

RAO BULLETIN

1 JUN 2021

PDF Edition



THIS RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE BULLETIN CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

Pg	Article	Subject
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*** DOD ***

- 04 == DoD Nuclear Mission [03] ---- (Ten Year Modernization Cost Jumps to \$634B)
- 05 == NPRC Military Records [09] ---- (Rep. Davidson Speaks on Center's Nonperformance)
- 06 == NPRC Military Records [10] ---- (NARA Calls In DoD To Help Resolve Its Backlog)
- 08 == DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ---- (Reported MAY 01 thru 31, 2021)
- 09 == U.S. Capitol Riot [14] ---- (Quantico Marine Major Warnagir Charged)
- 10 == U.S. Capitol Riot [15] ---- (Capitol National Guard Protection Cost to Date \$520M+)
- 11 == TRICARE Dental Program [20] ---- (Slight Premium Increase Begins in May)
- 13 == Arlington National Cemetery [92] ---- (Eligibility Could Change Soon)
- 14 == POW/MIA [128] ---- (Agency Wants to Disinter 'Unknown' From Punchbowl)
- 17 == POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ---- (Reported 01 thru 31 MAY 2021 | Twenty-Four)

*** VA ***

- 21 == VA Cemeteries [24] ---- (All Restrictions on Cemetery Visits Lifted Ahead Of Memorial Day)
- 22 == VA Cybersecurity [01] ---- (How Secure Is Veterans' Data?)
- 23 == VA Toxic Exposure Care ---- (Addition of 3 AO Presumptive Conditions to Begin)
- 25 == VA Covid-19 Vaccines [04] ---- (Overseas Vets to be Reimbursed – Not Provided)
- 26 == VA Covid-19 Vaccines [05] ---- (Overseas Reimbursement Procedure)
- 27 == Covid-19 Headgear [18] ---- (Respiratory Helmet in Use at Hines VAMC)
- 28 == VA FMP [06] ---- (Medical Claims Abroad)
- 30 == VA Herbicide Related Claims ---- (Previously Denied Vet & Survivor Ones to be Readjudicated)
- 30 == VA Dizziness Care ---- (Investigating and Treating Services Available from VA Audiology)
- 31 == VA Caregiver Program ---- [72] ---- (After Court Ruling VA Overhauls Application Process)
- 33 == Hepatitis C [06] ---- (If Enrolled at VA Test Is Available upon Request)

- 33 == VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ---- (Reported MAY 01 thru 31, 2021)
- 35 == VA Manila OPC ---- (Announcements & Reminders 29 MAY 2021)

*** VETS ***

- 37 == 3M Earplugs Lawsuit [08] ---- (Federal Jury Awards 3 Army Vets \$7.1 Million in Damages)
- 38 == American Vet's Recollections ---- (Elizabeth Barker WWII 6888th Central Postal Bn Member)
- 38 == Tiger Flight 762 Memorial ---- (Soldiers Who Perished In 1962 on Secret Mission Memorialized)
- 39 == Vet Fraud & Abuse ---- (Reported MAY 01 thru 31, 2021)
- 40 == RP Vet Items of Interest ---- (May 2021)
- 42 == Afghan Vets 17 ---- (Jason Pak | IED Casualty)
- 43 == WWII Vets 258 ---- (Joseph G. Demler | Dubbed WWII's Human Skelton)
- 44 == WWII Vets 259 ---- (William J. Balchus | Palawan POW Massacre Survivor)
- 45 == Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ---- (As of 31 MAY 2021)
- 46 == Vet Hiring Fairs ---- (Scheduled as of 1 JUN 2021)
- 46 == Vet Death Preps [02] ---- (Keeping Records for Our Significant Others)
- 47 == Vet Employment Opportunities ---- (MAY 30 Listings from Companies Looking For Vets)
- 48 == State Veteran's Benefits ---- (Kansas 2021)

*** VET LEGISLATION ***

- 48 == Military Family Hunger [02] ---- (S.0000/H.R.2339 | Military Hunger Prevention Act)
- 49 == Agent Orange Thailand [04] ---- (S.657 | Agent Orange in Thailand)
- 50 == Reserve Benefits [05] ---- (H.R.0000 | Healthcare for Our Troops Act)
- 51 == Military Toxic Exposures [01] ---- (S.000/H.R.0000 | COST of War Act of 2021)
- 52 == Military Survivor Benefits [05] ---- (S.1669/H.R.2214 | Survivor Comfort Act)
- 53 == VA Contraceptive Care ---- (S.2821/H.R.0000 | Access to Contraception Expansion for Veterans Act)
- 54 == VET Legislation Progress ---- (1-31 MAY 2021)

*** MILITARY ***

- 55 == China's Military Buildup [01] ---- (April Triple Commissioning)
- 55 == USS Boise (SSN-764) ---- (Sidelined 8 Years for Maintenance)
- 56 == USMC Missile System [01] ---- (Target At Sea Struck By Missile Strapped To Truck)
- 58 == Stryker Vehicle ---- (Army to Retire Older Variant)
- 59 == Iron Dome [01] ---- (Israel's Intercepts Drone during Combat for First Time)
- 61 == Army Artillery [02] ---- (Ramjet Shells Could Triple Artillery Range)
- 62 == Army Electronic Warfare ---- (Manning Numbers to Triple in Next 2 Years)
- 63 == Navy Advancement [01] ---- (E4-E6 Exam Results Delayed Again)
- 64 == Military Grooming Standards [03] ---- (Loosened Army Women Hairstyle Standards Bring Out Critics)
- 65 == Military Base Name Changes [03] ---- (Proposal to Rename Fort Bragg to Fort Bragg)
- 67 == Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ---- ('Speeding Ticket' thru 'Steel Beach')

*** MILITARY HISTORY ***

- 68 == WWII Great Escape Tunnel ---- (Unearthed at Stalag Luft III Site)
- 69 == My Life My Story ---- (Charlie: I Don't Want Notoriety)
- 70 == WWII POW Camps ---- Measures Taken for Escape
- 71 == WWII Ghost Army ---- (Conducted Military Deception Ops against Third Reich)
- 72 == Medal of Honor Awardees ---- (Jack Mathis | WWII)
- 74 == Hindenburg ---- (New Documentary Sheds Light on the Decades-Old Disaster)
- 75 == WWII Adolf Eichmann Capture ---- (Daring Israeli Spy Operation to Capture Nazi Mass Murderer)
- 77 == Military History Anniversaries ---- (01 thru 15 JUN)
- 77 == Every Picture Tells A Story ---- (War's Aftermath)
- 78 == WWII Bomber Nose Art [75] ---- (Little Chief)

78 == Legends of WWII ---- (Thiele Fred Harvey | Iwo Jima Silver Star Marine)

*** HEALTH CARE ***

- 79 == Coronavirus Vaccines [35] ---- (COVID Arm Reaction)
- 80 == Coronavirus Vaccines [36] ---- (Heart Inflammation Reaction)
- 81 == Heart Failure [03] ---- (Tailored, Earlier Rehab Program Shows Benefits for Patients)
- 82 == Covid-19 Testing [10] ---- (Buffy the Foot Sniffing Greeter)
- 83 == Unrefrigerated Foods [01] ---- (When to Toss Them)
- 85 == Smoking [10] ---- (World No Tobacco Day Encourages You to Live Life without Tobacco)
- 86 == Ativan ---- (Misuse, Addiction, & Treatment)
- 88 == Dizziness ---- (What It Is & What Causes It)
- 90 == Sleep [13] ---- (Personal Light Treatment Device Sub Study)
- 91 == Colon Cancer [10] ---- (Updated Guidance Says Screenings Should Now Start at Age 45)
- 92 == Drug Price Gouging [08] ---- (Drug Company Head Faces Grilling Over Massive Increases)

*** FINANCES ***

- 93 == COLA FY 2021 ---- (April CPI)
- 94 == COLA FY 2021 ---- (January COLA? Up, Up and Away!)
- 95 == Long Term Care FLTCIP [12] ---- (Can Offer Peace of Mind)
- 96 == Uncommon State Tax Laws ---- (Strange but True Tax Laws | N.M. – S.C.)
- 97 == Prescription Drug Costs [71] ---- (Legislation Facing a Surprise Problem)
- 98 == Prescription Drug Costs [72] ---- (President Will Not Propose Lowering Drug Prices in His Budget)
- 99 == Free Trial Offer Scam 3 ---- (Trying CBD? Watch for Free Trial Cons)
- 100 == Air Travel Scams [01] ---- (Travel is Back, and So Are Scammers)
- 101 == Moving Scams [01] ---- (New Home? Look Out)
- 102 == Fortune Teller Scams ---- (Take Your Cash & Don't Show Up)
- 103 == Tax Burden for North Carolina Vets ---- (As of May 2021)

*** GENERAL INTEREST ***

- 107 == Notes of Interest ---- (MAY 01 thru 31, 2021)
- 108 == DPRK-U.S. Relations [03] ---- (U.S. Warned of 'Very Grave Situation' Over Biden Speech)
- 109 == Hacks & Gadgets ---- (Items that Can Save You Time/Money with Hidden Purposes)
- 111 == Car Safety [01] ---- (Ninety vehicles earn 2021 IIHS awards)
- 113 == Home Pests ---- (How to Keep Them at Bay)
- 115 == Emigration Options ---- (Countries You Can Emigrate To if You're Over 50)
- 117 == Optical Illusions ---- (Forest or Feline?)
- 118 == Rubbing Alcohol [01] ---- (Household Cleaning Uses)
- 119 == News of the Weird ---- (May 01 thru 31, 2021)
- 121 == Vocabulary ---- (Some Words to Enhance Yours | 210601)
- 122 == Have You Heard or Seen? ---- (Math 1 | Riddles 1 | Think Toons)

NOTE

1. The page number on which an article can be found is provided to the left of each article's title
2. To read the articles open the website and slew to the page number of the article you are interested in.
3. Numbers contained within brackets [] indicate the number of articles written on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to raoemo@sbcglobal.net 'or' raoemo77@gmail.com
4. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin articles to other vets or veteran organizations

*** ATTACHMENTS ***

- Attachment – Kansas State Veteran's Benefits
- Attachment – Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 JUN (Updated)
- Attachment – VA Manila OPC May 2021



DoD Nuclear Mission

Update 03: Ten Year Modernization Cost Jumps to \$634B

The next decade of work to replace America’s nuclear bombers, missile submarines, and ICBMs will cost roughly \$35 billion more than expected, about a 7 percent jump, the Congressional Budget Office said in a new report. The report updates the 10-year projected cost of the Pentagon’s nuclear modernization plan. In 2019, the CBO estimated that the work would cost \$494 billion through 2028. The new report, which covers the years 2021 to 2030, puts the cost at \$634 billion. About half of the \$140 billion difference reflects the planned shift from research and development to the more expensive production phase. Another quarter of the difference reflects anticipated higher inflation.

The final quarter — the \$35 billion increase — reflects that projected costs for command, control, communications, and early-warning systems have “increased substantially,” the report says, adding that if full costs of B-52 and B-21 bombers were included, “the total costs of nuclear forces, with cost growth, would be \$711 billion.” It’s the second time CBO has raised their projections for the costs of modernizing U.S. nuclear forces. Some lawmakers have balked at what they perceive as the steep price tag for modernizing the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal. Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) has called for a debate specifically on the high cost of replacing the intercontinental leg of the triad. On Monday, he unveiled a new bill, dubbed the SANE act, to cut \$73 billion from the U.S. nuclear weapons budget.

“The United States can deter our adversaries and reassure our allies without making an insane investment in nuclear weapons overkill, including capabilities that may invite, rather than prevent, a nuclear exchange,” he said in a statement. “We must bring the same energy in arresting the climate crisis to reducing another existential threat—that posed by nuclear weapons—and that begins with smart cuts to our nuclear arsenal.” Gen. John Hyten, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has expressed hope that new digital engineering processes would help suppress costs of building new weapons by reducing the need for some physical prototypes.

“We have got to make it more affordable,” Hyten told Defense One in April. He said he was working with weapons maker Northrop Grumman, the prime contractor on the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent, or GBSD, program, to bring down the cost. GBSD is the program to replace the aging Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles. CBO cautioned that the plans come with “substantial uncertainty,” as “future plans are not yet fully determined for some programs; and estimates of the costs of developing, producing, and operating weapon systems are uncertain even when the plans are fully determined.” [Source: DefenseOne | Patrick Tucker | May 24, 2021 ++]

NPRC Military Records

Update 09: Rep. Davidson Speaks on Center's Nonperformance



Last March, like many other government office buildings, the National Personnel Records Center closed in response to the spread of the novel coronavirus. Considering that everything from Social Security Offices, to National Parks, to Motor Vehicle Centers closed down, the NPRC closure went largely unnoticed. Fifteen days to slow the spread came and went, but the center — which houses all the military records for America's service members — remains barely operational.

Unlike many other government agencies, the NPRC's primary mission cannot be carried out remotely. Four stories and some six million square feet in St. Louis house millions of hard-copy records that make up complete service histories for America's veterans. Veterans need these records to access the benefits they earned while protecting our freedom. Without them, veterans cannot access VA health care, VA home or student loans, obtain burial honors, or get COVID vaccines through the VA.

And yet, as federal, state, and local governments attempted to sort American businesses into “essential” and “nonessential” designations, the importance of keeping the NPRC up and running was overlooked. A combination of decisions from the Office of Personnel Management, the National Archives and Records Administration, and the City of St. Louis have never allowed the center to be staffed at more than 25 percent capacity — if it was open at all. In the meantime, a backlog of some 500,000 outstanding records requests has piled up. Each request represents an individual who faithfully served this country and is simply trying to access the benefits the U.S. government promised them.

Over the summer, more congressional offices became aware of the growing backlog of requests. These requests, which should take days to complete, were now delayed by weeks and months. In December, recognizing the importance of maintaining operations of the NPRC, Congress allocated \$15 million to the center with the intent of fully reopening the center and reducing the backlog. In late March 2021, the VA announced a partnership with National Archives to vaccinate employees. This good news came as 185 members of Congress joined me and Rep. Deborah Ross (D-NC) in calling on the Biden administration to correct this bureaucratic negligence. However, when I personally visited the center in St. Louis, I was disappointed at the center's lack of urgency and its overall complacency. The center is emphasizing its digitization project, which will enable more work to be done remotely. Certainly, this is an important facet of modernizing the center, but veterans need their paper records now.

Funerals, medical care, emergency housing — these essential services for veterans cannot wait on a record digitization project. Waiting for VA loans and GI Bill benefits means putting life on hold, hoping

that the delay will not permanently hamper important milestones like graduating college or buying a home. The focus should be on fully staffing the center, around-the-clock, to eliminate the backlog. So far, there's no plan or benchmarks in place to determine when the center can return to full capacity. But at the current rate, veterans can expect to wait 18 months to two years for their documents. Such a delay is an unacceptable failure. Our veterans deserve better. For \$15 million and vaccination prioritization, Congress should not have to worry that our veterans are falling through the cracks. Even the NPRC admits the situation is unacceptable. A spokesperson for the center recently told Coffee or Die Magazine, "We know we are failing. We know the situation is untenable, and we are eager to fix it."

Americans expect military readiness from our veterans when they serve, but we're treating a service for veterans as if it is an unimportant museum collection. I'm asking that the National Archives and Records Administration and the Office of Personnel Management to get the NPRC back to fully operational — even if it means purchasing HAZMAT suits. Alternatively, we could look again to the National Guard. Over the past year, governments have deployed the National Guard for a variety of missions to aid states at food banks, COVID testing sites, most conspicuously, to reinforce police in cities across the country and bolster security at the U.S. Capitol. Perhaps we can ask the Guard, once again, to help.

These are a few immoderate proposals I've considered, although the cleanest solution would be to modify the occupancy limits at the NPRC as employees are vaccinated. To assure our veterans that we have not forgotten our obligations to them during the pandemic, I hope the NPRC and its parent agencies will articulate a plan that will eliminate this backlog in a timely manner and with the same sense of urgency we expected from our veterans when they served this country. As I've said throughout this pandemic, "Anyone can find an excuse, but leaders find a way." I'm determined that we find a way to fix this eminently solvable problem for our nation's heroes.

Rep. Warren Davidson represents Ohio's 8th Congressional District. He enlisted in the Army after high school and later earned an appointment to West Point. As an officer, he led in The Old Guard, the 75th Ranger Regiment, and the 101st Airborne Division.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Warren Davidson (Opinion) | April 29, 2021 ++]

NPRC Military Records

Update 10: NARA Calls In DoD To Help Resolve Its Backlog

The National Archives and Records Administration is making an urgent plea to the Defense Department, calling on the Pentagon to help it address a backlog of 500,000 pending records requests and another 400,000 refiling requests. Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have been fielding complaints from their constituents for months, many of whom have struggled to access services at the Department of Veterans Affairs during the pandemic. William Bonsanko, NARA's chief operating officer, issued a formal request for assistance to the Pentagon last week, and a bipartisan group of House members, including the chairmen and ranking members of the House Oversight and Reform and Veterans Affairs Committees, are calling on the Pentagon to respond.

"We respectfully ask DOD to prioritize and fulfill NARA's request," the members said 20 MAY in a letter to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. "Veterans and their families depend on timely access to

personnel records in order to receive life-saving medical care, emergency housing assistance, proper military burials and other vital benefits earned through service to our country. We urge DoD to support the NPRC's work and to ensure that we uphold our solemn pledge to care for our nation's veterans." Veterans need their military records in order to get access to VA health, housing, burial and other benefits. But most records at the NPRC exist only in a paper format, and employees can't access them remotely.

During most years, the NPRC receives 20,000 records requests each week, or 1.2 million annually. The agency responded to most within 10 days, NARA said, before the pandemic hit. "We have not been able to maintain our normal, high level of responsiveness during the pandemic," Bonsanko said in request to DoD. "We have taken a number of actions to protect our workforce from exposure to COVID-19, including reducing the number of employees permitted in our facilities at one time and implementing strict social distancing procedures for on-site work." NARA, for example, brought employees into work on Saturdays and added a second shift for the workforce, meaning the agency could double the number of personnel on hand without breaking COVID-19 safety protocols.

During a nine-month period last year, NARA responded to nearly 80,000 emergency requests for veterans, David Ferriero, the chief archivist, told Congress last December. "Unfortunately, these efforts have not been enough to keep pace with the new requests received over the same period, and our backlog of unanswered requests has continued to grow," he said at the time. VA has tried in several ways to help. Thomas Murphy, VA's acting assistant secretary for benefits, told Congress last week that his team worked with NARA to process some emergency records requests more quickly, and the department has chipped in some of its own COVID-19 relief funding to pay for NPRC employee overtime. The department detailed employees to the NPRC, and VA Secretary Denis McDonough offered vaccines to NARA employees through VA's allotment of doses.

Today, the two agencies are working together to digitize some records. Still, those efforts clearly haven't been enough. NARA told Congress it could take two years to resolve the backlog of pending records requests without additional help. NARA's request to DoD illustrates the complexity of the work that lies ahead. Specifically, the agency said it needs DoD's help in transporting up to 400,000 official military personnel folders to a location off site from the NPRC in St. Louis. DoD personnel would sort and group folders in sequential order so the NPRC can refile them later. DoD would transport the newly batched files back to the NPRC and help the agency with refile and digitization efforts. It would also help NARA search, find and respond to records requests and photocopy and mail separation documents to those who have requested them.

"We are prepared to begin immediately," the NARA request reads. "To support social distancing, we request the on-site work be performed in the afternoon, between the hours of 1 and 7 p.m. daily, when there are fewer staff and contractors in the facility. We expect the duration to be less than six months." While NARA processes and houses these records for a fee, military services own the documents themselves. NARA will not reimburse DoD for the use of its personnel, but it will repay the department for any other costs associated with the project, Bonsanko said. [Source: Federal News Network | Nicole Ogrysko | May 20, 2021 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse

Reported May 01 thru 31, 2021

Gainesville, Va -- A former Army Green Beret who admitted divulging military secrets to Russia over a 15-year period was sentenced to more than 15 years in prison Friday on espionage charges. The sentence of 15 years and 8 months imposed on **Peter Dzibinski Debbins**, 46, of Gainesville, Va., by U.S. District Judge Claude Hilton was largely in line with the 17-year term sought by prosecutors. Defense lawyers sought a 5-year term. Debbins' lawyer, David Benowitz, argued that Debbins caused minimal damage and that Russian agents had blackmailed Debbins by threatening to expose his same-sex attractions in a military era in which "don't ask, don't tell" was still in force.



Debbins, at the 14 MAY sentencing hearing in Alexandria, offered an apology of sorts in which he largely emphasized how he was victimized by the GRU, the Russian intelligence service, and said he's put himself at danger of retaliation at their hands for admitting his service to them. "I have suffered in lonely silence for 25 years," Debbins said. As for the danger he faces from the GRU, he said, "The GRU does not make threats; they keep promises." Prosecutors, in seeking a 17-year term, said Debbins never told the FBI anything about being blackmailed during 20 hours of interviews. They said he's fabricated the excuse and that his original explanation of his motive is far more likely, that he was bitter about his time in the Army and that he considered himself a "loyal son of Russia."

And they said the very fact that a Special Forces soldier agreed to betray his country is just as damaging as any particular information he betrayed. "The world has now observed that Russia successfully placed an espionage recruit within the elite U.S. Army Special Forces, a propaganda victory for Russia at the expense of the reputation of the Special Forces," prosecutors Thomas Traxler and James Trump wrote in their sentencing brief.

Debbins' relationship with Russian intelligence dates to 1996 and spanned 15 years, Debbins admitted in November when he pleaded guilty to violating the federal Espionage Act. It began when he was an ROTC student at the University of Minnesota and on a visit to Russia gave a handler there the names of four Catholic nuns he had visited after a Russian intelligence agent told him the nuns were involved in cult activity. In later years, he provided details about activities of his Special Forces unit overseas and the names of fellow Special Forces members. Debbins entered active-duty Army service in 1998 and by then had already committed in writing to serve the Russians and had been assigned the code name "Ikar Lesnikov."

In a handwritten confession filed in court, Debbins wrote that in 1997, he gave Russian intelligence a signed statement saying that "I want to serve Russia." "I had a messianic vision for myself in Russia, that I was going to free them from their oppressive government, so I was flattered when they reached out to

me," Debbins wrote. He later joined the Special Forces and served there until 2004, when he was a captain assigned to Azerbaijan. But he was dishonorably discharged for a security violation, specifically for relocating his wife to Azerbaijan and providing her with a U.S. government cell phone. In 2008, he traveled to Russia and gave intelligence agents information about old Special Forces unit's activities in Georgia and Azerbaijan. A damage assessment of what Debbins disclosed was filed under seal — Debbins said in sentencing papers that he thought he only gave the Russians information they already knew.

Debbins received nominal payments for his information, even though he initially refused an offer of a \$1,000 cash payment. In one meeting with Russian intelligence, he accepted a bottle of Cognac and a Russian military uniform as payment, according to the indictment. Raj Parekh, acting U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, whose office prosecuted the case, said in a statement after the hearing that "the defendant's brazen disclosures to Russian intelligence agents jeopardized U.S. national security and threatened the safety of his fellow servicemembers. This prosecution underscores our firm resolve to hold accountable those who betray their sworn oath and bring them to justice for their exceptionally serious crimes." [Source: Associated Press | Matthew Barakat | May 14, 2021 ++]

U.S. Capitol Riot

Update 14: Quantico Marine Major Warnagiris Charged



An active-duty Marine officer stationed in Quantico, Virginia, was arrested 13 MAY and charged with crimes related to the U.S. Capitol breach on 6 JAN, the District of Columbia U.S. Attorney's Office said. Maj. **Christopher Warnagiris**, 40, of Woodbridge, Virginia, was charged "with federal offenses that include assaulting, resisting or impeding certain officers; obstruction of law enforcement during civil disorder; and obstruction of justice, among other charges," according to a Thursday press release.

In the first 120 days after Jan. 6, approximately 440 individuals have been arrested on charges related to the Capitol breach — most supporters of then-President Donald Trump — which disrupted a joint session of Congress that was in the process of certifying electoral votes to the 2020 presidential election for President Joe Biden. Warnagiris was the first active-duty service member to be charged in connection to events that day, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said. Warnagiris allegedly was the first one through the East Rotunda doors on 6 JAN according to court documents, "after pushing through a line of police officers." Video footage <https://twitter.com/i/status/1392900330522910728> , captured shortly after 2:25 p.m. on 6 JAN, allegedly shows the Marine, once inside the Capitol, putting himself in a doorway corner

and using his body to keep the door open and pull other people inside. A U.S. Capitol Police officer tried to close the doors, but the man in the video continued to push it open, pushing the officer in the process.

The Marine Corps confirmed that Warnagiris is an active-duty Marine field artillery officer. He put on the rank of major in 2013. He is currently assigned to the Marine Air-Ground Task Force Staff Training Program as part of Training and Education Command in Quantico, Virginia. “The Marine Corps is clear on this: There is no place for racial hatred or extremism in the Marine Corps,” Headquarters Marine Corps spokesman Maj. Jorge Hernandez said in a Thursday email. “Our strength is derived from the individual excellence of every Marine regardless of background. Bigotry and racial extremism run contrary to our core values. Participation with hate or extremist groups of any kind is directly contradictory to the core values of honor, courage, and commitment that we stand for as Marines and isn’t tolerated by the Marine Corps.”

Warnagiris was identified 16 MAR after a witness saw three photos posted online looking to locate a man who had entered the Capitol, according to a criminal complaint. That witness, who had worked with Warnagiris once a week for about six months in 2019, contacted the FBI. On 17 MAR two FBI agents went to Warnagiris’ command at Quantico, Virginia, where a co-worker, who has worked with the Marine for about nine months and sees him in close proximity many times a week, also identified him as the one in the photos. Warnagiris’ first court appearance was 13 MAY in the Eastern District of Virginia. He has not yet hired an attorney, nor knows if he has funds to hire an attorney, he said in court, which made audio available for a telephone audience.

In 2017 Warnagiris was the operations officer for a U.S. landing force command element aboard the French Navy amphibious assault ship Tonnerre during a two-month deployment with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, according to a Marine Corps story. The deployment, dubbed “Bois Belleau 100,” commemorated the 100th anniversary of the World War I Battle of Belleau Wood in France. His awards include the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (three), the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Sea Service Deployment Ribbon (six), Meritorious Service Medal, Navy Unit Commendation (three), Defense Meritorious Service Medal, NATO medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and National Defense Service Medal. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Andrea Scott | May 13, 2021 ++]

U.S. Capitol Riot

Update 15: Capitol National Guard Protection Cost to Date \$520M+

Just over 1,000 National Guard members remain in Washington to protect the U.S. Capitol after their mission following a riot by Donald Trump supporters ran up a bill topping \$500 million. The \$520 million National Guard presence, which surrounded the Capitol compound for months, began after the Jan. 6 riots and ended at midnight Sunday. The National Guard Bureau estimated the initial mission cost from January through March to be \$410 million, and the extension until 24 MAY cost an additional \$111 million for a massive \$521 million bill to protect a vast perimeter of the Capitol grounds through the winter and spring.

At its peak, nearly 26,000 Guard members were on duty in Washington, D.C., from all 54 states, territories, and the District of Columbia. “There’s no reimbursal plan,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told the Washington Examiner 24 MAY. “The thousand or so [members] that are still in the [National]

Capital Region are preparing for departure.” Kirby said there would be no residual force left behind and no equipment transferred to the U.S. Capitol Police — and no plans for a quick-reaction force that could respond to a repeat of the violence at the legislative hall. “Most of these soldiers were essentially acting as physical and barrier sentries,” Kirby added of the hundreds of Guard members who stood and patrolled each day behind fencing hundreds of feet from the Capitol doors.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who was responsible for renewing the Guard mission in March despite a lack of clear threat intelligence, praised the citizen-soldiers who served. “These airmen and soldiers protected not only the grounds, but the lawmakers working on those grounds, ensuring the people’s business could continue unabated,” Austin said in a statement. “As these troops depart for home and a much-deserved reunion with loved ones, I hope they do so knowing how much the nation appreciates their service and sacrifice,” he added. Guard members often stood in freezing temperatures pelted by rain and snow from behind 7-foot non-scalable fences. Initial concerns regarding dangerous protests faded when each new date of significance to conspiracy theorists came and went.

“The Capitol Police did not request the Guard to stay past May 23 and the mission concluded last night at 2359,” National Guard spokeswoman Capt. Chelsi Johnson told the Washington Examiner Monday. “The D.C. National Guard will return to normal operations and the out-of-state Guard members will return to their home station over the next few days.” DOD spokesman Lt. Col. Chris Mitchell said most Guard troops should be home by Wednesday. “They’re not standing watch,” he said of the Guard members still at the Capitol, noting they were out-processing before heading home.

Democratic lawmakers in the House Thursday passed a \$1.9 billion Capitol Security Bill to reimburse the National Guard for its costs. The bill proposed paying for recommended security measures such as \$250 million in retractable fencing and \$200 million dollars to create a National Guard quick-reaction force. Hundreds of millions of dollars more would go to hardening features such as doors and windows that were broken by pro-Trump rioters, to improve the Capitol Police intelligence division, and prosecute those responsible for the security breach that led to the death of five and injury of 140 police officers. The bill's fate in the Senate is uncertain.

All Republicans voted against the House version of the bill. Many GOP members had criticized the continued Guard presence at the Capitol. Many of the security recommendations came from a report to Congress lead by retired Gen. Russel Honore. Absent congressional action, Kirby denied the Defense Department made a decision regarding Honore’s suggestions. “No decisions have been made about any of the specifics,” Kirby said. “There's no intention to have a quick reaction force.” [Source: Washington Examiner | Abraham Mahshie | May 24, 2021 ++]

TRICARE Dental Program

Update 20: Slight Premium Increase Begins in May

Effective May 2021, the premiums for Tricare Dental are increasing slightly. These increases should be reflected in your May pay. The rate increases are different for each premium group, with monthly increases ranging from \$0.05 to \$0.47, depending on the sponsor's military service status and the number of family members being insured through the program. Tricare Dental coverage beneficiaries who do not pay via military payroll payment need to ensure that their payment amounts are adjusted to the new rate. If payments

are not paid on time, you may be disenrolled from the Tricare Dental program. Once disenrolled, you are ineligible to re-enroll for 12 months.

Active Duty

For active duty families, there are two levels of coverage. The active duty member is not included in the rates, so single coverage is either just a spouse or one child. The family rates are for a spouse and any number of children, or more than one child without a spouse.

- Single: \$11.65 monthly premium in 2021, up from \$11.60 in 2020.
- Family: \$30.28 monthly premium in 2021, up from \$30.15 in 2020.

Drilling National Guard and Reserve

For non-activated National Guard, selected reserve (what most people consider "the reserves") and mobilization Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), there are four levels of coverage.

- Sponsor only covers the military service member.
- Single coverage does not cover the service member, but covers one family member: either a spouse or a child.
- Family coverage includes the spouse and/or all children, but does not include the service member.
- Sponsor and family include the military member and their spouse and/or all children.

Tricare Dental monthly premiums for drilling Guard/Reserve:

- Sponsor: \$11.65 in 2021, up from \$11.60 in 2020.
- Single: \$29.12 in 2021, up from \$28.99 in 2020.
- Family: \$75.71 in 2021, up from \$75.37 in 2020.
- Sponsor Plus Family: \$87.36 in 2021, up from \$86.97 in 2020.

Non-Mobilization IRR

For non-mobilization IRR, there are also four levels of coverage.

- Sponsor only covers the service member.
- Single coverage does not cover the military member, but covers one family member: either a spouse or a child.
- Family coverage includes the spouse and/or all children, but does not include the service member.
- Sponsor and family includes both the military member and their spouse and/or all children.

Non-Mobilized IRR monthly TRICARE Dental premiums:

- Sponsor Only: \$29.12 in 2021, up from \$28.99 in 2020.
- Single: \$29.12 in 2021, up from \$28.99 in 2020.
- Family: \$75.71 in 2021, up from \$75.37 in 2020.
- Sponsor Plus Family: \$104.83 in 2021, up from \$104.36 in 2020.

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In addition to monthly premiums, Tricare Dental coverage has cost-shares for many services, ranging from 0% to 50%. There are also annual maximum payment limits of \$1,300 per year per person for regular services, and \$1,200 per year per person for services related to accidents. There is a \$1,750 lifetime maximum per person for orthodontic benefits. For most families and situations, Tricare Dental coverage is a wise choice. However, some individuals might find it more cost-effective to "self-insure" for dental expenses, particularly National Guard and reservists and retirees. The cost-benefit analysis for each

individual situation needs to include the family size, genetic dental disposition, personal dental habits and general dental health. There's no one right answer for every family.

Refer to <https://www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Dental/SurvivorBenefit> for more information about dental benefits for military retirees and survivors via the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP). [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | April 2021 ++]

Arlington National Cemetery

Update 92: Eligibility Could Change Soon

The new eligibility regulations for Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) could be published later this year, but there's still time for Congress to step in and take much-needed corrective action. Karen Durham-Aguilera, executive director of the Office of Army Cemeteries, told lawmakers at a 5 MAY hearing the final regulations are expected to be approved and published in the Federal Register this fall. The proposed eligibility changes would dramatically reduce interment eligibility to those who receive a Purple Heart or are awarded a Silver Star and above, and would force many 20-year retirees to change their end-of-life plans.

The FY 2019 National Defense Authorization Act required the secretary of the Army to submit a proposal to extend the life of the cemetery by 150 years, a timeframe selected because the cemetery was 150 years old. MOAA members were very vocal during the public comment period, describing the change as discriminatory by service, specialty, and gender. The public comments are going through a legal review. The next steps for the proposed rule change are:

- Army staff review
- Approval by the secretary of the Army
- Staffing through the armed services
- Approval by the secretary of defense
- Interagency review through the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
- Publish in the Federal Register

MOAA discussed the significance of the proposed rule change in a recent meeting with an Army senior leader. It is a sensitive subject not lost on military senior leaders, but because of the language in the 2019 NDAA, only Congress has the authority to make a much-needed course correction via a change in law. MOAA's three priorities for ANC eligibility and expansion moving forward:

- Ensure 20-year retirees now eligible for ANC will not have to change end-of-life plans. They deserve full military honors at our national cemetery (the VA cemetery system does not afford full military honors) and should be grandfathered in regardless of eligibility changes.
- Provide full consideration of noncontiguous expansion for ANC, which was directed by Congress in Public Law 114-158 (approved May 20, 2016) but was not fully considered. The law directed "considerations for additional expansion opportunities beyond the current boundaries of the cemetery."

- Set a clear path forward for the next national cemetery: ANC will run out of room no matter what, and designating the next cemetery that affords full military honors is a matter of national conscience. If the current eligibility rules remain, ANC would reach capacity in 2050, leaving ample time to plan for the future.

