again. And yet he survived, barely. Upon arrival to Nagoya No. 7, a prison camp near the village of Toyama, Tonelli, stricken with malaria and the parasite, told the Notre Dame News he “felt that (Toyama) would be my last stop. I was going to die there or be liberated.” There Tonelli labored for 10 months before being transferred in June 1945 to a scrap metal plant. Putting on his new prison garb, Tonelli noticed the number 58 stitched into the fabric — the same number he wore at Notre Dame and as a member of the Chicago Cardinals. “From that point on,” he told Notre Dame News, “I knew I was going to make it.”

With American forces closing in on mainland Japan, Tonelli began seeing American planes flying overhead daily. “One day, a plane flew in close to the prison and dropped a carton of cigarettes that had a handkerchief tied on as a parachute,” according to the National Museum of the Army. “Writing scribbled on the parachute read, ‘Hostilities have ceased. Will see you soon.’” After 1,236 days as a prisoner of war, Tonelli, weighing just 98 pounds, was liberated. Two months after being freed Tonelli was back up to 183 pounds thanks to “a miracle of American roast beef, butter and milk,” Chicago Daily News sportswriter Francis J. Powers commented.

Cardinals owner Charlie Bidwill even re-signed Tonelli, despite the former POW’s lingering health issues, and on October 28, 1945, the former Notre Dame star was back on the football field. After playing in one game against the Green Bay Packers, Tonelli retired from professional sports. Soon after, he was sworn in as the youngest commissioner in Cook County, Illinois history — retiring in 1988 after 42 years of public service. Tonelli died in January 2003 at the age of 86. His Notre Dame ring was still on his finger. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Claire Barrett | March 22, 2021 ++]

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Lawrence “Yogi” Berra | Veteran & All-Time Great



Lawrence “Yogi” Berra is well-known for his long and successful playing career with the New York Yankees, his induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame and his roller-coaster post-player career as a coach and manager. Not as well-known was his service as a Navy gunner during World War II. Born Lorenzo Pietro Berra in May 1925, Berra grew up in St. Louis. He dropped out of school in the eighth grade to help his family financially. Berra played baseball as a teenager in American Legion Baseball, which was when he was given the nickname, “Yogi.” A friend thought Berra resembled a Hindu yogi because of the way he folded his arms and legs when waiting to bat.

During his teenage years, Berra tried out for the St. Louis Cardinals. They offered Berra a contract and signing bonus of \$250. But that was half the \$500 bonus they offered his friend, Joe Garagiola. He turned down the Cardinals and went back to his job at a shoe factory. The next year, he tried out for the Yankees. In November 1942, the team offered Berra a contract and a \$500 signing bonus to play with the Norfolk Tars, a Yankees affiliate. He accepted. In May 1943, just as Berra turned 18, he got word from Uncle Sam to take a pre-induction physical. He passed the physical and was allowed a deferment to finish the baseball season. Berra initially opted for the Army but was persuaded to join the Navy in hopes to be on a naval baseball team. Although Berra joined the Navy, his deployment prevented him from playing on the team.

Berra was sent to Bainbridge, Maryland, for basic training in 1943. In January 1944, he attended amphibious training in Norfolk, Virginia. Upon completion, Berra deployed to Europe, where he began training for the coming landings in Normandy, France. He was assigned as a gunner’s mate to USS Bayfield, an attack transport. During the D-Day landings, Berra was stationed on a rocket boat. He then departed from the Bayfield to help protect the waves of infantry by providing suppressive fire. Berra fired machine guns and rocket launchers, pounding hostile German bunkers.

In July 1944, Berra participated in Operation Dragoon, the invasion of Southern France. Berra and his comrades were sweeping the beaches with intense fire. Their gunning was directed at a former beach resort the Germans were using as a machine gun bunker. While shooting at this emplacement, Berra was struck in the left hand by an enemy bullet. He did not report the injury, as he was afraid his mother would worry if she found out. However, upon his return home, he reported his injury and was awarded a Purple Heart. Berra was stationed in Tunisia after his participation in Operation Dragoon. In January 1945, he was sent back to the United States and stationed at the Naval Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut. Berra was placed on Welfare and Recreation and subsequently played baseball for the Navy. He was discharged in May 1946 as a seaman second class.

Berra went on to have a legendary career with the Yankees. In his 19 years as a pro player, Berra won 10 World Series championships, the most ever for a single player, made 18 All-Star appearances and was American League Most Valuable Player (MVP) three times. When Berra retired as a player, he became the manager for the Yankees in 1964. He led the team to the World Series that year but was fired when they lost. The next season, he became a coach for the Mets and then manager in 1972, until he was fired three years later. He then went back to the Yankees as a coach and, in 1984, he was manager again, only to be fired the next year.

Berra became famous for his malapropisms, which was when he would misuse a word or phrase. These were also known as “Yogi-isms,” with one of them being, “We’re lost, but we’re making good time.” Berra was an astute businessman and a popular product spokesman. Berra died in September 2015. He was 90. Two months later, he was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. We honor his service. [Source: Vantage Point | Michael Veronda | April 1, 2021 ++]

Obit: Clayton Schenkelberg **14 April 2021 | Oldest Pearl Harbor Survivor**



Clayton Schenkelberg, 102 looks on, his great-grandson, PO2 Patrick Schenkelberg tosses a memorial wreath into San Diego Bay from the flight deck of the USS Midway Museum during the annual Pearl Harbor Remembrance Ceremony, December 7, 2019

Clayton Schenkelberg, who at age 103 was believed to be America’s oldest Pearl Harbor survivor, died 14 APR at a senior care facility in San Diego. Born a year before the Spanish flu swept the country, his final year included a run-in with the current pandemic, COVID-19. He caught it but didn’t get sick, according to family members. In between he experienced one of the most fateful days in modern U.S. history, the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor that shoved the United States into World War II. A Navy torpedoman at a submarine base, Schenkelberg volunteered to drive a train loaded with the underwater missiles away from strafing Japanese airplanes. Then he ran to an armory, grabbed a rifle and started shooting back.

After the war, he stayed in the Navy for another two decades, got married and raised seven children, and eventually settled in San Diego, where he had a second career as a high school custodian. His motto through the years: One day at a time. “If you asked him about any of it, he would tell you he was just doing

what needed to be done,” his son Patrick said. “He didn’t think it was anything special. He had a job to do and he did it.” Born Oct. 17, 1917, in Carroll, Iowa, Schenkelberg knew hardship early on. His mother died when he was 9. The stock market crashed when he was 12, triggering the Great Depression. When he was 17, his father, a livestock salesman and grain-elevator operator, was killed in an accident. In 1937, he followed an older brother into the Navy and was sent to Pearl Harbor and into torpedo work. On the morning the Japanese planes attacked, his shift was just ending. He was looking forward to spending the day with his girlfriend.

Of the roughly 50,000 American service members on Oahu that day, about 2,400 were killed and another 1,200 injured. More than 30 ships and hundreds of airplanes were destroyed or damaged. The survivors picked themselves up, helped win the war and then got on with their lives in a way that’s led them to be dubbed the Greatest Generation. There is no official roster of how many are still alive. “I would say less than 100,” said Stuart Hedley, 99, who for decades has been San Diego’s most active and visible survivor, giving talks, visiting schools and riding in parades. That estimate includes four men with ties to the now-defunct Pearl Harbor Survivors Association chapter in San Diego. At its peak, with almost 600 members, it was thought to be the largest chapter in the nation. When it shut down two years ago, it was believed to be the last one still operating.

Hedley said it’s his understanding that Schenkelberg had been the oldest survivor in the country. Patrick Schenkelberg said various officials in recent years told him that was the case, too. If so, it was a badge he wore modestly. At various memorial events, he routinely deflected attention from himself. “We’re still paying our respects to those who didn’t make it,” he said in 2016 during the annual Pearl Harbor Day remembrance at the USS Midway Museum. He retired from the Navy in 1967 and worked for almost 20 years as a custodian at Patrick Henry High and other local schools. He was active with Our Lady of Grace Parish in El Cajon, collecting donations and distributing food and clothing for more than 30 years. “He was an outstanding gentleman, very humble, and always ready to lend a hand,” Hedley said. “I’m honored to have called him a friend.”

Survivors include his children, Marlene Luedtke of Cut Bank, Mont., Karen Boyle (and husband Walter) of Round Rock, Texas, Robert Schenkelberg (Lucy) of San Diego, Patrick Schenkelberg (Patricia) of San Diego, and Carrie Harris (Spencer) of San Diego; and more than 40 grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife of 74 years, Alitheia, and two sons, Barry and James. Several of his descendants followed him into the Navy. One great-grandson, Patrick, who is still active-duty, arranged for a flag to be flown in Schenkelberg’s honor in recent days at various places in Pearl Harbor, including over the submarine base where his great-grandfather worked when the attack happened.

A memorial service is scheduled for May 6 at 10:30 a.m. at Our Lady of Grace. The family is asking attendees to wear Hawaiian attire, a nod to the colorful shirts the Pearl Harbor survivors long-ago adopted as their uniform for get-togethers. Hedley said he will be there, leading a traditional Navy farewell known as the two-bell ceremony. He’s had plenty of experience. When he joined the local survivors association in 1984, it had 358 members. “Sadly,” he said, “I’ve put more than 350 of them to rest.” [Source: The San Diego Union-Tribune | John Wilkens | April 24, 2021 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule

As of 1 MAY 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\veteterans related websites and resources.

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

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

Note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date\time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and\or other military retiree\veteterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, Milton.Bell126@gmail.com [Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | April 30, 2021 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs

Scheduled As of 1 MAY 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 30, 2021 ++]

Vet Employment Opportunities

APR 30 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. Following is just one of the jobs listed.

APR 28

- [**Airline Data Auditor**](#)
- Piedmont Airlines, Inc
- Charlotte, NC, United States

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Job Board | April 30, 2021 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits

Indiana 2021

The state of Indiana 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 – IN**” 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.in.gov/dva>:

- Housing
- Financial Assistance
- Employment
- Education
- Recreation
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing
- Burial
- Taxation
- Women Veterans

- Other State Veteran Benefits/Programs

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/indiana-state-veterans-benefits.html> | April 2021
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*** Vet Legislation ***



Vet Legislative Issues 2021

Legislation Pending Before the SVAC

On April 28 John Rowan, Vietnam Veterans of America’s National President testified before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) on legislation pending before the committee. Full testimony of that hearing can be accessed at <https://vva.org/category/vva-testimony>. Pending legislation that was scheduled to be addressed at the hearing included:

- S. 89 Ensuring Survivor Benefits During COVID-19 Act of 2021
- S. 189 Veterans’ Disability Compensation Automatic COLA Act of 2021
- S. 219 Aid and Attendance Support Act of 2021
- S. 437 Veterans Burn Pits Exposure Recognition Act of 2021
- S. 444 AUTO for Veterans Act
- S. 454 K2 Veterans Care Act of 2021
- S. 458 Veterans Claim Transparency Act of 2021
- S. 565 Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act of 2021
- S. 657 A bill to modify the presumption of service connection for veterans who were exposed to herbicide agents while serving in the Armed Forces in Thailand during the Vietnam era, and for other purposes
- S. 731 Department of Veterans Affairs Information Technology Reform Act of 2021
- S. 810 Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act of 2021
- S. 894 Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act of 2021
- S. 927 TEAM Act
- S. 952 Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act of 2021
- S. 976 Caring for Survivors Act of 2021
- S. 1031 A bill to require the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study on disparities associated with race and ethnicity with respect to certain benefits administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes
- S. 1039 A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve compensation for disabilities occurring in Persian Gulf War veterans, and for other purposes
- S. 1071 VA AID Act of 2021

- S. 1093 A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish in the Department the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, and for other purposes
- S. 1095 Colonel John M. McHugh Tuition Fairness for Survivors Act of 2021
- S. 1096 Fry Scholarship Enhancement Act of 2021
- S. 1188 SFC Heath Robinson Burn Pit Transparency Act

To view the above bills go to <https://vva.org/what-we-do/veterans-advocacy/legislative-action-center> and click on view key legislation. Go to <https://www.veterans.senate.gov> to view future SVAC hearings live. [Source: VVA News Flash | April 27, 2027 ++]

Military Uniforms

Update 8: H.R.2502 | Equal Pay for Servicewomen Act

On 14 APR, Congresswoman Julia Brownley (CA-26), Congresswoman Jackie Speier (CA-14), and Congresswoman Elise Stefanik (NY-21) introduced the **Equal Pay for Servicewomen Act**, which would direct the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to ensure gender equity in the cost of uniforms, a measure that ensures equal pay for all who serve in our nation’s military.

“Requiring servicewomen to pay more for uniforms than servicemen pay is blatant gender discrimination, pure and simple. The military requires servicewomen to buy swimsuits, dress pumps and other items that are either not required for servicemen or that have less-expensive equivalents for men, and GAO found that servicewomen have been more affected by mandatory uniform changes that must be covered out of pocket by the servicewoman. I am proud to support Congresswoman Brownley’s legislation to end this unfair and sexist ‘pink’ tax – an abuse I’ve fought to end my entire career – on America’s brave servicewomen,” said Congresswoman Jackie Speier, Chair of the House Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee.

“As Chair of the Women Veterans Task Force, I’d heard repeatedly what the Government Accountability Office report found: women servicemembers pay far more than their male counterparts on uniforms,” said Congresswoman Julia Brownley. “These gender-based inequities are antiquated, and we have a duty to ensure that all servicemembers are treated fairly and do not incur disproportionate out-of-pocket costs for uniforms. I am eager to work with Congresswoman Speier and Congresswoman Stefanik to advance this bill to make certain that the U.S. military executes equitable and inclusive policies for all its personnel.”

“The Equal Pay for Servicewomen Act is a straight-forward solution to address a tremendous gender-related inequity in the United States Military,” said Congresswoman Elise Stefanik. “America’s selfless military women deserve equal considerations in all aspects of their service, and I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this bipartisan bill.” The Equal Pay for Servicewomen Act would incorporate the four legislative recommendations of a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on the parity of military uniform costs. The recommendations direct DOD to:

- Develop consistent criteria for determining which uniform items are considered “uniquely military,” so as to reduce differences in out-of-pocket uniform costs across services and by gender.

- Periodically review the items included in the services’ calculation of standard cash clothing replacement allowances for enlisted servicemembers to ensure consistency and address out-of-pocket cost differences across services and by gender.
- Forward plans submitted pursuant to the first two recommendations to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness for review.
- Review military service plans for changing uniform items to determine any potential out-of-pocket cost differences among the services or among genders within a service that may result, and to make any needed adjustments to ensure equity.

[Source: Congresswomen Jackier Speier | Press Release | April 14, 2021 ++]

Canada/Mexico Prescription Drugs

Update04: S.249/H.R.832 | Safe and Affordable Drugs from Canada Act

Sens. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) on 4 FEB reintroduced the **Safe and Affordable Drugs from Canada Act**, which would allow individuals to safely import prescription drugs from Canada, creating savings for consumers and bringing greater competition into the pharmaceutical market.

- “Addressing the rising costs of prescription drugs has continued to be one of my top priorities. Safe and affordable prescription drugs have been for sale just across the border, but legally out of reach for American families. This commonsense, bipartisan bill will empower Americans to have more choices at the pharmacy,” Grassley said. “This is one critical piece of the puzzle of improving access to affordable medications. I’ll also continue to fight against high prescription drug prices through increased competition and expanded access to more affordable generics.”
- “Prescription drugs are unaffordable for far too many Americans,” Klobuchar said. “This bipartisan legislation would allow for the safe importation of less expensive drugs from Canada, which would in turn increase competition and bring down drug costs in the United States. The fact that Americans pay more than people in other countries for the exact same medications is just wrong. I will continue working to ensure Americans have more options when picking their medications, which will ultimately save consumers money.”

Grassley has been steadfast in his work to address the rising costs of prescription drugs. Last year, he worked with President Trump to curb drug prices and praised the Administration’s finalized rule that establishes a process for some importation from Canada. Grassley and Klobuchar have repeatedly encouraged increased importation of prescription drugs from Canada and worked to address the ever-increasing costs of prescription drugs. Together, they have:

- Urged former HHS Secretary Tom Price to use statutory authority to fast-track the importation of prescription drugs from Canada.
- Pressed the FDA on certain drug importation policies and introduced the Creating and Restoring Equal Access to Equivalent Samples (CREATES) Act to further reduce costs to patients.
- Worked to increase access to affordable prescription drugs by curbing abuse of the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) petition process by introducing the Stop Significant and Time-wasting

Abuse Limiting Legitimate Innovation of New Generics (Stop STALLING) Act, which passed the Senate Judiciary Committee in June 2019.

This bipartisan legislation is cosponsored by Sens. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Susan Collins (R-ME), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Angus King (I-ME), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Jeff Merkley (D-OR) Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Gary Peters (D-MI). Companion legislation was introduced by Reps. Chellie Pingree (D-ME) and Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA). Unfortunately, as of 15 APR, the House and Senate bills only have 1 and 12 cosponsors respectively. [Source: Prescription Justice | Sen. Chuck Grassly | April 15, 2021 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | Palomares Spain

Update 05: S.000/H.R.0000 | Palomares Veterans Act

U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and U.S. Representative Jahana Hayes (D-CT) reintroduced the bicameral **Palomares Veterans Act** on 15 APR to remove barriers to benefits and compensation for the veterans who responded to the 1966 nuclear accident in Palomares, Spain. Many of the 1,600 servicemembers were sent to the site without protective clothing or warning of potential dangers, and were subjected to dangerous levels of radiation.

The Palomares Veterans Act would amend current law to include the cleanup of Palomares as a “radiation risk activity.” This would provide Palomares veterans with disability compensation. As many Palomares veterans have passed away over the years, this legislation would also make surviving spouses and their children eligible for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation – a tax-free monetary benefit paid to eligible survivors of veterans whose death resulted from a service-related injury or disease. This would ensure that Palomares veterans exposed to radiation during their service and their families are afforded the health care and benefits they need and deserve.

- “This bill is urgently needed to bring long-overdue relief to Palomares veterans and their loved ones,” said Blumenthal. “The nuclear disaster in Palomares caused untold suffering and harm to the servicemembers sent in to clean up radioactive material without adequate protective gear or warning of severe health risks. Yet fifty-five years on, the VA still hasn’t recognized radiation risks at Palomares, cutting off benefits and health care for these deserving veterans. They are aging and this cannot wait any longer. We must honor their selfless sacrifice, and enact the Palomares Veterans Act as soon as possible.”
- “Failing to recognize the sacrifice of Palomares veterans is a breach of our responsibility to service members and veterans. This critical, commonsense legislation works to address this issue. I remain committed to fighting for veterans suffering from all forms of toxic exposure, preventing generations of future veterans from the same fate, and ensuring all veterans have accessible and affordable health care,” said Hayes.

In January 1966, a U.S. Air Force B-52 bomber collided with a U.S. Air Force KC-135 tanker aircraft over the Spanish village of Palomares, resulting in one of the largest nuclear disasters in history and causing radiation exposure in approximately 1,600 U.S. airmen who responded to the crash. These airmen were sent to respond to this nuclear accident with little to no protective clothing and were not warned of

any potential dangers. They were ordered to clear contaminated crops, shovel tainted soil into burn pits, and consume the local water and food – placing them in direct contact with large amounts of plutonium. Declassified reports from the Atomic Energy Commission show more than 3 billion micrograms of plutonium were released following the crash. Even one microgram of plutonium is considered harmful to the human body—exposure to 3 billion micrograms of plutonium raises significant concerns of toxic exposure in Palomares veterans.

Many of the airmen who participated in the cleanup operation are suffering from health conditions that are likely the result of their close contact with radioactive plutonium dust. However, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does not list Palomares as a radiation-risk activity under current regulations that presume that radiation-exposed veterans with certain conditions are entitled to disability benefits. The VA continues to rely on flawed methodology and data provided by the Air Force that assigns Palomares veterans radiation dose estimates too low to find that their conditions are more likely radiogenic than not. The Air Force’s methodology for assigning radiation exposure estimates after the cleanup operation did not follow scientific protocol and has been determined unreliable—grave errors this legislation seeks to correct.

In December 2020, the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims found that the VA had not fulfilled its legal responsibility to determine whether the method it uses to assess Palomares veterans’ radiation exposure is scientifically sound and demanded that the VA reexamine this policy. The lead appellant in the case is Retired Chief Master Sergeant Victor Skaar who argues the VA has unjustifiably excluded Palomares from its list of “radiation-risk activities,” and used scientifically unsound methodology to deny Skaar’s disability benefits claims based on exposure to ionizing radiation. Skaar is the lead appellant in a proposed class action of approximately 1,600 Palomares veterans and is represented by the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School.

“Palomares veterans, including Retired Chief Master Sergeant Victor Skaar, have been fighting for recognition from the VA and the military for their sacrifices for years. More than fifty years after the event, the Palomares Veterans Act will be a groundbreaking step forward in supporting these veterans and guaranteeing them recognition for their service. Senator Blumenthal has been a persistent advocate for these veterans over the years, and we are grateful for his dedication to improving the lives of Palomares veterans, their survivors, and our client, Mr. Skaar,” said Lauren Lin, Yale’s Veterans Legal Services Clinic.

“The veterans of the 1966 Palomares nuclear disaster have waited over half a century for recognition of their radiation-connected illnesses,” said US Air Force Veteran and Vietnam Veterans of America National President John Rowan. “Until now, their appeals to the VA have been in vain. Vietnam Veterans of America has fought for the VA to recognize and appropriately compensate and treat all wounds, disabilities, and illnesses resulting from military service – including toxic wounds caused by exposure to chemicals and radiation. VVA is proud to support Senator Blumenthal and Congresswoman Hayes in their introduction of the Palomares Veterans Act of 2021, and we urge swift passage of this important legislation which will allow Palomares veterans the long-overdue presumption of service connection for their radiogenic health conditions.”

The Senate legislation is also cosponsored by U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA). The full text of the Senate legislation can be found [HERE](#). [Source: VVA Web Weekly | Sen. Richard Blumentha | April 16, 2021 ++]

Nuclear Button

Update 02: S.0000/H.R.2603 | No-First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act

A pair of leading Democrats in the House and Senate reintroduced a bill 15 APR to make it U.S. policy not to use nuclear weapons first in a military conflict. The bill from House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA) and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) simply says, “It is the policy of the United States to not use nuclear weapons first.” “Threatening to use nuclear weapons first makes America less safe because it increases the chances of a miscalculation or an accident,” Warren said in a statement. “There are no winners in a nuclear war, and the US should never start one.” It has long been the policy of the United States that the country reserves the right to launch a preemptive nuclear strike.

Smith and Warren previously introduced the bill in 2019, but it went to nowhere amid bipartisan concerns about a “no first use” policy. Opponents of such a policy argue that taking the option off the table to use a nuclear weapon first could embolden adversaries and undermine the confidence of allies in the U.S. nuclear umbrella. But the bill could find a more receptive audience in President Biden. Biden has not addressed the topic since he became president, but as vice president in 2017, he said he finds it “hard to envision a plausible scenario in which the first use of nuclear weapons by the United States would be necessary or make sense.” In an effort to build their case against a “no first use” policy should Biden move toward one, Republicans have been asking defense officials and nominees for their views on the issue at hearings.

At a House Armed Services Committee hearing 15 APR, Gen. Tod Wolters, commander of U.S. European Command, told lawmakers that allies would have “mixed” reactions if the United States adopted a “no first use” policy “depending upon the ally’s awareness of the nuclear enterprise.” “I currently support the U.S. position on not adhering to the nuclear no first use policy,” Wolters added under questioning from Rep. Scott DesJarlais (R-TN). In their 15 APR news release, Smith and Warren argued their bill would improve U.S. national security by reducing the risk of a miscalculation, clarifying U.S. policy and preserving the ability to conduct a nuclear strike after a nuclear attack on the United States or its allies.

“The United States should never initiate a nuclear war,” Smith said in a statement. “This bill would strengthen deterrence while reducing the chance of nuclear use due to miscalculation or misunderstanding. Codifying that deterring nuclear use is the sole purpose of our nuclear arsenal strengthens U.S. national security and would renew U.S. leadership on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament.” [Source: VVA Legislative Alert | April 10, 2021 ++]

DoD/VA Concurrent Receipt

Update 13: H.R.303/S.0000 | Retired Pay Restoration Act

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) and U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) are introducing bipartisan legislation to end the unfair offset of retirement pay and disability benefits for nearly 400,000 military retirees. Under current law, thousands of veterans who receive military pay

from the Department of Defense take a dollar-for-dollar pay reduction for any disability compensation they receive from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Senators' bipartisan Act would eliminate the current offset that prevents veterans with less than a 50 percent disability rating from receiving benefits from both agencies.

- "No military retiree should ever have to forfeit a portion of their hard-earned pension simply because he or she got injured serving our country," said Chairman Tester. "The Retired Pay Restoration Act will ensure veterans receive compensation for their injuries while keeping what they rightfully earned through their service. This bipartisan bill is a necessary step in making sure we do right by thousands of men and women who've sacrificed on our behalf."
- "Currently, only military veterans who retire after 20 years of service and who are over 50 percent disabled may receive concurrent pay for disability and retirement. This means that many of America's veterans who suffered service-related injuries are receiving a much lower payment for disability and retirement assistance than they have rightfully earned. This is unacceptable. Our men and women in uniform who sacrificed their safety and well-being-many of whom endured permanent injuries to protect our freedoms-should receive the compensation they deserve," said Senator Murkowski. "I'm proud to join Senator Tester in introducing the Retired Pay Restoration Act, which will ensure veterans are paid fairly for the time they've served as well as their painfully earned disability."

While prior legislative reforms have carved out protections for certain veterans against the concurrent receipt offset, veterans with disability ratings of less than 50 percent and Chapter 61 retirees-those forced to retire before 20 years of service due to a combat-related disability-have been excluded from such reforms. The Retired Pay Restoration Act would significantly expand the eligibility to these veteran populations. Veterans Service Organizations applauded the Senators' bipartisan effort to remove the concurrent offset and provide disabled veterans with their earned compensation.

- "Military retired pay and VA disability compensation are two different benefits for two different purposes, and no veteran should have to forfeit a portion of the pay they earned simply because they suffered a service-connected disability," said Vice President of Government and Community Relations at **Wounded Warrior Project** Jose Ramos. "Wounded Warrior Project strongly supports the Retired Pay Restoration Act and we thank Senator Tester and Senator Murkowski for their commitment to ending this unjust offset for all veterans."
- "This legislation would rightfully provide total offset relief for servicemembers and veterans who put in 20 years of service that don't meet the current service-connected disability threshold" said Director of Legislative Affairs at The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA) Bill McCabe. "TREA thanks Chairman Tester, Senator Murkowski, and their staffs for their leadership on this important issue. We urge Congress to pass this long overdue correction without delay."
- "Veterans who have given a full career to the U.S. military, including many DAV members, have rightfully earned their retirement pay independent of the injuries or illnesses they may have incurred," said National Legislative Director of Disabled American Veterans (**DAV**) Joy Ilem. "DAV is proud to support the Retired Pay Restoration Act, which would eliminate the unfair offset of DoD retired pay and VA compensation benefits for longevity retired disabled veterans. DAV has long advocated for the removal of this unfair policy and we thank Senator Tester for his efforts to honor the service and sacrifice of our nation's veterans."

