

RAO BULLETIN

15 JUN 2021

PDF Edition



THIS RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE BULLETIN CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

Pg	Article	Subject
* DOD *		
04 ==	Military Draft [06]	---- (Supreme Court Supreme Court Won't Review Men-Only Law)
05 ==	DoD Budget 2022 [02]	---- (Details on Pay Raise, TRICARE Fees, and More)
08 ==	Arlington National Cemetery [93]	---- (FY 2022 Budget Addresses Space Problem)
09 ==	Military Tenant Rights	---- (More Delays for Some)
10 ==	DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse	---- (Reported JUN 01 thru 15, 2021)
11 ==	3M Earplugs Lawsuit [09]	---- (3M Wins Over Military-Issued Earplugs)
13 ==	POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials	---- (Reported 01 thru 15 JUN 2021 Five)
* VA *		
14 ==	Gulf War Illness VA Claims [02]	---- (Nearly All Claims for Gulf War Improperly Denied)
15 ==	Burn Pit Toxic Exposure [85]	---- (Amid Pressure, VA Eyes Speeding Benefits)
16 ==	VA Infrastructure	---- (Grim Conditions at Some VA Hospitals Revealed)
18 ==	VA Budget FY 2022 [01]	---- (Battle Is Brewing Over the Rising Costs)
20 ==	VA Claims Backlog [168]	---- (Likely Won't Be Fixed Until Late 2022)
21 ==	VA & Medicare Combined Coverage	---- (How They Work Together)
23 ==	VA Multiple Sclerosis Care	---- (Benefits and Services)
26 ==	VA Multiple Sclerosis Care [01]	---- (Podcasts)
26 ==	VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse	---- (Reported JUN 01 thru 15. 2021)
* VETS *		
29 ==	Vet Health Resources	---- (Medicare Organizations, Healthcare Helplines, & More)
31 ==	Long Term Care [01]	---- (Paying for It)
32 ==	Memorial Day 2021	---- (American Legion Officials Resign over Censored Speech)
33 ==	USPS Military Service Stamps [03]	---- Go For Broke Japanese American Soldiers of WWII)
34 ==	Normandy Update 01	---- (D-Day Remembrance 2021)

- 35 == OIF/OEF Vets ---- (Jason Redman | Seal Casualty)
- 36 == Obit: John Warner ---- (May 25, 2021 | Former Sen, SECNAV, WW2/ROK Vet)
- 38 == WWII Vets 260 ---- (Calvin Moore | USMC Camp Montford Point Graduate)
- 39 == WWII Vets 261 ---- (Hazel Lee | WASP Pilot)
- 40 == American Vet's Recollections ---- (D-Day Paratrooper Tom Rice)
- 40 == Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ---- (As of 15 JUN 2021)
- 41 == Vet Jobs ---- (Bridge My Return Hiring Platform)
- 42 == Vet Hiring Fairs ---- (Scheduled As of 15 JUN 2021)
- 43 == Vet Unemployment 2021 [04] ---- (Another Big Drop in May)
- 43 == Vet Employment Opportunities ---- (JUN 15 Listings from Companies Looking For Vets)
- 44 == Vet Death Preps [02] ---- (Keeping Records for Our Significant Others)
- 45 == State Veteran's Benefits ---- (Kentucky 2021)

*** VET LEGISLATION ***

- 46 == Liver Flukes 02] ---- (H.R.1273 | Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act).
- 46 == LGBT Dependents ---- (H.R.0000 | Armed Forces Transgender Dependent Protection Act)
- 47 == Vet Educational Assistance [04] ---- (H.R.2878 | Native VetSuccess at Tribal Colleges/Universities Act)
- 48 == GI Bill Student Loans [08] ---- (H.R.2968 | Military and Veteran Student Loan Relief Act)
- 49 == SGLI/VGLI [19] ---- (H.R.3793 | VGLI/SGLI Coverage Increase)
- 50 == VA Billing ---- (H.R.845 | VA Billing Accountability Act)

*** MILITARY ***

- 50 == Navy Transgender Policy ---- (New One Spelled Out)
- 51 == Military Suicides ---- (Frequent Military Funeral Duty Impact)
- 54 == Navy Rail Gun Program [01] ---- (Publicly the Program End Appears to Be in Sight)
- 56 == Army SLRC ---- (1,000 Mile Range Supergun Set To See Its Budget Slashed)
- 58 == Military Housing Lawsuits [04] ---- (Ten More Military Families at Three Texas Bases)
- 60 == Army Budget Request | 2022 ---- (\$176.6B Reflects Troop Level & Spending Cuts)
- 61 == USMC Budget Request | 2022 ---- (Force Continues to Get Smaller Under \$47.8B Proposal)
- 62 == Navy Budget Request | 2022 ---- (Aiming To Downsize)
- 63 == USAF Budget Request | 2022 ---- (Asking \$5.5B to Boost Personnel and Shrink Aircraft)
- 65 == USSF Budget Request | 2022 ---- (Sizable Increase Request Reflects Domain Importance)
- 67 == USCG Budget | 2022 ---- (Biden Proposes Flat Budget)
- 69 == Iranian Navy [05] ---- (Largest Warship Catches Fire, Sinks in Gulf of Oman)
- 70 == Military Retiree ID Card ---- (Update 05: Extensions Beyond 30 JUN)
- 71 == Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ---- ('Stern Tube' thru 'Subby')

*** MILITARY HISTORY ***

- 72 == Doughboy's Doughnuts ---- (Salvation Army Ladies Effort)
- 73 == X Troop Book Excerpt ---- (The Secret Jewish Commandos of WWII)
- 77 == Flying The Hump ---- (During WWII 600+ Planes Went Down In the Himalayas)
- 78 == Profiles in Courage ---- (Francis Gary Powers | U2 Pilo)
- 80 == Spanish-American War [01] ---- (Battle of Manila Bay)
- 81 == Medal of Honor Awardees ---- (Leonard Kravitz | Korea)
- 83 == Every Picture Tells A Story ---- (WWI Paris)
- 84 == WWII Bomber Nose Art [76] ---- (Just Plain Lonesome)
- 84 == Military History Anniversaries ---- (16 thru 30 JUN)

*** HEALTH CARE ***

- 85 == Tricare/Medicare Fraud & Abuse ---- (Reported JUN 01 thru 15, 2021)
- 85 == Tricare & Medicare Combined Coverage ---- (How They Work Together)

- 86 == Pee Q&A ---- (Questions You've Always Wanted to Ask About It)
- 88 == Psoriatic Arthritis ---- (Psoriasis with Joint Inflammation)
- 90 == Acute Pancreatitis ---- (Commonly Caused By Gallstones or Drinking Too Much Alcohol)
- 93 == Unrefrigerated Foods [02] ---- (When to Toss Them)
- 94 == Mold ---- (What You Don't know About it Can Ruin Your Life)

*** FINANCES ***

- 97 == TRICARE Premiums [01] ---- (Bill to Eliminate for Tricare Young Adult Program)
- 98 == TRICARE Prime [44] ---- (Future Urgent Care Concerns)
- 99 == Uncommon State Tax Laws ---- (Strange but True Tax Laws | S.D. – Washington DC)
- 100 == Dollar Stores ---- (Some Things Many Don't Know About Them)
- 103 == COVID-19 Scams [06] ---- (Scammers Pose as FEMA & Trick Grieving Families)
- 104 == Package Delivery Scam [01] ---- (New Spin)
- 105 == Medicare Telephone Scam [03] ---- (Free Genetic Test is Really Medicare Fraud)
- 106 == Tax Burden for North Dakota Vets ---- (As of JUN 2021)

*** GENERAL INTEREST ***

- 109 == Notes of Interest ---- (JUN 01 thru 15, 2021)
- 110 == Afghan Withdrawal [06] ---- (U.S. Allegedly Pledges 3.3 Billion to Kabul over the Next Two Years)
- 111 == Afghan Withdrawal [07] ---- (U.S. Troops Can Do What Is Needed To Go Out With Our Heads Held High)
- 115 == China/Russia Military Budgets ---- (Exceed U.S. When Combined)
- 116 == Law of the Sea Convention [01] ---- (Why the U.S. Can't Touch Iran's Atlantic-Bound Warships)
- 118 == U.S. Sanctions on Iran [03] ---- (U.S. Lifts Some in Overture to Iran)
- 120 == Hacks & Gadgets [01] ---- (Items that Can Save You Time/Money with Hidden Purposes)
- 122 == Home Pests [01] ---- (How to Keep Them at Bay)
- 125 == Airline Logic ---- (Spacing)
- 125 == News of the Weird ---- (JUN 01 thru 15, 2021)
- 127 == Vocabulary ---- (Some Words to Enhance Yours | 210615)
- 127 == Have You Heard or Seen? ---- (Getting Older Insights | Military Humor 21 | 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 – Kentucky State Veteran's Benefits
- Attachment – Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 30 JUN (Updated)
- Attachment – Gulf War Illness VA Claims



Military Draft

Update 06: Supreme Court Supreme Court Won't Review Men-Only Law

The Supreme Court said 7 JUN that for now it'll be up to Congress, not the court, to decide whether to change the requirement that only men must register for the draft. It's one of the few areas of federal law where men and women are still treated differently. In a statement, three justices said Congress is weighing whether to change the Military Selective Service Act, which requires men but not women to register for the draft when they turn 18. They said that was a reason for the court to kick the matter back to lawmakers.

"It remains to be seen, of course, whether Congress will end gender-based registration under the Military Selective Act," Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote in a statement for herself, Justice Stephen Breyer and Justice Brett Kavanaugh. "But at least for now, the Court's longstanding deference to Congress on matters of national defense and military affairs cautions against granting review while Congress actively weighs the issue." In recent years, bills to require women to register for the draft have been proposed in the House but not gone anywhere. Just last year, however, a congressional commission concluded that the "time is right" to extend the obligation to register to women. The Senate Armed Services Committee held a hearing on the report this year, and Sotomayor pointed to the report and the hearing, suggesting Congress is currently studying the issue.

The question of whether it's unconstitutional to require men but not women to register could be viewed as one with little practical impact. The last time there was a draft was during the Vietnam War, and the military has been all-volunteer since. But women's groups are among those arguing that allowing the male-only requirement to stand is harmful. Ria Tabacco Mar, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Women's Rights Project, who had urged the court to take up the issue, said that requiring men to register imposes a "serious burden on men that's not being imposed on women."

Men who do not register can lose eligibility for student loans and civil service jobs, and failing to register is also a felony punishable by a fine of up to \$250,000 and five years in prison. But Tabacco Mar said the male-only requirement does more than that. "It's also sending a tremendously harmful message that women are less fit than men to serve their country in this particular way and conversely that men are less fit than women to stay home as caregivers in the event of an armed conflict," said Mar, who represents the National Coalition For Men and two individual men who challenged the law. "We think those stereotypes demean both men and women."

Even if the draft is never used again, retaining the requirement sends a "really damaging message," she said. On 7 JUN, she urged Congress in a statement to "update the law either by requiring everyone to register for the draft, regardless of their gender, or by not requiring anyone to register." A group of retired senior military officers and the National Organization for Women Foundation were among those that had urged the court to take the case.

The issue of who has to register for the draft has been to the court before. In 1981, the court voted 6-3 to uphold the men-only registration requirement. At the time, the decision was something of an outlier because the court was regularly invalidating gender-based distinctions in cases about other areas of the law. Many of those cases were brought by the founding director of the ACLU's Women's Rights Project, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who became a justice in 1993.

The last time the high court considered the Military Selective Service Act, then-Justice William Rehnquist explained that the purpose of registration "was to prepare for a draft of combat troops." He said

that because women could not serve in combat, the law was not unlawful sex discrimination that violated the Constitution. But military policy has changed. In 2013, the Defense Department lifted the ban on women serving in combat. Two years later, the department said all military positions would be open to women without exception.

The Biden administration had urged the justices not to take the case and to let Congress instead tackle the issue. Administration lawyers wrote in a brief that any “reconsideration of the constitutionality of the male-only registration requirement ... would be premature at this time” because Congress is “actively considering” the issue. The case is *National Coalition for Men v. Selective Service System*, 20-928. [Source: The Associated Press | Jessica Gresko | June 7, 2021 ++]

DoD Budget 2022

Update 02: Details on Pay Raise, TRICARE Fees, and More

The Biden administration released the full version of its FY 2022 budget proposal to Congress on May 28, and the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) government relations team has been hard at work analyzing the 1,000-page proposal to understand what successes can be hallmarked and what potential threats need to be addressed in the upcoming budget cycle. The top-line figures of the full version are mostly in line with the so-called “skinny budget” the president released 9 APR, -- a proposed 1.7% increase in overall DoD funding and a 10% increase, a significant uptick, in VA spending compared with last year’s enacted levels.

House Budget Committee Chair Rep. John Yarmuth (D-Ky.) called the budget “transformative” and said it “will ensure we emerge from these past 14 months of crisis stronger and better prepared for the future than ever before.” Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), ranking member of the Senate Budget Committee, called the budget “dead on arrival – just like all other presidential budgets” and “insanely expensive,” adding it would “result in a weakened Department of Defense.” These differing opinions on the president’s budget from two key leaders in the congressional budgeting process augur the challenges to come.

What Comes Next?

After the release of the 0 APR skinny budget, Congress began meeting with administration officials to question them about their requests. Hearings will continue with the full version of the proposal. Following this analysis, the House and Senate Budget Committees will develop separate budget resolutions, which will set the spending constraints for the upcoming fiscal year’s mandatory and discretionary funding. Mandatory funding is used for existing federal programs like Social Security and Medicare. Discretionary funding is divided amongst the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, with the budget resolution setting the spending levels for each appropriations bill. Each of the 12 Appropriations subcommittees oversee the funding of the government’s federal agencies and programs.

Additionally, the budget resolutions establish the budget authority for the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The NDAA is the main legislative engine for MOAA’s advocacy to affect change on DoD programs and policies. Work on the NDAA begins in the House Armed Services Committee and the Senate Armed Services Committee. Both

committees will continue to conduct hearings with DOD officials and will begin markups for this year's NDAA.

If the budget doesn't pass by the start of the new fiscal year (1 OCT), Congress can pass a continuing resolution (CR), which carries over the appropriated funding set in the last fiscal year through the date that the CR ends. In cases where a budget has not been passed by Congress and signed by the president, and there is no CR in place, the government begins the process of shutting down. Government shutdowns further disrupt regular order in Congress and delays congressional business until the previously preventable funding emergency is resolved.

What MOAA Is Tracking on DoD

The DoD budget proposal is set at \$715 billion, an \$11 billion (1.7%) increase that does not keep pace with inflation from FY 2021's enacted level, nor does it match the 3% to 5% above inflation through FY 2023 that served as a benchmark for previous budget discussions. Key takeaways include a 2.7% pay raise that remains tied to the Employment Cost Index for the military, and unlike years past includes the president's authority to program the civilian raise also at 2.7%. Along with these pay raises is a badly needed increase of \$200 million for family support programs. Additionally, the budget proposal does not include any new cost increases to TRICARE beneficiaries. The budget indicates a reduction of overall military end strength, which is concerning when considering the growth of the Space Force. The reduction is especially concerning after a year that marked the largest mobilization of the Reserve Component since World War II and previous requirements for servicemembers to "do more with less."

The proposed active duty end strength would drop to 1,346,400 under the budget, from 1,351,000 in the enacted FY 21 version. Here's the breakdown by service:

- Army: FY 21 enacted 486,000; FY22 proposed 485,000
- Marine Corps: FY 21 enacted 181,200; FY 22 proposed 178,500
- Navy: FY 21 enacted 348,400; FY 22 proposed 346,200
- Air Force: FY 21 enacted 329,100; FY 22 proposed 328,300
- Space Force: FY 21 enacted 6,400; FY22 proposed 8,400

The Reserve Component also would face an overall reduction, but at a smaller scale and with some components seeing small end strength increases:

- Army National Guard: FY 21 enacted 336,500; FY 22 proposed 336,000
- Army Reserve: FY22 enacted 189,800; FY 22 proposed 189,500
- Marine Corps Reserve: FY 22 enacted 36,200; FY 22 proposed 36,800
- Navy Reserve: FY 22 enacted 59,000; FY 22 proposed 58,600
- Air National Guard: FY 21 enacted 108,100; FY22 proposed 108,300

DoD could grow its overall civilian workforce from FY 21 enacted 777,428 to FY 22 proposed 785,952 full time equivalent (FTE) positions, in a reversal from previous cuts to civilian positions. The proposed active-duty personnel cuts come at a time where the Government Accountability Office has issued a report that Navy personnel are overworked and ships are not crewed properly – conditions that contribute to accidents.

An Army spokesman has also indicated that the proposed total manning reduction of 1700 soldiers, the equivalent of two battalions, will not impact planned deployments and National

Training Center rotations. In the past year, 170,000 soldiers have deployed to 140 countries while 40,000 have performed COVID-related missions, responded to natural disasters, and supported civil authorities in the last year. No change in force structure is planned, with the reduction adding to concerns modernization will be prioritized over personnel in the future.

The budget request also detailed:

- \$54 million for the Military Health System (MHS), a 5.3% increase from the previous year's enacted level.
- A 2% increase in active military medical end strength, although the budget overview narrative indicates DoD will continue "optimizing military medical end strength to match operational requirements." MOAA will remain vigilant on the medical billets issue.
- \$8.6 billion for military family support programs, including funding for child care and youth programs; Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs; Warfighter and Family Services; commissaries; and Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools.

Of particular note, as MOAA continues to hear concerns about accessible, affordable child care options, the budget request seeks to fund a pilot program providing financial assistance to servicemembers to offset the cost of in-home child care, such as care provided by nannies or au pairs.

What MOAA is Tracking on VA

The VA is requesting \$269.9 billion for FY 2022, a 10% increase over last year. Priorities flagged by MOAA in this year's budget proposal include:

Veterans' Health Care

- Continuing investment in VA's electronic health record modernization.
- Expanding VA caregiver support program services, including the phased expansion of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers included in the MISSION Act. Once fully implemented, this will provide eligible caregivers of pre-9/11 veterans additional services and a monthly stipend for caregiving.
- Increasing case management services to help more veterans gain permanent housing through vouchers and to prevent homelessness among low-income veteran families.

Veterans' Benefits

- Modernization efforts to support the Digital GI Bill, an integrated system to support veterans, VA, and schools.
- An additional 334 full-time employees to help process the claims for the new Agent Orange presumptives added by the FY 2021 NDAA.
- Funding for a pilot program focused on supporting service-disabled veterans finding employment opportunities.

What MOAA Is Tracking: Other Departments

- The Department of Commerce's budget requests \$11.5 billion, up 29% (\$2.6 billion) from the FY 2021 enacted level. The administration's proposal funds the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at \$6.9 billion, which is over half of the department's budget request and a 28% increase from the previous year's enacted level. Over \$800 million of NOAA's budget would be utilized to expand climate observation and forecasting and help combat climate change-related challenges.

• The Department of Health and Human Services’ FY 2022 proposal includes \$131.8 billion in discretionary spending, a 23.5% increase from the FY 2021 enacted level. Of note, this request includes \$4.6 million for the U.S. Public Health Services Civilian Corps readiness training and \$13.8 million for the U.S. Public Health Services Ready Reserve program.

• The Department of Homeland Security’s FY 2022 budget requests \$52 million, which is nearly equal to the FY 2021 enacted level. The administration’s proposal funds the Coast Guard with \$13.1 billion, only a 0.3% increase from the FY 2021 enacted level.

[Source: MAA Newsletter | Government Relations Staff | June 3, 2021 ++]

Arlington National Cemetery

Update 93: FY 2022 Budget Addresses Space Problem



Arlington National Cemetery would receive nearly triple its current budget under the U.S. Army funding request for fiscal 2022. The Army, which operates Arlington National Cemetery, proposed \$228 million for the cemetery — up from the \$82 million it received in 2021. Of the requested amount, \$141 million would go toward a project to expand the cemetery’s border and add 80,000 burial spaces.

- The Southern Expansion Project would add 37 acres to the cemetery. If Congress approves the budget request, construction would begin late this summer, said Barbara Lewandrowski, director of public affairs for Arlington. The work would take about six years, with an estimated completion date in early 2027.
- The project would expand the cemetery’s border to encompass the U.S. Air Force Memorial. Tens of thousands of burial sites would be readied in the land around it. The cemetery acquired the land — both the existing green space and roads — last year.

Arlington National Cemetery, long viewed as a shrine to America’s fallen heroes, is quickly nearing capacity. In 2018, the cemetery opened a 27-acre expansion that had been in the works since the 1990s. Even with the extra acres from that expansion and the Southern Expansion Project, the cemetery is still expected to reach its limits by the mid-2050s. The cemetery is expected to announce later this year new eligibility criteria for burial at Arlington. Currently, most veterans and military retirees are eligible for either above- or below-ground burial. The Army began a lengthy rulemaking process in 2019 to change the criteria.

At the start of the rulemaking process, the Army proposed restricting below-ground burial to servicemembers killed in action, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, presidents and vice presidents, combat veterans who were awarded the Silver Star or above, servicemembers who had combat-related deaths and combat veterans who also served as government officials and “made significant

contributions to the nation’s security at the highest levels of public service.” Arlington also would reserve 1,000 burial plots for Medal of Honor recipients.

“The hard reality is we are running out of space,” Karen Durham-Aguilera, director of the cemetery, said at the time. “To keep Arlington National Cemetery open and active well into the future means we have to make some tough decisions that restrict the eligibility.” The final rules that the cemetery is planning to announce this year remain unknown. In the National Defense Authorization Act approved by Congress in 2019, lawmakers ordered the Army to develop new criteria that would allow the cemetery to remain active for the next 150 years. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | June 9, 2021 ++]

Military Tenant Rights

More Delays for Some

Military tenants will have to wait four more months to get all their remaining tenant rights, despite [congressional testimony from military leaders](#) over the past few weeks assuring lawmakers those remaining rights would be place in June. In an announcement from the Defense Department late 5 JUN, a Defense Department official stated that “with few exceptions, the DoD expects all 18 tenant rights to be fully available at all installations with privatized housing by the end of fiscal 2021” — the end of September.

While [14 of those 18 congressionally-mandated tenant rights](#) were implemented a year ago, four key tenant rights have been under negotiation:

- A Dispute Resolution Process
- A Universal Lease
- Process for Withholding Rent During Dispute Resolutions, and
- Providing A Tenant With Seven Years Of A Unit’s Maintenance History.

A number of privatized housing projects have already incorporated these rights — with the exception of the universal lease, said Paul Cramer, performing the duties of assistant defense secretary for sustainment and chief housing officer, in the announcement. There are still installations where the other three key tenant right are still unmet, but it is not clear where. The Pentagon did not immediately respond to a question about where those key rights have yet to be implemented. “Military members and their families who are tenants of [privatized] housing should check with the property manager or the government’s installation housing office to confirm which of the tenant rights have been implemented at their installation,” said Cramer, in the announcement.

Cramer said DoD has issued policy guidance for implementing the 18 tenant rights at all the housing projects. “Through negotiation and lots of work with our privatized housing partners, nearly all of the [privatized] housing companies have agreed to implement all 18 tenant rights at their existing privatized housing projects,” he said. But while policy guidance has been issued, it doesn’t mean that all the rights have been implemented for military families.

“I’m absolutely shocked,” said Sarah Lynne Kline, of the Military Housing Advocates’ Network, about the delay. “The tenant bill of rights is still failing military families. We’ve been promised again and again for a date of implementation, and that date continues to be pushed. “Also, there’s no accountability to ensure the housing companies are complying with the tenant bill of rights. And they want the families to go out and ask [about their tenant bill of rights]? They’re not going to publish a list? “I think we can chalk up the tenant bill of rights as a failure.”

The universal lease framework will standardize the general content of the military privatized housing tenant lease to the maximum extent possible, given the need for tenant leases to comply with state and local requirements, the announcement stated. In the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress mandated the 18 tenant rights. It was part of comprehensive reform provisions to address pervasive issues with mold, rodents and other health, safety and environmental hazards in privatized military housing. Military families called for a dispute resolution process and a process to withhold rent if the landlord doesn’t fix the problems. Families testified about frustration over inability to get some of the private companies to fix the problems, and the lack of assistance from their military leadership on some bases.

Defense officials are working to implement additional reforms to improve the safety, quality and maintenance of privatized housing, and to ensure accountability at all levels of DoD and the housing companies — in order to perform the oversight that was originally intended with the privatization program, Cramer said. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has also established a deputy assistant defense secretary for housing position, to support the chief housing officer in oversight of privatized housing. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | June 5, 2021 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse **Reported JUN 01 thru 15, 2021**

Two former managers for a major privatized housing company have pleaded guilty to fraud charges in connection with a conspiracy to cover up poor maintenance work at military families’ homes — to make sure the company received millions of dollars in performance incentive fees, according to the Justice Department. These are the first two cases in a scheme that involves 14 total co-conspirators, according to a Justice Department spokesman. One of those unnamed co-conspirators listed in court documents is described as a regional vice president.

While Balfour Beatty Communities was getting millions of dollars in rewards for its maintenance performance, the company wasn’t actually performing the necessary maintenance in some communities, allowing parts of the communities to fall into disrepair and leaving service members in substandard housing, according to court documents filed by the government. The court documents don’t name Balfour Beatty, but names five communities operated by the company. The actions of the managers between 2013 and 2016 deceived the Air Force into believing that the company was properly maintaining the housing communities, according to court documents.

Rick Cunefare, 61 of Glendale, Arizona, a former regional manager for Balfour Beatty, pleaded guilty to major fraud against the United States in connection with incidents that happened between 2013 and 2015, according to documents filed with the 9 JUN plea agreement in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. He directly supervised community managers at Lackland Air Force Base, Travis Air Force Base, Vandenberg Air Force Base, Tinker Air Force Base, and Fairchild Air Force Base. Cunefare is scheduled to be sentenced at a later date, facing a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Neither Cunefare nor his attorney could be reached for comment.

Stacy M. Cabrera, 47, of Converse, Texas, the community manager at Lackland AFB from about 2013 to 2016, pleaded guilty April 21 to conspiracy to commit wire fraud. Cabrera is scheduled to be sentenced at a later date, facing a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Neither Cabrera nor her attorney could be reached for comment. As a former Balfour Beatty regional manager, Cunefare directly supervised the housing community managers who were responsible for the day-day-day operations at those five installations. He was responsible for reviewing and approving quarterly maintenance reports prepared by community managers, and ensuring that the numbers were submitted to the Air Force with the request for performance bonuses — which were based on those reports. From 2013 to 2015, Balfour Beatty received about \$2.5 million in performance incentive fees for meeting maintenance objectives at the military housing communities overseen by Cunefare, according to court documents.

Balfour Beatty operates 21 Air Force housing projects and another 34 on Army and Navy installations. ‘We do not know how high up this conspiracy may go’ In Cunefare’s case, there were 10 unnamed co-conspirators, and one was described in a court document as a regional vice president. “Cunefare admits that he participated in the scheme described herein with the full knowledge, consent, and encouragement of his superiors” at the company, the document states. In a joint statement, Sens. Jack Reed (D-RI) and Jim Inhofe (R-OK). Chairman and ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, respectively, said they “will be keeping a close eye on the results of this case, which remains ongoing as we do not know how high up this conspiracy may go.

“Should any other charges pan out, we expect all criminals involved to be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law. With the help of the Department of Justice, the Department of Defense and military services must work to ensure this never happens again,” the senators said. “Military housing companies must take every step to regain the trust of our military families.” The Air Force Office of Special Investigations and the Defense Criminal Investigative Service are continuing to investigate. Refer to <https://www.militarytimes.com/pay-benefits/2021/06/10/former-managers-for-privatized-housing-company-plead-guilty-to-fraud-in-doctoring-maintenance-records> to read the complete report on this fraud. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | June 10, 2021 ++]

3M Earplugs Lawsuit

Update 09: 3M Wins Over Military-Issued Earplugs

A federal jury in Florida sided with earplug manufacturer 3M that the company’s product did not cause hearing loss for a veteran who used them while serving in the military. The trial was the second of three scheduled this year that could impact the outcome of a lawsuit involving nearly 236,000 veterans who were issued the earplugs while in the service. 3M, a Minnesota-based company, lost the first trial April in

which a jury awarded \$7.1 million to three Army veterans who said they suffered from hearing loss and tinnitus because of the earplugs. The second trial involved one veteran, Dustin McCombs, with a similar lawsuit.



The jury on 28 MAY determined 3M was not liable, negligent or fraudulent when selling earplugs to the military, according to court documents. “We are pleased with today’s verdict and will continue to vigorously defend ourselves in upcoming trials. The Combat Arms Earplug Version 2 product is and has always been safe and effective to use,” 3M representatives said in a statement. Nearly 236,000 veterans are part of the multidistrict lawsuit against 3M, which claims the company’s dual-sided earplug used by the military for more than a decade, including during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, could imperceptibly slip in the wearer’s ear. Work began on the earplugs in the 1990s and 3M sold them to the military until 2015. The three trials scheduled for this year are bellwether trials, which are used to present a representative of the cases before a jury to gain useful information for potentially reaching a settlement for all cases. It can help both parties determine the costs of subsequent lawsuits.