The 2017 ANC report to Congress outlining the capacity concerns also provides a course of action that would address the challenge of addressing space at ANC: “[E]stablishing a new Department of Defense-run national cemetery in another location. This would mean building a new cemetery in a suitable place that would offer the same burial honors as ANC. While it is impossible to recreate the aesthetic appeal and history of ANC, this new cemetery could grow to become iconic over time, in the same way that ANC has gradually evolved over the past 150 years.”

MOAA will continue to engage Congress on Arlington National Cemetery, and they need your voice as constituents. Reach out to your lawmakers and ask them to include language in the FY 22 NDAA that would require DoD to designate the next national cemetery. This you can easily do by clicking on <https://takeaction.moaa.org/moaa/app/write-a-letter?3&engagementId=511221> and forwarding the preformatted editable message to your Congressional representatives asking them to preserve Arlington National cemetery and eligibility for 20-year retirees. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Mark Belinsky | May 20, 2021 ++]

POW/MIA

Update 128: Agency Wants to Disinter 'Unknown' From Punchbowl



The Defense POW /MIA Accounting Agency said it has talked with the Navy about disinterring 94 sailors from the famed battleship USS Arizona who are buried as "unknowns" at Punchbowl cemetery in Honolulu. But not for identification and potential return to families, as is the usual case, and has been done with hundreds of other unknowns at Punchbowl — officially named the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.

The accounting agency disinterred 388 from the USS Oklahoma in 2015. It has exhumed casualties from the USS West Virginia and USS California and the 1943 Battle of Tarawa and hundreds from the Korean War for identification. It's now planning to disinter from Punchbowl about 400 buried as unknowns who died as prisoners of war on Japanese transport ships including the Enoura Maru, with conditions so bad they were dubbed "hellships." But with the group of USS

Arizona unknowns — and for reasons that are not entirely clear — the accounting agency is considering taking the unprecedented step of placing their remains back in the sunken Pearl Harbor battleship that accounted for the greatest loss of life on Dec. 7, 1941.

A total of 1,177 men were killed on the warship, which still is a grave for many and a national memorial to the losses suffered at what became America's entry into World War II. "We have had preliminary discussions with the Navy, and one of the proposals that we have notionally talked about is to disinter all of them — not for the purpose of identification — but to entomb them in the hull of the Arizona along with their shipmates," Kelly McKeague, director of the accounting agency, said at an online 20 FEB "family member update" for those with loved ones unaccounted for from past wars. McKeague was responding to a question as to when the USS Arizona unknowns would "finally" get disinterred.

"It's something that, again, we could never take on the process of disinterring the 94 from the national cemetery, only because it would cause us to have to get (DNA) family reference samples" from the more than 900 men who remain in the battleship grave to compare against the 94, he said. "So it's not a proposition that makes pragmatic sense, but more importantly, it's not one that the United States Navy is open to — only because the Arizona, the memorial itself, is their final resting place," said McKeague, a Hawaii native and 1977 Damien Memorial School graduate. "So our notional plan, again, was to disinter the 94 (and) entomb them all together ... to achieve the fullest possible accounting of the entire USS Arizona crew."

The proposal does not sit well with two of the better-known families of what is one of the most tragic and revered Navy ships of World War II. "I thought, 'God, this is just wrong. This is just absolutely beyond wrong,'" said Randy Stratton, son of Arizona crew member Don Stratton, who, despite burns over 65 % of his body on Dec. 7, was one of six men to climb hand over hand on a rope thrown from the adjacent repair ship USS Vestal in one of the most dramatic rescues of the Pearl Harbor attack. Don Stratton died on Feb. 15, 2020, at the age of 97, leaving just two living members of a crew that once numbered 1,514.

"If they are doing DNA samples (from other unknowns buried at Punchbowl), why couldn't they do DNA samples of those unknown (USS Arizona) tombs and be able to notify the family" for possible burial back home in a family graveyard, Randy Stratton asked. If a family wants to reinter an identified Arizona crew member from the group of 94 back on the ship, that's fine, too, said Stratton, who lives in Colorado. "The family members should have that option of whether or not that's where he would belong, or he would rather belong beside his wife, his son, daughter — whoever may have passed before him — and not just clump them into one big 94-people (group). That just doesn't make any sense to me at all."

DPAA, which is headquartered in Washington, D.C., but has a big identification lab and offices at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, literally goes to the ends of the Earth bushwhacking through jungles and climbing mountains to recover the fallen from past wars, identify their remains and return them home. "If you are killed in action and we can't just get you out right then and there,

we're going to come looking for you and get you home," Navy Adm. Jon Kreitz, DPAA's former deputy director, said in a 2019 accounting agency release. Identification of World War II unknowns at Punchbowl — many of whom are commingled in big caskets due to the circumstances of their death — has been made possible in recent decades by advances in science, particularly DNA.

Lou Conter, a California resident and one of just two remaining survivors of the Arizona — and who will turn 100 in September — also said that identifications should be made for his shipmates removed from Punchbowl, and that the families of those men should be given the choice to re-inter them on the battleship or in a family plot. "Let the family decide, but definitely, if they are going to bring them up, identify them," said his daughter, Louann Daley. "Give them that respect of identification. I think they should show them the respect like they did with the Oklahoma of identifying them."

There was no discussion by McKeague, DPAA's director, as to how the remains of 94 USS Arizona crew members would be re-interred aboard the battleship. Lauren Bruner, an Arizona crew member who died in 2019 at the age of 98, was the 44th survivor to have his ashes interred by divers in gun turret 4 of his former ship. The Honolulu Star-Advertiser asked the accounting agency if the Arizona disinterment plan is going forward. In an email, it chose to refer to Memorandum DTM-16-003 "policy guidance for the disinterment of unidentified human remains," and did not answer the question. The accounting agency didn't provide any answer at all as to why getting DNA family reference samples to make identifications for the Arizona unknowns apparently is out of the question.

It could take over \$5 million, thousands of DNA tests and several years to undertake the USS Arizona identifications. According to a Pentagon budget document, the accounting agency had a \$155 million operations and maintenance budget in fiscal 2019, but a projected drop in fiscal 2021 with a \$129 million estimate. The Navy's reported preference for re-interring the unidentified USS Arizona dead back on the battleship has precedence in a plan involving the USS Oklahoma, which was heavily damaged in the Pearl Harbor attack. In 2013, the predecessor organization to DPAA wanted to exhume all the Oklahoma casualties buried as unknowns at Punchbowl but got pushback from the Navy, which preferred to maintain the "sanctity" of the graves. Further, the Navy suggested taking the partial and commingled remains of more than 100 Oklahoma crew members that had already been disinterred in 2003 from a single casket at Punchbowl and reburying them unidentified at a memorial and gravesite on Ford Island.

Congressional pressure on the accounting agency to make at least 200 identifications a year to address a significant backlog from World War II in part led to the current pace of disinterments at Punchbowl, including the exhumation of all Oklahoma crew. Navy reluctance to identify unknowns from Punchbowl stems from tradition, namely, "you go down with the ship, you stay with the ship," said Lisa Phillips, past president of WWII Families for the Return of the Missing.

"That is their stance on it," Phillips said. "Then you've got the family stance of, 'I want to know where my relative is.' They want to have identification so they can have closure." [Source: The Honolulu Star-Advertiser | William Cole | May 23, 2021 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials

Reported MAY 01 thru 31, 2021 | Twenty-Four

“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/b012.htm>
- <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>

LOOK FOR

-- **Army Chaplain (Capt.) Emil J. Kapaun**, of Pilsen, Kansas, served in the Korean War with the 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. On Nov. 2, 1950, his unit was near Unsan when they came under heavy fire from Chinese forces and received orders to withdraw. Approximately a quarter of the unit's soldiers made their way back to friendly lines. The others, including many wounded soldiers, became trapped. Kapaun volunteered to stay with the wounded and was soon captured and taken to a Chinese-run prison camp on the Yalu River's south bank known as Camp 5. Kapaun will be buried Sept. 29, 2021, in Wichita, Kansas. [Read about Kapaun.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Clifford S. Johnson, 20**, of Valatie, New York, was a member of Headquarters Battery, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Johnson will be buried May 19, 2021, in Schuylerville, New York. [Read about Johnson.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Eldert J. Beek, 20**, of Sibley, Iowa, was a member of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported killed in action on Dec. 1, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Beek will be buried June 14, 2021, in George, Iowa. [Read about Beek.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Henry L. Helms, 24**, of Collbran, Alabama, was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Helms will be buried May 22, 2021, in Ringgold, Georgia. [Read about Helms.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. James W. White, 21**, of Chester, Ohio, was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional), also known as Merrill's Marauders. After taking the airfield in Myitkyina, Burma, from the Japanese on May 17, 1944, White's battalion was tasked with holding the airfield and taking part in the siege of Myitkyina. White was reported to have been killed during fighting on July 2, 1944. White will be buried June 12, 2021, in Long Bottom, Ohio. [Read about White.](#)

-- **Naval Reserve Cmdr. Paul C. Charvet, 26**, was the pilot of an A-1H Skyraider airplane assigned to Attack Squadron 215 aboard the USS Bon Homme Richard. During a mission near Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam, his plane disappeared in an area of low cloud cover and fog a kilometer northeast of Hon Me Island. His remains were not recovered after a search of the area. On March 22, 1967, Radio Hanoi Broadcast reported an American aircraft was shot down the day before off the coast of Thanh Hoa Province. Charvet's plane was the only U.S. aircraft loss in that area March 21. Charvet was considered missing in action until Dec. 2, 1977, when his status was changed to "Presumed Killed in Action." Interment services are pending. [Read about Charvet.](#)

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 2nd Class Leaman R. Dill, 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 Dill. Interment services are pending. [Read about Dill.](#)

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Charles D. Brown, 22**, was assigned to the battleship USS West Virginia, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS West Virginia sustained multiple torpedo hits, but timely counter-flooding measures taken by the crew prevented it from capsizing, and it came to rest on the shallow harbor floor. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 106 crewmen, including Brown. Interment services are pending. [Read about Brown.](#)

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 2nd Class Harold F. Trapp, 24, and Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class William H. Trapp, 23**, of La Porte, Indiana, were 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 429 deaths, including the Trapp brothers. They will be buried on June 15, 2021, at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. [Read about the Trapp brothers.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Everett C. Titterington, 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 Titterington. Interment services are pending. [Read about Titterington.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Paul E. Saylor, 21**, of Johnson City, Tennessee, 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 Saylor. He will be buried on Aug. 20, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Saylor.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Robert J. Harr, 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 Harr. Interment services are pending. [Read about Harr.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 2nd Class Ralph C. Battles, 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 Battles. Interment services are pending. [Read about Battles.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Robert J. Harr, 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 Harr. Interment services are pending. [Read about Harr.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class William D. Tucker, 19**, of Bedford, Iowa, 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 Tucker. He will be buried on June 30, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Tucker.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 2nd Class Carl M. Bradley, 19**, of Shelley, Idaho, 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 Bradley. He will be buried on June 26, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Bradley.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 2nd Class William K. Shafer, 20**, 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 Shafer. Interment services are pending. [Read about Shafer.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Harry R. Holmes, 19**, 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 Holmes. Interment services are pending. [Read about Holmes.](#)

-- **Navy Lt. Cmdr. Hugh R. Alexander, 43**, 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 Alexander. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for his actions in saving the lives of several fellow crew members. Interment services are pending. [Read about Alexander.](#)

-- **Navy Musician 2nd Class Charlton H. Ferguson, 19**, of Kosciusko, Mississippi, 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 Ferguson. He will be buried on July 9, 2021, at the NMCP. [Read about Ferguson.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Wallace G. Mitchell, 19**, of Los Angeles, 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 Mitchell. He will be buried on May 28, 2021, in San Diego. [Read about Mitchell.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Charles L. Saunders, 18**, 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 Saunders. Interment services are pending. [Read about Saunders.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Raymond D. Boynton, 19**, 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 Boynton. Interment services are pending. [Read about Boynton.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Russell O. Ufford, 17**, 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 Ufford. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ufford.](#)

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

* VA *



VA Cemeteries

Update 24: All Restrictions on Cemetery Visits Lifted Ahead Of Memorial Day

Ahead of Memorial Day weekend, [Veterans Affairs officials](#) are lifting all restrictions on visitors to veterans cemeteries across the country provided that they have been vaccinated against [coronavirus](#). That means no masks, no social distancing and no limits on group size at any of the [155 national cemeteries](#), starting 26 May. Individuals who are not fully vaccinated are expected to continue wearing masks and avoiding crowds, in keeping with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Officials at Arlington National Cemetery — arguably the best known veterans cemetery in America, but actually operated by the Army — are expected to announce new visitation rules for next week’s holiday soon. That site typically drew tens of thousands of visitors in the week before and after Memorial Day, but saw far fewer last year because of pandemic restrictions.

The mask and crowd size restrictions have been in place since last June, following a 10-week partial closure of the cemetery sites at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Funeral services have been ongoing but limited to small numbers of immediate family members. Public gatherings have been curtailed. Officials said large-scale events typically held over Memorial Day weekend still will not be held at the sites this year, because of ongoing worries about mass gatherings. But individuals and families planning on visiting the cemeteries will be able to resume activities under the same protocols as before the pandemic began.

“For those of us in the VA and especially those in the National Cemetery Administration, Memorial Day is one of the most important days of the year,” acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Ron Walters told reporters on 21 MAY. “I’m sure many families will be happy to get the news that there will no longer be a limit on the number of people who can attend these services.” VA officials could not estimate how many individuals may visit the cemeteries next week as a result of the loosened rules. Local staff have been conducting burial and committal ceremonies since last summer, and grounds crews have been

maintaining sites throughout the pandemic. “All of our district directors said that lifting [the restrictions] does not pose any additional challenges to the cemeteries,” Walvers said. “We’ve still had a cemetery representative there, the cemetery directors still needed to be there. Things were already kept up prior to the new COVID guidance.”

Families who had a small funeral service during the height of the pandemic can request a larger memorial service now if they want to include a larger crowd in their mourning. Walters said he does not anticipate those requests to add significant workload to staff. VA officials will not be checking individuals’ vaccine status, but are asking all visitors to use common sense and respect other families by following vaccine guidelines and staying home if they are feeling ill. About 93 percent of all veterans in America today live within 75 miles of a national or local veterans cemetery, according to the National Cemetery Administration. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 21, 2021 ++]

VA Cybersecurity

Update 01: How Secure Is Veterans’ Data?



The issue of cybersecurity is splashed across media headlines seemingly almost every day -- headlines sounding the alarm about the vulnerabilities and challenges facing government, corporations, and personal computer networks we rely heavily on across the globe. The Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack brought home the issue and just how far reaching the fallout was felt by Americans dependent on gas products for their livelihood.

The VA is not immune to cybersecurity attacks, as seen over the years. As recent as September 2020, hackers breached the VA health care computer systems and exposed information on about 46,000 veterans. The breach shut down the department’s finance office as hackers attempted to divert veteran disability and other payments for financial gain. Earlier in 2015, a massive Office of Personnel Management data breach exposed Social Security numbers, family and health information, and fingerprints for over 21.5 million employees, including currently serving servicemembers and veterans. In 2012, VA inadvertently exposed veterans’ personal information online, and in 2006, the burglary of a VA employees’ home included the theft of a laptop housing the personal information of millions of veterans and servicemembers.

On 21 MAY, VA’s chief information and security officials attempted to allay lawmakers concerns during a House Veterans’ Affairs Committee hearing on cybersecurity. The technology modernization subcommittee lawmakers held the hearing to learn more about current cybersecurity efforts and other technological challenges facing the VA given the significant number of information technology (IT) modernization projects underway within the department. The most notable is the Cerner joint VA-DoD electronic health record (EHR) modernization project. VA Secretary Denis McDonough implemented a

strategic review early after taking office in February because of problems in rolling out the Cerner system at the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane, Wash. The review should be completed in June.

While VA officials sought to ease member concerns by conveying how serious the department is about protecting veterans', employees, and department assets, the threats to VA's network remain an ongoing challenge. "The COVID-19 pandemic fueled the adversaries with new content and topics to leverage in their attacks, such as phishing campaigns disguised as informational updates," Paul Cunningham, the VA's deputy assistant secretary and chief information security officer, told lawmakers. "Fortunately, the VA workforce is trained on identifying such attacks, and the department had tools in place for reporting and responding to those threats."

How Big Are VA's IT Security Challenges?

The VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) pointed to 21 consecutive years of audits where the VA was repeatedly charged with many of the same discrepancies year after year. The OIG provided VA with 26 recommendations to address problem areas, but many have yet to be resolved. While the OIG acknowledged recent improvements in information management, many of VA's ongoing problems in implementing adequate security controls are due in part to the aging and outdated IT infrastructure maintained by the department.

Solutions Congress May Want to Consider

"Relative to other agencies, VA spends more on cybersecurity, but less as a percent of its overall budget," said Chris Jaikaran, an expert in cybersecurity policy at the Congressional Research Service (CRS). "Most federal agencies spend less than 1% of their budgets on cybersecurity. VA spends almost twice as much as other federal agencies on protecting its internal networks." CRS offered these options for lawmakers to consider. Congress may choose to:

- Shift VA's cybersecurity activities to an agency with more expertise in this area.
- Create new technical capabilities within the department.
- Accelerate the plan for the VA to move toward implementing the next generation of cybersecurity services.
- Create new statutory requirements for reporting VA's cybersecurity efforts.
- Target specific systems like the VA-DoD EHR for adopting the next generation of cybersecurity services.

Lawmakers were left with more questions than answers from the hearing but assured VA officials discussions on these issues would continue. Any follow-on hearings will be laser-focused on VA's progress, including incremental improvement over time on the OIG recommendations. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | René Campos | May 25, 2021 ++]

VA Toxic Exposure Care

Addition of 3 AO Presumptive Conditions to Begin

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced 27 MAY two major decisions related to presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange and particulate matter exposures during military service in Southwest Asia.

Agent Orange

VA will begin implementing provisions of the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283), adding three conditions to the list of those presumptively associated with exposure to herbicide agents, more commonly known as Agent Orange. Those conditions are bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism. “Many of our Nation’s Veterans have waited a long time for these benefits,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “VA will not make them wait any longer. This is absolutely the right thing to do for Veterans and their families.”

VA will apply the provisions of court orders related to [Nehmer vs. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#), which may result in an earlier date for entitlement to benefits for Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Vietnam War era Veterans and their survivors, who previously filed and were denied benefits for one of these three new presumptive conditions, will have their cases automatically reviewed without the need to refile a claim. VA will send letters to impacted Veterans and survivors.

Particulate Matter Exposures

The secretary recently concluded the first iteration of a newly formed internal VA process to review scientific evidence to support rulemaking, resulting in the recommendation to consider creation of new presumptions of service connection for respiratory conditions based on VA’s evaluation of a National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine report and other evidence. VA’s review supports initiation of rulemaking to address the role that particulate matter pollution plays in generating chronic respiratory conditions, which may include asthma, rhinitis, and sinusitis, for Veterans who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the Persian Gulf War and/or after September 19, 2001, or in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan during the Persian Gulf War.

“VA is establishing a holistic approach to determining toxic exposure presumption going forward. We are moving out smartly in initiating action to consider these and other potential new presumptions, grounded in science and in keeping with my authority as Secretary of VA,” said McDonough.

VA is initiating rulemaking to consider adding respiratory conditions, which may include asthma, sinusitis, and rhinitis, to the list of chronic disabilities, based on an association with military service in Southwest Asia, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan during the covered periods of conflict. VA will conduct broad outreach efforts to reach impacted Veterans and encourages them to participate in the rulemaking process. For more information, visit Airborne Hazards and Burn Pit Exposures - Public Health at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/index.asp>. If you have questions send queries to VAPublicAffairs@va.gov. [Source: VA News Release | May 27, 2021 ++]

VA Covid-19 Vaccines

Update 04: Overseas Vets to be Reimbursed – Not Provided

When Congress passed legislation last month to expand COVID vaccine distribution to all veterans and caregivers, Marine Corps veteran Wayne Beverly hoped he'd be able to get an appointment through his local U.S. embassy. Instead, the expatriate living in Thailand has been frustrated to find out that enrollees in the Department of Veterans Affairs Foreign Medical Program are still on their own to find doses. "There are many veterans here," said Beverly, 75, who has a 100-percent disability rating due to injuries sustained during the Vietnam war. "I am a member of the local VFW, and there are chapters all over Thailand. But I have heard nothing from anyone about being able to receive a vaccine. "It feels like we're getting screwed over by our government and the VA once again."

Under provisions in the SAVE LIVES Act signed into law 24 MAR, VA officials were given authority to administer vaccines to all American veterans, their spouses and caregivers in an effort to speed up distribution of the doses. The legislation included "overseas veterans who rely on the Foreign Medical Program." About 55,500 veterans are currently registered in that overseas medical assistance program, though VA officials have noted fewer than 5,000 were active users of the program in fiscal 2020. But the program is typically a reimbursement program where veterans can receive payments for health appointments or medication after they arrange that care on their own.

In a statement, VA officials said that they will "pay or reimburse claims for vaccines that veterans receive from their local providers," but not provide any direct doses to overseas veterans through American embassies or other U.S. facilities. The one exception is in the Philippines, where VA staff is providing vaccines directly at the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Manila. Expanding that to more foreign country locations would present significant logistical challenges for the department, which has coordinated closely with federal partners to distribute tens of thousands of vaccine doses each week at established stateside sites.

But the lack of a direct path to a vaccine presents significant challenges for overseas veterans, as many foreign governments have struggled to obtain and distribute the doses. Beverly said getting a dose in Thailand right now "is next to impossible" for most residents. He had hoped the U.S. government would find a way to make some supply available. "But our embassy has said 'you are on your own, good luck,'" he said. "What are we, third-class citizens? I don't remember giving up my citizenship when I moved 11 years ago." In a statement, a State Department official said that the agency "does not provide direct medical care to private U.S. citizens abroad. We are committed to providing all possible consular assistance to U.S. citizens in need overseas, including by providing information on local medical resources when appropriate."

On 26 APR, amid increasing criticism and desperation from the international community, White House officials announced they will share up to 60 million doses of the excess vaccine doses with other countries in coming weeks. Earlier this month, Defense Department officials announced they would prioritize overseas deployed personnel and their families for vaccine doses "because of limited availability to receive vaccinations from local health care providers." But overseas veterans have not received the same priority. Restrictions on vaccine imports and exports remain in place across the globe, and getting shots into individuals' arms is still largely controlled by foreign governments, even for U.S. citizens.

More than 150 million individuals worldwide have contracted COVID-19 over the last 18 months, and more than 3 million have died from complications related to the virus. The virus has been particularly deadly among elderly individuals, a group that includes many of the overseas U.S. veterans. Beverly said he is still searching for a local hospital for a vaccine appointment, but he isn't optimistic. "They put (outsiders) at the back of the line for sure," he said. "When Americans are left out, the only hope us veterans have is the VA." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 30, 2021 ++]

VA Covid-19 Vaccines

Update 05: Overseas Reimbursement Procedure

Are you a Veteran living or traveling outside the United States? With enactment of the SAVE LIVES Act on March 24, 2021, Veterans eligible for VA's Foreign Medical Program (FMP) can receive reimbursement from VA for a COVID-19 vaccine provided by a local community provider. We can pay for a COVID-19 vaccine that is formally approved for use by the national health authorities of the country in which the Veteran receives the vaccine. It does not need to be a COVID-19 vaccine authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has information about [FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccines](#)Getting a vaccine

For us to pay for the vaccine, all you have to do is make arrangements to receive a COVID-19 vaccine from a provider in your community. After you get the vaccine, ask the provider to send a claim directly to VA for reimbursement. If the provider doesn't send the claim directly to VA, then you will need to pay the provider and then submit a claim to us, including proof of payment. The process for submitting claims is the same for the provider and the Veteran. To submit a claim, complete [VA Form 10-7959f-2](#), FMP Claim Cover Sheet. Make sure to include:

- Veteran's full name
- Social Security Number
- VA claim file number
- Date of birth
- Physical address
- Mailing address
- Country
- Telephone number
- E-mail address

Next, attach an itemized invoice or receipt from the provider for the COVID-19 vaccine and its administration. We recommend both the form and any invoices or receipts be written in English. While we will translate the claim submission if provided in another language, we will need more time for translation. We also recommend making a copy of the completed form and any invoices or receipts for your records. Make sure the provider's receipt or invoice includes:

- Provider's full name, medical title, office address, phone number and billing address (if different from the office address).
- Name of the COVID-19 vaccine/vaccine manufacturer.

- Billed charge and date(s) for each service.

Once everything is together, mail the completed form and invoices/receipts to: VHA Office of Community Care, Foreign Medical Program (FMP), P.O. Box 469061, Denver, CO 80246-9061. When we get it, we will review the claim to make sure all required documentation is present and that we can pay for the COVID-19 vaccination. We will contact you if we need more information. Please note that claim amounts are converted to U.S. dollars according to the foreign currency rate on the date of service, and claims must be submitted within two years from the date of service. Once approved, reimbursement is provided via U.S. Treasury check, usually within 145 days. [Source: Vantage Point | Jonathan Ludwig | May 23, 2021 ++]

Covid-19 Headgear

Update 18: Respiratory Helmet in Use at Hines VAMC



It may look like something from a science fiction movie, but the spacesuit-like respiratory helmets at Chicago's Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital represent the cutting edge in COVID-19 treatment. Developed in Italy during the early 1990s, respiratory helmets, often nicknamed bubble helmets, are used in hospitals across southern Europe for patients suffering from respiratory distress but are uncommon in North America. When COVID-19 spread to the United States in March 2020, Hines VA Hospital immediately began looking for ways to treat the mostly unknown virus. "We were overwhelmed with patients in respiratory distress and we were trying to find a solution," said Dr. Franco Laghi, pulmonologist at Hines VA.

According to Laghi, the pulmonology team was familiar with early respiratory helmet research and its use during Italy's first wave of coronavirus. Despite a surge in global demand, Hines VA was soon able to secure the strange looking but effective device. "It's been around prior to COVID but it's really been used a lot during the COVID pandemic," added fellow pulmonologist Dr. Rishi Mehta. "The basic idea behind it is that you are giving pressurized oxygen to a patient in an interface that is hopefully more comfortable and allows the patient to breathe more naturally." According to Laghi and Mehta, the helmet (pictured above) is not for every patient but can offer advantages when used.

Helmet treatments can reduce intubations which have high mortality rates. It can be used without mechanical breathing machines in some cases and doesn't cause skin deterioration from long-term oxygen mask use. Additionally, the bubble keeps medical staff away from infectious patients' airways by eliminating the need to readjust masks. Respiratory helmets can also benefit Veterans who have PTSD by

not restricting the face, like standard oxygen masks, which can be upsetting, the doctors noted. Still, its unusual appearance may leave some Veterans initially confused. “It can look very strange at first for a patient. You see people bringing this big helmet but they adjust very quickly,” admits Edita Vines, respiratory therapist at Hines VA. “They can talk, get a sip of water and they can communicate and see what is going on around them more comfortably in the helmet.”

When the team received their first helmet a year ago, learning how to use it wasn’t easy, Vines noted. “We used it on ourselves to learn.” “The training was really limited. We had to find the studies and find the research ourselves,” Vines said. “We started networking with other respiratory therapists and just trying it on, using it on ourselves to learn.” “The nurses and respiratory therapist took the time to learn it right before we started deploying it on patients,” Mehta said. “They learned on the fly. This is a whole new technology that no one is used to. Usually, this process takes a long time but with the pandemic, they did it astonishingly fast.”

In the summer of 2020, the team was ready to use its tested helmet on a volunteer Veteran in respiratory distress from COVID-19. “His oxygen levels improved immediately and the patient felt comfortable inside the helmet,” Vines said. “He learned how to manage the helmet by opening the access port to drink some water, take medicine and inflate and deflate the comfort pillow around his neck.” Since then, Hines VA has successfully deployed the new treatment on other COVID-19 patients. The hospital procured additional helmets last winter.

Hines is among the first hospitals in the nation to use the technology. Vines noted that numerous VA medical facilities have reached out to learn from her team’s experience. Many have purchased respiratory helmets to use at their hospitals. Refer to https://youtu.be/wDid_3MVedc for a video demonstration on the helmet’s use. [Source: Vantage Point | Matthew Moeller | May 17, 2021 ++]

VA FMP

Update 06: Medical Claims Abroad

VA’s Foreign Medical Program (FMP) is a health care benefits program for U.S. Veterans who are residing or traveling abroad. Through this program, we can pay for care and services you need for treatment of service-connected conditions and conditions held to be associated with and aggravating a service-connected condition. (VA can also cover non-service-connected care through FMP for Veterans enrolled in a VA vocational rehabilitation program, on an as-needed basis, when the case manager authorizes the services with a signed referral.)

We cannot reimburse the cost of any treatment, including COVID-19 vaccines, for Veterans who receive services in countries where U.S. Department of Treasury checks are restricted or where travel is prohibited. Also, other than COVID-19 vaccinations and care available within the limits of the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic, FMP does not generally cover non-service-connected disabilities or conditions. To learn more about FMP, including eligibility and the enrollment process, visit the following:

- [Website: VA Foreign Medical Program.](#)
- [Video: VA Foreign Medical Program Overview.](#)

For Veterans Living in Canada, Australia, Costa Rica, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Spain and the UK call the following:

- USA/Canada: 877-345-8179
- Australia: 1-800-354 965
- Costa Rica: 0800-013-0759
- Germany: 0800-1800011
- Italy: 800-782655
- Japan: 00531-13-0871
- Mexico: 001-877-345-8179
- Spain: 900-981-776
- UK: 0800-032-7425

For Inquiries call or send to:

- Phone (General Inquiries): 877-345-8179, Monday-Friday, 6:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. MT]
- Phone (Claim Inquiries): 303-331-7590, Monday-Friday, 8:05 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. ET
- Email: fmp@va.gov
- Mail: VHA Office of Community Care, Foreign Medical Program, PO Box 469061, Denver, CO 80246-9061

Frequently Asked Questions

1. I am a Veteran eligible for FMP. Can VA send a COVID-19 vaccine that can be administered to me locally?
(A) No, provision and administration of a COVID-19 vaccine is conducted locally.
2. I am a Veteran eligible for, but not enrolled in FMP. Can I still get a COVID-19 vaccine through FMP?
(A) Yes, you can submit a claim to FMP to be reimbursed for the COVID-19 vaccine before enrolling in the program. If you are eligible, after VA receives the claim, VA will enroll you in the program and then issue you the reimbursement. If you are not enrolled, be sure to include a completed Foreign Medical Program (FMP) Registration Form when submitting your claim. The form is located here: https://www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/vha-10-7959f-1%20-fill_012317.pdf.
3. I am a Veteran located in the Philippines. Can I get a COVID-19 vaccine directly through VA?
(A) If you have access to the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic and are eligible for FMP, you can receive a COVID-19 vaccine directly from VA from that clinic. Information about the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic and COVID-19 vaccines are located at <https://www.visn21.va.gov/locations/manila.asp> and <https://ph.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/veterans-affairs/>. If the VA Manila Outpatient Clinic is too far away or too difficult to access, you can receive a COVID-19 vaccine from a local community provider and send a claim to FMP for reimbursement, if you are eligible for FMP.
4. I am a Veteran located in a foreign country and not eligible for FMP. How do I get a COVID-19 vaccine?
(A) Please refer to the local U.S. embassy website or social media account for the country in which you are located. Country-specific information and guidance for COVID-19, including vaccine availability, is located on the following U.S. State Department website:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/COVID-19-Country-Specific-Information.html>.

5. I am a Veteran eligible for and enrolled in FMP. Can my spouse and/or caregiver also get a COVID-19 vaccine through FMP?

(A) Under current law, VA cannot reimburse COVID-19 vaccines for spouses and caregivers through FMP.

[Source: Vantage Point | Jonathan Ludwig | May 23, 2021 ++]

VA Herbicide Related Claims

Previously Denied Vet & Survivor Ones to be Readjudicated

Veterans who were previously denied service connection for an [herbicide related](#) presumptive condition due to lack of in-country Vietnam service will have their claims automatically readjudicated by VA. The department began readjudicating claims in April for Veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War but were denied for one or more herbicide related conditions, on the basis that military service was not performed on the landmass of the Republic of Vietnam or on its inland waterways.

“Readjudication means VA will review the evidence of record and provide replacement decisions in the cases of Veterans who were previously denied service connection benefits,” said Acting VA Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. “We have the proper resources in place to meet the needs of our Veteran community and will ensure all eligible Veterans’ and their survivors’ claims are examined thoroughly and fairly.” The review also applies to eligible survivors of deceased Vietnam-era Veterans and is part of the Veterans Benefits Administration’s implementation of the Nov. 5, 2020, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California order in [Nehmer vs. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#), requiring VA to readjudicate previously denied claims.

VA will determine if benefits for qualifying disabilities can now be paid retroactively to the date of previously denied claims. The court’s decision requires automatic readjudication in such cases without requiring a new claim, and potentially paying benefits to the survivors or estates of deceased beneficiaries. More information is available regarding VA disability benefits based on [Agent Orange exposure](#). [Source: VA News Release | May 14, 2021 ++]

VA Dizziness Care

Investigating and Treating Services Available from VA Audiology

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) estimates that 40% of the US population will experience some form of dizziness or balance difficulty over their lifetime. Investigating and treating dizziness is one of the many services of the VA Audiology team, which improves Veterans’ quality of life and helps them return to their daily activities. Florida Veteran Robert had seen an audiologist for episodes of dizziness and a neurologist for migraines. He experienced daily dizziness

episodes, which he described as a “drunken, spinning” sensation. He also experienced nausea and imbalance following a Traumatic Brain Injury in 2012.

Robert’s Miami VA audiology team quickly shifted to virtual care for vestibular rehabilitation therapy (VRT) using VA Video Connect (VVC). Video Connect allowed him and others to continue their care without leaving their homes. At first, he was reluctant. “I felt thrilled at the prospect at the time, but I was also curious as to its potential effectiveness versus in-person treatment,” he said. “Thankfully, both concerns were addressed most positively, the travel time and distance as well as effectiveness success in treatment.” Much needed and appreciated treatment

Robert attended weekly/bi-weekly virtual visits between October 2020 and March 2021. During this period of the COVID-19 pandemic, if not for video connect therapy, my malaise may have continued without treatment,” he added. “Video Connect has allowed for much-needed and appreciated treatment while safeguarding my life and potential exposure to the COVID19 virus.” Robert shared that his healthcare provider experience was professional, patient and accommodating, finding scheduling to be manageable and much less stressful as he could coordinate directly with the provider in the event of a need for rescheduling.