- "Senators Tester and Murkowski's introduction of legislation to repeal the remaining vestiges of the disabled veterans tax, known as concurrent receipt, continues a decades-long endeavor to reverse a gross injustice," said Executive Director of Government Affairs of **American Legion** Chanin Nuntayong. "With passage of this bill by Congress, eligible veterans will never have to choose between payment for their service or the debt owed to them for their sacrifices."
- "We appreciate Senators Tester and Murkowski for introducing legislation to restore retired pay concurrent with all levels of VA disability compensation," said President and CEO of Military Officer Association of America (**MOAA**) Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins. "MOAA was instrumental in getting Congress to approve a portion of concurrent receipt in the 2003 NDAA for those with disabilities rated at 50 percent and higher, but continuing efforts by Congress along with Military and Veteran Service Organizations have been met with fiscal road blocks. In our support of this legislation we ask Congress to identify the funding source to pay for this significant improvement for these deserving retirees-without putting the fiscal burden on the back of our uniformed services members and their families."
- "Our government provides for the security and well-being of those who defend our country-those who risk life and limb-by affording them healthcare and disability compensation when they are physically and/or emotionally diminished as the result of their active military service. Sadly, this is not true for all disabled veterans injured protection our nation's freedom," said National President of Vietnam Veterans of America (**VVA**) John Rowan. "Retirement pay and disability compensation must be awarded to all veterans for injuries they incurred while in service, regardless of time served, as stated in the Retired Pay Restoration Act."
- "Retirement pay and Disability Benefits are two entirely different benefits earned for different reasons," said National Legislative Director of Veterans of Foreign Wars (**VFW**) Pat Murray. "The VFW supports this effort to restore full receipt for veterans who have some of their earned benefits reduced due to unjust offsets. We're thankful for the bipartisan support in Congress to correct this practice and make sure veterans receive their full benefits."
- "Retired, disabled veterans are entitled to VA compensation due to their service-connected conditions just as they are entitled to retired pay or Combat-Related Special Compensation because of their service. The Retired Pay Restoration Act will eliminate offsets that veterans have faced for too long," said Executive Director of AMVETS Joe Chenelly.
- "Veterans with service-connected illnesses and injuries have rightfully earned their military retirement pay and VA disability benefits regardless of their disability level," said Associate Executive Director of Government Relations of Paralyzed Veterans of America (**PVA**) Heather Ansley. "PVA supports the Retired Pay Restoration Act, which eliminates the current system's inequities by expanding eligibility for concurrent receipt to all veterans."
- "**FRA** supports full concurrent receipt for all disabled veterans and this legislation is a big step forward in achieving that goal," said Director of Legislative Programs of Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) John Davis.

Text of the Senators' bill can be found [HERE](#). [Source: VVA in the News | Sen. Jon Tester | Apr 16, 2021 ++]

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 ***



USAF Mission Statement

Update 08: To Fly, Fight, and Win. ... Airpower Anytime, Anywhere.

For the first time in more than a decade, the U.S. Air Force has a new mission statement. The service on 8 APR unveiled its operational goal as, "To fly, fight, and win. ... Airpower anytime, anywhere." "As we developed this new mission statement, we consulted Airmen from across the entire spectrum -- enlisted, officers, reservists, guardsmen and civilians," Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown said in a release accompanying the announcement.

The Air Force added "cyberspace" to its mission statement in 2005, citing growing threats to the nation's network security. That year, the service changed the wording to, "Deliver sovereign options for the defense of the United States of America and its global interests -- to fly and fight in air, space and cyberspace." Then in 2008, it updated its mission statement again to, "Fly, fight and win... in air, space and cyberspace." It wasn't immediately clear how long "space" has been a part of the Air Force mission. But the U.S. Space Force was created in December 2019, taking over the space mission. "The Air Force can now focus solely on Airpower and maintain a sustained focus on core air domain missions," the release states.

The Space Force does not have an official mission statement, but does have a description of its responsibilities. Its motto, "Semper Supra," translates to "always above." An Air Force spokesperson told Military.com that "cyber" was also dropped from the mission statement because "it is a joint capability that all the services contribute to." "The ability to fight and win with Airpower is key to facing emerging competitors and near-peer adversaries," the release states. Leaders said the 689,000 Air Force personnel worldwide contribute to airpower through the service's five core missions: air superiority; global strike; rapid global mobility; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; and command and control.

"Delivering airpower for our nation requires more than just aircraft," Brown said in the release. "It requires total force Airmen -- active-duty, Guard, Reserve, civilians -- in all Air Force specialties working together as a seamless team to operate, maintain, and enable our mission and bring the unique capabilities and effects of airpower to bear." "As the new mission statement was formulated, it was important to us that all Airmen see where they fit in," added Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne Bass. "Every

Airman, from every career field, is directly responsible for delivering, supporting, launching and driving Airpower, which is the culmination of our diverse specialties, expertise and capabilities that make up our great Air Force." [Source: Military.com | Oriana Pawlyk | April 8, 2021 ++]

Military Draft

Update 05: National Coalition For Men v. Selective Service System, No. 20-928

The Biden administration has asked the Supreme Court to decline to hear a lawsuit alleging that America's all-male military draft amounts to unconstitutional discrimination on the basis of sex. In a 26-page brief, the Department of Justice on 14 APR urged the justices to turn down the petition because lawmakers are "actively considering" the scope of the national registration requirement, noting that the court previously said the issue was better suited to Congress than judges. At issue in the case is whether an all-male draft remains legally sound after the Defense Department in 2013 lifted the ban on women serving in combat roles.

Military conditions have changed dramatically since the court upheld the draft law in a 1981 decision in the case of *Rostker v. Goldberg*. The court ruled 6-3 that the Military Selective Service Act's male-only requirement was justified because of women's exclusion from combat roles. Petitioners in the current case, backed by the American Civil Liberties Union, argue that the elimination of sex-based barriers in the military without a concurrent broadening of the draft to include women created unjustified sex-based discrimination against men. The justices are likely to discuss the petition — as well as the Biden administration's opposition to them hearing the case — at a private conference in coming weeks or months. Four or more justices must agree to hear the dispute for a petition to be granted.

A federal judge in Houston ruled in 2019 for the challengers, two men and a group called the National Coalition for Men. A three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit reversed that ruling last year, prompting the challengers appeal to the Supreme Court. The case is *National Coalition For Men v. Selective Service System, No. 20-928*. [Source: The Hill | John Kruzel | April 15, 2021 ++]

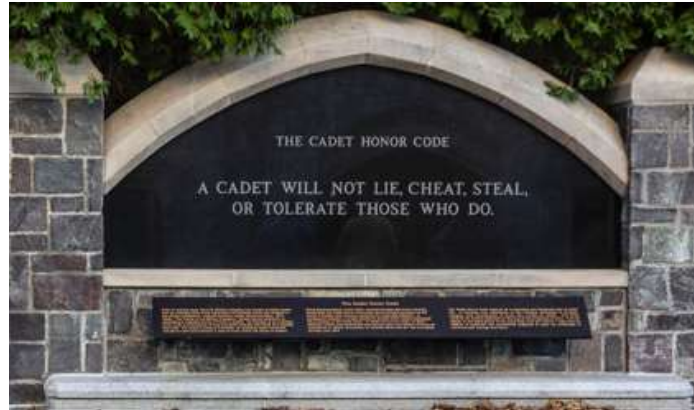
West Point

Update 07: 51 Cadets Caught Cheating Must Repeat a Year

Most of the 73 West Point cadets accused in the biggest cheating scandal in decades at the U.S. Military Academy are being required to repeat a year, and eight were expelled, academy officials said Friday. The cadets were accused of cheating on an online freshman calculus exam in May while students were studying remotely because of the coronavirus pandemic. An investigation was launched after instructors noticed irregularities in answers. All but one were freshmen, or plebes, in a class of 1,200. The other was a sophomore.

Cadets at the centuries-old officer training academy on the Hudson River are bound by an honor code that they "will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do." The cheating scandal is the biggest at West Point since 1976 and preceded the tightening of an academy policy that spared many cadets in this case

from being kicked out. West Point said that of the 73 cases investigated by the cadet honor committee, six cadets resigned during the investigation, four were acquitted by a board of their peers, and two cases were dropped due to insufficient evidence. Most of the cadets, 51, were "turned back" one full year after admitting to cheating, and two were turned back six months. Those cadets are under probation until graduation.



Lt. Gen. Darryl A. Williams, West Point's superintendent, personally adjudicated each case. "The tenets of honorable living remain immutable, and the outcomes of our leader development system remain the same, to graduate Army officers that live honorably, lead honorably and demonstrate excellence," Williams said in a prepared release. "West Point must be the gold standard for developing Army officers. We demand nothing less than impeccable character from our graduates." Eight cadets were removed from the academy. Of those, three accepted the chance to take part in an "academy mentorship program" that allows them to reapply to the academy after serving for up to a year as an enlisted soldier.

The academy also said it will end its 6-year-old "willful admission process," which was used by 55 cadets and is designed to protect cadets who promptly admit to wrongdoing from being kicked out. Officials determined the process was not meeting its goal of increasing self-reporting and decreasing toleration for violations of the honor code. West Point said that 52 of the cadets were athletes, but that none of the guilty cadets are currently representing the academy on teams. The 1976 scandal involved 153 upperclassmen who resigned or were expelled for cheating on an electrical engineering exam. The secretary of the Army appointed a select commission headed by former astronaut Frank Borman to review the case, and more than 90 of those caught cheating were reinstated and allowed to graduate. [Source: | Associated Press | Michael Hill | April 16, 202 ++]

Drone Defense

Update 03: DARPA's Plan to Use Drones to Find Drones

The military is developing a number of counter-drone systems, using technologies such as directed energy, microwaves and more to defeat small unmanned aircraft systems. But in order to hit the drones, the military first needs to be able to see them. That's difficult enough in the desert or in open areas, and it's even harder to do in cities. That's where the Aerial Dragnet program comes in. The wide-area surveillance capability from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency uses sensors mounted on drones to detect, classify

and track small drones in dense urban environments. “We’re using drones to find drones, essentially,” Paul Zablocky, a program manager with the DARPA Strategic Technology Office, said Wednesday during the annual C4ISRNET Conference.



The government is concerned about the various dangers posed by small UAS, which can be armed with explosives or used to collect sensitive information. “A small drone certainly poses a threat, and we’ve seen that at airports. We’ve seen on the news where they’ve been equipped with explosives. We’ve seen them used for ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] capabilities. And these can be used against our soldiers as well as civilian populations, so there’s certainly a threat there, and they are widely available,” explained Zablocky.

DARPA wants Aerial Dragnet to eventually be able to interface with C-sUAS systems, passing along its tracking data from optical sensors, acoustic sensors and inexpensive radars so that the weapon system can defeat the threat. DARPA is targeting a price point of \$20,000 for coverage of 20 square kilometers (about 12 miles), which Zablocky says is relatively cheap compared to other systems. Aerial Dragnet was tested in San Diego in 2019 and more recently in Rosslyn, Virginia. The San Diego event was the first test of the system in a dense urban environment, and Zablocky said he was surprised how much clutter showed up in the data. Using data from that test, DARPA has been able to refine its signal processing algorithms, he said.

That effectively wraps up DARPA’s testing of the system, said Zablocky, and the agency is looking to transition the program to another organization for further testing and development. “We’re in conversations now with transitioning that program over. There’s still a lot of research and development to do,” said Zablocky. “So we’ve brought down a lot of the risks. We’ve — as I said — collected a lot of data and have a much better understanding of what needs to be done, but to really turn this into a capability or product will still take some work, so we are in conversations with various organizations to pick it up and continue to run with it.” [Source: C4ISRNET | Nathan Strout | April 22, 2021 ++]

Nuclear Weapons Arsenal

Update 08: Calls to Scrap Ground-Based Missiles Ongoing

The head of the United States' nuclear arsenal issued a chilling warning on Capitol Hill this week about the country's ability to deter nuclear war. Admiral Charles Richard, commander of U.S. Strategic Command said 20 APR that for the first time in the country's history, the U.S. is now facing two nuclear powers at the

same time: Russia and China – and he can't do it with today's aging stockpile. "I cannot deter with the leftovers from the Cold War forever in the future," Richard, told the Senate Armed Services Committee.



Admiral Charles Richard, Commander, United States Strategic Command

Some Democratic lawmakers are calling to scrap one leg of the nuclear triad – the 400 ground-based missiles currently in silos across three states, North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming. Richard testified that he needs to replace -- not update -- his fleet of 50-year-old Minuteman III missiles. "That is a 70s-era weapons system that I am going to have to employ against 2030-level threats," he said speaking about Russia and China's growing arsenal. He provided an anecdote about the challenges his nuclear forces face. "We are down to two of a particular switch that is required to go in the launch control centers," Richard said. "Nobody knows how to make it anymore. It's obsolete."

In September, the U.S. Air Force announced Northrop Grumman Corporation was selected to modernize the nation's aging Minuteman III missiles with a \$13.3 billion contract for "engineering and manufacturing development" of a new missile called the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD). In a tweet, STRATCOM warned the threat of nuclear war is greater today. "We must account for the possibility of conflict leading to conditions which could very rapidly drive an adversary to consider nuclear use as their least bad option." The nuclear triad consists of ground-based missiles, ballistic-missile submarines, and strategic bombers. The U.S. stopped keeping nuclear-capable bombers on 24-hour alert in 1991. Richard says the U.S. really has a "dyad" today, not a triad.

The plain-spoken naval flag officer from Decatur, Alabama warned lawmakers that if the U.S. got rid of its 400 ground-based missiles, he recommends changing posture. "If you don't have intercontinental ballistic missiles, we can't meet that criteria. You are completely dependent on the submarine leg. I've already told the secretary of defense, under those conditions, I would request to re-alert the bombers."

- A recent report by the Atlantic Council warned against cutting the 400 intercontinental ballistic missiles as well as reducing the number to 300 missiles as some have advocated. "A larger arsenal of ICBMs is critical for deterring a nuclear attack. An attacker faced with fewer US ICBM silos would have an easier time disarming the United States," the report by Matthew Kroenig, Mark J. Massa, Christian Trotti said. "Eliminating one hundred ICBMs would free up additional enemy weapons to target US cities, increasing damage to the United States."
- One nuclear expert in Washington agrees. "We have to work to make sure that our nuclear weapons convince our enemies that the United States has the will and ability to make them regret doing anything really, really stupid," said Rebecca L. Heinrichs, a senior fellow at Hudson Institute where she specializes in nuclear deterrence.

- A former defense secretary under Bill Clinton thinks the ground-based missiles need to go away. "Retiring the ICBMs would save considerable costs, but it isn't only budgets that would benefit. These missiles are some of the most dangerous weapons in the world. They could even trigger an accidental nuclear war," William J. Perry, secretary of defense from 1994 to 1997 said in the New York Times five years ago.

A report from June of last year by the Union of Concerned Scientists said the focus of the U.S. nuclear arsenal should be with its ballistic submarine fleet, which carries 70% of nuclear warheads and "have the advantage of being essentially invulnerable to attack when the submarines are hidden at sea. Yet the United States continues to not only keep its ICBMs, but also maintain them on high alert with a 'launch-on-warning' option, creating unnecessary risks." The report also recommends discontinuing plans to build new nuclear missiles to replace the aging Minuteman III. "The United States should continue to extend the operational life of the Minuteman III missiles and should not build the new GBSM missile."

"You know we're currently spending \$44.5 billion a year on nuclear weapons and I know STRATCOM likes spending that money, but I don't," Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) told Richard during Tuesday's Senate hearing. She reminded him about the purpose of the Biden administration's ongoing nuclear posture and quoted from the report to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our defense strategy. "The entire nuclear deterrent is about 6% of the entire defense budget and the new ICBMs are peanuts inside that small bucket," Heinrichs said. "We can afford the best insurance plan we have to protect the American people and our way of life."

At the hearing, Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) called the idea of getting rid of nuclear weapons a "fanciful idea." "We hear from some misguided and misinformed people on the left who might want to eliminate a leg of our triad or eliminate the entire nuclear forces," Cotton said. "We have used them every single day for 76 years to deter another war like the terrible wars of the first half of the 20th century." In his annual address to the nation, Russian President Vladimir Putin boasted 21 APR that Russia will have modernized over 88% of its nuclear weapons by the end of this year. Richard said the U.S. hasn't started the process. "The threat is only getting worse rapidly," he said. [Source: FoxNews.com | Lucas Y. Tomlinson | April 21, 2021 ++]

Russian Military Strength

Update 03: Submersible Patrol Ship Developed



Russian submarine designer Rubin Design Bureau revealed it has developed a submersible patrol ship combining the features of a submarine and a surface patrol vessel. Named Sentry (Border and Offshore Submersible Sentry, BOSS), the concept is intended for foreign clients, according to Rubin. Offshore patrol vessels are relatively inexpensive, which makes them affordable for countries with constrained budgets. Their operation is profitable because they can be used to prevent illegal trade, poaching and other law infringements. Ships of this type are multi-functional and can be used as patrol ships, and as rescue or research vessels as well. Equipment for the new ship comes mostly from surface ships and aircraft and is commercially available, the company said.

As explained, the ability to dive allows the ship to carry out discreet surveillance operations and evade harsh weather conditions without aborting the mission. A submersible ship can be used as a submarine, for intelligence, surveillance & reconnaissance (ISR), as well as other missions. Seabed research capability of the submersible patrol ship would be wider than those of a surface ship. It can also serve as an inexpensive training vessel to give crews seagoing experience and prepare the infrastructure before purchasing traditional submarines at a later stage. In its architecture and outline, the ship resembles the Soviet Union's Whiskey-class diesel-electric attack submarines (Project 613).

Basic parameters are also much the same, with the surface displacement of around 1,000 tons, overall length of 60 to 70 metres depending on the configuration, and the crew of up to 42 people including the boarding team. There will be large pressure-proof containers that can be used to store rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIBs) or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The latter's launch sequence will be automated, not requiring the presence of people on the ship's open deck. The ship can be fitted with torpedoes, small guided missiles and autocannon. [Source: USSVI Tucson Base | Naida Hakirevic | April 16, 2021 ++]

Indonesia Lost Sub Wreckage Located | All Hands Died



Indonesia's military on Sunday officially said all 53 crew members from a submarine that sank and broke apart last week are dead, and that search teams had located the vessel's wreckage on the ocean floor. The grim announcement came a day after Indonesia said the submarine was considered sunk, not merely missing, but did not explicitly say whether the crew was dead. Officials had also said the KRI Nanggala 402's oxygen supply would have run out early Saturday 24 APR, three days after the vessel went missing off the resort island of Bali.

"We received underwater pictures that are confirmed as the parts of the submarine, including its rear vertical rudder, anchors, outer pressure body, embossed dive rudder and other ship parts," military chief

An underwater robot equipped with cameras found the lost submarine lying in at least three pieces on the ocean floor at a depth of 2,750 feet, said Adm. Yudo Margono, the navy's chief of staff. That's much deeper than the KRI Nanggala 402's collapse depth of 655 feet, at which point water pressure would be greater than the hull could withstand, according to earlier navy statements. Margono said emergency survival suits that are normally kept in boxes were found floating underwater, apparently indicated the crew may have tried to put them on during the emergency.

The cause of the submarine's sinking remains uncertain. The navy had previously said an electrical failure could have left the submarine unable to execute emergency procedures to resurface. The KRI Nanggala was conducting a torpedo-firing exercise in waters north of Bali when it was reported missing. The wreckage is located 1,500 meters to the south of the site where the submarine last dove 21 APR, Margono said. Photos of the debris were presented at the news conference. The underwater robot deployed by Singaporean vessel MV Swift Rescue provided the images, while the Indonesian vessel KRI Rigel had scanned the area where the submarine was believed to have sunk using multibeam sonar and a magnetometer, Tjahjanto said.

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo delivered his condolences in a televised address Sunday. "All Indonesians convey deep sorrow for this tragedy, especially to all of the families of the submarine's crew. They are the best sons of the nation, patriots guarding the sovereignty of the country," Widodo said. An American reconnaissance plane, a P-8 Poseidon, landed 24 APR and had been set to join the search, along with 20 Indonesian ships, a sonar-equipped Australian warship and four Indonesian aircraft. The German-built diesel-powered KRI Nanggala 402 had been in service in Indonesia since 1981 and was carrying 49 crew members and three gunners as well as its commander, the Indonesian Defense Ministry said.

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago nation with more than 17,000 islands, has faced growing challenges to its maritime claims in recent years, including numerous incidents involving Chinese vessels near the Natuna islands. Indonesian naval officials have confirmed that the next step will be to look at how to recover the wreckage, acknowledging that any such attempt would be a delicate and difficult undertaking, although recovery operations have been successfully carried out from deeper and more hazardous waters before, such as the salvage of the wreckage of the Russian submarine Kursk, which sank in the Barents Sea following a torpedo explosion in 2000. [Source: Associated Press & Fadlan Syam | Edna Tarigan | Associated Press April 4, 2021| ++]

Douglas Munro (WHEC 724)

Decommissioned But Name Lives On



The Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Munro (WHEC 724) was decommissioned during a ceremony 24 APR at Coast Guard Base Kodiak and presided over by Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz. The Douglas Munro was the Coast Guard's last remaining 378-foot Hamilton-class high-endurance cutter. The fleet of high-endurance cutters is being replaced by 418-foot Legend-class national security cutters, which serve as the Coast Guard's primary long-range asset.

Commissioned in 1971, Douglas Munro was the tenth of 12 high-endurance cutters built for long-range, high-endurance missions, including maritime security roles, drug interdiction, illegal migrant interception and fisheries patrols. The cutter was named after Signalman 1st Class Douglas Albert Munro, who was awarded the Medal of Honor for acts of extraordinary heroism during World War II. Munro was the officer-in-charge of an eight-craft amphibious landing force during the Guadalcanal Campaign and used his landing craft and its .30 caliber machine gun to shield and protect several hundred Marines who were under heavy enemy fire. He was mortally wounded during this effort, but his actions allowed for the Marines to be extracted by other landing craft. For these actions Munro was posthumously bestowed the Medal of Honor, making him the only person to receive the medal for actions performed during service in the Coast Guard.

“Today we say thank you and goodbye to the end of an era — an era of nearly 50 years when high endurance cutters took our service's racing stripe around the globe, modeling the maritime rules-based order,” said Schultz during the ceremony. “Today we say thank you and goodbye to cutter Douglas Munro — the first cutter to be named after Coast Guard hero — Signalman First Class Douglas Munro.” Over the past 49-years of distinguished service, Douglas Munro's crews have served in a multitude of domestic and international theaters including the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska, Persian Gulf and Horn of Africa, and Southeast Asia and the Eastern Pacific. The cutters proud legacy of honorable service to the nation began in the early 1970s patrolling Ocean Stations Delta, Bravo and November, providing weather data to trans-Pacific flights, supporting oceanographic research missions and performing search-and-rescue operations.

The crew of Douglas Munro also patrolled the Pacific for decades as an enforcer of fisheries regulations. In 1998, Douglas Munro's crew discovered and seized over 11.5 tons of cocaine from a Mexican flagged vessel, the Xolesuiente, in what remains to this day one of the largest single drug seizures in Coast Guard history. The following year, Douglas Munro's crew seized the motor vessel Wing Fung Lung, which was attempting to transport 259 illegal Chinese migrants to the United States. In early 2005, at the beginning of a six-month, 37,000 mile global circumnavigation that included support to Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, the crew of Douglas Munro was diverted to render assistance to countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami on December 26, 2004.

The legacy of Douglas Munro was epitomized on March 23, 2008 when the cutter's crew and their embarked MH-65 Aviation Detachment worked with a forward deployed Air Station Kodiak MH-60 helicopter crew to recover 20 survivors from the fishing vessel Alaska Ranger that sank in the Bering Sea early that morning. The 17th Coast Guard District commander at the time of the rescue, Rear Adm. Arthur Brooks, declared it “One of the greatest search and rescue efforts in modern history.”

“Serving as the final crew aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Munro, the last 378-foot cutter in the Coast Guard has been an exciting and rewarding experience for myself and my shipmates,” said Capt. Riley Gatewood, commanding officer of the Douglas Munro. “During my time aboard I have witnessed the sacrifices of the crew as they spent time away from their loved ones in service to their country. This dedication echoes the hard work put forth by our predecessors during the cutter's 49-years of service and

embodies the ship's motto 'Honoring the past by serving the present.' While Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Munro is being decommissioned, I know that the legacy and service of Signaller 1st Class Douglas Albert Munro lives on in the Coast Guard men and women serving around the world today, and in the national security cutter Munro that continues to bear his name."

Munro's legacy does not disappear with the decommissioning of the high endurance cutter Munro, however. Since 2017, the service has had two ships named Munro: the National Security Cutter Munro, part of the Legend Class built to take on the missions of the retiring high-endurance cutters, was commissioned in April that year. Of the Coast Guard's white-hull patrol cutter fleet, the NSC is the largest and most technologically sophisticated in the Coast Guard. Each NSC is capable of operating in the most demanding open ocean environments, including the hazardous fisheries of the North Pacific and the vast approaches of the Southern Pacific where much of the American narcotics traffic occurs. With robust Command, Control, Communication, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) equipment, stern boat launch and aviation facilities, as well as long-endurance station keeping, the NSCs are afloat operational-level headquarters for complex law enforcement and national security missions involving multiple Coast Guard and partner agency participation. [Source: www.military.com & Seapower | Patricia Kime | April 26, 2021 ++]

Military Justice | Westmoreland

Negligent Homicide | Drunk Behind the Wheel

A night of heavy drinking with fellow airmen that ended in a deadly car crash two years ago has landed a Spangdahlem airman in jail for three years and ended his military career. Senior Airman **Jade A. Westmoreland** was sentenced after pleading guilty to negligent homicide and related charges at a Spangdahlem court-martial 26 APR before military judge Col. Charles Wiedie. Westmoreland also received a bad-conduct discharge and a reduction to E-1. The senior airman admitted to being drunk behind the wheel on April 20, 2019, when he veered into the opposite lane and collided with a car carrying two local German men.

Kevin Schneider died at the scene of the wreck near Speicher, a village about seven miles southwest of Spangdahlem. His cousin, Pascal Mayer, sustained serious injuries. "He was a happy guy," Schneider's mother, Petra Marx, said about her only son in tearful testimony. "He was helpful. He loved playing soccer and he loved his family." Schneider was married with two daughters and a son on the way. Westmoreland, assigned to the 52nd Maintenance Squadron, apologized to the victims and their families. He faced a maximum of six years in jail based on his guilty pleas to the charges, which also included reckless endangerment, and driving a vehicle while drunk and causing injury. A fourth charge of involuntary manslaughter was withdrawn as part of the plea agreement.

Prosecutors asked for a minimum of four years. "This wasn't a freak accident," said Capt. Cynthia McGrath, a military lawyer for the government. "Every single decision the accused made that night put him in that car in the wrong lane." The victims and their families "deserve more than an apology," she said. Westmoreland told the judge he went out the evening before the crash with other airmen after working a long shift that was part of a base exercise. He estimated consuming about seven mixed drinks and additional whiskey shots over five hours.

Prosecutors filled in more detail, describing how Westmoreland and his friends had several rounds before going to Kajutes, a bar a few minutes' drive from the base. A nearly empty whiskey bottle was later recovered in Westmoreland's car, prosecutors said. Most of the airmen in Westmoreland's group took a taxi home around 3 a.m. But Westmoreland told the judge he couldn't afford a taxi because of expenses from a recent off-base move. He said he stayed at the bar drinking with "Sergeant Brown," who was described in court as Westmoreland's supervisor. Westmoreland drove Brown home around 5:30 a.m. and sat in his Volvo S40 talking with him in his driveway. When Brown didn't invite him to stay over, Westmoreland said he continued driving but pulled over and passed out for about 90 minutes.

That Westmoreland gave an airman "two ranks above him" a ride home should be a mitigating factor in sentencing, his defense attorney said. It was unclear whether Brown was disciplined for letting Westmoreland drive drunk. The crash happened around 8 a.m., a few minutes after Westmoreland got back on the road. His speed was estimated at 52 mph. Prosecutors said Westmoreland's blood alcohol content was .109 a few hours later at the hospital, and approximately .19 at the time of the crash. The legal limit in Germany is .05. Westmoreland recalled hearing a "huge crash sound" and seeing "red dust."