McCombs’ lead attorneys — Bryan Aylstock of Aylstock Witkin Kreis & Overholtz, PLLC, Shelley Hutson of Clark, Love & Hutson GP, and Christopher Seeger of Seeger Weiss LLP — said in a statement that they are “disappointed” in the jury’s conclusion, but look forward to the next bellwether case, which is scheduled to begin 7 JUN in Pensacola, Fla. “We continue to believe that the evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that 3M knew their [Combat Arms Version 2] earplugs were defective, yet allowed our service members who relied on them for hearing protection to suffer from preventable hearing loss and tinnitus,” the attorneys said. “We will continue to hold 3M accountable for the damage they have caused to those who served our nation.”

No recall was ever issued on the product and a fourth version of the earplug remains in use by the military, according to 3M. In July 2018, the Justice Department announced 3M agreed to pay \$9.1 million to resolve allegations that it knowingly sold the earplugs to the military without disclosing defects that hampered effectiveness. That lawsuit was filed through the whistleblower provision of the False Claims Act, according to the Justice Department. In settling the claim, 3M did not admit to wrongdoing, according to the company.

[Source: Stars & Stripes | Rose L. Thayer | June 1, 2021 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials

Reported JUN 01 thru 15, 2021 | Five

“Keeping the Promise“, “Fulfill their Trust” and “No one left behind” are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century as of FEB 2019 are: World War II 73,025 of which over 41,000 are presumed to be lost at sea, Korean War 7665, Vietnam War 1589 (i. e. VN-1,246, Laos-288, Cambodia-48, & Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7), Cold War 111, Iraq and other conflicts 5. Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home.

For a listing of all missing or unaccounted for personnel to date refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil> and click on ‘Our Missing’. Refer to <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories> for a listing and details of the 141 accounted for in 2005. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

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

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



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

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

LOOK FOR

-- **Army Pvt. Wayne M. Evans, 21**, of Hamilton, Montana, was a member of Battery G, 59th Coast Artillery Regiment, when Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands in December. Intense fighting continued until the surrender of the Bataan Peninsula on April 9, 1942, and of Corregidor Island on May 6, 1942. Evans was among those reported captured after the surrender of Corregidor and held at the Cabanatuan POW camp. More than 2,500 POWs perished in this camp during the war. According to prison

camp and other historical records, Evans died July 19, 1942, and was buried along with other deceased prisoners in the local Cabanatuan Camp Cemetery. Evans will be buried in his hometown. The date has yet to be decided. [Read about Evans.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Burl Mullins, 23**, of Dorton, Kentucky, was a member of Heavy Mortar Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 30, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. It was later learned he had been taken as a prisoner of war. Mullins will be buried in his hometown. The date has yet to be decided. [Read about Mullins.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Bill F. Hobbs, 20**, of South Coffeyville, Oklahoma, was a member of Heavy Mortar Company, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 30, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Hobbs will be buried June 26, 2021, in Coffeyville, Kansas. [Read about Hobbs.](#)

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Leslie P. Delles, 21**, of St. Charles, Illinois, 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 Delles. He will be buried on Oct. 23, 2021, in Sutter Creek, California. [Read about Delles.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Wilbur F. Ballance, 20**, of Paw Paw, Michigan, 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 Ballance. He will be buried on Dec. 3, 2021, at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. [Read about Ballance.](#)

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

* VA *



Gulf War Illness VA Claims

Update 02: Nearly All Claims for Gulf War Improperly Denied

In a May 20 feature for The War Horse, David Goldstein chronicles the health impact of service on Gulf War veteran John Saul, USMC, and the challenges he, like many of his fellow Gulf War veterans, face when trying to get help from the VA. His skin problem was eczema, VA examiners told him, and they used

the wrong rules on the other claims. Saul appealed. VA corrected its mistake and approved service-connection for his fibromyalgia and irritable bowel syndrome.

A 2017 GAO report found that VA had denied more than 80% of Gulf War illness claims. Denial rates were three times higher than for all other medical issues related to the war, and the claims process took longer. And more recent research from veterans service organizations shows the problem hasn't improved: Two veterans' advocacy groups, Veterans for Common Sense and Vietnam Veterans of America, analyzed VA's claim decisions between 2002 and the first quarter of 2018 and found that VA rejected 90% of undiagnosed disability claims from Gulf War veterans, denying them Congress-approved eligibility for free VA medical care. The claims process for Gulf War illness veterans remains so badly broken that nearly all veterans who apply are improperly denied. To learn more on what has been going on refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Gulf War Illness VA Claims**". [Source: VVA Web Weekly | David Goldstein | May 20, 2021 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Exposure

Update 85: Amid Pressure, VA Eyes Speeding Benefits



Amid increasing calls for action from Congress and health care advocates, Veterans Affairs leaders on 27 MAY announced plans to consider adding respiratory illnesses to the list of conditions presumed caused by exposure to military burn pits in Iraq, Afghanistan and other overseas combat locations in recent decades. The move is a significant albeit preliminary step towards granting new disability payouts and medical benefits for millions of veterans who served in the recent wars, only to return with a host of rare illnesses believed connected to toxic smoke at overseas bases. VA officials don't have estimates on how much veterans could get in payouts and how much the changes could cost, or even when the work could be complete.

The link between burn pits — used to dispose of excess equipment, human waste and a host of other toxic materials — and serious medical conditions has been widely assumed for years, but not conclusively linked to a specific set of health problems. About 250,000 veterans have signed up for VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, designed to track illnesses related to burn pit exposure and ease access to veterans benefits. But advocates have complained that tool is limited, and the actual number of veterans suffering from burn pit conditions is likely several times that figure. They've also pushed for more liberal granting of disability claims connected to burn pits, noting that insufficient monitoring of the smoke has led to numerous questions about which troops were exposed and poisoned.

Earlier this year, VA Secretary Denis McDonough ordered an internal review into the issue, promising to speed up work on the already decade-old problem. On 27 MAY, in a press conference with reporters, he promised that officials are “attacking this issue with urgency” and said it has been a frequent topic of conversation with White House officials. “It breaks all of our hearts that we have veterans who suffer because of the service they carried out on our behalf,” he said. “It makes me particularly saddened to know we have veterans with terminal diagnosis. We are going to spare nothing to generate answers for them.”

A day earlier, at a press conference on Capitol Hill, veterans advocates praised recent congressional efforts to address the issue but also acknowledged fatalism about the slow pace of reaction to numerous deaths and serious illnesses over the last 20 years. “More than 8 in 10 veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan say they were exposed to burn pits, and more than 80 percent of those say they’re suffering some health effects from that today,” said Tom Porter, executive vice president of government affairs at Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. “We have to do this, and we have to do it now.” McDonough did not offer a timeline for when veterans might start seeing new benefits from the move announced Thursday. He promised to “respect the rulemaking process,” which can take several years in some cases.

Congress may not wait that long.

Officials from the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee on 26 MAY unveiled plans to make 23 respiratory conditions and rare cancers contracted by Iraq and Afghanistan veterans automatically eligible for disability benefits, and expect to advance the legislation next month. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee members later in the day unanimously advanced a similar plan with fewer presumptive conditions but a similar approach to granting wider benefits access to all veterans who served near burn pits. Chairman Jon Tester, D-Mont., has said he hopes the two chambers can pass a final compromise plan by the end of the year.

If they do, the VA work may form the procedural backbone for implementing those changes. VA’s announcement noted that the conditions being reviewed “may include asthma, sinusitis, and rhinitis” and will cover “military service in Southwest Asia, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.” Officials also pledged to engage veterans advocates in coming months on how to shape the new benefits rules. “This is the beginning of this effort,” McDonough said. “We will continue to work aggressively at identifying the available science ... to make sure we’re getting all we can.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 27, 2021 ++]

VA Infrastructure

Grim Conditions at Some VA Hospitals Revealed

The Department of Veterans Affairs has long cited the necessity to repair aging buildings and construct modern facilities to meet the needs of veterans -- at an estimated cost of \$60 to \$70 billion. But the department is just beginning a process to review its aging infrastructure, and officials have given few specifics on the state of those assets or how they would spend any funding they receive to address them. With the agency slated to get more than \$18 billion for its infrastructure needs under President Joe Biden's American Jobs Plan, members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on 9 JUN pressed the VA's director of the office of asset enterprise management for details on his plans for the proposed funding. And they painted a grim picture of the facilities in their states.

- In New Hampshire, for example, longstanding fly infestations in operating rooms led to canceled medical procedures for veterans in 2018 and 2019, according to Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan.

- At the Sonny Montgomery VA Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi, the dialysis treatment center has closed its doors due to aging infrastructure, according to Pat Murray, director of legislative services at the Veterans of Foreign Wars.
- And at the West Haven VA Medical Center in Connecticut last year, a routine maintenance operation turned deadly when a steam pipe exploded during replacement, killing two. "The facility needs to be rebuilt, and two people are dead now because of a failure to take necessary steps to invest in this infrastructure," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. "It is horrifying and outrageous."

Congress established an effort in 2018 for an independent review of the VA's real estate assets, infrastructure and construction needs and to make recommendations for future facilities. The Asset and Infrastructure Review commission, whose members have not yet been announced, is expected to oversee a process similar to the Defense Department's base closure and realignment commissions (BRAC). But final decisions by the commissioners, who are expected to deliberate for seven months and hold public hearings on their findings, aren't expected until 2023. Murray and others said repairs and maintenance can't wait two more years and the VA must take steps now to improve oversight of projects and make repairs.

"We must not wait for its completion to perform maintenance, upgrades and necessary construction. [The commission] represents the future of the footprint of VA, but there is 60-plus billion dollars of work needed now," Murray said. But lawmakers increasingly are balking at providing more funds without seeing fixes in management that would improve oversight. The VA's discretionary spending has risen by 291% since fiscal 2003, totaling \$109.5 billion in fiscal 2021, and its mandatory spending has risen 313% to \$133.8 billion -- increases that should have included investments in infrastructure, noted Kansas Sen. Jerry Moran, the committee's ranking Republican.

But projects undertaken in the past two decades, including construction of a new medical center in Colorado that took 14 years and ran \$1 billion over budget, demonstrate that mismanagement at the VA is responsible for many of the problems, according to Moran. "More focus is needed on the VA's business process that produced this dismal state of affairs," he said.

Officials with the Government Accountability Office agree. According to the GAO, the VA lacks the resources and skills needed to effectively manage projects, with staffing shortages and insufficient communication between its central office for construction and facilities management and local offices. It also lacks a system that allows it to evaluate its asset performance, said Andrew Von Ah, director of physical infrastructure for the GAO. "Without such indicators, VA will have difficulty knowing whether the system is working and where it may need to make improvements," Von Ah said.

Those who testified alongside VA officials, including Murray and Don Orndoff, senior vice president for national facilities services at health care company Kaiser Permanente, had a number of suggestions for the department to improve its infrastructure oversight and management. They included teaming with the Army Corps of Engineers -- which was called in to fix the troubled Colorado construction project -- and partnering with private industry. Kaiser Permanente, Orndoff said, invests roughly \$3 billion each year in infrastructure. He suggested that the VA standardize its facility design and use modular components for facilities; accelerate project delivery so hospitals and clinics aren't outdated by the time they are complete; and practice sustainment -- staying on top of issues at existing infrastructure to prolong their service life.

Brett Simms, the VA's director of the office of asset enterprise management, said the department would use the \$18 billion in Biden's proposed budget to address immediate needs and build new facilities.

According to Simms, the VA would spend \$3 billion immediately to upgrade facilities to support health care for female veterans, improve utility and building systems to increase energy efficiency, and make accommodations for aging veterans. The remaining \$15 billion would be used to modernize or replace 10 to 15 aging medical centers, although Simms did not say which ones. And he asked senators to support legislation that would give the VA more flexibility in leasing clinics in 13 states. "It offers much-needed flexibility for VA," Simms said.

Committee Chairman Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) said he would work to get that legislation passed, adding that he supports the commission. "I'm hoping the VA makes this commission an opportunity to get rid of the excess VA infrastructure that is not being utilized, while building new leasing, new buildings and right-sizing facilities so they're able to meet the long-term needs of our veterans," he said. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | June 10, 2021 ++]

VA Budget FY 2022

Update 01: Battle Is Brewing Over the Rising Costs

Unlike most federal agencies, each year the administration proposes a budget for the VA that covers not only the upcoming fiscal year operations, but also additional funds for the following fiscal year. The additional request is called an "advance appropriation." In a nutshell, the additional funding is to serve as a bridge between fiscal years to ensure the department can provide continuity of the health care and benefits to veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors without disruption should unforeseen circumstances prevent Congress from getting a VA budget signed into law before the Oct. 1 start of a new fiscal year.

In recent years, government shutdowns and continuing resolutions prompted Congress to establish advance appropriations as safeguard protections for seven VA accounts. VA medical services, community care, and other medical programs have been receiving advance funding since October 2009 with the enactment of the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act. Advance appropriations for other VA benefit programs became law a few years later. The VA is one of few federal agencies to see significant growth in its budget over the last decade. From 2012 to 2021, total VA funding grew from about \$197 billion to over \$245 billion.

What makes this year's FY 2022 budget request different from previous years? The proposal brings a level of complexity and includes multiple funding sources the department expects to draw from. This makes the administration's request unique, but also a little more challenging to understand. This year, the VA is requesting \$269.9 billion for FY 2022, or a 10% increase over last year. Within the total resides two main funding accounts:

- Discretionary spending, which includes \$117.2 billion to support health care, benefits, and national cemetery programs – a 9% increase over 2021. Medical care receives 86% of this funding in the FY 2022.
- Mandatory spending of \$152.7 billion to support benefit programs – a 10.8% increase over 2021. This funding pays for compensation and pension, readjustment, housing, and insurance programs.

Secretary Denis McDonough's vision for this year's budget request centers on three core responsibilities of the department:

- Providing veterans with timely, world-class health care.
- Ensuring veterans and their families have timely access to their benefits.
- Honoring veterans with their final resting place and lasting tributes to their service.

Additional Funding Sources

Both discretionary and mandatory accounts include five additional sources of funding to help boost and supplement the budget request, and aim to address the rising need for health care, services, and benefits among beneficiaries:

- **The CARES Act.** The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act was signed into law in March 2020 and provided the VA with funding to care for veterans and strengthen its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The department has obligated 75% of the \$19.6 billion to date.
- **The American Rescue Plan.** The president signed this relief package in March 2021. In part, it's designed to sustain the VA's COVID-19 response efforts beyond the expiration of the CARES Act. The plan provided the VA with over \$17 billion to help reduce the backlog of veteran benefit claims and appeals, meet additional medical care and health needs including assistance to state veterans homes, and help train veterans who lost their jobs because of the pandemic to find work in high demand occupations.
- **The American Jobs Plan and the American Families Plan.** The administration recently put forth these plans, which include funds to modernize the VA and improve infrastructure; provide support to a growing population of women and younger veterans; enhance education and employment programs; and support about 136,000 veteran and family interments in the VA national cemetery system, including maintaining 4 million gravesites and innovative efforts to memorialize those who served.
- **The VA Transformational Fund.** This new, recurring expense account allows the VA to use expired unobligated discretionary funding to supplement its budget and apply these resources toward improving facility infrastructure and information technology.

VA Health Care

"The funding request invests in the core foundations of our country's strength and advances key VA priorities," McDonough said. "The discretionary request ensures that all our veterans, including women veterans, women of color, and LGBTQ+ veterans, receive the care they have earned and enable them to create civilian lives of meaning and opportunity." In addition to the VA's focus on defeating the COVID-19 pandemic, here are a few of the many health care system outcomes and programs the increased funding supports:

- Providing care to 7 million veteran patients.
- Covering the costs of 119 million outpatient visits.
- Continuing investment in VA's electronic health record modernization.
- Improving facility infrastructure and operation and maintenance accounts for approximately 5,625 buildings and 1,690 leases the VA operates.
- Increasing case management services to help more veterans gain permanent housing through vouchers and prevent homelessness among low-income veteran families.
- Expanding suicide prevention outreach programs, including the Veterans Crisis Line to help veterans at risk for suicide and provide interventions before a veteran is in crisis.

- Strengthening VA’s diversity programs to ensure the department is welcoming to all, including women veterans, veterans of color, and veterans who are LGBTQ+. A new Office of Resolution Management, Diversity and Inclusion has been established to strengthen VA’s diversity program.
- Expanding VA caregiver support program services, including the phased expansion of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers included in the MISSION Act. Once fully implemented, this program will provide eligible caregivers of pre-9/11 veterans additional services and a monthly stipend for caregiving.
- Providing more than \$115 billion in advance appropriations for FY 2023 to ensure continuity of health care services into the new fiscal year.

The Road Ahead

VA’s budget proposal is a strong indicator of the administration’s and the secretary’s commitment to serving veterans. However, some members of Congress are ready to take the VA to task to find out how the department has spent its appropriations in recent years. A battle is brewing around the unsustainable trajectory and rising costs of health care and what to do about it. According to the VA, a significant factor in the rising costs of health care is because of community care in recent years, particularly with the implementation of the MISSION Act.

The budget increases appear reassuring but the details of how the VA plans to execute the various elements of its health care budget remain elusive, including its community care account. Such details are important for ensuring the department is funded at the necessary levels, so veterans have uninterrupted care and the best health outcomes possible. Rest assured lawmakers will delve more deeply into the VA’s budget proposal during hearings in the coming weeks as part of the congressional appropriations process. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | René Campos | June 7, 2021 ++]

VA Claims Backlog

Update 168: Likely Won’t Be Fixed Until Late 2022

The number of backlogged veterans disability claims has been cut by about 10 percent in recent weeks but likely won’t return to pre-pandemic levels until late 2022, Veterans Affairs officials acknowledged 10 JUN. And they warned that number could grow again if Congress passes pending legislation granting new disability benefits to tens of thousands of veterans exposed to burn pits while serving overseas in the recent wars. As of this week, about 191,000 disability claims were considered backlogged, meaning they have been pending for four months or more.

That’s down from a peak of about 210,000 cases earlier this spring, but still well above the roughly 70,000 backlogged cases in early 2020, before the coronavirus pandemic began. If their claims are eventually approved, veterans with backlogged claims will get back pay to their initial filing date. But the months-long wait for the start of those payouts can be both frustrating and financially damaging for veterans suffering from service-connected ailments.

The rise in the claims backlog stems in large part from pandemic related shutdowns which began in spring 2020 at the National Personnel Records Center. Veterans Affairs claims processors use military and personnel records from the agency to decide cases, but without staff in offices to pull the records, the new

disability filings have lingered. Earlier this year, VA officials helped vaccinate the National Archives and Records Administration workforce against coronavirus to help their offices return to normal operations. In addition, about 60 VA staffers have been temporarily assigned to the NPRC offices to help with records retrieval and digitizing.

As a result, VA records requests are now being processed on average in two or three days, faster than pre-pandemic levels, according to Kenneth Smith, assistant deputy undersecretary at the Veterans Benefits Administration. But, clearing the backlog will still take time. The department currently has a workload of about 500,000 cases, with nearly 40 percent pending for more than 125 days. “Our workload is dynamic,” he said. “We’re hoping to keep our backlog to under 200,000 through the end of the fiscal year. And we’re hoping we can reduce it to around 100,000 by the end of fiscal 2022.”

The claims backlog drew national scrutiny in 2013, when the number of overdue claims topped 610,000 cases after a host of new Agent Orange-related illnesses were added to VA’s disability lists. The issue prompted a major overhaul and digitization of VA records, slowly driving down the case totals. Congress is considering making a similar move in coming months, adding a host of respiratory illnesses and cancers believed connected to burn pit exposure as well as expanded benefits for other military toxic exposure cases. Smith did not take a stance on the legislation, but cautioned that adding those claims into the system could lead to another backlog increase. In addition, VA is already dealing with about 60,000 cases undergoing a court-mandated review related to past Agent Orange presumptive illnesses.

Under the American Rescue Plan approved by Congress in March, VA was given \$150 million to help digitize NPRC files to speed up future disability claims work. Smith could not give a percentage of how many records that work would cover, but noted that “we need these records in order to process the claims.” Earlier this week, in testimony before the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, veterans groups called the size of the backlog worrisome for the veterans community. “While we are pleased to see the administration’s proposed amount for [improvements at] the Veterans Benefits Administration, we are greatly concerned about the current claims backlog,” said Shane Liermann, deputy national legislative director at Disabled American Veterans.

Smith said officials are pleased with the progress in recent weeks but aware of the work still to be done. “More work is being done,” he said. “But removing issues with the [NPRC] records will allow us to remove one external obstacle from that, and allow us to expedite the decisions.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 10, 2021 ++]

VA & Medicare Combined Coverage

How They Work Together

It’s possible to have VA and Medicare benefits at the same time. Having both types of coverage is helpful if you need specialized care, if you have a condition not connected to your military service, or if you want to use non-VA providers. Because the Department of Veterans Affairs assigns each beneficiary to a priority group that determines how much you pay for services, having Medicare is especially helpful if you’re in one of the lower priority groups with higher out-of-pocket costs. If you decide to enroll in Medicare, your VA benefits pay for VA-authorized services, and Medicare pays for Medicare-covered services.

- Medicare Part A Covers care at a non-VA facility and gives you more flexibility when seeking medical care.
- Medicare Part B may pay for services not covered by your VA benefits, allows you to use non-VA doctors, and can help reduce your out-of-pocket costs if your VA benefits don't cover some services.
- Medicare Part C may cover more services than your VA benefits and since Medicare Part C combines the benefits available under Original Medicare into a single plan that may cover more than your VA plan.
- Medicare Part D covers prescriptions filled at non-VA pharmacies/facilities. VA benefits typically cover the same prescriptions Medicare does, but some plans may have a lower copay for prescriptions than VA.
- Medigap pays for copays and other expenses not covered by Original Medicare. Can help you reduce your out-of-pocket costs if you decide to use Medicare instead of your VA benefits if you have to seek care from a non-VA provider

VA benefits and Medicare Part A

Medicare Part A covers the care you receive in an inpatient facility, such as a hospital or skilled nursing center. Services covered include nursing care, laboratory tests, X-rays, and surgical procedures. Because VA benefits and Medicare benefits are separate, you should enroll in Medicare Part A if there's any chance you'll ever need to go to a non-VA facility for inpatient care. If you go to a non-VA facility and don't have Medicare or some other type of insurance, your VA benefits may not cover your stay. Enrolling in Medicare Part A ensures you have coverage for ailments not connected to your military service. Many veterans qualify for premium-free Part A. You may also qualify for assistance on Part B premiums.

VA benefits and Medicare Part B

Medicare Part B covers preventive and [medically necessary services](#), including ambulance services, doctors' services, durable medical equipment, clinical research, and mental health treatment. You should enroll in Medicare Part B to ensure you have adequate coverage for your health care needs, whether they're service-connected or otherwise. Should you ever lose some of your VA benefits, or your VA benefits don't cover everything you need, you'll be able to use Medicare Part B instead of paying 100% of the expenses out of your own pocket. Although Medicare Part B has a monthly premium, it's well worth it if it helps you avoid high out-of-pocket costs. It's wise to enroll in Part B during your initial enrollment period – you'll incur penalties if you enroll later.

VA benefits and Medicare Part C

Medicare Advantage Plans, also known as [Medicare Part C](#), combine the benefits of Medicare Parts A and B – and in most cases, Part D – into a single plan offered by a private health insurance company instead of the federal government. All Medicare Advantage Plans must offer the same level of coverage as [Original Medicare](#), but some insurers cover additional services, such as dental or vision care. Enrolling in Medicare Part C can help you reduce your out-of-pocket medical expenses by covering services that aren't covered by your VA benefits. You may also gain access to a larger network of doctors and other health professionals.

VA benefits and Medicare Part D

Medicare Part D, whether a standalone plan or a Medicare Advantage Plan with drug coverage, covers at least [two prescription medications](#) per drug category. Because VA drug coverage applies only to prescriptions [filled at a VA pharmacy](#) or other VA facility, enrolling in Medicare Part D is a good idea if

you don't live near a VA pharmacy or you want more flexibility in choosing a pharmacy. Depending on the plan you select, Medicare Part D may also cover a wider variety of medications, often with a lower copayment. If you live near a VA pharmacy and don't mind going there to pick up your prescriptions, then you may not need to enroll in Medicare Part D.

Your VA drug benefit counts as creditable coverage for Medicare Part D purposes. If you decide to defer enrollment in Part D, you will not incur late penalty charges if you join a Medicare drug plan at a later time.

VA benefits and Medigap

Medigap, also known as Medicare Supplement Insurance, covers copays, coinsurance, and most deductibles for services covered by Original Medicare. Medigap often has a lower copayment than Medicare. To purchase one of these plans, you must be enrolled in Medicare Part A and Medicare Part B.

You should consider a Medigap plan if there's a chance you'll need care at a non-VA facility, as your VA benefits only cover services through VA providers. If you need to visit a non-VA hospital or clinic, you'll be able to use your Original Medicare benefits. Then Medigap will pay its share of the remaining costs, leaving you with fewer unpredictable out-of-pocket medical expenses. You will pay a monthly premium for a Medigap policy.

[Source: <https://www.medicareplans.com/va-military-and-medicare-benefits-resource> | Donna Williams | June 10, 2021 ++]

VA Multiple Sclerosis Care Benefits and Services

As a Veteran with MS, you may be eligible for VA's many programs and services. Access to VA health care is based upon your enrollment eligibility and discharge status from active military service. If not already enrolled, information on how to apply for VA health care can be found on the VA Benefits and Health Care [website](#). Once enrolled, you may find that navigating the large, and sometimes complex, range of VA benefits and grants can be confusing. Luckily, your VA health care team is available to assist you. It is important for Veterans receiving VA health care to know who their assigned Primary Care Team or MS social worker is. These providers can help you navigate VA services. They can also connect you to a Veteran Service Organization (VSO).

The VA offers a variety of medical and support services and programs for Veterans, with several of them being of particular interest for Veterans with MS. Some of these benefits are based on [level or percent of disability](#), while others may be based on service-connection.

- *Service-connected* (SC) status refers to Veterans who are disabled by an injury or disease that was caused or aggravated by military service or occurred while serving in the military. MS is a presumptive condition, which means that it is presumed that the disability is caused by military service if diagnosed within a certain time frame. For MS, the presumption is that MS is service connected when symptoms or a diagnosis of MS occurred during military service or within seven years after honorable discharge.

- *Non-service connected* (NSC) status refers to Veterans who have a disability or health issue not related to their military service. Veterans diagnosed with MS after the presumptive period of seven years could be eligible for some VA benefits under the non-service-connected status.

VA has a wide range of benefits that may be of particular interest to Veterans with MS. Note that this list does not include all VA resources and programs available to Veterans. Also, some VA benefits are offered through the VA, while other benefits are offered through the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). It is important to reach out to your assigned primary care or MS social worker to determine all the supports and benefits you may be eligible for. If you don't know who your social worker is, contact your local VA medical facility Social Work department.

Medical Care

Medical care for eligible Veterans with MS may include specialty care visits with a neurologist and/or rehabilitation medicine physician, disease modifying therapies, symptomatic medications, physical and occupational therapy, and other health care services and medical equipment. Veterans may also be eligible for services through the VA's [Extended Care](#) pro-am which includes the following:

- [Skilled Home Health Care](#) is for Veterans needing short-term care when moving from a hospital or nursing home back to their home.
- [Homemaker and Home Health Aide Care](#) provides an agency caregiver who can come to a Veteran's home and help the Veteran take care of themselves and their daily activities.
- [Respite Care](#) pays for Veteran care for a short time when family caregivers need a break, need to run errands, or need to go out of town for a few days.
- Personal Emergency Response Systems help Veterans receive immediate assistance in an emergency event.
- [Veteran Directed Care](#) provides funding to Veterans to hire a person to help with personal care and activities of daily living.
- [Medical Foster Homes](#) may be appropriate for Veterans who require nursing home care but prefer a non-institutional setting with fewer residents.

Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service Program

The VA's [Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service](#) (PSAS) is an integrated delivery system designed to provide eligible Veterans medically prescribed devices such as hearing aids, eyeglasses, speech and communication devices, home dialysis supplies, orthopedic braces/supports/footwear, wheelchairs, home respiratory aids, hospital beds, and other daily-living aids. The basic eligibility for prosthetic items is enrollment in the VA system and proper medical justification. Service connection does not have a role in eligibility except for certain programs. While PSAS has many programs and services, the three below may be of particular interest to Veterans with MS.

- The [Automobile Adaptive Equipment](#) program provides funding for the purchase of a vehicle and/or modifications to a vehicle. This program is primarily for SC Veterans, though NSC Veterans may be eligible for equipment/modifications that will improve entrance and exiting from a vehicle. ([Fact Sheet](#))
- [Clothing Allowance](#) is a program that provides funding for Veterans who are rated for a SC disability for which he or she uses prosthetic or orthopedic appliances. This requires an annual application which must be submitted before August 1st of each calendar year.

- [Home Improvements and Structural Alterations](#) program provides medically necessary improvements and structural alterations to the primary residence of Veterans for specific purposes. This program is available to SC Veterans as well as NSC Veterans who meet specific criteria

Veterans Benefits Administration

In addition to benefits from the VA, there are benefits and grants available through the Veterans Benefits Administration for Veterans who meet certain service-connected disabilities and eligibility requirements.