Reactions have been overwhelmingly positive. At the Lovell Federal Health Care Center in Chicago, medical staff use telehealth to evaluate dizzy patients. Patients are from the parent medical center and five community-based outpatient centers in the immediate area. The locations identify patients closer to home and determine if advanced testing is needed. One Veteran remarked that “it was swift and easy.” Another expressed appreciation for the virtual care opportunity, saying “It’s at least three hours for me to get up to the main facility for dizziness issues. Now, I am only two miles away from the closest accommodating clinic.” Robert’s story and those at other facilities like Lovell are the reason we are committed to building connections on all fronts of VA care. VA Audiology is excited to be a part of the growing virtual care opportunities and innovations in virtual vestibular evaluation and treatment allowing us to help Veterans return to daily activities safely.

Learn more about the various telephone and telehealth options used to address VHA audiology patient needs from a distance by visiting VA’s Audiology web page <https://www.rehab.va.gov/audiology>. VA Video Connect Instructions for Patients (a video that provides instructions on how to use the VA Telehealth system).

- Enterprise Remote Tuning of Hearing Instruments (ERTHI).
- VA Cochlear Implant Centers.
- Vendor Resources to assist patients with a hearing aid and accessory maintenance.

[Source: Vantage Point | May 3, 2021 ++]

VA Caregiver Program

Update 72: After Court Ruling VA Overhauls Application Process

Veterans Affairs officials are overhauling their application process for caregiver benefits while simultaneously fighting a court ruling that would force them to allow a legal review for individuals rejected

for the program. The move follows an order last month from a panel of U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims judges, which ruled that families rejected by the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers should have an opportunity to appeal those decisions to the Board of Veterans' Appeals, which handles other VA benefits disputes.

But VA officials have opposed that idea, arguing instead that keeping program decisions within the clinical side of department operations will produce better health care options for veterans and less complexity for families. "We believe that participation in this program is part of a veteran's overall medical care plan," said Meg Kabat, senior advisor on families, caregivers and survivors at VA. "These clinical and medical decisions being thrown into the litigation process is not what is best for veterans." On 10 MAY, VA asked the full veterans claims court to revisit the April decision. At the center of the case are concerns over how applications to the caregiver program are handled.

For veterans who need significant home care from a spouse or family member, the program awards up to \$2,300 a month in stipends and access to additional support services. About 25,000 veterans are participating in the program today, and another 27,000 applications are pending. Currently, leaders from individual VA medical centers review applications and make decisions on who receives the benefit. That has led to complaints about inconsistency and a lack of transparency with the application process from a number of veterans advocates, and formed much of the basis of the recent lawsuit. Kabat said those applications will now go to clinical teams at each of the department's 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks. More than 200 new medical professionals are being hired for the work.

Veterans who are rejected for the program by the new review panels will be able to appeal to a different VISN twice if they believe the decision was made in error. VA officials said the new process will allow families and outside advocates to better understand the reasons for the decisions, and ensure that similar applications across the country are handled in a similar way. But the new process will likely do little for families rejected in the past who could be in line for a substantial financial payout under the appeals court's April order.

In that case, Jeremy Beaudette, a Marine Corps veteran who left legally blind and suffering from traumatic brain injury after multiple combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, was rated as 100 percent disabled by VA officials because of his wounds. But when his wife, Maya, applied for benefits through VA's caregiver program she was rejected. Multiple appeals to department officials were also denied. Thanks to their court victory, the couple can appeal the decision to the Board of Veterans' Appeals, which could award back benefits as well as new eligibility for the caregiver program.

Nothing in the new application process unveiled by VA would award back pay to veterans previously rejected for the program. In a statement, Amanda Pertusati, supervising staff attorney at Public Counsel (which brought the lawsuit against the department), said officials are still reviewing the changes. "We look forward to implementing the courts order to ensure that all caregiver program claimants have the ability to seek appellate review, as well as to obtain the benefits that they are entitled to," she said. "It is unfortunate that the parties and the court will now have to be distracted by VA's attacks on the court's decision, rather than focusing all efforts to implement it."

The court ordered VA to develop an implementation plan for the retroactive appeals by 3 JUN. VA officials said they will follow that order, even as they fight the lawsuit. Meanwhile, outside advocates say they are watching both the legal fight and program reforms closely. "We commend VA for its commitment

to comply with the lower court's decision and we strongly encourage them to continue collaborating closely with the [veterans] community on communications, planning, and strategy moving forward," said Steve Schwab, CEO of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation "We await the full court review of this case, but EDF is committed to working with the VA on a more equitable and transparent appeals process that provides all caregivers with a chance to access the benefits they have earned and deserve." [Source: MOAA Newsletter | May 13, 2021 ++]

Hepatitis C

Update 06: If Enrolled at VA Test Is Available upon Request

Did you know that all adults age 18-79 should be tested for hepatitis C at least once? If you aren't sure if you've been tested before, talk to your provider about it the next time you check in. Ask if the test is right for you. Hepatitis C is a disease that affects your liver. It is caused by a virus, called the hepatitis C virus, or HCV for short. Approximately 2.4 million people in the United States are thought to have hepatitis C. Veterans have higher rates of hepatitis C than the general population Any Veteran enrolled in VA care can ask for a hepatitis C test. You may or may not need an appointment to get tested at your local VA medical center. Different sites have different practices. Your provider will give you basic information about the testing process and to answer any questions that you have about hepatitis C or the test itself.

If you are diagnosed with hepatitis C, new treatments for hepatitis C are able to cure most people in about 12 weeks. VA has cured over 100,000 Veterans of hepatitis C so far! If you test negative, you may experience feelings of relief. You should remember, though, that just because you tested negative, you are not immune from hepatitis C. Continue to protect yourself from becoming infected. Here are some ways to reduce your risk of getting hepatitis C:

- If you inject drugs, don't ever share your needles, or works with anyone else. If you need help with this, talk to your provider about sterile syringe programs and safe injection practices and visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/ssp> .
- Always practice safe sex. Though risk of hepatitis C transmission via sex is low, it is important to use a latex barrier, such as a condom (or rubber) every time you have sex. Using condoms also reduces your chances of getting some sexually transmitted infections.
- Do not use anyone else's razor, toothbrush, or other personal care items.

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month and the perfect time to check if you've had a hepatitis C test. Learn more about hepatitis C at <https://www.hepatitis.va.gov/hcv/patient/index.asp> . [Source: Vantage Point | May 19, 2021 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse Reported MAY 01 thru 31, 2021

San Antonio, TX — A federal judge in San Antonio on 39 APR sentenced 49-year-old **Bradley Lane Croft**, owner of Universal K-9, Inc., to 118 months of imprisonment for scheming to defraud the federal government of more than \$1.5 million in Veterans Affairs GI Bill benefits to train service canines and their handlers. In addition to the prison term, Senior U.S. District Judge David A. Ezra ordered that Croft

pay \$1,506,758.31 in restitution and be placed on supervised release for a period of three years after completing his prison term. “Today’s sentence demonstrates what can happen to you if you choose to rip off one of the most important benefit programs we have for our veterans. My thanks goes to the prosecutors and our law enforcement partners who worked so hard to see justice served,” said U.S. Attorney Ashley C. Hoff.

On August 8, 2018, federal authorities executed a search warrant at Croft’s business in San Antonio. A total of 26 canines at the business were placed into the custody of the city’s Animal Care Services. Croft has remained in federal custody since the verdict. After a bench trial in November 2019, Judge Ezra found Croft guilty on eight counts of wire fraud, four counts of aggravated identity theft, two counts of money laundering and two counts of making a false tax return. Testimony during trial revealed that beginning in 2015, Croft provided false information in applications to the Texas Veterans Commission, including instructors’ names, certifications and training documents to receive GI Bill educational benefit payments. Croft and others solicited veterans as students indicating that they could use their GI Bill benefits to pay for a dog handler’s courses that cost between \$6,500.00 and \$12,000.00. During the scheme, Universal K-9 filed approximately 185 fraudulent claims relating to the education of about 132 veterans totaling over \$1.5 million.

Trial testimony also revealed that Croft submitted fraudulent income tax returns showing his 2016 reported income as \$2,000 and his reported income as \$2,000 for 2017. Evidence showed that Croft actually received substantially more income than what he reported to the IRS in 2016 and 2017. Judge Ezra also ordered Croft to forfeit: his San Antonio business property; approximately \$239,825.73 seized from his bank accounts; approximately \$4,372 seized on site at Universal K-9; a 2017 American Eagle 45T Motorhome (valued at over \$450,000); a 2018 Ford F-150 King Ranch Lariat; a 2017 Dodge Ram 1500 Laramie; a 2016 Yamaha Superjet Ski; a 2008 Yamaha Waverunner Jet ski; and a 2012 Rocket International Trailer. Judge Ezra also granted the government’s motion for a money judgment in the amount of \$1.3 million. [Source: DoJ Western District of Texas | U.S. Attorney’s Office | April 30, 2021 ++]

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New Bern, N.C. -- A Hope Mills man, **Daniel Bruce Ross**, was sentenced 12 MAY to 24 months in prison for conspiring to accept bribe payments in exchange for the performance of official acts while working as a federal government employee. Ross previously pled guilty to the charge. He was also ordered to pay \$21,520.00 in restitution.

According to court documents and other information presented in court, Ross worked for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in Fayetteville as an agent for the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant program, which provides federal funds to eligible veterans with certain severe, service-connected disabilities for the purpose of constructing adapted homes or modifying existing homes. SAH agents have day-to-day responsibility for managing the grant program, including recommending action on grant applications to VA supervisory officials. Among other things, SAH agents are required to inform the veteran that he or she may choose their own builder. Agents are prohibited from recommending a particular builder.

During the offense period, Ross was the assigned SAH agent for multiple grant projects awarded to All American Home Renovations (AAHR), a Fayetteville-based construction company then-owned and operated by Marc Schantz. According to the investigation, Ross abused his position as an SAH agent to

steer over \$1 million worth of grant projects to AAHR in exchange for monetary payments from Schantz. For example, Ross routinely advised his VA supervisors to approve grant awards to veterans in which AAHR was improperly and deceptively designated as a particular veteran's "builder of choice" when, in fact, Ross had misled the veteran to believe that AAHR had been selected for them by the VA. AAHR concealed the unlawful payments to Ross by transferring the funds to a dormant business owned by Ross, making it appear as if the business was providing legitimate subcontracting services to AAHR.

Related court documents and information can be found on the website of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina | U.S. Attorney's Office | May 12, 2021 ++]

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San Antonio – Federal authorities have charged a pharmacy technician at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Kerrville (VAMC) with stealing hydrocodone and oxycodone prescriptions from the VAMC mailroom and from mailboxes at some 40 locations in Kerrville, Ingram and Center Point. A federal criminal complaint charges 35-year-old Kerrville resident **Scott M. Brown** with one count of theft of U.S. Mail. According to the complaint, the Kerr County Sheriff's Office received several theft reports from victims beginning in March 2021. Victims reported that their prescriptions sent from the VAMC were missing. According to the complaint, Brown allegedly stole packaged narcotics from inside the VAMC mailroom as well as residential mailboxes between March and April 2021.

Upon conviction, Brown faces up to five years in federal prison. He remains in custody awaiting a detention hearing scheduled for 10:45 a.m. 24 MAY in San Antonio before U.S Magistrate Judge Henry Bemporad. A criminal complaint is merely a charge and should not be considered as evidence of guilt. The defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. [Source: DoJ Western Dist. of Texas | U.S. Attorney's Office | May 20, 2021 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Jackson, MS – A Jackson man pled guilty 20 MAY before U.S. District Judge Carlton W. Reeves to two counts of wire fraud in a scheme to steal federal funds, announced Acting U.S. Attorney Darren J. LaMarca and Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey Breen with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General.

Anthony Kelley, 59, of Jackson, owns Trendsetters Barber College in Jackson, Mississippi. Trendsetters was certified by the VA and Mississippi's State Approving Agency to offer courses which would be covered by GI Bill benefits for veterans enrolled in the school's programs. Beginning at least as early as October 2016 and continuing through March 2019, Kelley offered a Master Barber course that was not an accredited course of study approved by the state's Board of Barber Examiners. Kelley fraudulently represented that this course was an approved course of study and, as a result, was allowed to collect GI Bill money from veterans enrolled in the program. At least two veterans were enrolled in the Master Barber program using their GI Bill benefits and, as a result, the VA made interstate wire transfers of federal funds to Kelley based on his fraudulent representations.

An Information was filed against Kelley on April 22, 2021 charging him with two counts of wire fraud. Kelley will be sentenced on August 24, 2021 and faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison on each count. The Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General investigated the case. The case is

being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Andrew W. Eichner. [Source: DoJ So. District of Mississippi | U.S. Attorney’s Office | May 20, 2021 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Little Rock, AR — A former program analyst for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was sentenced to prison on 25 MAY after stealing personal information from veterans and VA employees. **Phillip Hill**, 35, of Malvern, was sentenced to 46 months in federal prison by United States District Judge Kristine G. Baker.

In the fall of 2017, federal agents learned that Hill, who worked at the North Little Rock VA Medical Center, had access to veterans’ and current VA employees’ personal information to include names, dates of birth, and social security numbers. Agents learned that Hill had contacted another individual and attempted to sell personal identifying information to a buyer for approximately \$100,000. Multiple recorded conversations with this individual and Hill were monitored by agents. Throughout one monitored conversation, Hill repeatedly acknowledged the illegality of his conduct. Hill explained that he was offering to sell the personal identifying information for any veteran who had received VA compensation or a pension, visited a VA medical center, or had completed a VA financial assessment. Hill also offered to sell personal identifying information for VA employees, explaining the employees data would be particularly valuable to identity thieves, as it would include personal identifying information and personal account information for employees who were earning over \$50,000 a year.

Hill was arrested on December 17, 2017, at the VA Regional Office by agents. As part of the investigation, his phone was searched. Records found on the phone indicated that a VA database spreadsheet containing personal information had been loaded onto Hill’s Google drive account had been accessed by Hill on his phone days prior to his arrest.

Hill was indicted in January 2018 with attempted trafficking in access devices, aggravated identity theft, and possession of access device-making equipment. In September 2019, he pleaded guilty to attempted trafficking in access devices in exchange for dismissal of the remaining charges. In addition to 46 months in prison, Judge Baker sentenced Hill to two years of supervised release following his term of imprisonment. [Source: DoJ Eastern District of Arkansas | U.S. Attorney’s Office | May 25, 2021 ++]

VA Manila OPC **Announcements & Reminders 29 MAY 2021**

Refer to Addendum to this Bulletin titled, **VA Manila OPC May 2021**. This edition covers the following **subjects**:

- Memorial Day 2021
- COVID-19 Vaccinations Updates inclusive of ‘How to Let VA Manila Know You Want a Vaccine’.
- VA Manila Outpatient Clinic Operations – Effective July 6, 2021
- Upcoming Holidays at VA Manila
- Parking Updates at VA Manila
- 2021 Clothing Allowance Applications

[Source: VA Manila OPC msg. | Daniel Gutkoski Clinic Mgr | May 28, 2021 ++]

* Vets *



3M Earplugs Lawsuit

Update 08: Federal Jury Awards 3 Army Vets \$7.1 Million in Damages

A federal jury in Florida on Friday awarded \$7.1 million in damages to three Army veterans, finding that 3M Co. failed to warn about design flaws in earplugs widely sold to the U.S. military that ultimately caused hearing loss. The closely watched lawsuit is the first of thousands of complaints to go to trial, and it could set rules for the way other proceedings are handled. More than 230,000 service personnel have sued 3M, claiming that the manufacturer knew its Combat Arms earplugs (CAEv2) were defective and yet sold them anyway without warnings.

"The evidence is clear: 3M knew their earplugs were defective, yet they allowed our service members to suffer these life-altering injuries," plaintiff attorneys said in a statement 30 APR. A second trial on the same claims is scheduled for later this month, and a third is slated for next month. 3M on said it did not agree with the jury verdict and indicated it may appeal. "We do not believe the plaintiffs met their burden of proving that the CAEv2 product was defectively or negligently designed or caused each plaintiff's purported injuries," it said in a statement. "While we are disappointed and disagree with today's verdicts, they are just the first step in this litigation. We believe there are multiple grounds for appeal."

U.S. soldiers used the earplugs for years in combat and in training missions in Iraq, Afghanistan and in the United States. 3M acquired the earplugs when it bought Aearo Technologies in 2008, and it stopped selling the product in 2015. It has argued that the product was properly designed, worked as intended and was not responsible for any hearing loss. The dual-ended Combat Arms earplugs were designed with one side to block all noise and the other to let through voice commands but block other harmful loud sounds such as those emanating from explosives. Military members say that didn't happen. During the trial, attorneys for the plaintiffs said they found evidence that Aearo Technologies knew years ago that one of the flaps in the earplug was too short and could create a fitting problem.

The military veterans argued that Aearo Technologies, and later 3M, failed to warn the military about the findings of its own lab and test results. The floodgates of litigation regarding those allegations first opened in 2018, after 3M agreed to pay U.S. military branches \$9.1 million to settle a whistleblower lawsuit. That settlement, in which 3M did not admit guilt, opened the door for individual veterans to sue 3M. Lawsuits have since poured in from veterans across the country. The U.S. District Court in Pensacola, Fla., is handling the multidistrict litigation. The trials and verdicts arising out of early cases are expected to help decide which of the thousands of other cases against 3M continue on to trial, settle or are dropped.

[Source: The Star Tribune | Dee Depass | April 30, 2021 ++]

American Vet's Recollections **Elizabeth Barker WWII 6888th Central Postal Bn Member**



Elizabeth Bernice Barker is a World War II veteran of the 6888th Central Postal Battalion of the Women's Army Corps. Ms. Barker and her sisters in arms were members of an all-African American female unit responsible for sorting the backlog of mail to maintain the morale of Americans stationed in Europe. Watch as she tells the story and what she experienced in the 20 minute video at <https://youtu.be/Fv0ilSmbRH8>. [Source: American Veterans Center | /august 28 2021 ++]

Tiger Flight 762 Memorial **Soldiers Who Perished In 1962 on Secret Mission Memorialized**



Nearly 60 years ago, dozens of soldiers assembled for a top secret mission to Vietnam, three years before President Lyndon Johnson officially sent U.S. combat troops to the country. They never made it. Their airplane disappeared between Guam and the Philippines, leaving behind no trace. Ever since, their families have been fighting to get answers about the mission from the Pentagon. They also want their loved ones to be recognized on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

For the families, it's been heart-wrenching that the soldiers were not properly memorialized like others who died in the war. "I do feel frustrated. It's almost as if they never existed as soldiers. It's almost like they don't matter, that their deaths don't matter," said Dianna Taylor Crumpler, of Olive Branch, Mississippi, whose brother, James Henry Taylor, an Army chaplain, died on the flight. On 15 MAY, families of more than 20 of the fallen soldiers were on hand for the unveiling of a memorial in Columbia Falls, Maine, to honor those who perished when the plane disappeared over the Pacific Ocean. Columbia Falls is about 190 miles (305 kilometers) east of Portland, Maine.

"It's incredible," said Donna Ellis, of Haslett, Michigan, who was 5 when her father, Melvin Lewis Hatt, died in the crash. The mission, early in the Vietnam War, is shrouded in mystery. Soldiers from across the country assembled at Travis Air Force Base in California before boarding a propeller-powered Lockheed Super Constellation operated by the Flying Tiger Line, which chartered flights for the U.S. military. The 93 U.S. soldiers, three South Vietnamese and 11 crew members aboard Flight 739 never made it to Saigon. It departed from California and made refueling stops in Hawaii, Wake Island and Guam before vanishing on the next leg of the flight to the Philippines on March 16, 1962. There was a report of a midair explosion witnessed by sailors on a tanker in the area, but no debris from the aircraft was recovered.

The families have spent years seeking answers to no avail. Freedom of Information Act requests by Ellis and others yielded redacted documents with little useful information about the clandestine mission. "It turns into a rat maze," Ellis said. Because their deaths were not in the combat zone, their names were not allowed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. Sen. Gary Peters, a Democrat from Michigan, took up the cause and introduced legislation in 2019 to allow the names to be etched on the memorial, but it never made it to the Senate floor. "It is past time that we properly honor those lost. That's why I will continue to work with my colleagues and the families of those lives lost on ways we can honor the service members," Peters said.

In Maine, the founder of Wreaths Across America, which places wreaths at Arlington National Cemetery and at veteran gravesites around the world, was moved by the story and decided to create a monument. The granite stone has a marble marker with the names on it. The unveiling featured a reading of the names, a rifle salute, the playing of taps and the laying of a wreath. [Source: The Associated Press | David Sharp | May 16, 2021 ++]

Vet Fraud & Abuse

Reported May 01 thru 31, 2021

Clarksburg, West Virginia -- A former nursing assistant was sentenced 11 MAY in federal court for murder and assault charges in the deaths of eight veterans at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in Clarksburg, West Virginia, Acting U.S. Attorney Randolph J. Bernard announced. **Reta Mays**, 46, of Harrison County, West Virginia, was sentenced to seven consecutive life sentences, one for each murder, and an additional 240 months for the eight victim. Mays pleaded guilty in July 2020 to seven counts of second-degree murder in the deaths of veterans Robert Edge Sr., Robert Kozul, Archie Edgell, George Shaw, W.A.H., Felix McDermott, and Raymond Golden. She pleaded guilty to one count of assault with intent to commit murder involving the death of veteran Russell Posey.



Mays was employed as a nursing assistant at the VAMC, working the night shift during the same period of time that the veterans in her care died of hypoglycemia while being treated at the hospital. Nursing assistants at the VAMC are not qualified or authorized to administer any medication to patients, including insulin. Mays would sit one-on-one with patients. She admitted to administering insulin to several patients with the intent to cause their deaths.

This investigation, which began in June 2018, involved more than 300 interviews; the review of thousands of pages of medical records and charts; the review of phone, social media, and computer records; countless hours of consulting with some of the most respected forensic experts and endocrinologists; the exhumation of some of the victims; and the review of hospital staff and visitor records to assess their potential interactions with the victims. Today's sentence was the result of the tireless and comprehensive efforts of both criminal investigators and healthcare experts. Mays was also ordered to pay a total of \$172,624.96 to the victims' families, the VA Hospital, Medicare, and insurance companies. [Source: DOJ Northern Dist. of W. VA | U.S. Attorney's Office | May 11, 2021 ++]

RP Vet Items of Interest

May 2021

1. **COVID-19 Vaccine Appointments.** Under the new law all veterans, spouses, and caregivers are eligible to receive COVID-19 shots from the VA. Tracey Betts Manila VA Director advises the Manila VA Clinic has the Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine. Oldest veterans and their spouses will be notified for appointments. No Walk-Ins. Administering vaccines is a clinically controlled process and will require detailed tracking. All vets are encouraged to sign up for shots on the My Healthy Vet website. Even if you have not decided on getting the vaccine, the enrollment will ensure you will receive updated information on the Vaccine via email.

2. **Foreign Medical Program:** They are currently opening mail received on 01/19/21, processing claims received on 9/2/20, and processing registrations received on 12/16/20. To receive a faster FMP reimbursement, consider e-mailing instead of faxing or mailing your claim. You will receive a confirmation email quickly. E-mail or Fax (1-303-331-7803) your claim in one complete package. Submitting an incomplete package to FMP form WILL result in denial and will need to be resubmitted. Any Veteran with new service-connected ratings can request an upgraded FMP letter by email. DAVTBH CH#3 Office can email it for you or provide their address.

3. **VA Specially Adapted Housing Program.** SAH can be used by Veterans overseas, The grant can be used to purchase a new home or to do renovations on an existing home that meets program requirements. You can find more information by checking out the website: <https://www.va.gov/housing->

[assistance/disability-housing-grants/](#). You can contact SAH Alexander Dickinson, who works in the SAH program and is familiar with the Philippines at alexander.dickinson@va.gov.

4. **VA Clinic Appointments**. Primary and some Specialty Doctor's appointment are being scheduled at the Manila CA Clinic. Phone interviews are allowed for Veteran's unable to travel to the Manila Clinic. You can receive your annual flu shot at the VA Manila clinic. If you can't physically going to any VA appointments, contact Dr. Sugay at TMCC, Secretary Wheng 0935-939-8046 for flu shots. You can schedule an appointment with them choosing the date and time using the link <https://v2.waitwhile.com/welcome/vamanila>. Manila VA telephones are now operating from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. They are providing an option to schedule a telephonic or video interview utilizing the 'wait while' scheduling application. You can have one attendee with you ages 18-65 for appointment.

5. **STEP Registration**. All Veterans and American Citizens residing in the Philippines are encouraged to register with the U.S. State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at <http://step.state.gov>.

6. **FMP Fast Reimbursement Tip**: Submit a completed VAF 10-7959F-2, Foreign Medical Program (FMP) Claim Cover Sheet. Use a permanent address where mil will always reach you.

7. **FMP Replacement Letter**. Any veteran currently resister with FMP, with new service connected ratings, can request an upgraded FMP letter by emailing hac.fmp@va.gov. Include the following:

- a) A diagnosis or nature off illness or injury.
- b) Doctor's name and medical title, his office address, and office telephone number.
- c) Doctor's billing address if different.
- d) Include claim information – ESPECIALLY the Diagnosis Treated.
- e) Narrative description of each service and/or drug (This determines if the condition is Service Connected).
- f) Each service's billed charge and Dates(s) of service.

8. **VA Phone Numbers**.

- Now include the prefix 8. Call 2-8550-3888. VA Manila dial 011(33-2) 8550-3888. Regional Office, press 1, to speak to outpatient clinic press 2, follow the prompts to be connected (i.e. press 2 for an attendant to answer). Toll free at: 1-800-1-888-5252 from either Smart, Sun cellular, or PLDT carriers. Fax numbers: 08-550-3965 or 3964 or 2968.
- For the United States VA now once centralized phone number for all customer service 1-800-MyVA (800-698-2411). The old numbers are still active and are not going away. Dial U.S. number: 808-433-5254 which will connect you with the main VA switchboard and then follow the instructions above.
- The White House VA hotline is 855-948-2311. Dial U.S. number: 808-433-5254 which will connect you with the main VA switchboard and then follow the instructions above. Their toll free number remains the same 1-800-1-888-5252.
- For PLDT and Smart/Sun/TNT callers, you can also use the MyVA or #6982 anywhere from the Philippines.

- For Veterans who use the AudioCare automated refill line to request medication renewals, note the new number MyVA, option 8 (or 02-8550-3888, Option 8).

9. **New Agent Orange Conditions.** The Fiscal Year 2021 NDAA has passed adding bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and parkinsonism to the list of VA's presumptive conditions associated with exposure to Agent range.

10. **VA OPC Manila.** VA Manila Clinic Director Daniel Gutkowski advises an Ass't Clinic Director Elizabeth Harris is now working at the Manila VA Clinic.

[Source: VFW Post 9892 Commander's Report | May 2021 ++]

Afghan Vets 17

Jason Pak | IED Casualty



Jason Pak grew up in a military family. His father, a colonel, was a West Point graduate who served 30 years in the Army. His service inspired Pak to join. After graduating from high school in 2007, Pak received an appointment to West Point. While at the academy, he learned the importance of building strong relationships with others in order to be a good leader. Pak graduated from the Academy in 2011 with a degree in systems engineering. He later completed both Airborne School and Ranger School. Following his time in Ranger School, Pak reported to his first unit based in Fort Lewis, Washington, where he was an assistant battalion fire support officer. Pak and the rest of his battalion spent time at the National Training Center in California before deploying to Afghanistan in October 2012.

Based in Panjwai, they often interacted with the Afghan people during reconnaissance patrols and worked closely with the Afghan National Army and the local police. Pak also participated in routine patrols as a company fire support officer. On Dec. 12, 2012, insurgent activity near Pak's location led to an airstrike. Afterwards, Pak and his company completed post-airstrike battle damage assessment. During the assessment, the unit maintained a single file line, marking their steps as the path of life. The mine detector went first, and Pak was in charge of telling the patrol where to go. The patrol followed all procedures, but an IED exploded when Pak crossed a mound.

Pak was knocked backwards, and the IED blew off both his legs and two of his fingers. Members of his unit pulled him away and applied first aid by fastening tourniquets to his legs. Despite being in great pain, Pak's main concern at the time was making sure that no one else had been injured during the explosion. Team members put Pak on a stretcher and took him to the closest checkpoint. A helicopter evacuated him to an operating room in Kandahar. When he woke up from his surgery, he received a Purple Heart. By Dec.

16, Pak transferred to Walter Reed National Military Center for recovery. While there, fellow wounded soldiers visited him to support his recovery and foster a positive perspective.

Ultimately, Pak medically retired from the Army at the rank of captain. Although he had initially pictured himself having a career in the military, Pak has embraced new opportunities as they have come his way. Pak is now the director of the Mid-Atlantic region's veterans' initiatives and outreach for Boeing. When discussing his prosthetics and point of view about the future in an interview with the American Veterans Center, Pak said, "I wasn't going to make this define me. I wasn't going to make this prevent me from doing the things that I love." Thank you for your service! [Source: MilitaryTimes | Claire Barrett | March 22, 2021 ++]

WWII Vets 258

Joseph G. Demler | Dubbed WWII's Human Skelton



Joseph G. Demler graduated from high school in June 1944. Ten days later, he received a draft letter to serve in the U.S. Army. With few options, the 18-year old packed his belongings and headed to Camp Blanding, Florida, for 17 weeks of basic training. After completing his training, Demler went to Camp Shanks, New York. There, he boarded a convoy and set sail for Europe on Nov. 22, 1944, leaving for a journey that put his resolve to the test. Demler arrived in Marseille, France, one day after his 19th birthday. Just weeks later, on Dec. 26, 1944, Demler and his comrades were sent to reinforce the 35th Infantry Division, which was devastated by the early fighting in the Battle of the Bulge.

His time with the 35th Infantry Division did not last long. On Dec. 29, 1944, Demler and a few soldiers stood at an outpost when a German tank fired at the building. The blast sent Demler flying into the air. After realizing they were attacked and could not receive aerial support due to poor weather conditions, he and his fellow soldiers surrendered. The future looked bleak for these Nazi prisoners of war (POWs). Rumors that Hitler wanted to kill all POWs quickly spread among the captives. As the Allied soldiers filed out of the outpost, German soldiers took all their personal belongings. The German guards then marched Demler and his fellow captives toward Stalag 12A, one of Nazi Germany's largest POW camps.

The journey toward the prison camp was rife with filthy and dangerous conditions. While stopping in the cities of Prüm and Gerolstein, Demler was forced to help repair destroyed German railroads at night. His guards' cigarette smoke often attracted Allied bombers to strafe his location, jeopardizing Demler's life several times. Furthermore, his captors only fed him small portions of bread and cheese, and his straw beds were crawling with lice. Demler's miseries only worsened once the railroads were repaired. One night, the

Germans packed Demler and his comrades into compact railcars set for Stalag 12A. The railcars were so crowded that no one could sit down, and they had only a bucket to serve as bathroom facilities.

For nearly a week on the train, Demler and the others went almost entirely without food or water, sustaining themselves with whatever snow they could collect. When the train reached Stalag 12A, Demler developed a severe case of pneumonia. Demler's health worsened while staying at Stalag 12A. The Germans repeatedly stole Demler's rations, leading to his malnourishment. Fellow prisoners died all around him, reminding him he could be next. Allied troops liberated Stalag 12A in late March 1945. By then, Demler weighed around 70 pounds, and the outlines of his bones were plainly visible. Awed by Demler's physical condition, John Florea with LIFE Magazine took a picture of him.

Demler was treated at a field hospital and then shipped to the 48th General Hospital in Paris. The military later flew Demler to numerous hospitals in the United States. After a long recovery, Demler was discharged in November 1945. Demler went on to live a comparably more peaceful life. After being discharged, he settled in Wisconsin. He soon met the love of his life, Loretta, and they got married. Demler served 37 years with the U.S. Postal Service. He also helped found an Honor Flight hub in Milwaukee, organizing trips for local Veterans to visit memorials in Washington, D.C.

Despite his harrowing ordeal as a Nazi POW, Demler reflected positively on the experience in his later years. In an interview with the Veterans History Project, Demler attributed part of his survival to not having "a defeated attitude." "You got to think positively, and all my life I've done that," he said. Demler died in February 2020. He was 94. We honor his service. [Source: Vantage Point | Calvin Wong | April 8, 2021 ++]

WWII Vets 259

William J. Balchus | Palawan POW Massacre Survivor



Born in October 1921, William J. Balchus grew up in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, the only son of seven children. He joined the Army Feb. 12, 1940. During World War II, he served as a corporal in Battalion I, 60th Air Defense Artillery Regiment Coast, formerly known as the 60th Coast Artillery. As part of Harbor Defenses of Manila and Subic Bays of the U.S. Armed Forces in the Far East, the 60th Coast Artillery provided air defense over Manila Bay in addition to serving in the Battle of Bataan and the Battle of Corregidor. After the Battle of Corregidor, the 60th surrendered to the Japanese on May 6, 1942. Balchus became a POW for 32 months.

On Dec. 14, 1944, Balchus was a POW at the old Philippine Constabulary Barracks in Puerto Princesa, Palawan, a Philippine province. To prevent allied forces from rescuing the POWs held by the Japanese, units from the 14th Area Army under Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita brought the POWs back to the prison camp. After they arrived, the air raid warning sounded, and the 150 POWs sought refuge in the shelter trenches. Once the POWs had entered the trenches, Japanese soldiers used barrels of gasoline to set them on fire. Guards shot the allied POWs who tried to escape. Only 11 POWs escaped the Palawan massacre; Balchus was one of them. Balchus and the other men who escaped went to Southern Palawan and were eventually rescued by Filipino scouts and guerillas under Nazario Mayor's command.

During his service, Balchus received a Bronze Star Medal, a Purple Heart, an American Defense Service Medal with a bronze star, an Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, an Distinguished Unit Citation with two oak leaf clusters, a Good Conduct Medal, a Philippines Defense Ribbon and a Philippines Liberation Medal. He left the service in July 1945, as a sergeant and returned to Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. Balchus married his wife, Helen Wisniewski, and worked driving coal mining trucks and later driving construction equipment. He was an avid fisherman and enjoyed the outdoors. He spent the last eight years of his life with his son and daughter-in-law in Yuba City, California.

Balchus passed away on Dec. 11, 2013, at the age of 92. He was the last of the 11 massacre survivors to pass away. Balchus was survived by his two children, six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. We honor his service. [Source: Vantage Point | Katherine Berman | April 14, 2021 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule

As of 31 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\vetterans 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\vetterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, Milton.Bell126@gmail.com [Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | May 31, 2021 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs

Scheduled As of 1 JUN 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>

[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | May 31, 2021 ++]

Vet Death Preps

Update 02: Keeping Records for Our Significant Others

Veterans need to be well organized when it comes to keeping records for our significant others. They will be stressed out enough dealing with our passing. They do not need the added chore of trying to find critical items necessary for planning funerals and other issues. What follows is a list of documents that are necessary to ensure that things get taken care of in a timely manner when we die.