McGrath said Mayer, who was driving the other car, tried to swerve, but there was nothing he could do. Westmoreland's car "obliterated the right side of his car," she said, adding Schneider "never stood a chance." Mayer has had multiple surgeries to repair a fractured arm and has not recovered full use of one of his hands, according to court testimony. He still suffers from anxiety when driving, he wrote in a victim impact statement. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Jennifer H. Svan | April 27, 2021 ++]

Briar Death Benefits Lawsuit

Marine Drowning Leads to Intended's Lawsuit for Benefits

The tragic 2019 drowning death of Marine Master Sgt. Jeff Briar off the San Diego coast on 22 SEP has sparked a legal battle. Briar drowned attempting to rescue two children caught in the rip current near San Diego. At the time of his death Jeff Briar was a member of Headquarters Battalion, Tactical Training Exercise Control Group, in Twentynine Palms, California. While he and his intended did not have a marriage license prior to the ceremony that day, Jennifer Crowley, now Jennifer Briar, maintains he was at the beach that day for their wedding ceremony. Jeff Briar's mother, Debbie Robinson, however, previously told Marine Corps Times that the ceremony was not a wedding but something closer to a promise ceremony, emphasizing that the couple did not have a marriage license.

Eventually the Supreme Court of the State of California issued an order establishing that Briar and Crowley were legally married as of Sept. 22, 2019. Because of the lack of marriage license, Briar's parents were treated as next of kin by the Marine Corps, giving them the ability to decide on his burial and ultimately led to them receiving the Marine's Servicemember's Group Life Insurance benefits, also known as SGLI. His parents requested he be buried in Arlington National Cemetery, while Jennifer Briar said his final wishes were that he be cremated. He was eventually cremated and his ashes were split between his parents and his widow, Jennifer Briar told Marine Corps Times in mid-March.

On 19 MAR, Jennifer Briar filed a lawsuit against the Marine Corps attempting to claim the Marine's SGLI and have the Marine Corps enroll her into the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or

DEERS. “The Marine Corps unconstitutionally refused to recognize Mrs. Briar’s marriage to Mr. Briar,” the lawsuit reads. “The Marine Corps’ refusal to enter Mrs. Briar into DEERS, to certify and process her SGLI paperwork, and to otherwise recognize her as MSgt Briar’s spouse and afford her any of the benefits to which a military spouse is entitled, based on the conclusion that she and MSgt Briar were not married, is unconstitutional,” it adds. The Marine Corps has no comment on the case due to “pending litigation,” said Yvonne Carlock, a spokeswoman for Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

“This is a unique case because outside of TSGLI (Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection), Christopher Brochu, a lawyer who represents service members who make insurance claims, told Marine Corps Times on Thursday. “Most SGLI litigation involves Prudential, not the Marine Corps.” Jennifer Briar told Marine Corps Times that her husband wanted her to be a stay-at-home mother, so when he died and she did not receive his benefits she was immediately put in a difficult financial position. “I had to uproot my children from California to move to North Carolina, to be with my daughter and her husband who was an active-duty Marine, it’s just been very difficult,” she said.

If she is given access to the \$400,000 SGLI payout, Jennifer Briar said she would use it to invest in her children’s future. Jennifer Briar’s lawyer, Antoinette Quinn O’Neill, said filing the lawsuit was a last resort after repeated inaction by the Marine Corps. “Our hope is ... a lawyer is going to look at this and say, ‘Yes they are clearly married we have no reason not to put her into the system and recognize her as a spouse’ and it can just be settled without having to go through anything further,” the lawyer told Marine Corps Times in a phone interview. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Philip Athey | April 28, 2021 ++]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang

‘Snorkers’ thru ‘SpecOps’

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

Snorkers - (RN) Sausages.

Snotty - (RN) Derogatory term for a midshipman. Supposedly due to the "young gentlemen’s" habit of wiping their noses with their sleeves. The navy attempted to counter this habit by sewing buttons on the cuffs of naval uniform jackets.

SNUB – Shortest Nuke Onboard

Sod’s Opera – (UK) An impromptu variety show put on by the ship’s company, usually of a bawdy nature.

Soft Deck – (Aviation) A safety altitude below which certain maneuvers are prohibited during ACM. Expressed as feet AGL. Typically 5,000 feet AGL. See also HARD DECK.

Sonar Dome – The generally onion-shaped structure at a surface ship's bow which houses the sonar transducer.

Sonar Girls - Submarine sonar operators. The rate is STS. The term is somewhat derogatory, and refers to behavioral and hygiene habits. Minus the behavioral quirks, the equivalent rates are ST (surface) and AW (aviation).

Son of a Gun – Traditionally, a male child born (or conceived) afloat. An archaic term from the days of sail, when crewmen were typically not let ashore for fear of desertion. Women were let aboard (the regulation said "wives", but this was immediately and widely ignored, or at least winked at), and even carried at sea at times.

SOP – Standard Operating Procedure.

SOS – Shit On a Shingle, i.e. creamed chipped beef on toast.

SOSUS – SOund SURveillance System. A land-based system of seabed hydrophones and sophisticated analysis equipment, used to monitor worldwide movements of ships and submarines.

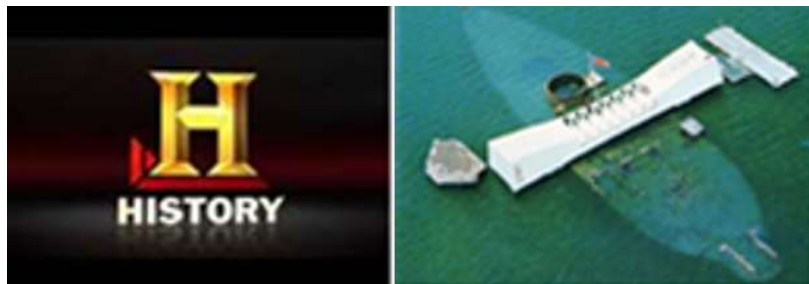
Spanner - (RN) Wrench.

Sparker, Sparks - (RN) Radio operator.

SpecOps - Special Operations. Any mention of SpecOps is generally followed with "If I told you, I'd have to kill you."

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | April 30, 2021 ++]

* Military History *



WWI Aviation

How the Fokker Scourge Came About

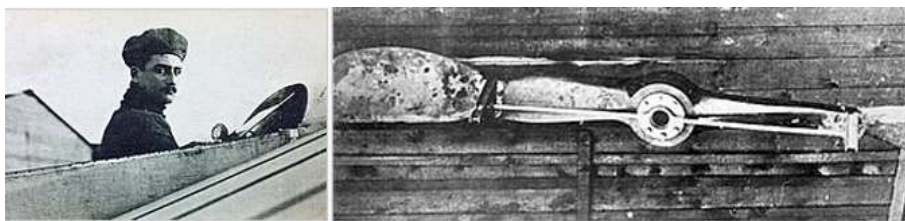
In the early stages of the air war in World War I, the problem of mounting a forward-firing machine gun on combat aircraft was considered by several people. French aviator Eugène Garros was involved in

solving the problem. Garros had gained fame on 23 September 1913 for making the first non-stop flight across the Mediterranean Sea from Fréjus-Saint Raphaël in the south of France to Bizerte in Tunisia in a Morane-Saulnier G monoplane. The following year, Garros joined the French army at the outbreak of World War I.

Reports published in August 1914 claimed Garros was involved in the "first air battle in world history" and that he had flown his plane into a Zeppelin, destroying the airship and killing its pilots and himself. This story was quickly contradicted by reports that Garros was alive and well in Paris. Such early reports maintained that an unidentified French pilot had indeed rammed and destroyed a Zeppelin, however, German authorities denied the story. Later sources indicated the first aerial victory against a Zeppelin occurred in June 1915 and earlier reports, including that of Garros, had been discounted.

As a reconnaissance pilot with the Escadrille MS26, Garros had made several attempts at shooting down German aircraft, however these efforts were unsuccessful due to the difficulty in hitting an aircraft with a hand-held carbine and he visited the Morane-Saulnier works in late 1914 to discuss the problem. Raymond Saulnier had begun work on a synchronizer before World War I and had taken out a patent for a workable mechanism by 14 April 1914, however circumstances beyond his control resulted in its being tested with the Hotchkiss 09/13 portable machine gun, which proved unsuitable due to an inconsistent firing rate. As a workaround, Garros, with the help of his mechanic, Jules Hue, developed protective wedges, which were fitted to the slightly narrowed propeller blades which deflected the occasional round which would have otherwise struck the propeller.

With a workable installation now fitted to his Morane-Saulnier Type L parasol monoplane, Garros achieved the first ever shooting-down of an aircraft by a fighter firing through a tractor propeller, on 1 April 1915 and two more victories over German aircraft were achieved on 15 and 18 APR. On 18 APR Garros was hit by ground fire, and he came down in German-controlled territory. Although Garros attempted to burn his aircraft after force-landing behind German lines, this was not sufficient to conceal the nature of the device. The significance of the deflector blades was immediately appreciated by the German authorities, who quickly requested several aircraft manufacturers, including Anthony Fokker, who had been working on a system for at least six months, to produce a copy.



Garros in an aircraft cockpit and the propeller, with its bullet defectors, after being recovered from his downed aircraft

Fokker's answer was a genuine synchronization gear, known in German as the Stangensteuerung (push rod controller), using impulses from a cam on the aircraft's motor to control the firing of the machine gun so that it did not (so long as the gear functioned properly) hit the propeller at all. This was not the first such gear proposed – but it was the first one to be actually fitted to an aircraft and proved in flight. It was rapidly fitted to the most suitable existing Fokker type, the M.5K, (military designation A.III), of which Otto Parschau's A.16/15 example became, in essence, the prototype of the E.I. With the Fokker's introduction of an interrupter gear, the tables were turned on the Allies, with Fokker's aircraft shooting down many Allied aircraft, leading to what became known as the Fokker Scourge.

What is usually counted as the first day of the Fokker Scourge proper is 1 AUG, when at 5 AM, the B.E.2c aircraft of No. 2 Squadron RFC bombed the base of FFA 62, waking the sleeping German pilots. Oswald Boelcke was quickly in the air after the raiders; Max Immelmann soon followed. Boelcke suffered a gun jam, but Immelmann caught one of the raiders and succeeded in shooting him down. His victory was over an unarmed B.E.2c - no observer was carried in order to give the underpowered British machine a respectable bomb load, and the pilot answered Immelmann's machine gun fire with his automatic pistol. The "fight" took about 10 minutes of maneuvering and Immelmann fired 450 rounds, riddling his opponent's machine, and wounding him in the arm.

Boelcke and Immelmann continued to score – as did Hans Joachim Buddecke, Ernst von Althaus and Rudolph Berthold, all from FFA 23, and Kurt von Crailsheim of FFA 53. In spite of this, the "official" list of victories over Allied aircraft (many of them French) claimed by Fokker pilots for the whole second half of 1915 was 28; 13 of these belonged to either Immelmann or Boelcke; the total number of victorious Fokker pilots being just nine. January 1916 brought another further 13 claimed victories, most of them French; February, and the last month when German air superiority was more or less unchallenged, brought fewer than 20 more. Most victories still belonged to the established aces; few of the newer pilots flying the increased number of Fokkers were scoring.

Although these casualties were very low by later standards, the fact that the Germans were fighting back in the air, and that they possessed a new, supposedly invincible aircraft (whose capabilities were often exaggerated) caused considerable consternation among the Allied commanders, as well as problems in the morale of Allied airmen. The German Command was concerned that their invention would be discovered, and German fighters were forbidden to fly over Allied lines. This policy was generally continued, for various reasons, until the end of the war. While there were a number of tactical advantages in this approach, the effect of German air superiority was often blunted by the fact that German fighters were rarely encountered on the Allied side of the lines.

The beginning of the end of the Fokker Scourge proper was the Battle of Verdun. At the time of the start of the battle on 21 February 1916, the German air superiority created by the Fokkers meant that the preparations for the launching of the initial German offensive were largely concealed from French aerial reconnaissance, with the use of a systematic blockade on the French air squadrons called *Luftsperr*, relying as much on chasing their opponents away as actually shooting them down. However during the course of the battle, the new French fighter, the Nieuport 11 was assigned to this sector in increasing quantities. The Nieuports were not only superior to the German Eindeckers in almost every aspect of performance and combat effectiveness, they greatly outnumbered them, as they arrived at the front in specialist fighter squadrons – enabling formations larger than the singletons or pairs normally flown by the Fokkers. Before the end of the Battle, air superiority had been effectively reversed, the French now having the upper hand.

After almost three years in captivity in various German POW camps Garros managed to escape on 14 February 1918 together with fellow aviator lieutenant Anselme Marchal. They made it to London via the Netherlands and from there he returned to France where he rejoined the French army. He settled into Escadrille 26 to pilot a SPAD, and claimed two victories on 2 October 1918, one of which was confirmed. On 5 October 1918, he was shot down and killed near Vouziers, Ardennes, a month before the end of the war and one day before his 30th birthday. His adversary was probably German ace Hermann Habich from

Jasta 49, flying a Fokker D.VII. [Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Garros_%28aviator%29 | April 18, 2021 ++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

Daniel D. Bruce | Vietnam



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

MEDAL OF HONOR

To

Pfc. Daniel D. Bruce

Organization: Headquarters & Service Company, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division
(Rein) FMF Battalion, 3d Special Forces Group (Airborne)

Place and date: March 1, 1969 Fire Support Base Tomahawk, Quang Nam Province, Republic of
Vietnam

Entered service: May 16, 1968

Born: May 18, 1950, Michigan City, La Porte County, IN, United States



Marine Corps Pfc. Daniel D. Bruce was just a teenager when he gave his life to save others during the Vietnam War. His selfless actions kept him from returning home, but they also earned him the Medal of Honor and a legacy that's made his family proud. Bruce was born May 18, 1950, in Michigan City, Indiana, about an hour east of Chicago. He had three brothers and a sister and was the eldest of the group, which could be why helping others seemed to be in his nature. According to his family, when Bruce was 16, he tried to save a drowning boy during a church outing. Bruce's sister, Karen, said he tried to stay with the boy for as long as he could, but he eventually got tired and had to give up so they weren't both pulled under. Despite the teen's best efforts, the boy didn't make it.

Two years later — just days after turning 18 and graduating high school — Bruce enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve. The Vietnam War was in full swing, so, on July 17, 1968, he transferred to the active-duty Marines. After months of training, Bruce was promoted to private first class on Jan. 1, 1969, and ordered to Vietnam later that month. Before he left, he married his high school sweetheart, Carol. Upon arrival to Southeast Asia, Bruce was assigned the role of anti-tank assaultman with Headquarters and Service Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division.

On March 1, 1969, Bruce and another Marine were on a late-night watch in a set position at Fire Support Base Tomahawk when Bruce heard movement in some nearby woods. A bundle of explosives was then heaved in their direction. Reacting instantly, Bruce caught the bundle and shouted for his partner and two other nearby Marines to take cover. Holding the device close to his chest, the 18-year-old ran from the area to try to get clear. The bomb detonated while he was on the move, killing him. Bruce had only been on deployment for about a month, but he had given his life to save three others.

The following day, Bruce's wife, Carol, gave birth to their daughter, Stacey. They wouldn't learn of his death until nearly a week later. Bruce's body was returned home and buried in Greenwood Cemetery in his hometown. On Feb. 16, 1971, Bruce's family received the Medal of Honor on his behalf from President Richard M. Nixon during a White House ceremony. Eleven other service members who had given their life for the cause also received the nation's highest honor that day.

Bruce's memory has lived on much longer than he was actually alive. In June 1976, his parents cut the ribbon at a new dining facility, Bruce Hall, at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia. In the 1980s, a monument to the fallen Marine was erected in Michigan City's Memorial Plaza. He is also remembered at the town's Disabled American Veterans Post 23, where another memorial was dedicated to him on March 1, 2019 — the 50th anniversary of his death. His Medal of Honor is on display there. Along with the names of other Vietnam veterans, Bruce's name can be found on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmoahs.org> | Katie Lange | March 1, 2021 ++]

Haym Salomon

American Revolutionary War Prime Financier



Haym Salomon was born in Leszno, Poland, in 1740 to a Sephardic Jewish family descended from Spanish and Portuguese Jews who migrated to the Jewish communities of Poland as a result of Ferdinand and Isabella's expulsion of the Jews in 1492. In 1775, he immigrated to New York City, where he established himself as a financial broker for merchants engaged in overseas trade. Sympathizing with the Patriot cause, Salomon joined the New York branch of the Sons of Liberty. In September 1776, he was arrested as a spy. The British pardoned him, but only after requiring him to spend 18 months on a British boat as an

interpreter for Hessian soldiers – German troops employed by the British. Salomon used his position to help prisoners of war from the Continental Army escape and encouraged the Hessians to desert the war effort.

In 1778 Salomon was arrested again and sentenced to death. Again, he managed to escape, making his way with his family to the revolutionary capital in Philadelphia. Once resettled, Salomon resumed his activities as a broker. He became the agent to the French consul as well as the paymaster for the French forces in North America. In 1781, he began working extensively with Robert Morris, the newly appointed Superintendent for Finance for the Thirteen Colonies. From the period of 1781–1784, records show Salomon's fundraising and personal lending helped provide over \$650,000 (approximately over \$9.4 billion in 2017 dollars) in financing to George Washington in his war effort. His most meaningful financial contribution, however, came immediately prior to the final revolutionary war battle at Yorktown.

In August 1781, the Continental Army trapped Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis in the Virginia coastal town of Yorktown. George Washington and the main army and Count de Rochambeau with his French army decided to march from the Hudson Highlands to Yorktown and deliver the final blow. But Washington's war chest was completely empty, as was that of Congress. Without food, uniforms and supplies, Washington's troops were close to mutiny. Washington determined that he needed at least \$20,000 to finance the campaign. When Morris told him there were no funds and no credit available, Washington gave him a simple but eloquent order: "Send for Haym Salomon". Salomon raised \$20,000, through the sale of bills of exchange. With that contribution, Washington conducted the Yorktown campaign, which proved to be the final battle of the Revolution.

Salomon brokered the sale of a majority of the war aid from France and the Dutch Republic, selling bills of exchange to American merchants. Salomon also personally supported various members of the Continental Congress during their stay in Philadelphia, including James Madison and James Wilson. He requested below-market interest rates, and he never asked for repayment. Salomon is believed to have granted outright bequests to men that he thought were unsung heroes of the revolution who had become impoverished during the war. One example is Bodo Otto, a senior surgeon in the continental army. Otto joined the army at the age of 65 and served for the entire war. Among other things, he established the hospital at Valley Forge, where he often used his own funds to purchase medical supplies. Due to Salomon's bequest, Otto was able to rebuild his medical practice in Reading, Pennsylvania, at war's end.

The Treaty of Paris, signed on September 3, 1783, ended the Revolutionary War but not the financial problems of the newly established nation. America's war debt to France was never properly repaid, which was part of the cascade of events leading to the French Revolution. The financier died suddenly and in poverty on January 8, 1785, in Philadelphia. Due to the failure of governments and private lenders to repay the debt incurred by the war, his family was left penniless at his death at age 44. The hundreds of thousands of dollars of Continental debt Salomon bought with his own fortune were worth only about 10 cents on the dollar when he died.

His obituary in the Independent Gazetteer read, "Thursday, last, expired, after a lingering illness, Mr. Haym Salomon, an eminent broker of this city, was a native of Poland, and of the Hebrew nation. He was remarkable for his skill and integrity in his profession, and for his generous and humane deportment. His remains were yesterday deposited in the burial ground of the synagogue of this city." There is a legend that during the design process of the Great Seal, Washington asked what compensation Salomon wanted

in return for his financial contributions to the American Revolutionary War. He replied that "he wanted nothing for himself but that he wanted something for his people".

While there is no evidence, there is a theory that the 13 stars representing the colonies on the seal were arranged in the shape of the Star of David in commemoration of Solomon's contributions. This appears to have little basis in fact, however, although it is oft-repeated. In 1975, the United States Postal Service issued a commemorative stamp honoring Haym Salomon for his contributions to the cause of the American Revolution. This stamp, like others in the "Contributors to the Cause" series, was printed on the front and the back. On the glue side of the stamp, the following words were printed in pale green ink: "Financial Hero – Businessman and broker Haym Salomon was responsible for raising most of the money needed to finance the American Revolution and later to save the new nation from collapse". [Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haym_Salomon | April 18, 2021 ++]

Military History Anniversaries

01 thru 15 MAY

Significant events in U. S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 MAY**". [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | April 2021 ++]

Legends of WWII

Harry Martin | Iwo Jima First Wave Marine



In this WWII veteran interview USMC Vet Harry Martin, tells his story. He came ashore as a Light Machine Gunner in the first wave of the Battle of Iwo Jima. Despite being shot in the face and temporarily losing vision in one eye, he continued fighting every day of the battle, which lasted more than a month. Martin describes the challenge of shooting at the Japanese without being able to see any of them, what it was like going in the Japanese caves, and his thoughts about the flag raising atop Mt. Suribachi in the 22 minute video at <https://youtu.be/lsM0hr10sWg>. [Source: Legends of WWII | June 16, 2020 ++]

Every Picture Tells A Story

Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, Germany



A British soldier reads a sign erected by British forces at the entrance of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, Germany. (1945) Following the end of German occupation of Europe, British forces erected signs at the entrances to concentration camps that not only displayed the prowess of British forces but also explained the devastation that the Germans brought to the area. When British troops came upon the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on April 15, 1945 they were completely unprepared for what was waiting for them. [They discovered 38,000 prisoners](#) who were clinging onto life with no food, water, or lavatories. In an overflow camp there were 15,000 more prisoners waiting for the British troops. The liberation of the camp was the first of many triumphant moments for the British Army.

USS Nevada

Update 02: Sunk at Pearl Harbor, Went to War on D-Day



Just under a year ago, a deep-sea exploration found the wreck of an American battleship in 15,400 feet of water, more than three miles beneath the Pacific Ocean. She had been previously sunk on December 7, 1941, during the attack on Pearl Harbor, returned to duty to take part in the Normandy invasion on D-Day, and later conducted bombardments against the Japanese-controlled islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. After the war, this once-majestic warship was painted orange and used as a test ship at the Bikini Atoll atomic bomb detonations in 1946. Yet she survived.

Few warships in American history have such a colorful career as USS Nevada (BB-36), the first of a class of two 27,500-ton battleships. Commissioned in March 1916, she operated in the waters of the Western Atlantic and the Caribbean until mid-1918 when she headed to the British Isles for service at the end of the First World War. Modernized from 1927 to 1930, Nevada was fitted with a new superstructure, her five-inch secondary battery was relocated and new anti-aircraft guns installed. She was more powerful and better protected than ever when she was returned to duty with the U.S. Battle Fleet, operating mainly in the Pacific. Only the second United States Navy vessel to be named for the 36th state, she was considered a leap forward in dreadnought technology, featuring triple gun turrets, using oil in place of coal for fuel and featuring the “all or nothing” armor principle. The Nevada-class was seen as the first U.S. Navy’s “standard-type” of battleships.

Along with the rest of the U.S. Navy’s Pacific Fleet battleships – which were all in port for the weekend for the first time since July 4, 1941 – USS Nevada came under attack on December 7, 1941. While she was the eldest, even if just by a few months, of the battleships in port that day, she was also the only battleship to get underway. She had already been hit by a torpedo and several bombs, when she began to steam down the channel, past the doomed USS Arizona, toward the Navy Yard. She ran aground on the Navy Yard side of the channel, just south of Ford Island. Her crew fought many fires and with the help of tugs, she was moved to the other side of the channel. She soon settled to the bottom of the fairly shallow water of the channel.

Vigorous salvage work along with temporary repairs enabled the aging battle wagon to steam back to the West Coast in the spring of 1941. At the Puget Sound Navy Yard, she received repairs and improvements including greatly enhanced anti-aircraft batteries. She returned to combat in May 1943 and took part in the Attu landings to liberate the occupied Alaskan islands, and then was transferred to the Atlantic, where she served as a convoy escort. USS Nevada became the only battleship to have been at both Pearl Harbor during the attack and to take part in the June 6, 1944 landings on Normandy. She was praised for “incredibly accurate” fire support, hitting targets just 600 yards from the front lines. The battleship then took part in operations in the South of France in August and September of that year, before returning to the Pacific, where she assisted with the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

Neither Nazi Germany nor the Japanese was able to sink her – a Japanese kamikaze did hit her as well as a Japanese artillery shell – and after the war the U.S. tried something even bigger. Too old for the post-war fleet, she was assigned to serve as a target in the July 1946 atomic bomb tests at Bikini in the Marshall Islands. She survived a pair of tests, and it was finally on July 31, 1948, that the radioactive warship was used in a four-day naval gunfire exercise. The ship that was too tough to die was finally sunk sixty-five miles southwest of Pearl Harbor.

Last year, the wreck of Nevada was found by a mission conducted by SEARCH and Ocean Infinity. They found a debris field stretched some 2,000 feet from the hull. “Nevada is an iconic ship that speaks to American resilience and stubbornness,” said Dr. James Delgado, SEARCH’s senior vice president and lead

maritime archaeologist on the mission. “Rising from its watery grave after being sunk at Pearl Harbor, it survived torpedoes, bombs, shells, and two atomic blasts,” added Delgado. “The physical reality of the ship, resting in the darkness of the great museum of the sea, reminds us not only of past events but of those who took up the challenge of defending the United States in two global wars. This is why we do ocean exploration – to seek out those powerful connections to the past.” [Source: *19FortyFive* | Peter Suci | April 20, 2021 ++]

WWII Bomber Nose Art

[74] Double Trouble 3



WWII Fortress Norway

Josef Terboven's Reign



Josef Terboven, one of the most notorious Nazis, became “Reichskomissar” for Norway in 1940, even before German troops completed the occupation of that country. He moved into Skaugum, the official residence of the Crown Prince of Norway, in September 1940 and made his headquarters in Stortinget (the

Norwegian parliament building). For many years he held the high function of “Reichskommissar” where he was virtually a dictator during the German occupation. He could rule practically by his own accord, which he, it seems, exploited abundantly. Terboven was one of the early Nazis. He had joined the Nazi Party (NSDAP) in 1923, i.e. the same year as Heinrich Himmler. Terboven married Joseph Goebbels’s former secretary and Adolf Hitler was the guest of honor at the wedding. His title meant that he was at the head of occupied Norway.

Terboven did not have authority over the regular German Army forces stationed in Norway which were under the command of Generaloberst Nikolaus von Falkenhorst, but he did command a personal force of around 6,000 men, of whom 800 were part of the secret police. Terboven behaved in the same petty and ruthless way he did as governor of the Rheinprovinz, and was widely disliked, not only by the Norwegians, but also by many Germans. From 1941, he increasingly focused on crushing the irregular military resistance against the Germans, declaring martial law in Trondheim in 1942, and ordering the destruction of Telavåg. Goebbels expressed annoyance in his diary about what he called Terboven's "bullying tactics" against the Norwegians, as they alienated the population against the Germans. Terboven nevertheless remained in ultimate charge of Norway until the end of the war in 1945, even after the proclamation of a Norwegian puppet regime under Vidkun Quisling, the Quisling government. On 18 December 1944, Falkenhorst was dismissed from his command for opposing certain radical policies of Terboven.

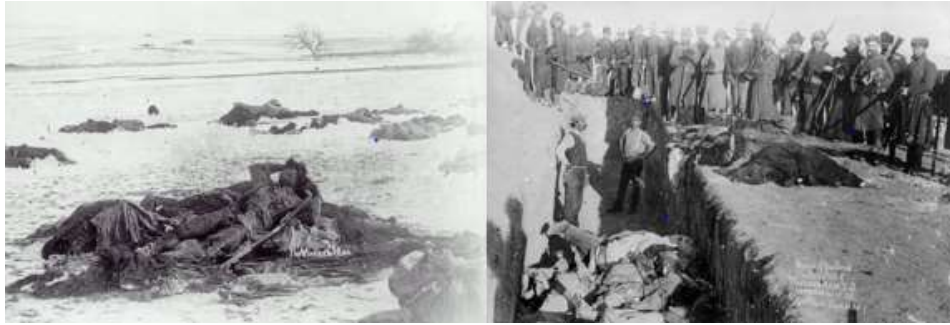
Terboven planned to convert Norway into the last stronghold of Nazism in Europe. Specifically, he wanted to organize the so-called “Fortress Norway” (German: Festung Norwegen), where the Nazis could continue to resist in the event that Allies take control of the rest of Europe. There was also a plan to build the German capital in Norway, which would be called Nordstern (English: North Star). The city was supposed to be located in a strategically protected fjord position around Norway city of Trondheim. He also planned concentration camps in Norway, establishing Falstad concentration camp near Levanger and Bredtvet concentration camp in Oslo in late 1941. One of the few German projects that were actually completed in Norway under his regime was the German submarine base Dora 1.