- [Specially Adaptive Housing \(SAH\), Special Housing Adaptations \(SHA\), or Temporary Residence Adaptation](#) (TRA) programs are available for Veterans who need to buy, build, or change their or a family members permanent home. Veterans must be SC to receive the SAH and SHA grants while certain other requirements must be met for the TRA grant. Generally, funds can be used at different times up to the total amount. ([Fact Sheet](#))
- [Aid and Attendance or Housebound](#) benefits provide monthly payments added to the amount of a monthly VA pension for qualified Veterans and survivors. Veterans can't get Aid and Attendance benefits and Housebound benefits at the same time, and must have served during wartime. ([Fact Sheet](#))

VA Caregiver Support Program

VA's [Caregiver Support](#) programs offer family caregivers of Veterans an opportunity for education, financial planning, peer support, and resources. Your [ocal VA Caregiver Support Coordinator](#) can connect you to resources or you can call the Caregiver Support Line at 855-260-3274.

- The [Program of General Caregiver Support Services](#) provides resources, education, and support to caregivers of Veterans.
- The [Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers](#) provides resources, education, support, a financial stipend, and health insurance (if eligible) and beneficiary travel (if eligible) to caregivers of eligible Veterans. There are several downloadable factsheets on the website, including the [Eligibility Criteria Fact Sheet](#), which can help determine if you are eligible to apply for this program.

In addition to SC and NSC status, the percent of disability may influence benefits and/or the amount that Veterans may need to financially contribute towards their VA care, such as co-pays and travel.

Catastrophically Disabled (Priority Group 4) Rating: Being rated Catastrophically Disabled means you have a severely disabling injury, disorder, or disease that permanently compromises your ability to do your daily activities of living. This is an especially important rating for Veterans who have less than 30% SC since it will remove your copayments for inpatient, outpatient, medication, and non-institutional extended care services. It may also help you qualify for VA Special Mode Beneficiary Travel, like paratransit or a cabulance, to VA medical appointments if your income is below the income cap of this travel category.

Veterans Service Organizations

Veteran Service Organizations (VSO), like [Paralyzed Veterans of America](#), [United Spinal](#), and [Disabled American Veterans](#), can also assist you with VA disability claims, benefits, and services. To see a complete list of VSOs and designate a VSO to assist you, talk to your VA social worker about completing a [VA Form 21-22](#).

National MS Society

In addition to VA care and services, the [National MS Society](#) (NMSS) is an official partner of the VA. If you find yourself in need of additional information, resources, and support call a NMSS Navigator directly at 800-344-4867 or email them at contactusnmss@nmss.org. If desired, your VA provider, nurse coordinator, or social worker can complete a MS Navigator [referral form](#) along with a VA health release form ([VA form 10-5345](#)) to talk with the MS Navigator on your behalf.

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In summary, working with your MS provider, social worker, and Veteran Service Organization can help make navigating VA benefits and programs easier to understand, less stressful, and provide you with assistance you may need to a better quality of life with MS. [Source: VA Multiple Sclerosis E-letter | June 1, 2021 ++]

VA Multiple Sclerosis Care Update 01: Podcasts

Nearly 1 million people in the United States are living with MS, more than double the original estimate from a few years ago. The MS Centers of Excellence "MS & Vets" podcast series, developed in collaboration with the VA Employee Education System, discusses important issues related to the health and quality of life for Veterans with MS. During every episode you'll hear subject matter experts weigh in on MS issues and also talk about services the Veterans Health Administration provides because every Veteran's health really does matter. The main page for the "MS & Vets" podcast series is on [Spreaker](#). When you go to the ["MS & Vets" Spreaker page](#), you will see a listing of the podcasts that have occurred while applications that allow you to listen to the podcasts are on the right. Select which application you would like to use for listening to the podcasts. Once you choose a podcast application, you should be able to subscribe to the series and be alerted to future episodes. A new podcast will be posted the 2nd Monday of each month. [Source:

https://www.va.gov/MS/Products/videos/Podcasts_for_Veterans_with_Multiple_Sclerosis.asp | June 2021 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse Reported JUN 01 thru 15, 2021

Ozarks, AR — Inadequate oversight by Veterans Affairs senior leaders and a fear of whistleblower reprisal among other staffers allowed a department pathologist to make thousands of serious medical errors, including the deaths of at least two patients, according to the findings of a scathing investigative report released 2 JUN. The findings from the VA Inspector General focus on the actions of **Robert Morris Levy**, a former staffer at the Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks in Arkansas from 2005 to 2018. In January, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison for involuntary manslaughter and mail fraud connected to the mistakes, brought to light after several years of investigation by VA and law enforcement authorities.



The critical report also comes less than a month after another damning set of findings on institutional failures connected to a former VA nursing assistant in West Virginia who killed at least seven patients, tragedies the inspector general said may have been prevented with better communication and oversight by facility leaders. In Levy's case, officials found "a culture in which staff did not report serious concerns in part because of a perception that others had reported [the problem] or they were concerned about reprisal."

Senior leaders who knew about Levy's struggle with alcoholism and past unethical behaviors failed to fully monitor his work, even amid concerns that he may be manipulating medical reports. Investigators also criticized leaders who "failed to promote a culture of accountability" at the site. "Any one of these breakdowns could cause harmful results," the report states. "Occurring together and over an extended period of time, the consequences were devastating, tragic, and deadly." Levy was arrested in March 2018 for suspicion of drunk driving in a parking lot near the VA hospital while he was supposed to be on duty. He was fired then, and officials initiated a review of his past work to look for any potential patient care problems.

They found more than 3,000 errors, including 589 "major diagnostic discrepancies" with serious repercussions for patients. In at least two cases, Levy overlooked clear evidence of cancers which, if treated earlier, may have saved the patients' lives. Supervisors had suspected Levy was drinking alcohol while on duty as far back as 2015. He was temporarily suspended in 2016, but reinstated by department and state medical officials after completing an addiction treatment program. But prosecutors said Levy cheated drug tests and falsified records to cover up his relapses. As a result, he continued reviewing sensitive patient medical information while intoxicated, potentially issuing incorrect or dangerous diagnoses for thousands of veterans.

The IG report said some of those mistakes could have been prevented with better policies and procedures at the medical center. Under VA rules, much of Levy's work should have been reviewed by a second department pathologist, but Levy for years altered records to make it appear as if his work had undergone that extra check. Officials higher up missed the forgeries in their work. Investigators also noted that Levy's alcohol use on the job was noticed by multiple staff members, but most opted not to report the problems because of fear of reprisal from the doctor and his supervisors and confusion surrounding the chain of command. One staff member who did report the improper behavior "felt belittled" by leadership after doing so.

And investigators said that officials failed to follow up on Levy's past alcohol-related legal issues before his 2005 hiring, which might have disqualified him from the sensitive patient work. The inspector general found similar problems with pre-hiring background checks in the West Virginia case. In a statement, VA Inspector General Michael Missal called the findings "a reminder for all VHA facilities of

the potential consequences of failing to have open communications and an effective patient safety program.”

VA officials promised reforms in response to the case. “We are deeply saddened by the harm Dr. Levy committed against our veterans,” Richard Stone, acting under secretary for health at VA, said in a statement. “Our medically vulnerable patients trusted him with their care and several lost their lives due to his behavior. VHA condemns his actions and is committed to improving processes to ensure safe care for veterans across the system.” In a separate statement, VA officials noted that Levy “sought to deceive the government, and VA was not aware of the actions he took to conceal his errors. Once the full extent of his actions was known, VA worked immediately to enact process changes ... that would prevent any provider from causing tragic patient harm.”

VA officials said new policies regarding medical report reviews will be in place by the end of the summer. A full review of facility leadership response and responsibility is expected to be finished by this fall. Department leaders are also looking into potentially requiring mandatory alcohol testing policy for on-duty staff, following confusion over whether Levy was required to submit to such testing before his 2016 treatment program. VA has also creating a new quality analyst position at focused solely on pathology and laboratory issues. The full report is available on the [VA Inspector General’s web site](#). [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 2, 2021 ++]

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Elyria, OH. A federal grand jury returned a one-count indictment on May 27, 2021, charging **Daniel Devaty**, 49, of Elyria, Ohio, with influencing a federal official by threatening a family member. According to the affidavit in support of the criminal complaint, on March 24, 2021, it is alleged that the Defendant sent a text message to the government-issued cell phone of a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Social Worker threatening to kill his daughters. Law enforcement officials with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigated the alleged threat and determined that the VA social worker previously worked with the Defendant on a HUD-VA program that offered support services to homeless Veterans and their families to help find and sustain permeant housing.

According to the affidavit, the Defendant was admitted to the HUD-VA program in March of 2014 and was removed in January of 2021 after numerous complaints of physical threats and public intoxication. The Defendant stated to law enforcement investigators that he sent the threatening text message to the cell phone of the VA social worker and a non-threatening message to another social worker after learning of his removal from the program.

An indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is entitled to a fair trial in which it will be the government’s burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. If convicted, the Defendant’s sentence will be determined by the Court after review of factors unique to this case, including the Defendant’s prior criminal record, if any, the Defendant’s role in the offense, and the characteristics of the violation. In all cases, the sentence will not exceed the statutory maximum, and in most cases, it will be less than the maximum.

[Source: DoJ Northern District of Ohio | U.S. Attorney’s Office | June 8, 2021 ++]

* Vets *



Vet Health Resources

Medicare Organizations, Healthcare Helplines, & More

Medicare Organizations

If you need more information about your VA benefits or the different types of Medicare coverage, reach out to one of the resources below for help:

- **[Senior Medicare Patrol](#)**
The Senior Medicare Patrol provides one-on-one assistance to enrollees who need help preventing or detecting health care fraud. If you have a complaint about a provider, visit the national SMP page and click [Find Help in Your State](#) to locate the SMP closest to you.
- **[State Health Insurance Assistance Programs](#)**
SHIP helps Medicare-eligible individuals make decisions about their health coverage. SHIP counselors are available to answer your questions about Medicare and help you compare plans. To access one-on-one assistance, visit the [SHIP website](#) and click Find Local Medicare Help. You can also call 877-839-2675 or email info@shiptacenter.org.
- **[Area Agencies on Aging](#)**
Area Agencies on Aging help older adults make informed decisions and maintain their independence for as long as possible. Trained counselors are on hand to answer your questions about Medicare and point you to carefully vetted resources for more information about your coverage options. To find aging resources in your area, visit the [National Association of Area Agencies on Aging](#) website and enter your ZIP code or city/state into the search tool on the main page.
- **[Legal Services Corporation](#)**
Legal Services Corporation provides funding for legal aid organizations in each state, giving veterans, seniors, and low-income Americans access to much-needed legal advice and representation. If you have a problem with Medicare and can't get help from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, you may want to contact LSC for a referral to a licensed attorney in your area. To request assistance, fill out the contact form on the LSC website or call the Washington D.C. office at 202-295-1500.
- **[Medicare Support](#)**
You can contact Medicare directly for the most up-to-date information on your coverage options. Call 1-800-MEDICARE or visit the Medicare website and click on the Chat Now button to chat with an agent. Live chat is available 24/7 most days of the year.

Veteran Healthcare Helplines

- [**Veterans Experience Office**](#)
The White House operates the Veterans Experience Office, a 24/7 hotline with live agents available 365 days per year. If you have concerns about your VA health benefits or the care you've received at a VA facility, call the hotline at 855-948-2311 to discuss the issue with an agent. Employees in the Veterans Experience Office use the information collected during each phone call to identify concerning trends within the VA system and make sure those trends are addressed quickly and efficiently. Agents are also trained to refer veterans in crisis to the Veterans Crisis Line if needed.
- [**VA Health Care Customer Service**](#)
If you have an issue with your VA benefits, call the VA health care customer service line first. Agents are available to answer your questions about qualifying for VA benefits, how much your benefits cost, what priority group you're in, and other issues related to VA health care. If you're concerned about the treatment received from a VA provider, a customer service agent can also refer you to the correct department for lodging a complaint and making sure the issue is addressed. Contact the VA health care customer service line at 877-222-8387.
- [**Veterans Benefits Resource Center**](#)
The Veterans Benefits Resource Center exists to help veterans and their family members apply for any benefits for which they're eligible. If you'd like assistance from another veteran, call the VBRC's vet-to-vet helpline at 888-777-4443 to ask questions about your health benefits. The VBRC also offers extensive information on VA health benefits, educational benefits, VA pensions, and other benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Visit the VBRC website to download fact sheets and other publications that can help you explore your options.

Learn More from Other Sources

- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | VA Priority Groups](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [Medicare | What Medicare Covers](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | Emergency Medical Care for Veterans: Eligibility and VA Payments](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [Medicare | What Part B Covers](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services | What is Medicare Part C?](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [Medicare Interactive | VA Drug Coverage and Part D](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [Medicare | What's Medicare Supplement Insurance \(Medigap\)?](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [TRICARE | About Us](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [TRICARE | Becoming Medicare-Eligible](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [TRICARE | Prescriptions](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | Eligibility for VA Health Care](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [Medicare | Estimate When I'm Eligible for Medicare](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [Medicare | When Can I Sign Up?](#) Trusted Source Medicare.gov (N/A) The official U.S. government website for Medicare, providing information about plans, coverage, costs, claims, resources, and more to the public. Government Authority [Go to source](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [Medicare | Joining a Health or Drug Plan](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [Social Security Administration | Checklist for Online Medicare, Retirement & Spouses Applications](#) Last accessed May 2021

- [Social Security Administration: Office Locator](#) Last accessed May 2021
- [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs | Your Health Care Costs](#) Last accessed May 2021

[Source: <https://www.medicareplans.com/va-military-and-medicare-benefits-resource> | Donna Williams | June 10, 2021 ++]

Long Term Care

Update 01: Paying for It



About 70% of Americans will need long term care at some point in their lives. Have you thought about how to pay for long term care? Many Veterans and their loved ones think that VA will pay for all costs related to long term care. Frankly, many Americans believe that Medicare pays for more than it does. Residential Settings and Nursing Homes have different eligibility requirements for each setting. The VA does not pay for room and board in residential settings such as Assisted Living or Adult Family Homes. However, you may receive some VA Home and Community Based Services while you are living in a residential setting. The Paying for Long Term Care section at www.va.gov/Geriatrics explains:

- [Standard Medical Benefits](#)
- [Service Connected Disability](#)
- [Veterans Pension](#)
- [Aid and Attendance and Housebound Attendance](#)
- [Medicare](#)
- [Medicaid](#)
- [Personal Funds and Long Term Care Insurance](#)

If you still have questions, call toll-free, 1-877-222-VETS (8387), M-F, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. (CST). Or contact your VA social worker. To learn more about services and resources for Veterans and their caregivers, visit www.va.gov/Geriatrics. If you want to know more about long term care options outside of VA, the [National Clearinghouse for Long Term Care](#) provides details about:

- Average costs of long term care services in each state
- Options to help pay for long term care services

[Source: Veterans Health | June 4, 2021 ++]

Memorial Day 2021

Update 02: American Legion Officials Resign over Censored Speech



Retired Army Lt. Col. Barnard Kemter taps the microphone after organizers turned off the audio during his speech at a Memorial Day ceremony on May 31, 2021, in Hudson, Ohio

The Adjutant of American Legion Post 464 in Ohio stepped down 4 JUN amid criticism following the decision of Memorial Day ceremony organizers to turn off a retired U.S. Army officer's microphone while he was speaking about how freed Black slaves honored fallen soldiers just after the Civil War. American Legion leaders in Ohio also suspended the post's charter and are taking steps to close it.

The moves come in the wake of intense backlash to the decision to censor retired Army Lt. Col. Barnard Kemter, who said he included the story in his speech because he wanted to share the history of how Memorial Day originated. But organizers of the ceremony in Hudson, Ohio, said that section of the speech was not relevant to the program's theme of honoring the city's veterans. The organizers of the ceremony turned off a speaker's microphone when the former U.S. Army officer began talking about how freed Black slaves had honored fallen soldiers soon after the Civil War.

Cindy Suchan, chair of the Memorial Day parade committee and president of the Hudson American Legion Auxiliary, resigned 6 JUN. She said this week that either she or Jim Garrison, adjutant of the American Legion Post, turned down the audio, the Akron Beacon Journal reported. Garrison resigned his leadership position a day after the state organization demanded he step down, said Roger Friend, department commander for the Ohio American Legion. Garrison has since been asked to drop his membership altogether, Friend said. "The American Legion Department of Ohio does not hold space for members, veterans, or families of veterans who believe that censoring Black history is acceptable behavior," Friend said in a statement.

He said the censoring was premeditated and planned by Garrison and Suchan. "They knew exactly when to turn the volume down and when to turn it back up," Friend said. In the days before the ceremony, Suchan said she reviewed the speech and asked Kemter to remove certain portions. Kemter said he didn't see the suggested changes in time to rewrite the speech.

Kemter, who spent 30 years in the Army and served in the Persian Gulf War, told The Beacon Journal he was disappointed that the organizers silenced two minutes of his 11-minute speech. His microphone cut out just as began talking about how former slaves and freed Black men exhumed the remains of more than 200 Union soldiers from a mass grave in Charleston, South Carolina, and gave them a proper burial. Kemter at first thought there was a problem with audio, tapping on the microphone.

The decision to silence him disrespected Kemter and all veterans, Hudson’s mayor and City Council said in a statement 3 JUN. “Veterans have done everything we have asked of them during their service to this country, and this tarnished what should have been a celebration of their service,” the statement said. The American Legion Department of Ohio said Army Lt. Col. Barnard Kemter will get another chance to deliver his speech and has invited him to speak next week at the organization’s Buckeye Boys State, an annual gathering that teaches young men about government. [Source: The Associated Press | June 4, 8 & 10, 2021 ++]

USPS Military Service Stamps

Update 03: Go For Broke | Japanese American Soldiers of WWII



The U.S. Postal Service has unveiled a new commemorative stamp honoring WWII veterans representing the all-Japanese American 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442 Regimental Combat Team from Kauai. “The Nisei soldiers of the 442d Regimental Combat Team and the 100th Infantry Battalion are exemplary role models who displayed perseverance, bravery and aloha. This stamp includes their motto ‘Go for Broke,’ which became the basis for their teamwork and victories on the battlefield,” Democratic state Rep. Nadine K. Nakamura told The Garden Island on Saturday.

The “Go For Broke: Japanese American Soldiers of World War II” stamp honors the second generation Japanese Americans, or Nisei, who fought during the war and faced discrimination in the U.S. The stamp features Shiroku “Whitey” Yamamoto from the Big Island, a member of the combat team. It was designed by Antonio Alcala based on a photograph taken in 1944. “A picture is worth a thousand words,” said Lynn Heirakuji, president of the Nisei Veterans Legacy and co-chair of the Stamp Our Story Hawaii Organizing Committee. “There is a big story behind this little stamp. But it’s more than a history lesson. It holds powerful lessons for this and future generations.”

Heirakuji, whose father was also a member of the combat team, said this is the first U.S. Postal stamp to feature an Asian American soldier and bring recognition to about 33,000 Japanese American soldiers

who fought in the U.S. Army during the war. He also credited the effort to the Stamp Our Story campaign, which started in 2005 by three Japanese American women from California — Fusa Takahashi, Aiko O. King, and the late Chiz Ohira.

The USPS announced that the stamp is being issued as a forever stamp, which will always be equal in value to the current First Class mail one-ounce (28-gram) price. The stamp is available at all post offices, and online. “This stamp not only honors the bravery and dedication of our Japanese American Nisei soldiers; it reminds us of our obligation to carry on the legacy of these soldiers to fight for a more-equal and just world,” Democratic state Rep. Della Au Belatti said. [Source: The Associated Press | June 7, 2021 ++]

Normandy

Update 01: D-Day Remembrance 2021



When the sun rises over Omaha Beach, revealing vast stretches of wet sand extending toward distant cliffs, one starts to grasp the immensity of the task faced by Allied soldiers on June 6, 1944, landing on the Nazi-occupied Normandy shore. Several ceremonies were being held 6 JUN to commemorate the 77th anniversary of the decisive assault that led to the liberation of France and western Europe from Nazi control, and honor those who fell. “These are the men who enabled liberty to regain a foothold on the European continent, and who in the days and weeks that followed lifted the shackles of tyranny, hedgerow by Normandy hedgerow, mile by bloody mile,” Britain’s ambassador to France, Lord Edward Llewelyn, said at the inauguration of a new British monument to D-Day’s heroes.

On D-Day, more than 150,000 Allied troops landed on the beaches code-named Omaha, Utah, Juno, Sword and Gold, carried by 7,000 boats. This year on 6 JUN, the beaches stood vast and nearly empty as the sun emerged, exactly 77 years since the dawn invasion. For the second year in a row, [anniversary commemorations](#) are marked by virus travel restrictions that prevented veterans or families of fallen soldiers from the U.S., Britain, Canada and other Allied countries from making the trip to France. Only a few officials were allowed exceptions.

At the U.K. ceremony near the village of Ver-sur-Mer, bagpipes played memorial tunes and warplanes zipped overhead trailing red-white-and-blue smoke. Socially distanced participants stood in awe at the solemnity and serenity of the site, providing a spectacular and poignant view over Gold Beach and the English Channel.

The new monument pays tribute to those under British command who died on D-Day and during the Battle of Normandy. Visitors stood to salute the more than 22,000 men and women, mostly British soldiers, whose names are etched on its stone columns. Giant screens showed D-Day veterans gathered

simultaneously at Britain’s National Memorial Arboretum to watch the Normandy event remotely. Prince Charles, speaking via video link, expressed regret that he couldn’t attend in person.

On June 6, 1944, “In the heart of the mist that enveloped the Normandy Coast ... was a lightning bolt of freedom,” French Defense Minister Florence Parly told the ceremony. “France does not forget. France is forever grateful.” Charles Shay, a Penobscot Native American who landed as an U.S. Army medic in 1944 and now calls Normandy home, was the only surviving D-Day veteran at the Ver-sur-Mer ceremony. He was also expected to be the only veteran taking part in a commemoration at the American memorial cemetery later in the day.

Most public events have been canceled, and the official ceremonies are limited to a small number of selected guests and dignitaries. Denis van den Brink, a WWII expert working for the town of Carentan, site of a strategic battle near Utah Beach, acknowledged the “big loss, the big absence is all the veterans who couldn’t travel.” “That really hurts us very much because they are all around 95, 100 years old, and we hope they’re going to last forever. But, you know...” he said. “At least we remain in a certain spirit of commemoration, which is the most important,” he told The Associated Press.

Over the anniversary weekend, many local residents have come out to visit the monuments marking the key moments of the fight and show their gratitude to the soldiers. French World War II history enthusiasts, and a few travelers from neighboring European countries, could also be seen in jeeps and military vehicles on the small roads of Normandy. Some reenactors came to Omaha Beach in the early hours of the day to pay tribute to those who fell that day, bringing flowers and American flags. Later on Sunday, another ceremony took place at the American cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, on a bluff overlooking Omaha Beach, which was broadcast on social media.

The cemetery contains 9,380 graves, most of them for servicemen who lost their lives in the D-Day landings and ensuing operations. Another 1,557 names are inscribed on the Walls of the Missing. Normandy has more than 20 military cemeteries holding mostly Americans, Germans, French, British, Canadians and Polish troops who took part in the historic battle. Dignitaries stressed the importance of keeping D-Day’s legacy alive for future generations. “In the face of the threats of today, we should act together and show unity,” Parly said, “so that the peace and freedom last.” [Source: The Associated Press | Sylvie Corbet | JUN 6, 2021 ++]

OIF/OEF Vets

Jason Redman | Seal Casualty

Born in a small town south east of Columbia, Ohio, Jason Redman joined the Navy Sept. 11, 1992. He continued his long family history of military service. Redman spent two years working as an intelligence specialist. Afterward, he completed Basic Underwater Demolition Training (BUD/S) to become a SEAL. After graduating in December 1995, Redman completed three deployments in South America, where he served on multiple counter-narcotic missions throughout Peru and Columbia. Redman graduated Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, receiving a bachelor of science in business management. In May 2004, Redman commissioned as a SEAL officer, later completing deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan.



On Sept. 13, 2007, while on a mission to capture a high-value Al-Qaeda operative outside Fallujah, Iraq, Redman and his team came under heavy machine gun fire. Redman received a critical wound from a gunshot wound to the face. He and his team survived the attack and returned home. While recovering from his injuries at then-Bethesda Naval Medical Center in Maryland, Redman posted a bright orange sign on his door to discourage people from showing him pity. The handwritten sign garnered national attention and became a symbol for wounded service members throughout the country.

In November 2013, after 21 years of military service, Redman retired as a lieutenant. He received numerous medals and decorations, including a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star Medal. Redman founded multiple nonprofits to for service members and families. In a 2019 interview with the American Veteran Center, Redman said that he was fighting the war at home by expanding his work to help Veterans find their purpose when transitioning back to civilian life. Thank you for your service! To watch a 22 min video in which Redman discusses his service go to https://youtu.be/zdwizRp3z_w. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Claire Barrett | March 22, 2021 ++]

Obit: John Warner

May 25, 2021 | Former Sen, SECNAV, WW2/ROK Vet



Former Sen. John W. Warner of Virginia, a centrist Republican who served in World War II, the Korean War, as Navy secretary and one of the Senate's most influential military experts, has died at 94, his longtime chief of staff said 25 MAY. Warner died 26 MAY of heart failure at home in Alexandria, Virginia, with his wife and daughter at his side, Susan A. Magill said. "He was frail but had a lot of spirit and was involved until his last days," Magill said.

Warner, a courtly figure who squired celebrities and was married to Elizabeth Taylor when he was elected to the Senate in 1978, and went on to serve five terms before retiring from the chamber in 2008. He drew support from moderates of both major parties, establishing himself in the center of American

politics. He was a key supporter of President George W. Bush's declaration of war in Iraq, and served for a time as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He had an independent streak that sometimes angered more conservative GOP leaders. But he was hugely popular with Virginia voters.

Being the sixth of Taylor's seven husbands didn't hurt when he ran for the Senate. The two were married in 1976 and divorced in 1982. Taylor wrote later that they remained friends, but she "just couldn't bear the intense loneliness" when he became engrossed in his Senate duties. He was succeeded in 2008 by Democrat Mark Warner — no relation — who had challenged him for the Senate in 1996 and went on to serve a term as Virginia's governor. After years of rivalry, the two became good friends. Mark Warner said his friend "epitomizes what it means to be a senator." Warner won support from moderates in both parties. The courtly senator with chiseled features and a thick shock of gray hair was so popular with Virginia voters that Democrats did not bother to challenge him in 2002 for his re-election to his fifth term.

"Virginians know that I stand up for what I think is right, and I accept the consequences," Warner said in 1996. "Virginia has lost an unmatched leader, and my family has lost a dear friend," said Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA). "Once I came to the Senate, I understood even more deeply the influence of John Warner. I came to know John McCain, Carl Levin, and so many others who served with him and attested to his integrity and outsized influence in a body he loved so dearly." Warner had been an early supporter of McCain's campaign for president, endorsing his fellow senator in February 2007.

The former secretary of the Navy, a veteran of World War II and Korea, Warner devoted most of his career to military matters. He lost his post as Armed Services Committee chairman in 2001 when Sen. Jim Jeffords' departure from the GOP put Democrats in control of the Senate, but he regained it after the 2002 elections put Republicans back in charge until the 2006 elections. Warner often defended the Bush administration's handling of the war in Iraq, but he also showed a willingness to buck the White House. After a 2007 trip to Iraq, Warner called upon Bush to start bringing troops home. He summoned top Pentagon officials to hearings about the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal and the Iraq war. Years earlier, he cast a critical vote denying President Reagan's nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court, Judge Robert Bork, a favorite of conservatives.

In 2005, Warner was part of the "Gang of 14" — a group of centrist senators who defused a showdown over judicial filibusters on Bush's appeals court nominees. That same year, Warner was the lone senator to formally object to the federal government stepping in on the Terri Schiavo right-to-die case. "Greater wisdom is not always reposed in the branches of federal government," he said at the time. He had quietly inserted his statement into the Congressional Record hours after the measure passed the Senate on a voice vote.

Republicans nominated Warner for the Senate in 1978 after the party's first choice, Richard Obenshain, died in a plane crash. Warner was ridiculed by some who thought he was riding on the coattails of his then-wife, Taylor, whom he had married in late 1976. Warner was elected by the razor-thin margin of 4,721 votes out of 1.2 million cast and was easily re-elected in 1984 and 1990. In 1994, Warner angered conservatives by opposing GOP nominee Oliver North's bid to unseat Democratic Sen. Charles S. Robb. Warner declared the Iran-Contra figure unfit for public office and backed independent J. Marshall Coleman, who drew enough independent and moderate GOP votes to ensure Robb's re-election.

Steamed by what they viewed as disloyalty to the party, GOP conservatives tried to deny him a fourth term in 1996, backing a challenge by former Reagan administration budget director Jim Miller. Miller

portrayed Warner as an elitist who spent too much time squiring stars, including Barbara Walters. But Warner easily defeated Miller in the primary, and went on to beat Democrat Mark Warner in the general election. John Warner mended his strained ties with the GOP by supporting the successful campaigns of Jim Gilmore for governor in 1997 and George Allen for Robb's Senate seat in 2000. "I sure risked my political future, that's for sure," Warner said in 1994. "But I'd rather the voters of this state remember that I stood on my principle. ... That's the price of leadership."