The first item is a copy of your DD-214. This is the most important document relating to your military service. It shows a funeral director that you are a veteran and, in some cases, determines the level of services you are eligible for. If you are drawing benefits from the VA and you do not have a copy of your DD-214, log on to www.ebenefits.va.gov where you will be able to find and print a copy, as well as review your disability rating.

The second item is a copy of your award letter from the VA. This document shows what your disabilities are and their percentages. If you are a 100 percent permanent and totally disabled veteran, the

letter will save your significant other a lot of headaches when it comes to filing for Dependent Indemnity Compensation. It also gives the physician who fills out the death certificate a list of conditions that should be named as contributing factors to the veteran's death.

During the pandemic the primary cause of death listed for many veterans has been COVID-19. But the veteran's service-connected conditions in most cases were contributing factors. COPD and diabetes, for example, often are contributing factors. By having the doctor list a service-connected condition as a contributing factor on the death certificate, the widow will not have any difficulty getting the DIC claim approved. As a 100 percent permanent and totally disabled veteran, you are authorized a free death insurance policy providing you filed for that benefit within two years after you received your rating award letter. Locate the phone number for the insurance agency and keep it with the policy.

Then you need to compile all the documents listed below. The items and all pertinent information should be kept in a folder.

- Will
- Do Not Resuscitate statement
- Obituary
- Funeral wishes
- Passwords for computers and other items
- List of people to contact other than family (old military buddies, etc.)

It's also important to contact your nearest Casualty Assistance Office, which can help you file whatever documents are necessary for retirement pay and other issues. If your significant other is not a member of a Veterans Service Organization, locate the nearest VSO that helps with filing DIC claims and performs graveside honors.

This list is by no means complete. However, it will give you a starting point and provide critical information necessary to take care of the most time-sensitive items. AVVA offers a Paper Safe. Most funeral homes have guides, and will provide additional guidance. Please take the time and make this one of your priorities. As Vietnam veterans, we are all living on borrowed time. For more information, see "Navigating the VA Widow's Benefits Maze: Get the Facts and Don't Give Up," by Claudia Gary, in the July/August 2019 issue of The VVA Veteran (<http://vvaveteran.org>). [Source: VVA | John A Miterko | May 2021 ++]

Vet Employment Opportunities

MAY 31 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.

MAY 30

- [Collections Representative](#)
- Ultimate
- Lee, NH, United States

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

State Veteran’s Benefits Kansas 2021

The state of Kansas 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 – KS**” 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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/kansas-state-veterans-benefits.html> | May 2021 ++]

* Vet Legislation *



Military Family Hunger

Update 02: S.1488/H.R.2339 | Military Hunger Prevention Act

Thousands of military families face food insecurity, but the way the Department of Agriculture calculates eligibility for federal benefits is locking many of them out of assistance. A group of lawmakers are hoping

to change that with the Military Hunger Prevention Act, reintroduced 29 APR by Sens. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN). The bill is co-sponsored by a group of 11 bipartisan lawmakers, and has a companion bill in the House. The law would require the USDA to calculate service members' eligibility from their basic pay, rather than considering their basic allowance for housing — a striped that helps service members pay rent or a mortgage when they live off-base — as part of their income.

“Basically, what happens is right now, we know that there are many military families that have to rely on food stamps, that are food insecure, and many more that would qualify for the program, except that they can't because their BAH was being counted against them,” Duckworth told Military Times on 29 APR. An E-3 with a spouse and one child is eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, according to the USDA's chart, but if they live off-base, the money they receive to secure their own housing is counted as part of their overall income. USDA doesn't calculate any other benefits this way, Duckworth said, so her legislation would put service members and civilians on par in their eligibility.

Food insecurity has been in the military family conversation for years. Duckworth first introduced the same bill back in 2018, after learning of the issue while volunteering. “And I saw the wife of somebody I knew, who was still actively serving, come through the food pantry,” she said. “And I had the same reaction, as most Americans. What do you mean, there are military families that are having to use food pantries? What do you mean, military families need to use SNAP benefits?” This bill fixes a small part of the larger issue of military compensation, she said.

“The way the pay scales have been, is really based on a force that doesn't exist anymore,” she said. “It's based on a force that was mostly ... half the force is mostly younger and unmarried. Today, you have ... the most junior ranks of both commissioned and enlisted, those folks are married. So if you are a private and you are married with a child, you qualify for SNAP. And so we do need to take a look at the pay scales and how we deal with compensation.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers | April 29, 2021 ++]

Agent Orange Thailand

Update 04: S.657 | Agent Orange in Thailand

On 10 MAR Sen. John Boozman, (R-AR) introduced S.657 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. It was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs who held hearings on it on 28 APR. It currently has 14 cosponsors. During the Vietnam War, more than 40,000 gallons of Agent Orange were used in Thailand, yet the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does not automatically recognize all veterans who served there as being exposed to this toxin. VA's adjudication manual only acknowledges herbicide exposure for veterans with specific military occupational specialties who served on the perimeter of eight specific Thai Bases.

S. 657 would automatically concede herbicide exposure for all veterans who served at military installations in Thailand, regardless of the base, duty on the perimeter or military occupational specialty. These veterans would be eligible for VA health care and presumptive service-connected benefits due to their Agent Orange exposure. Readers can support this bill by clicking on DAV's take action site <https://dav.quorum.us/campaign/33432> and forwarding DAV's prepared editable letter to their Senators asking for their support of this bill. [Source: DAV Message | May 25, 2021 ++]

Reserve Benefits

Update 05: H.R.0000 | Healthcare for Our Troops Act

A bipartisan bill would provide medical and dental care for Selected Reserve members at no out-of-pocket cost, bringing their coverage in line with their active duty counterparts. MOAA supports the **Healthcare for Our Troops Act**, introduced 25 MAY by Reps. Trent Kelly (R-MS) and Andy Kim (D-NJ), because the health of Selected Reserve servicemembers is a readiness issue. The enhanced coverage would be for Selected Reserve servicemembers only. Their dependents still would be eligible to purchase premium-based TRICARE Reserve Select.

The bill addresses one of the top goals of National Guard Bureau Chief Gen. Daniel Hokanson. “Among my most pressing concerns are premium-free health care for every Guardsman who serves in uniform,” Hokanson said in his opening statement at the 4 MAY House Defense Appropriations hearing. He reiterated this priority at the Senate Defense Appropriations hearing 18 MAY. The Healthcare for Our Troops Act would provide zero out-of-pocket cost medical and dental care for Reserve Component members eligible for TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) by eliminating monthly TRS premiums and cost sharing for covered services. The bill also would require a study on eliminating annual physicals during drill and replacing them with forms to be completed by civilian providers to assess medical readiness.

“The health of National Guard and Reserve members is a readiness issue,” said MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret). “For the past year, our nation has relied on the Reserve Component to assist with responses to wildfires, natural disasters, civil disturbances, the COVID-19 pandemic, and global operations. Yet, they lack the health care provided to their active duty counterparts. MOAA strongly supports legislation that would provide Reserve Component members with health and dental care at no cost to maintain their medical readiness. We thank Congressman Trent Kelly and Congressman Andy Kim for their work on this important issue.”

TRS coverage with no out-of-pocket costs would provide continuity of care for injuries and illnesses rather than cycling reservists between health care providers based on duty status. It would also be a recruiting and retention tool for the Reserve Component, but “free” family member coverage will remain a unique benefit for active duty servicemembers. Perhaps most importantly, it would provide affordable health care for the approximately 130,000 Selected Reserve servicemembers who don’t have private health insurance. The bill also addresses two other long-standing MOAA goals for Reserve Component health care:

- It would fix the parity gap for Reserve Component “gray area” retirees who receive early retirement pay due to deployment credits but don’t currently get TRICARE by making them eligible for TRICARE upon receipt of retirement pay.
- It would extend TRICARE eligibility to servicemembers who are also federal employees (and eligible for the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, or FEHBP). This fix was part of the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act but would not take effect under that law until Jan. 1, 2030 – the Healthcare for Our Troops Act would accelerate implementation of that fix.

In press releases accompanying the introduction of the Healthcare for Our Troops Act, the co-leads explained why expanding TRICARE to the Reserve component is so important. “Americans who wear the uniform and protect our nation should not be without healthcare. It’s that simple,” said Kim. “We owe our Reservists and National Guard so much, and this bill fulfills a basic bipartisan promise: that we will be there for them as they are there for us every day to keep our country safe.” Kelly, who has spent 35 years in the Mississippi Army National Guard as a combat engineer and is currently serving as a major general, said recent nonstop deployments, pandemic relief missions, and protecting the capital amounted to “unprecedented use of our military.”

“Current bureaucratic policies prevent some of our service members from having the same healthcare benefits as their counterparts on active-duty,” he added. “Providing health care for all service members is a readiness issue that is easily fixed. Our Guardsmen and Reservists deserve to have access to preventive and routine healthcare. The Healthcare for our Troops Act ensures that no military member will have to worry about paying for medical bills.” MOAA appreciates the efforts of these lawmakers to address this important issue. Please join us in advocating to fix to the Selected Reserve coverage gap

Contact your lawmakers today to tell them you support this important legislation. This you can easily do by clicking on <https://takeaction.moaa.org/moaa/app/write-a-letter?0&engagementId=511917> and forwarding the preformatted editable message to you congressional representatives asking them to sign-on as cosponsors of this bill. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Karen Ruedisueli | May 26, 2021 ++]

Military Toxic Exposures

Update 01: S.000/H.R.0000 | COST of War Act of 2021

Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) introduced an omnibus bill to provide comprehensive toxic exposure reform, a move he promised in a Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee hearing earlier this month. The **Comprehensive Overdue Support for Troops (COST) of War Act of 2021** was marked up at a 26 MAY meeting and includes many of the bills discussed at the legislative hearing. The bill passed out of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee (SVAC) unanimously via voice vote. The omnibus bill includes:

- The Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Act (S. 927 and H.R. 2127)
- The Veterans Burn Pits Exposure Recognition Act (S. 437 and H.R. 2436)
- The addition of Agent Orange presumptives for hypertension and monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance, better known as MGUS (S. 810 and H.R. 1972)
- The recognition of radiation exposure in the Enewetak Atoll and from the 1966 accident in Palomares, Spain (S. 565, H.R. 1585, and H.R. 2580)
- Improvements to studies and epidemiological reporting for all exposures

Along with their existing Advocacy in Action bills, MOAA supports the Senate’s omnibus package. Vet’s efforts during Advocacy in Action and prior work on this issue by MOAA have helped lead to what they are hoping is a true effort at comprehensive reform. MOAA has analyzed the omnibus bill, and while it's not perfect -- no omnibus bill ever is -- it's a dramatic step forward in getting these veterans and their families the benefits they deserve.

Hurdles remain and continued outreach and support for comprehensive reforms are even more important to get toxic exposure reforms across the finish line. Despite SVAC passage, it is clear there will be more adjustments before it is sent to the floor. “My commitment to the ranking member [Kansas Republican Sen. Jerry Moran] is that I will not advance the bill to the floor without his consent,” Tester said during the 26 MAY hearing. “And I commit to all of you to work in a transparent and bipartisan manner to address any concerns related to cost or potential negative impacts on the VA.”

Once finalized, the Senate needs to first pass the bill and then reconcile any differences with the House version. House Veterans' Affairs Committee leadership has compiled a similar omnibus package, the Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2021. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Cory Titus | May 25, 2021 ++]

Military Survivor Benefits

Update 05: S.1669/H.R.2214 | Survivor Comfort Act

Bipartisan legislation to correct a financial injustice for new survivors was introduced in the Senate on 18 MAY, joining a House bill on the issue introduced in March. The Senate version of the Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act (S.1669) was introduced by Sens. Rob Portman (R-OH) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA). Reps. John Garamendi (D-CA) and Michael Turner (R-OH) introduced H.R. 2214 on 26 MAR.

When a retired servicemember passes, the Defense Finance and Accounting Services (DFAS) recoups the last month of retirement pay. This action often adds terrible financial stress to a grieving widow. The Military Survivor Comfort Act would allow survivors to avoid this immediate recoupment (and possibly overdraft fees) and instead gradually repay the amount over the next 12 months. They also would have an opportunity to request debt forgiveness through DoD. “Too many surviving spouses are financially caught off guard when their servicemember passes,” said Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret), president and CEO of MOAA. “DFAS recoupment of the last paycheck can empty a banking account for a grieving survivor. MOAA strongly supports Senators Portman and Warren’s introduction of the Military Survivor Comfort Act that will ease the financial burden with a gradual repayment and option to appeal for debt forgiveness.”

Portman said overdraft fees should be “the last thing families of veterans and retired servicemembers need to worry about after the death of their loved ones,” adding that the bill “would end DoD’s practice of taking back benefits without account holders’ knowledge and avoid any unnecessary financial hardships for grieving military families during an already difficult time.” Warren said the bill “stops the Defense Department from inflicting unnecessary financial hardships on our military families during a loss,” and that the service of her three brothers helped make her aware “that the sacrifices of veterans and their families should never be diminished by the insensitive practice of reclaiming retirement benefits.”

Some surviving spouses are caught off guard by all the notifications and transactions required when their servicemember passes. Forgetting to notify DFAS can result in large fund recoupment that could easily empty a banking account for a new survivor. The gradual repayment and option to appeal for debt forgiveness has support across military and veterans service organizations. Many of those groups are part

of The Military Coalition (TMC), which represents a combined 5.5 million members of the uniformed services community. You can read the TMC’s letters to House and Senate members in support of this act.

Add your voice to this effort by contacting your lawmakers today. This you can easily do by clicking on <https://takeaction.moaa.org/moaa/app/write-a-letter?0&engagementId=511506> and forwarding the preformatted editable message to your legislators asking them to aloe gradual repayment of the amount over the next 12 months and have an opportunity to request for debt forgiveness through DoD. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Mark Belinsky | May 25, 2021 ++]

VA Contraceptive Care

S.2821/H.R.0000 | Access to Contraception Expansion for Veterans Act

Like many insurers, the VA will only provide three months’ worth of birth control pills to patients at a time. A group of Democratic lawmakers introduced legislation Thursday that would allow VA to dispense up to a years’ supply at a time, in an attempt to reduce the likelihood that supplies will run out or refills will be delayed, forcing patients to skip a pill and increase their risk of unintended pregnancy. **The Access to Contraception Expansion (ACE) for Veterans Act** would require VA providers to inform their patients that there is an option to request a year of oral contraceptive pills at a time, according to a release.

“As the number of women volunteering to serve our nation continues to rise, it’s critical we modernize our healthcare systems to meet their unique needs,” Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), one of the bill’s sponsors, said in the release. “I’m proud to be introducing this important legislation today with Senator Hirono and Representative Underwood that would help Veterans who are experiencing difficulty accessing contraception get the care they need while also saving taxpayer dollars and reducing unintended pregnancies.” Duckworth is joined by Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) on the Senate bill. The House has introduced its own version, co-sponsored by Reps. Lauren Underwood (D-IL) and Conor Lamb (D-PA) Duckworth previously introduced a version of this bill in 2019.

Studies have shown that both that larger prescriptions lead to fewer missed days of birth control, while saving time and money for the VA. According to a study of VA data released in 2013, more than 64 percent of patients had experienced at least one week-long gap in coverage in the previous year. Though VA has the ability to fill year-long prescriptions, common practice at VA — as well as with many private insurers — is to limit refills to three months. The study, however, pointed out that the cost of unintended pregnancies for veterans far outweighs any extra costs associated with providing 12 months of pills at a time.

“When you ask a veteran to pick up their contraception every few months rather than just once a year, it’s more than just a few extra drives to the pharmacy, it costs the VA money and makes women veterans more susceptible to unintended pregnancies,” Underwood said in the release.

“The ACE Veterans Act will reduce this burden and bring the VA’s current policy up-to-date with evidence-based policies implemented across the country.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers | May 27, 2021 ++]

VET Legislation Progress 1-31 MAY 2021

H.R. 958 -- Passed House on 12 MAY. The **Protecting Moms Who Served Act** would structure VA’s maternity care coordination programs to provide community maternity care providers with training and support for veterans' unique pregnancy and postpartum needs. This legislation would also require a report on maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity among veterans, infant mortality rates, and racial and ethnic disparities in maternal health outcomes. The bill was introduced 8 FEB by Rep. Lauren Underwood (D-IL-14) and had 43 cosponsors.

H.R. 1448 -- Passed House on 12 MAY. The **PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act** which would provide a VA 5-year pilot grant program to cover the cost of pairing a service dog with an eligible veteran diagnosed with PTSD. The bill also authorizes the VA to provide service dogs to veterans with mental illnesses, regardless of whether they have a mobility impairment. Under the act VA would maintain certain veterinary insurance coverage for each service dog provided the veteran continues to see their physician or mental health care provider every six months. On 13 MAY it was received in the Senate and read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. The bill was introduced on 1 MAR by Rep. Steve Stivers (R-OH-15) and had 317 cosponsors.

[Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | May 17, 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 ***



China's Military Buildup

Update 01: April Triple Commissioning

China commissioned 60,000 tons worth of major vessels in April, officially putting into service a new nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, a guided-missile cruiser and an amphibious helicopter carrier on the 72nd anniversary of its Navy. The unprecedented triple commissioning was carried out in a ceremony held at the Yulin naval complex near the city of Sanya on the southern Chinese island of Hainan. Yulin is the main naval base of the South Sea Fleet of the People's Liberation Army Navy. The fleet's area of responsibility lies in the waters of the nearby South China Sea.

Chinese President Xi Jinping attended the ceremony, which saw the Type 075 (Yushen-class) amphibious helicopter carrier Hainan, the Type 055 (Renhai-class) guided-missile cruiser Dalian and the Type 094 (Jin-class) nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine Changzheng-18 join the PLAN. The Hainan is the lead ship of a new class of amphibious assault ships being built for the PLAN as it continues to boost its naval capabilities. The helicopter carriers, which are estimated to displace between 35,000 to 40,000 tons, have an uninterrupted flight deck with seven deck spots for large transport helicopter operations, and a well dock for launching conventional or air-cushioned landing craft for amphibious landing operations. At least two more Type 075s are under construction at a shipyard in the major eastern city of Shanghai, and their introduction will significantly boost the PLAN's ability to conduct large amphibious operations — a capability gap for China despite its massive military modernization program.

The Dalian is the second ship of the 10,000-ton Type 055 cruisers, which are seen as roughly analogous to the U.S. Navy's Ticonderoga-class cruisers equipped with the Aegis combat system. Each Type 055 is fitted with a phased array radar similar to those found on the Aegis-equipped cruisers and destroyers, and is armed with a total of 112 vertical launching missile cells for surface-to-air, anti-ship or land-attack cruise missiles. At least eight Type 055s are concurrently under construction at two shipyards in Shanghai and the northern Chinese port city of Dalian, with both facilities also building the smaller Type 052D destroyers in a demonstration of the scale of China's remarkable naval shipbuilding program.

Meanwhile, the Changzheng-18 is one of two such submarines previously reported by Defense News as undergoing construction, bringing the PLAN's fleet to six. The Type 094 can carry up to 12 CSS-N-14 (JL-2) submarine-launched, nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles, which reportedly has a range of about 4,500 miles. According to the U.S. Defense Department, China is planning a follow-on class of ballistic missile submarines dubbed the Type 096, which is expected to be armed with the JL-3 sub-launched ballistic missile. [Source: Defense News | Mike Yeo | April 26, 2021 ++] |

USS Boise (SSN-764)

Update 05: Sidelined 8 Years for Maintenance

Back in October 2015, Adele soared to the top of the pop charts with the song “Hello,” and then-Vice President Joe Biden confirmed he would not be running for president the following year. It was also the last month that the hapless fast-attack submarine Boise was out on patrol. The boat was supposed to head into maintenance back then, but an unending backlog in availabilities meant the sub had to wait ... and

wait ... and wait. But in a bit of good news for Boise, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday told lawmakers 29 APR that the sub's long-awaited yard time is expected to begin this year.



The attack submarine Boise arrives at Huntington Ingalls Industries' Newport News, Va., shipyard on June 18, 2018, to begin an extended engineering overhaul.

The boat will soon get space so the maintenance can begin, Gilday told the House Appropriations defense subcommittee during a hearing on the fiscal 2022 Navy and Marine Corps budgets. The work will cost about \$355 million and will be done at Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia, Navy Times' sister publication, Defense News, reported last fall. Boise's resurrection is expected to take about two years, which means that it will be roughly eight years between the ship's last patrol and the time it heads out again. The long-suffering Los Angeles-class attack submarine is projected to return to the fleet in 2023.

Gilday also said 29 APR that the Navy is making progress when it comes to timely maintenance, and that delay days had dropped from 7,000 to 1,200 in the past 18 months. "We're not satisfied yet in terms of where we are, but we think we're in the right direction," he said. While noting that the Navy's public shipyards need to do better, Gilday also chided industry for their failures. Without naming names, Gilday said that private vendors have not been delivering ships on time. "It's been disappointing to us," he said. "It's an area where industry has to step up, with the Navy stepping up, to deliver these ships on time." [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | April 29, 2021 ++]

USMC Missile System

Update 01: Target At Sea Struck By Missile Strapped To Truck

Two Marine majors and industry technicians stripped down a tactical vehicle, strapped an anti-ship missile onboard and hit a target at sea from land. And the top Marine was quite pleased. Commandant Gen. David Berger said in a congressional hearing 29 APR that the tests were the result of the "brilliance of a couple of young officers" and industry partners. The Marines and technicians with Oshkosh Defense took a modified, unmanned joint light tactical vehicle, removed the cab and installed a Naval Strike Missile, ground launcher and fire control system on the back. The unmanned version is known as the remotely operated ground unit for expeditionary fires vehicle, or ROGUE.



The Naval Strike Missile already is aboard ships and the JLTV is fielded, the Marines simply combined two existing platforms to get after a problem, Berger said. “This is the speed at which we have to move,” he said. “Our job is to support the fleet commander, the fleet’s job is to support the joint force commander and this is one way to do that.” The combination is known as the Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System, or NMESIS. Military.com first reported the missile test and Berger’s comments on 29 APR. That test was performed recently on Point Mugu Sea Range, California, according to a Raytheon Missile and Defense statement.

“Our Naval Strike Missile is a vital weapon for denying enemies the use of key maritime terrain,” said Kim Ernzen, vice president of Naval Power at Raytheon. “This test further demonstrates our partnership for advancing the Marine Corps’ modernization priorities of enabling sea control and denial operations.” Berger told representatives at the hearing that this kind of capability helps Marines support Navy operations. “Now we can move this around on vessels, put it ashore and hold an adversary’s navy at risk in order to ensure that the lines on the sea are kept open,” Berger said. Such a system, shooting at ships from both sea and ashore, is critical for the Marine Corps’ massive force redesign. Nearly halfway through his tenure as the top Marine, Berger has pinned the Corps’ future on a smaller, more dispersed force nimble enough to deploy unseen and take out big naval targets.

Lt. Gen. Eric Smith, deputy commandant for Combat Development and Integration, has trumpeted the necessity of Marines with such systems. In February, Smith spoke at the Armoured Vehicles Conference about work Marines were already doing with the JLTV and other targets. “The experimentation that we’ve done now to date successfully using lightweight mounted fires — think the back of a Joint Light Tactical Vehicle — is killing armor at ranges, rough calculation, about 15, 20 times the range that a main battle tank can kill another main battle tank,” he said, according to the U.S. Naval Institute. The exact range wasn’t included in the press release, but company data shows that the Naval Strike Missile can hit targets a 100 nautical miles.

Taking unorthodox measures to combine Marine weapons with or against ships is an approach the Corps has been taking for a while now. Marine Corps Times reported in 2017 that Marines took a High Mobility Rocket System aboard the amphibious transport dock Anchorage and fired missiles to destroy a target on land 70 km away. That effort was part of early work linking HIMARS and the F-35B to find and strike targets from multiple platforms. Even with sensing, Marines and sailors have taken some novel approaches. In January 2019, the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship Kearsarge with the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit was transiting the Suez Canal.

Drone and missile threats were, and still are, a threat in U.S. Central Command, especially at those key choke points such as the canal or the Strait of Hormuz entering the Persian Gulf and others. So, Marines parked their counter-drone system, Light Marine Air Defense Integrated System, or LMADIS, on the ship's deck. The LMADIS uses two Polaris MRZR all-terrain vehicles. One is the command vehicle, the other is a sensor platform and can detect, identify, track and shoot down small aerial drones with electronic measures. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Todd South | April 30 202 ++]

Stryker Vehicle

Army to Retire Older Variant



The Army is eliminating the Stryker Mobile Gun System, a vehicle that played a large role during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but proved vulnerable to roadside bomb attacks by insurgents. The Army will divest itself of the Stryker variant by October 2022 in a move focused on freeing up money for more modern systems. “This decision comes after a comprehensive analysis highlighted obsolescence and systemic issues with the system’s dated cannon and automatic loader,” the Army said. Various other Stryker platforms, including the Double V-Hull, will continue to be supported.

The Stryker Mobile Gun System was developed in the early 2000s with what the Army at the time deemed state-of-the-art technology. The system enabled Stryker brigades to support infantrymen by destroying or suppressing hardened enemy bunkers and sniper positions in urban combat zones. It also was the first Army system fielded with an autoloader, which the Army said became costly to maintain over time. The Stryker MGS was based on a flat-bottom chassis that “was never upgraded against more modern threats such as improvised explosive devices or anti-tank mines,” the Army said. In recent years, the Army has upgraded Stryker systems with more powerful weapons systems designed partly in response to concerns about a more aggressive Russia.

In April, the Germany-based 5th Battalion, 4th Air Defense Artillery Regiment was the first to field a new mobile air defense system that helps defend against threats while soldiers are on the move. The unit will use the Maneuver Short Range Air Defense system, known as M-SHORAD, mounted on its Stryker A1 vehicles. The system will “defend maneuvering forces against unmanned aircraft systems, rotary-wing and fixed-wing threats,” the Army said in a statement.

Given concerns about the Stryker MGS vulnerabilities, Army officials decided it was time to invest in other modernization efforts to improve the rest of its Stryker fleet. “Decisions on when it is best to divest a

system currently in the force are not taken lightly,” Lt. Gen. James F. Pasqualette, Army deputy chief of staff for programs, said in a statement. “The Army has done its due diligence to ensure lethality upgrades will remain intact to provide our Stryker formations the capabilities they need in the future.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | John Vandiver | May 13, 2021 ++]

Iron Dome

Update 01: Israel’s Intercepts Drone during Combat for First Time



Israel’s Iron Dome air defense system has intercepted a drone belonging to the Hamas militant group, a first for the platform, according to the country’s defense forces. In total, Israel has intercepted six drones using multiple countermeasures since hostilities began between Israel and Hamas on 10 MAY, the Israel Defense Forces said 17 MAY. A senior Air Force officer described the interception as a significant advancement. Israel touted new capabilities for Iron Dome over the last year, including a drill where it worked alongside other air defense systems to confront multiple threats and another exercise this year during which it downed unmanned aerial systems.

Israeli media on 13 MAY reported that several drones were launched from the Gaza Strip. An F-16 fighter jet with a Python-5 air-to-air missile downed one of the drones, and an Iron Dome system intercepted another. Other drones were downed by “classified means,” local daily Yediot Ahronot reported. The IDF on 13 MAY noted “a short while ago, the Iron Dome Aerial Defense System intercepted a UAV belonging to the Hamas terror organization that crossed from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. The Israeli Air Force monitored the unmanned aerial Vehicle (UAV) until interception. The IDF is continuing to protect Israel’s air space and will not allow activity such as this.” On May 17, the IDF added that this event was the first UAV interception by Iron Dome during combat.

In March, Defense Minister Benny Gantz said “the technological capabilities developed by defense industries, including the Iron Dome and the multi-tier missile defense array, are central to the defense of the State of Israel. In the face of emerging and rapidly changing threats, these new capabilities provide the political echelon and defense establishment with the operational flexibility that is critical to our national security.” At the time, the Israel Missile Defense Organization said “the Iron Dome was tested in a range of complex scenarios and successfully intercepted and destroyed targets simulating existing and emerging threats, including the simultaneous interception of multiple UAVs as well as a salvo of rockets and missiles.”

Since 10 MAY, approximately 3,000 rockets have been fired from the Gaza Strip at Israel. Iron Dome intercepted more than 1,000 of them, representing about 90 percent of those determined to pose a threat. Many rockets fall in open areas or don’t even leave the Gaza Strip due to malfunctions. Hamas UAVs have now been added to the rocket threat. Tal Inbar, a UAV and aerospace expert as well as the former head of the Space Research Center at the Fisher Institute for Air and Space Strategic Studies, said drones are now an integral part of nonstate actors’ inventories, including those of Hamas and Hezbollah. “This is a relatively new threat on the battlefield and homefront. You need effective means to intercept them,” explained Inbar, who is now a research fellow at the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance. He added that this interception illustrates that drones pose a challenge, as they are low flying and have a low radar cross section, but noted that the Iron Dome system has received updates to help it cope with new threats.

Israel uses three terms to refer to drones: malatim or UAVs for larger drones; rakfanim for quadcopters; and kli tais for aircraft, which also is used to refer to Hamas UAVs. Hamas’ use of drones is nothing new, but the group recently unveiled a video of the Shehab, a drone that is launched from a kind of catapult, slinging it into the air where it then flies to its target, apparently along a preprogrammed route. The drone includes a warhead, slamming into the target on a kamikaze mission. This is similar to an Iranian Ababil and the Qasef used by Houthi rebels in Yemen; the latter is based on the former. In September 2019 Iran used a series of kamikaze-style drones and cruise missiles to attack Saudi Arabian oil facilities.

Israel has been working on a number of systems to detect and neutralize drones, including new laser systems and a drone that uses a net to shoot down smaller drones. Rafael has developed lasers to down drones, and the company showed off the ability to intercept numerous small drones during a February 2020 demonstration. Israel has also used planes and helicopters with missiles to address drone threats, including one UAV that flew into Israeli airspace from Syria in February 2018. In July 2018, Israel used a Patriot missile to down a drone from Syria.

The U.S. Army has two Iron Dome system batteries, and the country’s Missile Defense Agency works with Israel on a variety of air defense projects, including the Arrow missile. Congress has also supported counter-drone work with Israel via the fiscal 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan and his Israeli counterpart, Meir Ben-Shabbat, discussed cooperation on counter-drone threats in April 2021. A readout of their discussion noted that the “United States and Israel agreed to establish an interagency working group to focus particular attention on the growing threat of unmanned aerial vehicles [UAVs] and precision-guided missiles produced by Iran and provided to its proxies in the Middle East region.” [Source: DefenseNews | Seth J. Frantzman | May 17, 2021 ++]

Army Artillery

Update 02: Ramjet Shells Could Triple Artillery Range



Test of Northrop Grumman's ramjet engine for extended-range 155 mm artillery shells

The Army is about to award development contracts for future artillery shells that will look more and more like missiles, with precision guidance, fins, and even ramjet engines. The program – part of a much wider buildup of US missile and cannons – aims to boost both range and accuracy far beyond anything possible with gunpowder alone. The goal: enable the currently outgunned and outranged US artillery force to compete with more advanced Russian and Chinese guns.

The US Army has long had rocket-[boosted howitzer shells](#). The Cold War M549A1 has a range of roughly 30 kilometers (not quite 19 miles). The new XM1113 Rocket Assisted Projectile goes 40 km (25 miles) or more from the current M109 Paladin cannon and 70 km (44 miles) from the XM1299 Extended Range Cannon Artillery (ERCA) now in development. But to break triple digits – 100 kilometers (62 miles) and more – you can't rely on rockets: You need something much more powerful, like a ramjet. There are three main ways you can extend the range of a projectile, and the Army's Extended Range Artillery Munitions Suite is exploring all of them in combination for the future XM1155 shell, ERAMS project manager Nick Berg told me in an interview:

- **Increase muzzle velocity.** The faster the projectile comes out of the gun barrel, the farther it can go before drag and gravity bring it down to earth. Higher muzzle velocity is the emphasis of the XM1299 ERCA howitzer, which has a longer barrel and more powerful propellant than the current Paladin.
- **Add lift surfaces.** Basically, this means adding wings and fins to the shell – like a missile or miniature aircraft – to make it more aerodynamic. The more lift generated, the longer the projectile can fly. Of course, the wings, fins, and electronics all have to survive the brutal shock of being fired from a cannon.
- **Add “post-launch propulsion.”** This is where rockets and ramjets come in: They kick in after the projectile has cleared the gun barrel (hence “post-launch”) to give it an extra burst of thrust. Again, the motors first have to survive the shock of launch.

“We've actually investigated and looked at all of those areas,” Berg told me. “We really have focused on lifting surfaces to increase your glide [distance], but then also we've looked at solid fuel ramjets as a post-launch propulsion mechanism to boost you out to extended ranges.” Why ramjets over rockets? The

basic difference is that rockets contain their own oxidizer to burn their fuel, while jets of all kinds – from ramjets to turbofans – get their oxygen from the atmosphere. (Hence the name “air-breathing engine”). That saves weight, since you don’t have to carry oxidizer; it improves safety, since the fuel doesn’t ignite as easily; and it extends endurance, since the jet can keep thrusting as long as it has air and fuel. (A longer, gentler burn is also more aerodynamically efficient, reducing drag). A rocket-boosted artillery shell might burn for just 10 seconds, Berg told me, while a jet could conceivably last much longer.

How does a ramjet differ from other kinds of jet engines? All jets work by sucking in air at the front end, compressing it, mixing it with fuel, and igniting it, blasting thrust out the back end. (The shorthand is “suck, squeeze, bang, blow.”) At subsonic speeds, you need to mechanically compress the air with some kind of fan, like the one on the front of an airliner’s turbofan engine. But at supersonic speeds, around Mach 2, the air is coming in the front of the engine so fast that it compresses itself, without mechanical assistance: That’s a ramjet.

A ramjet’s actually mechanically simpler than a conventional jet, since it doesn’t need a compressor, which is one less thing that might break when shot out of a cannon. Historically, the hard part with ramjets has been that they don’t work at speeds below Mach 2 – but being shot out of a cannon gets you to those speeds. So ramjets are in some ways a natural fit for artillery propulsion. That doesn’t make them easy to build. “The ramjet does offer a little more technical challenge,” Berg told me, because you have to fit sophisticated, shock-resistant electronics into a small package along with inlets to feed air to the ramjet itself.