The scope of Festung Norwegen originally included the entire coastal perimeter of Norway, from the Oslofjord around the southern coast and to the border with the Soviet Union. Part of the invasion plan for Norway had included the immediate deployment of German coastal artillerymen in Norwegian batteries, around the main cities of Horten, Kristiansand, Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim, and Narvik. This was because Norway was considered an essential part of Germany’s Atlantic Wall. Although the fortifications in Norway were primarily based around coastal artillery, they also included elements of anti-aircraft batteries, tank and infantry forces. There were as many as 400,000 German troops in Norway during the occupation, a large proportion of whom were dedicated to the defense of the Northern flank of the Atlantic wall.

The war ended without any of the fortifications being used in action. The fortress kept German troops away from the main battles on mainland Europe and thus helped to bring the war to a quicker end. The British Operation Fortitude North was designed to delude the Germans that they intended to invade Norway in 1944, as well as the Pas de Calais, so as to keep their troops away from the Normandy beaches. The Third Reich had a total of five so-called Reichskommissariats. In addition to Norway, countries under such arrangement included the Netherlands, Ukraine, the Baltic states, and Belarus (aka Reichskommissariat Ostland), and for a short time also Belgium with northern France. [Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Terboven | April 22, 2021 ++]

Wounded Knee Massacre

Tribes Want Medals Awarded Rescinded



Native Americans are stepping up efforts to pressure Congress to revoke Medals of Honor awarded for the killings of Sioux, including unarmed women and children, at Wounded Knee. Troy Heinert, a Democrat who serves in South Dakota’s State Senate, sponsored a resolution calling for a congressional inquiry into the award of Medals of Honor to troops who took part in the Wounded Knee massacre. Troy Heinert, a Democrat who serves in South Dakota’s State Senate, [passed a resolution](#) calling for a congressional inquiry into the award of Medals of Honor to troops who took part in the Wounded Knee massacre.

On Dec. 29, 1890, along the Wounded Knee Creek on the Pine Ridge Reservation in the southwest corner of South Dakota, the U.S. Army killed hundreds of unarmed members of the Lakota Sioux tribe, including many women and children. In the aftermath of one of the bloodiest acts of violence against Native Americans by federal forces, the government looked into the conduct of the troops of the Seventh Cavalry — and decided to award 20 Medals of Honor, the nation’s highest military commendation, to soldiers involved in the massacre. Now members of the tribe are stepping up a long-running pressure campaign to have those medals rescinded, saying that the government should recognize the atrocity for what it was and take a step that could help heal the historical wounds of that day.

They recently won support from the State Senate in South Dakota, which passed a resolution in February urging Congress to investigate the award of the medals. On Capitol Hill, supporters of the effort, led by Senators Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Jeff Merkley of Oregon, both Democrats, are hoping to make a new push in the 117th Congress on behalf of legislation they have sponsored, the “**Remove the Stain**” bill S.3164 (formerly H.R.3467 in the 116th Congress), that would rescind the medals. “I believe on our reservation, we have a pervasive sadness that exists here because of what happened at Wounded Knee, the massacre, and it has never been resolved and there has never been closure,” said Marcella Lebeau, a citizen of the Two Kettle Band, Cheyenne River Sioux.

Many of the award citations noted “gallant conduct in battle” and “distinguished” or “conspicuous” bravery, while documenting few details to justify those characterizations. To date, the nation has awarded more than 3,500 Medals of Honor, including about 400 to soldiers who fought during campaigns against Native Americans. About 900 awards have been rescinded, according to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, most for awards made during the Civil War, but no medals awarded for service in the Indian campaigns have been revoked.

Troy Heinert, a Democrat who serves in South Dakota's State Senate, sponsored the resolution calling for a congressional inquiry. Mr. Heinert, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, said Congress and the Biden administration owed it to Native Americans to take a closer look at stripping the medals from soldiers involved in the massacre. The resolution passed unanimously in a deeply Republican state. The medals for service in the U.S. Army's Indian War campaigns are part of the country's history of celebrating divisive figures as heroes, Mr. Heinert said. Many of the medals given out during this time were for violent acts against Native Americans by white settlers and the federal government as they sought to occupy more of the South and the West.

- The decades-long push to rescind the medals gained new momentum last year amid a broader national wave of reckoning about historical and systemic racism, with Confederate monuments coming down, the military backing efforts to rename military bases in Southern states that now honor Confederate generals and demonstrators holding large protests against the killings of Black men and women by the police. "The U.S. government did everything they could to exterminate and assimilate the Indigenous population in our country," Mr. Heinert said. "Our ancestors fought and died to keep our language, keep our tradition and keep our ceremonies, and I think the climate has put us in a space and time that allows us to have a frank conversation about public policy and what it means to be Indigenous in this country."
- Kevin Killer, president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, said the push to rescind the medals honored the wishes of elders whose calls went unheard for generations. Mr. Killer said it was important for future generations to know an injustice was addressed. "It was one of the largest atrocities in the history of this country, where mostly women and children were massacred because they were trying to have peace," Mr. Killer said. "History tries to retell it and say there was a misunderstanding, but it was an atrocity any way you look at it."

Bernardo Rodriguez, a tribal council representative for the Wounded Knee District of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, said that the community was reminded every day about the tragedy by a memorial to it — and that action by the government to rescind the medals was more than 100 years overdue. "We've been pushed, pulled, put aside and treated like second-class citizens since Day 1 and never given a chance," Mr. Rodriguez said. "I want them to know and to understand that this would be the same as giving a Medal of Honor to the Nazis of Auschwitz."

Despite some bipartisan support for rescinding the medals, it is not clear whether Congress or the Biden administration might act on the issue. The Medal of Honor is awarded by presidents, but it can be rescinded by Congress. Representative Dusty Johnson, a South Dakota Republican, said in a statement that Congress understood that it was a mistake to award the medal to those who took part in the massacre. Mr. Johnson's statement said he asked the Army in 2019 about starting a formal review but was told that only the president had the power to do so.

In 1990, the descendants of Native Americans killed and injured during the Wounded Knee massacre received an apology from Congress after lawmakers approved a resolution expressing "deep regret" for the Army's actions. The resolution did not provide reparations to the descendants or declare the remote site a national monument, as the Wounded Knee Survivors Association had requested. "This was a sin of our nation and the United States Congress has issued a formal apology; that doesn't make the massacre go away, but it's those kinds of efforts toward reconciliation that I think can help mend hearts and minds and

give it the opportunity to move forward,” Mr. Johnson said. “Medal of Honor recipients of today are held to a tremendously higher standard,” he said. “It’s painfully clear from our history, the U.S. didn’t have these same standards in 1890.”

In 2019, Senator Mike Rounds, a South Dakota Republican, said that he believed Wounded Knee was a massacre rather than a battle, but also that he opposed going back to changing the recommendations to bestow the medals. His office did not respond to a request for comment. Senator John Thune, Republican of South Dakota, and Gov. Kristi Noem of South Dakota, also did not respond to a requests for comment. Ms. Warren’s office said the bill remained a priority for her, and she and an array of Democratic sponsors have reintroduced it into both the House and the Senate for the current Congress to consider. [Source: The New York Times | Mark Walker | April 23, 2021 ++]

USMC Uniform

Update 04: Evolution 1965 thru 2021

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.



Vietnam War (1965-1975)

Headgear - The M1 helmet was the same as the one used in the Korean War and World War II. The Marine Corps camouflage helmet cover changed to the same as the Army's. The "Mitchell" pattern was reversible, with leaf camouflage in green colors on one side and brown colors on the other. The covers had buttonholes for inserting natural foliage for additional camouflage. A black rubber band, improvised from cut-up rubber inner tubes and worn around the helmet, made it distinct from other services. The band was sometimes used to hold items like bug repellent.

Body Armor - In 1955, the Marine Corps introduced the M1955 flak vest, which featured separate rigid, fiberglass plates sewn into pockets of the vest to give it ballistic capabilities. While it lacked the ballistic capability to stop bullets, the vest stayed in use until the early 1980s.

Equipment - The M1962 Marine individual equipment belt was webbed with three rows of eyelets and a row of snaps down the center to attach M14 magazine pouches. The belt had a ball-type buckle and could be adjusted in length from one end. The M1941 pack suspenders were canvas straps attached to the equipment belt. The equipment belt held several single magazine pouches for the M14 rifle. Each magazine held 20 rounds of ammunition. The M17 gas mask was an improved version of the mask issued during the Korean War.

Clothing - The tropical combat jacket was made of a tightly woven, lightweight, cotton poplin material and later cotton poplin ripstop in olive drab green. The jacket was a bush-style design with two slanted, bellow-type chest pockets with button flaps and two lower bellow pockets with button flaps below the waist. Olive drab green cotton T-shirts were also commonly worn in hot weather, and replaced the white T-shirts worn early in the war. The matching tropical combat trousers were also made of a tightly woven, lightweight, cotton poplin material and later cotton poplin ripstop in olive drab green. With two front pockets, two rear pockets and two bellow-type cargo pockets on the legs, the trousers had either a button or zipper fly and a drawcord at the bottom of each leg to protect from insects. Although ripstop material was intended to reduce tears, it did not prove very useful in Vietnam's jungles.

The ERDL camouflage pattern was developed in 1948 by the Engineer Research and Development Lab and initially used during the Vietnam War in 1967. It was a combination of dark green, light green, brown and black and issued in both cotton poplin and ripstop fabric for the tropical uniform. It was first worn by Special Forces and special operations troops.

Footwear - The upper part of the tropical combat boots or jungle boots was a mix of synthetic and natural materials in olive drab green shade canvas, which was more breathable and dried faster than leather. Nylon straps were later added to protect the ankle and help prevent puncturing the canvas. The lower part is black smooth-out leather with a bonded rubber sole with tractor-type tread to prevent mud from kicking up from the boot. Steel plates reinforced soles to mitigate wounds caused by punji sticks - spikes made from wood or bamboo.

Desert Storm (Gulf War) 1990-1991

Headgear - The personnel armor system for ground troops (PASGT) helmet was made of ballistic fiberglass, trademarked as Kevlar, to protect from bullets and fragmenting munitions. The profile was smaller for a better fit and provided ear protection and better visibility. Inside was an integrated strap suspension system. Marines wore either the Chocolate Chip or Woodland pattern helmet covers. Kevlar paved the way for radical changes in protective helmets and body armor. It was much stronger than steel, lightweight and ultra-protective. Earlier Kevlar designs provided low-velocity protection.

Body Armor - The fragmentation protective vest, part of the PASGT system, was a Woodland camouflage pattern made of spun Kevlar and designed to stop low-velocity shrapnel and fragments. It did not have the ballistic capability to stop high-velocity bullets. Although the fragmentation protective vest was issued in a woodland pattern camouflage, during the first Gulf War a desert Chocolate Chip camouflage cloth was used to cover the vest to blend in with the rest of the uniform.

Clothing - The desert battle dress uniform was a six-color, unified set that included the coat, trousers and helmet cover. The design of these 50/50 cotton-nylon blend BDUs was an upgrade from the uniform worn

in Vietnam. Troops were issued woodland pattern BDUs (pictured) and, where necessary in the environment, the desert pattern BDUs. The Chocolate Chip design lasted until the end of Operation Desert Storm.

- Woodland Camo. The tightly rolled sleeves that Marines are known for today was used as a means of intimidation in psychological warfare. The sleeves of the Marine blouse tightly folded up to the biceps, exposing the lighter inside layer.
- The Chocolate Chip camouflage pattern was modeled using the southwestern U.S. landscape. When troops arrived in the Middle East, the pattern was impractical as a desert backdrop. The three-color desert camouflage uniform replaced it in the early 1990s and remained in use in desert environments until the introduction of the Marine Corps MARPAT, or Marine pattern, uniform.

Footwear - Marines were still wearing black leather boots or jungle boots from earlier eras.

Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-2014)

Headgear - The personnel armor system for ground troops, or PASGT, helmet was the same one used in Desert Storm. Optional goggles protected the eyes from blowing particles. They did not have ballistic capabilities.

Body Armor - In 1999, the military introduced the interceptor body armor, or IBA, also known as the outer tactical vest. It was the first body armor designed to stop high-velocity bullets. The IBA had bullet-stopping capabilities superior to the personnel armor system for ground troops. The outer shell protected against fragments and low-velocity rounds and could be integrated with the enhanced tactical load bearing vest, or ETLBV, system. The vest was issued in woodland camouflage. The IBA could also be fitted with additional parts to extend protection: a groin protector; the deltoid axillary protection system (made of four components for the shoulder areas); a throat protector; and a yoke and collar. The pieces, which were not bulletproof, could be mixed and matched as needed for the mission or by preference. Small-arms protective inserts, or SAPI, are rigid ceramic composite plates layered with Kevlar or similar material inserted into the vest's front and back pockets, giving the vest greater ability to stop bullets.

Clothing - The tri-color desert battle dress uniform, or BDU, replaced the Chocolate Chip camouflage worn in Desert Storm. The style and shape of the uniform did not change but the color scheme was more effective in the open-air deserts of the Middle East. Both the jacket and trousers were a 50/50 cotton-nylon ripstop fabric. The tri-color BDU was the same uniform issued to the Army.

Footwear - Marines were still wearing black leather boots or jungle boots from earlier eras. They had not yet changed over to the desert tan boots.

Operation Iraqi Freedom (2002-2011)

Headgear - The headgear was the same as used in operations Enduring Freedom and Desert Storm. Improvements in the personnel armor system for ground troops, or PASGT helmet, included increased ballistic capability, reduced weight, better head mobility, improved padded suspension system and other enhanced features.

Body Armor - Integrated body armor and equipment, similar to that worn in Operation Enduring Freedom, was issued in a neutral coyote brown color to better blend in with any environment. The outer tactical vest was the same as used in Operation Enduring Freedom. The small arms protective inserts, or SAPI, were the same as used in Operation Enduring Freedom.

Equipment - The modular lightweight load-carrying equipment (MOLLE) system used in Operation Enduring Freedom remained in use. Each individual ammo pouch was designed to hold two 30-round magazines.

Clothing - The Marine pattern (MARPAT) camouflage, which replaced the old generic BDUs, was a multi-scale digital camouflage and featured utilities in two patterns: woodland and desert. The MARPAT pattern was copyrighted by Marines and is only used by Marines. Separate knee and elbow pads became standard issue and special pouches were added to coats and trousers to accommodate them. The military started producing and issuing military-grade knee and elbow pads after Marines privately purchased pads used by skateboarders to contend with the rough and rocky terrain in Afghanistan. Flight gloves were made of a trademarked material called Nomex to prevent burns, bruises and cuts.

Footwear - Coyote brown roughout boots were made from a combination of nylon and leather that was non-polishable.

Modern (2019-2021)

Headwear - The advanced combat helmet, or ACH, is an upgraded design of the Kevlar helmet. It has increased ballistic protection, provides more head mobility, and includes a four-point chin strap system that better stabilizes the helmet on the head. Pads replace suspension straps inside to prevent the helmet from resting directly on the head, reducing injury from blunt force trauma and concussions. The helmet also includes rail systems to interface with tactical headsets, microphones and other technology, as well as a mounting bracket for night vision goggles. The ACH helmet resembles the inside of motorcycle and football helmets. Lightweight ballistic protective glasses in clear and tinted versions replaced the goggles used in earlier conflicts.

Weapons - The M27 IAR (infantry automatic weapon), a significant change to the battle rifle, was introduced in 2018. It is a much more accurate and versatile weapon than the M16 although it uses the same ammunition and has a similar ergonomic design.

Equipment - The modular lightweight load-carrying equipment II, or MOLLE system, improves the original system to provide troops with added benefits including versatility, greater load distribution and customized attachments. The flashlight is standard issue. The grenade pouch holds a Mark 67 fragmentation grenade. The magazine pouches are designed to carry two 30-round magazines and are incorporated into the MOLLE system. The model is wearing three magazine pouches. The M50 gas mask maintains the concept of previous versions and is issued to all services.

Clothing - While Marines continue to use the MARPAT camouflage pattern jacket and trousers, the construction and materials of the combat garment changed to flame-resistant organizational gear, or FROG. The entire garment is now made from a flame-resistant trademarked material called Nomex, the same material used for firefighter uniforms to reduce injuries such as flash burns.

- The entire combat FROG shirt is a jersey-type design with a body that is breathable, lightweight, moisture-wicking and prevents chafing in hot weather. The sleeves and collar share the same camouflage pattern material as the jacket and trousers. The shirt is worn under body armor, tactical vests and chest rigs.
- Nomex hood and gloves are also standard-issue garments to prevent cuts and fire-related injuries. The entire combat utilities are equivalent to a firefighter's uniform protecting most of the body.

Footwear - The boot is an improved version of the roughout coyote brown boots worn during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

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

* Health Care *



Covid-19 Vulnerability

Update 12: Study Indicates Having it doesn't Prevent Reinfection

A study of more than 3,000 Marine recruits indicates that having a case of COVID-19 doesn't necessarily keep young people from getting the illness again. The research, conducted during six months last year at the Marine Corps' recruit depots, found that 10% of 189 recruits known to have previously had COVID-19 became reinfected with the virus while in quarantine or during boot camp. The risk of reinfection was five times lower than the infection risk among those who hadn't previously had the virus, but shows that people can get COVID-19 more than once and can pass it along to others, wrote researchers from the Naval Medical Research Center and the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York.

"Our findings indicate that reinfection by SARS-CoV-2 in healthy young adults is common," said senior author Dr. Stuart Sealfon, a neurology professor at the medical school, using the technical name for the disease. "Despite a prior COVID-19 infection, young people can catch the virus again and may still transmit it to others." The study, published 15 APR in *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*, assessed 3,249 18-to-20 year-old Marine recruits, 90% of whom were male, who were tested for COVID-19 antibodies after arriving for supervised restriction of movement at boot camp. During the six-week study period, 2,346 were followed for the duration and were tested for COVID-19 every two weeks after quarantine.

Initial antibody testing found that 189 were "seropositive" on arrival at boot camp, indicating they previously had a COVID-19 infection. Of those, 19 contracted COVID-19 during the study period. Of the recruits who showed no evidence of a previous coronavirus infection, 1,079, or 48%, were diagnosed with COVID during the six-week study period. The viral loads of the reinfected recruits were roughly 10 times lower than those in the newly infected, and most of the reinfected had asymptomatic or mild cases of COVID-19, according to the report. The authors said the study is significant because it can help determine the rate at which reinfection occurs following natural immunity or vaccine-induced immunity. That calculation could help determine when the U.S. population may reach "herd immunity" -- the proportion of the population with immunity developed by either having the illness or receiving a vaccine -- that can deprive the coronavirus of hosts, leading to a decline in prevalence and cases.

"Despite a prior COVID-19 infection, young people can catch the virus again and may still transmit it to others," Sealfon said. "This is an important point to know and remember as vaccine rollouts continue. Young people should get the vaccine whenever possible, since vaccination is necessary to boost immune

responses, prevent reinfection, and reduce transmission." The authors also said the study had some limitations, including that it likely underestimated the risk of reinfection in previously infected individuals because it didn't include individuals with low levels of antibodies.

In commentary accompanying the research, two infectious disease experts also noted that without having sequenced the virus in both the first and second infections, it's difficult to determine whether the repeat cases were actually reinfections and not the result of the patient harboring a persistent COVID strain. But the results do show that having had a COVID-19 infection does provide "an important, albeit limited protection, for new infections," even as it does not provide an "almost universal and long-lasting protective immunity unlike that seen in measles, for example," wrote Dr. Maria Velasco of Hospital Universitario Fundacion Alcorcon, and Dr. Carlos Guisjarro of Rey Juan Carlos University, both in Madrid. They added that the results show that even young people with a previous COVID-19 infection should be vaccinated to target transmission from asymptomatic individuals and improve immune response. "Reports suggest that vaccine-induced immune response might be higher than that elicited by SARS-CoV-2 infection, suggesting that vaccination might be more effective in preventing new infections," they wrote.

As of 19 APR, there have been 183,875 cases of COVID-19 diagnosed in U.S. service members, including 66,598 in the Army, 37,379 in the Navy, 30,538 in the Air Force and 21,353 Marines. Nearly 27,000 cases have been tallied in the National Guard and 1,105 additional cases among personnel assigned to Defense Department agencies. Twenty-four service members have died, including three active-duty Army soldiers, five active-duty Navy sailors, six Army Reserve members, two Navy Reserve members and eight Air Force or Army National Guard members. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime| April 19, 2021 ++]

COVID-19 Social Distancing

Update 02: Indoor Exposure Risk Same at 6 Or 60 Feet

People who maintain 60 feet of distance from others indoors are no more protected than if they socially distanced by 6 feet, according to a peer-reviewed study published 27 APR in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the United States of America. Cambridge-based Massachusetts Institute of Technology professors Martin Bazant and John Bush, PhD, developed a model to calculate indoor exposure risk to COVID-19 by factoring in the amount of time spent inside, air filtration and circulation, immunization, variant strains, mask use, and respiratory activity such as breathing, eating or talking.

"We argue there really isn't much of a benefit to the six-foot rule, especially when people are wearing masks," Mr. Bazant told CNBC. "It really has no physical basis because the air a person is breathing while wearing a mask tends to rise and comes down elsewhere in the room so you're more exposed to the average background than you are to a person at a distance." As with smoking, even people wearing masks can be affected by secondhand smoke that makes its way around the enclosed area and lingers. The same logic applies to airborne droplets of the virus, according to the study. However, the study did note that mask use by both infected and susceptible people reduces "respiratory plumes" and thus increases the amount of time people may safely spend together indoors.

When crafting guidelines, the CDC and World Health Organization have overlooked the amount of time spent indoors, Mr. Bazant claims. "What our analysis continues to show is that many spaces that have been shut down in fact don't need to be," Mr. Bazant said. "Oftentimes, the space is large enough, the ventilation is good enough, the amount of time people spend together is such that those spaces can be safely operated even at full capacity, and the scientific support for reduced capacity in those spaces is really not very good." Opening windows or installing new fans to keep air moving may be just as effective or more effective than purchasing a new filtration system, Mr. Bazant said.

The CDC currently recommends staying at least 6 feet away from other people and wearing a mask to slow the spread of COVID-19, citing the fact that the virus spreads mainly among people who are in close contact for a prolonged period. The distancing isn't helping you that much and it's also giving you a false sense of security, because you're as safe at six feet as you are at 60 feet if you're indoors. Everyone in that space is at roughly the same risk, actually," Mr. Bazant said. After three rounds of peer review, Mr. Bazant says he hopes the study will influence social distancing policies. [Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Gabrielle Masson | April 2, 2021 ++]

Covid-19 Misinformation

Update 04: Miracle Mineral Solution Is Not a Cure

Mark Scott Grenon, 62, and his three sons, Jonathan David Grenon, 34, Jordan Paul Grenon, 26, and Joseph Timothy Grenon, 32, have been criminally charged with fraudulently marketing and selling "Miracle Mineral Solution" (MMS) as a cure for COVID-19, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, autism, malaria, hepatitis, Parkinson's disease, herpes, HIV/AIDS, and other serious medical conditions. They were further charged with defying federal court orders. Each of the Grenons was charged with one count of conspiracy to commit fraud and two counts of criminal contempt. If convicted, they each face up to life in prison. The criminal complaint and indictment charge that the Grenons:

- Manufactured, promoted, and sold MMS—a chemical solution containing sodium chlorite and water which, when ingested orally, becomes chlorine dioxide, a powerful bleach used for industrial water treatment or bleaching textiles, pulp, and paper
- Manufactured MMS in a shed in Jonathan's backyard in Bradenton, Florida
- Sold tens of thousands of bottles of MMS nationwide under the guise of Genesis II Church of Health and Healing, an entity they are accused of creating to avoid government regulation of MMS and shield themselves from prosecution
- Received more than \$1 million from selling MMS
- Willfully violated a federal court injunction halting the Grenons' distribution of MMS
- Threatened the federal judge presiding over the civil case and threatened that, should the government attempt to enforce the court orders halting their distribution of MMS, they would "pick up guns" and instigate "a Waco"

When a search warrant was executed at Jonathan Grenon's house at the time of his arrest, officers seized dozens of chemical drums containing nearly 10,000 pounds of sodium chlorite powder, thousands of bottles of MMS, and other items used in the manufacture and distribution of MMS. The government

also recovered multiple loaded firearms, including one pump-action shotgun concealed in a custom-made violin case to disguise its appearance.

MMS has not been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for any medical use. In 2019, the FDA strongly urged consumers not to purchase or use it for any reason, explaining that drinking MMS was the same as drinking bleach and could cause severe vomiting, diarrhea, and life-threatening low blood pressure. The FDA received reports of people requiring hospitalization and even dying after drinking MMS. [Source: DoJ Southern Dist. of Florida | U.S. Attorney's Office | April 23, 2021 ++]

Coronavirus Vaccine Concerns

Update 04: DoD Tracking New Heart Inflammations in Recipient's

The Defense Department is tracking 14 cases of heart inflammation, or myocarditis, in military health patients who developed the condition after receiving either the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. The rare disorder, usually caused by a virus, has been linked to COVID-19. But following a number of reports from Israel of patients developing the inflammation in conjunction with receiving vaccines, the Israeli Health Ministry is exploring a possible link, Israel's Channel 12 reported Friday, according to the Jerusalem Post. Myocarditis is an inflammation of the heart muscle, the myocardium, that can reduce the heart's ability to function or cause abnormal heart rhythms. The first report of myocarditis in a patient who received a COVID-19 vaccine was published in Israel on 1 FEB. Another case of myocarditis in a 39-year-old male was reported in Revista Española de Cardiología in early March.

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The DoD has been tracking myocarditis cases since March, according to spokesman Peter Graves. Of the 14 cases, one patient, who tested positive for COVID-19 three months ago, developed myocarditis after their first dose of vaccine. The remaining 13 patients developed myocarditis after their second vaccine doses. Eleven received the Moderna vaccine; three got Pfizer.

- Military.com reporter Steve Beynon, 30, a member of the Washington, D.C., National Guard, is among the 14 military patients who developed myocarditis after his second dose of the Moderna vaccine. He was hospitalized at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in February and spent nearly three days in the ICU, but returned to work and has since performed his National Guard duties.
- A civilian member of the Pentagon Press Corps, Marcus Weisgerber, 39, developed myocarditis after his second Pfizer shot and spent two days in the hospital. Weisgerber, who writes for DefenseOne, is married to Military.com reporter Oriana Pawlyk.

According to reports, Israel is exploring any link between myocarditis and the Pfizer vaccine. Of more than 5 million vaccines administered in Israel, 62 cases of myocarditis were recorded days after vaccination. Most were seen in men under age 30; 56 of the 62 cases occurred after the second vaccine dose. A review by Military.com of the Food and Drug Administration's Vaccine Adverse Event Report System, or VAERS, database as of 23 APR showed at least 45 reports of myocarditis following COVID-

19 vaccines. The majority of cases occurred after the second dose, with 19 cases reported after the Pfizer vaccine and 26 after the Moderna vaccine.

More than 62% of the American cases reported were in men, most between the ages of 20 and 45. In one report, a 19-year-old male developed symptoms of myocarditis -- chest pain, fatigue and shortness of breath -- six days after receiving his first dose; the reporting party described his case as being "post-COVID-19 vaccine syndrome." "Based on the current available information and temporal association between the use of the vaccine and the start date of the event, a causal relationship cannot be excluded," wrote the reporting party in VAERS. VAERS officials stress that reports of illnesses or health problems following a vaccine do not indicate that the vaccine caused or contributed to the condition, only that an illness occurred in conjunction with receiving a vaccine. "The reports may contain information that is incomplete, inaccurate, coincidental, or unverifiable. In large part, reports to VAERS are voluntary, which means they are subject to biases. This creates specific limitations on how the data can be used scientifically," VAERS notes on its web page.