While the military was Warner's top priority, he also championed legislation to toughen seat belt laws and took up an increasing number of environmental causes. Born in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 18, 1927, Warner volunteered for the Navy at 17 and served as a 3rd class electronics technician. He received an engineering degree from Washington and Lee University in 1949. He entered law school at the University of Virginia in the fall of 1949 but volunteered the next year for the Marines, serving in Korea as a first lieutenant and communications officer with the First Marine Air Wing. Following Korea, he returned to law school and received a degree from U.Va. in 1953. He was a law clerk at the United States Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, went into private practice, and then served four years as a federal prosecutor.

In 1960, he resumed private practice and specialized in banking, securities and corporate practice. He became under secretary of the Navy in 1969 and served as secretary of the Navy from 1972 to 1974. He was administrator of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration from 1974 to 1976. Warner got an estimated \$7 million fortune in the breakup of his first marriage, to Catherine Mellon, daughter of multimillionaire Paul Mellon. He and Taylor divorced in 1982 and he married real estate agent Jeanne Vander Myde in 2003. Warner had three children, Mary, Virginia and John, and was a member of the Episcopal Church. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Eileen Putnam | May 26, 2021 ++]

WWII Vets 260

Calvin Moore | USMC Camp Montford Point Gradute



In August 1942, at Camp Montford Point near Jacksonville, North Carolina, the first group of African American soldiers to ever train for the Marine Corps began reporting for basic training. Over the course of seven years, 20,000 Black Marines received training at Montford Point after President Franklin Delano Roosevelt ordered their access to basic training in June 1941. Among those was Calvin Moore. Camp Montford Point was a segregated facility. Moore said he never forgot the harsh treatment and racism he endured for wanting to serve his country. The African American men lived in prefabricated huts in Montford Point. White Marines stayed a few miles away at a new facility on Camp Lejeune. When the

camp was first established in 1942, all the individuals in charge were white, but by late 1943, Black Marines replaced the white instructors.

Black Marines experienced racism every day. Moore, in particular, remembers an instance of not being served a meal on a train full of Marines headed home, and the feelings associated with the blatant discrimination. In 1948, President Harry Truman eliminated all segregated units within the military. The surviving Montford Marines received the Congressional Gold Medal on behalf of the entire group from President Barack Obama in November 2011. Moore said in an interview with the Detroit Free Press, “I’m going to cherish it. I’m going to put it in a case and hang it on the wall in a prominent place for everyone to see.”

Out of the nearly 20,000 Marines to train at Montford Point, there are an estimated 300-400 still living today. Moore discharged as a corporal. He continued to drive, cook and work in his yard until age 95. Thank you for your service! [Source: Vantage Point | Katherine Berman | April 24, 2021 ++]

WWII Vets 261

Hazel Lee | WASP Pilot



Originally from Portland, Oregon, Hazel Lee was the daughter of Chinese immigrants and grew up with seven siblings. As a teenager, Lee took a job as an elevator operator at Liebes Department Store in downtown Portland to save money for private flying lessons. She later joined the Chinese Flying Club of Portland and enrolled in the flying program sponsored by the Portland Chinese Benevolent Society.

Lee earned a pilot’s license in October 1932 after graduating from Cleveland High. She became one of the first Chinese-American women to ever earn a license. When the Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1931, she traveled to China to volunteer with the Chinese Air Force but was turned down. Lee worked as a pilot for a commercial airline based in Guangzhou in southern China and took a military desk job. After the Marco Polo Bridge incident began the Second Sino-Japanese War in July 1937, Lee attempted to volunteer again in the Chinese Air Force but was again turned down. Lee returned to the U.S. in 1938 and settled in New York. She worked for the Chinese government as a buyer of war materials.

When the U.S. entered World War II in December 1941, Lee applied for the Women’s Flying Training Detachment in the fall of 1942. She attended an all-women’s flight school in Sweetwater, Texas, for six months of training. Before Lee graduated, the detachment merged with the Women’s Air Ferrying Service to form the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs). After graduating in 1943, Lee became the first Chinese-American female pilot to fly for the U.S. military. She qualified to ferry cargo and trainer aircraft. She served with the 3rd Ferrying Squadron at Romulus Army Air Base in Romulus, Michigan. With the 3rd Ferrying Squadron, Lee flew ferrying and administrative flights in Boeing PT-17 Stearmans, North American T-6 Texans, and the Boeing C-47 aircraft. From Romulus, WASPs also

delivered the aircraft they flew to ports on both the West and East coasts. The military loaded the aircraft onto transport ships for the longer trip overseas.

In September 1944, Lee attended the Pursuit School in Brownsville, Texas. She became one of 130 women certified to fly high-powered fighters like the North American P-51 Mustang and Bell P-63 Kingcobra. On Nov. 23, while ferrying a P-63 Kingcobra fighter from Niagara Falls, New York, to Great Falls, Montana, Lee's aircraft collided with another P-63 aircraft immediately after landing in Montana. Though rescued from the flaming wreckage, she was badly injured and passed away on Nov. 25. Lee was the last WASP casualty during World War II.

Lee was buried at River View Cemetery in Portland. In 2010, President Barack Obama posthumously awarded the WASPs the Congressional Gold Medal. In 2011, Hazel Lee the Women in Aviation International's Pioneer Hall of Fame inducted Lee. We honor her service. [Source: Vantage Point | Sarah Concepcion | May 1, 2021 ++]

American Vet's Recollections

D-Day Paratrooper Tom Rice



In 1942, Thomas Rice attended Camp Toccoa, Georgia, before being sent to the U.S. Army Airborne School at Fort Benning, where he joined the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) of the famed 101st Airborne Division. While serving with the airborne infantry, Rice commanded a 60mm mortar crew and served as platoon sergeant. Deployed in 1944 to England with the entire company C, 501st PIR, he prepared for "Operation Overlord," the largest allied invasion against Nazi Germany. He belonged to a support group mainly armed with mortars. He jumped from a Douglas C-47 into Normandy on June 6, 1944. The mission of his division was called "Albany," aimed to secure several roads crossing the Cotentin marshes. On June 5, 2019 – at the age of 97 – he once again jumped into Normandy, landing near the exact same location he landed 75 years prior. Watch the 49 minute video at https://youtu.be/KhgnZiJdvlk?list=PLaz8anrWIM49nO_mEpPWevAIMbio3KdGV&t=81 in which he tells the story of what he experienced during the preparation for and jump into Normandy. [Source: American Veterans Center | March 10, 2020 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule

As of 15 JUN 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 | June 15, 2021 ++]

Vet Jobs

Bridge My Return Hiring Platform

BMR is a free hiring platform connecting Veterans with military-ready employers. They help translate core military skills for the present workplace. Trust, self-motivation, confidence, mission-driven, gold-standard work ethic, loyalty, respect, ability to improvise, discipline, teamwork, leadership. These are just some of the qualifications that you – our Veterans – bring to the table. These are qualities and traits that every employer wants – and needs – in its workforce.

At Bridge My Return (BMR), they translate all of your core military skills and training. They don't pigeonhole you into the job you did when active. Driving a truck in the military doesn't mean you only qualify to drive a truck for a civilian company. The additional skills they'd map to that truck driver MOS would include operation, control, coordination, communication, time management and problem solving. These are skills employers seek in a host of jobs – operations, logistics, project management, sales, etc. We believe that this unleashes broader, better opportunities!

It takes about 20-30 minutes to complete a BMR profile, about the same amount of time to watch a streaming program. After that, their software works for you 24/7. As new jobs are added, you're matched to new opportunities. Plus, the BMR application automatically creates a personalized resume for you – a resume you can immediately share with BMR employer partners or other employers you approach separately. At Bridge My Return, they work with all stakeholders to tackle Veteran unemployment and underemployment while constantly listening and building the funnel of opportunities for both our Veterans and our employers.

Building a Veteran community and pool of job opportunities

To build their Veteran community, they partner with diverse organizations, such as VA, Semper Fi, America’s Fund and Western Governors University. To build their pool of meaningful job and career opportunities, they partner with military-ready employers across a range of industries – leading companies like Northrop Grumman, Northwestern Mutual Life, CME Group, American Residential Services and Molson Coors. The best part is that it is free for Veterans and offer on-going resource support. It all works because the BMR technology is “bet the ranch,” bar none cutting-edge.

BMR’s team of coders and designers are relentless, challenging themselves to drive efficiency and effectiveness in order to reach the higher standard you deserve. It’s pretty simple, actually. You register and cruise through a profile-building process, and you leave with a solid resume and an open door to job opportunities across the country. BMR is led by three entrepreneurs with business, technology and military experience. Ben Hogan is the connector who opens doors to opportunity with decades of experience (the old guy); Dan is the technology guru who lives for this stuff; and Branden is a Navy Veteran and a strong and steady voice for Veteran support and advocacy.

They are are passionate about their mission and good at what they do. Check out his Video (“The Mission”) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDGPboynFrY> which captures the situation. It may capture your attention. Help BMR create the energy for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. To get started, click <https://www.bridgemyreturn.com/user/register?p=272>. For more info refer to www.bridgemyreturn.com or email info@bridgemyreturn.com.

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

Vet Hiring Fairs

Scheduled As of 15 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 | June 15, 2021 ++]

Vet Unemployment 2021

Update 04: Another Big Drop in May

The [veterans unemployment rate](#) dropped sharply last month to 4.1 percent, the lowest level it has been since the start of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data released Friday. The [May 2021 rate](#) is down from the 5.2% estimate for a month earlier and matches the unemployment estimate from March 2020, the first month of partial business closures and layoffs due to coronavirus prevention restrictions. The jobless rate spiked to 11.7 percent a month later in April 2020, and has steadily declined over the last 13 months.

Outside analysts warn that individual monthly employment snapshots for veterans can be volatile given the limited number of veterans surveyed by federal researchers. But Robert Frick, corporate economist at Navy Federal Credit Union, said the continued positive trend for veterans in recent months is encouraging. “It’s a good drop,” he said. “And I would suspect to see veterans employment even more towards the end of the year, as manufacturing and construction jobs accelerate. Those are industries where a lot of veterans are employed.” The national unemployment rate fell from 6.1 percent in April to 5.8 percent in May, the first time that number has been below 6.0 percent since the start of the pandemic.

The hospitality industry — largely shuttered by the pandemic — saw the biggest gains, with more than 292,000 added nationwide last month. Those tourism-related jobs are major employers in several southern and western states, many of which have large concentrations of veterans living there. The veterans unemployment rate has been better than the national rate 48 of the last 50 months. Frick attributed the improvement in the veterans numbers of late to the broader national economic recovery, and not any veteran specific trends or initiatives.

On Friday morning, President Joe Biden called the new jobs report “great news” for the country. “Since [the survey was finished], 21 million more adults have gotten vaccinated, making it easier for them to return to work safely,” he said. “This is historic progress in pulling our economy out of the worst crisis it has seen in 100 years.” The 4.1 percent unemployment figure still translates into roughly 380,000 veterans unable to find steady work last month. Of that group, roughly 40 percent were veterans who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan War era. That group younger veterans saw their unemployment rate fall to 4.0 percent in May, down from 5.1 percent in April.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 4 , 2021 ++]

Vet Employment Opportunities

JUN 15 Listings from Companies Looking For Vets

Military Times has listings from companies looking for vets to hire which is updated daily. Anyone interested can check them out by clicking on <https://jobboard.militarytimes.com> which will open a daily

listing by job title such as posted below. Clicking on the job title will reveal the company and location offering the position, the job summary and description, its core responsibilities, what employees are expected to do, plus prerequisite education and relevant work experience requirements. Also a tab to click on to apply for the job. Following is just one of the jobs currently listed.

JUN 14

- [Underwriter](#)
- Ultimate
- Frederick, MD, United States

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Job Board | June 15, 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 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits Kentucky 2021

The Commonwealth of Kentucky 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 – KY**" 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://veterans.ky.gov>:

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

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

*** Vet Legislation ***



Liver Flukes

Update 02: H.R.1273 | Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act

DAV is pleased to support H.R. 1273, the **Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act** introduced on February 23, 2021 by Representatives Lee Zeldin (R-NY-01) and Andrew Garbarino (R-NY-02). This legislation directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct an epidemiological study on the prevalence of cholangiocarcinoma in veterans of the Vietnam era. Bile duct cancer (cholangiocarcinoma) is a cancer of the biliary duct system, which includes the gallbladder, bile ducts, and certain cells inside the liver. One risk factor for bile duct cancer is past infection with tiny parasitic worms called liver flukes, which are found in the fresh waters of Southeast Asia. Veterans who ate raw or undercooked freshwater fish during their service in Southeast Asia, such as Vietnam veterans, might have been infected. Currently, there are no available studies to show that bile duct cancer occurs more often in Vietnam Veterans than in other groups.

The Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act can help determine if environmental exposures faced by Vietnam veterans can be linked to bile duct cancer. DAV supports this legislation in accordance with DAV Resolution No. 049. Refer to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1273> to see the bill details and latest status.

DAV is requesting readers to contact their Congressional representatives to ask them to cosponsor this important legislation. To facilitate this DAV has prepared an editable message at <https://dav.quorum.us/campaign/33558> for your use. If you do not have your legislator's contact data you can locate it by referring to <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm> or <https://www.house.gov/representatives>, clicking on their name, and following the guidance provided for sending them your message asking for this support. [Source: DAV National Cdr | Stephen Whitehead | June 1, 2021 ++]

LGBT Dependents

H.R.0000 | Armed Forces Transgender Dependent Protection Act

A group of 39 House Democrats on 1 JUN introduced a new bill to ensure that transgender dependents of active duty service members have access to needed health care. Led by Rep. Jimmy Panetta (D-CA) the **Armed Forces Transgender Dependent Protection Act** would prevent the Defense Department from stationing service members and their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender dependents “in states or countries that prohibit or otherwise restrict gender affirming healthcare and treatments” for them. “Despite the progress that we have made in our fight for LGBTQ equality, service members and their transgender

dependents continue to face hurdles that threaten their development,” Panetta said in a statement announcing the bill.

Republicans in more than 30 states across the country have passed or advanced legislation targeting transgender Americans, particularly students, in the past several months. Democrats and LGBT advocates have deemed such legislation as discriminatory and several lawsuits are expected to ensue. Earlier on 1 JUN, the first day of Pride Month, Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) signed a law that prohibits transgender student athletes from playing on teams that align with their gender identity. The Biden administration has taken steps to show support for LGBT rights. President Biden in January signed an executive order lifting the ban on transgender service members implemented during the Trump administration.

In late March, the Pentagon released its new rules allowing open service by transgender troops, essentially reverting to the Obama administration’s open service policy. But the Democratic lawmakers want to make sure the Pentagon goes a step further and install protections for the dependents of service members. “Across America, Republican-led states have embarked on the discriminatory mission of legislatively outlawing medical treatment for trans Americans,” House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler (D-N.Y.), a co-sponsor of the bill, said in a statement. “Ensuring that transgender children and spouses of active duty service members can access medically necessary treatment is a question of dignity, fairness, and civil rights.” [Source: The Hill | Ellen Mitchell | June 1, 2021 ++]

Vet Educational Assistance

Update 04: H.R.2878 | Native VetSuccess at Tribal Colleges/Universities Pilot Program

A bill sponsored by a Marine veteran in Congress could bring Department of Veterans Affairs benefits closer to Native American veterans at Tribal Colleges and Universities, or TCUs. **The Native VetSuccess at Tribal Colleges and Universities Pilot Program Act**, H.R. 2878, passed the House and was referred to the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on 19 MAY. The bill would increase funding for the Veteran Technology Education Course, or VET TEC, program; bolster student veteran housing benefits; and enable partnerships between the VA and nonprofit organizations, states, tribes and localities to fight veteran homelessness.

Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) reintroduced the bill in the House on 28 APR, along with co-sponsors Rep. Dusty Johnson (R-SD) Rep. Tom O'Halleran (D-AZ) and Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK). "H.R. 2878 helps us keep our promise to Native veterans, a group that has fought for this country in every war since the American Revolution," Gallego, a Marine Corps combat veteran and member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said in a statement after the bill passed that chamber. "I am proud to have worked across the aisle to assemble this legislative package to help improve access to economic and educational opportunities for veteran communities. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate to get it signed into law."

Approximately 14,627 active-duty service members identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, according to a 2019 demographics report from the Defense Department. O'Halleran told Military.com that Native American vets have played a vital role in the U.S. military. "Our veterans have done so much for our country, and Native Americans have had the highest level of participation in our military on a per capita basis throughout America's history," he said. "We need to acknowledge that, but the best thing we can do

for our veterans is to make sure they're highly educated, and help them and their families out." O'Halleran represents Arizona's 1st Congressional District, where 22.3% of residents are Native American, according to 2018 data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

"We have veterans that have to travel five hours one way to get care and then turn around and go five hours back in the same day," O'Halleran told Military.com. "Even with the added funding that we've seen, it still hasn't gotten to a level where a veteran, whether on tribal lands or in rural America, is getting treated the same as a veteran in urban environments. They need to be able to get the benefits that they deserve."

Native American veterans face unique challenges as they transition from military to civilian life, Johnson said in a statement to Military.com. "Currently, at TCUs, there is no specific programming to help Native Veterans make the transition from active duty to college life," he said. "By expanding the already successful VetSuccess on Campus program to TCUs, Native veterans will be able to access on-campus benefits assistance and counseling that other veterans currently benefit from." Johnson said he decided to co-sponsor the bill because "educational ... programs are critical to the long-term success of our Native veterans."

Moving forward, O'Halleran said that the government "needs to understand that they have to get out there" and proactively reach out to Native veterans. "There's a fairness issue, and we need to make sure that people start to understand that we have to reach out to our veterans. You can't just sit in Phoenix or Tucson and say, 'Oh, we have a hospital here, or we have a program here,'" he said. "We need to continue down the path of treating our veterans in these tribal and rural areas to the same level as we treat people in the rest of America."

Refer to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2878> to see the bill details and latest status. [Source: Medill News Service| Karli Goldenberg | 2 Jun 2021++]

GI Bill Student Loans

Update 08: H.R.2968 | Military and Veteran Student Loan Relief Act

Caregivers of our nation's disabled veterans have dedicated so much to care for their injured and ill loved ones, often sacrificing or delaying their own career and educational goals to do so. In many cases, when they do seek to advance their education, the high costs are overwhelming—especially for those who lost income in order to take on caregiving responsibilities.

On 4 MAY Rep. Gerald E Connolly (D-VA-11) introduced the **Military and Veteran Student Loan Relief Act** to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to include service as a veteran family caregiver as a public service job for purposes of the public service loan forgiveness program, and for other purposes. The bill currently has six Cosponsors. This bill would help ease the financial burden caregivers face in pursuing their educational goals by including service as a military or veteran caregiver as a public service job, making them eligible for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program. This program forgives remaining direct loan balances after an individual has made 120 monthly payments while working for a qualifying employer.

This bill will not only help provide much-needed financial relief for caregivers, it will offer well-deserved recognition of the commitment and dedication they have shown caring for their loved one. DAV Resolution No. 018 supports legislation to improve and provide comprehensive services for the caregivers

of severely disabled veterans. Refer to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2968> to see the bill details and latest status.

DAV is requesting readers to contact their Congressional representatives to ask them to cosponsor this important legislation. To facilitate this DAV has prepared an editable message at <https://dav.quorum.us/campaign/33689> for your use. If you do not have your legislator's contact data you can locate it by referring to <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm> or <https://www.house.gov/representatives>, clicking on their name, and following the guidance provided for sending them your message asking for this support. [Source: DAV National Cdr || Stephen Whitehead | June 8, 2021 ++]

SGLI/VGLI

Update 19: H.R.3793 | VGLI/SGLI Coverage Increase

A bill to increase the maximum life insurance coverage for service members and veterans to \$500,000 has been introduced by a bipartisan group of four lawmakers who say the increase is needed to reflect inflation levels. The current maximum coverage is \$400,000 for both the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance and the Veterans' Group Life Insurance. The proposal would update "the antiquated SGLI/VGLI policy coverage options that haven't been changed since 2005," stated a press release from Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA) who introduced the bill 8 JUN, along with Reps. Chip Roy (R-TX), Elissa Slotkin (D-MI), and Mariannette Miller-Meeks R-IA).

The bill "provides a long overdue increase in death benefits to ease financial hardships for our Gold Star Families and other military families," Levin said, in the announcement. Levin is chair of the House Veterans' Affairs subcommittee on economic opportunity. The Department of Veterans Affairs supervises the SGLI and VGLI programs. Under the legislative proposal, the VA would determine the amount of the monthly premium troops would pay for \$500,000 worth of coverage; and the proposal requires that the change would not cause the insurance program to operate at a loss. Currently, the premiums for SGLI are \$25 a month for the maximum of \$400,000, which includes \$1 for Traumatic Injury Protection coverage, or TSGLI. SGLI premiums are the same for every service member, regardless of age or other factors. Service members can choose to reduce their amount of coverage in decrements of \$50,000.

The VGLI premiums are based on age, and the cost increases every five years up to age 80. Effective 1 APR, the VGLI premiums were reduced by an average of 7 percent across all age groups. Any separating service member who has SGLI coverage is eligible to sign up for VGLI coverage after separation, but they must submit their application and initial premium within 240 days after leaving the military to apply without proof of good health. Those who apply after the 240-day period but before the deadline of one year and 120 days from separation must submit proof of good health by completing a questionnaire regarding medical conditions. But both those deadlines have been temporarily extended by 90 days because of COVID-19, for service members leaving the military between June 11, 2020, and June 11, 2021. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | June 8, 2021 ++]

VA Billing

H.R.845 | VA Billing Accountability Act

On February 4, 2021 Rep. Lloyd Smucker (PA) introduced the **VA Billing Accountability Act**. The bill would authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to waive veterans' copayment requirements for medications, hospital, outpatient or nursing care when the VA has committed a billing error that delayed co-payment notification to the veteran for more than 180 days (18 months for a non-VA facility) after the date on which the veteran received the care.

VA billing errors often cause veterans financial and personal distress. DAV members—veterans with disabilities related to military service—have already paid a high price for their medical care and should not be subjected to copayments, particularly after a significant time has passed between receiving the service and the bill. At this time of worldwide economic recovery, “surprise” billing may further undermine veterans' financial stability. DAV supports H.R. 845, in accordance with DAV Resolution No. 365, which calls for the reduction or elimination of health care co-payments for service-connected disabled veterans.

DAV is requesting readers to contact their Congressional representatives to ask them to cosponsor this important legislation. To facilitate this DAV has prepared an editable message at <https://dav.quorum.us/campaign/33724> for your use. If you do not have your legislator's contact data you can locate it by referring to <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm> or <https://www.house.gov/representatives>, clicking on their name, and following the guidance provided for sending them your message asking for their support. [Source: DAV National Cdr | Stephen Whitehead | June 10, 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 ***



Navy Transgender Policy

New One Spelled Out

The Navy has unveiled new guidance to help ensure transgender individuals may openly join and serve in the Navy. “All transgender persons who wish to serve in the United States Navy and can meet the appropriate standards shall be able to do so openly and free from discrimination,” the Navy said in a

NAVADMIN released 3 JUN. “The Navy remains committed to treating all persons with dignity and respect.” “No person, solely on the basis of gender identity, will be denied accession, involuntarily separated or discharged, denied reenlistment or continuation of service, or subjected to adverse action or mistreatment,” the NAVADMIN said.

According to the new guidance, a service member must receive a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria from a military medical provider or civilian medical provider stipulating a gender transition is “medically necessary” to get the ball rolling on transition-related treatment. A medical treatment plan will be crafted, and the service member will seek approval from their commanding officer concerning the timing of their request, the Navy said. “The CO is the final approval authority for the transition plan,” the NAVADMIN said. Next, the commanding officer must issue guidance so that readiness is not undermined as it pertains to deployment, training and “good order and discipline of the command,” among other things. The NAVADMIN also recommends commanding officers examine the service member’s planned rotation date and other “career milestones” while signing off on the transition plan.

Military medical providers will document that the service member has wrapped up medical treatment necessary to transition, and will subsequently issue a memorandum for the service member advising his or her commanding officer to modify their gender marker in DEERS. “Gender transition concludes when the Service Members gender marker in DEERS is changed, upon which the Service Member is recognized in their self-identified gender...At this point, the Service Member must meet all applicable military standards in the self-identified gender,” the NAVADMIN said. That means that the service member will therefore be recognized and subsequently adhere to grooming and uniform standards, physical readiness test standards and other requirements that match their sex designation in DEERS, the Navy said.

The policy updates come in response to Pentagon guidance from March, which undid policies the Trump administration imposed that essentially blocked transgender individuals from serving in the military. The Pentagon said the update restores the Defense Department’s 2016 policies concerning transgender individuals, which allowed recruits to join the military and serve as their self-identified gender so long as standards are met and they receive medical treatment to transition. “We would be rendering ourselves less fit to the task if we excluded from our ranks people who meet our standards and who have the skills and devotion to serve in uniform,” Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said in a statement in March. “This is the right thing to do. It is also the smart thing to do.”

The Pentagon’s guidance concerning transgender employees has been in effect since 30 APR. The Air Force and the Space Force revised their transgender policies this spring following the Pentagon’s announcement, becoming the first of the services to do so. [Source: NavyTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | June 7, 2021 ++]

Military Suicides

Frequent Funeral Duty Impact

Army Capt. Kristen Bell stunned XVIII Airborne Corps leaders at a forum on preventing suicides in the ranks with her warning that soldiers assigned frequently to military funeral details are at risk of taking their own lives. "Capt. Bell presented eye-opening statistics regarding the volume of soldier suicides

following duty on military funeral details. Everyone in the room was surprised," said Col. Joe Buccino, spokesman for the XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.



Bell drew on her experience last year as commander of the 97th Transportation Company, where she assigned 44 soldiers to a total of 52 military funerals from January through March 2020. In June 2020, one of those soldiers she assigned, a sergeant, died by suicide, Bell said in an interview with Military.com. "I know it was something that deeply, emotionally affected him based on the conversations he would have with his father after presenting funeral honors" so many times over a short period, Bell said of the sergeant. "There were other members of that detail that experienced other hardships." In 2020, a total of five deaths by suicide among soldiers were recorded at Fort Eustis, Virginia; three of the five took part in honors details she had assigned, Bell said.

There were other problems, she added. "We did see an increase in legal troubles among those that served on the [military funeral] team ... whether it was involvement in illegal substance use, DUIs -- that's where I made the correlation [that the emotional stress of serving on honors details could put soldiers at risk]," Bell said. In a 25 MAY presentation on suicide prevention to the XVIII Airborne Corps' "Dragon's Lair" program, a format based on ABC's "Shark Tank" show, Bell recommended that the Army conduct mandatory, six-month behavioral assessments of all soldiers to gauge whether they might be at risk. Making the assessments mandatory would remove the "stigma" that can attach to soldiers who seek help for emotional stress, she said. "What I proposed for the change is for systematic and routine behavioral health screening ... specifically for a soldier before they participate in something such as funeral honors," Bell explained.

Her warning about the risk to soldiers assigned to military funerals may have come as a surprise to the leadership, but not to Sgt. Maj. Emmanuel Emekaekwue, the senior logistics noncommissioned officer for XVIII Airborne Corps. He commended Bell for her presentation and also attested to the emotional strain on soldiers from repeated assignments to military funerals, citing his own experience while attending the Army Sergeant Major's Academy in Fort Bliss, Texas.

In an interview, Emekaekwue, a 23-year Army veteran with two tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan, said one of his instructors told him that "when he was a battalion command sergeant major, he had soldiers on this detail [for military funerals]." "He had a squared-away team. They were a go-to group [for the honors details]. It never dawned on him 'til somebody came and talked to him and said, 'Hey, Sergeant Major, we gotta switch these guys out because they're taking emotional heat doing this over and over,'" said Emekaekwue, who is originally from Nigeria.

In his own presentation to the Dragon's Lair panel, as well as in an earlier article in the NCO Journal, Emaekaekwue stressed the importance of top leadership in taking a hands-on approach to suicide

prevention. "I've been in the Army long enough to see that when leaders take something seriously, changes happen," he said. Specifically, he said that battalion commanders and command sergeants major should take more time to speak with company commanders and first sergeants on how to deal with stresses that may be affecting their troops. The top leaders have more experience, he said. "It's just another set of eyes. This is more eyes to help the population of soldiers that are hurting the most," he explained.

Suicides Increase Across the Services

Dr. Rajeev Ramchand, a senior behavioral scientist at Rand Corp., said the concern that soldiers assigned to military funerals might be at risk is new to him, but added he is not surprised by Bell's analysis. "Every individual has a different level of vulnerability" in stress situations, said Ramchand, co-director of Rand's Epstein Family Veterans Policy Research Institute. "The same experience is going to affect different people differently." In the case of military funerals, there could be a risk of emotional distress for those participating, "whereas others could do it quite well." The Army would do well to consider careful preparation for those assigned to military funerals and making sure they know that support is available, he said.

The possibility that participating in funerals might be a factor in the increase in suicides across all the service branches did not figure in recent reports from the Defense Suicide Prevention Office. According to the Defense Department's 2019 Annual Suicide Report, which was taken before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, there were 344 suicides among active-duty personnel in 2019, up from 326 the year before. The rate of suicides per 100,000 service members was 25.9 -- the highest level since the military began tracking suicides in the ranks in 2000.