Some of the technology involved gets pretty exquisite, even exotic. The munition’s control system needs to sense airflow, pressure, heating, including phenomena that don’t happen at lower speeds, said Bob Bakos, CEO of Innoveering, a small firm working with the Picatinny Arsenal Armaments Center on the ramjet ammo. “You’re talking about thousands of degrees” of heating from, essentially, the friction of the air, he told me. To steer in such extreme conditions, he went on, the projectile needs the traditional flaps and fins, but it might be possible to use tiny air ducts, electromagnets, or even plasma to affect the airflow and correct course. Once the XM1155 shell is developed, a future “cargo” variant could be used to deliver other payloads besides explosives, such as sensor packages and jamming pods.

The Army’s already run Phase I of the ERAMS program, with participation by Boeing, General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman, and Raytheon. Now it’s working on two contracts for Phase II, with awards expected within two weeks. A Raytheon spokesman confirmed they’re no longer working on the program, while Boeing confirmed they’re competing. [Source: BreakingDefense | Sydney J. Freedberg Jr. | May 24, 2021 ++]

Army Electronic Warfare Manning Numbers to Triple in Next 2 Years

The Army will nearly triple the number of electronic warfare personnel in the next two years to begin staffing specialized units and staff sections at every echelon from brigade up. The schoolhouse is preparing to increase the number of enlisted electronic warfare personnel from 180 to 500 in the next year to two years, Brig. Gen. Paul Craft, commandant and chief of cyber at the Army Cyber School, said 26 MAY at the Cyber Electromagnetic Activity conference hosted by the Association of Old Crows. Adversaries have

placed a high level of importance on the electromagnetic spectrum, investing in capabilities to jam communications or even geolocate enemy units based on their electromagnetic signature. As this maneuver space has gained attention, the Army wants more skilled personnel that understand the environment and can translate it to commanders to make more informed decisions.



In 2018, the Army folded electronic warfare personnel into the cyber branch converging around an emerging concept the service called cyber and electromagnetic activities, or CEMA. For the high-end personnel, the schoolhouse would send them to the cyber mission force at U.S. Cyber Command. However, others will learn foundational concepts of cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum and could serve in new tactical electronic warfare units or in integrated cyber, electronic warfare, information operations units, as well as staff sections.

The growth in personnel “is because of the number of CEMA sections that we’re going to have in every brigade combat team, every combat aviation brigade, every division, every corps, every ASCC [Army Service Component Command],” Craft said. “The CEMA sections have existed, but they’re being built out.” The CEMA sections are cyber and electronic warfare personnel that exist in the staff section at whatever echelon they’re assigned to and act as planners and managers of their disciplines for the commander. The plan is to have a staff section at every echelon from brigade up in the next five years.

Craft also noted the Army is in the process of building electronic warfare platoons and companies that will also exist within the brigade, division and corps levels. As part of Army unit design updates, every brigade combat team will have an electronic warfare platoon and a separate signals intelligence network support team. [Source: C4ISRNET | Mark Pomerleau | May 27, 2021 ++]

Navy Advancement

Update 01: E4-E6 Exam Results Delayed Again

Sailors are going to have to wait a little bit longer to receive the E-4 to E-6 advancement results. While the advancement results are typically available on Memorial Day, that’s not going to happen for the second year in a row — thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic. The delay impacts roughly 90,000 active duty and Reserve sailors who are eligible to be promoted to E-4, E-5 and E-6. Reservists may access the results on the Navy Enlisted Advancement System (NEAS) website on 2 JUN, while active duty sailors will be able to access them on 9 JUL, according to the Navy. There are several reasons for the delays, according to the Navy.

- “Typically you have a single exam administration date, but now that is a two-week window of testing for each paygrade [due to COVID-19],” Updike said. “Exam answer sheet returns are mostly delayed until the end of the [30-day] administration windows.”
- Likewise, commands may administer substitute exams for those who were unable to take the exam on the original date.
- “The exam scoring process requires we get back all substitute answer sheets as well,” Updike said. “Substitute exams administered aboard fleet units in the Indian Ocean take much longer to receive than answer sheets express-mailed from San Diego or Norfolk.”
- The next step is for the Naval Education and Training Professional Development Center to craft an advancement plan, which delineates how many sailors from each rating have passed the exam. That is then pushed to enlisted community managers to determine quotas.

“The primary goal of NEAS is that no Sailor is disadvantaged in the advancement processes, Updike said. “Another delay in our cycle results due to COVID is only acceptable when we know that every Sailor was given a fair opportunity to compete for advancement.” The chief of naval personnel determines the advancement result schedule. [Source: NavyTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | May 27, 2021 ++]

Military Grooming Standards

Update 03: Loosened Army Women Hairstyle Standards Bring Out Critics



One week after the Army changed its policy to permit female service members to wear their hair in something other than a bun, the verdict from social media is anything but unanimous. The change allows women to wear ponytails and braids in all duty uniforms, but a common complaint on social media forums like Facebook, Twitter and TikTok, particularly from men, is that the change makes unfair concessions to women. Out of more than 200 comments on the Stars and Stripes Facebook page, several commenters, mostly men, pointed out the change as a softening of Army standards.

The hairstyle change follows another the Army made in January to provide relief to soldiers suffering migraines and traction alopecia, a hair loss condition caused by repeated pulling and tension on the hair and scalp. The changes come from a uniform policy board helmed by Sgt. Major Brian Sanders that met with female soldiers in December. The Army in January said the change was also meant to be more accommodating for Black women and permits “multiple hairstyles at once,” including twists, braids, locs and cornrows.

Men aren't the only ones taking to social media to attack the Army's new grooming standards for women. A retired Army master sergeant posted a video on TikTok recently that shows her in uniform with her hair in a ponytail. "Yeah right, this is a terrible idea. They should have let the guys have beards instead," she says while securing her hair in a bun. "C'mon ladies, it isn't that hard." The video had over 25,000 views as of 13 MAY. A barrage of comments attached to it accused the creator of being an unsympathetic leader, inconsiderate of Black women and a "pick me" — a term used online for women who align their views with men to receive their attention or approval. The video's creator, who goes by jelly.bags_ on the video-sharing app, declined an interview with Stars and Stripes.

An active-duty soldier who goes by Princess Nadia on Twitter said videos like these are discouraging for women in the military whom the new policy helps. "I think the main reason why people disagree with the pony is simply due to lack of information," she said in a Twitter direct message to Stars and Stripes on 12 MAY. "If they sat down and saw the effects of the buns on curly and coily hair I feel as though they would think twice." Nadia, 22, said she needs biannual shots to help with her traction alopecia. "It's from brushing it back and slicking it into a bun," she said. If critics like the retired master sergeant could see the thin patch of hair on Nadia's head, "she wouldn't have made the video and she would understand why the regulation is necessary."

The Army policy follows similar moves by the Navy and the Air Force. The Air Force in March started allowing women to wear braids and ponytails; the Navy has permitted these hairstyles since 2018. The Navy in April removed subjective words like "faddish" and "eccentric" from its grooming regulations. The Marine Corps Headquarters Public Affairs Office did not respond to phone and email queries from Stars and Stripes Wednesday and Thursday about their female grooming regulations.

Army veteran Celeste Flaherty told Stars and Stripes via Facebook Messenger on Friday that she would like to see male soldiers stop counting a win for women as a loss for men. "Let's be supportive of our professional counterparts and colleagues," she said. "Changes to come may address the outdated standards of male grooming. But this change isn't about male grooming, it's about female hair standards. Not everything revolves around males. Be happy for your female counterparts, this is a productive change." [Source: Stars & Stripes | Erica Earl | May 14, 2021 ++]

Military Base Name Changes

Update 03: Proposal to Rename Fort Bragg to Fort Bragg



Confederate Gen. Edward Bragg



Union Gen. Braxton Bragg

A Wisconsin state senator is proposing renaming Fort Bragg — to Fort Bragg, after a cousin of the Confederate general. In December, Congress approved the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, which includes a provision from a bill filed by Sen. Elizabeth Warren seeking to remove Confederate names from installations within three years. Fort Bragg is one of those nationwide installations and is named after [Confederate general Braxton Bragg](#) (pictured left above), who historians say was a slave owner who fought with subordinates and lost battles. Fort Bragg is one of 10 Army installations slated for a name change because of their ties to Confederate leaders.

The National Defense Authorization Act states that a renaming commission will research costs of changing the names of the installations, while also seeking the input of stakeholders and communities near the installations. In a news release 18 MAY, Wisconsin state Sen. Dale Kooyenga (R-Brookfield) announced his resolution that proposes renaming Fort Bragg after Braxton Bragg's cousin, Union Gen. Edward Stuyvesant Bragg (pictured right above), of Wisconsin. Edward S. Bragg volunteered for the Union Army at the outset of the Civil War with no prior military service and reached the rank of brigadier general by 1864, according to the news release. Bragg would later command the 6th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment that was joined by the 2nd Wisconsin, 7th Wisconsin, and 19th Indiana and became known as the "Iron Brigade." According to the news release, the brigade participated in "several famous bloody attacks of the Civil War." Edward S. Bragg retired from the Army in 1865 and later served Wisconsin as a state senator and in Congress.

In a phone interview 19 MAY, Kooyenga said a friend who loves to read history books told him about Edward S. Bragg. "I knew about the looking to change (Fort Bragg's) name and did some research and thought this was perfect," Kooyenga said. "I think American history is full of ironies, and I thought it was appropriate for a Wisconsin state senator to bring it up." Kooyenga himself enlisted in the Army in 2005 and has served at Fort Bragg as has one of his brothers, who is also in the Army. Kooyenga is currently a major in the Army Reserve under the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command.

While Kooyenga said he has other priorities he's focusing on for his district, he hopes the Commission on Removing Confederate Symbols and Names from U.S. Military Assets takes the resolution into consideration. "To me, I think this offers a beautiful compromise," Kooyenga said. Kooyenga said he's heard points that advocate for removing the Confederate name association of Fort Bragg. But, Kooyenga said, he's also heard that some associate Fort Bragg with the military service of its soldiers, not the Confederate general it is named after.

The news release from his office states that Bragg fought against the nation he pledged allegiance to and that "even his Confederate subordinates considered him quick-tempered with an inability to lead, resulting in the needless slaughter of men and his eventual resignation from the Confederate army." "With (Braxton) Bragg, he was not an honorable guy in any respect," Kooyenga said, also questioning why an installation would be named after an "enemy of the U.S." or someone who lost battles. "I get that, and I think this offers a compromise to the renaming." Kooyenga said he hopes his resolution gains bipartisan support and creates a compromise, while also honoring a native of Wisconsin.

"In contrast to the man it currently honors, Fort Bragg creates some of America's greatest leaders, men and women who dedicate themselves to principles that stand in sharp contrast to Braxton Bragg's principles," the news release from his office states. "In fact, Fort Bragg better resembles the ideals of

Wisconsin Gen. Edward S. Bragg, not his cousin.” [Source: USSVI Tucson Base | Naida Hakirevic | April 16, 2021 ++]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang

‘Speeding Ticket’ thru ‘Steel Beach’

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

Speeding Ticket - A citation written by the MAA, often for a Charley Sierra infraction such as "out of uniform."

Speed of Heat (The) – (Aviation) Moving very fast.

Splash – (1) Signifies the kill of an aircraft, e.g. "Cowboy one-six, splash one." (2) (Gunnery) A radio call warning that a salvo or shell will land in ten seconds (see also SHOT). The call may be to warn you to get your head down (if you’re in the target area) or to get your head up (to observe the fall of shot if you are a member of the fire direction team).

Splice the Main Brace - Have a drink. Originated in the days of the sailing navies.

Square Away – Originating in the days of sail, the term refers to putting a ship before the wind (getting way on the ship). Today, the term refers to getting organized or ready for something, be it an inspection, a drill, etc.

Squawk - To use an IFF transponder, or the numeric code set into such a device.

Squid - Sailor. Frequently modified by the other services, especially Marines, with the adjective "fucking".

Speed Jeans - G-suit.

Spook - Intelligence personnel.

Spot – (Gunnery) Observing the fall of shot and calling corrections to the firing unit; also refers to the actual corrections themselves.

Spud Locker - The stern gallery of a carrier. Where a really low ramp strike ends up.

Squared Away – Originally, to "square away" meant to trim a ship’s sails to put her before the wind (i.e. get underway). Today, it means a ship that looks good, maneuvers smartly, etc., or refers to a sailor who is capable and smart in appearance and action.

SSORM – Ship’s Service and Organization Manual. The bible for shipboard organization.

STAB - (UK) Stupid Territorial Army Bastard

Stateroom – The room in which an officer lives. Originally, the term ‘stateroom’ referred to the better-quality lodging available aboard riverboats plying the rivers of the early United States; these rooms were named after various states of the Union. It has come to mean any motel-style room aboard ship (as compared to berthing spaces, which are barracks style).

Steaming as before - The beginning of a log entry made at when changing the watch. If at the beginning of the day (i.e. midnight), it is followed with a detailed narrative of ship, system, and machinery status. It is traditional that the first log entry made in the new year should be in verse.

Steel Beach - Barbecue on the flight deck or other weather deck. Often hosted by a department to give the cooks a break.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | May 31, 2021 ++]

* Military History *



WWII Great Escape Tunnel Unearthed at Stalag Luft III Site

Untouched for almost 7 decades, the tunnel used in the Great Escape has finally been unearthed. The 111 yard passage nicknamed 'Harry' by Allied prisoners, was sealed by the Germans after the audacious break-out from the POW camp Stalag Luft III in western Poland. Despite huge interest in the subject, encouraged by the film starring Steve McQueen, James Garner and many others the tunnel was undisturbed over the decades because it was behind the Iron Curtain and the Soviets had no interest in its significance. But at last British archaeologists have excavated it, and discovered its remarkable secrets.

Many of the bed boards which had been joined to stop it from collapsing were still in position. And the ventilation shaft, ingeniously crafted from used powdered milk containers known as Klim Tins, remained in working order. Scattered throughout the tunnel, which is 30 feet below ground, were bits of old metal buckets, hammers and crowbars which were used to hollow out the route. A total of 600 prisoners worked on 3 tunnels at the same time. They were nicknamed Tom, Dick, and Harry, and were just 2 feet square for most of their length. It was on the night of March 24 and 25, 1944, that 76 Allied airmen escaped through Harry.



The entrance to the original 'Harry' tunnel (left) excavated by British archaeologists in 2011. Their dig in AUG (right) located the entrance to Harry, which was originally concealed under a stove in Hut 104.

1/3rd of the 200 prisoners, many in fake German uniforms and civilian outfits and carrying false ID papers, who were meant to slip away, managed to leave before the alarm was raised when escapee number 77 was spotted. Only 3 made it back to Britain. Another 50 were executed by firing squad on the orders of Adolf Hitler, who was furious after learning of the breach of security. In all, 90 boards from bunk beds, 62 tables, 34 chairs, and 76 benches, as well as 1000's of items including knives, spoons, forks, towels and blankets, were squirreled away by Allied prisoners to aid the escape plan under the noses of their captors. NO Americans were involved in the operation. Most were Brits and Canadians, (all the tunnelers were Canadian personnel with backgrounds in mining) Poland, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa.

The team also found another tunnel, called George, whose exact position had not been charted. It was never used as the 2,000 prisoners were forced to march to other camps as the Red Army approached in January 1945. Watching the excavation was Gordie King, 91, an RAF radio operator, who was 140th in line to use Harry and therefore missed out. 'This brings back such bitter-sweet memories', he said as he wiped away tears. 'I'm amazed by what they've found. [Source: DailyMail.com | Andrew Levy | November 11, 2011 ++]

My Life My Story

Charlie: I Don't Want Notoriety

In this 8 minute audio clip listen to the story of the oldest Veteran ever interviewed by VA in their My Life My Story podcast series. “Charlie” was nearly 108 when his story was written in the spring 2020, which means he was old even for World War II Veterans. By the time he fought in the Battle of the Bulge, he was already 32. His recall of events from 80 years ago is, of course, far from perfect. His version of events won't be found in history books. His story is subjective, a little meandering. But in about a thousand words, we learn enough about Charlie's life – about his parents, his military service, his wife, and his career – to get an idea of what meant the most to him during his 108 years on this planet. Click on <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/88044>.

[Source: Vantage Point | May 12, 2021 ++]

WWII POW Camps

Measures Taken for Escape



Starting in 1940, an increasing number of British and Canadian Air men found themselves as the involuntary guests of the Third Reich, and the Crown was casting about for ways and means to facilitate their escape. Now obviously, one of the most helpful aids to that end is a useful and accurate map, one showing not only where stuff was, but also showing locations of 'safe houses' where a POW on-the-lam could go for food and shelter. Paper maps had some real drawbacks -- they make a lot of noise when you open and fold them, they wear out rapidly, and if they get wet, they turn into mush.

Someone in MI-5 (similar to America's OSS) got the idea of printing escape maps on silk. It's durable, can be scrunched-up into tiny wads and unfolded as many times as needed and makes no noise. At that time, there was only one manufacturer in Great Britain that had perfected the technology of printing on silk, and that was John Waddington Ltd. When approached by the govt. the firm was happy to do its bit for the war effort. By pure coincidence, Waddington was also the U.K. Licensee for the popular American board game Monopoly As it happened, 'games and pastimes' was a category of items qualified for insertion into 'CARE packages', dispatched by the International Red Cross to prisoners of war.

Under strict secrecy, in a guarded and inaccessible old workshop on the grounds of Waddington's, a group of sworn-to-secrecy employees began mass producing maps, keyed to each region of Germany, Italy, and France, or wherever Allied POW camps were located. When processed, these maps could be folded into such tiny bits that they would fit inside a Monopoly playing piece. As long as they were at it, the clever workmen at Waddington's also managed to add:

- A playing token, containing a small magnetic compass
- A two-part metal file that could easily be screwed together
- Useful amounts of genuine high-denomination German, Italian, and French currency, hidden within the piles of Monopoly money!

British and American air crews were advised, before taking off on their first mission, how to identify a 'rigged' Monopoly set – by means of a tiny red dot, one cleverly rigged to look like an ordinary printing glitch, located in the corner of the Free Parking square. Of the estimated 35,000 Allied POWs who escaped, an estimated 1/3rd were aided in their flight by the rigged Monopoly sets. Everyone who did so was sworn to secrecy indefinitely, since the British Govt. might want to use this highly successful ruse in still another, future war.

The story wasn't declassified until 2007, when the surviving craftsmen from Waddington's, as well as the firm itself, were finally honored in a public ceremony. It's always nice when you can play that 'Get Out of Jail' Free' card! Some readers of this email are probably too young to have any personal connection to

WWII (Sep. '39 to Aug. '45), but this is still an interesting bit of history for everyone to know. [Source: Daily Odds & Ends | October 20, 2018 ++]

WWII Ghost Army Measures Taken for Escape



During World War II, 23d Headquarters, Special Troops and the 3133d Signal Service Company conducted military deception operations against the Third Reich. Their mission was highly classified for decades after the war, and few were aware of their service in misdirecting and confusing enemy forces. This week, a Congressional Gold Medal was approved by Congress in recognition of the contribution that these secret soldiers made to the war effort.

In 1944 and 1945, these units operated in the European theater setting up elaborate deceptions that included fake radio transmissions, inflatable decoy tanks, and creating entire divisions of soldiers out of thin air. They simply didn't exist, it was all part of the ruse to confuse the Nazis. After landing on Omaha beach during D-Day, the unit, "used inflatable tanks, artillery, airplanes and other vehicles, advanced engineered soundtracks, and skillfully crafted radio trickery to create the illusion of sizable American forces where there were none and to draw the enemy away from Allied troops," the citation for the unit's Congressional Gold Medal reads.

During the Battle of the Bulge, they created deceptions that masked the movements of Gen. Patton's 3rd Army. The unit's final mission was to impersonate two entire Army divisions, "using fabricated radio networks, soundtracks of construction work and artillery fire, and more than 600 inflatable vehicles." This ruse drew the Germans away from attacking American forces, distracting them with a fake mobilization of fake military units. Three members of the unit were killed during the war, and many others injured. The Congressional Gold Medal is awarded to honor America's "Ghost Army" and their quiet, selfless service. At <https://youtu.be/x0UOG9V5nWI> can be viewed a short video on the Ghost Army. [Source: Audacy | Jack Murphy | May 19, 2021 +++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

Jack Mathis | WWII



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

MEDAL OF HONOR

To

1st Lt. Jack Mathis

Organization: 359th Bombardment Squadron, 303d Bombardment Group 8th Air Force

Place and date: March 18, 1943, over Vegesack, Germany

Entered service: June 12, 1940

Born: Sept. 25, 1921, in Sterling City, Texas



Army Air Corps 1st Lt. Jack Mathis gave his life to make sure one of the biggest bombing campaigns on the Western Front of World War II was successful. He earned the Medal of Honor for his actions; however, his story really can't be told without including his older brother, Mark, who served at the same time and whose wartime journey is inextricably linked.

Jack was born Sept. 25, 1921, in Sterling City, Texas, to parents Rhude Mark and Avis. He had two brothers; Mark, who was older, and younger brother Harold. Jack graduated from San Angelo High School. According to the book, "Assignment to Hell," he enrolled in San Angelo Business College before deciding to enlist in the Army on June 12, 1940. After serving for a few months at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Jack learned that Mark, who had also enlisted, had transferred to the Army Air Corps. Jack followed suit, and they both began training as bombardiers in the same unit.

The younger Mathis was commissioned as a second lieutenant on July 4, 1942. About two months later, he was sent to England to serve with the 8th Air Force as a bombardier for the 303rd Bomb Group's 359th Bomb Squadron. Mark was sent elsewhere. As 1942 turned to 1943, the U.S. Army Air Forces had begun a daytime strategic bombardment plan meant to cripple the German war effort. High on the priority list: Destroying submarine production. In mid-March, Mark was transferred from the North Africa campaign to a unit in England.

Upon arrival, he got to stop by Jack's base to see him the night before a raid on the submarine marshalling yards at Vegesack, Germany. Jack, now a 1st lieutenant, was the lead bombardier for the 100-plane mission. In a later radio broadcast, Mark said his brother wanted him to join his crew on their B-17,

called The Duchess, for the raid, but it couldn't be arranged. Instead, Mark watched The Duchess fly off without him on March 18, 1943. It was the last time he saw his brother alive. As lead bombardier on the mission, Jack's accuracy was crucial — if his aim was off, the bombers following him would also be off-target.

The crew of the Duchess initially encountered enemy fighter aircraft on the way to the target. Jack's friend and fellow navigator, 1st Lt. Jesse H. Elliott, recalled that Jack had run out of ammunition at least twice because he had to pass him more throughout the flight. The bomber had just started its first bomb run when intense anti-aircraft fire exploded all around them. Jack, however, stayed focused. He opened the bomb bay doors and was seconds from dropping his bombs on the target 24,000 feet below when The Duchess was hit right across the nose. Jack was knocked about 9 feet to the back of the compartment. The explosion tore a large wound into his side and abdomen and shattered his right arm, nearly severing it above the elbow.

The bombardier was in terrible shape, but he knew the mission's success depended on him. So — likely through sheer determination and willpower — he dragged himself back to his Norden bombsight and released the bombs. According to a September 1943 Fort Worth Star-Telegram article, Jack's crew was accustomed to hearing a celebratory "bombs away!" from him during missions. This time, they only heard a faint, "bombs...." before the intercom went silent. Jack died on top of his equipment, using his last act of strength to hit the switch to close the bomb bay. "I still think that when Jack reached for the handle to close the bomb bay door, he already was dead — that even in death he still was carrying out his job, even though then only by reflex," Elliott said during a March 1943 interview with future famed journalist Walter Cronkite.

Thanks to Jack's dying actions, all of the other planes in his bombardment squadron dropped their bombs directly on the target, making the attack a huge success. But for the 26-year-old Mark, the mission's results were devastating. The older Mathis watched as the damaged bomber carrying his brother's body landed. That night, he asked to be transferred to the 359th Squadron to take over where his hero brother left off. The transfer was approved. Mark finished out the Duchess' tour of duty with a different crew, then stayed on in combat in a different B-17. Sadly, on May 14, 1943 — just two months after his brother's passing — Mark's bomber was shot down over the North Sea near Kiel, Germany. He was never heard from again, and his remains were never recovered.

Jack Mathis, who was only 21 when he died, had flown 14 missions in his short career. He was the only crewmember of The Duchess to die during its 59 missions. Years later, reconnaissance photographs showed that seven enemy submarines and a majority of the shipyard they targeted during his 1943 mission had been destroyed. It turned out to be one of the most successful raids of the war in Europe. Jack's body was returned home and buried in Fairmount Cemetery in San Angelo, Texas. On Sept. 21, 1943, a ceremony was held at Goodfellow Field in San Angelo. On her middle son's behalf, Avis Mathis received the Medal of Honor, as well as an Air Medal and Oak Leaf Cluster that Jack had earned on prior missions.

Jack's Medal of Honor was the first awarded to an 8th Air Force airman. It is currently kept at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. Mark also received accolades for his sacrifice, posthumously receiving the Air Medal and the Purple Heart. He is memorialized at the American Cemetery in Margraten, Netherlands. The memories of both Mathis brothers live on. In 1966, the fitness center at Goodfellow Air Force Base was named for Jack. About two decades later, the municipal airport in San Angelo was renamed to honor both of the Mathis brothers.

[Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmoahs.org> | Katie Lange | March 8, 2021 ++]

Hindenburg

New Documentary Sheds Light on the Decades-Old Disaster



Eighty-four years after the airship Hindenburg crashed in Lakehurst, New Jersey, a new PBS documentary has new evidence about why the disaster may have happened. “Hindenburg: The New Evidence,” a film produced by PBS’ NOVA television program, features U.S. Air Force veteran Jason O. Harris as part of a team completing the first investigation into the crash since its immediate aftermath in 1937. Harris, a lieutenant colonel, teamed up with historian Dan Grossman to discover why the fire, which ultimately killed 36 people, happened in the first place.

Up until now, many considered the cause of the Hindenburg crash to be lost to history. Using newly discovered footage from an amateur videographer at the scene, filmmakers present a never-before-seen view of the crash, including moments before the airship caught fire. Harris, who is also a commercial airline pilot trained in accident investigation, jumped on the opportunity to research the cause of the disaster, especially given the new evidence and methods of investigating modern accidents. “Oftentimes we see history, we see stories and we don’t get to see it up close and personal,” Harris told Military Times. Having this opportunity to interact with the Hindenburg’s history made him consider the accident in light of his military and professional training. Specifically, he looked the people in charge of the airship’s crew and the dynamics of the people on the ship.

Aircraft crew members in the 1930s did not have as in-depth training in decision making as they do today. Given the ongoing rain on the day the Hindenburg was scheduled to land, the ship’s arrival was already delayed. Once the ship neared New Jersey, rain picked up again just as landing cables dropped. The German crew members on the Hindenburg were likely stressed given that the ship was arriving significantly late to New Jersey, but did not want to add to the delays by not landing immediately. Harris also noted that having high-level officials and leaders overseeing the crew inside of the craft may have added additional stress. “Every accident is nothing more than a chain of events, a chain of decisions that were made over a period of time that either led to something catastrophic or led to someone breaking that chain of events and making a different decision,” said Harris. Viewing the accident through the lens of stressful decision making adds new layers to what may have happened in the moments leading up to the crash, he added.

The Hindenburg’s crash was remarkable and unexpected. The press present at the event planned on waiting to film once the ship landed, hoping to get views of passengers disembarking. For this reason, most of the known footage that existed before this new discovery captured what happened after the airship caught fire, Rushmore DeNooyer, writer and producer for the film, said. The videographer, Harold Schenck, did not capture what specifically caused the German airship’s landing to become disastrous. “Mr. Schenck was filming all the stuff that the press pool did not film, but even he missed the exact moment that the spark

sparked” said DeNooyer. “[The Hindenburg] goes from pristine airship...to just charred wreckage on the ground in just 60 seconds.”

Schenck and his family tried to give the film to accident investigators right after the crash, but they chose not to look at it. The rediscovery and verified authenticity of the footage sparked NOVA to launch new scientific experiments to find out the origin of the blaze. “Thanks to this stunning new footage, we were able to revive a cold case investigation surrounding one of the most iconic disasters of the 20th century,” said the documentary’s executive producer, Gary Tarpinian, in a press release. The film follows Harris and Grossman from the site of the crash in New Jersey, to Germany’s Zeppelin Museum Friedrichshafen, to a Caltech laboratory in Pasadena, California. The 53 minute documentary is available on online PBS’ website at <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/video/hindenburg-the-new-evidence> and on the PBS app. [Source: AirForceTimes | Caitlin O'Brien | May 18, 2021 ++]

WWII Adolf Eichmann Capture

Daring Israeli Spy Operation to Capture Nazi Mass Murderer



The identity card(right) issued to Adolf Eichmann (left) under his new Argentinian identity

“Un momentito, Señor.” They were the only three words Israeli intelligence Peter Malkin knew in Spanish, but they were about to change the course of history. Malkin uttered the words to a balding Mercedes-Benz factory worker headed home from work on May 11, 1960. And when the man reluctantly acknowledged him, Malkin sprang into action. With the help of three other secret agents, he wrestled the man to the ground and into a car. As they sped away, they tied him down and covered him with a blanket in the back. This wasn’t your average abduction. The man in the back seat was one of the world’s most notorious war criminals: Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi official who helped Germany carry out the mass murder of six million Jews during World War II. For years, he had evaded the authorities and lived in relative peace in Argentina. Now, he was in the custody of the Mossad, Israel’s secret service—and his once secret crimes were about to become public knowledge.

Eichmann’s capture, interrogation and trial were part of one of history’s most ambitious secret missions. “The logistics [of the capture] were incredible,” says Guy Walters, author of *Hunting Evil: The*

Nazi War Criminals Who Escaped and the Quest to Bring them to Justice. “It’s like a movie plot that occurs in real life. And it woke the world up to the Holocaust.” But that awakening—and Eichmann’s capture—was decades in the making.

When he first joined the Austrian Nazi party in 1932, few would have predicted that Adolf Eichmann had a future as a mass murderer. But Eichmann was both a skilled bureaucrat and a committed anti-Semite. He rose swiftly through the ranks of the party, and by 1935 he was already helping the party plan its answers to the so-called “Jewish question,” Nazi terminology for a debate over how European Jews should be treated. Though he later claimed that he was just following orders, Eichmann helped the Nazis tackle the logistics of mass murder. He attended the Wannsee Conference, the meeting at which a group of high-ranking Nazi officials coordinated the details of what they called the “Final Solution.” Though he did not make decisions there, he took notes on the conference and prepared data which were used by higher-ranking officials to determine exactly how to murder Europe’s Jewish population. After the conference, Eichmann helped implement the genocide, coordinating the deportation and murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews in German-occupied areas.

But though many of the architects of the Holocaust were arrested, tried at Nuremberg and executed after the war, Eichmann escaped justice. After his capture by Americans as the war ended, he escaped, changing his identity multiple times as he traveled throughout postwar Europe. In Italy, he was given aid by Catholic priests and bishops with pro-Nazi sympathies, and reached Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1950. Eichmann had a new identity—“Ricardo Klement,” laborer. His family joined him in Argentina soon after, living a relatively quiet life as Eichmann attempted to support himself at a variety of jobs. But he wasn’t the only Nazi in the South American country, and he didn’t make a secret of his past. Eichmann had social ties to other escaped Nazis, and even sat down for an extensive interview with a pro-Nazi journalist, to whom he complained that he had made a mistake by not murdering all of Europe’s Jews.

Rumors of Eichmann’s activities in Argentina made their way to the United States, Europe and Israel. But though both West German and American intelligence operations received tips on Eichmann, they didn’t follow up on the leads. “It wasn’t the job of the Americans to hunt Nazis,” says Walters. But there was a new state that was very interested in arresting Eichmann: Israel. Thanks to Lothar Herrmann, a blind Jewish refugee who had fled to Argentina after being imprisoned in Dachau, they learned of his whereabouts and began planning one of history’s most ambitious captures. When Herrmann discovered Eichmann was in Argentina through his daughter Sylvia, who dated one of Eichmann’s sons, he wrote to Germany with the information.

A German-Jewish judge, Fritz Bauer, asked for more details, so with Sylvia’s help, Herrmann provided Eichmann’s address. Worried that Nazi sympathizers would alert Eichmann to any German investigation, Bauer covertly tipped off Mossad, the Israeli secret service, instead. Mossad assembled a “snatch team”—most of whom had seen their entire families wiped out during the Holocaust—to abduct Eichmann. Their goal was not just to capture him, but to get him back to Israel where he could be tried publicly for his crimes. The plan was simple enough. As the team spied on Eichmann, they realized that his routine was extremely predictable. They decided to capture him as he walked back home after getting off of a city bus after work.

The carefully orchestrated plan to abduct Eichmann on May 11, 1960 was almost foiled when Eichmann didn’t get off the bus at the expected time. Half an hour later, though, Eichmann got off of a later bus. Malkin and his associates accosted him on a quiet, dark street. They took him to a “safe house”

in Buenos Aires, where he was interrogated for days before he was drugged and put on a plane to Israel. The trial that followed was among the first to be televised in its entirety. It gripped millions with its emotional testimony and its first-person views of the reality of the Holocaust. At the trial, Eichmann presented the same deceptively normal facade he had kept up in Argentina—an image of a meek bureaucrat who simply followed orders. That image caused political theorist Hannah Arendt to coin the term “the banality of evil,” arguing that Eichmann was not a psychopath, but a normal human.

“Actually, Eichmann was a rabid zealous key Nazi who was absolutely delighted to do his bit to try and kill as many Jews as possible,” says Walters. “He wasn’t just a functionary.” Though he insisted to the end that he wasn’t responsible for the Holocaust, Adolf Eichmann was found guilty by a special tribunal. He was hanged on May 31, 1962. [Source: www.history.com | Erin Blakemore | May 6, 2019 ++]

Military History Anniversaries **01 thru 15 JUN**

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 JUN**”. [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | May 2021 ++]

Every Picture Tells A Story **War’s Aftermath**



A homeless German refugee sitting on her only possessions amongst ruins of Cologne, Germany, March 1945. By the end of World War II Cologne, Germany's fourth largest city, was a wasteland. [After 168 raids and](#)

50,000 tons of explosives were dropped on the city there was barely anything left for the formerly gorgeous landscape. Upon entering the city, one American soldier referred to it as nothing but "wrecked masonry surrounded by city limits. Even though the fighting moved out of Cologne after its destruction, the Germans who stayed in the city were fearful of another attack. Still, when Americans arrived on the scene the locals were thrilled to see them. It was a sign that in some way the war was coming to an end. It took years to rebuild this once bustling center of Germany, something that the survivors of the destruction never forgot.