Abby Capobianco, an FDA spokeswoman, said 26 APR that the FDA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have not seen any "new safety signals for myocarditis following administration of any of the authorized COVID-19 vaccines." "Post-authorization safety monitoring during the COVID-19 pandemic vaccination program will aim to continuously monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines to rapidly detect safety problems if they exist. Should any new safety signals be identified by FDA and CDC through this safety surveillance, that information will be communicated to the public," she added.

The U.S. has administered more than 228 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines of all types, including Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, according to the CDC. The Defense Department has administered 2,713,640 COVID-19 vaccines, with diagnoses of myocarditis occurring in .000516% of that group. Graves said the Defense Health Agency is proud of its medical professionals who referred their otherwise young, fit and healthy patients for cardiac evaluations -- a decision drawn from observances with the ACAM2000 smallpox vaccine.

In 2003, at least 10 military personnel and several civilians developed myocarditis after receiving the vaccine; two died of heart attacks. The CDC took steps to recommend that people with known heart disease avoid the smallpox vaccination. "We applaud Military Health System medical professionals for considering cardiac evaluations. ... Following diagnosis, these adverse events, temporally associated with immunization, were submitted to the CDC's VAERS and subsequently brought to the attention of the CDC's COVID-19 Safety Technical Subgroup," Graves said. He added that discussions are ongoing among subject matter experts.

Myocarditis is most frequently diagnosed in young adults ages 20 to 40, according to the National Organization for Rare Disorders. Men develop myocarditis more frequently than women, "possibly due to effects of testosterone on the immune reaction to infection," according to NORD. The condition is treatable but can lead to heart attack or stroke or cause chronic thickening of the heart muscles. Recovery, depending on the initial reason for development, can take up to several weeks but it also may linger for months, reducing a patient's ability to work out or engage in physically strenuous activities, including military training and exercises. Military myocarditis patients are being advised not to exercise for three to six months; to limit carbohydrates and sugar to reduce inflammation; and to restrict themselves to no more than one alcoholic beverage a day. "No PT, exercise, marching or drill for the next six months," according to one service member's discharge instructions.

According to Channel 12 and a subsequent report in the Jerusalem Post, the Israeli Health Ministry contacted Pfizer, which said that "it has not detected similar findings in the rest of the world at this time," adding that it would "look deeper into the phenomenon." The Post also reported that two people -- a 22-year-old woman and a 35-year-old man -- died as a result of heart-related issues after receiving a vaccine. Moderna did not respond to an email sent Feb. 23 by Military.com about the military cases. The company also did not respond to subsequent requests for information or an interview. Pfizer did not respond to a request for comment 23 APR.

As reported by Channel 12 and the Jerusalem Post, the Israeli Health Ministry estimates that one out of every 20,000 young men developed myocarditis after COVID-19 vaccination. "It is likely that the onset of myocarditis is associated with receiving the vaccine (especially the second dose)," the report notes. Graves said the Defense Health Agency's Immunization Health Division's clinical support center, VAERS and the CDC's safety group are "fulfilling their intended purpose -- monitoring for an unexpected adverse event signal" and consulting with specialists. "It's important to remember that medical events developing or worsening around the time of a vaccine does not mean that the vaccine was involved," Graves said. He added that reports of myocarditis following COVID-19 vaccines do not change the DoD's recommendations that all patients in the military health system get the COVID-19 vaccine "as soon as possible."

"It is important to remember that COVID-19 disease can also affect multiple organ systems in your body -- including the heart -- even in those without significant symptoms or who were asymptomatic during COVID-19 infection," Graves said. "Evidence available in peer-reviewed literature suggests that cardiac risk of complications are clearly higher in those with COVID-19 disease as opposed to a potential risk from the COVID-19 vaccine."

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines utilize a novel technology that uses messenger RNA to instruct cells to make the spike protein seen on the COVID-19 coronavirus, triggering an immune response. The mRNA is broken down by the cell and the spike protein itself is broken down by the body when it leaves the cell, but the immune system is trained to recognize it and respond to any exposure. The CDC recommends that patients contact their doctor after receiving the vaccine if redness or tenderness worsens at the vaccine site after 24 hours or if "side effects are worrying or do not seem to be going away after a few days." Graves said the military patients all experienced chest pain 12 to 96 hours after vaccination.

As of Monday, more than 486,000 U.S. service members, or 23% of the total force, including the Reserve and National Guard, had been fully vaccinated. The DoD has logged more than 284,000 cases of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, including troops, family members, employees and contractors. Of those, 344 people died, including 24 troops and 12 dependent family members. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | April 26, 2021 ++]

PTSD & Heart Disease

Female Vets Twice As Likely As Males to Suffer

A recent study in the Journal of the American Medical Association reports that female veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are more than twice as likely as male veterans to suffer from ischemic

heart disease than those without PTSD. The study examined nearly 400,000 female veterans, of which nearly one-third suffered from PTSD. The results of that study reflected that female veterans suffering from PTSD were 44% more likely to have the debilitating heart disease than their fellow veterans who did not have PTSD. A similar study done in 2017 found that male veterans suffering from PTSD were 18% more likely to suffer from heart disease than their fellow veterans who did not have PTSD.

PTSD can affect women and men in different ways. Women with PTSD are more likely to feel depressed and anxious, while men with PTSD are more likely to have problems with alcohol or drugs. However, while both women and men who experience PTSD may develop physical health problems, the severity and preponderance of those symptoms also differ between the sexes. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, between 11% and 20% of modern-day veterans suffer from PTSD. According to the American Heart Association, ischemic heart disease refers to problems caused by narrowing of the arteries. That results in less blood and oxygen reaching the heart muscle and ultimately can lead to a heart attack.

As with men, the most common symptom of a heart attack in women is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and back or jaw pain. Ischemic heart disease is also known as coronary artery disease or coronary heart disease. Often, ischemic heart disease has no symptoms and can lead to a heart attack with no prior warning. Despite advances in prevention and treatment, cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death worldwide. In the U.S., one in four deaths is caused by heart disease. The study further found that female veterans who suffered from PTSD at relatively young ages, especially those under 40 years old, were at greater risk for heart disease.

The authors of the study recommend that physicians closely monitor patients with PTSD for coronary and related diseases as a result of their findings. [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | 19 Apr 2021 ++]

Advance Care Planning

Confusion about Health Care Preferences Makes Things Difficult



During the 29 years Bruce Tucker has worked with Veterans and their families as a social worker and now as a VA Medical Center director, he has seen his share of medical crises and the challenges they can

present for Veterans and their families. During a crisis, medical staff may ask family members to help make health care decisions for a loved one. If a conversation about care preferences did not previously occur, it may be difficult for family members or trusted others to know exactly what decisions to make. “I’ve worked most of my VA career as a social worker in various areas and assisted Veterans in completing hundreds of health care decision forms,” Tucker said. “Some of the most difficult situations were when a Veteran’s preferences had not been expressed in advance and there was confusion about what decisions the Veteran would want made on their behalf.”

Almost half of all U.S. Veterans are under the age of 65. According to recent research published in the Journal of Health Affairs, in 2017 only about a third of the U.S. population under the age of 65 had completed an advance directive communicating their wishes about medical and mental health care choices they would want in case they would not be able to make decisions on their own. Tucker is raising the awareness of advance care planning by recently completing his own advance directive. He encourages others to do the same. “I would not want any family to go through the stress, uncertainty and conflict of making health care decisions for a loved one without knowing the person’s wishes,” he said.

Advance care planning can help reduce this stress and uncertainty during an unexpected emergency, according to Jennifer Koget, a social worker and VA acting national director of Social Work. “Advance directive forms allow the health care team to know what the Veteran’s preferences are and to honor those preferences in situations when the Veteran is unable to communicate,” Koget said. “When Veterans appoint a health care power of attorney, it allows the health care team to make sure we engage the person the Veteran trusts to make decisions on their behalf.”

According to National Social Work Program Office officials, there are many reasons to communicate these choices ahead of an unexpected situation, including to:

- Make sure you receive the treatment you want.
- Help your loved ones represent your preferences to the healthcare team when making decisions.
- Reduce the stress your loved ones may experience when asked to make decisions on your behalf.
- Communicate cultural and religious preferences related to medical care.

Additional information about advance care planning is available:

- Check out <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hU9vNHwYDGU&feature=youtu.be> for VA Podcast: Choosing a Health Care Agent
- Check out https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSw13r93Lic&feature=emb_logo for VA Podcast: What’s an Advance Directive and Why Should I Complete One?
- Check out <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0uu7ZzF7Og&feature=youtu.be> for VA Podcast: I’ve Been Chosen as A Health Care Agent – Now What?
- Check out https://www.ethics.va.gov/for_veterans.asp to complete a VA Advance Directive form.
- Check out https://www.va.gov/geriatrics/pages/advance_care_planning_topics.asp for more content about Advance Care Planning
- Check out https://www.socialwork.va.gov/ACP_GV.asp to learn more about Advance Care Planning in a Group Visit setting.

[Source: Vantage Point | April 20, 2021 ++]

Diabetes

Update 26: Type 2 Glucose Monitoring



Type 2 diabetes is rapidly becoming one of the most common long-term diseases in the world. Type 2 diabetes is an elevation in blood sugars that occurs when a sugar called glucose, can't get into your fat and muscles where it is needed. The problem causing an elevation in the blood glucose levels, occurs when there is a change in the shape of the insulin receptor. In the normal situation, the body produces a small chemical called insulin (key) whose purpose is to bind to a receptor (lock) on the surface of fat and muscle cells, opening a channel to allow glucose to enter those cells. In type 2 diabetes the shape of this receptor changes mostly as a consequence of weight gain around the stomach. Elevated blood glucose damages the lining of blood vessels leading to a range of complications in various organs of the body.

You may be checking and monitoring your blood glucose levels around four times per day, or even more if you're using insulin. Careful and regular daily monitoring is the only way to ensure that your blood glucose levels remain within the target range. If you have type 2 diabetes and you aren't using insulin, you will likely check your blood glucose levels less frequently throughout the day. Free diabetic log sheets can be downloaded to assist you in self-monitoring. Just copy & paste them into a word-processing program of your choice to print them, or highlight and select it to print. To use enter your blood glucose reading into each corresponding box. The additional columns marked 'Other' can be used for snacks, exercise sessions, etc. The Notes column is for anything that might have affected your blood sugar, ie. missing an exercise session, skipping a meal, etc. If you take more than one type of medication, you can add another line to record the dosages for each. To download go to:

- <https://www.type2diabetesguide.com/free-diabetic-log-sheets-no-meds-type2diabetesguide.pdf> those who do not take medication or insulin.
- <https://www.type2diabetesguide.com/free-diabetic-log-sheets-meds-type2diabetesguide.pdf> those who do take medication or insulin.

Monitoring can alert patients with type 2 diabetes that they are becoming hypoglycemic, especially those using insulin who are at risk of severe hypoglycemia requiring urgent medical care. Sometimes those who self-monitor might get a blood glucose result that doesn't fit with how they feel. For example, you may get a reading that says your blood glucose levels are low, but you aren't exhibiting any symptoms of hypoglycaemia. If this happens, take a second reading or try testing on an alternative glucose meter if you have access to one. It's also important to make sure that you wash your hands thoroughly and dry them before conducting the finger prick test. If you don't wash your hands properly after eating and before testing, you may contaminate the results. This can occur because of any food residue or crumbs left on your fingers, could provide a falsely high reading. If you don't dry your hands thoroughly after washing them,

then you may get a falsely lowered blood glucose reading! Any water left on your finger may dilute your blood when you're testing your glucose levels. You can also prevent inaccurate results by doing the following:

- Ensure test strips aren't expired
- Ensure the test strips 'match' the glucose meter – some glucose meters have specific test strips
- Draw enough blood for the test strip
- Don't let the test strip with the blood drop dry before putting it in the glucose meter – insert the strip right away
- Keep the glucose meter clean by storing the meter in a clean dry area to avoid dust getting on the sensor
- Keep the battery fully charged

In addition to daily monitoring, you should be having a blood test every three months to check your Hb A1c. Hb A1c is a measure of your average blood glucose level over three months. Hb A1c test is a good indicator for how well your diabetes treatment plans have been going overall. Your target levels may differ from someone else due to your age or what medications you may be taking to help with your diabetes management. [Source: <https://www.myhealthexplained.com> | Kevin Rodgers | April 17, 2021 ++]

Oral Cancer

Kills About One Person Every Hour

April is Oral Cancer Awareness Month. It kills more than 9,750 people each year in the United States or about one person every hour. The key to preventing deaths and serious consequences from oral cancer is early detection, and to raise awareness. Milwaukee VA Medical Center dentists will host a virtual information session for its Veterans later this month. “Just like for all cancers, early detection is important,” Milwaukee VA dentist Dr. Kristine Schedler says. “That can really have a positive impact on outside treatment outcomes.” Schedler noted that oral cancer is difficult for people to detect on their own because it can occur in hard-to-see areas inside the mouth, such as the back of the tongue or near the tonsils.

Difficulty swallowing may be an indicator A sore or lump that doesn't clear up in due time, or difficulty swallowing, may be indicators. “Don't ignore those symptoms. Definitely get them looked at,” Schedler added. Milwaukee VA Medical Center dentist Dr. Kachelmeyer said some of his colleagues in the Milwaukee VA dental clinic have detected lesions that were found to be cancerous. And the effects of oral cancer can be devastating. “To have oral cancer really affects the psychological state and the quality of life,” Kachelmeyer said. “It can lead to tongue resections, tooth loss and major issues affecting appearance, talking, functioning and things we take for granted.”

There are three major high-risks behaviors that cause oral cancer -- smoking, chewing tobacco and drinking alcohol. But those aren't the only contributors. There are others, including viral infection. “The population of people at risk has increased and you may not know if you've been exposed to those viruses,” Schedler s said, noting a link between HPV and oral cancer. She says HPV may be a significant factor in more younger people developing oral cancer. There is a vaccine for HPV which is recommended for children around age 11, though it can also be given to young adults. “We want to broaden the net to not

only educate and spread awareness but also offer screenings for Veterans who receive dental care,” Schedler said. Those screenings aren’t available yet due to ongoing pandemic restrictions, but the dentists hope to offer them in the near future.

Detecting possible oral cancer is one more reason why people need to have regular checkups twice a year. “Seeing your dentist regularly will already decrease the chances that something goes undetected. Good oral health – brushing and flossing regularly – are the best ways to prevent oral cancer. And people with dentures still need to see their dentists regularly. “We recommend they be seen at least once a year and a big part of that is to do an oral cancer screening,” he said. “Everything in dentistry comes down to prevention, seeing your dentist and doing your job at home. Brushing and flossing are the keys to preventing a lot of these dental problems. “A clean, healthy mouth definitely decreases your risk for a lot of problems.” Signs and symptoms of oral cancer include:

- Any sore that does not heal within 14 days.
- A red, white, or black discoloration of the soft tissues of the mouth.
- Any abnormality that bleeds easily when touched.
- A lump or hard spot in the tissue, usually border of the tongue.
- Tissue raised above that which surrounds it, a growth.
- A sore under a denture, which even after adjustment of the denture, that does not heal.
- A lump or thickening that develops in the mouth.
- A painless, firm, fixated lump felt on the outside of the neck, which has been there for at least two weeks.
- Sensation that something is stuck in the throat when swallowing or other difficulty in swallowing.
- Ear pain that occurs on one side only.
- Unexplained numbness in the mouth or lips.
- Hoarseness or sore throat that does not resolve within a few weeks.

[Source: Vantage Point | David Walter | April 20, 2021 ++]

Health Saving Account

Update 05: What You Should Know if You Have TRICARE



Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) come with some nice benefits. They are federal triple-tax-advantaged, which is appealing. Money is deposited in the HSA pre-taxed, money in the account grows tax-deferred, and money withdrawn for approved medical expenses is tax-free. But like all financial matters, there are pros and cons to HSAs. Note that tax laws in some States may not allow some of these same tax advantages.

How HSAs Work

HSAs have two parts: a savings account and a High-Deductible Health Plan (HDHP). Money deposited in the savings account is used to pay all medical expenses up to the HDHP's deductible amount. Then insurance kicks in. Plan details vary, so check the specifications on your available plans to understand how they work.

- Annual deductible contributions to a HSA are limited to \$3,600 for individuals and \$7,200 for families. If you make contributions from your own funds, they will be tax-deductible. Contributions do not have to be from “earned income” as is required by an IRA.
- Eligible HDHPs must have deductible amounts within \$1,400-7,000 for individuals and \$2,800-14,000 for families. Typically, the higher the deductible, the lower the monthly premium. Being healthy helps with these plans. Owning these plans makes the most sense when you do not have to withdraw from them.
- The HSA savings account belongs to the individual. You'll take it with you when you change jobs or when you don't have a job or are retired. It's not like a Flexible Spending Account (FSA), where you have to spend down the account each year. Instead, you keep the contributions and the growth. You can always use it for medical expenses — even into old age to pay for Medicare expenses, although you cannot contribute to a HSA after Medicare enrollment.
- You can use the funds for retirement purposes and not medical expenses. Starting at age 65, you can withdraw funds for retirement purposes paying regular income taxes on withdrawals and without the 20% tax penalty for early withdrawals. And there are no Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) with a HSA.

What If You Have TRICARE?

HSAs were initially established for self-employed people who had no access to other health insurance. But laws expanded to include more people, and now they are more common among employers and employees. However, the requirement that a person have no other form of health insurance remains. Employees whose employers offer HSAs can just join the HSA without enrolling in the other more traditional health plans offered by the employer. Check with your employer personnel office for their plan details.

Currently serving family members or retirees (including family members) with TRICARE are not eligible for HSAs if they are enrolled in a TRICARE plan. So, are you willing to disenroll from TRICARE? Active-duty servicemembers cannot disenroll from TRICARE. For information about enrolling and disenrolling in TRICARE, [visit this PAGE](#). If you want to know more about Health Savings Account rules, check out [IRS Publication 969](#). [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Shane Ostrom | April 21, 2021++]

Hair

Update 01: How Stress Causes Loss

Long-term, or chronic, stress puts people at risk for a variety of health problems. These can include depression and anxiety, as well as problems with digestion and sleep. Chronic stress has also long been linked to hair loss, but the reasons weren't well understood. Young woman looking in a mirror at a balding spot on her head

Hair growth involves three stages. In growth (anagen), strands of hair push through the skin. In degeneration (catagen), hair ceases to grow, and the follicle at the base of the strand shrinks. In rest (telogen), hair falls out and the process can begin again. Hair is among the few tissues that mammals can regenerate throughout their lifetime. The hair growth cycle is driven by stem cells that reside in the hair follicle. During growth, stem cells divide to become new cells that regenerate hair. In the resting period, the stem cells are inactive. Until now, researchers hadn't determined exactly how chronic stress impaired hair follicle stem cells.

A team led by Dr. Ya-Chieh Hsu of Harvard University studied the underlying mechanisms that link stress and hair loss. The study was supported in part by NIH's National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS). Results appeared in *Nature*, on March 4, 2021. The researchers began by testing the role of the adrenal glands, which produce key stress hormones—corticosterone in rodents and cortisol in humans. Removing the adrenal glands from mice led to rapid cycles of hair regrowth. Hair follicle regeneration didn't slow as these mice grew older, like it did in control mice. Rather, hair follicle stem cells continued to enter the growth phase and regenerate hair follicles throughout the animals' lifespans. The team was able to restore the normal hair cycle by feeding the mice corticosterone.

Subjecting mice to mild stress over many weeks increased corticosterone levels and reduced hair growth. Hair follicles remained in an extended resting phase. Together, these findings supported the role of corticosterone in inhibiting hair regrowth. The scientists next examined how corticosterone affects hair follicle stem cells. They found that the stress hormone was not regulating stem cells directly. By deleting the receptor for corticosterone from different cells, they determined that the hormone acts on a cluster of cells underneath the hair follicle called the dermal papilla. Further studies revealed that corticosterone prevented the dermal papilla from secreting GAS6, a molecule they showed can activate hair follicle stem cells. Delivering GAS6 into the skin restored hair growth in mice fed corticosterone or undergoing chronic stress.

Last year, findings from Hsu's team advanced the understanding of how stress causes gray hair. These results reveal a key pathway involved in hair loss from chronic stress. These findings may also lead to further insights into how stress affects tissue regeneration in other parts of the body. "In the future, the Gas6 pathway could be exploited for its potential in activating stem cells to promote hair growth," says first author Dr. Sekyu Choi of Harvard University. However, further study is needed to understand whether the same mechanism is at work in people. [Source: National Institute on Aging | Erin Bryant | April 13, 2021 ++]

Cold Intolerance

Reasons You Are Always Cold

Our bodies react differently to cold, and some feel colder than others. This situation is called cold intolerance. People with cold intolerance feel extremely cold even if others are comfortable or warm. It's also possible that one feels cold intolerance in some parts of the body, like hands or feet. Cold intolerance can be a symptom of an underlying medical condition, and in our opinion, you should consult a health provider. However, women are more likely to feel colder than men. A lower resting metabolic rate in a woman could be a possible cause for this. In simple words, it means women don't generate as much energy as men. But if you feel cold all the time, there might be a medical condition behind this like hypothyroidism, etc. Here we have mentioned some of the potential reasons why you're always cold.

Anemia

This is a condition when you don't have enough healthy red blood cells to bring your body the oxygen it needs. You may feel tired, dizzy, short of breath, or weak. Another symptom of anemia is feeling extremely cold, especially in your hands and feet. Though anemia is common, it can be severe if it continuously persists. Iron-deficiency anemia is when your body doesn't have the iron, it needs to make enough red cells. It's also the most common type of anemia; causes include blood loss, poor diet, pregnancy, and inflammatory bowel disease. However, it can be treated with proper diet and precautions. That's why you should immediately consult your health provider.

Hypothyroidism

Cold intolerance is a well-known symptom of hypothyroidism. It occurs when your thyroid gland doesn't produce enough thyroid hormone. These hormones help to regulate temperature and metabolism in the body. When your body doesn't produce enough thyroid hormone, all the processes tend to slow down. Though symptoms of hypothyroidism vary, these often include: *Dry skin, Fatigue, Forgetfulness, Weight gain and/or Constipation*. A doctor diagnoses the thyroid through a simple blood test and gives medicines for it.

Raynaud's Disease

The disease affects the arteries in the fingers, toes, or both. Due to this condition, the arteries become narrow, reducing the blood flow. The affected area can turn blue or white since there is no proper blood flow. When the blood reaches there, the area turns red again, and the areas can feel numb or painful. A person having this condition may overreact to cold temperatures. Also, cold temperatures and stress can trigger symptoms of Raynaud's disease. Treatments consist of avoiding triggers as much as possible and medications or surgery for a few people.

Diabetes

Diabetes can cause kidney problems and circulation issues that often cause you to feel cold. If not treated at the right time, it may cause nerve damage, making you feel cold, especially in your feet. Type 2 diabetes makes one feel colder than Type 1 diabetes. Some common symptoms of diabetes include:

- Injuries that take time to heal
- Fatigue
- Blurry vision
- Urinating often
- Excessive thirst or hunger

Deficiency of Vitamin B12

People get Vitamin B 12 by eating animal products. You get deficient in Vitamin B 12 when you can't consume it or don't get enough of it through your diet. This condition is prevalent in those who:

- Have opted for a vegan diet
- Are older than 50
- Have some digestion issues
- Had gastrointestinal surgery.

Some common symptoms include: Shortness of breath, Fatigue, Irritability, Anemia, Weakness, Loss of balance, and/or Loss of appetite.

Peripheral Artery Disease

This occurs when plaque builds up in the arteries that carry blood to our entire body. This buildup is also known as atherosclerosis. The buildup or accumulation of the plaque makes the arteries narrower and difficult for blood to flow through them. Peripheral artery disease sometimes reduces the blood flow so much that it may cause the person to feel cold, numb, feel pain or numbness, or tingling in feet, hands, or both. In exceptional cases, peripheral artery disease causes tissue death. Though this disease can be treated by opting for healthy lifestyle choices like quitting smoking, some may need surgery.

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia or anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder characterized by an excessive fear of gaining weight and distorted perception of your body weight. People with anorexia reduce or restrict their food intake, exercise a lot, or adopt every measure to lose weight. This condition may cause a person to feel excessively cold due to inadequate body fat. Some common symptoms of anorexia include:

- Stomach problems, such as cramping or constipation
- Trouble concentrating
- The lack of a period in women
- Weakness
- Intense fear of becoming overweight
- Dizziness or fainting
- Social isolation
- Fear of eating in front of everyone

Low Blood Pressure

Low blood pressure or hypotension can occur due to many reasons like blood loss, dehydration, endocrine disorders, and certain medications. When your blood pressure drops low, your blood vessels shift away the extremities' blood to other vital organs. This can leave your hands or feet feeling cold. Some of the common symptoms are: Nausea, Confusion, Blurry vision, Dizziness, and/or Weakness. If these symptoms persist, bring them to the attention of your doctor.

Anxiety & Stress

As we know, stress can cause problems to other parts of the body, and hands or feet are no exception. When someone goes through stress or anxiety, their body goes into a fight or flight mode. Adrenaline rises, and the blood vessels contract, making your fingers and hands as well as feet cold. These symptoms can be treated by practicing meditation, yoga, mindful activities, etc.

Your Medication May Have Side Effects

It sounds quite strange, but your medications may make you feel cold. Many medications cause the contraction of blood vessels, especially in a few arteries, and when this occurs, one of the possible side effects may be Raynaud’s disease. If you’re taking some medications, it’s best to consult your doctor to determine whether they are the cause behind you feeling extremely cold all the time. If the conditions bother you very much, the doctor may alter the medications or find other ways to deal with the situation.

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The Bottom Line: If cold intolerance is a new symptom, or you’re feeling your tolerance diminishing day by day, it’s time you should consult a health provider. The doctor may ask you how long the condition persists and physically examine you or run some tests. Depending on the results, the doctor may give you medication or other treatments.

[Source: <https://theoutdoorwear.com> | April 2021 ++]

*** Finances ***



Prescription Drug Costs

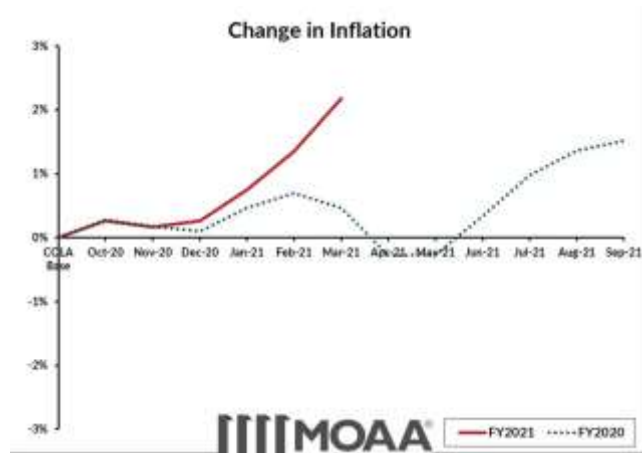
Update 70: Drug Companies Trick to Keep Prices High

A new report suggests that “product hopping”—a practice by drug companies to extend their patents on profitable drugs—costs American consumers and the U.S. health care system billions of dollars each year. The report looked at five prescription drugs and found that drug companies slightly alter the formulas in those drugs, allowing them to extend their patents on the new formulations, and delay the move to the generic drug marketplace. This, of course, keeps the costs of those drugs much higher than if a generic version were available. That is only one of the issues involved with high drug prices, and the drug companies aren’t the only issue. According to the lobbying arm of the major drug companies, in 2018, nearly half of the money spent on brand medicines went to some business other than the research companies that discover and manufacture medicines. Those include pharmacy benefit managers, insurers, hospitals and others in the biopharmaceutical supply chain. Meanwhile, a greater share of the cost of medicine has shifted onto patients. [Source: TSCL Weekly Update | April 17, 2021 ++]

COLA FY 2021

March CPI

The March 2021 CPI 258.935, 2.2 percent above the FY 2021 COLA baseline. The Consumer Price Index for April is scheduled to be released May 12. The CPI baseline for FY 2021 is 253.412.