Last September, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown said he expected the suicide numbers to increase as a result of the pandemic. "COVID adds stress," he said at the Air Force Association's virtual Air, Space & Cyber conference in 2020. "From a suicide perspective, we are on a path to be as bad as last year. And that's not just an Air Force problem, this is a national problem because COVID adds some additional stressors -- a fear of the unknown for certain folks." The latest quarterly report from the Defense Suicide Prevention Office appears to back up Brown's concerns about the pandemic's impact on suicides. The report, released in early April, showed that the military recorded 156 deaths by suicide among all services, including active-duty, National Guard and Reserve troops, from Oct. 1 to Dec. 31 last year. The 156 deaths represented a 25% increase from the 125 suicides that occurred in the last quarter of calendar year 2019, the report said.

At Fort Bragg last week, the Dragon's Lair program heard five presentations on suicide prevention from among a total of 84 proposals submitted from soldiers of the XVIII Airborne Corps, as well as from soldiers in Army units unaffiliated with the Corps. Lt. Gen. Michael "Erik" Kurilla, the Corps commander, "was particularly interested in Kristen Bell's idea for mandatory behavioral health checks for all soldiers every six months. This idea, we believe, can go a long way to destigmatizing seeking help," said Buccino, the spokesman for the Corps. All soldiers would be required to get the check, "so there is no stigma," he said in a statement to Military.com.

Others who submitted presentations at Dragon's Lair and spoke with Military.com included Spc. Skyler Boyer and Col. Will Bimson, command surgeon for the XVIII Airborne Corps. Both praised Bell's initiative in bringing forward her concerns about soldiers participating in military funerals. "I personally think it's a great idea," Boyer said of Bell's call for mandatory, six-month behavioral assessment evaluations for all soldiers. His own submission called for the Army to make better use of the enormous

amount of data it collects on soldiers to gauge unit morale, including the periodic command climate surveys. His recommendation: Do it by text message. "The problem is most people don't take these surveys seriously," Boyer said. "People tend to glaze over emails. I think with text the response rate would be a lot higher."

In an interview, Bimson said that Kurilla had tasked him as the Corps' surgeon to follow up on the feasibility of implementing Bell's recommendations. "I mean, that sounds like a high-risk group of people," Bimson said of the military funeral details. He said that one of the issues in suicide prevention is realizing that "suicide is infectious." If someone in the soldier's family has died by suicide, "then you're at increased risk," Bimson said.

His own recommendation on suicide prevention involved addressing the spiritual needs of soldiers, and giving priority to spirituality in the same way that the Army emphasizes physical fitness. Everyone knows that you're not supposed to evangelize, you're not supposed to proselytize," Bimson said, but said there are non-denominational methods to give soldiers a spiritual grounding to focus on their purpose in life and why they're here. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | May 30, 2021++]

Navy Rail Gun Program

Update 01: Publicly the Program End Appears to Be in Sight.



After some 16 years of research and development, the U.S. Navy appears poised to kill its electromagnetic railgun program. The service has not asked for any new funding for the project in its latest budget request and says it will wrap up all the work it has planned now by the end of the current fiscal year, before effectively putting what's left of this effort into storage. The Navy's proposed Fiscal Year 2022 budget zeroes out two separate line items related to railgun research and development. It also shows that the service did not ask for, or receive, any funding for the project through the Innovative Naval Prototypes (INP) Applied Research account in the Fiscal Year 2021 budget. It did, however, get nearly \$9.5 million in requested funding, plus another \$20 million that Congress decided by itself to add on top of that, through the INP Advanced Technology Development portion of the budget for that fiscal cycle.

Since the Office of Naval Research (ONR) formally began work on the railgun project in 2005, funding for it has come through a number of different line items. In the past, this sometimes caused confusion and led to erroneous reports that the program had been canceled. The Navy's plans now seem to be clear. With regards to the INP Advanced Technology Development account, the budget documents say that "the decrease in funding from FY 2021 to FY 2022 is due to the completion of Advanced Technology

Development efforts under this Activity." This line item also says that the objectives for this program in the 2022 Fiscal Year are "N/A" and does not make any mention of future work funded through other portions of the budget.

"Railgun technology and knowledge attained will be documented and preserved," according to a separate section describing the purpose of the extra funds Congress added to the program in the 2021 Fiscal Year, further indicating that the plan is now, at best, to shelve the project indefinitely. "Railgun hardware will be realigned to maximize its sustainability to facilitate potential future use." The War Zone has reached out to ONR for further information on the exact fate of the railgun program and how it or other entities within the U.S. Navy or elsewhere across the U.S. military might leverage any of the project's existing work. The Navy has tested at least two different railgun designs since 2005, one from BAE Systems and one from General Atomics, with the former being the primary prototype the service has used in its previous research and development efforts. Both of these weapons functioned in the same way, launching solid projectiles using powerful electrically-generated magnetic fields.

As of 2017, ONR said that it had demonstrated the ability of at least one of these weapons to fire rounds at speeds greater than 4,500 miles per hour, or around six times the speed of sound, in land-based testing. That same year, it also showed that it could fire a salvo of rounds in relatively rapid succession from the BAE Systems prototype. The stated goal at that time was to develop a design capable of hitting targets of various kinds, ranging from ships and threats ashore to aircraft and incoming missiles, up to 100 miles away.

In the past four years, however, the status of this program and any milestones it may have achieved have becoming increasingly murky, due in no small part to a gag order the service imposed on virtually any public discussion about this work. The last major development the service publicly acknowledged was its decision to move all of the work, including the prototype railguns, from the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Dahlgren Division (NSWC Dahlgren), in Virginia to the U.S. Army's White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) in New Mexico. At that time, there was also public discussion about a possible upcoming at-sea test off the coast of the Pacific Northwest. The Navy had originally planned to fire a prototype railgun from a ship in 2016, before repeatedly pushing back that timeline. The service had previously said it expected operational examples of these weapons to be in service by 2025, as well.

Now, whatever may have happened behind the scenes, the end of the railgun program, at least publicly, does appear to be in sight. At the same time, especially given the secrecy surrounding the existing project, its worth pointing that railgun-related work could still continue in the classified realm. It is also important to note that the Navy had already spiraled off work on Hyper-Velocity Projectile (HVP), based on the design of the round for the railgun, but which could be fired from other weapons, including 5-inch naval guns and 155mm howitzers, at speeds up to Mach 3. The service has said that this is still fast enough to engage a wide variety of targets compared to traditional gun-fired ammunition. A U.S. Army XM1299 155mm self-propelled howitzer did successfully shoot down a BQM-167 target drone acting as a surrogate for a cruise missile during a larger, multi-faceted experimental last year.

The Navy is also exploring ripping out the AGSs on two Zumwalt class destroyers it has already received, as well as the third example, which is in the latter stages of construction, and replacing them with entirely new weapon systems. One possibility may be launchers for future hypersonic weapons. Progress on various hypersonic missile programs may be among the factors that have led the service to stop work on the railgun program. Though not necessarily as flexible as the railgun was expected to be,

the Navy has a number of hypersonic missiles in development now that still promise to be versatile. This includes the SM-6 Block IB, which is designed to be able to promptly engage a variety of aerial and surface threats.

"We've learned a lot and the engineering of building something like that that can handle that much electromagnetic energy and not just explode is challenging," now-retired Navy Admiral John Richardson, then Chief of Naval Operations, said during a talk at the Atlantic Council think tank in 2019. "It's too great a weapon system, so it's going somewhere, hopefully." Still, he added that, in his opinion, the railgun program had been a "case study that would say 'This is how innovation maybe shouldn't happen.'"

Congress could still add money to the final Fiscal Year 2022 budget to keep this program alive. However, the aforementioned justification lawmakers gave for giving the Navy extra funds for the project in the current fiscal year indicates they agree with the service's current plan. The Navy does now plan to retain hardware and documentation related to the past 16 years of railgun work, in case it wants to revisit the concept again in the future. For now, at least, the service's ambitions to field weapons of this type look like they have finally come to an end. [Source: The War Zone | Joseph Trevithick | June 1, 2021 ++]

Army SLRC

Army's 1,000 Mile Range Supergun Set To See Its Budget Slashed



The U.S. Army plans to stop major research and development work on a huge artillery piece, intended to be able to hit targets out to a range of 1,000 miles or more, by the end of this year. Instead, the service wants to move funds it would have spent specifically on this Strategic Long Range Cannon into a more general account that it could use to help mature various advanced technologies.

The update on the Army's plans for the [Strategic Long Range Cannon](#) (SLRC) program were contained within its proposed budget for the 2022 Fiscal Year as part of the larger U.S. military-wide budget request. In lieu of funding for the SLRC line item, the service asked for just over \$72.6 million for a new account called Technology Maturation Initiative (TMI) Planning for Super-System and Technology Product Prototyping. "This effort [SLRC] is projected to end in FY 2021," the Army's budget documents say to explain the request to "realign" this funding with the broader line item. The new, separate planning and prototyping effort "will execute prototyping in support of Soldier evaluations in potential areas of deep strike munition/munition systems, advanced navigation/networking capability, and/or advanced Soldier, vehicle, and platform

It is possible that this new funding stream, which includes work on "deep strike munition/munition systems," may continue, in part, to fund certain activities related to the SLRC.

However, even if this is the case, the requested \$72.6 million would be spread between those efforts and the other areas of interest described in the Army budget documents. As such, this would still likely reflect a significant cut in funding for the cannon program, which had, by itself, received just over \$61.8 million and almost \$62.8 million in the 2020 and 2021 Fiscal Year budgets.

The Army does say that it plans to complete various research and development and testing of SLRC components in the current fiscal year, which ends on 30 SEP. This includes work on the very large rocket-assisted projectile that was supposed to give the cannon its 1,000-mile-plus range, as well as "system integration and technology maturation for SLRC to include designs for long lead prototypes to be used in upcoming major system level demonstrations." The service is also looking to "scale and perform prototyping on components including objective cannon, gun carriage, and test platform."

The Army's budget documents do not provide any specific reasons for why it has decided now to look to close out the main SLRC account. However, this is hardly the first time the U.S. military, among others, has explored the idea of a very long-range supergun, projects that often present both technical challenges and logistical hurdles. The M65s, for instance, were ultimately only in service for around seven years, between 1955 and 1962, and were only ever assigned to units forward-deployed in Germany, Japan, and South Korea.

Ground-based artillery has, historically, offered significant flexibility, especially when compared to combat aircraft. Guns, as well as rocket artillery systems, are a highly efficient way to provide persistent fire support across a broad area, and are able to readily shift focus from one target to another, as long as it is within their range. They also generally have significant magazine depth and can rapidly move from one area to another, including in order to reduce their vulnerability to hostile counterattacks. They can do all of this without the cost and complexities associated with basing aircraft, which would also have to deal with issues around flying in potentially contested airspace, at multiple locations within a theater of operations.

A gun with a range of 1,000 miles or more would be able to exploit those inherent benefits to an even greater degree, as long as sufficient logistical resources existed to move what would be very heavy weapons into suitable firing positions and keep a steady stream of the large, specialized ammunition flowing to them. At the same time, when the SLRC effort was first publicly announced in 2018, one of its biggest potential benefits was simply being a very long-range, ground-based strike weapon that was compliant with the [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty](#), or INF, between the United States and Russia. That agreement prohibited both parties from deploying ground-launched nuclear or conventionally-armed cruise and ballistic missiles with ranges between 310 and 3,420 miles.

However, this impetus is now gone. In 2019, the U.S. government under President Donald Trump pulled out of that deal over Russian violations. Since then, the Army, as well as the U.S. Marine Corps, have begun investigating a variety of ground-based missile systems, including

hypersonic weapons that would have been banned under the INF. All of this can only have impacted the service's cost-benefit calculus with regards to the SLRC, which, as Brigadier General Rafferty acknowledged earlier this year, is a very complex weapon concept

With all this in mind, it would now appear that the Army has decided to drastically scale back its supergun ambitions, if it hasn't canceled the project entirely. [Source: The War Zone | Joseph Trevithick | June 3, 2021

Military Housing Lawsuits

Update 04: Ten More Military Families at Three Texas Bases

Ten military families are suing their privatized housing landlord, alleging mold, bugs, water leaks and other unhealthy and unsafe living conditions at three Texas bases — Fort Bliss, Lackland Air Force Base and Sheppard Air Force Base. The lawsuit describes multiple cases of sewer backups, mold infestation, rodent and insect problems, water intrusion and burst pipes. In one instance, a hot water pipe ruptured in the concrete foundation in the children's bedroom of the Drosos family in the middle of the night at Fort Bliss “and woke the children by burning them with [scalding] hot water,” according to the lawsuit. Army Pfc. Alexander Drosos and his family moved out of the house in December 2019.

The complaint was filed 8 JUN in federal court in San Antonio, naming Balfour Beatty Communities LLC and its associated companies at Fort Bliss, Lackland AFB and Sheppard AFB as defendants. The families seek an unspecified amount in damages, alleging financial losses in damage to their personal property, excessive utility bills, medical bills and other expenses. “We are aware of the complaint, which we believe is entirely without merit, and intend to defend ourselves vigorously,” said Balfour Beatty Communities officials in a statement to Military Times. The lawsuit alleges the privatized housing companies “concealed harmful housing conditions” from the military families before the families signed their lease, and when problems came up, the companies failed to fix those problems.

In their statement, Balfour Beatty Communities said the well-being of service members and their families is their top priority. “We take all service requests from our residents very seriously, and have comprehensive protocols in place to address any potential life, health or safety concerns,” officials stated. “We are committed to the continuous improvement of our military housing, and are laser-focused on ensuring we provide the highest quality living experience.” Balfour Beatty Communities provides housing at 55 Army, Air Force and Navy installations across the U.S.

The 10 families are Army and Air Force: the Banner family; the Clarke family; the Drosos family; the Dozier family; the Houston family; the Keever family; the Kinney family; the Northup family; the Roellchen family, and the Straight family. Some of the individual families' allegations were:

- The cockroach infestation was so bad at Air Force Staff Sgt. Jonn Roellchen's house, that Roxanne Roellchen noticed a cockroach crawling on her special-needs son's feeding tube, according to the lawsuit. The two subsequent homes they were moved to also had bugs and mold. They are still living in housing at Lackland AFB.

- The lawsuit alleges that James Banner was medically discharged from the military as a result of debilitating migraines he suffered while living in the house at Sheppard AFB, which had issues ranging from sewer blockages to mold, insect and rodent infestations. The family moved into the house in July 2018.
- Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Clarke and his family allege that the company refused to provide financial assistance when the family was told to leave due to a gas leak. They moved into the house at Fort Bliss in July 2015, and moved out in July 2018. They dealt with rodents, insects and various water issues.
- Army Staff Sgt. Cody Straight, in dealing with sewer blockages causing non-functioning showers and sinks; multiple HVAC leaks; toxic mold and insects; had to miss work to meet maintenance workers at the house, according to the lawsuit. “He was informed that unless he solved his problems and ceased missing work, he would not be promoted,” the lawsuit states. The family moved into the Fort Bliss home in October 2015.

The lawsuit describes “deplorable living conditions,” “systemically poor maintenance,” and “appalling defects” such as the presence of asbestos and lead-based paint; structurally deficient flooring and walls; faulty insulation; pervasive mold and other toxins; deficient electrical, plumbing and HVAC systems; and other issues. Because of these conditions, many of the military personnel and their family members “suffer from resulting medical issues such as difficulty breathing, asthma, pneumonia infections, migraines, serious allergic reactions, nose bleeds, and respiratory issues,” according to the lawsuit, filed by law firms Watts Guerra LLC; Pulman, Cappuccio & Pullen, LLP; and Law Offices of James R. Moriarity.

The defendants named are Balfour Beatty Communities LLC; and its associated companies at each of the installations: Lackland Family Housing, LLC; Fort Bliss/White Sands Missile Range Housing; BBC Military Housing – Bliss/WSMR General Partner LLC; Balfour Beatty Military Housing Management, LLC; AETC Housing, LP doing business as Sheppard AFB Homes; BBC Military Housing – AETC General Partner, LLC; and BBC AF Management/Development, LLC.

Among other things, the complaint accuses the companies of breach of the lease agreement, deceptive trade practices; negligence; fraud in a real estate transaction; common law fraud; and violations of the lead-based paint hazard reduction act. This is the latest in a string of lawsuits filed by dozens of military families who have alleged problems with mold, water intrusion, rodents and insect infestation, and many other problems with their military housing, and have alleged repeated frustration in trying to get landlord companies to fix the problems.

Following Reuters and other media reports and congressional hearings in 2019 that brought attention to mold and other widespread problems with military housing, laws were enacted in late 2019 and late 2020 to address the problems and force defense and service officials to provide better oversight of privatized housing landlords, and to be more responsive to families frustrated by lack of action.

DoD and the services have taken a number of actions to address these problems with privatized housing, such as increasing the number of personnel at housing offices to provide better oversight, and to act as liaisons with families and landlords. The final provisions of the military tenants’ bill of rights are set to be in place by the end of September. The tenant bill of rights addresses issues that have been brought forward, such as quick responses to maintenance requests. Many of the housing companies have also taken steps to improve the quality of the homes and their service to military families. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | June 10, 2021 ++]

Army Budget Request | 2022

\$176.6B Reflects Troop Level & Spending Cuts



The [Army faces cuts to end strength](#) and top line funding in President Joe Biden’s fiscal year 2022 budget request, according to documents released 28 MAY. “The reduction for the Army reflects the president’s decision to withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan by the beginning of fiscal year [2022],” said Anne McAndrew, acting Defense Department comptroller, in a media briefing that day.

All three components of the total Army face small personnel cuts, totaling 1,700 troops. The service’s overall spending will decline from its current fiscal 2021 authorization of \$176.6 billion to \$173 billion if enacted — a \$3.6 billion decrease. The cuts will not impact force structure, said Maj. Gen. Paul Chamberlain, director of Army budget. The end strength reductions would come over the strenuous objections of Army Chief of Staff Gen. James C. McConville, who has previously expressed grave concern over the size of the force.

“This is the same size Army that we had on 9/11, and when I take a look at what the requirements are, when I take a look at what historically we needed, and now that we’re in a time of great power competition, I’m very, very concerned about the size of the Army,” McConville said during an [April discussion](#) at the Center for a New American Security. McConville has also warned that withdrawing from Afghanistan will not offer many resources back to the Army, since the total commitment of soldiers to that country is minor at this point in the war.

Former Army Secretary Mark Esper had previously called for a 500,000 member active-duty force. If enacted, Biden’s budget request will cut the Regular Army from 485,900 troops to 485,000. The Army National Guard could shrink from 336,500 troops to an even 336,000, despite senior Guard brass begging for more troops after the busiest year for the component since World War II. “The demand signal for the National Guard goes up and up,” said Maj. Gen. David Baldwin, the California National Guard’s top general, in a January media roundtable. “The Guard is not big enough and we need to grow.”

The force’s smallest component, the Army Reserve, will reduce by 300 troops from 189,800 to 189,500. Even as troop numbers go down, though, [spending on military personnel](#) is increasing in order to accommodate a 2.7 percent pay raise, 3.1 percent basic allowance for housing increase and other increases to quality of life programs. The Army may cut from other key areas in order to protect its modernization priorities, too.

- The service’s military construction budget is slated to decline by 15 percent from \$1.4 billion to \$1.2 billion, according to the request.

- The Biden administration is also requesting less in procurement, research, and maintenance funds compared to fiscal 2021's enacted spending. This includes a \$1.3 billion cut to aircraft procurement.
- The Army's operation and maintenance request is about \$700 million less than previously enacted, largely due to changes in the Army's posture in U.S. Central Command, according to the service. The request will fund 20 Combat Training Center rotations, [four less than last year](#), as well as the new [Regionally Aligned Readiness and Modernization Model](#).

[Source: ArmyTimes | Davis Winkie | May 27, 2021 ++]

USMC Budget Request | 2022

Force Continues to Get Smaller Under \$47.8B Proposal

The Marine Corps plans to continue downsizing, while asking for a slightly bigger budget, according to the 2022 budget request released on 28 MAY. Overall the Corps' budget increased to \$47.86 billion in 2022 from \$45.06 billion in 2021, despite plans to reduce the active duty manpower in the Marine Corps to 178,500, from the 181,200 Marines authorized in fiscal year 2021. All of the cuts will come from the enlisted side, with the Corps planning on cutting 3,066 enlisted Marines. The Marine Corps plans on adding 366 officers during the same time period. The Corps ultimately wants to cut to about 174,000 active-duty Marines by 2030, as it plans to modernize and focus on a war against a near-peer adversary like China or Russia.

If the Corps shrinks to 174,000 Marines it will line up with the end strength authorized in 2002, when the Marine Corps was just starting to grow after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. The downsizing will come with "talent management reform," which will ensure the Corps retains the "most talented Marines" and replaces "individuals leaving the Marine Corps with even more talented Marines," a summary of the budget proposal said. The Corps plans adopting a model that is "focused on the longer-term" and retaining the good Marines, rather than simply ensuring Marines make it through their first enlistment.

Berger's vision of a dispersed force that may give platoons responsibilities currently retained for companies or battalions, will require an older more experienced force. While the Corps looks to shrink the active-duty force, it plans on increasing the reserves end force by 600 Marines in 2022, according to the budget proposal. Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger has said he plans on using the money saved by shrinking the force, along with cutting "legacy" capabilities like tanks and tube artillery, to reinvest in the more important technology for the future war.

The budget proposal calls for \$102.7 million investment in research and development for the ground based anti-ship missile and the remotely operated ground unit expeditionary fires vehicle. The combined system basically removes the cab of the joint light tactical vehicle and straps a missile capable of sinking ships to the back. The Marine Corps already tested the combination in early 2021 with some success. "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," said Lt. Gen. Eric Smith, deputy commandant for Combat Development and Integration, according to the U.S. Naval Institute.

The Corps also will increase its procurement budget for the amphibious combat vehicle, the replacement for the Vietnam-era amphibious assault vehicle, by \$95 million. “The plan for the ACV is to increase the buy from 72 to 97 vehicles in FY22,” Navy Rear Adm. John Gumbleton, deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget, said on Friday. “The tank divestiture is a piece of that.” The Marine Corps slightly increased its procurement budget to \$3 billion in 2022 from \$2.7 billion in 2021. The Marine Corps also hopes to increase its ammunition budget in the upcoming fiscal year, from \$292 million in 2021 to \$427 million in 2022. The increase is a possible sign that Marines will spend more time in the field as the service conducts experiments on the best way to face off against China and Russia. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Philip Athey| May 29, 202 ++]

Navy Budget Request | 2022

Aiming To Downsize

The Navy is aiming to downsize its end strength and cut its higher education funding, while bolstering funds for mental health and sexual assault prevention, according to the fiscal 2022 budget request released 28 MAY. “Our focus remains to recruit, develop and retain the optimal mix of personnel with the right skills and experience to man the fleet,” according to the budget document. The Navy said it is requesting funds to support an active duty end strength of 346,200 personnel in FY22 — 56,020 officers, 285,830 enlisted personnel and 4,350 midshipmen. The request is a decrease of 1,600 active duty personnel in comparison to FY21.

“This end strength level aligns with force structure requirements and maintains a force that can fight and win,” the budget request reads. “We continue to retain the very best with special and incentive pays, as well as upwardly mobile career tracks.” According to the Navy, the smaller end strength request reflects force structure changes like the decommissioning of 15 ships, including the recent decommissioning of the amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard, which was destroyed in a massive fire in July 2020. “These reductions are partially offset by new construction crews on various platforms including Virginia class submarines and Arleigh Burke class destroyers,” the budget request document said. The Navy is also requesting to cut 200 personnel to the reserve force, which primarily come from helicopter mine countermeasures, helicopter maritime strike and helicopter sea combat squadrons, the Navy said.

Altogether, the Department of the Navy is requesting \$498 million in higher education funding — a drop from the \$615 million that was enacted in FY21. That’s because the Navy’s Education for Seapower strategy has come under internal scrutiny and an expansion in funds for the campaign in the last budget was taken out of the FY22 request, the Navy said. Then-Secretary of the Navy Secretary Richard Spencer unveiled the Education for Seapower campaign in 2019 as part of an effort to enhance the service’s intellectual advancement. At the time, Spencer hoped the program would combine the education efforts for enlisted and officer personnel under a single Department of the Navy university accredited to grant diplomas, from associate degrees up to advanced post-graduate work. “Resources were balanced to ensure FY 2022 educational requirements are met,” the budget request document said. “Programs that decrease include the United States Naval Academy, Naval Postgraduate School, and Naval War College.”

Other educational funding efforts are growing. For example, the Navy wants to increase funding for the Reserve Officers Training Corps and the Naval Community College in comparison to the enacted budget

in FY21. This year, the budget includes \$164 million for ROTC programs, and under the proposed budget that would grow to \$167 million in fiscal 2022. Additionally, \$13 million in funding is requested for the Naval Community College in FY22, up from the \$9 million approved for this year. The Naval Community College kicked off its pilot program in January for nearly 600 students from the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, and is slated to conduct another round of the pilot program in 2022. “In FY22, the effort will expand to include up to 5,000 students,” Navy Rear Adm. John Gumbleton, deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget, told reporters 28 MAY.

The budget request also includes a boost in funding for sexual assault prevention and response programs, as well as mental health programs. The request includes \$131 million for sexual assault prevention and response funding — a 56 percent increase over the \$84 million in this year’s budget — to go toward items including victims’ legal counsel, SAPR officers and headquarters’ staff. Furthermore, the budget also seeks \$44 million for mental health funding, more than double the \$21 million included in the FY21 budget. The funds would go toward virtual mental health initiatives, expanded drug and alcohol counselor training, additional mental health staffing across the Department of the Navy, and information technology modernization and upgrades, among other things.

Of all the services, the Department of the Navy has the largest proposed budget, amounting to \$211.7 billion — an overall increase of \$3.8 billion, or 1.8 percent, in comparison to this year. That includes a request for eight ships — two Virginia-class attack submarines, one Arleigh Burke-class destroyer and one Constellation-class frigate — along with four other support ships. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | May 28, 2021 ++]

USAF Budget Request | 2022

Asking \$5.5B to Boost Personnel and Shrink Aircraft



The Department of the Air Force hopes to soon boast a workforce exceeding 660,000 personnel, while shrinking to about 5,400 aircraft, as part of its \$173.7 billion budget request for fiscal 2022. This year’s ask is \$5.5 billion — or 3.3 percent — higher than the department’s enacted budget in 2021. Under the proposed spending plan unveiled 28 MAY, the department would reach an end strength of 660,324 airmen and guardians, an uptick of about 5,600 over the level Congress approved for 2021. The increase is largely

thanks to a spike in Space Force manning as Air Force, Army and Navy troops join the newest service, as well as the likely temporary reinstatement of some 3,000 medical jobs Congress had planned to remove. Lawmakers later opted to keep health care workers because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Most Air Force staffing, meanwhile, will remain flat as it prepares for potential conflict with another world power. “In order to create a sustainable and affordable workforce ... the Air Force must continue to divest, terminate and/or restructure programs and facilities with limited utility in a high-intensity conflict,” the service said. The Department of the Air Force finished out 2020 with about 334,600 active-duty troops, which exceeded the number of available billets. Now it wants to grow the number of billets to 336,700, in part to keep pace with higher-than-usual retention amid pandemic-era uncertainty. Active-duty Air Force billets would number 328,300 — just 1,200 or so more than in 2021 — while Air National Guard staffing would add 200 logistics, special operations rescue, special warfare, cyber and intelligence personnel for a total of 108,300 troops. The Air Force Reserve would remain the same at 70,300.

On the Space Force side, the service plans to grow by 1,966 billets to 8,400 active-duty uniformed personnel in total. For the first time, that includes troops who will transfer in from the Army and Navy. The civilian workforce would also grow by fewer than 1,000 people to 4,364 employees. The department’s military personnel spending would reach \$38.4 billion, up from the \$37.5 billion Congress provided in 2021. That’s largely due to a 2.7 percent civilian pay raise for those projected 140,660 workers, mission and installation support, and facility improvements. Military personnel would also see their paycheck grow by 2.7 percent, their housing allowance grow by 3.8 percent and subsistence pay grow by 2.3 percent.

Funding for air operations and maintenance would jump to \$63.2 billion, thanks to a spending increase of more than \$2.3 billion — the largest requested bump in any USAF spending category this coming year. At the same time, the service wants to cut its flying program to about 1,150,000 hours — nearly 87,500 fewer than the previous year. America’s withdrawal from Afghanistan is driving the majority of that rollback, said Maj. Gen. James Peccia, the Air Force’s deputy assistant budget secretary. Taking on more risk to flight readiness during peacetime is also a factor.

“What we’ve done over the last several years is we’ve built our flying our program to match what we believe our requirement is, but we haven’t been able to execute that full amount,” Peccia said during a budget briefing at the Pentagon Friday. “In FY ’21, we reduced the flying hours to actually execute more in line with what we can do in each given fiscal year. In FY ’22, we’ve done the same thing, but we’ve taken just a little bit more risk.”

Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. David Allvin told the House Armed Services readiness subcommittee in March that the service’s inability to meet its flying hour goals spurred a study to find the right amount of flying to improve the force while trying not to stretch too thin. “Our most significant limitations to growing the flying hour program are enduring overseas commitments, protracted maintenance on legacy airframes, diversion of aircraft into modernization pipelines and shortfalls in maintenance manning — all of which reduce aircraft availability with which to train,” Allvin said in written testimony.

To beef up training in 2022, the Air Force wants to invest in cross-service training, new technology for pilot and other types of courses, and training centers with wireless internet. “This budget also ... takes action to address the difficult challenges of sexual assault, suicide and disparate treatment of airmen,” the service continued. As part of a push to tackle policies and processes that disproportionately hold back

minority airmen, the department looks to add \$68 million for diversity and inclusion programs. That covers initiatives like training to recognize unconscious biases, and increasing aviation scholarships for Reserve Officers Training Corps cadets at historically Black colleges and universities and Hispanic-serving schools.

USAF finished 2020 with more than 100 suicides across the total force, the same as in the prior year. Now it wants to spend \$876,000 on suicide-prevention initiatives to curb those deaths. “We support our people by implementing guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to foster relationships and build protective environments, continuing gun safety campaigns to mitigate suicide by firearm and bolstering support for chaplain programs and family training that reduces stress,” the service said.

Sexual assault and domestic violence prevention could see a \$7.7 million boost. And for military housing, a major focus of Pentagon reform in the past few years, the Air Force would allocate \$105 million toward making homes safer for families. “The Air Force continues to push the Military Housing Privatization Initiative restructures to revitalize housing at Offutt and ... Robins Air Force Bases for a total cost of \$56 million,” the service said, along with \$49 million to upgrade homes at Yokota Air Base in Japan and \$172 million for two dormitory complexes for recruits in basic training. It seeks \$2.9 billion for 56 major military construction projects, and \$10.2 billion to pay for overseas air and space combat operations and related costs like the Afghanistan drawdown.

The Space Force’s \$17.4 billion budget request, its second since the service was created in December 2019, jumps by \$2 billion over 2021. That’s because the newest branch is taking on programs like the Army’s wideband communications satellites and the Navy’s Mobile User Objective System, another type of military comms satellite. It also pulled money from Air Force ops to support the Space Force’s \$3.4 billion operations and maintenance ask. In addition to expanding its workforce and mission set, the service aims to fund software-coding courses for up to 90 military and civilian personnel. It also wants to create a Space Warfighting Analysis Center to lead its analysis, modeling, wargaming and other experiments to help shape the future inventory and job requirements.

“The Department of the Air Force efforts are guided by the three overarching Department of Defense priorities of defending the nation, taking care of people and succeeding through teamwork,” Peccia said. “This budget is the beginning of a journey to the Air and Space Forces of 2030.” [Source: AirForceTimes | Rachel S. Cohen | May 28, 2021 ++]

USSF Budget Request | 2022

Sizable Increase Request Reflects Domain Importance

The U.S. Space Force asked Congress Friday for \$17.4 billion in its 2022 budget request, a bold 13 percent increase for the smallest service when overall military spending is expected to be nearly flat. The \$2 billion increase is driven by both additional proposed investments in capabilities and the transfer of space-related funding from the other services to the Space Force — ostensibly beginning the long-awaited consolidation of space programs within the new service. The budget would invest in space launch vehicles and GPS and missile defense satellites for the domain that’s increasingly important to future conflicts and joint war fighting.

The Space Force budget remains small compared to the other services, representing just 2.4 percent of the Department of Defense's \$715 billion proposed budget. However, the fact that the Pentagon wants to provide more financial resources to the nascent service even as the U.S. Army budget is set to shrink by 2.3 percent to \$173 billion demonstrates the growing priority of military space capabilities to DoD leadership.

While the fiscal 2022 budget proposal continues the transfer of U.S. Air Force programs and funding to the Space Force that began in the 2021 budget, it also includes the first transfers of U.S. Army and Navy satellite communications infrastructure to the new service. The Space Force will take over the U.S. Army and Navy's Global Command, Control, Communication, Intelligence (C3I) and Early Warning infrastructure and personnel to the tune of \$143 million. Global C3I and Early Warning includes the survivable satellite communications systems needed to connect the nation's ballistic missile early warning capabilities and coordinate offensive strikes.

Major drivers of the budget include \$686 million for the procurement of two GPS III Follow-On satellites (the same number as last year), \$1.3 billion for the purchase of [five national security space launch vehicles](#) (three more vehicles than last year and \$341 million more), and \$132 million extra for [Next Generation Overhead Persistent Infrared](#) to keep the program on track for an initial launch capability of the first polar satellite in 2028. The service also requested \$3.4 billion for operations and maintenance, \$11.3 billion for research, development, test and evaluation, and \$2.8 million for procurement.

At an organization level, the budget request provides \$20 million to [establish a National Space Intelligence Center](#) and \$43.2 million to establish the Space Warfighting Analysis Center, which will help generate operational concepts and force designs options for the Department of Defense. According to the Space Force, SWAC has already completed an initial force design for the joint missile warning/missile tracking enterprise through cooperation with the Missile Defense Agency, Space Development Agency and National Reconnaissance Office. The budget request also includes \$347 million to maintain and modernize its facilities and transfer facility operations support.

The decision on whether to fund the Space Force at the requested amount lies in the hands of Congress, which will spend the coming months working through the lengthy budget process. Notably, House Armed Services Committee ranking member Rep. Mike Rogers (R-AL) told Defense News in February that the nascent service would have no issue securing funding from Congress. [Rogers said the Space Force](#) "has very unanimous support in the House Armed Services Committee and overwhelming support in the Senate Armed Services Committee. As long as it's got congressional support, we're going to be fine." He also said that declassifying more of what the Space Force does and the threats it's up against would help lawmakers convince the public the young service needs more support.

When it created the Space Force in 2019, Congress gave the service just \$40 million for fiscal 2020 to begin setting up — \$32.4 million less than requested. Then-Secretary of the Air Force Barbara Barrett said at the time that the discrepancy wouldn't be a huge problem, noting that the Space Force wouldn't need the full funding requested since approval came almost a quarter of the way through the fiscal year. For fiscal 2021, the Air Force passed its space portfolio over to the new Space Force, with the new service requesting \$15.4 billion in its first budget request. According to the Air Force's calculations, that's \$800 million more than the \$14.6 billion the Air Force requested for the same portfolio in fiscal 2020.

In the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act that passed in December last year, Congress funded the Space Force slightly below that requested \$15.4 billion, providing \$76 million less. Lawmakers reduced funding for procurement and operations/maintenance by \$144 million and \$17 million respectively, while increasing research, development, test and evaluation funding by \$85 million. Overseas contingency operations (OCO), intended to fund wartime operations, were fully funded at the requested \$77 million.

The head of the Space and Missile Systems Center said in November 2020 that [he expected the Space Force's budget to grow](#) in the coming years, building on the nation's increased investment in national security space that began when the Pentagon declared space a war-fighting domain in 2019. "If you thought space was going to be a priority in a kind of one-and-done way, that's not clearly what's been happening, right?" said Lt. Gen. John Thompson during the Schriever Space Futures Forum. "So three years in a row budgets have gone to the Hill with foundational changes to the space budget." That reflects a consensus among DoD leaders that there needs to be more investment in the military's space capabilities, Thompson said.

"During the cycle the Deputy's Management Action Group, [or DMAG] ... the folks that advise the secretary of defense on investment, continued to label space as one of the big strategic areas that DoD needs to address," Thompson explained. "The DMAG and many other DoD leaders are clearly sending a message that across the [Future Years Defense Program], the importance of the space enterprise is growing and needs to grow further." [Source: C4ISRNET | Nathan Strout | May 27, 2021 ++]

USCG Budget | 2022

Biden Proposes Flat Budget



Despite recent calls for more resources, the Coast Guard won't receive a topline boost in President Joe Biden's 2022 budget proposal. The fiscal blueprint, released 28 MAY, would provide \$13.1 billion to the sea service. That is just \$38 million, or 0.3 percent, more than it received for 2021, according to budget documents. However, it is higher than the \$12.2 billion enacted for 2020. "The standout item for me is that it's a flat line budget," Seth Crospey, director of the Center for American Seapower at the Hudson Institute, told *National Defense*. "And this is at a time when the Coast Guard is deploying and is actively involved in the United States' competition with major powers" such as China, he added.

The Coast Guard protects U.S. territorial waters, but also assists partners throughout the world including

the U.S. military's combatant commands. It performs a wide variety of missions including upholding international maritime law, providing situational awareness and counter-drug operations. Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Schultz has been banging the drum about the need for more funding. "To close the Coast Guard readiness gap, we need sustainable annual budget growth — I'd say 3 to 5 percent over the next five years," Schultz said during a speech in January at the Surface Navy Association's annual symposium. "We need a booster shot of sorts, about \$900 million to \$1 billion to address our most pressing needs."

In a letter accompanying the release of the budget documents, Schultz said readiness is his top priority. "Today, the U.S. Coast Guard is in the midst of the most extensive recapitalization effort since the Second World War. However, until recapitalization is fully completed, the women and men of the U.S. Coast Guard continue to conduct missions with legacy assets, some of which are over 50 years old," he said. "Ensuring the Coast Guard is ready to meet the challenges of today and able to prepare for the threats of tomorrow requires predictable, recurring, annual funding increases to account for the rising and inflationary costs of maintaining assets and infrastructure, and more importantly, sustaining a ready workforce. Absent additional investment in Coast Guard readiness, the service has already been forced to make difficult trade-offs among competing demands for services, and may soon confront challenges responding to disasters or adequately conducting our statutorily-mandated missions," he added.

Under the Biden administration's proposal for 2022, the Coast Guard's procurement, construction and improvements accounts would total \$1.64 billion, less than the \$2.26 billion it received for 2021 and the \$1.77 billion it received for 2020.

- About \$1.04 billion of the PCI funding would go toward vessels including: \$597 million for the construction of Offshore Patrol Cutter No. 4 and long lead time materials for OPC No. 5; \$170 million for the Polar Security Cutter program including project management for the construction of the first two polar security cutters and initial long lead time materials for a third PSC; \$78 million for post-delivery activities for National Security Cutters 10 and 11; \$67 million for the Waterways Commerce Cutter initial detail design and construction contract award; \$20 million for program management activities to support ongoing construction of Fast Response Cutters; and \$15 million to support a multi-year service life extension effort for the Polar Star, the nation's only operational heavy icebreaker.
- Another \$222 million in PCI funding would help recapitalize and sustain fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft including: sustainment of the current MH-60T helicopter fleet and initial funding for fleet expansion; modernization and sustainment of MH-65 helicopters to extend their service life into the 2030s; continued "missionization" of HC-27J medium-range surveillance aircraft. It would also fund the installation of small unmanned aerial systems for National Security Cutters, which will provide a "persistent airborne surveillance capability," according to budget documents.

Under Biden's budget, the service would see a significant boost in operations and support funding in 2022. The \$9.02 billion for O&S would be \$535 million, or 6.3 percent, more than it received for 2021. "It's a step in the right direction," Cropsey said. As of press time, the Coast Guard had not responded to a request for comment about whether the proposed funding would be sufficient. In his letter accompanying the budget documents, Schultz said: "Our FY 2022 president's budget request is a direct reflection of continued focus and commitment to ensuring U.S. Coast Guard readiness." [Source: National Defense Magazine | Jon Harper | May 28, 2021 ++]

Iranian Navy

Update 05: Largest Warship Catches Fire, Sinks in Gulf of Oman



Iranian Navy Support Ship Kharg

The largest warship in the Iranian navy caught fire and later sank 2 JUN in the Gulf of Oman under unclear circumstances, the latest calamity to strike one of the country's vessels in recent years amid tensions with the West. The blaze began around 2:25 a.m. and firefighters tried to contain it, the Fars news agency reported, but their efforts failed to save the 207-meter (679-foot) Kharg, which was used to resupply other ships in the fleet at sea and conduct training exercises. State media reported 400 sailors and trainee cadets on board fled the vessel, with 33 suffering injuries.

The ship sank near the Iranian port of Jask, some 1,270 kilometers (790 miles) southeast of Tehran on the Gulf of Oman near the Strait of Hormuz — the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf. Satellite photos from Planet Labs Inc. analyzed by The Associated Press showed the Kharg off Jask with no sign of a fire as late as 11 a.m. Tuesday. Photos circulated on Iranian social media showed sailors wearing life jackets evacuating the vessel as a fire burned behind them. Fars published video of thick, black smoke rising from the ship early Wednesday morning. Satellites from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that track fires from space detected a blaze near Jask that started just before the time of the fire reported by Fars. Iranian officials offered no cause for the fire aboard the Kharg, though they said an investigation had begun.

Meanwhile, a massive fire broke that night at the oil refinery serving Iran's capital, sending thick plumes of black smoke over Tehran. It wasn't immediately clear if there were injuries or what caused the blaze at the Tondgooyan Petrochemical Co., though temperatures in the capital reached nearly 104 degrees Fahrenheit and hot summer weather in Iran has caused fires in the past. The fire aboard the Kharg warship follows a series of mysterious explosions that began in 2019 targeting commercial ships in the Gulf of Oman. The U.S. Navy accused Iran of targeting the ships with limpet mines, timed explosives typically attached by divers to a vessel's hull.

Iran denied that, though U.S. Navy footage showed Revolutionary Guard members removing one unexploded limpet mine from a ship. The attacks came amid heightened tensions between the U.S. and Iran after then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. Negotiations on saving the accord continue in Vienna.

In April, an Iranian ship called the MV Saviz believed to be a Guard base and anchored for years in the Red Sea off Yemen was targeted in an attack suspected to have been carried out by Israel. It escalated a yearlong shadow war in the Mideast between the two countries, ranging from strikes in Syria, assaults on ships and attacks on Iran’s nuclear program. The Israeli prime minister’s office did not respond to a request for comment regarding the Kharg. Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said the U.S. was aware of the loss of the ship, but declined to comment further.

State TV and semiofficial news agencies on 2 JUN referred to the Kharg, named after the island that serves as the main oil terminal for Iran, as a “training ship.” The vessel often hosted cadets from the Imam Khomeini Naval University on the Caspian Sea. Like much of Iran’s major military hardware, the Kharg dated back to before Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution. The warship, built in Britain and launched in 1977, entered the Iranian navy in 1984 after lengthy negotiations. That aging military equipment has seen fatal accidents as recently as 1 JUN, when a malfunction in the ejector seats of an Iranian F-5 dating back to before the revolution killed two pilots while the aircraft was parked in a hangar.

In recent months, the navy converted a slightly larger commercial tanker called the Makran to use it as a mobile launch platform for helicopters. The Kharg also could launch helicopters on a smaller scale. But the newer vessel likely can’t fill the role of the Kharg, which could handle both refueling and replenishing supplies of ships at sea, said Mike Connell of the Center for Naval Analysis, an Arlington, Virginia-based federally funded nonprofit that works for the U.S. government. The Kharg also was seaworthy enough to sail through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea and into South Asia in the past and could lift heavy cargo.

“For the regular Iranian navy, this vessel was very valuable because it gave them reach,” Connell said. “That allowed them to conduct operations far afield. They do have other logistics vessels, but the Kharg was kind of the most capable and the largest.” The sinking of the Kharg marks the latest naval disaster for Iran. In 2020, during an Iranian military training exercise, a missile mistakenly struck a naval vessel near Jask, killing 19 sailors and wounding 15. Also in 2018, an Iranian navy destroyer sank in the Caspian Sea. [Source: The Associated Press | Jon Gambrell | June 2, 2021 ++]

Military Retiree ID Card

Update 05: Extensions Beyond 30 JUN

DoD announced the further extension of certain expired retiree and dependent identification cards in [a June 7 news release](#). The previous extension was scheduled to end June 30. Now, all ID cards with expiration dates between Jan. 1, 2020, and July 31, 2021, will be extended as described below:

- Through Aug. 31, 2021, for all Foreign Affiliates and their dependents.
- Through Oct. 31, 2021, for active duty dependents, as well as Reserve and Guard servicemembers and their dependents.
- Through Jan. 31, 2022, for retirees, their dependents, and all other Uniformed Services ID (USID) beneficiaries.

ID cards that expired prior to Jan. 1, 2020, or will expire after July 31, 2021, must follow regular ID card replacement protocols.

More Resources

Have questions about the ID card process? Check out these links for expanded details:

- DOD's response to COVID ID policy can be found at www.cac.mil/Coronavirus/, where you'll also be able to view and download PDFs with answers to frequently asked questions, service-specific ID card information, fact sheets, and more.
- Use the [RAPIDS locator tool](#) to find a RAPIDS office and make an appointment online. ID office phone numbers are also available on the website.
- Check out MOAA's [ID card webpage](#), which includes email and postal addresses, fax and phone numbers, and other useful ID information.
- Need more? Visit [this DoD webpage](#) for full details on sponsorship, eligibility, issuance, and other ID guidance.

[Source: MOAA Newsletter | Paul Frost| June 8, 2021 ++]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang 'Stern Tube' thru 'Subby'

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

Stern Tube – (1) (Submarine) Torpedo tubes which point aft. Many modern subs (and all U.S. subs) today have only a single set of torpedo tubes mounted well aft of the bow in order to permit installation of the bow sonar array. These tubes point forward but are angled outboard of the centerline. (2) The point where the propeller shaft passes through the skin of the ship. This tube includes a packing gland which permits rotation of the shaft without excessive leakage of water.

Stew Burner - Cook.

STFB – Stand The Fuck By, i.e. prepare for heavy rolls and bad weather (get ready for trouble).

Still - See EVAP.

Stinger – (1) The MAD boom, which extends aft of a P-3's empennage. (2) An additional bell stroke given when the captain actually departs the ship.

Stoker, stokes - (RN) Marine Engineering Mechanic, Technician, or Artificer.

Stores – (1) (Services of Supply) Almost anything which is handled or consumed aboard ship, e.g. food, spare parts, etc. (2) (Aviation) Weapons or other devices which can be carried by an aircraft.

Straddle – In shipboard gunnery, when one round or salvo is over, and the next is short, or vice versa. A hit is often soon to come, as the firing ship is getting the target's range (prior to the advent of radar, the most difficult aspect of the fire control puzzle).

Straight Board – In submarines, the more modern version of the "GREEN BOARD" (q.v.) report. Hull closure indicators are mounted on a panel. Closures which are shut are indicated by a backlighted dash (short straight line), while open closures are indicated by a backlighted 'donut' (circle). Therefore, with a 'straight board,' all hull openings are closed and it is safe to dive the boat.

Strangle - Shut off or disable. "Strangle your parrot" is a common call to shut off an aircraft's IFF transponder.

Strike – (1) (Aviation) The mud-moving side of the community. (2) To attempt to qualify for a new rate (specialty).

Striker - Crewmember, usually a nonrate, who 'tries out' for a specific rate.

Striking for Chief – Brown-noser, or someone really good at his job.

Stripey - (RN) Able rate with two or three good conduct badges.

Subby - (RN) Sub-lieutenant.

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

* Military History *



Doughboy's Doughnuts **Salvation Army Ladies Effort**

Comforts were few and far between for the soldiers fighting in the trenches during World War I. And there's frankly nothing that says home like a warm piece of fried dough — at least, that's what the ladies of the Salvation Army reckoned. Evangeline Booth, daughter of Salvation Army founder William Booth, began a National War Board at the outset of World War I to ensure the welfare of American soldiers. In 1917, she called upon Lt. Col. William Barker to assess what soldiers needed abroad, and he reportedly asked her to "send over some lassies."



Booth set to work and the organization set up canteens run primarily by women that offered baked goods and warm drink to those at the front lines. But they quickly realized that traditional pastry-making in the midst of combat with limited resources was not exactly feasible. Two Salvation Army volunteers, Ensigns Margaret Sheldon and Helen Purviance, who were stationed with the 1st Division of the American Expeditionary Forces, opted for a simpler (and frankly more delicious) option: doughnuts.

“With only flour, sugar, lard, baking powder, cinnamon and canned milk at their disposal, it was agreed that they would make and serve Doughnuts,” according to records from the World War I Centennial Commission. “The dough was patted into shape by hand and fried, seven at a time, in a small pan. The tempting fragrance of frying doughnuts drew the homesick soldiers to the hut and they lined up in the rain waiting for a taste.” And who can blame them?

With scores of flavors, icings, and fillings to choose from, doughnuts have since become a staple American breakfast food and in recent years have even entered the zeitgeist as a popular wedding dessert. “The simple doughnut became a symbol of all the Salvation Army was doing to ease the hardships of the front line fighting men,” records noted. And “The American Expeditionary Force was nicknamed ‘The Doughboys.’” As a result of the lassies’ efforts, the Salvation Army named the first Friday in June “National Doughnut Day [Source: NavyTimes | Sarah Sicard | June 5, 2021 ++]

X Troop Book Excerpt **The Secret Jewish Commandos of WWII**



The incredible World War II saga of the German-Jewish commandos who fought in Britain’s most secretive special-forces unit — but whose story has gone untold until now.

June 1942. The shadow of the Third Reich has fallen across the European continent. In desperation, Winston Churchill and his chief of staff form an unusual plan: a new commando unit made up of Jewish

refugees who have escaped to Britain. The resulting volunteers are a motley group of intellectuals, artists, and athletes, most from Germany and Austria. Many have been interned as enemy aliens, and have lost their families, their homes — their whole worlds. They will stop at nothing to defeat the Nazis. Trained in counterintelligence and advanced combat, this top secret unit becomes known as X Troop. Some simply call them a suicide squad.

During the night, the US 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions and British airborne and glider troops had landed in Normandy in an attempt to capture key roads, towns, and bridges. The RAF had bombed the coastline. Then came the minesweepers and air and naval bombardments. Sword, like the other beaches, was protected by German beach obstacles and 75 mm and 155 mm guns from shore batteries and by 88 mm guns inland. There were also snipers, mortars, and machine guns trained on the beach from the summer houses along the shore, as well as pillboxes in the dunes. The British Third Infantry Division would land at 7:25 a.m. and secure the beach while the Royal Engineers would clear the mines and the obstacles. They would be followed shortly thereafter by the commandos.

Huddled below decks in his landing craft, infantry (small), in the early morning hours of June 6, Peter Masters knew they were in the vicinity of Sword Beach when suddenly all the naval guns in the world seemed to let loose at once. The Royal Navy was softening up the coast in advance of the main invasion.

[Peter Masters was the nom de guerre of Petar Arany, a Jewish Austrian refugee who had escaped to Britain as a teenager and had been interned as an enemy alien before being selected as a member of a top-secret commando unit called X Troop. The X Troopers, nearly all Jewish refugees like Masters, were German speakers who were trained in counter intelligence and advanced combat techniques. To protect themselves from execution if captured they took on fake British names and personas. The X Troop had proven itself so valuable to the British military, that the men had been parsed out in small groups to assist existing commando units. Masters has been chosen for the Bicycle Troop (officially known as No 1. Troop of No. 6 Commando). If all had gone according to plan, in the early hours of D Day a coup de main force of 181 glider troops led by Major John Howard, should have landed by glider and taken Pegasus Bridge over the Caen Canal near Benouville. At first light the Germans would have almost certainly counterattacked, and they would need to be reinforced as quickly as Bicycle Troop could get there.]

While some of the others on the landing craft began singing to calm their nerves, Masters remained silent and focused. He thought about the fact that finally he was getting his chance to strike back. He was confident that if he could get off the landing craft in one piece, he could bring the fight to the enemy. “I felt well-trained,” he would later recall, “and definitely a better-than-even match for what I was likely to encounter.” As the surf got rougher, Masters battled his seasickness by reading the comic novel *Cold Comfort Farm*. Finally, after hours of being tossed about in the midst of the naval shelling and rocket fire, the beach was in sight. As sirens began to sound, Masters optimistically dog-eared his paperback and put it in his pocket.

“Attention on deck! Attention on deck!” a naval rating yelled. The shelling continued and Masters thought he could hear return fire coming from the shore. “Get your bicycles and prepare to land!” someone shouted. Peter went up to the chaotic, heaving deck and desperately tried to find his bicycle among the tangle of bikes that had been stacked in a messy pile. “Attention on deck!” the naval rating kept yelling. On the horizon behind him, Peter could see an enormous flotilla of ships that seemed to go on forever. Ahead, the beach was obscured with black smoke.

- More men were throwing up now.
- Spray was coming over the sides of the landing craft.
- Peter could see the muzzle flashes from machine-gun fire up beyond the dunes.
- The landing craft hit the shallows. Masters looked at the shore and noticed that the houses he had seen in the model back at Southampton were no longer there; they had all been blown to smithereens.

“Attention on deck! Attention on deck!” Heavy gears began turning and the ramp in front of him began to creak downward. Peter was hit with a startling realization: “This may be the last thing I ever do.” It was 8:41 a.m. The ramp was steeper than Peter Masters had been expecting, and it was already slick with diesel, vomit, and greasy sea spray. The landing craft was pitching up and down in the surf like an angry sea monster. France was burning, the sky was gray, men were yelling, sometimes screaming. This was not a good day or a good place to die. At the very least, Masters decided, he was going to get off this bloody boat. Wheeling his bike with one hand, he held his tommy gun and the guide rope with the other and jumped into the cold, waist-high surf, which to his horror was turning red from the blood of the dead and dying of the Eighth Infantry Brigade, which had struggled ashore before them.

Staggering through the waves, Masters labored to stay upright with his bike; his tommy gun with its thirty-round magazine; his heavy backpack containing extra ammunition, four grenades, a pickaxe, and a two-hundred-foot hemp rope that would be used to cross the canal if the Germans had managed to blow up Pegasus Bridge. All over the Normandy beaches that morning Allied soldiers were drowning under similarly heavy loads. Peter made it through the breakers and stumbled onto the sand. Field Marshal Montgomery, Brigadier Lovat [the commander of No. 1 Special Service Brigade which included the commando units of the X Troopers], and Major Hilton-Jones, the CO of X-Troop, had told the men over and over, “Don’t stop on the beach! Advance! Advance!” These words were ringing through his head as he stood there gasping. The very worst thing would be to get stuck between the sea and the German defenses, an easy target for the enemy. Although Masters did not know it, this very situation was happening on Omaha Beach, a few miles to the west, where American soldiers were being slaughtered by the hundreds as they struggled to get off the heavily defended beach exits.

But Masters found it hard not to stop and gape at the horrific scene in front of him. The air smelled of diesel and brine, gunpowder and death. Behind him dead men and parts of men were being pitched about by the surf. In front of Masters a dying soldier kept trying to stand up in slow motion, but he had lost too much blood. Nearby Masters saw two men digging frantically into the sand, trying to hide from the bullets and mortars. It was a Sisyphean task as the waves kept filling in their useless trench. A few brave men charged the enemy defenses and were mowed down. Others were frozen in fear, just sitting on the sand, a look of emptiness in their eyes. Everything seemed to be going wrong. The beach should have been cleared already. The commandos were supposed to be doing their fighting inland. Peter stood with the other members of Bicycle Troop, unsure what to do next.

Then Peter saw the towering figure of Brigadier Lovat, still wearing his white turtleneck sweater under his battle dress uniform, emerging from the very next landing craft and wading through the surf. The next man out of Lovat’s landing craft was shot in the face and fell into the sea. The man after him was Lovat’s personal piper, Bill Millin, wearing his full kilt and carrying his bagpipes. As his kilt floated away from his body into the surf, he began playing the jaunty “Hieland Laddie,” one of Lovat’s favorites. As Masters watched in amazement, next down the ramp was the Skipper [Major Hilton Jones]. Lance Corporal Peter

Masters stood at attention and absurdly found himself saluting his CO. Lovat, Millin, and Hilton-Jones all began moving forward, and Peter would be damned if he was going to stay there with the dead and dying, so he moved forward too.

Peter and the Bicycle Troop made it off Sword Beach and headed inland toward their rendezvous with the glider troops who had taken Pegasus Bridge. As Bicycle Troop rode through the small villages, people opened their doors and yelled, "Vive La France, vive les Tommies!" In one small hamlet the bicyclists pedaled hard to avoid a sniper in the church steeple. They continued east toward Bénouville which lay on the outskirts of their ultimate aim: Pegasus Bridge. On a hill before the village their lead cyclist was killed by machine-gun fire. He fell to the ground with, as Masters vividly recalled, "one wheel of his bike . . . spinning in the air as if it, too, had been mortally struck." Captain Robinson ordered the men to ditch the bikes and deploy behind the hill. They could not proceed until the enemy was dealt with.

"Ah, Corporal Masters," Robinson said. "Now there is something you can do. Go down to that village and see what's going on." Masters, happy to finally be chosen, asked how many men to take with him. "No men, Masters, just you." Fine, thought Peter, I can do that. He explained to Robinson that he would sweep around the village and approach from the side to get the needed intelligence. "You still don't seem to understand what I want you to do. Go down this road and see what's going on in this village," Robinson said. Masters understood. They were going to send the funny-talking stranger to draw the Germans' machine-gun fire. During their training back in the British Isles they had been warned that some of the Brits might see them as an expendable suicide squad, and now it seemed this warning was coming true.