WWII Bomber Nose Art

[75] Little Chief



Legends of WWII

Thiele Fred Harvey | Iwo Jima Silver Star Marine

In February 19, 1945, Fred landed on Red Beach with the 26th Marines on Iwo Jima. He was awarded the Silver Star for his bravery during a 3-man patrol. His citation reads: "When his three-man patrol which was sent out to establish contact with the adjoining company was ambushed by heavy fire from an enemy machine gun and one of the men was seriously wounded, PFC Harvey dragged the fallen Marine under heavy fire to the shelter of a nearby hole. Remaining with the wounded man while his companion went for aid, he held off the hostile forces with his rifle and hand grenades until the arrival of the rescue party. Then, exposing himself to enemy fire and directing accurate heavy fire on the Japanese position, he successfully covered the evacuation of the casualty. By his initiative, courage and unselfish devotion to duty, he undoubtedly saved the life of his comrade and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service" Watch as he tells his remarkable story of service and sacrifice in the 29 minute video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLUfRu_1uZ0.

[Source: American Veterans Center | July 2, 2020 ++]

* Health Care *



Coronavirus Vaccines

Update 35: COVID Arm Reaction

More information has emerged about "COVID arm" — a delayed arm rash appearing after Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine is administered — including likelihood, duration and treatment. A small study published in March found some recipients of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine experienced delayed rashes. Another study, published 12 MAY in JAMA Dermatology and led by researchers from New Haven, Conn.-based Yale School of Medicine, provides more information about the condition.

Researchers examined 16 patients who experienced red and itchy blotches on their arms after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. The patients, whose ages ranged from 25 to 89, were referred to Yale New Haven (Conn.) Hospital from Jan. 20 through Feb. 12, 2021. The researchers emphasized the fact that such reactions are rare, citing the clinical trial that led to the vaccine's emergency approval, in which 312 such cases were reported out of more than 30,000 participants. Seven report findings:

1. Of the 16 patients, 13 were women. Women are more vulnerable than men to "hypersensitivity" reactions to vaccines, and are also more likely to report such side effects to physicians, the researchers wrote.
2. None of the reactions arose at the time of vaccination. The skin reaction appeared anywhere from two to 12 days after the first Moderna shot, with a median latency to onset of seven days.
3. The arm reaction lasted for a median of five days, but could persist for up to 21 days.
4. Most people who had a skin reaction after the first shot also had a reaction after the second, typically around two days after the injection.
5. Treatments such as topical steroids, oral antihistamines and cool compresses can help.
6. No serious adverse events tied to this reaction were observed.
7. No such arm reactions were observed in individuals receiving Pfizer's vaccine. It's not known why Moderna vaccinations are tied to the side effect.

[Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Gabrielle Masson | May 18, 2021 ++]

Coronavirus Vaccines

Update 36: Heart Inflammation Reaction

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is looking into cases of *myocarditis*, or heart inflammation, in a small number of Americans vaccinated against COVID-19, including at least 17 Defense Department patients. The CDC's Vaccine Technical Work Group gave a presentation 17 MAY to public health officials on myocarditis among recipients of the Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines, including several reported by the DoD. In February, several service members were hospitalized for myocarditis days after receiving their immunizations. Roughly 125 incidents have been reported to the CDC's Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, or VAERS, since January.

Whether there is a relation between the vaccines and the condition, however, has not been determined. Myocarditis can be caused by a virus, and cases have been linked to COVID-19. But several of the individuals reported to the CDC tested negative for COVID-19 at the time of their diagnosis. Of the small number of cases reported in VAERS out of the nearly 164 million people vaccinated in the U.S., the majority were young -- between the ages of 16 and 45 -- and male. The vaccine working group reported that the condition typically developed within four days of vaccination and followed the second dose more often than the first.

The panel stressed that the occurrence was not more frequent "from expected baseline rates." Previous research has shown that vaccines or vaccine ingredients may induce an inflammatory response, including swelling of the heart muscle, beyond a typical reaction of the immune system. Panel members recommended that medical providers be aware of the cases, which they described as "mild." They also suggested that infectious disease specialists, cardiologists and rheumatologists work together to diagnose and treat the condition. "Information about this potential adverse event should be provided to clinicians to enhance early recognition and appropriate management of persons who develop myocarditis symptoms following vaccination," they wrote in a release.

Military.com was the first to report incidents of myocarditis in Americans following vaccination in the U.S., after the Israeli Health Ministry announced it was exploring a possible link. At the time, 14 patients in the DoD's health system were being monitored for myocarditis. That figure stood at 17 as of 27 APR. Pentagon officials did not provide an update on the number of cases when asked Monday. "That is the extent of information we have available at this time," Pentagon spokeswoman Lisa Lawrence said.

"The cases described in CDC's press release include cases in military members and military beneficiaries reported in national surveillance systems," she said. "The Department of Defense is working closely with CDC, other federal partners, and academic medical professionals to ensure we evaluate all cases consistently. As CDC noted, evaluations of this important topic are ongoing." Among those diagnosed with the condition is Steve Beynon, 30, a reporter for Military.com and National Guard member who was hospitalized at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for several days following his second dose of the Moderna vaccine.

Marcus Weisgerber, 39, a civilian member of the Pentagon press corps who works for DefenseOne, also was diagnosed with the condition after his second dose of the Pfizer mRNA vaccine. Weisgerber said he felt poorly after receiving the shot with typical side effects, including fever, and thought the chest pain was a normal side effect of the vaccine. After his wife, Oriana Pawlyk, a reporter for Military.com, became

concerned that he was having a heart attack, the couple went to the hospital, where they learned Weisgerber's heart was functioning at roughly 35% to 40%.

Both Beynon and Weisgerber say they would not hesitate to get the vaccine again, adding that their condition is treatable and less of a gamble than contracting COVID-19. "You should still get vaccinated, this is a rare condition -- but it's worth being on the radar of troops and other physically active people," Beynon tweeted 26 APR "This isn't a debate about the vaccine," Weisgerber said Monday. "I've wanted to share my story because I want people to know what a normal side effect is and what's not normal. If I had been by myself, I wouldn't have gone [to the hospital] and I may have hopped on the Peloton the next day and dropped dead."

According to the National Institutes of Health, viral myocarditis is rare, resulting in 1.5 million cases worldwide each year. Symptoms can appear similar to a heart attack, including shortness of breath -- particularly after exercise or lying down; fatigue; heart palpitations; chest pain; lightheadedness; swelling of the hands and feet; or sudden loss of consciousness.

As of Tuesday, nearly 164 million Americans have received a COVID-19 vaccine, including 5.1 million between the ages of 12 to 18. According to The New York Times, a report on seven cases of myocarditis in young people has been submitted to the journal Pediatrics for review. The working group also received a briefing from the Department of Veterans Affairs on its plans for the future investigation of myocarditis. A VA official said April 29 that the department had "zero cases of myocarditis" in patients who have received the COVID-19 vaccine. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | May 25, 2021 ++]

Heart Failure

Update 03: Tailored, Earlier Rehab Program Shows Benefits for Patients

An innovative cardiac rehabilitation intervention started earlier and more custom-tailored to the individual improved physical function, frailty, quality-of-life, and depression in hospitalized [heart failure](#) patients, compared to traditional rehabilitation programs. "Designing earlier and more personalized individual-specific approaches to heart failure rehab shows great promise for improving outcomes for this common but complex condition that is one of the leading causes of hospitalization for older adults," said NIA Director Richard J. Hodes, M.D. "These results mark encouraging progress on a path to better overall quality of life and physical function for the millions of older Americans who develop heart failure each year."

For this new study, a research team led by Dalane W. Kitzman, M.D, followed 349 clinical trial participants with heart failure enrolled in "A Trial of Rehabilitation Therapy in Older Acute Heart Failure Patients" (REHAB-HF). Participants had an average of five comorbidities — diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, lung disease or kidney disease — that also contributed to loss of physical function. In an earlier pilot study, Kitzman and his colleagues found striking deficits in strength, mobility and balance, along with the expected loss of endurance in older patients with acute heart failure, the vast majority of whom were categorized as frail or pre-frail. The team decided to focus on improving patients' physical function, which already weakened by chronic heart failure and age, was worsened by the traditional cardiac hospital experience featuring lots of bedrest and resulting in loss of functions that tended to persist after discharge.

The REHAB-HF team designed earlier and more customized exercise programs that emphasized improving balance, strength, mobility and endurance. They also began REHAB-HF during a patient’s hospital stay when feasible instead of waiting until the traditional six weeks after discharge. After release from the hospital, the study participants shifted to outpatient sessions three times per week for three months. Compared to a control group that received usual cardiac rehab care, REHAB-HF participants showed marked gains in measures of physical functioning and overall quality of life, including significant progress in Short Physical Performance Battery, a series of tests to evaluate lower extremity function and mobility, and a six-minute walk test.

They also had notable improvements in self-perception of their health status and depression surveys compared to pre-trial baselines. More than 80 percent of REHAB-HF participants reported they were still doing their exercises six months after completing their participation in the study. “These findings will inform choices of heart failure rehabilitation strategies that could lead to better physical and emotional outcomes,” said Evan Hadley, M.D., director of NIA’s Division of Geriatrics and Clinical Gerontology. “Tailored interventions like REHAB-HF that target heart failure’s related decline in physical abilities can result in real overall benefits for patients.”

The study did not show significant differences in related clinical events including rates of hospital readmission for any reason or for heart-failure related rehospitalizations. The research team plans to further explore that and other issues through future expansions of REHAB-HF into larger and longer-term trials with broader participant subgroups. Overall this NIH-funded clinical trial improved frailty, depression and overall quality of life. [Source: NIH News Release | May 17, 2021 ++]

Covid-19 Testing

Update 10: Buffy the Foot Sniffing Greeter



A yellow Labrador retriever named Buffy greets visitors at Doctors Hospital of Sarasota (Fla.) three days a week. With their permission, she sniffs their feet. If she lays down, she isn't just giving guests a warm welcome — she has possibly detected COVID-19 infection. About a year ago, Southeastern Guide Dogs CEO Titus Herman reached out to the hospital's CEO, Robert Meade, to study whether dogs can detect COVID-19 by smell, Monica Yadav, director of communications and community engagement for the hospital, told Becker's. The training facility was originally training dogs to use scent to detect stress hormones in military veterans who suffered from night terrors or panic attacks.

In December, the hospital sent Southeastern deactivated COVID-19 saliva samples from consenting emergency room patients who had the infection. The dogs were trained to detect signs of immune response changes caused by the body fighting the infection. Southeastern reported the dogs detected COVID-19 with 95 percent accuracy, a 26 APR news release said. Early studies are emerging on dogs trained to detect COVID-19 in Europe, yet they are still unproven, the Tampa Bay Times reported. After the study was conducted, Mr. Herman reached back out to Mr. Meade, asking if he would like one of the four dogs trained at his hospital, which he happily accepted, Ms. Yadav said.

Buffy detected COVID-19 in a hospital visitor after just one week, the hospital reports. A woman who entered the lobby was directed to the normal screening procedures, and a temperature check found the woman had a low-grade fever. She was asked if Buffy could give her a sniff. Buffy sniffed her feet and laid at them — signaling a potential positive COVID-19 infection. The woman was directed to the emergency room, where she tested positive for the virus. "Buffy was able to detect the woman's COVID-19 within seconds, much faster than standard testing," Ms. Yadav said.

Buffy is not replacing other screening processes; she is being offered as an additional resource. Patients who Buffy has signaled may have the virus are offered free on-site testing or may leave the facility to seek testing at a facility of their choice. A concern Ms. Yadav has heard is that Buffy could contract COVID-19 from the training process or through her work at the hospital. However, she said, the saliva samples are deactivated and there has not been evidence showing dogs can contract COVID-19 from sniffing the virus. When Buffy is not working at the hospital, she lives with Mr. Meade and his family at their home. To see Buffy training at the hospital, click [HERE](#). [Source: Beckers Hospital Review | Hannah Mitchell | April 30, 2021 ++]

Unrefrigerated Foods

Update 01: When to Toss Them



We've all been guilty of letting perishable foods sit out perhaps a bit too long, then wondering what dishes or ingredients are still safe to eat. Luckily, there's a wealth of information available on food safety, so that you can be sure you're not wasting good leftovers, or accidentally ingesting spoiled, bacteria-laden ones that you really should avoid. Here are 8 everyday foods and how long you have to eat them while unrefrigerated before they present a danger to your health and should be tossed. Go to

https://cdn.cheapism.com/images/013118_food_danger_zone_slide_0_fs.max-784x410.jpg if you had rather view a slide show of all 25 foods discussed in this series:

Mayonnaise -- Time: Around eight hours

Unopened mayonnaise can be kept in the pantry indefinitely, but once opened, the egg yolk-derived condiment quickly becomes vulnerable to spoilage and bacterial growth if left out. FoodSafety.gov recommends discarding mayonnaise after sitting at above 50-degree temperatures for more than eight hours, so keep it cold and out of the sun or don't open it.

Mushrooms -- Time: One day

Mushrooms flourish away from the sun before picking, and they will enjoy a dark corner of your fridge afterward, too. If left accidentally on the counter overnight they will still be safe to eat — just check for brown or slimy spots that should be cut off after too long. Once cooked, however, mushrooms become like most other prepared foods in that they shouldn't be kept at room temperature more than two hours.

Jelly -- Time: One to two days

The acids and natural or added sugars in jellies and jams act as natural preservatives to keep bacteria at bay. So an opened jar left at room temperature for one to two days will be fine, provided there are no signs of spoilage such as mold or strange odor. If refrigerated, jellies will remain at peak quality for roughly an entire year. Don't leave it out in the sun, but don't worry too much, either.

Peppers -- Time: One to two days

Whether bell or jalapeño, raw peppers can be left to sit at room temperature for multiple days without concern. For the longest shelf life, however, it's best to have a policy to store them in airtight containers or bags in the fridge for one to two weeks. Raw cut or cooked peppers can also stay in the fridge for three to five days. It's best to cut them up when you want to eat them, but they shouldn't sit out longer than two hours.

Tomatoes -- Time: One to five days

Tomatoes are a countertop-safe vegetable with a high production rate of ethylene, which means they can be used to speed up the ripening process of nearby fruits or vegetables (read: put them next to those green bananas if you want to eat them sooner rather than later). Fresh tomatoes will ripen fully in one to five days, after which they can be stored in the fridge for another five to seven before these perishable fruits begin to mold.

Bananas -- Time: Two to five days

Only refrigerate bananas once they've reached the desired ripeness, which keeps them suitable for eating another five days even as the skin darkens. Before then, they're best stored at room temperature for several days while they ripen to yellow-brown or brown for baking, as with most other countertop-safe fruits. Unless you like banana bread, have a policy to eat these sun-loving but perishable fruits when there's just a touch of green instead of freckled.

Bread -- Time: One week

Though pre-sliced or whole loaves can be frozen for long-term storage (save money by freezing sale-priced loaves), refrigeration is almost never recommended for bread, as it can quickly turn a loaf dry and stale. Whether sliced or not, soft-crust breads keep for five to seven days on the counter, while hard-crust breads like baguettes last only a day or two.

Basil -- Time: Seven to 10 days

Basil is the rare, sun-loving fresh herb that shouldn't be refrigerated, lest its highly perishable and moisture-sensitive leaves begin to spoil and turn black. Basil stored at room temperature can last from

seven to 10 days. Read: To maximize that shelf life, trim the basil's ends and place the stems in an inch or so of water covered by a loose-fitting plastic bag. [Source: Cheapism | Daily Update | March 8, 2021 ++]

Smoking

Update 10: World No Tobacco Day Encourages You to Live Life without Tobacco



Most people make several attempts before they stop using tobacco for good. Whether you're ready to try for the first time or the next time, remember: every attempt helps you get closer to your goal. Work with your VA provider to explore what works — and what doesn't — for you. They can help you can identify your triggers and learn ways to handle them without tobacco.

VA encourages Veterans to use a combination of counseling and medication to stop using tobacco. There are many treatment options available through VA. If you've tried once before, try again. No matter how many times it takes, VA will work with you to find the combination of options — including a variety of proven, effective therapies and medications — that are right for you. Don't stop trying. Try stopping, even if you have tried once, twice, [15 times](#) or never before.

Find your motivation. It may help propel you toward your goal to consider the ways your life can improve once you're free of tobacco. For some people, that might mean working out harder, playing with their children longer, eliminating smoking breaks at work, and enjoying time with friends, uninterrupted by the need to use tobacco. Be able to play with your children longer. Some might find a financial incentive in saving money spent on cigarettes or smokeless tobacco. Whatever your motivation, VA can help you identify and focus on it. Don't stop doing things you enjoy. Stop using tobacco to enjoy those things more.

Explore your options. Stopping tobacco use is seldom easy, but VA has helped many Veterans stop chewing, dipping and smoking. We can help you, too. VA has many approaches to help end your relationship with tobacco, including the best combination of tools for long-term success:

- Tobacco cessation counseling can help you make changes to your behavior that will break your emotional ties to tobacco use. VA offers counseling, in person or by phone, to talk about your tobacco use and to identify strategies for coping with the triggers that make you want to use tobacco. Counseling helps you to identify changes you can make to your routine that can help you quit.

- FDA-approved medications, like nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), the patch, gum, lozenge, and bupropion and varenicline can help you manage nicotine withdrawal symptoms and overcome the urge to smoke.

Your VA health care provider can help you decide which options are likely to work best for you. You can sign in to [My HealthVet](#) to access support and contact your VA primary care or mental health care provider. Don't stop trying. Try stopping – with VA's help.

Embrace your opportunities

Every week, month and year spent free of tobacco brings new opportunities to improve your quality of life. This World No Tobacco Day (May 31), talk to your primary care or mental health provider about the many [A resources that can help](#) you stop using tobacco, including:

- [Quit VET](#): Veterans can call 1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838) to receive tobacco cessation counseling and get help building their plan to quit. Quitline counselors are available Monday through Friday, between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. ET to help Veterans prepare for potential challenges and avoid relapse. These tobacco cessation counselors offer continued support through follow-up calls and counseling.
- [SmokefreeVET](#): For tools and tips to quit, Veterans can sign up for SmokefreeVET by texting VET to 47848. SmokefreeVET provides regular text messages as well as extra support at Veterans' fingertips when they text the keywords URGE, STRESS, DIPPED or SMOKED to 47848. (Para inscribirse en SmokefreeVET en español, manda el texto VETesp al 47848.)

When you're ready, VA can help with tobacco cessation counseling and medications provided through all VA medical centers and community-based outpatient clinics. To find the VA location closest to you, visit www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp.

[Source: Vantage Point Blog | <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/89180> | May 29, 2021 ++]

Ativan

Misuse, Addiction, & Treatment



Ativan is the trade name for the generic drug lorazepam, which is a benzodiazepine. These drugs act on the brain and nervous system to produce a calming effect. Ativan works by enhancing the effects of certain natural chemicals in the body. Other benzodiazepines include diazepam, clonazepam, oxazepam, and nitrazepam, and are prescribed by doctors for a range of uses. As one of the most potent benzodiazepines, Ativan is known for its potentially dangerous side-effects and addiction. It is also known for severe issues stemming from withdrawal.

Doctors prescribe Ativan to treat a range of issues, including Anxiety disorders, sleeping difficulties, active seizures (including status epilepticus), alcohol withdrawal, chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting. It may also be used as a sedative before surgery or operative dental treatment. Before you take Ativan, you should note that it is not suitable if you suffer from any of the following issues:

- Allergic to lorazepam or other benzodiazepines
- Severe breathing or chest problems
- Diagnosed with myasthenia gravis
- Serious liver problems
- Diagnosed with sleep apnea

It is important to speak to your doctor or pharmacist about precautions before taking Ativan if you are experiencing any of the below:

- Pregnant or trying to become pregnant
- History of substance abuse
- Diagnosed with a personality disorder
- Elderly or debilitated
- Suffer from breathing problems, kidney or liver problems, or glaucoma
- History of depression or suicidal feelings
- Currently taking other medications or substances

Side-Effects of Ativan

As with other benzodiazepines, most adverse reactions when taking Ativan are dose-dependent. The most severe side-effects occur following higher-than-recommended doses. According to a study by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) involving 3,500 patients treated for anxiety, Ativan's most frequent adverse reaction was sedation. This was followed by dizziness, weakness, and unsteadiness. The study also noted that incidences of sedation and unsteadiness increased with age.

In addition to sedation, dizziness, weakness, and unsteadiness, the Ativan side-effects include: Amnesia, Memory impairment, Confusion/Disorientation, Depression/Unmasking of depression, Suicidal ideation/attempt, Convulsions/Seizures, Vertigo, Impotence, Jaundice, Worsening of sleep, and Coma.

Ativan Addiction and Dependence

Like many drugs, including benzodiazepines, Ativan can cause physical dependence. Due to its higher potency than many other benzodiazepines, Ativan may result in individuals developing tolerance faster than with other lower-potency drugs. As tolerance to benzodiazepines builds, Ativan's beneficial effects will begin to diminish after several weeks of use. Abuse potential with Ativan is high, especially in patients with a history of drug or alcohol abuse.

Dependence on Ativan may lead to numerous withdrawal symptoms, particularly if treatment is discontinued abruptly. Ativan should always be discontinued gradually. Due to the possibility of dependence following prolonged use, Ativan is generally prescribed for short courses. Prescriptions are often for no more than four weeks. A dose reduction at the end of treatment reduces the risk of dependency. Withdrawal symptoms often accompany the abrupt termination of Ativan treatment. Such symptoms can appear following cessation of recommended doses after as little as one week of therapy. Studies have shown a significant association between suicide attempts and benzodiazepine usage in the United States. If

you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 for free and confidential support.

Ativan Overdose Risks

Each year, drug overdoses kill more people in the United States than HIV/AIDS, homicide, and firearms. For people between the age of 35 and 54, it is the leading cause of death related to an injury. As a potent benzodiazepine, Ativan is a drug that may cause an accidental overdose that could be fatal. Risks are increased when combined with other drugs or alcohol. The FDA has not yet approved any medication for the treatment of addiction to Ativan or other benzodiazepines. However, there are many treatments that have been proven to help. These treatments include therapy, rehab, support groups, and medically-assisted detox. Refer to <https://addictionrehabtreatment.com/drugs/prescription/benzos/ativan> to learn more on dealing with Ativan.

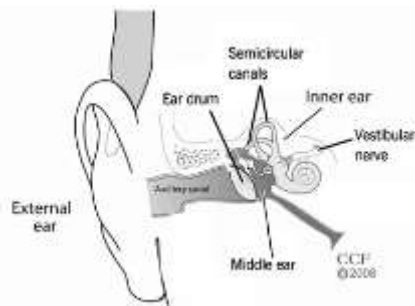
Finding the right facility to treat your Ativan addiction is important. Making sure you detox under the proper medical supervision and have the right treatment options and environment greatly increases your chances of breaking free from addiction. [Source: www.AddictionRehabTreatment.com | Ronald Torres | May 2021 ++]

Dizziness

What It Is & What Causes It

Dizziness is disorientation in space, lightheadedness, or a sense of unsteadiness. It affects your sense of balance and can increase your risk of falling. The term can describe several different sensations. Dizziness is an impairment of spatial orientation. A dizzy spell doesn't always indicate a life-threatening condition, but it can be unnerving. Dizziness can be associated with more serious conditions, such as a stroke or cardiovascular problems. Even on its own, though, if dizziness leads to a fall, it can be dangerous.

Dizziness can occur when you're moving, standing still or lying down. When you're dizzy, you may feel faint, lightheaded, nauseous, unsteady or woozy. It is different than vertigo. Intense vertigo can make you nauseous or so unsteady you can't drive or walk. It feels like you or objects around you are floating, spinning, swaying, or tilting. It's common to experience dizziness. Almost half of people see their healthcare provider at some point because of feeling dizzy. The older you are, the more likely you are to have this symptom. Possible causes could be in your external ear, middle ear, inner ear, vestibular nerve, semicircular canals, ear drum, or auditory canal



A number of conditions can cause dizziness because balance involves several parts of the body. The brain gets input about movement and your body's position from your inner ear, eyes, muscles, joints, and skin. Inner ear disorders are frequently the cause of feeling dizzy. The most common causes include benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV), Meniere's syndrome and ear infections.

- **Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV).** This makes you dizzy when you change your head or body position (like bending over). It usually only lasts a few seconds or minutes. This harmless condition happens when calcium crystals in your inner ear move out of place. You may have BPPV as a result of a head injury or simply from getting older. The good news is that the treatment is easy. Your healthcare provider can lead you through a series of simple moves, called canalith repositioning procedure (CRP). These movements get the crystals back to their proper position.
- **Meniere's syndrome.** This involves having too much fluid in the inner ear. Experts aren't sure why it accumulates. Anyone can develop Meniere's, but it's most common in people ages 40 to 60. If you have Meniere's syndrome, you may also experience Hearing loss, Muffled or distorted hearing, Nausea and vomiting, and/or Tinnitus (ringing in the ear).

Meniere's attacks usually happen suddenly. They can last from 20 minutes to 24 hours. Treatment methods include anti-nausea and anti-vertigo medications. Lifestyle changes may help, too, including following a low-salt diet, limiting use of alcohol and caffeine, changing medications, or quitting smoking. If your condition doesn't respond to simple measures, your healthcare provider may recommend more aggressive treatments. Those include injecting medication directly into the ear and surgery.

- **Ear infections.** Viral or bacterial ear infections can cause inflammation (irritation) in the inner ear. The inflammation interferes with the messages your inner ear sends to your brain. A nerve in the inner ear, the vestibulocochlear nerve, has two branches. Each branch communicates with the brain: The vestibular nerve sends signals about balance. When the vestibular nerve is inflamed, you develop vestibular neuritis. The cochlear nerve sends signals about hearing. If inflammation also affects the cochlear nerve, you develop labyrinthitis. Labyrinthitis also causes ringing in the ears and hearing loss. Ear infection treatments include medications to relieve the symptoms of nausea and dizziness. You might also need antibiotics, antiviral drugs or steroids.
- **Other causes.** There are many other factors that can cause dizziness. Within the heart and vascular system, conditions that can cause dizziness include irregular heartbeat (atrial fibrillation), low blood pressure (hypotension), and narrowed arteries (atherosclerosis). Brain-related conditions that can cause dizziness include: Head injury or traumatic brain injury (TBI), Migraine, and Multiple sclerosis. Additional conditions that can cause dizziness include alcohol use, anxiety and stress (if you hyperventilate or breathe too quickly), carbon monoxide poisoning, low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), medications, and vision problems.

Treatment for vertigo and dizziness varies widely depending on the cause. Your healthcare provider may refer you to an audiologist for vestibular and balance assessment to help determine the cause for dizziness, and help determine next steps in management. If you have an ear infection, you may just need anti-nausea medication until the infection is gone. For long-term (chronic) conditions, your healthcare provider may recommend vestibular rehabilitation. It's similar to physical therapy, with the goal of

improving your balance through specific exercises. If your dizziness won't go away or keeps coming back, it's important to talk to your healthcare provider about it. [Source: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org> | May 2021 ++]

Sleep

Update 13: Personal Light Treatment Device Sub Study



Participants in the “Using Personal Light Treatment Devices to Enhance Performance of Submariners” study aboard the USS Vermont, wearing their assigned PLTDs. Officers in the blue light glasses (left, and third from left) are at the beginning of their shifts and officers in the orange (blue light blocking) glasses (second from left, right) are at the end of their shifts and are preparing to go to sleep.

It's great to hear that somebody's actually getting a good night's sleep, but who knew it would be aboard an active-duty nuclear submarine? That seems to have been the case for 42 lucky sailors aboard the USS Vermont, who last November took part in a study where they wore special glasses, called personal light treatment devices, to try to get their sleep schedule in a better rhythm. Despite the glasses' resemblance to the much maligned 'birth control glasses' issued to service members for decades, the study was a success, and many sailors wanted to keep wearing their glasses after it was over. While researchers still need to analyze the data, it could be a promising development for sleepy sailors across the Navy.

“These PLTDs are inexpensive, unobtrusive, and if they prove to be an effective countermeasure to circadian misalignment among submariners during underway periods, the U.S. Navy will have one more option to help sailors get the rest and sleep they need to maintain their performance, enhance their moods, and potentially even improve their health,” said Dr. Sarah Chabal, a research psychologist with the Naval Submarine Medical Research Laboratory and the lead researcher on the study, in a recent press release.

The sailors must have been really sleep deprived, because the glasses look straight out of a high school chemistry class. Still, they address an unseen problem in the Silent Service: it can be hard to get some shut-eye when you're stuck in a metal tube without a view of the sun or the night sky. Those external environmental cues help the body maintain a circadian rhythm, that internal clock telling us we should be awake during the day and asleep at night. Submarine crews take shifts to keep the boat running 24 hours a day, which means there are always lights on throughout the vessel. To make matters worse, sailors, like many of us, spend some time on their phones or computers relaxing in their bunks before going to sleep. The problem is that those devices emit blue light, which suppresses the release of nocturnal melatonin, an enzyme that helps humans fall asleep. That means sailors may take longer to fall asleep and have more difficulty staying asleep, the press release explained.

Loss of sleep and circadian misalignment can result in decreased performance, impulsiveness, and even health consequences, which can lead to dangerous and costly errors aboard a \$2.7 billion submarine like Vermont. What to do about it? Wear some not-so-cool glasses, apparently. Chabal said that the goal of her study was “to investigate whether the judicious scheduling of light exposure through the use of personal light treatment devices, or PLTDs, can help sailors transition into and maintain their desired watch time.” Two types of glasses were used in the study: one provided blue light exposure to be worn in the morning immediately after waking, while the other blocked blue light and was worn at night before sleep. Meanwhile, a control group wore no glasses.

Lt. Cmdr. Joseph DeCicco, an undersea medical officer with NSMRL and Head of the Submarine Medicine and Survival Systems Department, went aboard Vermont in November with dozens of pairs of PLTD glasses as the crew prepared for a deployment to Brazil. All participants took sleep and mood surveys and wore sleep trackers on their wrists. DeCicco also collected biochemical circadian rhythm markers via saliva samples and measured the sailors’ cognitive performance with tablet-based games. “The sailors were fascinated by the study,” DeCicco noted. “They thought that using personal light treatment devices to tailor their sleep schedules to their personal needs is much better than forcing the entire crew to one sleep schedule or another. Additionally, the crew members overwhelmingly reported increased ‘awakeness’ during their appropriate awake period while wearing the glasses.”

The study only lasted through Vermont’s trip to Brazil, but DeCicco pointed out that the sailors wanted to keep wearing the glasses on the journey back, past the end of the study. The press release did not say whether they were allowed to keep the glasses, but perhaps the Navy and other services will take note of the study’s success considering submariners are not the only service members stuck in perpetual fluorescent twilight: many sailors serving on massive aircraft carriers are usually stuck below decks most of the time, young Air Force missileers pull 24-hour shifts 60 to 80 feet below ground, and plenty of special operations members adopt a nocturnal sleep schedule while deployed. Could these military-grade BlueBlockers help them too? Hopefully, and if these glasses go the way of ‘birth control glasses,’ then somehow stylish hipsters will make them look cool in a few decades anyway. [Source: Task & Purpose | David Roza | May 17, 2021 ++]

Colon Cancer

Update 10: Updated Guidance Says Screenings Should Now Start at Age 45

Colorectal cancer screenings should now start at age 45 instead of 50, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force said in updated guidance released 18 MAY. Overall, all adults aged 45 to 75 should be screened for the disease, according to the recommendations, which applies to all adults, regardless of symptoms, personal or family history. The USPSTF classified the recommendation to start screening earlier as Grade B, meaning there is "high certainty that the net benefit is moderate or there is moderate certainty that the net benefit is moderate to substantial." "Far too many people in the U.S. are not receiving this lifesaving preventive service," said Michael Barry, MD, vice chair of the task force. "We hope that this new recommendation to screen people ages 45 to 49, coupled with our long-standing recommendation to screen people 50 to 75, will prevent more people from dying from colorectal cancer."

Additionally, deciding whether to screen older adults aged 76 to 85 should be made on an individual basis, the recommendations say. "The American Cancer Society made this recommendation in 2018 but many other guidelines still said to start at age 50, which caused confusion and some insurance companies would not cover the screening until age 50," said Heather Hampel, genetic counselor and associate director of the human genetics division at Ohio State University in Columbus. "This is why it is very important that the USPSTF has now confirmed that colorectal cancer screening should begin at age 45," Ms. Hampel told Becker's, adding that under the task force's new recommendations, screenings should be covered for all insured Americans who are at least 45.

"Since the Affordable Care Act mandates that insurance companies cover preventative services with a Grade B or higher recommendation from the USPSTF with no copay, this screening should now be covered," she said. Colorectal cancer is the third leading cause of cancer death in the U.S., with nearly 53,000 people estimated to die of the disease in 2021, according to the American Cancer Society. [Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Erica Carbajal | May 18, 2021 ++]

Drug Price Gouging

Update 08: Drug Company Head Faces Grilling Over Massive Increases

Last week The Senior Citizens League (TSCl) reported that Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY), the Chairwoman of the Committee on Oversight and Reform, was going to hold a hybrid hearing to examine the pricing and business practices of AbbVie Inc., which sells the anti-inflammatory drug **Humira** and the cancer drug **Imbruvica**. Humira is the best-selling drug in the United States and the world and Maloney wanted to find out why its manufacturer, AbbVie, has raised its price 27 times since launching Humira in 2003. Humira is now priced at \$2,984 per syringe, or \$77,586 annually—a 470% increase from when the drug entered the market. AbbVie, and its partner Janssen Biotech, Inc., have also raised the price of Imbruvica nine times since launching the drug in 2013. Today, Imbruvica is priced at \$181,529 per year for a patient taking three pills per day, as compared to \$99,776 per year at launch.

Again, Maloney wanted to know why such huge price increases took place. According to a report in The Hill newspaper, Democrats on her committee accused the company of "taking advantage of patients and the health care system to charge more for medicine and bring in billions of dollars for revenue and executive bonuses." "You haven't made the drug any better even as you doubled the cost," Rep. Katie Porter (D-Calif.) said during the hearing. "You're feeding us lies that we must pay astronomical prices to get innovative products." In her closing remarks, Chairwoman Maloney said, "But the facts showed that AbbVie raised prices on Americans for one simple reason: greed." She added that AbbVie pushed for escalated prices in the U.S. because Medicare does not have the ability to negotiate lower drug prices, while other nations could.