The calculation is made by comparing the average CPI from July through September of the current fiscal year to the average for the same months of the year prior. Remember, active duty pay raises are calculated differently. This information is calculated from the non-seasonally adjusted Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W). Calculation for monthly COLA change: (Monthly CPI-Yearly baseline CPI)/Yearly baseline CPI. Learn more about CPI on the [BLS web page](#). [Source: MOAA Newsletter | April 15, 2021 ++]

Uncommon State Tax Laws

Strange but True Tax Laws | MS - NJ

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.

Massachusetts: Outside the Lines

Massachusetts residents traveling for a holiday or celebration might run afoul of the law if they bring a bottle of liquor or wine. A special permit and fee are required to bring alcohol that wasn't purchased, and isn't intended for resale, in the state.

Michigan: Be Prepared to Pay

Like many states, Michigan taxes prepared food but not unprepared food, and the law goes into detail about how to distinguish the two. Buying hot popcorn at a concession stand may be taxable, as that counts as prepared food, but a bag of chips isn't (unless it's heated or sold with an eating utensil).

Minnesota: A Fur Cry

Those trying to stay warm during the Minnesota winter used to think twice before buying a fur coat. While most clothing items are tax-exempt, real fur was subject to sales tax — 6.875% statewide plus local taxes. The tax applied to fur coats bought online, as well. The rule has since been revoked, likely because fur has become a less popular option.

Mississippi: Grows on Trees

Individuals and groups of "private nonindustrial landowners" have been able to get a tax credit for up to 50% of the costs associated with hardwood and pine reforestation. The credit has a cap of \$10,000 a year and a lifetime limit of \$75,000.

Missouri: The Bachelor Tax

To encourage young men to marry, Missouri charged an annual tax of \$1 to single men between the age of 21 and 50. The "bachelor tax" was passed in 1820, when \$1 was equivalent to about \$20 today, and it's no longer enforced.

Montana: Prescription for Savings

In Montana, prescribed drugs and insulin count toward medical expenses for those who itemize deductions. Even with a valid medical marijuana card, though, the cost of buying or growing marijuana isn't deductible.

Nebraska: Drug Tax Stamps

Like Alabama, Nebraska taxes the sale of illegal controlled substances. The state's law says drug dealers must buy drug tax stamps at a rate of \$100 per ounce of marijuana, \$150 per gram of controlled substances, or \$500 per 50 dosage units of controlled substances that aren't generally sold by weight.

Nevada: The Body Oil Deduction

Since 1999, the Mr. Olympia bodybuilding competition has been held in Las Vegas. Like everyone else, bodybuilders can deduct ordinary and necessary business expenses. But it's one of the few professions that can count body oil among those expenses.

New Hampshire: Improperly

New Hampshire has neither a sales tax nor an income tax (with the exception of a 5% tax on interest and dividends above \$2,400, or \$4,800 for joint filers). Instead, many local governments rely on property taxes, which are among the highest in the nation.

New Jersey: The Pumpkin Rule

Several states, New Jersey included, have made a distinction between pumpkins used for food and pumpkins used for decoration. If they were painted, cut, or sold as decorations, the pumpkins were taxable.

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

Returns

Products Costco Will Take Back That Are a Pain to Return Elsewhere

Costco membership has one great privilege, no matter the price: The liberal return policy lets members return just about anything, regardless of cost or condition. The store's deadline-free return policy states they guarantee your satisfaction on every product they sell, and will refund your purchase price. Even membership fees for dissatisfied customers. There are some exception such as electronics, diamonds, tires, and batteries which tend to have return policies that rival those of competitors. However, Costco does draw the line on taking back booze or special-ordered merchandise, and put some pandemic rules were put in place early in 2020. Following is what buyers can expect:

Air Conditioners -- Summer is three months at the least. If an air conditioner bought in May conks out by August, how unhappy will Walmart's 90-day return policy for A/C make you as the weather goes on sweltering? Costco doesn't include air conditioners in its return-policy exemptions.

Gas-Powered Tools -- Costco has lawn mowers, pressure washers, and other power equipment in stock, and will take them back if you're unsatisfied. That is far from standard. Home Depot trims its 90-day return policy to just 30 days for gas-powered equipment.

Electronics -- Costco puts rare limit on returns for televisions, projectors, computers, tablets, smart watches, cameras, drones, camcorders, MP3 players, and cellphones. Even then, the return window is 90 days (though phones vary by carrier). At Best Buy, even customers with "Elite Plus" don't qualify for even the 45-day returns they used to for phones, tablets and wearables such as fitness trackers — it's now just 45 days to return an item and must pay a \$45 restocking fee or 15% of the purchase price for drones, cameras, projectors, and the like. Best Buy isn't alone: Kmart, Sears, Target, Macy's, and other outlets freak out about electronics and limit returns to 15 to 45 days. Walmart has a bunch of 30-day exceptions for consumer electronics and toys.

Patio Sets -- Home Depot gets stringent with furniture and limits returns to just 30 days, knowing what the elements can do to a patio set. Wayfair will take back a patio set within 30 days, but only if it hasn't been assembled and it's in its original packaging. If you bought a patio set at Costco a year ago and the wind turns its umbrella inside out tomorrow, you can return it for a full refund.

Groceries -- Returns can stray into ethical gray areas with perishable items, but Costco sticks by its policy and will take back the occasional opened produce or returned meats. The Kroger grocery chain, which doesn't have membership fees to fall back on, has a similarly broad return policy, but notes some reasonable "exclusions." Costco has none.

Books -- Amazon has a 30-day return policy on books and will provide a complete refund during that window. It will even take back Kindle ebooks for up to seven days. Barnes & Nobles gives customers 30 days to return a book. You could decide tomorrow that a book bought from Costco five years ago is just taking up space and return it for a full refund.

Underwear -- Victoria's Secret sees a lot of lingerie and other underwear returned to its shops, but starts sliding the return window shut at 90 days. That policy demands customers return an item with a receipt and a sewn-in garment tag, with store credit after 90 days. Costco issues a full refund no matter how long you've owned them ... or what condition they're in when they arrive.

Grills -- If your grill gets a summer of use but didn't really get the job done, where you bought it makes a difference. Home Depot and Lowe's will give 90 days to make a return, but may refuse if they see a grill as overused. Costco will take a grill back at any time, even if you make it to the next Labor Day and can't bear the thought of another season with it.

Online Purchases -- One would think we've reached the point of just bringing back any item bought online to a corresponding bricks-and-mortar store, but there are still some stores that don't quite play along. For example, JCPenney has restrictions for certain items sold only on its website. Costco will take back just about any item bought in its online store.

Video Game Consoles -- Costco does not mention video game consoles specifically in its return policy, but does sell consoles at stores and online. Costco has acknowledged that some folks return consoles when an upgraded version comes along, but hasn't slapped a hard return policy on them.

Sporting Goods -- Dick's Sporting Goods has a 60- to 90-day return policy, but with some strings attached. Just about anything gas-powered can't be returned at all. Baseball bats, electric scooters, and bicycles also can't be returned. Costco has no restrictions.

Swimwear -- Beach Bunny swimwear will accept unworn/unwashed returns only within 45 days of a purchase. Likewise PacSun and Zaful won't take returns at all if the swimwear's not in its original condition, and there's also a 30 window with them. Costco, which sells a lot of swimwear and seemingly keeps a blast furnace in the back of each store for burning compromised returns, will accept returned swimwear no matter where, when, or how it's been worn.

Area Rugs -- Home Depot, Macy's and Wayfair will give just 30 days to return a rug. At Bloomingdale's, it's 14 days. Costco, once again, places no limits.

Pet Toys, Pest-Control Items, and Vitamins -- Pet stores are generally pretty understanding about returns. PetSmart and Petco have broad 60-day return policies covering the toys your dogs and cats don't love. Also for pest-control items but Petco won't take back flea and tick prevention items at all if there's no receipt. Neither PetSmart nor Petco will take back their own vitamins and supplements without the original packaging and a receipt, and then only up to 60 days. Costco will take it back all of these items any time for a full refund

Jewelry -- If you aren't feeling 100% sure about the prospects of an engagement or marriage, check out wedding jewelry at Costco. JCPenney will give all of 60 days to return jewelry with a receipt, and Macy's also limits such returns to 60 days. Costco will take back jewelry, but diamonds of more than one carat don't just need all original paperwork (IGI and/or GIA certificates) to get a Jewelry Credit Memo, but must also be inspected for authenticity. That takes up to five business days.

Mattresses -- This is where return policies start to vary wildly. Kmart won't accept them after seven days. IKEA extends that deadline to 90 days, while Sears will take back mattresses after up to 180 days, but not before it's been slept on for a month. Macy's demands that the mattress be undamaged, unsoiled, and free of stains, but won't refund delivery fees and will charge a \$99 pickup fee and 15% restocking fee. Costco doesn't care when you return it, why you're returning it, or what condition it's returning in.

Exercise Equipment -- Walmart will take back a treadmill after 90 days, but the customer pays to have it shipped back to a store. Johnson Fitness & Wellness will take back a product only within 14 days of purchase. Costco won't refund for shipping or setup, but will take back even the costliest elliptical machine at any time for a full refund.

Furniture -- Macy's will give three days, Sears and Kmart will give seven days, JCPenney will give 30 days, and Ikea will give an entire year (with loads of caveats). Costco's furniture collection isn't bound by such restrictions, unless you've customized it.

Appliances -- This is a bit trickier. Costco will give refunds for returns on appliances but won't refund for services such as installation or delivery. Home Depot will accept returns for only 48 hours after delivery, and only if a product is damaged or defective. Lowe's offers a 30-day return policy on major appliances,

as does Sears (though with a 15% restocking fee). Costco's return policy on major appliances is 90 days for refrigerators, freezers, stoves, dishwashers, and the like.

Shoes -- Zappos has an incredible return policy that allows returns for a up to a year with free shipping. Compare that with DSW, with a 90-day overall return policy (watch for 60-day policies too) and an \$8.50 shipping charge deducted from a refund. Costco has open-ended returns for shoes.

Generators -- Generators are not typically items stores will take back after any amount of time. Neither Home Depot nor Lowe's will accept a generator return after 30 days. Costco generators you can return any time they aren't working or fall short of expectations.

[Source: Cheapism | JasonNotte | April 12, 2021 ++]

Romance Scams

Update 01: Con Promises Easy Money

If someone is offering money for nothing, there's probably a catch, right? In this new twist on a romance scam, a con artist offers to become your "sugar momma" (or "sugar daddy") and pay your bills. But according to recent [BBB Scam Tracker](#) reports, it's really a way to trick victims out of money.

How the Scam Works:

- You get a message through a dating or social media app from someone offering to be your "sugar momma" or "sugar daddy." In exchange for your affections, they will pay you a "weekly allowance" of several hundred dollars. The offer sounds too good to be true, but your benefactor seems legitimate – at first.
- The scammer sends you a check or pretends to transfer money into your bank account. They tell you to keep most of the money as your "weekly allowance" – after you do them a small favor. The scammer asks you to transfer part of the cash to their needy friend, pay an outstanding bill, or even make a donation to charity. One victim reported that the con artist wanted him to donate several thousand dollars of the money he received to an "orphanage." Of course, the check or bank transfer was fake, and the "orphanage" was really just the scammer – or an associate - using a different name.
- Watch out for other versions of this con too. Some victims report that the scammer claimed to need access to their bank account in order to deposit money. They ended up sharing their banking info with a con artist.

Protect yourself from this scam:

- Know your rights and responsibilities when it comes to using checks. Banks will make the funds from a check available before the money is actually transferred into your account. If you spend the money and the check is a fake, the bank has the right to recover the funds from you. Learn more about check scams.
- Research your date first. Many scammers steal photos from the internet to use in their dating profiles. You can do a reverse image lookup using a website, like Google Images, to see if the

photos on a profile are stolen from somewhere else. You can also search online for a profile name, email, or phone number to see what adds up and what doesn't.

- Ask specific questions about details given in a profile. A scammer may stumble over remembering details or making a story fit.
- Never send money or sensitive personal information to someone you've never met in person. Cut off contact if someone starts asking you for financial or personally identifiable information (PII), like your credit card number or government ID numbers.

For More Information

Find more information in this romance scams [study from BBB](#) and these [romance scam tips](#). Learn more about [fake check](#) scam. If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](#). 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 16, 2021 ++]

Air Travel Scams

Update 01: Travel is Back, and So Are Scammers

With the COVID-19 vaccines rolling out, travel is coming back. That's great news for summer vacation plans... and scammers. [BBB Scam Tracker](#) is receiving reports of con artists creating fake airline ticket booking sites or customer service numbers. If you are buying airfare, use caution and double check the URL or phone number before providing your credit card information.

How the Scam Works

- While doing an online search for cheap flights, you come across what seems like a great deal with a major airline. You book the flight—either through the website or by calling a customer support number—and receive a confirmation message. However, when you look more closely at the email, you notice that you never actually received your ticket.
- In another version of this scam, you book a flight on a travel website offering deals on airfare. You pay with your credit card like normal. But shortly after making the payment, you receive a call from the company saying that there's been a sudden price increase or an extra charge to finalize your booking. This is something a legitimate company would never do!
- In either case, you call the airline to follow up about your flight. After talking to an agent, you find that they have no record of your booking. It turns out you accidentally purchased tickets through a scam website or a phony customer service number.

Protect yourself from this scam:

- Do your research. If you come across a company you haven't dealt with before, research it before making any purchases. Look on [BBB.org](#) for reviews and feedback from previous customers.
- Double check the URL before you enter personal and payment information. It can be easy to click on a sponsored ad or imposter website without noticing. Before you enter any sensitive information,

double check that you are on the right website and that the link is secure. (Secure links start with “https://” and include a lock icon on the purchase page. Learn more at [BBB.org/BBBSecure](https://www.bbb.org/BBBSecure).)

- Make online purchases with your credit card. Fraudulent charges made on a credit card can usually be disputed, whereas that might not be the case with other payment methods. Unfortunately, there is no way to get back the personal information you may have shared.

For More Information

To learn more about planning a getaway during COVID-19, check out this tip [from BBB](#). For ways to protect yourself from travel scams, go to [BBB.org/TravelScam](https://www.bbb.org/TravelScam). Read more about customer service [number scams](#). If you’ve spotted a scam (whether or not you’ve lost money), report it to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](https://www.bbb.org/AvoidScams). [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | April 23, 2021 ++]

State Tax Tips Oregon thru Wyoming

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.

Oregon -- While the Beaver State often gets dinged for having some of the country’s highest income tax rates (4.75% to 9.9%), consumers there do catch a break in that there is no sales tax. Residents looking to buy their [first](#) home may also be eligible for the state’s First Time Home Buyer Savings Account [program](#) that lets individuals sock away up to \$5,000 (\$10,000 for joint filers) and subtract that amount from their taxable income.

Pennsylvania -- Taxpayers are likely keenly aware that flat-tax Pennsylvania doesn't allow many of the deductions available on the federal return — but there [are a few](#), including employment-related expenses that aren't reimbursed by an employer, contributions to medical and health savings accounts, and contributions to 529 college savings accounts up to \$15,000 per student or \$30,000 per year for married couples.

Rhode Island -- Taxpayers [saving for college](#) should consider taking advantage of the state's 529 College Savings plans. Not only will their contributions grow free of state and federal tax, but Rhode Island allows taxpayers to deduct \$500 per year for individuals and \$1,000 for married couples filing jointly.

South Carolina -- There are a range of [tax credits](#) worth exploring, including refundable credits for up to \$11,000 for parents of qualifying exceptional needs children paying tuition to an eligible school and up to \$10,000 for the first 500,000 pounds of milk a taxpayer sells below its production price. Nonrefundable credits go broader, with up to \$1,000 for taxpayers who retrofit their home against hurricanes and floods or

even \$50 for couples who complete a “premarital preparation course” before applying for a marriage license. You can even get 20% off an investment that helps make movies in the state.

South Dakota -- After benefiting from the lack of an income tax, South Dakotans can't deduct state income tax from federal returns but can still save by deducting state and local sales tax. Individuals and businesses can also benefit from a tax credit for donating to [Scholarship Granting Organizations](#) that help students in nonpublic primary and secondary schools.

Tennessee -- Taxpayers don't have to pay a state "hall" tax on income from salaries and wages, and have finally seen the completion of a six-year phaseout on income from interest and dividend earnings too. And people 65 and older with an income of \$37,000 or less (\$68,000 for joint filers), are also exempt. Starting last year, anyone age 100 or older is also exempt.

Texas -- No income tax is collected from Texans, who can save further by taking the state and local tax deduction (aka SALT) on their federal returns, though the deduction is now capped at \$10,000 and may not be worthwhile for many after the federal tax reform law increased the standard deduction.

Utah -- Taxpayers making a sacrifice to help those in need can be helped in turn by the [live organ donation](#) expenses credit of up to \$10,000 for certain expenses (such as travel, lodging, or lost wages) when donating certain organs, including bone marrow. The state also offers credits for things such as retirement income, solar projects, and educational savings plans.

Vermont -- Vermont has one of the higher income tax rates in the country, but residents can still save thanks to a number of tax credit [programs](#).. Among the more popular is one helping working people offset the cost of caring for children and other dependents. The state also offers a rebate program to help with a percentage of rent paid for households where the annual income doesn't exceed \$47,000.

Virginia -- Farmers who have had a particularly abundant year may want to consider donating excess food crops to a nonprofit food bank and reaping the [Food Crop Donation Credit](#) allows credit equal to 30% of the fair market value for the donated food up to \$5,000. Non-farmers can take advantage of [other deductions](#), including for child and dependent care.

Washington -- One more state that doesn't collect income tax, Washingtonians should be sure investigate whether it is worthwhile to deduct their pricey state and local [sales taxes](#) on federal returns.

West Virginia -- Taxpayers 65 or older, or who are permanently and totally disabled, may subtract [up to \\$8,000](#) from their federal adjusted gross income for West Virginia tax purposes.

Wisconsin -- Low- to moderate-income working families may be eligible for tax relief from the Wisconsin Earned Income [Tax credit](#) (in addition to the federal credit). Individuals or married couples age 62 or over, or the disabled, may also find some relief with the state's [Homestead Credit](#).

Wyoming -- Wyoming doesn't collect state income tax or tax intangible assets such as stocks and bonds. And retirees don't [don't have to pay](#) tax on Social Security, withdrawals from a 401(k), or other types of retirement income.

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

Tax Burden for Montana 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 **Montana:**

Sales Taxes

While Montana has no statewide sales tax, some municipalities and cities (especially large tourist destinations) charge their own local sales taxes on most purchases. There are additional taxes on tourism-related businesses such as hotels and campgrounds (7%) and rental car companies (4%). Montana does not allow local jurisdictions like cities or counties to collect a local sales tax.

Excise Taxes

An excise tax is a tax directly levied on certain goods by a state or federal government. The most prominent excise taxes collected by the Montana state government are the fuel tax on gasoline and the so-called "sin tax" collected on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. Montana's excise taxes are flat per-unit taxes that must be paid directly to the Montana 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 Montana merchants pass on the excise tax to the customer through higher prices for the taxed goods. An average of \$545 in yearly excise taxes per capita is collected, higher than 68% of the other 50 states.

- **Alcohol:** Beer: \$0.14 per gal | Wine: \$1.06 per gal | Liquor \$9.74 per gal. The excise tax on beer is lower than 78% of the other 50 states and is ranked #39 out of all states. The excise tax on wine is higher than 62% of all states and is ranked #19 out of the 50 states. The excise tax on Spirits is higher than 78% of all states and is ranked #11 out of the 50 states. Note that the IRS also collects a federal excise taxes on alcoholic beverages, which are included separately from Montana's alcohol taxes in the final purchase price
- **Cannabis:** 20% of retail price. As of March 2021, retail sale of recreational marijuana has not yet started.
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans is \$6.03 per phone service plan, one of the lowest cellphone taxes in the country. Montana's average cellphone tax is ranked #47 out of all states. The cellphone tax is already included in the service plan price you pay to your service provider, and may be listed as "Misc. taxes and Fees" or "Other" on your monthly bill.
- **Cigarettes:** The Montana excise tax on cigarettes is \$1.70 per 20 cigarettes, higher than 64% of the other 50 states. Montana's excise tax on cigarettes is ranked #18 out of the 50 states. The Montana cigarette tax of \$1.70 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 Montana excise tax on gasoline is 27.00¢ per gallon, higher than 56% of the other 50 states. Montana's excise tax on gasoline is ranked #22 out of all states. The Montana gas tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations in Montana 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. Refer to <https://www.salestaxhandbook.com/maine/gasoline-fuel> for all state and federal taxes by type of fuel
- **Vehicle:** Montana 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 Montana Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid.

Personal Income Taxes

The average family pays \$1815 in income taxes which is ranked 16th highest of all states. In Montana, taxpayers can deduct up to \$5,000 of Federal income tax from their Montana taxable income for individuals and \$10,000 for married couples filing jointly.

Tax Rate Range: Low - 1%; High – 6.9%

Income Brackets: Seven. Lowest – \$3,100; Highest – \$18,700

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$2,560; Married – \$5,120; Dependents – \$2,560

Additional Exemptions: Over 65 or blind on each

Standard Deduction: Single – \$4,790; Married filing jointly or head of Household – \$9,580.

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: All federal income taxes paid for the year, up to \$5,000 for single filers and \$10,000 for married couples filing jointly.

Retirement Income Taxes: Montana taxes all pension, Social Security and other retirement income, except Tier I and II Railroad benefits. Social Security is taxed differently than it is at the federal level and is deductible for taxpayers who meet income requirements. Single taxpayers with an AGI under \$25,000 and those who file a joint return with less than \$32,000 AGI can deduct all Social Security retirement income. Taxpayers who have a higher AGI, but under \$34,000 for single filers or \$44,000 for joint filers, may deduct one-half of Social Security retirement income. Those with higher AGIs can deduct 15%.

Some Montana retirees are entitled to a partial exemption on up to \$4,180 from a retirement plan income, including from 401(k) plans and IRAs. Taxpayers must have a federal adjusted gross income of \$36,910 or less, or \$39,000 or less for joint filers. Married spouses can each claim the exemption. Interest income is partially exempt from Montana tax for taxpayers age 65 or older. The exemption is on up to \$800 of the interest income reported in federal adjusted gross income. If married and filing jointly, the amount is \$1,600.

Retired Military Pay: Military retirement benefits are taxable income in Montana. Survivor benefits are taxed following federal tax rules.

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: Elderly Homeowner/Renter Credit. A property tax relief program that provides a refundable income tax credit of up to \$1,000 for those who are 62 or older on 31 DEC, lived in Montana for at least nine months, have rented, owned, or leased a home in Montana for six months, and have a household income under \$45,000. Montana homeowners or renters age 62 or older may qualify for this program even if they not have to file an income tax return. To file refer to <https://tap.dor.mt.gov/#2>.

Delinquent Fee: Effective January 1, 2021, the annual interest rate assessed on outstanding balances is 3 percent. This rate also applies to underpayment of estimated taxes. Interest is calculated daily.

Website: Montana Department of Revenue <https://mtrevenue.gov/taxes>.

Tax Forms:

- <https://app.mt.gov/myrevenue/Endpoint/DownloadPdf?yearId=1044> Tax Instructions
- <https://app.mt.gov/myrevenue/Endpoint/DownloadPdf?yearId=1043> Resident Return
- <https://app.mt.gov/myrevenue/Endpoint/Directory?type=SiteMenu> All Tax forms

Property Taxes

The median property tax is \$1,465 per year for a home worth the median value of \$176,300. Counties collect an average of 0.83% of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year. Montana is ranked number twenty nine out of the fifty states, in order of the average amount of property taxes collected. The state's median income is \$52,498 per year, so the median yearly property tax paid by residents amounts to approximately 2.79% of their yearly income. Montana is ranked 24th 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. Missoula County collects the highest property tax in Montana, levying an average of \$2,176 (0.93% of median home value) yearly in property taxes, while Wibaux County has the lowest property tax in the state, collecting an average tax of \$505 (0.84% of median home value) per year. Property taxes are collected on a county level, and each county in Montana 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 Montana. For more localized property tax rates refer to the county list at <http://www.tax-rates.org/montana/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.

Montana's Property Tax Assistance Program (PTAP) reduces the property tax rate for citizens on a fixed or limited income. The PTAP benefit applies to the first \$200,000 of the primary residence market value. Reductions from 30% to 80% are determined by marriage status and income range. The state reduces property taxes for veterans with 100% disability related to service and unmarried surviving spouses via the Montana Disabled Veterans (MDV) Assistance Program. Property tax reductions range from 50% to 100%, depending on income level and marital status. Visit Montana's [tax relief page](#) for information about all available property tax assistance.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax and no estate tax. For more information on inheritance and estate taxes refer to http://revenue.mt.gov/home/individuals/estateinheritance_taxes.

Note: Montana has a statutory provision for automatic adjustment of tax brackets, personal exemptions or standard deductions to the rate of inflation.

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>.
- 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 [Montana Department of Revenue](http://www.mt.gov) site. If you are thinking of moving to Montana, refer to <http://mt.gov>

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#MONTANA> | April 2021 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest

April 16 thru 30, 2021

- **The Big Departure Speech.** What did you think of Dragnet's Joe Friday's Officer Friday's speech at <https://youtu.be/FZo2hhvvlpw> to some teenagers about their wishes to start a new country. Does it still hold up today?
- **End of Life Documents.** Check out the 10 min video at <https://youtu.be/e8Lycb1MFeQ>. Following this guidance will greatly assist your family in the event of your death.
- **Parents & Children.** According to the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey the number of children living with two parents has dropped since 1968, while the percentage living with their mother only has doubled. In 1968, 85% of children under 18 lived with two parents (regardless of marital status); by 2020, 70% did. The number of children living with their father only, although small, more than quadrupled from 1% to 4.5% between 1968 and 2020.
- **Norway U.S. Bases.** The U.S. and Norway signed a revised defense cooperation agreement 16 APRG that will allow the Americans to build facilities at three airfields and one naval base in the country.

- **Beer vs. Women.** Check out https://img-9gag-fun.9cache.com/photo/azm8rrq_460svav1.mp4 to listen to a song on why beer is better than woman.
- **Geico Security Breach.** In a data breach notice filed with the California attorney general’s office, Geico said information gathered from other sources was used to “obtain unauthorized access to customer’s driver’s license numbers through their website’s online sales system between January 21 and March 1, 2021.
- **China.** The naval base in the East African nation of Djibouti which China opened in 2017 is now large enough to host aircraft carriers, marking the latest sign that Beijing is looking to expand military efforts in the region, U.S. Africa Command’s top leader said. It operates just seven miles from Camp Lemmonier, the U.S. military’s operational hub in the Horn of Africa.
- **Military Spending.** Global spending on militaries rose to \$1.981 trillion last year, an increase of 2.6 percent over the previous year’s figure, according to new research by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Overall, the U.S. and China represent 52 percent of all military spending for the year.
- **Medicare Spending.** A Kaiser Family Foundation study has found that ten percent of prescription drugs make up the majority of Medicare drug spending.
- **Military Traditions.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qy3SIRuUyMw> to learn about 10 of the weirdest ones.
- **Vietnam.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKtWX9TDFYc> to listen to a participant’s 10 min description of The Battle of Ia Drang LZ X-RAY three day conflict.