To Masters it "felt rather like mounting the scaffold leading to the guillotine." But he didn't take it too personally; drawing the enemy's fire might truly be the most effective and quickest means of getting through Bénouville and reaching their objective, even if he was killed in the process. Peter walked alone down the middle of the road, like a hero in one of the Westerns he had watched in the Welsh cinemas. He was terrified but reminded himself that this was for the greater good. It was just a pity, he thought, that all his years of training were going to go to waste. Then he remembered a different movie, one he had seen in 1939 called *Gunga Din*, starring Cary Grant as Sergeant Archibald Cutter, a British Army warrant officer in colonial India. To disarm an angry mob in one scene, Cutter had yelled that they were all under arrest. Perhaps that could work here.

Where the lead bicyclist had fallen, Masters cleared his throat and bellowed in German: "All right! Surrender, all of you! Come out! You are completely surrounded and don't have a chance! Throw away your weapons and come out with your hands up if you want to go on living. The war is over for all of you." There was an eerie and unnerving silence, but no one fired at him. Masters looked back at Captain Robinson, who motioned at him to keep moving forward. So Peter continued down the road until the inevitable happened. A German popped up from behind a small wall. He looked at Masters, considered him for a moment, and then shot at him. In response Masters went down on one knee, aimed his tommy gun, and fired back. Both of them missed.

Peter pulled the trigger a second time. The tommy gun jammed. He dived for cover to give himself time to clear the gun. The German fired another burst. Masters tried to shoot back, but his gun jammed again. He ripped out the magazine, cleared the breech, cocked it, and just as he was about to fire he heard a noise from behind him. The men of Bicycle Troop were charging with fixed bayonets. He got up and joined them, and they roared into the village as most of the Germans hightailed it across the fields, perhaps persuaded by Masters's *Gunga Din* speech and certainly encouraged in their flight by the glint of the fixed bayonets.

The story of Peter Masters’s gambit on the road to Benouville would go down in X Troop lore. But this tale — like the tale of X Troop more broadly — has never been told in full. Until now. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leah Garrett | May 25, 2021 ++]

Flying The Hump

During WWII 600+ Planes Went Down In the Himalayas

One of the most dangerous missions for an Army Air Forces pilot during World War II was a trip flying over “The Hump” – a flight between India and China over the Himalayas. This was true for any aircraft of the era, whether it was a fighter, bomber or transport plane. More than a thousand airmen aboard more than 600 planes went down in the Himalayas during World War II, but that’s just an estimate. So many were lost flying over the top of the world, the Army Air Forces couldn’t count them all. If a plane did go down in the Himalayas, rescue was uncertain at best. Search and rescue missions were described at worst as “spasmodic,” and at best, “negative.” The presence of Japanese fighters only made it more dangerous



Gen. George C. Marshall hated the The Hump, claiming it bled the Army of its necessary transport planes and may have prolonged the war in the Pacific by nearly a year. He had every right to be skeptical. The primary dangers associated with “Flying the Hump” didn’t even register a loss to the enemy. The air up there was just so bad and the flights so long that any pilot – even an experienced one – risked their lives just to fly it. So when an actual enemy fighter did show up, it was bad news for the Air Transport Command.

That’s what happened to Capt. Wally A. Gayda during one flight over the Himalayas. Gayda was a C-46 Commando transport plane pilot in the USAAF Air Transport Command flying from India to China. He was on his way to Chunking to drop off supplies for Chinese Nationalists fighting the Japanese. His trip was already hazardous for the reasons mentioned above but the weather soon turned harsh, the winds picked up and his crew had trouble operating the aircraft. The Curtiss C-46 was already a whale of a plane. At the time, it was the largest transport aircraft in the world and many pilots wanted nothing to do with it. The C-46 had a wingspan 4' longer than a B-17 despite being a twin engine transport. The C-46 was also pressurized, and could carry roughly twice the load of a C-47 transport.

Curtiss’ behemoth transport plane also had a snag for wartime pilots: it was unarmed. So when Capt. Gayda saw a Japanese Nakajima Ki.43 Oscar fighter out the side of his cockpit window, he needed to do something about it in a hurry. Luckily, he had a Browning Automatic Rifle handy. The BAR in the cockpit of his C-46 was the same kind used by the Army infantry in small formations. The Browning Automatic Rifle was a compact light machine gun that could be used by just one soldier, as it was designed to be fired from the hip, while walking. That was all the pilot needed. Gayda stuck the BAR out of his cockpit window and emptied an entire 20 round magazine at the enemy pilot, downing the plane immediately. It was the

first air-to-air kill by the C-46 in World War II. The C-46 would go on to have a long and mixed career in the U.S. Air Force and elsewhere, no matter what pilots thought about it. [Source: We Are The Mighty | May 27, 2021 ++]

Profiles in Courage

Francis Gary Powers | U2 Pilot



Soviet Air Force pilot Capt. Igor Mentyukov was sitting at a bus station in Perm, Russia when he was recalled to base and ordered to get into his Sukhoi Su-9 wearing whatever he had on. He was not wearing a flight suit or any other gear, and his fighter was currently unarmed. His orders from Moscow were to take off immediately and pursue an enemy aircraft flying at high altitude - and ram it. He headed toward his plane and took off, headed for certain death. Luckily for Mentyukov, he never made it that far. His onboard radar failed, and he couldn't see his target. He switched off his afterburner and flew home, low on fuel.

The enemy plane flying above the Soviet Union that day was a U-2 reconnaissance aircraft, flown by American CIA pilot Francis Gary Powers. Mentyukov may have missed Powers, but the Soviets fired eight S-75 Dvina surface-to-air missiles at the spy plane. Powers had taken off from a base in Pakistan to fly over almost 3,000 miles of Soviet airspace to land in Norway. His mission was to photograph ICBM sites at the Baikonur Cosmodrome in the Kazakh SSR and the Plesetsk Cosmodrome north of Moscow. He made it as far as Sverdlovsk in the Ural Mountains. Soviet Air Defenses knew he was coming and were waiting for him.

None of the S-75 missiles fired at him scored a direct hit; otherwise, he would never have lived to tell his side of the story, but one of them exploded behind Powers' plane. That was enough to bring it down and force Powers to bail out. "The nose pitches forward, the wings snap off, and the fuselage goes into an inverted spin," according to the pilot's son, Francis Gary Powers, Jr., "Dad is hanging upside down by a seatbelt, his harness spinning out of control down towards the ground. If he engages the ejection seat, it'll sever his legs off." Powers decided to open the canopy on the plane, which quickly went flying off into the air. When he unlatched his harness, he was sucked out of the cockpit but is still attached to the plane by his oxygen hose. As he's being banged around the side of the fuselage, he tried to reach the self-destruct button, knowing he'll only have 70 seconds to free himself once he hits it.

But he never got the chance. He broke free of the air hose and the airplane. At 15,000 feet, his parachute opened automatically. He landed in a farmer's field in Sverdlovsk, disoriented and with a ringing in his ear. A farmer tried to help him, but speaking no Russian, he could not communicate. He was soon taken to the

local police station. Back in the United States, the U.S. government tried to cover up the incident by claiming a NASA aircraft from Turkey had gone missing and that the pilot might have blacked out with the autopilot engaged. American officials had no idea if Powers was alive. He might have survived the incident, but he was issued a false silver dollar coin containing a potent neurotoxin to use in case of capture. They stuck to their story, but on May 7, 1960, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev revealed that Powers was indeed alive and in Soviet custody - and so was the aircraft.

"Once he was captured, he had meager orders at best," says the younger Powers. "He basically was told, 'If you're caught, you might as well tell them everything. They'll get it out of you anyway. Expect to be tortured.' But my father had made up his mind that he was not going to. The first seven days, dad was lying to his captors outright, holding back as much information as possible, misleading them any way he could." The same day Khrushchev announced the USSR was holding Powers was the first time the CIA pilot learned about the incident's notoriety and the press. The KGB gave him a copy of the New York Times that outlined the entire shoot down. The Times article also revealed the Powers had been lying to the KGB the whole time.

"So from that moment forward, my dad decided to tell the truth when he knew they could verify the information in the press. That would give him credibility. He lied to them when he could get away with it," his son says. "It would be close enough to be believable, yet far enough away to keep other pilots out of harm's way should the missions continue. He also did it to get a message back home to the CIA that he wasn't telling the full truth." After three months of interrogation, Powers was put on trial, but he knew it was all a propaganda show. The Soviets were going to use the trial to embarrass the United States and claim a propaganda victory. That's exactly what happened.

He was convicted and sentenced to three years of imprisonment and seven years of hard labor. He would only serve one year and nine months before he was exchanged for the captured Soviet spy Rudolf Abel in February 1962. But Powers' story doesn't end there. The U-2 Incident disrupted a scheduled peace conference between the U.S. and Soviet Union, and Khrushchev's political trap forced President Eisenhower to admit to the U-2 spy program.

While he was in captivity, the American and British press printed unflattering, accusatory accounts. Some leveled charges that Powers had defected and given all his sensitive information to the Russians. Others charged that he hadn't committed suicide like he was supposed to do. The fact that he wasn't able to destroy the plane made it easier for the press to say everything short of accusing him of treason. "It is easier to blame the pilot than it is to have to admit that the Soviets have the capability to shoot down the U-2 at 70,000 thousand feet," says Powers Jr. "It was easier to blame the pilot than to continue to embarrass the President of the United States, who had to admit he had personally authorized these U-2 overflights."

The CIA, it turns out, told President Eisenhower that no pilot would ever survive a CIA shutdown, but they never told the pilots that. The cover story about oxygen deprivation was also left out of the pilots' briefings. As far as the suicide device is concerned, that was optional at the pilot's discretion. "I remember him telling me that he thought he could use it as a weapon if he had to escape," says Powers Jr. "He could use it if he's in a crash and bleeding out, or if in the event of torture he could use it under that circumstance." The only reason Powers kept the device at all was to keep it out of the hands of some poor Russian farmer who might come across it to keep it as a souvenir.

Francis Gary Powers was partially exonerated during a Senate Armed Services Select Committee hearing. He received his back pay of \$50,000 for the period where he was held captive. CIA director Allen Dulles even offered praise for his performance in flight and in captivity. But the full story couldn't be told until the full account of the incident was declassified in 2000 and 2012. Sadly, Powers didn't live to see it. He died when a KNBC News helicopter he was flying in Los Angeles crashed in 1977. "In June of 2012, the Air Force posthumously awarded my father the Silver Star," Powers' son says. "So dad has been publicly recognized as a hero to our country. The United States government has officially acknowledged him as such and helped to dispel the misinformation. It took them 40 and 50 years respectively, but it goes to show it's never too late to set the record straight." [Source: Together We Served Newsletter | May 2021 ++]

Spanish-American War

Update 01: Battle of Manila Bay



The first major battle of the Spanish-American War was also one of the U.S. Navy's most resounding victories. Much has been written about how and why the Spanish-American War started, what the catalyst for the war was, and who's to blame for it all. Once Spain declared war on the United States and the U.S. Congress responded in kind, the U.S. Navy was ready for action. When the war broke out, the Spanish had a formidable squadron of ships stationed in the Philippines, and it was crucial for American war plans to knock it out. The man dispatched to do it was the commander of the U.S. Asiatic Squadron, Adm. George Dewey.

Dewey, until this point, was not a celebrated war hero or a known name, even in U.S. Navy circles. In 1898, he was a 60-year-old Civil War veteran who idolized Adm. David Farragut and served under him at the Battle of New Orleans. But then-Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt saw potential in the old sailor and arranged for him to be posted to the Asiatic Squadron in Hong Kong in January 1898. It was a good call. The Naval War College's attack plans had drawn up in 1896 called for the Asiatic Squadron to simply deplete the Spanish fleet or divert its ships so they couldn't be used elsewhere. But Roosevelt's orders to destroy the Spanish ships in the Philippines and Dewey set sail for the mission on April 27, 1898.

Rear Admiral Patricio Montojo y Pasaron was the commander of the Spanish Navy in the Philippines. He knew the Asiatic Squadron would be bearing down on his ships. He ordered the fortification of nearby Subic Bay to position his ships under a battery on Isla Grande and surprising Dewey from behind if he moved on Manila. But by the time the Spanish fleet arrived, the preparations were far from complete, and Montojo knew the Americans were on the way. Instead of lying in wait for the Americans, Montojo moved the ships to Manila and brought every gun he could to bear. Most of them were obsolete, and only a handful could fire far enough to hit incoming ships. The Spanish admiral was concerned about the town's safety, so rather than wait for the Americans under the protection of coastal defenses, the Spanish fleet positioned itself under the guns of Cavite.

For Montojo, the added benefit was the shallow waters in this position. In case his sailors had to abandon ship, they would be able to escape. Montojo had every reason to be concerned about his men. While he had six steel ships, four with armored decks, many of his ships were also obsolete. His largest ship was made of wood. The American squadron bearing down on him was a far superior force without the shore batteries. The Spanish believed Manila Bay was unnavigable at night without a Spanish pilot, so he expected Dewey to launch an attack on the morning of May 1st. But Dewey had waited to depart for the battle until he could get the latest intelligence from the U.S. Consul in Hong Kong. With the information provided, Dewey felt confident in moving at night on April 30th.

Dewey painted his white ships gray so they could move undetected under cover of darkness. They crept into Manila Bay through the Spanish channel single file. Dewey led the squadron aboard the flagship Olympia, which was followed by the USS Baltimore, Boston, Raleigh, Concord, and Petrel. The Revenue Cutter McCulloch and two cargo ships that sailed with the fleet held back as the Navy slipped into the bay. At 5:15 in the morning on May 1st, the Spanish shore batteries and the fleet began firing at the Americans, but they were well out of range. Less than a half-hour later, in position to attack, Dewey gave the famous order, "You may fire when ready, Gridley."

Dewey's squadron was already in line and began an oval pattern, firing a broadside into the Spanish fleet. They then swung around and poured another broadside into the enemy. The Spanish returned fire, but it had little effect. They repeated the action four more times over two hours, devastating the Spanish and setting two of the ships on fire. After the first round, Dewey withdrew to a safe distance and convened a meeting of his captains. With plenty of ammunition left and few injuries, the Americans stopped to have breakfast and then re-engaged the Spanish fleet. In the meantime, the Spanish pulled their ships into shallower to make themselves a smaller, more difficult target for the large U.S. ships. Dewey simply ordered his two gunboats into the bay to finish them off.

Montojo's fleet was completely destroyed. Whatever wasn't destroyed by the Americans was scuttled by the Spanish to keep them from being used by the enemy. The U.S. ships then fired on the shore batteries and government offices, each of which quickly surrendered. The next day, Dewey landed a force of United States Marines at Cavite and finished off the shore positions. The Spanish suffered 77 killed and 271 wounded. Only nine Americans were wounded, and the Chief Engineer aboard the USGSC McCulloch died of a heart attack. A force of more than 10,000 soldiers under Army Maj. Gen. Wesley Merritt would arrive to capture the Philippines by August 13, 1898.

Dewey's victory was so complete that the aging, once-unknown sailor became a national celebrity back home. His face was plastered on everything from plates and bowls to ribbons and buttons. His men were awarded a special medal designed by Tiffany & Co. bearing Dewey's likeness. Dewey was elevated to Admiral of the Navy in 1903, the only naval officer ever to hold the rank. [Source: Together We Served Newsletter | May 2021 ++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

Leonard Kravitz | Korea



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

MEDAL OF HONOR

To

Pfc Leonard M. Kravitz

Organization: U.S. Army Company M, 5th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division

Place and date: March 6, 1951, at Yangyong, Korea

Entered service: Summer 1950

Born: 1931, Brooklyn, Kings County, NY



In 1951, 20-year-old Army Private 1st Class Leonard Kravitz gave his life so his fellow soldiers wouldn't be overwhelmed on a Korean hillside. He initially earned the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions, but thanks to decades of work from a childhood friend, the award was recently upgraded to the Medal of Honor. Kravitz was born Aug. 8, 1930, and grew up in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. His older brother, Seymour, served as a Marine during World War II, which may have been what inspired the younger Kravitz to enlist as war was breaking out once again during the summer of 1950.

After a few months of service, Kravitz was sent to Korea as part of Company M of the 5th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. On March 6, 1951, Kravitz's company was pinned down by Chinese troops on a hillside near Yangpyong, south of Seoul. Friendly forces were initially able to push back two probing attacks, but eventually, the enemy launched into what Kravitz's citation called a "fanatical banzai charge." Enemy fighters charged forward with heavy gunfire supporting them from behind. Kravitz, who was an assistant machine gunner, watched as his lead machine gunner went down, so he quickly took charge of their weapon and raked the fighters rushing toward them.

Unfortunately, the Chinese fighters were able to breach a left flank, which left the friendly fighters no longer able to help Kravitz's men fight them off. The unit soon received orders to withdraw. Kravitz volunteered to stay behind to cover the backs of the retreating men, even though he knew his chances of surviving weren't good. As more enemy soldiers pushed toward friendly positions, he blasted them all with heavy fire, killing the entire group. That led to the enemies directing all their fire at him, but it gave his comrades a chance to escape. The next day, after friendly troops had retaken the area, Kravitz's body was found behind his gun, surrounded by enemy dead.

Kravitz's body was returned to the U.S. and he was buried in Knollwood Park Cemetery in Glendale, New York. Soon after, he was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second-highest award for valor, which his brother accepted on his behalf. While the Distinguished Service Cross is a big honor, it didn't sit well with Kravitz's childhood friend, Mitchel Libman, who was drafted into the Army in 1953 and arrived in Korea just as the ceasefire was signed. Libman thought Kravitz, who was Jewish, should have earned the Medal of Honor. Through research, he discovered that several minorities earned the Distinguished Service Cross when similar actions earned other men the nation's highest honor.

Concerned that Kravitz was a victim of institutional bias, Libman spent the next half-century campaigning to get his friend's medal upgraded. Eventually, he got help from a Florida congressman, who convinced Congress to consider a bill called the Leonard Kravitz Jewish War Veterans Act in 2001. It urged the Pentagon to review the Distinguished Service Cross awards previously given to Jewish Americans, as well as those who were Black and Hispanic. The review was eventually set in motion. After a decade of investigating more than 6,000 cases from World War II, Korea and Vietnam, DOD officials concluded that 24 Jewish, Hispanic and Black men — including Kravitz — had been overlooked for the Medal of Honor.

On March 18, 2014 — more than 63 years after Kravitz's death — President Barack Obama held a White House ceremony honoring him and 23 other service members whose awards were upgraded to the Medal of Honor. Unfortunately, Kravitz's older brother, Seymour, didn't live to see it. He died in 2005. Instead, Seymour's daughter, Laurie Wenger, received the award on her uncle's behalf. Kravitz's famous nephew and namesake, rock musician Lenny Kravitz, also attended the ceremony. Beforehand, he talked about the honor of being named for a Medal of Honor recipient. "It's a wonderful thing to be here today to be a part of this and to see him get his honor," the Grammy-award-winning Kravitz said. "It's part of who I am. I am Lenny Kravitz. I'm very proud to be named after him and carry his name forward."

While most people know the younger Lenny Kravitz for obvious reasons, his family likes to remind people that there's another Lenny who also deserves remembrance. "People say, 'Too bad your uncle never got to meet his famous nephew'" Wenger said in a 2014 article in the Vancouver Sun. "I tell them, 'No, it's too bad he never got to meet our uncle.'" [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | March 15, 2021 ++]

Every Picture Tells A Story

WWI Paris



French soldiers of the 127th Infantry Regiment walking through Paris, France on November 22, 1915. During the Great War more than nine million soldiers were killed between 1914 and 1918, making it one of the bloodiest wars that the world had ever known. For French soldiers, being stationed in Paris was definitely better than being on the front, but it was deadly none the less. Daily life in the city of lights was tough during the war. In 1915, the state took over the for distribution system and fixed the price of what and grain. A year later the same control was extended over milk, sugar, and eggs. Restrictions tightened so much in 1917 that only one type of

loaf of bread could be sold, any kind of specialty bread was forbidden. Everyone in Paris - men, women, and children - had to do their part in order to ensure that the French military was able to keep fighting during this devastating war.

WWII Bomber Nose Art [76] Just Plain Lonesome



Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 30 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 16 thru 30 JUN**". [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | June 2021 ++]

* Health Care *



Tricare/Medicare Fraud & Abuse

Reported JUN 01 thru 15, 2021

Miami, Florida -- A Georgia man was sentenced 27 MAY to over 11 years in federal prison for defrauding Tricare of approximately \$12 million through a South Florida compounding pharmacy fraud scheme. Tricare is the health care benefit program covering military personnel and their dependents.

According to court documents, 51-year-old **Erik Santos** and his co-conspirators ran the scheme as follows: Santos paid recruiters to convince Tricare beneficiaries to fill prescriptions for expensive, supposedly tailor-made, compounded medications that the beneficiaries did not need. Santos paid doctors to approve pre-printed prescriptions for large amounts of these medications. The doctors did not see the beneficiaries or otherwise consider their medical needs before approving the prescriptions. Lastly, Santos steered the Tricare beneficiaries to fill their prescriptions with Patient Care America (PCA), a compounding pharmacy located in Broward County, Florida. PCA would bill Tricare for expensive drug formulations that had little to no therapeutic value. Many of the compounded medications were billed to Tricare at \$10,000 to \$15,000 for a month's supply, even though the ingredients used in the mixtures were little more than common pain or scar creams. Santos's fraudulent referrals caused an actual loss to the Tricare program of approximately \$12 million. PCA pharmacy paid Santos over \$7 million in prescription referral kickbacks.

In addition to the prison sentence, the Court imposed restitution in the amount of \$11.8 million and entered a forfeiture judgement of approximately \$7.6 million. On January 27, 2021, Santos pled guilty in federal district court in Ft. Lauderdale to one count of conspiring to commit health care fraud and wire fraud. DCIS investigated the case with assistance from FBI Miami, and the Food and Drug Administration-Office of Criminal Investigation. The superseding indictment also named CHAMPVA (the Department of Veterans Affairs' version of Tricare) as a fraud target and the Department of Veterans Affairs-Office of Inspector General assisted with the investigation.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jon Juenger prosecuted the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Daren Grove is handling the asset forfeiture component of the case. A copy of this press release may be found on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida at www.usdoj.gov/usao/fls. Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida at www.flsd.uscourts.gov or on <http://pacer.flsd.uscourts.gov>, under case number 20-cr-60089. [Source: DoJ Southern District of Florida| U.S. Attorney's Office | May 28, 2021 ++]

Tricare & Medicare Combined Coverage

How They Work Together

TRICARE provides health coverage for members of the military, their family members, and retired service members. The program also includes dental plans, prescription plans, and special programs for enrollees with certain medical conditions. If you qualify for Medicare, you can use your TRICARE benefits along with your Medicare benefits to reduce your out-of-pocket costs as much as possible.

If you have TRICARE for Life, Medicare acts as the primary payer. In most cases, TRICARE is your secondary payer. However, if you have some other type of insurance, TRICARE won't pay anything toward your health care costs until claims have been submitted to Medicare and your other insurance company.

TRICARE pharmacy benefits cover a wide range of prescription medications, as long as each drug is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Your provider must also prescribe each medication "in accordance with good medical practice and established standards of quality" for the drug to be covered by TRICARE. Therefore, you may not need Medicare Part D, which also covers prescription drugs. However, if you meet certain financial criteria, you may qualify for help paying Medicare Part D premiums and drug costs.

If you want coverage through TRICARE for Life, you must have Medicare Part A and Medicare Part B. With TRICARE Prime, it's possible to have Medicare Part B without having Part A coverage. You may also want to consider purchasing a Medigap plan, as Medigap covers some of the costs not covered by Original Medicare, such as copays and coinsurance. Having TRICARE, Original Medicare, and a Medigap plan can help you reduce your out-of-pocket costs if you need ongoing care for a chronic illness. To understand more about your TRICARE and Medicare benefits refer to <https://milconnect.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect/help/pdf/turning65brochure.pdf>. [Source: <https://www.medicareplans.com/va-military-and-medicare-benefits-resource> | Donna Williams | June 10, 2021 ++]

Pee Q&A

Questions You've Always Wanted to Ask About It



Everybody does it, but not everybody talks about it: peeing. The color, smell, amount, and control of your pee can provide clues into your health. And we get it. Sometimes talking about your pee can be, well, a little uncomfortable. But don't worry — we have asked the questions that you want answered. Most bladders hold anywhere from 50 to 500 milliliters (a little less than the amount in one and a half soda cans). When the bladder is about halfway full, receptors that recognize when it has stretched start to signal the brain. However, there's a lot that can happen between the brain, what you eat and drink, and the bladder when it comes to your urine. Here's what you should know about your pee.

1. How often should you pee?

You should pee between six and eight times over the course of a 24-hour period. If you pee more often than this, there are several possible explanations:

- You drink too much fluid.
- You drink a lot of caffeine (a natural diuretic).
- You have an overactive bladder, which can be the result of excess weight, medications, nerve damage, or other conditions.
- You have a bladder infection.
- You have a problem with your prostate.
- You have weak pelvic floor muscles (usually due to childbirth).

If you are going more often than this and drinking a normal amount of fluid, you may want to talk to your doctor about how often you pee.

2. Why is pee yellow?

Your kidneys break down old hemoglobin, which is a portion of your red blood cells, and release the waste via your urine. One of these wastes is urochrome, a yellow-tinted substance. Urochrome can be amber in color, but when you drink enough water, the amber color gets more dilute and appears yellow. Ideally, your urine will appear yellow or straw-colored. If it's so light it's almost clear, you may be drinking too much. If it's darker, you may not be drinking enough.

3. Why do you pee more when you get older?

While you sleep, your brain tells your body to release a hormone known as antidiuretic hormone or ADH. This hormone helps your body retain fluid so you don't feel like you have to pee. When you get older, your body doesn't make as much ADH. This can make the bladder get fuller faster. Also, the bladder doesn't hold as much urine as you age.

4. Is urine really sterile?

A common misconception about urine is that it's somehow "sterile." People may think this gives survivalists license to drink urine or someone to pee on you if you get bitten by a jellyfish. Sorry to disappoint, but urine isn't sterile, even when you're totally healthy and don't have an active urinary tract infection. Bacteria is present in urine, even in completely healthy individuals. Bad news for those prepped and ready to help a friend relieve jellyfish pain. Peeing on a jellyfish sting can actually make the sting worse because urine contains salts. Literally, a person is rubbing salt into their wounds. Instead, a person should cleanse the affected area with fresh water.

5. Why do I feel like you need to pee when you have sex?

This sensation is a common occurrence for women, but physically impossible for men. Just as a man is about to ejaculate, the opening of his bladder closes to make way for semen to release. Women aren't the same. The vagina and bladder are in close proximity to each other. Sexual stimulation can stimulate and put pressure on the bladder as well. As a result, a woman may feel the need to pee when having sex. If she has a history of urinary incontinence, she may even leak urine. Also, sometimes women experience an impending sense of having to pee when they're about to orgasm. Sometimes they confuse female ejaculation with urine.

6. Is it really bad for you to hold your pee?

While your brain may tell you to start thinking about going to the bathroom when the bladder is roughly halfway full, most people can hold their urine until they can get to a restroom. However, eventually your

body will overcome your brain, and you will (simply put), pee your pants. According to Columbia University, you're not likely to rupture your bladder or have a bladder infection from holding your pee. But you will need to have an extra pair of pants handy.

7. Why can pregnancy and childbirth result in incontinence?

Having children can weaken the muscles and other connective tissues that hold the pelvic organs in their spots. The childbirth process can stretch these tissues to make way for baby. And they don't always bounce back like a rubber band afterward. Pregnancy and the expanding uterus can also place extra pressure on the bladder. As a general rule, the larger the baby, the more likely it is that a woman will experience incontinence during pregnancy and thereafter. The good news is that there are lots of treatments available to reduce the incidence of incontinence following childbirth. Kegel exercises that focus on strengthening the pelvic floor muscles, as well as pelvic floor therapy, may help.

8. How does food affect your pee?

If you see some pink or red in your pee, it's not always blood. Sometimes the foods you eat can actually turn your pee a certain color. This is especially true for beets, rhubarb, and blackberries. However, you shouldn't ignore pee that could potentially have blood in it. Always call your doctor if you haven't eaten these kinds of foods and your urine is pink or red. It's also possible that some foods can make your pee smell ... unique. An example is asparagus. Its components break down into volatile acids, one of which is appropriately named asparagusic acid. Other foods that can stink up your urine include curry, salmon, coffee, garlic, and Brussels sprouts

Bottom line

If you have concerns about your pee, always talk to your doctor. Your urine can help your doctor determine a lot about your current health status! Don't put off the conversation just because it may seem uncomfortable. It may help identify an underlying health issue.

[Source: Healthline | Rachel Nall, MSN, CRNA | March 3, 2017++]

Psoriatic Arthritis **Psoriasis with Joint Inflammation**



Psoriatic arthritis is a condition that causes pain and stiffness in the affected joints. It also leads to tiredness and fatigue in some people. The joint inflammation is usually caused by psoriasis. It can also affect People who don't have visible symptoms on their skin, though. Psoriatic arthritis can be a major problem, causing sleeping problems and affecting your family, work and free time. Various treatments can relieve the

symptoms and prevent damage to the joints. Psoriatic arthritis can cause various symptoms, mainly including the following:

- Painful joints,
- Stiff joints, especially in the morning (moving the joints often helps the stiffness to go away within a half hour),
- Swollen joints that feel warm and are sensitive to touch, and
- Generally feeling exhausted (fatigue).
- Back pain may be experienced if the small joints between the vertebrae (spine bones) are inflamed.