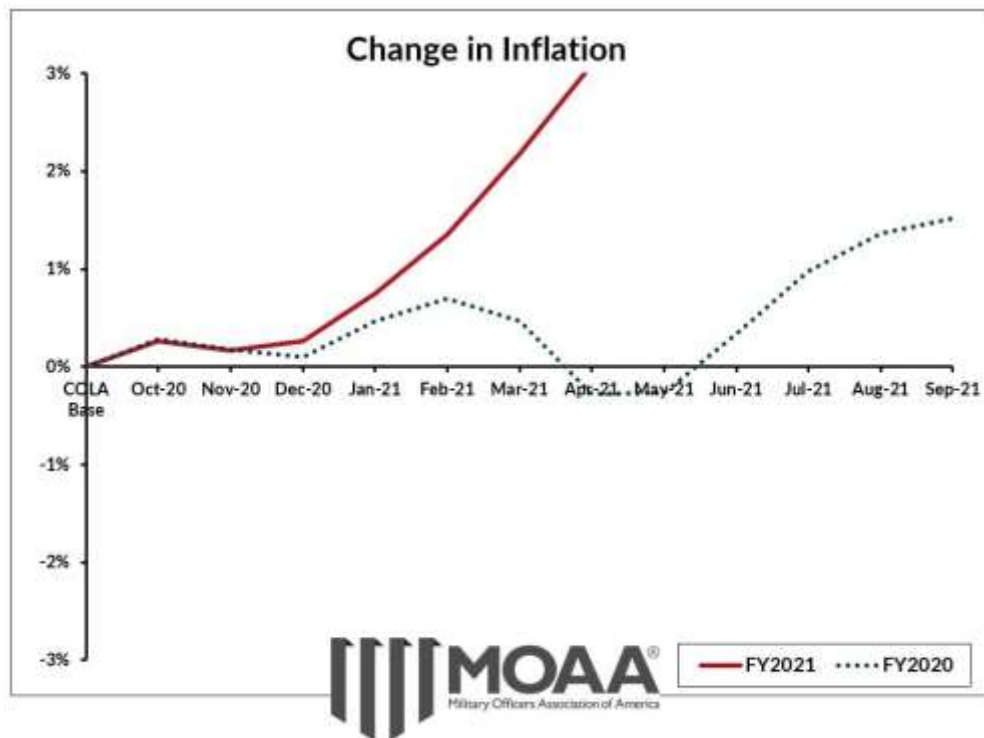
Committee member Rep. Clay Higgins (R-LA), asked the drug company representative, "How can you defend American prices of pharmaceuticals overseas versus the prices on drugs in the nation that you love?" "Your answers to the chair were evasive at best and appear to be obviously written by attorneys," Higgins said. TSCl is pleased that members of Congress are looking seriously at the problem of the outrageous costs of prescription drugs. Evidence like this will aid TSCl in their efforts to get legislation to reduce drug prices. [Source: TSCl Weekly Update | May 22, 2021 ++]



COLA FY 2021

April CPI

The April 2021 CPI is 261.237, 3.1 percent above the FY 2021 COLA baseline. The Consumer Price Index for May is scheduled to be released June 10. 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 | May13, 2021 ++]

COLA FY 2021

January COLA? Up, Up and Away!

Federal, military and Social Security retirees are in line for a cost of living adjustment (COLA) that could be their biggest in more than a decade. Current projections of the size of the inflation catchup range from 3% to as much as 4.7%. The higher 4.7% estimate comes from the Senior Citizens League, which says it would be the highest COLA since 2009 when retirees got 5.8%, reflecting price increases as the nation climbed out of the Great Recession. The final amount of the 2022 COLA won't be determined until living costs for July, August and September are tallied. That final figure won't be announced until early October.

Most recipients of Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and military and social security benefits will get the full COLA. Their benefits are linked to the official increase in inflation from the third quarter of this year over the third quarter of the previous year. And they are automatic. Most current federal retirees are under the CSRS program and will get the full amount of the 2022 COLA. But those who are under the newer Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) plan — the majority of current workers and of future retirees — aren't guaranteed full inflation protection. COLAs for them don't kick in until they are 62 or older, and the amount of the COLA is 1% less than the full inflation rate if it is 2% or higher. So if the COLA is 3%, they would get 2% in January. If it is higher, like the 4.7% estimate, they would get 3.7%. This year all retirees got a 1% COLA.

When Congress created the FERS program, it put civil servants under Social Security for the first time. And it gave them a more generous 401k plan option which includes a matching government contribution of up to 5%. CSRS employees do not get any government match to their Thrift Savings Plan accounts. In addition to getting a smaller federal annuity based on their contributions, cost of living adjustments for FERS retirees don't begin until age 62. Arthur Stein, a Washington area financial planner specializing in federal investors estimates, says that thanks to reverse compounding, the diet COLA can over an extended period of time reduce FERS retirees total income by as much as 30%. For more on what inflation over time can do to a FERS annuity, and what you can do to minimize the damage, [click here](#).

The January federal pay raise is a different animal. The amount each year is set by Congress and the White House based on political and fiscal conditions. This year, active duty civil servants got a 1% raise. President Biden has proposed a 2.7% pay raise while some House Democrats are pushing for a 3.2% increase. Under the House plan, 1% of the raise would be allocated to locality pay, meaning that feds in areas like Washington D.C., San Jose-San Francisco, Houston, New York City and Chicago would get bigger raises than their counterparts in Louisville, Salt Lake City or Fargo.

Although often confused, there can and usually are major differences between a federal pay raise and a COLA for retirees. When Congress gets a raise, many members refer to it as a cost of living catch-up, even though the final amount is often a political call with little or no relation to the rate of inflation as measured by the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index-W. That's a city-by-city pulse check by the Labor Department on prices for a market basket of goods.

Groups representing retirees, such as the National Active and Retired Federal Employees (NARFE), say the government should be using the CPI-E — for elderly — that takes into account higher costs for retirees for things like health care and prescriptions. While both CPI indexes measure food, drink, housing, clothing, transportation and costs for education and recreation, the CPI-E gives greater weight to medical costs. That

would benefit most retirees in the form of higher COLAs. [Source: Federal News Network | Mike Causey | May 27, 2021 ++]

Long Term Care FLTCIP

Update 12: Can Offer Peace of Mind

The prospect of needing long-term care may be far from your mind today, but circumstances can change. A long-term care event can happen at any age, and the potential financial and emotional strain that comes with it can have an impact on you and your loved ones. Unfortunately, traditional health insurance plans — including TRICARE For Life — do not pay for the chronic, ongoing assistance with daily living that is most often associated with long-term care. In fact, even the long-term care benefits offered through the VA are tied to specific triggers, including service-connected disability, available funding, and even your ability to contribute to the cost of care.

Long-term care can be expensive, and servicemembers often rely on the VA to cover associated costs. Depending on your eligibility status in the VA program, the level of coverage available to you might not be enough. For this reason, you may want to research stand-alone long-term care insurance like a plan offered through the Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program (FLTCIP). This program — created specifically for the federal family — offers active duty and retired uniformed servicemembers, including Reserve and National Guard members, the opportunity to help take control of their future long-term care needs with long-term care insurance. Designed to be both comprehensive and flexible, FLTCIP provides insurance coverage for qualified long-term care services, such as the type of care you may receive and where you receive it.

Coverage Under FLTCIP

FLTCIP 3.0, the current plan available to new applicants, offers comprehensive coverage, including a stay-at-home benefit and home care provided by friends and family, with added premium stability. Note: Informal care provided by friends and family members is covered, as long as the caregiver isn't your spouse or domestic partner and doesn't live in your home at the time you become eligible for benefits. Benefits for covered care provided by family members is limited to 500 days. What makes FLTCIP 3.0 unique is the premium stabilization feature. This built-in, innovative feature is designed to reduce the potential need for large future premium increases — a concern many consumers wanted the long-term care insurance industry to address. Under certain conditions, this amount may be used to offset an enrollee's future premium payments or provide a refund of premium death benefit.

FLTCIP is designed to reimburse for qualified long-term care services and can lessen or eliminate an individual's reliance on a loved one to provide hands-on care. 3.0 benefits include:

- International coverage up to 100% of the maximum lifetime benefit.
- Choice of a 3% automatic compound inflation option or future purchase option.
- Choice of a two-, three- or five-year benefit period.

There's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to long-term care insurance, and it's no secret that planning for your future care can be overwhelming. FLTCIP's new Guided Planner was designed to simplify the

process of building a FLTCIP plan that's right for you, and it will guide you through these key considerations:

- **Cost of care:** Compare the national average cost of long-term care with other locations in the U.S. You can choose where you live or plan to retire.
- **Care options:** Learn more about different care options, such as home care, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes, as well as the associated costs.
- **Inflation protection:** Understand the impact of inflation on the cost of care over time and see examples of how our inflation protection options can help.

Readers are encouraged to talk candidly with your family members and tell them about FLTCIP. Starting the conversation prior to needing care can help you prepare for the unexpected. If you're currently serving, your parents and parents-in-law are eligible to apply, too, even if you don't. Visit LTCFEDS.com/militaryfamily to learn more about the benefits of applying for FLTCIP. Personalized assistance from FLTCIP program consultants is available by calling (800) LTC-FEDS (800-582-3337)/TTY (800) 843-3557. Consultants are available to answer questions and can walk you step-by-step through the plan design and application process.

Note: Certain medical conditions, or combinations of conditions, will prevent some from being approved for coverage. You need to apply to find out whether you qualify for coverage under FLTCIP. The Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program is sponsored by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, insured by John Hancock Life & Health Insurance Company, under a group long-term care insurance policy and administered by Long Term Care Partners, LLC. To learn more about this and other long-term care insurance options, including those offered by MOAA Insurance Plans, visit MOAA.org/longtermcare. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | April 27, 2021 ++]

Uncommon State Tax Laws

Strange but True Tax Laws | NM - SC

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.

New Mexico: Happy Birthday

The year-round warmth of New Mexico draws many retirees, and the state tax rules have an interesting twist for the elderly: Those who are over 100 years old and not claimed as a dependent don't have to pay income tax.

New York: Any Way You Slice It

Looking forward to a delicious New York City bagel? Those who want it prepared — toasted, sliced, covered with cream cheese, or altered in any way — have to pay the 8.875% tax that applies to processed foods. An unsliced bagel to go, however, isn't taxed.

North Carolina: Taxing High Crimes, Too

The Tar Heel State also has a tax on illicit substances ranging from moonshine to marijuana. As the state department of revenue website points out, paying for the state tax stamp doesn't mean the drugs are legal, it just means the tax has been paid. Somewhat ironically for those possessing the illegal drugs, the bulk of the revenue from the stamps goes to law enforcement.

North Dakota: Have It for a Song

A musical composition performing tax levies 5% on the sale and licensing of performing rights for music and dramatico-musical compositions. The tax is based on gross receipts from the previous year.

Ohio: Going Organic

Ohio [doesn't tax human organs](#), bones, blood, or other parts for transfusing or transplanting. But sales tax applies to human hair and animal parts for transplantation and implantation.

Oklahoma: Taxing the Tangible

Most states have property taxes, but several counties in Oklahoma stand out because they tax personal possessions that aren't used to generate income. Even basic household items, such as furniture, could be subject to the "tangible personal property" tax.

Oregon: Going to Pot

Oregon started issuing marijuana licenses to retailers and lowered the state sales tax for recreational marijuana to 17% from 25% in October 2016. Municipalities can add up to 3% local sales tax on recreational marijuana, but medical marijuana is exempt from local and state sales tax.

Pennsylvania: After the Flood

The Keystone State has an 18% sales tax on liquor. While taxing booze isn't odd, the tax, initially 10%, was created specifically to pay for the repair of the city of Johnstown after a flood in 1936. Those repairs were completed in 1942, but the tax remains. So while death and taxes may be inevitable, taxes can take on a life of their own and live on indefinitely.

Rhode Island: Emoticon Tax Form

The Rhode Island individual income tax return form (RI-1040) features emoticons. A smiley face appears on the "Amount Overpaid" (refund) line, while a frowny face is shown on the "Total Amount Due" line.

South Carolina: The Carcass Credit

Hunters who also have a license or permit to operate as a meat packer, butcher, or processing plant could get a \$75 tax credit per carcass they donate to charity. The deer has to be prepared for consumption and the taxpayer must have a contract with a nonprofit to qualify for the credit.

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

Prescription Drug Costs

Update 71: Legislation Facing a Surprise Problem

In early MAY *Politico.com* reported that major legislation meant to lower prescription drug prices has run into unexpected trouble in the House of Representatives. It was always expected that few if any Republicans in the House of Representatives would support legislation to lower drug prices. But it turns out that a group of moderate Democrats has now said they do not support the sweeping legislation that

Democratic leaders in the House have proposed. According to Politico, “At least 10 caucus moderates are signaling opposition to Democrats’ drug pricing negotiation bill — more than enough to potentially force House Speaker Nancy Pelosi into dropping the reforms from [President Biden’s] infrastructure legislation Democrats hope to pass along party lines. Pelosi can only spare two Democratic defections on partisan legislation because of the party’s slim House majority.”

The report also states that “House leaders have said they’re committed to moving forward on H.R. 3, citing polls showing strong bipartisan support for empowering Medicare to negotiate drug prices. House Democratic leaders still see the infrastructure package as their best chance of passing major drug reforms, despite concerns raised by the moderate members, a senior aide said. “House Democrats in the previous Congress, when they enjoyed a larger majority, passed H.R. 3 almost entirely along party lines. The legislation went nowhere in the Senate, which was then controlled by Republicans, and former President Donald Trump opposed the bill. But many Democrats campaigned on the bill last cycle, showcasing it as an example of what the party could achieve if it won full control of Washington.”

Because the Democratic majority in the House is so slim, lawmakers are approaching legislation with an eye on the elections next year. Democrats, especially those facing tough reelection fights in swing districts, will face enormous pressure from the powerful drug lobby to oppose the bill. Instead of the sweeping legislation supported by the House Democratic leadership they have indicated supported for more modest measures that already have some Republican support. Those include things like capping Medicare enrollees’ out-of-pocket drug costs.

Again, according to the Politico report, “Several of the moderate Democrats expressing reservations about the drug pricing bill are the targets of a \$4 million-plus campaign by the conservative American Action Network opposing the legislation. The group plans to air ads in the districts of more than 40 Democrats, slamming H.R. 3 as “Nancy Pelosi’s socialist prescription drug takeover plan” and warning it would ‘cancel new cures for the patients who need them and send American innovation overseas.’”

Last year the Senate was a bigger problem when dealing with passing legislation but there still may be hope this year for a bi-partisan bill authored by Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR.) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA). “The bill would cap seniors’ drug costs and penalize drugmakers for raising prices too fast — a provision that many Republicans have likened to price controls. It would save the government a projected \$95 billion over a decade, far less than the \$450 billion-plus under the House negotiation bill,” according to Politico. [Source: TREA | May 17, 2021 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs

Update 72: President Will Not Propose Lowering Drug Prices in His Budget

When he ran for President last year Joe Biden made fixing health care, including Medicare and Medicaid, part of his campaign. Since becoming President, he has called on Congress to approve a plan to allow Medicare to lower spending on prescription drug costs and to strengthen Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act. Unfortunately, the President’s budget request, which will be released soon, will not include specific policies or cost estimates to advance these measures according to our sources in Washington.

The Senior Citizens League (TSCL) is very disappointed that this is the case but the fact remains that lowering drug prices remains extremely popular because everyone hates high drug prices. That's why TSCL will continue our work with members of Congress to get legislation introduced to lower those prices. We believe that if we can get drug price-reduction legislation through Congress the President will sign it. However, they need your continued support to get Congress to take action.

As they reported last week, Democrats in the House of Representatives are divided on what kind of legislation they will support and Republicans have refused to support any legislation the Democrats have passed to lower drug prices. In the Senate, there is bi-partisan legislation that would help lower prices but Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) blocked it last year when he was Majority Leader, and he still opposes it. So, seniors must work together to pressure Congress to get legislation passed to solve this crisis. [Source: TSCL Weekly Update | May 22, 2021 ++]

Free Trial Offer Scam 3

Trying CBD? Watch for Free Trial Cons

Cannabidiol (CBD), an active ingredient of cannabis, is now legal in many US states and Canadian provinces. If you want to try the drug, watch out for scams. BBB Scam Tracker has received dozens of reports from frustrated consumers who thought they signed up for a free trial offer but ended up getting billed for hundreds of dollars.

How the Scam Works:

- You see an ad for CBD on social media or in an online search. A company is offering samples of CBD oil. All you need to do is pay a couple dollars for shipping and handling, and you can try it for free. In some cases, the product is even endorsed by a celebrity. For example, recent Scam Tracker reports mention popular ministers Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen.
- Sounds great, right? Unfortunately, if you order the “free” sample, the scammers now have your credit card number. As soon after you receive your sample – if you receive it at all – you are charged \$80 to \$100 for an ongoing monthly subscription. Cancelling this subscription is not easy! Consumers report that scammers used numerous excuses to avoid issuing refunds. They claimed everything from trouble with the computer system to it being outside the cancellation window. Many victims also told Scam Tracker that the charges continued even after they cancelled their subscription.

Protect yourself from this scam:

- Research the company online. See what other people are saying about the company's free trials. Complaints from other customers can tip you off to “catches” that might come with the trial. Check the business's BBB Rating and see if there are any alerts.
- Understand what happens after the free trial ends. Always read the terms of the offer before signing up. Numerous victims of the CBD free trial con reported not ever seeing the terms and conditions. This is a huge red flag. If you can't find them or can't understand what you're agreeing to, don't sign up.

- Be skeptical of celebrity endorsements. Resist being swayed by the use of a well-known name. Scammers often fake celebrity endorsements.
- If you pay with a credit card, dispute fraudulent charges. Keep an eye on your monthly statements and notify your credit card company of any suspicious charges.

For More Information

Read BBB’s special report on [free trial offer scams](#). Learn more about scams on [social media advertising](#). 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 30, 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](#).)

- 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. 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. 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 23, 2021 ++]

Moving Scams

Update 01: New Home? Look Out

May marks the beginning of summer and the busiest time for moving. Unfortunately, more people moving means more potential for scams. Always do your homework when hiring a moving company and look out for these warning signs.

How moving scams work

Most moving scams take one of these three approaches:

- Consumers receive a quote and pay a deposit. But the “movers” never show up.
- The moving company provides a quote based on expected weight and, after loading the truck, they inform you that the load is over the expected weight and you must pay an additional fee. Most of the time, the fee is significantly more expensive, sometimes as much as double the original estimate.
- The most disruptive and difficult to anticipate moving scam is when everything appears to be going well. The movers provide an estimate, arrive on time and load your belongings on a truck. However, this is where the interaction turns disastrous. When the truck fails to arrive at its destination, either your belongings are simply gone or the company requires you to pay an additional fee to have them delivered, holding the possessions hostage.

Protect yourself from this scam:

- Watch out for warning signs. When reviewing a company's website, if there is no address or information about a mover's registration or insurance, it is a red flag.
- Be wary of unusual requests. If a mover asks for a large down payment or full payment in advance, that may be an indication of a fraudulent business.
- Get everything in writing. An identification number, issued by the [Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration](#) (FMCSA), is required of all interstate moving companies. This number [can be verified here](#). Make sure to carefully read the terms and conditions of the contract, as well as the limits of liability and any disclaimers. The pickup and expected delivery date should be easily identified.

- Keep an inventory of your belongings. Having an inventory sheet is one of the best ways to keep track of your possessions. Taking photos of the contents prior to packing is a great way to prove if damages were incurred during the moving process.

For More Information

Read the full [BBB alert](#) for more moving tips. To access BBB's 2020 report of moving scams, visit [BBB.org/MoverScams](#). 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 | May 14, 2021 ++]

Fortune Teller Scams

Take Your Cash & Don't Show Up

Astrology, tarot, and other psychic services is [a \\$2 billion industry](#), and scammers are cashing in on its popularity. BBB Scam Tracker has received reports from people who paid for psychic readings and other services but never received what they were promised.

How the Scam Works

- You follow a social media account that posts frequently about astrology, tarot, or a similar topic. You notice the content creator offers personal astrology and psychic readings, so you book a session. After selecting a time and date, you're directed to pay using a digital wallet app, such as [CashApp](#). When the time comes for your session, the psychic is unreachable. Unfortunately, when you ask about a refund, they block you or simply disappear.
- Complaints about no-show psychics are the most common version of this scam reported to BBB Scam Tracker, but watch out for variations. Consumers also reported seeing phony reviews or being pressured into paying additional services. For example, one victim reported losing \$3,500 to one such scammer. "She gets you to come back by saying she will do healing meditation to get rid of the evil spirits," the report read. "She pressures you that you need to give her cash to 'cleanse' the evil spirits."

Protect yourself from this scam:

- Evaluate the seller's social media profile. Look for someone who posts frequently, responds quickly, and clearly displays and describes the services they provide.
- Read the comments on their posts. Disgruntled customers sometimes comment on a seller's posts to inform potential customers about their poor experiences. However, this is not a foolproof way to tell if you're dealing with a phony seller since comments can be deleted or hidden.
- Check for clear appointment protocols. A trustworthy professional will have a streamlined process dictating how they book appointments to ensure they do not overbook themselves.
- Get everything in writing. Sellers should provide written confirmation of your purchase, the charges, relevant appointment details and instructions on what to do in event of a cancellation.

- Look out for red flags when paying. For example, one consumer told BBB a seller insisted they pay via a digital transfer app, and they were required to label the charge as a friends and family payment. This circumvents safeguards in place that could otherwise protect consumers from scams.

For More Information

Check out [BBB's online shopping tips](#) for guidance on shopping within social media apps. 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 | May 28, 2021 ++]

Tax Burden for North Carolina Vets

As of May 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 retired in **North Carolina** in 2021. Note - This state has a statutory provision for automatic adjustment of tax brackets, personal exemptions or standard deductions to the rate of inflation.

Sales Taxes

The North Carolina state sales tax rate is 4.75%, and the average NC sales tax after local surtaxes is 6.9% which is lower than 51.9% of states

- Prescription Drugs are exempt from the North Carolina sales tax. Groceries (2%) and prepared food (8.5%) are subject to special sales tax rates under North Carolina law. In most states, necessities such as groceries, clothes, and drugs are exempted from the sales tax or charged at a lower sales tax rate.
- Counties and cities can charge an additional local sales tax of up to 2.75%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 7.5%
- North Carolina has 1012 special sales tax jurisdictions with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax
- There is a state wide sales tax holiday on the first weekend of August (Friday to Sunday) for the benefit of back-to-school shoppers during which no sales tax is collected on most school related purchases. Exempt items include notebooks, computer equipment, school supplies, clothes, and sporting goods.

Excise Taxes

An excise tax is a tax directly levied on certain goods by a state or federal government. The most prominent excise taxes collected by the state government are the fuel tax on gasoline and the so-called "sin tax" collected on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. North Carolina's excise taxes are flat per-unit taxes that must be paid directly to the state government by the merchant before the goods can be sold. Merchants may

be required to attach tax stamps to taxable merchandise to show that the excise tax was paid. Even though excise taxes are collected from businesses, virtually all merchants pass on the excise tax to the customer through higher prices for the taxed goods. An average of \$398 in yearly excise taxes per capita is collected, lower than 64% of the other 50 states.

- **Alcohol:** Beer: \$0.62 per gal | Wine: \$1.00 per gal | Liquor \$12.30 per gal. The excise tax on beer is higher than 84% of the other 50 states and is ranked #42 out of all states. The excise tax on wine is higher than 58% of all states and is ranked #21 out of the 50 states. The excise tax on Spirits is higher than 86% of all states and is ranked #43 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:** none
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans in North Carolina is \$9.43 per phone service plan, higher than 50% of the other 50 states. North Carolina's average cellphone tax is ranked #25 out of the 50 states. The North Carolina 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 North Carolina excise tax on cigarettes is \$0.45 per 20 cigarettes, one of the lowest cigarettes taxes in the country. North Carolina's excise tax on cigarettes is ranked #44 out of the 50 states. The North Carolina cigarette tax of \$0.45 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 North Carolina excise tax on gasoline is 37.50¢ per gallon, one of the highest gas taxes in the country. North Carolina's excise tax on gasoline is ranked #6 out of the 50 states. The North Carolina gas tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations in North Carolina 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:** North Carolina 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 North Carolina Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid.

Personal Income Taxes

The average family pays \$ 2,868 in income taxes which is ranked 2nd highest of all 51 states.

Tax Rate: Flat 5.25%

Personal Exemptions: None

Standard Deduction: Single – \$10,750; Married filing jointly – \$21,500; Head of Household \$16,125

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security is exempt. All other forms of retirement income are taxed at the North Carolina flat income tax rate of 5.25%. The deductions for certain taxpayers of up to \$4,000 for federal, state or local government retirement benefits or up to \$2,000 for private retirement benefits are no longer available as of 2014. For more details on retirement income deductions, [click here](#).

Retired Military Pay: If an individual had five years of creditable service as of August 12, 1989, all military retired pay is exempt from taxes. Otherwise, a deduction of up to \$4,000 is allowed for military pay or survivor's benefits.

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.

Website: North Carolina Department of Revenue <https://www.ncdor.gov>

Tax Forms:

- <https://files.nc.gov/ncdor/documents/files/2020-D-401-Instruction-Booklet.pdf> D-401 Tax Instructions
- <https://files.nc.gov/ncdor/documents/files/2020-D-400-Web.pdf> Form D-400 - Individual Income Tax Return
- <https://www.ncdor.gov/taxes-forms> All Tax forms

Property Taxes

The median property tax is \$1,209 per year for a home worth the median value of \$155,300. Counties collect an average of 0.78% of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year. North Carolina is ranked number 15 lowest out of the fifty states, in order of the average amount of property taxes collected. The state's median income is \$55,928 per year, so the median yearly property tax paid by residents amounts to approximately 2.16% of their yearly income. North Carolina is ranked 34th of the 50 states for property taxes as a percentage of median income.

The exact property tax levied depends on the county in North Carolina the property is located in. Orange County collects the highest property tax in North Carolina, levying an average of \$2,829.00 (1.09% of median home value) yearly in property taxes, while Montgomery County has the lowest property tax in the state, collecting an average tax of \$494.00 (0.59% of median home value) per year.. Property taxes are collected on a county level, and each county has its own method of assessing and collecting taxes. As a result, it's not possible to provide a single property tax rate that applies uniformly to all properties in Montana. For more localized property tax rates refer to the county list at http://www.tax-rates.org/north_carolina/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.

A set of North Carolina homestead exemption rules provide property tax relief to seniors and people with disabilities. If you are totally and permanently disabled or age 65 and over, and you make below an

income limit of \$31,000, you can exempt from property tax half of your home's assessed value or \$25,000, whichever is greater. The income limit often increases from year to year.

If you are a disabled military veteran in North Carolina, regardless of your age or income, you may also be eligible for a separate program that excludes the first \$45,000 in assessed value of your home from property tax. You must have a total and permanent service-related disability or have received benefits for specially adapted housing, received an honorable discharge or left the military under honorable conditions. Surviving spouses of such veterans, and of veterans or service members who died due to service-related conditions, are also eligible for the benefit if they haven't remarried.

North Carolina's Circuit Breaker Property Tax Deferment Program limits taxes for each year to a percentage of income. The qualifying owner must either be at least 65 years of age or totally and permanently disabled. The Current income limit is \$31,000. Property owners with income over that amount but not exceeding 150% of the eligibility limit (\$46,500 for 2019) will pay taxes equal to 5% of income. Unlike the disabled veteran, senior citizen and other North Carolina benefits for housing, the tax isn't erased entirely. Instead, it becomes a lien on the property that comes due if the property is transferred, the owner passes away or the owner ceases to use the property as his or her primary residence. The income limit tends to increase from year to year.

Taxpayers may only enroll in one of the programs even if they're eligible for more than one according to age, disability and veteran status. The program that is most advantageous may vary based on your income and your home's assessed value. You can, however, apply for multiple programs at once through the North Carolina Department of Revenue's Application for Property Tax Relief, and if you're eligible for more than one, you'll be given the option to choose the appropriate one for your needs.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

The federal estate tax is imposed on the transfer of the taxable estate of every decedent who is a citizen or resident of the United States. Federal estate taxes give very wealthy families incentives to transfer resources directly to distant generations in order to avoid taxes on successive rounds of transfers. Until recently such transfers were impeded by the rule against perpetuities, which prevented transfers to most potential not-yet-born beneficiaries. Many American states have repealed the rule against perpetuities, raising concerns that the combination of tax incentives and new legal rights encourages the devotion of vast wealth to perpetual trusts designed to benefit distant generations, avoid taxes, and maintain a degree of control over the financial affairs of descendants in perpetuity. A certain amount of each estate is exempted from Federal taxation by the law. In 2020 this was \$11.58 million with amounts over that taxed a 40%.

Currently, fifteen states and the District of Columbia have an estate tax, and six states have an inheritance tax. Maryland has both. In states that impose an Inheritance tax, the tax rate depends on the status of the person receiving the property, and in some jurisdictions, how much they receive. Inheritance taxes are paid not by the estate of the deceased, but by the inheritors of the estate. North Carolina has neither an estate tax or nor an inheritance tax

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 North Carolina Department of Revenue site <https://www.ncdor.gov>.
 [Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#NORTHCAROLINA> | May 2021
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*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest

May 01 thru 31, 2021

- **Project Virgil.** Check out the 6 min clip at <https://pinearts.smugmug.com/The-Boy-on-the-Beach-Omaha-Beach-2014/i-vPVMh5F/A> of a young boy's observance of D-Day.
- **USMC Vet Story.** At <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/88026/life-story-8-hank-getting-focused> listen to a Vietnam vet relate his experiences during and after the war.
- **Census.** The U.S. Census Bureau announced that the 2020 Census shows the resident population of the United States on April 1, 2020, was 331,449,281. The U.S. resident population represents the total number of people living in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The resident population increased by 22,703,743 or 7.4% from 308,745,538 in 2010.
- **USAF Early Out.** As of May 27, the Air Force is ending early separation initiatives put in place to balance high numbers of airmen who chose to stay in the military amid the pandemic's economic uncertainty. Hundreds have accepted offers to retire early or serve the remainder of their military commitments in the Air Force Reserve or Air National Guard.
- **Russia*U.S. Relations.** Russian President Vladimir Putin's government has branded the United States an "unfriendly" nation, putting a new legal stamp on tensions with Washington in advance of high-level meetings with President Joe Biden's administration.
- **Capital Riot.** As of 6 MAY at least 47 of the 440 arrested are current or former military members. Of those, one is an active duty service member, four are current part-time troops in the Army Reserve or National Guard, and 42 previously served in the military, according to attorney statements, military service records and court documents obtained by CBS News. At least 10 of those arrested were either former police officers or were employed as law enforcement officers at the time of the riot
- **USN.** The U.S. Navy will request funding for eight new vessels in the next fiscal year budget, down from the 12 originally sought in a Trump administration blueprint meant to build a vastly larger fleet of ships and submarines, according to budget data and officials.

- **Holocaust.** Surviving members of Hitler's Third Reich speak in chilling new documentary 'Final Account' released 21 MAY whose trailer can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/qobRIgAyQiY>. This rare perspective of the Holocaust is taken from that of that of the perpetrators vice the victims.
- **Cares Act.** Twenty billion dollars is nothing to sneeze at, even for a department as big as Veterans Affairs. But that's how much extra VA got in the CARES Act aimed at pandemic relief and passed in March of 2020. This year, though, VA has only obligated about half the money according to the GAO.
- **U.S.*Russia.** The Russian parliament's lower house voted 19 MAY to withdraw from an international treaty allowing surveillance flights over military facilities following the U.S. departure from the pact.
- **RSVP.** While commonly known to most non-French speakers simply to signal a reservation response to an invitation, actually stands for "répondez s'il vous plaît," French for "please reply."
- **Iran/UN.** Iran and the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog agreed on 24 MAY to a one-month extension to a deal on surveillance cameras at Tehran's atomic sites, buying more time for ongoing negotiations seeking to save the country's tattered nuclear deal with world powers.

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

DPRK-U.S. Relations

Update 03: U.S. Warned of 'Very Grave Situation' Over Biden Speech

North Korea on 1 MAY warned the United States will face "a very grave situation" because President Joe Biden "made a big blunder" in his recent speech by calling the North a security threat and revealing his intent to maintain a hostile policy toward it. In the previous week, Biden, in his first address to Congress, called North Korea and Iran's nuclear programs "a serious threat to America's security and world security," and said he'll work with allies to address those problems through diplomacy and stern deterrence. "His statement clearly reflects his intent to keep enforcing the hostile policy toward the DPRK as it had been done by the U.S. for over half a century," Kwon Jong Gun, a senior North Korean Foreign Ministry official, said in a statement. DPRK stands for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the North's official name.

"It is certain that the U.S. chief executive made a big blunder in the light of the present-day viewpoint," Kwon said. "Now that the keynote of the U.S. new DPRK policy has become clear, we will be compelled to press for corresponding measures, and with time the U.S. will find itself in a very grave situation. "Kwon still didn't specify what steps North Korea would take, and his statement could be seen as an effort to apply pressure on the Biden administration as it's shaping up its North Korea policy. Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said that U.S. policy is "not aimed at hostility, it's aimed at solutions" and at "ultimately achieving the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." "And we're prepared to engage in diplomacy towards that ultimate objective, but work on practical measures that can help us make progress along the way toward that goal," Sullivan said on ABC's "This Week."

The White House said 29 APR administration officials had completed a review of U.S. policy toward North Korea, saying Biden plans to veer from the approaches of his two most recent predecessors as he tries to stop North Korea's nuclear program. Press secretary Jen Psaki did not detail findings of the review,

but suggested the administration would seek a middle ground between Donald Trump's "grand bargain" and Barack Obama's "strategic patience" approaches. Kwon's statement didn't mention Psaki's comments.

After performing a series of high-profile nuclear and missile tests in 2016-17, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un launched summit diplomacy with Trump on the future of his growing nuclear arsenal. But that diplomacy remains stalled for about two years over differences in how much sanctions relief North Korea could win in return for limited denuclearization steps. In January, Kim threatened to enlarge his nuclear arsenal and build more high-tech weapons targeting the U.S. mainland, saying the fate of bilateral ties would depend on whether it abandons its hostile policy. Despite testing its short-range ballistic missile in March, the first launches in a year, North Korea has maintained a self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and long-range missile tests since it entered talks with Trump three years ago.

"If Pyongyang agrees to working-level talks, the starting point of negotiations would be a freeze of North Korean testing and development of nuclear capabilities and delivery systems," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said. "If, on the other hand, Kim shuns diplomacy and opts for provocative tests, Washington will likely expand sanctions enforcement and military exercises with allies."

On 1 MAY, Kim's powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong, slammed South Korea over recent anti-Pyongyang leaflets that were sent by balloons across the border by a group of defectors in the South. The group's leader, Park Sang-hak, said Friday he sent 500,000 leaflets last week, in a defiance of a new South Korean law that criminalizes such action. "We regard the maneuvers committed by the human waste in the South as a serious provocation against our state and will look into corresponding action," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement. She accused the South Korean government of "winking at" the leaflets.