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

Marijuana

Update 05: Consequences of Using After Your State ‘Legalizes’ It

States across the country are claiming to have legalized marijuana. While they have the authority to do so for state law only, marijuana still remains an illegal Schedule 1 drug and controlled substance to the federal government. Many people, including gun owners, security clearance holders, and service members will soon learn that marijuana use is certainly still illegal. Anybody falling into one or more of these categories has three major concerns.

1. Marijuana users will fail future NICS firearm background checks

This is a collateral consequence that many fail to consider. Marijuana users are considered to be “prohibited persons.” Question 21(e) of the NICS questionnaire (ATF Form 4473 (5300.9)) asks, “Are you an unlawful user of, or addicted to, marijuana or any depressant, stimulant, narcotic drug, or any other controlled substance?” To give you an idea of how serious the federal government considers the issue of marijuana use to be, the remaining sub-questions in section 21 (prohibited persons) deal with felony arrests and fugitives from justice. The key words to focus on in question 21(e) are “unlawful” and “user.”

Marijuana is illegal in the United States. There can be no lawful use of marijuana in any state. Therefore, all marijuana use is illegal with regard to the federal government and the aforementioned form. That said, the question asks if you are a user. This question, for now, fails to address possession,

distribution, or investments in marijuana. As written, you are not presently required to disclose if you have possessed, distributed, or invested in marijuana manufacturing or distribution through dispensaries or other means. If you intend to visit a dispensary, you will need to provide ID, which will create a record of your purchase. There are avenues to pursue an appeal of the NICS determination, but the process can be difficult to navigate in most states.

2. Marijuana users will have their security clearances denied or stripped

Not all clearance applicants understand that all forms of marijuana use are illegal. Some applicants and clearance holders occasionally visit dispensaries for recreational use or claim that their marijuana use is for medicinal purposes. Regardless of whether the purchase is at a dispensary or the user has a marijuana card, the federal government considers the use to be illegal.

Guideline H (drug involvement and substance misuse) of the National Security Adjudicative Guidelines explains that use of controlled substances “can raise questions about an individual’s reliability and trustworthiness, both because such behavior may lead to physical and psychological impairment and because it raises questions about a person’s ability or willingness to comply with laws, rules, and regulations.” See Guideline H. Additionally, the SF-86 (questionnaire for national security positions) specifically asks about illegal use, purchase, manufacture, cultivation, trafficking, production, transfer, shipping, receiving, handling or sale. See SF-86, Section 23. Clearly, this goes well beyond including just marijuana users. This includes investing in stocks and dispensaries. As previously stated, the federal government considers marijuana to be a Schedule 1 controlled substance. Prior marijuana use is not a bar from obtaining a security clearance, but it will make obtaining a favorable adjudication more difficult.

3. Marijuana users will be processed for separation from their military branch

Some service members are tempted to visit local dispensaries in states that claim to have legalized marijuana. Again, you will create a record of visiting that dispensary and of any purchases made. The government does not differentiate between smoking and edibles. Even most CBD products contain a small amount of THC, which is a problem for polices that are considered to be zero tolerance. The record created during a visit to a dispensary might later be used to administratively separate the service member for violations of the UCMJ.

Article 112a of the UCMJ (10 U.S. Code § 912a) deals with wrongful use, possession, manufacturing, distribution, importation and exportation of controlled substances. Article 112b lists the specific substances and includes marijuana. Therefore, a service member involved in using, possessing, manufacturing, or distributing marijuana in any state or country is in violation of the UCMJ. That service member’s military branch might exercise a mandatory processing for separation policy, initiating separation proceedings against a service member believed to be in violation of Art 112a. The service member has due process and can challenge the action in an administrative separation board or court-martial.

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While marijuana use might appear to be legal in your state, you should consider your relationship to the federal government. Consider that, for now, the federal government still considers marijuana to be a controlled substance and illegal drug and that they might choose to enforce federal laws under certain circumstances. Ask yourself if the benefit outweighs the risks. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Anthony Kuhn | April 14, 2021 ++]

Stolen Valor

Update 121: Montana Supreme Court Overturn 2 Convictions



A former judge improperly punished two men who lied about their military service in court, the Montana Supreme Court ruled 14 APR. Former Montana Eighth District Court Judge Greg Pinski had forced **Ryan Patrick Morris** and **Troy Allan Nelson** in 2019 to conduct a series of acts of apology in order to be eligible for parole. In order for both to be eligible for parole, Pinski had mandated that every year during the three-year suspended sentences both men received, the two had to stand at the Montana Veterans Memorial for eight hours on each Memorial and Veterans Day wearing a sign that reads, “I am a liar. I am not a veteran. I stole valor. I have dishonored all veterans.”

The state high court struck down the sentencing condition on Wednesday. Morris had received 10 years in prison for violating the terms of his probation for felony burglary, while Nelson got five years for a drug possession conviction. Pinski also ruled that both men would have to write, by hand, the names of all 6,756 Americans killed in Iraq and Afghanistan; write out the obituaries of the 40 Montana residents killed in the two wars and send hand-written letters of apology to several veterans groups in which they would have to identify themselves as having lied about their military service to receive help and possibly a lesser sentence through a Veterans Court. Once paroled, the judge ordered that both men serve 441 hours of community service, an hour for each of the Montana residents that have been killed in combat since the Korean War.

The two men appealed the conditions last year. American Civil Liberties Union of Montana had called the conditions degrading and unconstitutional. Neither of the men had been officially charged with stolen valor. Morris had claimed in 2016 he did seven combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, had PTSD and had his hip replaced after he was wounded by an IED. Nelson successfully enrolled himself into the Veterans Treatment Court before officials determined he had not actually served in the military.

“At long last, Mr. Morris and Mr. Nelson were able to tell their side of the story,” said Morris and Nelson’s appellate defense attorney James Reavis. “The media covered the sensationalism of the district court’s actions, but largely did not stop to ask whether the court’s actions were legal or constitutional. Our brief successfully argued that the district court acted without statutory authority and violated the Montana & U.S. Constitutions.” [Source: Associated Press | April 15, 2021 ++]

Chernobyl

35 Years On, It Warns and Inspires



In this file photo (left) taken on Thursday, Dec. 22, 2016, a fox roams in the deserted town of Pripjat, about 2 miles from the Chernobyl nuclear plant in Ukraine. In the photo (right) a man walks APR 2021 past a shelter covering the exploded reactor

The vast and empty Chernobyl Exclusion Zone around the site of the world's worst nuclear accident is a baleful monument to human mistakes. Yet 35 years after a power plant reactor exploded, Ukrainians also look to it for inspiration, solace and income. Reactor No. 4 at the power plant 65 miles north of the capital Kyiv exploded and caught fire deep in the night on April 26, 1986, shattering the building and spewing radioactive material high into the sky. Soviet authorities made the catastrophe even worse by failing to tell the public what had happened — although the nearby plant workers' town of Pripjat was evacuated the next day, the 2 million residents of Kyiv weren't informed despite the fallout danger. The world learned of the disaster only after heightened radiation was detected in Sweden.

Eventually, more than 100,000 people were evacuated from the vicinity and a 1,000-square-mile exclusion zone was established where the only activity was workers disposing of waste and tending to a hastily built sarcophagus covering the reactor. Radiation continued to leak from the reactor building until 2019, when the entire building was covered by an enormous arch-shaped shelter. As robots inside the shelter began dismantling the reactor, officials felt new optimism about the zone. "This is a place of tragedy and memory, but it is also a place where you can see how a person can overcome the consequences of a global catastrophe," said Bohdan Borukhovskiy, Ukraine's deputy environment minister. "We want a new narrative to appear — it was not a zone of exclusion, but a zone of development and revival," he said.

For him, that narrative includes encouraging tourism. "Our tourism is unique, it is not a classic concept of tourism," he said. "This is an area of meditation and reflection, an area where you can see the impact of human error, but you can also see the human heroism that corrects it." The Chernobyl zone saw its tourism increase twofold after the lauded television miniseries of 2019 and officials hope that level of interest will continue, or grow, once the global pandemic has receded. One of the prime draws for tourists is to see the ruins of Pripjat, the once-modern town of 50,000 now being taken over by decay and vegetation. Work is underway to build paths to make it easier for visitors to navigate the ruins.

The Chernobyl plant is out of service, but there is still much work to be done at the decommissioned plant. Borukhovskiy said all four of its reactors are to be dismantled only by 2064. Ukraine also has decided to use the deserted zone as the site for its centralized storage facility for the spent fuel from the country's four remaining nuclear power plants, and that is to open this year. Until recently, the fuel was disposed of in Russia. Storing the spent fuel at home will save the country an estimated \$200 million a

year. "We are doing everything possible so that this territory, where it is now impossible for people to live, is used with benefit and gives the country a profit," said Serhiy Kostyuk, head of the agency that manages the exclusion zone.

Although the radiation level in the zone is low enough that tourists can visit and workers can carry out their jobs, permanent residence is banned. However, more than 100 people still live in the zone that extends 18 miles around the nuclear power plant, despite orders to leave the site. Among them is 85-year-old former teacher Yevgeny Markevich, who said "It's a great happiness to live at home, but it's sad that it's not as it used to be. Today, he grows potatoes and cucumbers on his garden plot, which he takes for tests "in order to partially protect myself." Long-term effects on human health remain the subject of intense scientific debate. Immediately after the accident, 30 plant workers and firefighters died from acute radiation sickness. Later, thousands of people died from radiation-related illnesses such as cancer.

To the surprise of many who expected the area might be a dead zone for centuries, wildlife is thriving: Bears, bison, wolves, lynx, wild horses and dozens of bird species live in the people-free territory. According to scientists, the animals were much more resistant to radiation than expected, and were able to quickly adapt to strong radiation. Ukrainian scientists are researching this phenomenon together with colleagues from Japan and Germany. "This is a gigantic territory ... in which we keep a chronicle of nature," said biologist Denis Vishnevskiy, 43, who has been observing nature in the reserve for the past 20 years. "The exclusion zone is not a curse, but our resource."

The Ukrainian authorities are calling for the exclusion zone to be included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, since the object is a unique place "of interest to all mankind". The Ministry of Culture of Ukraine has already taken steps to recognize the zone as a monument, which will attract more funding and tourists. "Chernobyl should not become a wild playground for adventure hunters," said Ukrainian Culture Minister Oleksandr Tkachenko. "People should leave the exclusion zone with the awareness of the historical memory of this place and its importance for all mankind." In the spirit of preserving the memories, some enthusiasts have created the Chernobyl App, which includes declassified documents about the disaster and allows users to explore augmented-reality view of the zone and structures.

"Sixty percent of Ukrainians do not know the date of the accident and we decided that there should be a resource where a lot of verified information is collected," said Valeriy Korshunov, one of the free app's developers. [Source: Associated Press | Yuras Karmanau | April 25, 2021 ++]

Afghan Russian Involvement

Update 03: May Not Have Been Russian Bounties on US Troops After All

U.S. intelligence agencies aren't particularly confident that Russia offered money to the Taliban for the killing of U.S. troops deployed to Afghanistan, a story that rocked the military and intelligence communities last summer. The Trump administration consistently downplayed the issue, based on a June report from the New York Times. Then-Defense Secretary Mark Esper told lawmakers during a hearing in July that those reporters were not corroborated. "The United States intelligence community assesses with low to moderate confidence that Russian intelligence officers sought to encourage Taliban attacks against U.S. coalition personnel in Afghanistan in 2019, including through financial incentives and compensation," a senior administration official told reporters on 15 APR.

Officials in President Donald Trump’s administration reportedly had heard of the possibility of the bounties since at least early 2019. In June, they told the Associated Press that the president hadn’t been briefed on the matter because it hadn’t been confirmed. In addition to Esper, U.S. Central Command boss Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie also shared doubts at the time that the intelligence reporters were accurate. “I found it very worrisome. I didn’t find that there was a causative link there,” said McKenzie, adding that it has been confirmed that Russia has supported the Taliban in other ways, including with weapons and other resources. The Biden administration on 15 APR announced sanctions against Russia for other actions, including election interference and hacking.

“We should always remember, the Russians are not our friends,” McKenzie said in June. “They are not our friends in Afghanistan. And they do not wish us well, and we just need to remember that at all times when we evaluate that intelligence.” The U.S. will be in a particularly vulnerable position in Afghanistan as it prepares to draw down its last 2,500 troops by Sept. 11. Administration officials have not yet detailed a plan for sustaining force protection as troop numbers dwindle. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers| April 15, 2021 ++]

North Korea Sanctions

Update 02: North Korea Has More Nuclear Weapons than Ever

Ever since North Korea began building nuclear weapons in the 1990s, the policy of the United States has been clear: Give up those bombs or face international isolation. After three decades of sanctions, threats of force and diplomacy — including President Trump's theatrical summits with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un — North Korea now has more nuclear weapons than ever, plus ballistic missiles that intelligence officials say could deliver a warhead to the U.S. A research report estimated that North Korea could have up to 242 nuclear weapons and dozens of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) by 2027. And because of the global pandemic, the hermit kingdom has shuttered its borders, halting imports of food and medicine in a way more punishing than international sanctions could ever be.

That dangerous security threat is now in President Joe Biden's lap, and his administration is expected to announce the results of a policy review on North Korea soon. Experts and people briefed on it say they expect that while Biden will not formally abandon the goal of "total denuclearization," he will attempt to achieve the more limited aim of diminishing North Korea's nuclear threat, while at the same time seeking to lower the visibility of a thorny foreign policy problem that has no neat solution. "Realistically speaking, the administration's North Korea strategy will probably be open to (an) approach in which North Korea's capabilities are capped or limited," Eric Brewer, who worked on North Korea policy at the National Security Council in the Obama administration, told NBC News. "Even if denuclearization remains a component of the strategy, I find it hard to believe they wouldn't be open to more interim solutions that reduce the threat."

The administration also plans to seek to reinvigorate the so-called trilateral relationship between the U.S., South Korea and Japan, according to a former Trump administration official who has been consulted. Whether there are direct talks with the North Koreans depends on the North's behavior, that person said. While denuclearization would remain a long-term goal, the U.S. could try to persuade North Korea to agree to restrictions on its delivery systems for nuclear weapons in return for substantial relief from

economic sanctions, Brewer said. If unchecked, those delivery systems, including solid-fuel missiles, ICBM warheads and multiple re-entry vehicles, could allow North Korea to launch attacks faster and potentially evade U.S. countermeasures.

Brewer recently co-authored an article in *Foreign Affairs* with Sue Mi-Terry, who worked on the National Intelligence Council under President Obama and served as a CIA analyst, arguing for a "realistic bargain" with North Korea. The two, who are both now senior fellows at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, wrote that the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the regime's economic woes, and could mean North Korean leader Kim Jong Un would be open to cutting a deal. "Kim has not been easily swayed by economic pressure in the past," they wrote, but it is possible he is desperate enough for sanctions relief — and confident enough in his existing nuclear and missile capabilities — that he would trade some limits on his weapons programs for a significant reduction in sanctions."

In an interview, Terry told NBC News, "Right now, we are looking to re-engage with North Korea in some form." Victor Cha, who oversaw Korea policy in the George W. Bush administration, agreed. He noted that North Korea has shut down its borders completely in an effort to tamp down the spread of Covid-19, including imports of food and medicine from China. In so doing, it has imposed a blockade on itself more draconian than sanctions, which don't usually cover humanitarian aid. "This is about as maximum as the sanctions can be and it's all self-imposed," said Cha, who said Biden may want to offer pandemic-related aid as a gesture of goodwill.

Even with a less ambitious objective, arms control negotiations with North Korea would be "really, really hard," Brewer said, particularly because Pyongyang has tended to fiercely resist any inspection or verification mechanisms. And any restrictions on the North's weapons systems would have to be verified on the ground, he said, not just via U.S. intelligence surveillance. Intelligence officials say North Korea has no intention of giving up its nuclear weapons, leaving the Biden administration faced with a series of unpalatable options. They range from attempting to restart talks that have a history of failure to a military strike that could have disastrous repercussions. "North Korea will be a WMD threat for the foreseeable future, because [Kim Jong Un] remains strongly committed to the country's nuclear weapons, the country is actively engaged in ballistic missile research and development, and Pyongyang's (chemical and biological) efforts persist," says an unclassified intelligence assessment released Tuesday by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

After two failed presidential summits with Trump, North Korea has greeted the incoming Biden team with a series of provocations, including harsh rhetoric and a short-range missile test. But so far, the regime has not taken the far more provocative steps of testing a long-range missile or a nuclear weapon, both of which it has done previously. There is always a chance, however, that Biden's bid for negotiations fails, and North Korea falls back on its pattern of aggressive and attention-seeking behavior, including threatening its neighbors and testing dangerous weapons. If that happens, the only real option short of war — covert CIA operations aside — is more economic sanctions, experts say. Critics point out that years of sanctions of various kinds have failed to convince the North to denuclearize. But in fact, observers say, the U.S. has never mounted the sort of sustained and biting sanctions campaign against North Korea that the Obama administration used to push Iran to bargain, resulting in a 2015 nuclear agreement from which Trump withdrew, but which Biden is seeking to restore.

"It took three years of really hard sanctions for Iran to come to the negotiating table," Terry said. Those sanctions included penalties against European and other banks accused of violating the law by doing

business with Iran. So far, no administration has been willing to levy similar "secondary sanctions" against Chinese banks that keep North Korea afloat. "The U.S. imposed \$8 billion to \$9 billion in fines on U.K. and French banks for money laundering for Iran, but \$0 in fines on Chinese banks for money laundering for North Korea," said Bruce Klingner, a former CIA analyst and Korea expert at the Heritage Foundation.

Klingner and other North Korea experts cite a single telling exception to that rule: An action against an obscure bank in Macau that they say could be a blueprint for putting the squeeze on North Korea. The Treasury Department imposed sanctions on Banco Delta Asia in 2005, accusing it of laundering money for the North Korean regime. Soon, more than two dozen financial institutions had pulled back from doing business with North Korea, imperiling its finances. Even many top U.S. officials were surprised at how hard the sanctions had bitten. "You Americans finally have found a way to hurt us," Cha, then the point person on Korea policy, recalls an inebriated North Korean diplomat mumbling during a round of toasts at a negotiation. But two years after the sanctions on the bank were imposed — including the freezing of \$25 million in North Korean assets — the U.S. gave the money back, paving the way for North Korea to re-enter the international banking system. It was part of a deal that was supposed to result in the unwinding of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. That didn't happen, of course, yet no similar sanctions have been levied since.

Joshua Stanton, who runs the blog [OneFreeKorea](#) and is one of the foremost experts on North Korea sanctions, argues that United Nations reports on sanctions compliance regularly provide evidence that could be used to penalize companies, but the U.S. has rarely acted on that material. "Why are we more tolerant of Chinese banks violating North Korea sanctions than Barack Obama was of European banks that violated Iran sanctions?" asked Stanton. One reason, Cha and others say, is because the U.S. has long sought China's help in pressuring North Korea. "We've always been careful about going after Chinese," Cha said. "It's a balancing act — there's a desire to have Chinese cooperation in the negotiations."

In order for diplomacy to work, it must be backed by a credible threat of force, the former Trump administration official and other experts say. "The only way to get the North to agree to anything is sanctions plus a military threat, and diplomatic pressure," the former official said. In response to questions from NBC News, a spokesperson for the National Security Council said, "The North Korea review is in its final stages and we're not going to get ahead of that." [Source: NBC News | Ken Dilanian, Carol E. Lee & Dan De Luce | April 17, 2021 ++]

Backyard Pools Reasons Not to Put One In

As the coronavirus pandemic has made it impossible in most places to go to the beach or schlep to the community pool, for the time being, it almost seems like a backyard pool would be an ultra-convenient way to cool off — and, in better times, welcome friends. Think twice, though: Despite all their warm-weather appeal, pools have some serious downsides that may not be readily apparent when the temperature (and pool temptations) are high. Here are some reasons to reconsider getting a pool at home.



It's Expensive to Install

The most obvious reason to forgo a pool? Big-time sticker shock. Installing an in-ground pool costs more than \$51,800 on average, according to HomeAdvisor. An above-ground pool is significantly less expensive, clocking in anywhere from [\\$1,100 to \\$3,500 to install](#) and around [\\$5,000 to build](#) — still not chump change for most homeowners.

There Are Other Hidden Costs

The pool is expensive enough, but the quote may not include related costs: Will a retaining wall or other costly landscaping be needed? Will there be a deck for an above-ground pool, or a concrete patio for an in-ground pool? What about fancy lighting? And don't forget all those fun accessories: diving boards, slides, pool floats — they add up.

It's Pricey to Maintain

The expenses don't end once installation is over. HomeAdvisor estimates an average \$115 a month going to pool maintenance, though that figure is skewed by pool owners who use professional services. Still, DIY maintenance isn't cheap, either: You'll have to pony up for supplies including a skimmer, chlorine, a pH kit, a pool vacuum, filters, and a quality pool cover, ranging from \$30 to upward of \$10,000 for a mechanical model.

Time Consuming

Do-it-yourselfers should remember that they may save on labor costs, but are still paying with their time. A pool owner can [spend five to 10 hours a week](#) maintaining a pool with skimming debris, making sure pool chemicals are in balance, and so on, according to a Money Crashers article.

Repairs Are Costly

One-time [pool repairs](#) outside a maintenance budget can be a real wallet-buster, experts tell Angie's List. A busted pool pump motor can be around \$350, and around \$800 to replace. Resurfacing a leaking pool starts around \$6,000, while replacing a vinyl lining starts around \$3,000. A new pool filter may cost around \$600.

Pool Safety Risk

Roughly [10 people a day died](#) after drowning in non-boating accidents from 2005 to 2014, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The highest rates are for children ages 1 to 4, and most of those young victims drowned in backyard pools. Educate yourself on how to [enjoy summer safely](#). Even pets are at risk, from drowning or lapping up chemical-laden pool water.

Keeping Them Safe Is Expensive

Many cities and counties won't allow a pool to be installed unless it's fenced in. Home insurers may also [require it](#). But pool fences start at well over \$1,000, and parents of young kids should also seriously consider a pool alarm that will sound if someone enters the pool or opens a pool gate when they shouldn't. These start around \$20 on Amazon and top out around \$250.

You'll Need More Liability Insurance

Pools are an "attractive nuisance," meaning possible liability if your pool causes an injury or death. The Insurance Information Institute cautions that pool owners should have at least \$300,000 to \$500,000 of [liability coverage](#), or even consider an umbrella policy providing \$1 million in protection, which could mean roughly \$300 a year more in premiums.

You'll Need Structural Insurance, Too

An in-ground pool is an investment, so don't forget to protect it by increasing your "other structures" [coverage](#), Insurance.com warns. Most policies include this coverage up to 10 percent of a home's value — if that's not enough, each additional \$1,000 in coverage may bump up a premium about \$5. Above-ground pools may fall under personal property coverage, but make sure there are no pool-specific claim limits.

Pools are Polarizing

Who wouldn't want a pool? Surely it will make the house an easy sell, you may think. Not so fast, real estate agents warn. While there are some people who find a pool appealing, other would-be buyers won't want the headaches that come with it, especially if they have small kids. Getting rid of a pool isn't exactly cheap, either: It could take \$10,000 or more to make a typical in-ground pool disappear.

You Won't Get All the Money Back

Pools are not kitchens: Spending big on one doesn't mean getting the money back when it's time to sell. Half the investment might be recouped on an in-ground pool, but only in very warm climates that boast good swimming weather most of the year, Money Crashers says. An above-ground pool may even cost money when it's time to sell, as many buyers consider them an eyesore.

Pools Are a Critter Haven

If you're not a wildlife lover, be forewarned: Animals love pools. Some of the most common visitors include frogs, snakes, ducks, and geese; you may even find alligators if you live down south. The CDC warns pool owners to keep a close watch for raccoons, which can harbor a parasite that can cause a serious neurological illness in humans.

The Electricity Bill May Soar

Pool pumps use more electricity than any household appliance, and can easily [add up](#) to \$300 to an electricity bill in a year, according to Oracle data. A variable-speed pump can cut down on energy costs, but might come at double the upfront cost of a single-speed pump.

The Water Bill May Soar

Water is no longer cheap — it's combined water and sewer bills that can be the real killer when filling up or topping off a pool. The bill could more than double for the month you fill a pool — depending on the size, you may need 15,000 or more gallons on top of the 12,000 a family may normally use in a month. That could mean as little as an extra \$65 in some cities, or well over \$360 in others, based on [increases tracked by](#) Circle of Blue.

It's Not Exactly 'Green'

If you're concerned about living an eco-friendly life, getting a pool probably isn't the best move. Increased electricity and water use not only affect a utility bill, but the environment, too. Researchers have found that [environmental impacts](#) are much greater in warmer, more arid climates where pools are likely to get greater use.

It Can't Be Used Year-Round

Experts recommend opening a backyard pool when the temperature makes it consistently past 70 each day. For much of the country, that means it's only reliably warm enough to enjoy a pool for about five months out of the year — typically May through September. For some northern parts, the swimming season is really only three months long.

It May Not Even Be Allowed

Do you live in a neighborhood with a [homeowners association](#)? Better check the rules before giving in to pool dreams. Above-ground pools are commonly prohibited, and associations may still restrict homeowners on the kinds of in-ground pools they can install.

It Eats Up Yard Space

Do you need grass for pets or kids to romp? Consider whether you'll have enough yard space for anything else once a pool is installed. In-ground pools begin around 10 by 20 feet, while the smallest above-ground pools are about 12 feet round. You'll also need to account for patio space or local rules requiring pools be a certain distance from homes and property lines.

Pools Can Make You Sick

A backyard pool may seem safer than a public pool when it comes to spreading illnesses, but a private paradise isn't immune from germs. According to the CDC, diarrhea is the most common recreational water illness; rashes, ear infections, and respiratory issues are also common. Properly chlorinated water can take care of most germs in an hour, but the CDC says others can survive for days.

You May Attract Unwanted Guests

A lovely pool can make a home suddenly attractive as a new hangout. While a planned pool party could be a great time, a pool may also mean family members, friends, and neighbors turning up to cool off without an invitation. It's best to set ground rules to minimize these awkward situations.

[Source: Cheapism | Sandra Latham | April 08, 2021 ++]

Dollar Bill

What Is On The Back - And What It Stands For!

The origins of the symbolism on the back of the U.S. one-dollar bill is a mixture of fact and folklore. On the rear of the One Dollar bill, you will see two circles. Together, they comprise the Great Seal of the United States. The First Continental Congress requested that Benjamin Franklin and a group of men come up with a Seal. It took them four years to accomplish this task and another two years to get it approved.

If you look at the left-hand circle, you will see a Pyramid. Notice the face is lighted, and the western side is dark. This country was just beginning. We had not begun to explore the west or decided what we could do for Western Civilization. The Pyramid is uncapped, again signifying that we were not even close

to being finished. Inside the capstone you have the all-seeing eye, an ancient symbol for divinity. It was Franklin's belief that one man couldn't do it alone, but a group of men, with the help of God, could do anything.



The Latin above the pyramid, ANNUIT COEPTIS, means, 'God has favored our undertaking.' The Latin below the pyramid, NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM, means, 'a new order has begun.' At the base of the pyramid is the Roman numeral for 1776 (MDCCLXXVI). If you look at the right-hand circle, and check it carefully, you will learn that it is on every National Cemetery in the United States. It is also on the Parade of Flags Walkway at the Bushnell, Florida National Cemetery, and is the centerpiece of most hero's monuments. Slightly modified, it is the seal of the President of the United States, and it is always visible whenever he speaks, yet very few people know what the symbols mean.

The Bald Eagle was selected as a symbol for victory for two reasons: First, he is not afraid of a storm; he is strong, and he is smart enough to soar above it. Secondly, he wears no material crown. We had just broken from the King of England Also, notice the shield is unsupported. This country can now stand on its own. At the top of that shield you have a white bar signifying congress, a unifying factor. We were coming together as one nation. In the Eagle's beak you will read, 'E PLURIBUS UNUM' meaning, 'one from many.'

Above the Eagle, you have the thirteen stars, representing the thirteen original colonies, and any clouds of misunderstanding rolling away. Again, we were coming together as one. Notice what the Eagle holds in his talons. He holds an olive branch and arrows. This country wants peace, but we will never be afraid to fight to preserve peace. The Eagle always wants to face the olive branch, but in time of war, his gaze turns toward the arrows. They say that the number 13 is an unlucky number. This is almost a worldwide belief. You will usually never see a room numbered 13, or any hotels or motels with a 13th floor. But think about this:

- 13 original colonies,
- 13 signers of the Declaration of Independence,
- 13 stripes on our flag,
- 13 steps on the Pyramid,
- 13 letters in, 'Annuit Coeptis,'
- 13 letters in 'E Pluribus Unum,'
- 13 stars above the Eagle,
- 13 bars on that shield,
- 13 leaves on the olive branch,
- 13 fruits, and if you look closely,

- 13 arrows.

And finally, if you notice the arrangement of the 13 stars in the right-hand circle you will see that they are arranged as a Star of David. This was allegedly ordered by George Washington who, when he asked Hayim Solomon, a wealthy Philadelphia Jew, what he would like as a personal reward for his services to the Continental Army, Solomon said he wanted nothing for himself but that he would like something for his people. The Star of David was the result. Few people know that it was Solomon who saved the Army through his financial contributions but died a pauper. [Source: Snopes | David Mikkelson | April 18, 2021 ++]

U.S. Embassy Manila
COVID-19 Vaccinations for PI Vets



April 14, 2021

U.S. Veterans currently receiving healthcare benefits from the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic will continue to receive e-mail updates about COVID-19 vaccinations directly from the VA Clinic. The VA Manila Outpatient Clinic expects to receive its initial shipment of COVID-19 vaccines in late April or early May 2021. Veterans will be contacted to schedule vaccination appointments based upon VA's prioritization guidance, which is available on VA's COVID-19 website. Veterans who are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine will be contacted directly by VA Manila staff to schedule a vaccine appointment, which will be provided at the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic in Pasay City. Vaccinations at the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic will be provided on an appointment basis only, no walk-ins will be allowed. At this time, VA Manila will only be offering vaccines to Veterans actively enrolled in healthcare services from the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic. As additional vaccine supplies become available, VA Manila will expand available vaccines to non-enrolled Veterans and spouses, in accordance with the PL 117-4, the SAVE LIVES Act. Veterans can access general information on COVID-19 vaccines on the CDC website <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/index.html>. For information about the VA Manila Regional Office and Outpatient Clinic refer to <https://ph.usembassy.gov/embassy/manila/sections-offices>. [Source: U.S. Embassy in the Philippines | Veteran Affairs | April 14, 2021 ++]

U.S. Embassy Manila
Launch of Online Fee Payment for Adult Passport Renewals



April 16, 2021

Beginning Monday, April 19, 2021, the U.S. Embassy and Consular Agency in the Philippines will begin accepting online fee payments for adult U.S. passport renewal applications. Paying online allows you to mail your application to the U.S. Embassy in Manila without the need to apply in person. Please see our [passport renewal webpage](https://ph.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/passports/renew-an-adult-passport) at <https://ph.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/passports/renew-an-adult-passport> for more information and to determine if you are eligible for online fee payment. If eligible, you will be able to submit payment via U.S. or international credit or debit card, electronic funds transfer from a U.S.-based bank account, Amazon Pay, or Pay Pal.

We encourage all eligible U.S. citizens to renew their passports by mail. In-person appointments remain limited at the Embassy in Manila and the Consular Agency in Cebu as a result of the ongoing pandemic. For questions about online fee payment for adult passport renewal applications, please visit our [website](#) or contact us via email at ACSInfoManila@state.gov.

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For further information:

- See the State Department's [travel website](#) for the Worldwide Caution, Travel Advisories, Alerts, and the [Philippines Country Specific Information](#).
- Enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) (STEP) to receive Alerts and make it easier to locate you in an emergency.
- Contact the U.S. Embassy in Manila, Philippines, located at 1201 Roxas Boulevard, at +(63) (2) 5301-2000, from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. After-hours emergency number for U.S. citizens is +(63) (2) 5301-2000.
- Call 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or 1-202-501-4444 from other countries from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).
- Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

[Source: U.S. Embassy Manila | acsmanilamascot@state.gov | April 16, 2021 ++]

U.S. Embassy Manila

Cancellation of Notarial Appointments Scheduled in May



April 28, 2021

In response to the recent increase in COVID-19 cases and the ongoing travel and movement restrictions throughout the country, the U.S. Embassy and Consular Agency in the Philippines have cancelled all notarial appointments scheduled for May 1, 2021, through May 31, 2021. If you need a document notarized urgently, we encourage you to use one of the alternative options listed on our [website](#). Keep in mind that the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) accepts local notarization of Affidavits of Legal Capacity to

Contract Marriage. If you are planning to marry in the Philippines, your affidavit does not need to be notarized at the Embassy or Consular Agency. Please visit our [notary page](#) for more information.

Passport, citizenship, and emergency services for U.S. citizens remain available in both Manila and Cebu. Passport and citizenship appointments already scheduled for the month of May are not affected at this time. There may be delays in our ability to answer routine emails and phone calls. We appreciate your patience as we continue to enforce social distancing and other requirements designed to slow the spread of COVID-19. Actions to Take:

- Monitor our [website](#) for information regarding the future resumption of notary services at the Embassy in Manila and Consular Agency in Cebu.
- Review the [Philippine Department of Health](#) website and the [Embassy's COVID-19 webpage](#) for updated information about conditions in the Philippines.
- Consult the [Philippine's National Task Force Against COVID-19 social media page](#) for additional information and updates.

[Source: U.S. Embassy in the Philippines | Veteran Affairs | April 28, 2021 ++]

VARO Manila

Update 08: COVID-19 Vaccinations Update

I am pleased to share with the Veteran community in the Philippines that VA Manila has been allocated its initial supply of COVID-19 vaccine. This has been a tremendous undertaking and required the collaboration of multiple Federal agencies. I appreciate the teamwork among these agencies that has gotten us to this point. VA Manila staff are ready to rise to the challenge to safely vaccinate as many Veterans as quickly as possible. I am also very grateful for the patience and understanding from the Veteran community in the Philippines as we have worked through the many hurdles involved with the shipping and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines to VA's most distant health care facility in a foreign country.

VA Manila has initially been allocated the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. This vaccine has been granted Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for use both in the United States and the Philippines. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is a two-dose series, consisting of an initial vaccine, and a second booster shot 21 days later. Veterans are encouraged to review the Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine Information Sheet and to consider the risks and benefits of being vaccinated. Veterans should ask their provider about any questions or concerns you may have about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine prior to scheduling, or prior to vaccine administration.

VA Manila will begin providing vaccines to Veterans on Monday, April 19, 2021. Vaccinations will be administered at the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic, 1501 Roxas Boulevard, 1302, Pasay City, Metro Manila, and will be offered by appointment only. VA Manila will not be able to accommodate Veterans seeking a vaccine on a walk-in basis, as the Clinic remains closed to walk-in appointments at this time. When a Veteran is eligible to receive a COVID vaccine, a VA Manila staff member will contact the Veteran by phone and secure messenger to offer an appointment in our dedicated COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic. Based on available vaccine supplies, VA Manila will offer the COVID-19 vaccine to our enrolled Veteran patients.

Due to the overwhelming demand that is anticipated, I am asking Veterans not to call the Clinic to inquire when they can receive a vaccine. Initially, our supplies will be limited, and the Clinic will be working through a prioritized list to offer the vaccine first to those at highest risk of getting or spreading the coronavirus, or of becoming severely ill from COVID-19. The Clinic will put out frequent email updates keeping the Veteran community up-to-date on developments throughout this process. VA Manila's clinic scheduling team has already started contacting Veterans based on established prioritization groups. These groups were previously published by the Department of Veterans Affairs in November 2020. The Clinic will strictly adhere to the priority groups initially and will start with Phase 1a and Phase 1b, which includes the following individuals:

Phase 1a includes these eligible Veterans who already receive care at VA:

- Veterans who live in VA community living centers and spinal cord units
- Veterans who live in other long-term care or congregate (group living) settings and don't have access to COVID-19 vaccines in those settings
- Veterans who work in cemeteries
- Veterans who work as health care personnel

Phase 1b includes these eligible Veterans who already receive care at VA:

- Veterans who are at least 75 years old
- Veterans who are essential frontline workers
- Veterans who are experiencing homelessness
- Veterans who receive hemodialysis care
- Veterans who've had a solid organ transplant or who are being considered for transplant
- Veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders
- Veterans who receive chemotherapy treatment in a clinic or hospital

Phase 1c -- Following the initial prioritization groups 1a and 1b, Veterans in priority group 1c will be accommodated: Phase 1c includes these eligible Veterans who already receive care at VA:

- § Veterans who are ages 65 to 74
- § Veterans who are younger than 65 years old and have certain health conditions that the CDC determines put them at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19
- § Veterans who the CDC considers essential workers not included in Phase 1b

[Go to the CDC website to read about health problems that increase risk from COVID-19](#)

[Go to the CDC website to read the full list of essential workers](#)

Once VA Manila has been able to offer COVID-19 vaccines to enrolled Veterans in Phases 1a, 1b, and 1c, the Clinic will offer a COVID-19 vaccine to all Veterans enrolled in VA health care in the Philippines. Finally, once that group has been offered their initial vaccines, VA Manila will then offer any remaining supplies of COVID-19 vaccine to other non-enrolled Veterans and other individuals, as supplies permit and as authorized by the SAVE LIVES Act (Public Law 117-4). This law requires VA to continue to prioritize enrolled Veterans in the absence of a readily available supply of vaccine.

When will I be contacted for my vaccine appointment?

VA Manila's initial COVID-19 vaccine allocation is not sufficient to vaccinate all enrolled Veterans at the Clinic, in addition to the non-enrolled Veterans and spouses/caregivers of Veterans living in the Philippines.

These groups of individuals were recently authorized to receive vaccine from VA by the SAVE LIVES Act (PL 117-4). At this time, only enrolled Veterans who are active patients at the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic and over the age of 75 will be contacted. It is unlikely that VA Manila will be able to accommodate Veterans younger than 75 with our initial allocation. As additional supplies of vaccine are allocated to VA Manila and shipped, the Clinic will work to vaccinate other Veterans based on the priority groups outlined above. However, it may be several weeks or even several months before the Clinic receives a second allocation and shipment of vaccine.

Veterans, spouses, and caregivers in lower priority groups who may have an opportunity to receive a vaccine from their Local Government Units or Departments of Health in the Philippines are encouraged to consider receiving their COVID-19 vaccine from these sources. Veterans who will be returning to the United States in the near future may also choose to receive a vaccine from VA or community provider while stateside. Regardless of the source, the best COVID-19 vaccine you can receive is the one that you can get in your arm.

How to stay up to date on COVID-19 Vaccines.

To get timely COVID-19 vaccine updates in English and Tagalog, please visit: www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine. Please note at this time, the Keep Me Informed Tool, also known as the “sign up” feature, is not compatible with Philippine Postal Codes. This tool only works with U.S. zip codes. VA Manila is developing our own local resource to allow Veterans, spouses, and caregivers to alert VA Manila that you are interested in receiving a COVID-19 vaccine from OPC. In the meantime, please do not use the ‘sign up’ tool, as this information likely will not reach VA Manila. We intend to share information about how you can let VA Manila know you’d like a vaccine in the next few days. Also, look out for regular email updates about Manila OPC’s unique vaccine rollout process.

As always, if you need any assistance, please email your primary care team in MyHealtheVet, or you are welcome to contact me directly: daniel.gutkoski2@va.gov.

Please continue to stay healthy and safe and continue vigilantly practicing the best strategies to prevent and spread COVID-19 infections – Washing your hands, Watching your distance from other people, and Wearing a mask.

Daniel Gutkoski, MHA, Clinic Manager, VA Manila Outpatient Clinic
US Embassy to the Philippines, Seafront Compound, 1501 Roxas Boulevard, 1302 Pasay City, Metro Manila
Tel: Direct: +63 (02) 8396-3735 Toll Free: #MyVA (#6982)

[Source: Your VA Manila Team via VFW DPA District 7 | Bobby Reyes | April 21, 2021 ++]

Cicadas

Ready to Descend On D.C. Area, 14 Other States

The swarm will arrive any day now. Billions, possibly trillions, of cicadas with bright red eyes will feverishly tunnel up from the ground where they’ve waited the past 17 years. One to 2 inches in size, the insects will take advantage of the warming spring temperatures to dig their way free and swarm up into the

nearby trees. Soon Brood X will invade the Washington, D.C., metro area and 14 other states to reproduce for about six weeks before disappearing again for another 17 years.



To the uninitiated, the flying, five-eyed periodical cicada with its frenzied, 96-decibel mating song might sound like something from an ambitious B movie. But entomologists with the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) stress this is a harmless and unique chance to encounter the rare cicada event and, for the brave, maybe even a unique culinary opportunity. Dr. James English, USU adjunct assistant professor of Preventive Medicine and Biostatistics now at the U.S. Geological Survey, recommends the best way to experience this phenomenon is to wait until midnight, get a flashlight and head to a forest as the insects emerge from the ground. "Go out there with a headlamp or flashlight and watch them come out of the ground," English said. "Silently and slowly, they come out of these holes in the ground, climbing up a tree or a bush or a vine."

After ascending, the cicadas will then break out of their nymph exoskeleton and over the next five to six hours harden a new adult life stage with wings. "(They'll) have translucent orange wings and orange legs and the beautiful cherry red eyes," he said. The colorful insects will then spend the next six weeks trying to reproduce, laying eggs in the trees before dying, and the process begins all over again. There are 15 documented cicada broods that come out either every 13 or 17 years. Brood X, named after the Roman numeral 10 and its order of classification, is one of the largest of these groups. The last time they debuted Facebook was still a new website and the television show 'Friends' had recently ended.

Some of the oldest living insects on the planet, cicadas are mentioned in Homer's 'The Iliad' and were observed by settlers in North America as early as the 1700s. According to English, the reason the cicadas have such a long underground development period, where they spend their time feeding off the roots of trees, is because of the need to outlast their predators - which is basically everything. Squirrels, rabbits, birds, and mice will all enthusiastically eat cicadas when they emerge. It's essentially an all-you-can-eat cicada buffet, and all those extra calories go to increasing the predator population. English said the number 17 has meaning. The prime number keeps the different cicada broods from coming out at the same time, except for every 221 years when hypothetical 13-year and 17-year broods might be co-located and emerge simultaneously, allowing them to breed with each other.

One of the tricky aspects of studying cicadas is in learning how they keep time. How is it they know 13 or 17 years have passed when they spend it under the ground? The prevailing thought is they have some sort of molecular clock that keeps track of the warming ground temperatures or, as English theorizes, through the hormones produced by trees as they bud in the spring. Navy Lt. Cmdr. James Dunford, a medical entomologist and USU adjunct professor, said he experienced Brood XIII in eastern Wisconsin while growing up. "I think you'll find, in general, some people will be freaked out, the people who have an aversion to bugs and certainly to lots of bugs piled up on each other," Dunford said. "But for me, just like

monarch migrations and some of these other amazing entomological phenomena, this is really one of the top 10 to me – maybe even top five of things you can see in the world of entomology."

Dunford said, despite making some people feel squeamish, the cicadas are completely harmless. "There have been some traffic incidents associated with lots of cicadas," Dunford said. "Maybe the conditions are slick, or they're flying into windshields." As far as experiencing the cicada invasion, Dunford said it depends on how comfortable someone was with insects. "You can get as close as handling them, because these are easier to handle than the annual cicadas, ...or monitor them from a distance with binoculars or even actively participate (in studies) and submit pictures to universities," Dunford said. One such study 'Cicada Safari', sponsored by Mount St. Joseph University in Cincinnati, can be found in online App stores.

For the adventurous, there are also culinary experiences to be had with the large Brood X emergence. The insect is apparently edible, and the curious can find recipes in cookbooks such as 'The Cicada Cookbook' or 'Cooking with Cicadas.' English said he has eaten the insects during fundraisers prepared by chefs. "And it's not good. It's never good," English said. "It is mainly because the chefs don't know what they're doing with bugs. They will cook with adults after their shells have hardened, so you're eating mainly crunchy shells. And males are hollow, so they are almost exclusively shells. Females will at least be filled with eggs." English said his advice to chefs is to contact an entomologist and collaborate, adding the best time to eat them is after they've first broken out of their shells. "That is when they're delicious," English said. "If you were to take shrimp and avocado and mix them together with just a little bit of butter...that's the closest thing (to their taste) I can think of."

Whether people are looking to avoid, observe, or even dine on Brood X – one thing is for sure – there will soon be plenty of opportunity. [Source: Health.mil | Ian Neligh | April 28, 2021 ++]

Map Comparisons

Japan, How Big It Is In Reality



News of the Weird

APR 16 thru 30, 2021

Bright Ideas – On 9 MAR, Eric Dion Warren, 50, was sentenced to federal prison in Lubbock, Texas, after pleading guilty to robbing a bank and using a BMW he was test-driving as his getaway car. The Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported that, according to court documents, Warren drove to the AIM Bank in Wolfforth on June 7, 2019, handed the teller a note demanding \$10,000 in small bills and showed what appeared to be a handgun. The teller complied, and Warren headed back to the dealership where he pulled out \$3,000 as the down payment on the car he had been driving. As Warren finalized the deal, the dealership received a call about the bank robbery and the connection was made. Warren was given the maximum sentence of 20 years. [Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 3/10/2021]

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Schemes –. Police in Naples, Florida, are looking for a woman identified only as "Rosalia," a self-described witch who is suspected of swindling more than \$100,000 from at least 10 victims. Authorities were first alerted to the scam on 14 MAR when a man called to report that Rosalia had disappeared with \$29,500 of his money, according to a police report. The man said he had responded to a flyer advertising Rosalia's "witchcraft services," WBBH-TV reported. She allegedly told the man she saw something "dark" in his future and gave him three eggs to put under his bed as he slept. When he brought them back the next day, she waved the eggs over his head and face, then opened them to reveal one filled with blood, one with needles and a third with worms, according to the report. She instructed the man to bring her all the money he had so she could bless it and multiply it at her temple in Fort Myers, promising to return it the next day, police said, but Rosalia hasn't been seen since. Police have identified more victims in the course of their ongoing investigation. [WBBH-TV, 4/19/2021]

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Going Out of Style – Mourners at Phil McLean's funeral in Wellington, New Zealand, first gasped, then laughed as his coffin, shaped like a giant cream doughnut, was brought into the chapel, the Associated Press reported on 15 APR. McLean had designed the special coffin with his cousin, Ross Hall, owner of Dying Art, a business in Auckland specializing in custom coffins. Over the last 15 years, Hall has fashioned a sailboat, a firetruck, a chocolate bar and Legos, among others. McLean's widow, Debra, said her husband had considered himself a connoisseur of cream doughnuts, and the coffin "overshadowed the sadness. ... The final memory in everyone's mind was of that doughnut and Phil's sense of humor." For himself, Hall said he had planned a red box with flames on it, but he changed his mind to a clear coffin, with him wearing nothing but a leopard-patterned G-string. "The kids say they're not going," he said. [Associated Press, 4/15/2021]

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People With Issues – Edward and Cheryl Patton of Lake View, New York, tried for three years to identify who was throwing used paper coffee cups -- some with cigarette butts inside -- on their front yard nearly every night, but they could never get a good look at the minivan as it drove by. Edward began keeping records of the littering and collecting the cups, eventually filling 10 garbage bags, reported The Buffalo News. They even installed a surveillance camera, but it wasn't until neighbors set up a stakeout and captured

the license plate number that the mystery was solved. On 18 APR, police set up their own stakeout and pulled over Larry Pope, 76, a former co-worker of Cheryl's whom she had had disagreements with. Pope was charged with harassment and throwing refuse onto a roadway. The Pattons said the littering has stopped since his arrest. [The Buffalo News, 4/19/2021]

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It's Good To Have a Hobby – Bearsun is the name Jesse Larios, 33, of Los Angeles gave to the teddy bear character he created in 2016 and fashioned into a human-sized Bearsun suit. On 12 APR, Larios decided to have a fun adventure walking from Los Angeles to San Francisco dressed as Bearsun, a journey of more than 400 miles. Mountain passes and road construction have made the trip slower than he expected, reported CNN Travel, and it's no luxury excursion: Bearsun sleeps wherever he finds himself at the end of the day and gets food at gas stations. "I'm like a puppy, I guess," Larios said. "I just see something and I chase after it." [CNN, 4/15/2021]

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Mistaken Identity – The Krakow (Poland) Society for the Protection of Animals responded on 14 APR to a report that a suspected iguana was stuck in a lilac tree outside a residential building, only to discover a discarded croissant instead. "People don't open windows because they're afraid it's going to enter their house," the caller told the group. United Press International reported the animal rescue agency was forgiving. "It's better to check and be pleasantly disappointed ... than not react, which can sometimes lead to a tragedy," the group posted on its Facebook page. [United Press International, 4/15/2021]

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Sightings – Detectives from the New Jersey State Park Police were dispatched on April 9 to a site in Wharton State Forest to examine a device found on the forest floor. The "UFO Detector Site" was determined to be safe by K-9 officer Prime, and officers had no trouble "disarming" the unit by unplugging headphone wires from the block of wood and soup can they were plugged into. It wasn't clear who had left the object. On Facebook, park police noted, "Although humankind and the visitors to New Jersey's state parks appreciate an extraterrestrial warning device like this, we should not be finding them in our state parks." [NBC New York, 4/13/2021]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/news-of-the-weird> | April 30, 2021 ++]

Vocabulary

Some Words to Enhance Yours | 210501

- **Ambidextrous** [am-bi-dek-struhs] -- able to use both hands equally well.
- **Ambrosial** [am-broh-zhuhl] -- exceptionally pleasing to taste or smell; especially delicious or fragrant.
- **Apologia** [ap-uh-loh-jee-uh] -- a defense especially of one's opinions, position, or actions.
- **Boondoggle** [boon-dog-uhl] -- waste money or time on unnecessary or questionable projects.
- **Bumfuzzle** [buhm-fuhz-uhl] -- to confuse or fluster.

- **Cantankerous** [kan-tang-ker-uhs] -- bad-tempered, argumentative, and uncooperative.
- **Cicerone** [sis-uh-roh-nee] -- a guide who gives information about antiquities and places of interest to sightseers.
- **Convalesce** [kon-vuh-les] -- to recover health and strength after illness; make progress toward recovery of health.
- **Corrie** [kor-ee] -- a circular hollow in the side of a hill or mountain.
- **Donnybrook** [don-ee-brook] -- an inordinately wild fight or contentious dispute; brawl; free-for-all.
- **Eucatastrophe** [yoo-kuh-ta-struh-fee] -- a sudden and favorable resolution of events in a story; a happy ending.
- **Meretricious** [mer-i-trish-uhs] -- alluring by a show of flashy or vulgar attractions; tawdry.
- **Pontificate** [pon-tif-i-keyt] -- (in the Roman Catholic Church) officiate as bishop, especially at Mass.
- **Rapprochement** [rap-rohsh-mahn] -- an establishment or resumption of harmonious relations.

Have You Heard or Seen?

Seniors Test | Military Humor 20 | Think Toons

Seniors Test

01. After the Lone Ranger saved the day and rode off into the sunset, the grateful citizens would ask, Who was that masked man? Invariably, someone would answer, I don't know, but he left this behind. What did he leave behind? _____.
02. When the Beatles first came to the U.S. In early 1964, we all watched them on the _____ Show.
03. 'Get your kicks _____.'
04. 'The story you are about to see is true. The names have been changed to _____.'
05. 'In the jungle, the mighty jungle, _____.'
06. After the Twist, The Mashed Potato, and the Watusi, we 'danced' under a stick that was lowered as low as we could go in a dance called the '_____.'
07. Nestlé's makes the very best....' _____.'
08. Satchmo was America's 'Ambassador of Goodwill.' Our parents shared this great jazz trumpet player with us. His name was _____.
09. What takes a licking and keeps on ticking? _____.

10. Red Skeleton's hobo character was named _____ and Red always ended his television show by saying, 'Good Night, and '_____ . '
11. Some Americans who protested the Vietnam War did so by burning their _____.
12. The cute little car with the engine in the back and the trunk in the front was called the VW. What other names did it go by? _____ & _____.
13. In 1971, singer Don MacLean sang a song about, 'the day the music died.' This was a tribute to _____.
14. We can remember the first satellite placed into orbit. The Russians did it. It was called _____.
15. One of the big fads of the late 50's and 60's was a large plastic ring that we twirled around our waist. It was called the _____ .
16. Remember LS/MFT _____/_____?
17. Hey Kids! What time is it? It's _____!
18. Who knows what secrets lie in the hearts of men? Only The _____ Knows!
19. There was a song that came out in the 60's that was "a grave yard smash". Its name was the _____!
20. Alka Seltzer used a "boy with a tablet on his head" as its Logo/Representative - What was the boy's name? _____

Answers

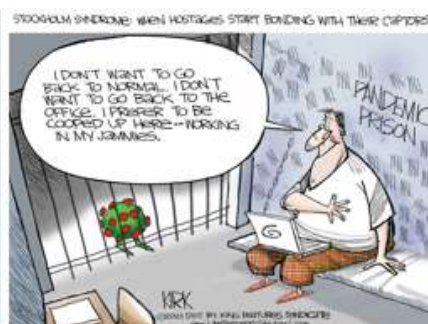
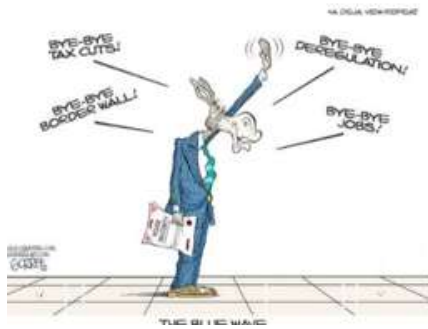
- To protect the innocent. **04.**
 The Timex watch **09.**
 The Lone Ranger left behind a silver bullet. **01.**
 The Lion Sleeps Tonight **05.**
 The limbo **06.**
 The Ed Sullivan Show **02.**
 Sputnik **14.**
 Speedy **20.**
 Shadow **18.**
 On Route 66 **03.**
 Monster Mash **19.**
 Lucky Strike/Means Fine Tobacco **16.**
 Louis Armstrong **08.**
 Howdy Doody Time **17.**
 Hoola-hoop **15.**
 Freddy, The Freeloader and 'Good Night and God Bless.' **10.**
 Draft cards (Bras were also burned. Not flags, as some have guessed) **11.**
 Chocolate **07.**
 Buddy Holly **13.**
 Beetle or Bug **12.**

Military Humor 29

1. **What's long, hard, and full of seamen?** A submarine.
2. **What did one troubled Sailor say to the other?** We're in the same boat.
3. **Two fresh Sailors were talking about assignments they would like to get.**
Sailor 1: "Someday I'd like to ride on a submarine."
Sailor 2: "Not me! I wouldn't set foot on any ship that sinks on purpose."
4. **What did the Navy say to the Coast Guard?** "SEAL you later!"
5. **Why couldn't the sailors play cards?**
The captain was sitting on the deck.
6. **Why did the US Navy gift the British Navy glass-bottomed boats?**
So they could see the old British Navy.
7. **Why do SEALs fall backward off the boat?**
If they fell forward, they'd still be in the boat.
8. **When I lost my rifle, the Army charged me \$85.**
That's why in the Navy the Captain goes down with the ship.
9. **As the storm raged, the captain realized his ship was sinking fast.**
He called out, "Anyone here know how to pray?"
One man stepped forward. "Aye, Captain, I know how to pray."
"Good," said the captain, "you pray while the rest of us put on our life jackets – we're one short."
10. **What do the Chinese call their Navy?** The censor ships.

Think Toons





Thought of the Week

I don't know about you, but this COVID has started to give me nightmares. Just last week, I had a dream I was a muffler.....woke up exhausted!

--- Ray Toczek

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