South Korean officials earlier said they were checking if Park truly floated the leaflets and that they would deal with the case in line with the law. Easley said the two back-to-back North Korean statements Sunday show that "Pyongyang is trying to drive a wedge between South Korea and the United States" ahead of the May 21 summit between Biden and South Korean President Moon Jae-in. [Source: Associated Press | Hyung-Jin Kim | May 1, 2021 ++]

Hacks & Gadgets

Items that Can Save You Time/Money with Hidden Purposes

There are very common household items, prevalent throughout our everyday lives hiding some very neat tricks and secrets. These items can solve LOADS of pesky little issues around the house when repurposed correctly. After all, most of us are spending plenty of time around the house right about now — so might as well make the most of it! Here are 8 common items, hacks and gadgets that can save you time, money and surprise you with a cool hidden purpose (or re-purposing) you never knew!



Gas Gauge Arrow

This is something you may or may not have noticed before. Next to the gas gauge of nearly every car that's been manufactured since 2010, there is an arrow that either points to the left or the right. A lot of people may not have even noticed it before it was pointed out to them. This is simply a way to indicate to the driver whether their gas cap is on the left side of the car or the right side of the car. Most people don't need a reminder because after filling their tank once or twice with a new car, it becomes instinct what side to pull into at the gas station. However, next time you drive a rental car, remember that the arrow is there; otherwise, you'll look foolish when you try to fill your tank only to realize the cap is on the other side.

Ridges on Coins

We're not sure if everyone has noticed this, but both quarters and dimes have rough edges while pennies and nickels don't. Go ahead, check all of your coins to confirm that I'm not lying to you. See, it's true. Well, the reason for this goes back to the days when coins were stamped in different weights to reflect the true value of the coin. To stop people from shaving the edges of the coins and melting them into new coins, minters put ridges on coins made of precious metals so that it would be easy to tell if the edges had been shaved off. It's not really an issue today, but we still have edges on our coins.

Holes in Pot Handle

Unless you're a professional cook, you may be confused as to why most pots and pans have a hole at the end of the handle. You may not have even noticed that the hole is there. There are actually two good reasons why pots and pans have this hole. First, it makes it easy to hang them up on hooks when they're drying or not in use. This is often seen in professional kitchens or house that have a lot of space. Another trick that experienced chefs like to use is using that hole to hold a utensil. For example, if you have a stirring spoon, you don't just want to leave it in the pot or set it on the counter. But with the hole at the end of the handle, you can slide the utensil in there so it just sits up and drips back into the pot. Try it out next time you want to impress people with your cooking skills.

Loop in Back of Shirt

First of all, this doesn't apply to garden-variety t-shirts. Surely, you own at least one nice, collared shirt that has this mysterious loop in the middle of your back. We actually have the Navy to thank for the loops on our shirts. Believe it or not, there isn't a lot of closet space while you're out at sea, so sailors would have loops on their shirts so they could just hang them on hooks. College kids in the 1960s also utilized the loops, as they could hang up their shirts and keep them neat and wrinkle-free while at the gym. Today, manufacturers put them on shirts as a sign of class and quality. Also, you may have noticed that young ladies sometimes pull the hooks of boys they like, so there is still a practical reason to have these on our shirts.

Randomly Placed Buttons on Jeans

Avid jeans wearers are no doubt aware of all the extra buttons scattered about their pants, usually around their pockets. Yes, it seems a little odd, but you've probably just accepted that's how jeans are made. But those buttons actually have an important purpose. First, they're technically called rivets, even if they resemble buttons. More importantly, they are strategically placed on the jeans to prevent them from getting worn out at the seams and ripping. Imagine that happening at an inopportune time and you'll be glad your jeans are properly riveted. It's actually interesting to note that jean tycoon Levi Strauss owns the patent on these rivets. The idea came about in 1829 after miners complained about how quickly their jeans were

wearing out. Young Mr. Strauss came up with a solution to the problem, and now it seems like jeans can practically last forever.

Pour Salt Down Your Sink Drain To Fix Clogs

Salt is one of the most commonly found minerals on earth. And while most people associate it with cooking, it actually has tons of uses all around the house. One of the more helpful alternatives uses for salt is to help fix clogged drains. Here's what you need to do. First, clear as much of the blockage as you can by hand. Then take 1/2 a cup of salt and 1/2 a cup of baking soda and pour it into the drain. Then take vinegar and pour it down the hole. It will bubble up fast, then by the time the bubbles stop, the clog should be gone. Salt can also be used for things like putting out a dangerous grease fire. You can also use it as an abrasive to help clean a very dirty pot or pan. There are literally ended uses for salt around the house, that's why it pays to always keep extra in your pantry.

Cleaning Your Shower Using A Dishwasher Tablet

Let's face it, cleaning the bathroom is a thankless task that seems almost impossible to get done properly. It takes a ton of elbow grease to get the shower spotless. And even after what seems like hours of scrubbing, it still looks dirty. There's an easy solution to this... dishwasher tablets! Take a sponge, cut out a small hole, and insert a dishwasher tablet. Now when you go to clean your shower doors, instead of endless scrubbing, just rub this sponge over the door and wash away. It's that easy. It even works on shower curtains, the tub, and faucets!

Dip in Wine Bottle

So you like drinking wine, huh? Well, then you probably noticed that sizable dip at the bottom of the bottle. It seems a little odd, but there are a number of reasons why it's there. For starters, it's called a punt or a kick-up, although it's not exactly clear why it's called that. In any event, it makes the bottle a little more stable, so it won't fall over and break with a slight touch or a strong wind if you happen to like taking a bottle on a picnic. Having the punt at the bottom also makes the bottle stronger so it can hold up to higher pressure if there is champagne or sparkling wine inside. The punt also makes it easier to distribute steam while cleaning the bottle before the wine is poured into it, ensuring that your wine is as pristine as possible.

[Source: <https://wpa.livestly.com> | Amanda Wagner | November 17, 2020 ++]

Car Safety

Update 01: Ninety vehicles earn 2021 IIHS awards



The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) is recognizing 49 models for providing the highest level of safety — more than double the number that earned the Top Safety Pick+ award in 2020. Another 41 vehicles earn Top Safety Pick (without the plus), bringing the total number of 2021 award winners to 90, compared with 64 in February 2020. “With these awards, we want to make it easy for consumers to find vehicles that provide good protection in crashes, sufficient lighting and effective front crash protection,” IIHS President David Harkey says. “Manufacturers have stepped up to meet the challenge, and the list of great options has grown to an impressive size this year.”

Both awards require good ratings in all six IIHS crashworthiness tests — driver- and passenger-side small overlap front, moderate overlap front, side, roof strength and head restraints. Award winners must be available with front crash prevention that earns a superior or advanced rating in both vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-pedestrian evaluations. Last but not least, Top Safety Pick winners must be available with good or acceptable headlights. The “plus” designation is given to models that have good or acceptable headlights across all trim levels and packages. This year:

- Of all manufacturers, Hyundai Motor Group, including the Hyundai, Kia and Genesis brands, has the most 2021 awards — 12 regular Top Safety Picks and five pluses.
- Volvo has the most Top Safety Pick+ awards with nine.
- Mitsubishi is the only one automaker who has failed to earn a single award so far.
- The low number of awards for General Motors — one Top Safety Pick and one Top Safety Pick+ — is striking for such a large manufacturer.
- Two minivans, the Honda Odyssey and Toyota Sienna, qualify for the Top Safety Pick+ award.
- A pickup truck, the Ram 1500 crew cab, qualifies for Top Safety Pick and is the only winner from Stellantis, the company created by the recent merger of Fiat Chrysler and Peugeot. A year ago, there were no minivans or pickups in the winner’s circle.

Headlight improvements

IIHS has been using a two-tier award system since 2013 as a way to phase in new requirements that may be tough for all manufacturers to meet immediately. Over the years, IIHS has used Top Safety Pick+ to introduce new crash tests and crash avoidance criteria before making them part of the requirements for the regular Top Safety Pick award. Headlight ratings were first incorporated into Top Safety Pick+ criteria for the 2017 award year. To qualify for the highest award, vehicles had to at least have good or acceptable headlights available as an option. The following year, that requirement became part of the base award.

As manufacturers showed they could produce headlights with better lighting and less glare, IIHS decided to encourage them to make this improved equipment standard. Starting in 2020, only vehicles with good or acceptable headlights across the board could earn Top Safety Pick+. The strategy seems to be working. A year ago, only 23 vehicles qualified for the higher-tier award. Today, the number has more than doubled, and the majority of awards handed out for 2021 models include the plus sign.

Front crash prevention

Vehicles don’t have to have front crash prevention as standard equipment to qualify for either award, but a voluntary manufacturer commitment is helping on that front. Twenty automakers have signed the pledge to equip at least 95 percent of vehicles they make with vehicle-to-vehicle automatic emergency braking beginning in the 2022-23 production year. All 49 Top Safety Pick+ winners and 31 Top Safety Pick winners have standard systems that meet the vehicle-to-vehicle requirement. Forty-eight of the Top Safety Pick+ winners and 26 of the TOP SAFETY PICK winners also meet the pedestrian crash prevention criterion with their standard systems. The others qualify based on optional equipment.

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The extensive list of criteria for both headlight and front crash prevention awards means many vehicles check all boxes but one. Twelve vehicles are only lacking good or acceptable headlights, while seven don't have pedestrian crash prevention that earns a superior or advanced rating. Only five fall short on crashworthiness. All five lack a good rating in the passenger-side small overlap front test. At the IIHS website, you can find a list of all the vehicles that earned Top Safety Pick+ and Top Safety Pick status. New cars have the latest and greatest safety features. But they tend to cost far more than used cars, and their value begins to tumble soon after you purchase them. At <https://www.iihs.org/news/detail/choices-expand-for-safety-conscious-consumers-as-90-vehicles-earn-iihs-awards> is provided a list of the cars that earned either the Top Safety Pick+ or the Top Safety Pick awards. The list is broken down by car sizes and types. Clicking on any specific car listed will bring up a picture of it and the ratings given it for crashworthiness, crash avoidance & mitigation, child seat anchors, along with a list of other safety features. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | March 10, 2021 ++]

Home Pests

How to Keep Them at Bay

Fleas, spiders, termites, flies, centipedes, ants, bedbugs, cockroaches ... these tenacious intruders won't give up, so we humans have to fight for our living spaces — especially since we're spending more time in them these days due to the coronavirus pandemic. In the quest to [keep their homes clean](#) and bug-free, many people don't want to expose their households to toxins or shell out lots of cash to debug. Fortunately, many homes don't require a professional exterminator to keep pests at bay. There are plenty of cheap, natural ways to control these invaders.

Break Out Borax for Roaches

- For cheap, natural roach bait, use borax (or boric acid) or a mixture of equal parts baking powder and sugar. The bugs carry the bait back to the colony, poisoning the lair. Sprinkle it along floorboards in rooms where roaches appear. (Note: Keep borax out of reach of kids and animals, and consider the baking powder/sugar mix in households with kids or pets.)
- Try Herbs to Make Roaches Flee Time to hit your garden or farmers market. Bay leaves, cucumber, and garlic effectively repel roaches.
- Another cheap cockroach repellent: catnip. Leave small sachets in areas where cockroaches appear. Homeowners can target individual roaches by mixing equal parts dish soap and water in a spray bottle and spraying directly on the pests.

Summon the Nematodes

Fight critters with critters. Nematodes are microscopic worms that are parasitic toward larvae or consume larvae, thereby keeping pest populations from growing. They can take down fleas, termites, cutworms, Japanese beetles, sod webworms, and a couple hundred other unwelcome pests. Nematodes are completely safe around people and animals other than insects. Use *Steinernema feltiae* (a nematode species) for warmer areas and *Steinernema carpocapsae* in cooler areas. Consumers can pay \$78 for 10 million active worms on Peaceful Valley Farm & Garden Supply, or find similar prices at a garden supply store. Online reviews suggest these nematodes are worth their weight in gold. Water them down and apply with a

watering can or gardening spray to the lawn and alleyways around the house. The recommended rate is 10 million per 600 square feet.

Make a Fruit Fly Trap

Fruit flies are gross, for sure, but harmless and easily removed. Generally, solutions to fruit fly infestations involve insecticides, or a crafty cone and special oil. But the easiest and cheapest method is pour about an inch of vinegar plus a squirt of dish soap into a plastic cup, glass, or bottle and cover with cling wrap. (An alternative to vinegar is a piece of the rotting fruit.) Secure the film with a rubber band and poke a few slim holes, and place the trap in the problem area. When curious fruit flies enter the vessel, the cover and sticky dish soap will prevent them from getting back out. We tested this method with basic white vinegar, generic Costco dish soap, dollar store cling wrap, and patience. Within a few hours, all the fruit flies got stuck in the container.

Make Lizards Shoo

Small insects and bugs naturally attract reptile predators, so with one pest problem comes another. Fortunately, many household ingredients drive out lizards.

- Try a spray of water plus hot sauce, onions, garlic juice, or pepper and chili powder. Spray around dark areas (behind cabinets and furniture), windows, and doors.
- If the solution doesn't work, rolled balls made of ground coffee and tobacco powder, fly paper, or cheap mouse traps can take care of lizards too. It's preferable not to kill them, though, as they're harmless and control the insect population outdoors.
- It seems a bit voodoo, but it's true that hanging or displaying bird feathers or spreading egg shells around the house, especially near doors and windows, can ward off lizards. They are birds' natural prey and hate the eggy smell (replace the shells every three to four weeks).

Protect Dogs With Essential Oils

Dog owners can protect their pets and homes from fleas without pricey flea-and-tick collars. Mixes of certain essential oils and natural ingredients function as do-it-yourself flea and tick repellants. Recipes generally incorporate rose geranium oil, lemon oil, eucalyptus oil, citrus oil, peppermint oil, or almond oil (about \$3 to \$13 a bottle). The bottles are small, but just a few drops at a time do the trick. Be sure to avoid any oils potentially harmful to dogs (listed here). Some DIY sprays also involve distilled white or apple cider vinegar. Apply the mixture to a doggie bandana, or spray lightly on the dog's harness and/or coat before venturing outdoors. One other natural way to repel fleas: cedar chips on the lawn.

Ward Off Spiders

- *With Plants:* While spiders help with household insects, such as mosquitos, flies, earwigs, roaches, and moths, arachnophobia may be encoded in our DNA. Many plants and natural oils repel spiders with great success. Eucalyptus, garlic, cilantro, conkers, and Osage hedge balls can be grown or placed in or outdoors to ward off spiders cheaply. Also consider putting chestnuts near windows and doors; spiders find them rank.
- *Get Rid of a Spider ASAP:* While spiders are really your friends in the fight against pests if you must kill one immediately, try a spray bottle with a few garlic cloves and water, or peppermint oil and water, or an essential oil of choice with dish soap and water. The pest control information site PestKill also recommends citronella candles, a refrigerated blend of tomato leaves and water in a spray bottle, or lemon dish soap mixed with water and five drops of citronella for spider prevention. Spray these natural concoctions near doors and windows.

Send Bedbugs Packing

Professional extermination services can be depressingly expensive, so try natural remedies first. Experts recommend preventive cleaning measures, such as vacuuming mattresses, washing bedding, scrubbing floors with a solution of rubbing alcohol and water, and cleaning doormats regularly. If bedbugs seem to have spread, use a hot iron on all clothes and bedding. Alternatively, clothes can be soaked in freezing cold water to kill these nasty little guys; they can't survive extreme cold or heat. Next, call on tea tree oil, Indian lilac ("neem") leaves, lavender oil, or black walnut leaves to eliminate the infestation. Natural-HomeRemedies has specific instructions.

[Source: Cheapism | Gina Martinez| April 07, 2021 ++]

Emigration Options

Countries You Can Emigrate to If You're Over 50

America's turbulent past few years has seen more residents [giving up their citizenship](#) and hightailing it for other countries. More than 5,800 Americans gave up their citizenship in the first six months of 2020, a steep jump from the 2,072 who renounced their citizenship in all of the previous year, says [Bambridge Accountants](#), a company specializing in preparing taxes for expats. The figure was only 1,534 a decade ago, when a Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act went into effect. But relocating with a resident visa to another country is not as easy for some Americans as it is for others. Those [over the age of 50](#) might find themselves shut out of residency in some of the world's most popular countries, such as Australia (unless of course you can [meet strict criteria](#)). Here are some countries still happy to become new homes to relocating people over 50.

New Zealand

You can't be an Aussie; how about being a Kiwi? New Zealand, Australia's neighbor in the South Pacific, offers several visa options, including a Work to Residence visa for those 55 or younger. To qualify, you must have a skill that's on the country's "[Long Term Skill Shortage List](#)" and work with an accredited employer. The country's immigration website notes that many of its work visa options are available to applicants of all ages, just in case getting resident status is not a must and you simply want to live and work in a nation that went a milestone 102 days with no coronavirus cases (so, yes, it is possible) under Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

Dominican Republic

Known for political and economic stability and a pleasant climate to boot, the Dominican Republic has recently made residency visas essential for those planning to live there long term: Without one you can't get a driver's license, car insurance, a bank account, or a mobile phone contract. There's no age limit, but you must be able to comply with at least one of the country's [residency visa conditions](#), such as employment, getting a monthly pension of at least \$1,500 or monthly rental income of at least \$2,000, or being prepared to invest \$200,000 in the country in the form of a business or home purchase.

Portugal

Portugal is popular among relocating Americans thanks to its picturesque geography, well-respected health care offerings, and affordability. Residency visas are open to retirees, who must [apply for a D-7 Residence](#)

[Visa](#) while still in their home country. Key requirements for eligibility include proving you can provide for your monthly living expenses through either work income or retirement funds (typically about \$1,000 per person); retaining an international health insurance policy that has an expiration at least one year in the future; and having a clean criminal background.

Ecuador

The bureaucratic process can be daunting and is best handled by hiring an immigration lawyer, but there's no age limit for getting a resident visa for Ecuador, which lets you stay permanently and import household goods duty-free — in fact, if you're 65-plus, resident status entitles you to [half-price bus transportation](#), half-price movie tickets, discounted airfare, a free landline (remember those?), and a refund on local taxes. If you're not retired but still hope to relocate, check out the Category 60-II visa that covers those with stable monthly income from sources outside Ecuador such as investments, rental properties, or wages.

Belize

Yet another warm weather option particularly popular among expats, Central America's Belize puts no age limit on resident visas. But if you want a visa, you must first live in the country for 50 consecutive weeks on a tourist visa, renewed every 30 days. After that, you can apply for permanent residence, paying a nonrefundable \$2,000 and proving financial stability. You'll also need to undergo a medical exam and provide a clean police background check from Belize and your home country. As a former British colony, Belize's official language is English — but there are cons as well, including less reliable health care.

Malta

First things first: [Malta is gorgeous](#). With its turquoise waters, sunny climate, and charming villages, English-speaking Malta is a nation worth visiting, and living there could be downright dreamy — and the country's [immigration website](#) says permanent residence is "open to everyone," without age restriction. To become a permanent resident, you'll need to buy or rent a property in Malta or Gozo (one of the Maltese islands) and pay a minimum annual tax liability on foreign income earned while in the country. A bonus? The country has done an exemplary job of handling the coronavirus outbreak, according to the World Health Organization, and has cheap but slow health care in general.

Panama

The Friendly Nations visa (officially called Permanent Residence for Nationals of Specific Countries) is your ticket to long-term residence in Panama if you're 50-plus. One of the countries that gets [top marks from the International Living website](#) for quality of life abroad, Panama offers the visa you want to those with a local bank account holding at least \$5,000 and who own real estate or a business in Panama, or who have a job in the country. It courts qualifying retirees with perks on health care, utility bills, travel, and entertainment.

Costa Rica

An eco-tourist mecca known for [lush jungles and tropical climate](#), as well as an extremely high standard of living and peaceful government, Costa Rica is another welcoming option for those concerned about age limits for long-term residency. Available resident visa options here include the *Rentista* and *Pensionado* programs. The Rentista Program is a good choice for professionals who are not yet retired and thus unable to provide proof of a monthly pension; they must be able to show \$2,500 in verifiable monthly income for the past two years. The Pensionado Program, on the other hand, requires having a minimum of \$1,000 a month in lifelong income from either a pension, Social Security, 401(k), or an IRA.

Argentina

Argentina offers everything from subtropical jungle to cosmopolitan cities comparable to Paris. This country is home to a significant expat population (many living in Buenos Aires). Known for welcoming, liberal visa policies, Argentina offers various relocation options: Its Rentista visa is open to people with a steady, guaranteed monthly income of 30,000 Argentine pesos (about \$411); it is valid only for a year, but can be renewed up to three times — and after that you can apply for permanent residency. Under this visa you can be [self-employed or start a business](#), but not work for someone else. The Pensioner visa also requires proof of monthly income of at least 30,000 pesos.

Mexico

With its low cost of living and convenient proximity to the United States, Mexico is one of the most popular expat destinations. [Professional, affordable medical care](#) is a bonus, International Living says. A temporary residency visa — for people who want to stay in the country longer than six months but less than four years — is one of the best ways to approach a long-term stay and has no age restriction, while having lower income requirements, at about \$1,620 per month. After four years, you can apply for permanent residency. Some of the perks of being an officially declared temporary resident of Mexico include being able to buy and register a car, open a bank account, and import household goods without paying duty. You'll also have unrestricted entry and exit rights.

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Note: A couple of websites you might want to explore related to living overseas are:

- [15 Countries Where You Can Live Comfortably on Social Security](#)
- [12 Countries Where It's Easy to Work Abroad](#)
- [15 Countries Where Americans Can Save Big on Medical Care](#)

[Source: The world News | Mia Taylor | August 14, 2020 ++]

Optical Illusions

Forest or Feline?



According to research conducted by experts at Queen’s University in Ontario, the typical human brain processes about 6,200 thoughts each day. In case you haven’t already done the math, that’s a new thought every 14 seconds. But did you know that how your brain analyzes information reveals a lot about your personality? Take this optical illusion, for example. What you see in it – or put another way, how your mind interprets it – may say more about you than you realize.

At first glance, you may see three trees looming in front of a sunset in this illusion. And if that’s the case, then you’re incredibly perceptive – a trait that serves you well. You’re also easygoing to the point that you’re happy whiling away hours doing very little. But what if you actually spotted something else? Maybe the first thing that sprang out at you was the face of a cat or tiger. This suggests there’s a certain single-mindedness to your nature – much like a big cat stalking their prey. Yes, seeing a predatory feline in this image likely means that you’re determined and tend to stick to any decisions you make. [Source: Atlantic Mirror | May 2021 ++]

Rubbing Alcohol

Update 01: Household Cleaning Uses

Alcohol has multiple uses in your home, from polishing to disinfecting. Grab a bottle and check the following household to-dos off your list.

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Cleaning blinds. Wrap an alcohol-soaked washcloth around a spatula, place a rubber band around the cloth, and clean between the slats of blinds. This can be a quick and easy way to get these hard-to-clean blinds clean.

Cleaning dry erase boards. You’ll need at least a 90 percent rubbing alcohol solution to truly remove dry erase marks. You can put the solution into a spray bottle or apply some on a washcloth or paper towel to clean the board.

Cleaning makeup brushes. You can harness alcohol’s disinfectant properties to clean your makeup brushes. Pour some rubbing alcohol into a small cup and dip your makeup brush into the cup, swirling it around for a few seconds. Rinse the brush with lukewarm water and lay flat on a towel to dry.

Cleaning sinks and chrome. Rubbing alcohol can make these surfaces clean and shiny again. Pour the alcohol on a soft cloth and clean. You don’t have to follow up with water to rinse because the alcohol will evaporate.

Deodorizing shoes. If your shoes are starting to smell a little strong, spraying on rubbing alcohol can help. Setting them out in the sun to fully dry can further aid the alcohol in killing bacteria.

Disinfecting computer mouse and keyboard. Using a 90 percent or greater rubbing alcohol can make for a quickly evaporating cleaner for your electronics. Use an alcohol-soaked cotton swab or damp alcohol-soaked microfiber cloth to clean your computer’s keyboard and mouse.

Disinfecting mobile phone. From skin oils to makeup, there are lots of things that can dirty up your phone. Use an alcohol pad or wipe to clean and disinfect.

Dissolving windshield frost. You can mix up a quick defrosting solution by combining one part water and two parts 70 percent rubbing alcohol in a spray bottle. Spraying this on the windshield will make the frost easier to remove.

Getting rid of fruit flies. Spraying fruit flies with rubbing alcohol will kill them almost on contact. However, don't aim toward any fruit as rubbing alcohol can cause fruit to spoil.

Creating homemade disinfectant. You can clean most surfaces by spraying or wiping rubbing alcohol on them. However, don't apply alcohol to permeable materials like quartz and granite. Plastic laminate and sealed marble are fine.

Cleaning jewelry. If your rings, bracelets, and other jewelry have lost their luster, soaking them in rubbing alcohol can help. Wipe them off with a clean cloth afterward to achieve a super shine.

Preventing ring around the collar. Wiping your neck with a rubbing alcohol-soaked cotton pad or ball can help you keep your shirts cleaner longer.

Refreshing sponges. Soaking kitchen sponges in rubbing alcohol can help to disinfect them so they're ready for use. This money-saving trick can give your sponge's new life.

Removing hairspray from mirrors and tile. Sticky hairspray can cloud up your mirrors and tiles. Soak or spray alcohol on a soft cloth and use to achieve a crystal-clear surface.

Removing ink and permanent marker stains. You can give pesky stains the boot by soaking a stained area in rubbing alcohol for several minutes. Follow this up by washing the garment.

Removing stickers. If your little one went a little overboard with the stickers, try saturating the sticker with rubbing alcohol. Wait 10 minutes and you should be able to more easily wipe the sticker away.

Cleaning stainless steel. Alcohol can make an excellent stainless steel cleaner by removing water spots and disinfecting the surface. Use a damp alcohol-soaked microfiber towel to clean any stainless steel in your home.

[Source: <https://www.healthline.com/health/rubbing-alcohol-uses#household-cleaning> | March 2021 ++]

News of the Weird

May 01 thru 31, 2021

Bright Ideas – On March 17, police at the Charleston, South Carolina, airport rushed to meet United Airlines Flight 728 in response to a report that someone's ear had been bitten off on the plane, which had been diverted there from its flight from Newark, New Jersey, to Miami, The State reported. Passenger John Yurkovich Jr., 45, of New Jersey, had become "agitated" and "restless" after making a trip to the restroom, police said, then "began to scream and thrash around," punching his seatmate and apparently biting the man's ear, which later required seven stitches, an FBI report said. A doctor on board injected Benadryl into Yurkovich's buttocks to help subdue him, and others bound him with zip ties and a belt. Authorities said they found 1.5 grams of suspected meth in Yurkovich's pocket; he was arrested and faces state charges of possession as well as federal charges of assault. [The State, 3/19/2021]

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The Continuing Crisis – On March 17, police at the Charleston, South Carolina, airport rushed to meet United Airlines Flight 728 in response to a report that someone's ear had been bitten off on the plane, which had been diverted there from its flight from Newark, New Jersey, to Miami, The State reported. Passenger John Yurkovich Jr., 45, of New Jersey, had become "agitated" and "restless" after making a trip to the restroom, police said, then "began to scream and thrash around," punching his seatmate and apparently biting the man's ear, which later required seven stitches, an FBI report said. A doctor on board injected Benadryl into Yurkovich's buttocks to help subdue him, and others bound him with zip ties and a belt. Authorities said they found 1.5 grams of suspected meth in Yurkovich's pocket; he was arrested and faces state charges of possession as well as federal charges of assault. [The State, 3/19/2021]

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The Entrepreneurial Spirit – When Damien Desrocher, 28, decided to "return to nature" in December, it meant leaving his job as an air force computer technician and moving to the northern French town of Wahagnies, where he started raising snails. But they're not for eating, Reuters reported. Desrocher harvests "slime" from the snails and uses it to make bars of soap. A single snail will yield about 2 grams of slime. Desrocher needs about 80 grams of slime to make 15 100-gram soap bars. "It's all in the dexterity of how you tickle," he said as he demonstrated the harvesting technique. "I only touch it with my finger, you see it's not violent, it's simple." Desrocher said snail mucus contains molecules of collagen and elastin, which have anti-aging and skin-healing properties. [Reuters, 5/17/2021]

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Silent But Deadly – In North Carolina, large stands of wetland forests along the coast have died, giving the areas an apocalyptic appearance, CNET reported. Salt water from rising seas and storm surges is causing the destruction of tens of thousands of acres. Researchers at North Carolina State University are studying the "ghost forests" to measure their environmental impact, which includes emitting greenhouse gases -- carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide -- that they call "tree farts." Graduate student Melinda Martinez acknowledged that the trees don't emit as much as the soils, but, she said, "Even the smallest fart counts." [CNET, 5/14/2021]

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No Good Deed – After Bryan Thayer, 34, finished up at his bar and grill in Metairie, Louisiana, on May 8, he stopped off at the City Bar, where he and a friend bought a drink for another patron, Andrew Nierman, 32. The first drink they bought spilled on Nierman, so they furnished him with a replacement. But Nierman evidently wasn't satisfied with that. "He grabbed my head and (bit) a chunk out of my nose," Thayer told The Times-Picayune, then ran out and jumped in a car. Thayer, who was holding his nose together, and other witnesses ran outside and flagged down a deputy, who stopped Nierman. He admitted to biting Thayer but said he'd been "accosted" by him. Doctors patched up Thayer's nose, but he said his injuries will preclude him from working at his own bar for a time. [Times-Picayune, 5/18/2021]

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Bright Idea – Ever stepped off a curb unexpectedly or run into a pole while looking down at your phone? Minwook Paeng, an industrial design student at London's Royal College of Art and Imperial College, has invented a device that will alert you to obstacles in your path: the Third Eye. A small translucent case shaped something like an eye affixes to the forehead with a thin gel pad, DeZeen reported, and "the black component that looks like a pupil is an ultrasonic sensor for sensing distance," Paeng explained. When the

gyroscope senses the head angled downward, the plastic "eyelid" opens and warns the wearer of obstacles in their path with a buzzer. Paeng believes humans are evolving into "phono sapiens," developing "turtle neck syndrome" and a curved pinky finger from holding our phones. "I hope that the act of ironically pointing out what we are doing with our smartphones can help people take time for self-reflection," Paeng mused. [DeZeen, 5/6/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Ewww! – Ana Cardenas of El Paso, Texas, woke up around 4 a.m. on 11 MAY and felt something dripping on her face, KTSM-TV reported. When she turned on the light, she was horrified to see that it was blood. Blood was coming in where her ceiling fan was attached to the ceiling, and the fan had splattered it all around the room. Cardenas called 911, and officers determined that the man living in the apartment above hers had died. "The firefighters knocked down his door and the body was laying exactly where my fan is underneath," Cardenas said. "He had carpet but the blood seeped through to my ceiling." Police said the man had died of natural causes and had been deceased for five to six days. Cardenas stayed at a hotel for a few nights but now has to replace her damaged belongings. She said she was traumatized by the incident: "It was awful, an awful impact." [KTSM, 5/17/2021]

May 31, 2021 ++]

Vocabulary

Some Words to Enhance Yours | 210601

- **Blandishment** [blan-dish-muhnt] a flattering or pleasing statement or action used to persuade someone gently to do something
- **Calumny** [kal-uhm-nee] a false and malicious statement designed to injure the reputation of someone or something.
- **Campanile** [kam-puh-nee-lee] a bell tower, especially one freestanding from the body of a church
- **Doughty** [dou-tee] -- steadfastly courageous and resolute; valiant
- **Eggcorn** [eg-kawrn] a word or phrase that is a seemingly logical alteration of another word or phrase that sounds similar and has been misheard or misinterpreted.
- **Ephemeral** [ih-fem-er-uhl] lasting a very short time; short-lived; transitory.
- **Garrulous** [gar-uh-luhs] excessively talkative, especially on trivial matters.
- **Hegemony** [hi-jem-uh-nee] leadership or dominance, especially by one country or social group over others
- **Ostentatious** [os-ten-tey-shuhs] characterized by or given to pretentious or conspicuous show in an attempt to impress others.
- **Perfidious** [per-fid-ee-uhs] deliberately faithless; treacherous; deceitful.
- **Prosaic** [proh-zey-ik] commonplace or dull; matter-of-fact or unimaginative.

- **Spurious** [spyoor-ee-uhs] (of offspring) illegitimate.
- **Surreptitious** [sur-uhp-tish-uhs] kept secret, especially because it would not be approved of.

Have You Heard or Seen?

Math 1 | Riddles 1 | Think Toons

Math 1

Math, even in its simplest form, can confuse the hell out of anyone, which is why this math problem is driving people crazy. The question, posed by popular YouTube account MindYourDecisions, was originally posted on Aug. 31, 2016 but is making the rounds across the internet again. Why? People keep arriving to two different answers: 1 and 9. To solve the problem, you need to remember PEMDAS, otherwise known as the order of operations. In case you forgot, PEMDAS stands for: parentheses, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, and subtraction. To solve a problem with PEMDAS, first you solve anything dealing with parentheses and exponents, and then move left to right with the remaining operations. Try it for yourself below.

$$6 \div 2(1+2) =$$

Ready with your answer? Perhaps you did the following: $6/2(3)$ leads to $(3)(3)$ with a final answer of 9. Others did something else: $6/2(3)$ gives you the next equation, $6/6$, and an answer of 1. The correct answer: 9! According to the man behind this YouTube account, Presh Talwalkar, people get one as the answer due to an old way of interpreting the division sign. "Historically the symbol / was used to mean you should divide by the entire product on the right of the symbol," he wrote in a blog post. So, if you got 1 as your answer, it's not right, but not your fault either for learning this method. Still confused. Listen to the explanation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URcUvFIUhQ>.

Riddles 1

1. Q: What do call someone with no body and no nose?
2. Q: What did the buffalo say to his son when he dropped him off at school?
3. Q: Take one letter away and I'm above your head, take away two and I'm invisible, take away none and I'm under you. What am i?
4. Q: I am a seed with three letters in my name. Take away the last two and I still sound the same. What am I?
5. Q: I eat, I live, I breath, I drink, I die. What am I?
6. Q: I wiggle and cannot see, sometimes underground and sometimes on a tree. I really don't want to be on a hook and I become a person when combined with book. What am I?
7. Q: Rearrange the letters: "nor do we" to make one word?
8. Q: What four letter word can be written forward, backward or upside down and can still be read from left to right?

9. Q: What word when read from left to right is a ruler but when read from right to left is a servant?
10. Q: What can you easily break but never touch?
11. Q: What three letters change a girl into a woman?
12. Q: Pronounced as one letter and written with three, two letters there are, and two only in me. I'm double, I'm single, I'm black, blue and gray, I'm read from both ends and the same either way. What am I?
13. Q: What do Henry the English and Kermit the frog have in common?

Answers

- 1) A: no one
- 2) A: bye-son (bison)
- 3) A: chair
- 4) A: pea
- 5) A: fire
- 6) A: worm
- 7) A: one word
- 8) A: noon
- 9) A: god
- 10) A: heart
- 11) A: man
- 12) A: eye
- 13) A: the word "the"

Think Toons





Thought of the Week

“When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has been opened for us.”

— Helen Keller

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