Psoriatic arthritis can affect many different joints and vary in its severity. It often affects the hands, feet, elbows, knees, neck or vertebrae. More than five joints typically become inflamed, including the joints at the end of the fingers and toes. These joints are especially prone to becoming deformed in severe cases. Sometimes the inflammation not only affects the joints, but the tendons and tendon sheaths as well. Most people who have psoriatic arthritis also have nail psoriasis. This can lead to small dents in the nails, which may become thicker, change color or start peeling off too. Nail psoriasis is difficult to treat and sometimes mistaken for a fungal nail infection.

Psoriatic arthritis is an autoimmune disease: The immune system is too active and releases more inflammation-causing chemical messengers (cytokines). Genes play a major role here. Your risk of developing psoriatic arthritis is much higher if one of your parents or a brother or sister has had psoriasis or psoriatic arthritis. About 25% of people who have psoriasis will develop psoriatic arthritis at some point. It usually starts between the ages of 30 and 50 years, but it can occur at any age. In about 80-90% of people who have psoriatic arthritis, it is caused by psoriasis. The psoriatic arthritis often only develops after many years. But the joints may become inflamed before skin symptoms become visible, or without any skin symptoms at all.

There is no clear link between the severity of psoriasis and the severity of psoriatic arthritis. Some people have severe psoriasis on their skin, but no problems with their joints. Others have psoriatic arthritis, but no symptoms on their skin, or hardly any. It's very difficult to predict how psoriatic arthritis will continue to develop. Some people have in just a few joints, while in others it affects more joints over time. If the inflammations are severe and the psoriasis progresses, the joints might become permanently damaged and deformed. Treatment with disease-modifying medications can stop or delay joint damage, though.

An estimated 10% of all people who have psoriatic arthritis don't have any visible skin changes. That makes it more difficult for doctors to tell whether it is psoriatic arthritis or another type of joint disease. Doctors use the following approaches and information to diagnose psoriatic arthritis and to rule out other types of joint inflammation.

- Physical examination: Certain changes are typical of psoriatic arthritis. For instance, the inflammation may affect a whole finger (dactylitis) or the tendons and tendon sheaths of the hands or feet (enthesitis), such as the Achilles tendon.
- Family medical history: If psoriasis is known to run in someone's family, any joint pain they have is more likely to be caused by psoriatic arthritis.
- Blood tests: 90% of people with psoriatic arthritis don't have any of the antibodies in their blood that are typical of rheumatoid arthritis. So if none of these "rheumatoid factors" are found, it's more likely to be psoriatic arthritis.

- Imaging techniques: X-rays and ultrasound scans can help to find out whether someone has psoriatic arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis or osteoarthritis. The images can also be used to get a better idea of how extensive the joint damage is and what type of damage is involved. But changes in the joints are often not yet clearly visible in the early stages of psoriatic arthritis.
- Measuring uric acid levels: High levels of uric acid in the blood are a sign that the joint problems are being caused by gout rather than psoriatic arthritis.

Treatments for psoriatic arthritis have various goals, including the following:

- Relieving the symptoms such as pain and swelling,
- Keeping the joints working properly, and
- Preventing long-term damage to the joints.

If you have psoriatic arthritis, there are a few things you can do on your own to reduce the inflammation, strengthen your joints and prevent exhaustion. They include getting enough exercise, not smoking and losing weight if you are very overweight. The effectiveness of these measures has hardly been tested at all in studies, though. Medication plays a large role in the treatment of psoriatic arthritis. In mild cases that only affect the knees, elbows or wrists, treatment with NSAID painkillers is sometimes enough. These types of painkillers include diclofenac, ibuprofen and naproxen, for instance. They can be taken as tablets or applied to the inflamed joints as a gel or cream.

If this isn't effective enough or if there is good reason to believe that the disease will get worse, treatment with disease-modifying drugs is recommended. These drugs reduce the inflammation in the joints. This allows them to both relieve the symptoms and prevent or delay damage to the joints. Examples of disease-modifying drugs include methotrexate, leflunomide and medications called biologics. Problems affecting the joints, muscles or tendons can also be treated with physical therapy, occupational therapy and orthopedic products such as insoles.

The often unpredictable symptoms of psoriatic arthritis can make it hard for many people to make plans in everyday life. Always waiting for the next flare-up can also be very difficult emotionally. Some people who have psoriatic arthritis worry about not being to keep up with things they have to do or being a burden to others. Most activities can be a challenge if you feel exhausted. But despite all the difficulties, there are also phases when the symptoms get better for a while. Over time, many people develop a good feel for their body and learn to interpret their body's signals and react to them. It's often helpful to learn all about psoriatic arthritis and the treatment options, develop practical strategies to cope with the disease, and not to fight it. Keeping your expectations realistic and accepting the disease as part of your life can make it easier to live with it. [Source: www.informedhealth.org | May 2021 ++]

Acute Pancreatitis

Commonly Caused By Gallstones or Drinking Too Much Alcohol

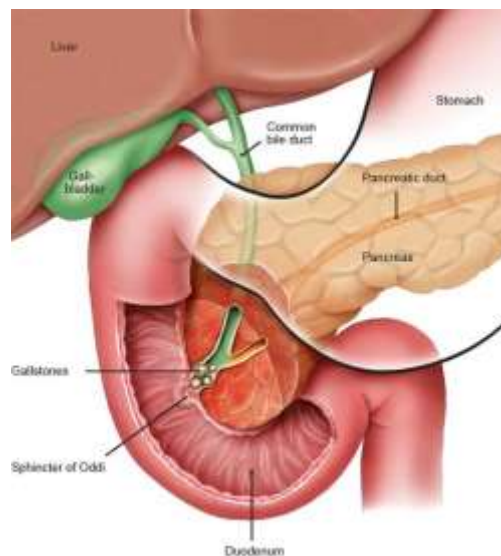
Acute pancreatitis is an inflammation of the pancreas that typically causes very sudden and very severe upper abdominal pain. It is most commonly caused by gallstones or drinking too much alcohol. The acute inflammation usually clears up within one to two weeks. But it may also lead to complications and other

illnesses. The treatment may then take several months. Pancreatitis is treated in a hospital because the complications can sometimes become life-threatening.

Symptoms, Causes and risk factors

This condition almost always causes severe upper abdominal pain. The pain can spread to your back and is usually accompanied by nausea and vomiting. Other common symptoms include fever, a bloated stomach and feeling weak and light-headed. The pain is usually sudden and so severe that most people go straight to a doctor. They typically go to a hospital the same day.

Acute pancreatitis is most commonly caused by gallstones. The pancreas produces digestive juices that flow into the duodenum (the first section of the small intestine) through a tube called the pancreatic duct. Just before the pancreatic duct reaches the duodenum, it is joined by the common bile duct. If gallstones form and enter the common bile duct, they may end up blocking the shared opening. As a result, the bile and pancreatic juices can't flow out into the duodenum and they start to build up. This is probably what causes the pancreas to become inflamed. The digestive juices usually don't start to work until they reach the small intestine. But if the pancreas is inflamed, they already become active in the . As a result, the pancreas starts “digesting itself.”



Gallstones blocking the opening into the bowel

The second most common cause of pancreatitis is drinking too much alcohol. It is still not known exactly how alcohol causes pancreatitis, but the link has been observed in many studies. Other factors that can increase the likelihood of pancreatitis include a narrowing of the bile duct and high levels of specific fats (triglycerides) or calcium in the bloodstream. Acute pancreatitis is sometimes also caused by medications or a viral infection. Surgery on the gallbladder or bile ducts can cause pancreatitis too, but only in very rare cases. In as many as 10 out of 100 cases of pancreatitis, no clear cause is found.

Prevalence & Outlook

In Germany, about 55,000 people are treated at a hospital for acute pancreatitis every year. That's about 70 out of every 100,000 people. Most people who develop pancreatitis are over the age of 45, and it's somewhat more common in men than in women. The course of pancreatitis can vary depending on how severe the inflammation is and how badly it damages the tissue. About 80% of people who have treatment for acute

pancreatitis recover within about one to two weeks. About 20% of them develop serious complications. For instance, part of the pancreas may die and become infected with bacteria. It can then take weeks or even months to get better again.

After leaving the hospital, some people still have pain or problems with digestion, or they might feel very exhausted. It can take a long time to recover and return to everyday life, and there may be setbacks. If caused by gallstones, pancreatitis often occurs again. To prevent this from happening, doctors recommend removing the gallbladder.

Effects

One common complication of acute pancreatitis is something called pseudocysts. These digestive-juice-filled sacs may develop in the pancreas several weeks after the inflammation arises. Pseudocysts often remain small and go undetected, but they sometimes become so large that they cause problems like indigestion or bloating. Larger pseudocysts are also at risk of tearing open and bleeding or causing an infection.

A rare but serious complication of pancreatitis is called infected pancreatic necrosis. This complication occurs if a part of the pancreas dies (“necrotizes”) and becomes infected with bacteria. It usually starts in the second or third week after pancreatitis has developed and is very dangerous because it can provoke a condition referred to as SIRS (systemic inflammatory response syndrome). In SIRS, the spreads from the pancreas to the entire body. The first warning signs may include a high or low body temperature, a drop in blood pressure and a faster heart rate or breathing rate. SIRS can cause organ failure in one or several organs. Overall, about 3 to 5% of people who develop acute pancreatitis die of complications.

Diagnosis

To find out whether you have acute pancreatitis, the doctor will first feel your abdomen (belly) with their hands. They will also ask about various risk factors for pancreatitis, such as alcohol consumption, medication use and possible signs of gallstones such as a cramping pain in the upper abdomen (biliary colic). They usually take a sample of blood and will likely also do an ultrasound scan. If you are diagnosed with pancreatitis, you will be referred to a hospital. The symptoms of pancreatitis can also be caused by other medical conditions, such as an inflamed gallbladder, a heart attack or a gastric perforation from an ulcer.

Various things are measured in the blood sample, including the lipase levels in the blood. Lipase is an enzyme that is made in the pancreas and usually flows into the intestine. Abnormally high levels of lipase in the blood are a sign of pancreatitis. Having certain other substances in the blood can be a sign of a blocked bile duct. An ultrasound scan of the belly is usually enough to tell whether gallstones are the cause. If the inflammation has led to changes in the pancreas, they can often be seen in an ultrasound scan too. Sometimes more testing is needed. For instance, a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan can be done to create a picture of the bile ducts and any gallstones. Another option is to use an endoscope to look for gallstones in the bile duct. This involves pushing a flexible tube with an ultrasound device at the end of it into the duodenum through the food pipe (endoscopic ultrasound).

A computed tomography (CT) scan can be used to detect complications such as dying tissue and to get an idea of how the is developing. If the pancreatitis is associated with gallstones or a bile duct infection, endoscopic retrograde cholangiography (ERC) may be needed for the pancreas. This also involves passing an endoscope through the food pipe and down to the bile duct opening in the duodenum. A contrast medium

(dye-like substance) is then injected into the duct to make any stones that are there show up in the x-ray image. With the help of the endoscope, these stones can also be removed during the examination. But ERC involves exposure to radiation, and may cause various complications.

Treatment

Although there aren't any treatments that fight the cause of pancreatitis, there are a number of treatment options that aim to reduce the strain on the pancreas and relieve the symptoms. Because acute pancreatitis often leads to dehydration, people are first given extra fluids through a drip. Medication can provide relief from pain, nausea and vomiting. Stronger painkillers known as opioids are often needed, and they may make you feel drowsy or light-headed. To give the pancreas a chance to recover, solid foods are avoided until you feel better again and your appetite returns. In mild cases of pancreatitis, it's often possible to return to eating solid foods after just two days. If the symptoms last longer, artificial feeding may be necessary to supply your body with enough nutrients.

If the pancreatitis is caused by gallstones, the stones may need to be removed soon using endoscopic retrograde cholangiography. After having acute treatment for pancreatitis, the gallbladder is surgically removed to prevent relapses. If the pancreatitis was alcohol-related, people are advised to drink a lot less alcohol afterwards. This is often difficult, but there are many places that offer support when trying to cut down on alcohol. [Source: InformedHealth.org | May 2021 ++]

Unrefrigerated Foods

Update 02: 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 9 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:

Potatoes -- Time: One to two weeks

Refrigeration converts some of the starches in raw potatoes to sugars (the versatile spuds are best stored in a dark, cool pantry for a shelf life of one to two weeks). Cooked potatoes can last three to five days in the fridge, though not at peak quality; for prep work, raw cut potatoes can be submerged in cold water and refrigerated for up to 24 hours before cooking.

Avocados -- Time: Two to seven days, until ripe

Avocados should be stored at room temperature until fully ripened, at which point the skin will feel slightly soft when squeezed. Then they can be used promptly or kept for longer within the fridge (they'll stay good another three to five days). Avocados puréed with a dash of lemon juice can also last months longer in the freezer.

Tortillas -- Time: Two to four weeks

Opened or unopened flour and corn tortillas can last up to a month in the pantry — or more conservatively, up to one week after their "best by" date. They'll last another two to six weeks once refrigerated. This will tend to dry them out, like with bread.

Peanut Butter -- Time: One to three months

There's no need to refrigerate even an opened jar of peanut butter, as it can keep well for up to three months at room temperature. Some natural peanut butters (without hydrogenated oils) call for refrigeration on their labels, but will still last up to a month in the pantry, and be easier to spread.

Ketchup, Mustard, Barbecue Sauce, & Other Acid-Based Condiments -- Time: One month or more

Many of the most common condiments last perfectly fine outside the fridge, including ketchup and barbecue sauces – both will keep up to one month at room temperature. The timeframes are even more generous in more acidic condiments such as mustard (two months), soy sauce (one year), and hot sauce (three years).

Onion -- Time: Two to three months

Keep whole raw onions in a loosely covered container in the pantry at temperatures of 45 to 55 degrees to make them last up to three months (the same length they would last in the fridge, where they should be stored only once chopped or in especially hot locations). Take care not to keep them near potatoes, as the two veggies in close proximity can accelerate each other's spoilage.

Garlic -- Time: Three to five months

At ideal temperatures of 55 to 60 degrees, bulbs of garlic will keep on the counter for nearly six months before spotting and turning soft with spoilage, while unpeeled individual cloves will last seven to 10 days. Garlic will usually start to sprout before going bad, so cooks may want to remove the green sprouts to get rid of their bitter (but otherwise harmless) taste.

Almond Milk -- Time: Varies

Some non-dairy milks such as almond or soy are ultra-pasteurized and sealed in Tetra Pak cartons, allowing unopened containers to be stored at room temperature for up to a month. Once opened, however, ultra-pasteurized and other almond milks (sold refrigerated) should be used within seven to 10 days, and not left out unrefrigerated for longer than two hours.

Salad Dressings -- Time: Varies

Premade salad dressings vary widely in terms of flavor and ingredients, but the chief consideration in evaluating shelf life once opened should be whether the dressing is cream-based or vinegar-based. Vinegar-based sauces contain natural preservatives that can keep them safe at room temperatures after several hours, whereas cream-based sauces such as ranch or blue cheese dressing should be tossed after two hours sitting out.

[Source: Cheapism | Daily Update | March 8, 2021 ++]

Mold

What You Don't know About it Can Ruin Your Life

Molds take many forms. Sometimes they're desirable, even tasty, like those in blue cheese. Other times molds show up as fuzzy green dots on old bread, or worse, black blotches that creep up in damp areas of your house. These pose a threat to your health and can end up costing you a fortune in cleaning and removal costs. To avoid a nightmare mold scenario, following are some of the most important facts and tips that will help you keep your home mold-free.

A mold is a type of fungus that aids in the biodegradation of organic matter. Molds thrive in warm, damp, and humid conditions, and they spread by one of two ways: growing larger where they are or by

releasing spores that travel to new locations through the air or water. These spores are especially resilient, able to survive in the kinds of dry, cold conditions that mold cannot. There are more than 100,000 different types of mold, and some pose serious health hazards. For a slideshow click on https://blog.cheapism.com/mold-removal/?mc_cid=bb8acfffac&mc_eid=12d025a806#image=1.

Mold and Health Hazards

There are five categories of toxic mold — Cladosporium, Penicillium, Fusarium, Aspergillus, and Stachybotrys — and people can respond differently to each. For those who are allergic, molds can cause nasal stuffiness, coughing, eye irritation, and a sore throat. Reactions can be far more serious for people with compromised immune systems. They may develop infections in their lungs when exposed to molds. There's also some evidence to suggest that mold exposure can lead to asthma in otherwise healthy children. In general, avoid damp and moldy areas when possible, and avoid handling molds directly.



Mold and Pets

Pets pose a twofold risk when it comes to mold: They can bring molds indoors, and pets are liable to play around or ingest things that contain mold. Some ways to prevent pets from ingesting molds include: restricting access to damp areas of the home; storing food in an airtight container; making sure pets don't eat trash; cleaning pet beds and food bowls regularly; and removing trash and dirty items from the yard.

How Mold Gets Into Your Home

Molds can enter your home in many ways: open windows, air ducts, pets, leaks, shoes, and, in some cases, molds can actually be a part of your building by living inside the very materials used to build it. Molds also travel well on paper products, wood, and ceiling tiles, many of which are materials frequently brought in and out of buildings.

How to Protect Your Home against Mold

It's virtually impossible to prevent all molds from entering your home. Still, you can minimize the amount of mold in your home by taking some protective measures, like using paint with mold inhibitors, removing carpets from bathrooms or other wet areas, cleaning roof gutters regularly, fixing leaks, shutting windows when the AC is on, ensuring proper ventilation (especially in areas where condensation is likely to occur), and using a dehumidifier.

Dehumidifiers

Since molds require moisture to thrive, one of the best things you can do to protect your home is to control indoor humidity levels with a dehumidifier. There are two main types: whole-house dehumidifiers, which can cost anywhere from \$1,000 to \$2,000, and portable units, which start at about \$60. People who have consistent mold problems should consider the whole-house option.

How to Prepare to Remove Mold

Before removing mold, take a few steps to prepare the area you're about to clean. First, you'll want to seal off the affected area with plastic sheeting so spores don't spread to other parts of the house. Meanwhile, make sure you have good ventilation in the room by turning on any exhaust fans or opening a window. And, perhaps most importantly, remember to never mix cleaning solutions.

What to Wear for Removing Mold

Before you remove the mold, you'll want to equip yourself with some basic protective outerwear: The CDC recommends an N-95 respirator mask, goggles or other eye protection, protective gloves, long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and waterproof boots.

How to Remove Mold from Your Home

You can remove most small mold problems with household cleaning products. For molds on non-porous surfaces, a mixture of 1 cup bleach to 1 gallon of water will do the trick, as will detergent and hot water. However, molds growing on porous surfaces can be harder to remove. These situations often call for a product like Foster First Defense 40-80, which is an EPA-registered disinfectant, fungicide, virucide, and germicide that costs about \$50 for a 5-gallon pail. Remember to thoroughly dry the affected area after cleaning. For more serious mold problems, consider hiring professionals. You can check sites like [Thumbtack](#) and [TaskRabbit](#) to find helpers and professional services in your area.

Mold Inspectors

If mold covers more than 10 square feet, or if you think there's a serious mold problem lurking somewhere undiscovered in your home, it's time to hire a mold inspector. This can be tricky because the field is mostly unregulated, and there's no official designation between professionals who inspect and those who remove mold. When browsing inspectors, look for those who have completed courses approved by the American Board of Industrial Hygiene or the American Council for Accredited Certification, who work independently from a mold remediation company, and who can provide reports outlining the lab results of air and surface samples. Prices vary, but you can expect to pay anywhere from \$200 to \$500 for an inspection.

Mold Remediation Professionals

Serious mold problems will require hiring a mold remediation company. Generally, these professionals will spend a day or two at your house performing a variety of duties, like cleaning and disinfecting walls and carpets, removing drywall and other mold-infested materials, vacuuming with HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filtration, and removing any stains left from mold or the removal process. Prices for professional mold remediation can reach into the thousands, but for small jobs, such as removing mold from crawl spaces, you can expect to pay about \$500.

Additional Resources

- www.questionsanswered.net/article/how-remove-black-mold-mildew
- <https://pocketsense.com/can-deduct-mold-remediation-expenses-12051186.html>
- <https://medlineplus.gov/molds.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/mold/faqs.htm>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mold-allergy/symptoms-causes/syc-20351519>
- https://www.medicinenet.com/mold_exposure/article.htm

[Source: Cheapism | Stephen Johnson | April 13, 2021 ++]



TRICARE Premiums

Update 01: Bill to Eliminate for Tricare Young Adult Program

Momentum is growing in Congress to allow military dependents to stay on their parents' Tricare health plan until age 26 without paying monthly premiums. Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ) along with Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) and others, has introduced a bill (S.S.1972) that would eliminate the monthly premiums now required under the Tricare Young Adult health program.

Tester chairs the powerful Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for Defense -- the panel that holds the purse strings for the Department of Defense. His backing, along with a companion bill in the House that has 45 co-sponsors, enhances the likelihood of the Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act making it into law this year. "Our bipartisan bill allows every military child under the age of 26 to continue receiving steady coverage under their parents' plan, enabling these young adults to finish school or start their careers without worrying about what happens if they get sick," Tester said in a release.

The Affordable Care Act allows children up to age 26 to remain on their parents' health insurance plans at no additional cost. But under current law, dependent children of active-duty or retired personnel lose their Tricare eligibility at age 21, or age 23 if they are full-time students. They have the option to purchase coverage under the Tricare Young Adult program up to age 26, at a cost of \$459 a month for Tricare Young Adult Prime and \$257 for Tricare Young Adult Select. For active-duty families who pay no enrollment fees or monthly premiums for their health care, and for retirees who pay \$606 per year for Tricare Prime or \$300 a year for Tricare Select, the premiums often come as a surprise.

"Back in 2006, when my son turned 21, I contacted Tricare concerning his continued coverage to age 26 as written in the [Affordable Care Act] and supported by Montana law," retired Montana National Guard Col. Kevin Collins said in a release. "After several past attempts and failures to align these two programs, it is now time to bring Tricare in line with the [Affordable Care Act.]" Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA) introduced the bill in the House last year, although it was not included in the final version of the fiscal 2021 National Defense Authorization Act. She is sponsoring it again this year with Rep. Michael Waltz (R-FL). 43 additional House members are also supporting it.

The legislation would affect roughly 37,000 families, according to 2020 data. DoD officials have said the majority of military dependents who use Tricare Young Adult are the children of retirees. Tricare was exempt from Affordable Care Act requirements because it was a stand-alone federal health program that met the intent of the ACA, but the exclusion extended to the part of the law that allowed family members to stay on their parents' health plans until age 26. Congress created Tricare Young Adult in 2011 to address the disparity, but it also stipulated that the program must cover its own costs, necessitating premiums based on commercial insurance rates and coverage.

Tester said the proposed legislation is a "no-brainer," ensuring that "service members and their families have access to the same affordable health care as folks with private insurance." "The fact is that children of service members feel the unique impacts of their parents' military careers and need the same access to care as their civilian peers," he said. Waltz told Military.com in January that the legislation would cost about \$125 million a year, according to the Congressional Budget Office. He argued, however, that health care benefits often factor into a service member's decision to stay in the military, and the issue is important to retention. "I put this in the 'It's the right thing to do' category," Waltz said. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | June 9 2021 ++]

TRICARE Prime

Update 44: Future Urgent Care Concerns

For many years, beneficiaries on TRICARE Prime were required to obtain a referral prior to visiting a civilian urgent care facility. This posed a problem for many military families because the need for urgent care sometimes arose when primary care managers (PCMs) who make TRICARE referrals and/or military treatment facility (MTF) staff were unavailable or inaccessible: Evenings, weekends, holidays, or when the family was traveling or PCSing, for example. Also, military hospitals and clinics across the direct care system varied in their willingness to refer families to urgent care when MTF acute care appointments were fully booked (and therefore unavailable). For many military families in a variety of circumstances, emergency department (ED) care became their only option – even for non-emergency medical issues such as an ear infection or strep throat.

This led to inconvenience and frustration for both military families and ED clinicians. It meant families sometimes had to seek care in the ED when a venue with lower cost to DoD would have been more appropriate. It also meant that some families delayed or deferred necessary care or paid out of pocket to be seen at a civilian urgent care facility. MOAA appreciates that Congress addressed this issue several years ago – first with a referral-free urgent care pilot program in the FY 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and then with a provision in the FY 2017 NDAA that authorized access to urgent care without the need for preauthorization, making the pilot obsolete by prompting a TRICARE policy change to allow unlimited self-referred urgent care visits for TRICARE Prime beneficiaries.

Since May 2016, referral-free urgent care has provided a critical relief valve when acute primary care isn't available or accessible, particularly in the direct care system. A June 2018 DoD report to Congress ([PDF download](#)) found while private sector urgent care volume rose 13% from FY 2016 to FY 2017, much costlier ED encounter volume fell 6% during the same time period. According to beneficiary surveys, 92% of urgent care pilot participants were satisfied with the increased access to care under the pilot. The report also documented the positive impact of the [TRICARE Nurse Advice Line](#) in directing beneficiaries to the appropriate care setting.

The 2022 DoD budget request, released as part of the administration's budget proposal to Congress on May 28, includes some limited details on TRICARE utilization trends. MOAA is concerned the budget narrative related to civilian urgent care use may indicate a potential threat to referral-free urgent care for TRICARE Prime beneficiaries. The request cites rising private-sector urgent care utilization as a factor in

the department's TRICARE cost increases. This could serve as an early warning sign toward targeting referral-free urgent care in future cost savings efforts; such a move would represent a significant step backward for beneficiaries' access to timely, appropriate care. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Karen Ruedisueli | June 8, 2021 ++]

Uncommon State Tax Laws

Strange but True Tax Laws | S.D. – Washington DC

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.

South Dakota: Income Untaxed

The bad news: South Dakota doesn't give tax breaks for contributions to in-state 529 college savings plans. The good news: It's because the state doesn't have an income tax.

Tennessee: Prepare Yourself

Foods that aren't prepared by the seller come with a 7% state sales tax. This includes baby food, dips, and some spreads. Livestock feed is exempt from sales and use taxes, though.

Texas: Holiday Spirit

Holiday greenery, such as wreaths, mistletoe, and Christmas trees, are all subject to sales tax in Texas — but not when bought from a charitable organization. Another way to lessen holiday taxes is to hire a decorating service and provide the decorations. If the company supplies them, both materials and labor are taxable.

Utah: Pole Tax

Although the rule was appealed all the way to the Utah Supreme Court, there is a 10% tax on fees charged by businesses such as strip clubs that have nude or partially nude workers. The tax also applies to food and drink sold by the establishment.

Vermont: No Curb Appeal

Street performers, keep your wallets handy. In Burlington, Vermont's largest city, [the City Council may tax](#) "the exhibition of common showmen, circuses, menageries, carnivals, and shows of every kind, and all plays, athletic contests, exhibitions, or entertainments for money."

Virginia: Back-to-School Corsets

Like many states, Virginia has an annual back-to-school tax holiday weekend. But Virginia's list of tax-free goods has been known to include an odd array of items: fur coats, lingerie, garters and garter belts, wedding apparel, aprons, and corsets, to name a few, eligible with sale prices of \$100 or less.

Washington: Yes Then No Income Tax

Residents of Washington were once hugely in favor of an income tax law, with 70% voting not once but twice in favor of it, during the Great Depression. How popular was the income tax? Only 62% of voters

wanted to repeal Prohibition, which was on the same ballot. But when the law was challenged by well-off business owners and got held up in the state supreme court, everyone had time to read the new income tax forms and suddenly the law that many thought would be easily approved was deemed unconstitutional — and Washingtonians voted against an income tax ever since.

West Virginia: Fireworks Fee

West Virginia legalized additional types of fireworks, such as roman candles and bottle rockets, in 2016. A 12% "safety fee" (in addition to sales tax) came along with the legalization. The money raised from the fee helps support veterans and volunteer fire departments.

Wisconsin: Internet Tax

As of last year, Wisconsin was one of just a few states that taxed internet access. That's illegal according to federal law, but Wisconsin secured a grandfather exemption and could continue the tax through June 30, 2020. The amount varied depending on the type of service (dial-up, DSL, cable, etc.) After last year's deadline, it was no longer taxable.

Wyoming: Sweet Deal

Wyoming considers candy (including mints and gum) food and exempts it from sales tax. Gift sets and holiday baskets are also exempt if more than 50% of the product's value comes from exempt foods.

Washington, D.C.: Mixed Message

The nation's capital apparently has mixed feelings when it comes to healthy habits. Both gyms and sugary drinks draw a tax of around 5.75% and 8% respectively, though there have been efforts to lift the "yoga tax."

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

Dollar Stores

Some Things Many Don't Know About Them

The most common variety store chains in the United States tend to have "dollar" in their names, but that doesn't necessarily imply a certain cost or even mean that there are similar products in each store. We even found some items you shouldn't buy at a dollar store. We did some digging and found out some of the secrets behind "dollar stores," and why they've become such a large part of the U.S. consumer landscape — not to mention one of the biggest retail winners of the pandemic. (That started with being allowed to stay open as "essential" at a time other stores were shut down.) Following are items of interest to anyone who might shop there:

Dollar Stores Aren't Always Cheaper

You still have to shop around. We compared dollar store prices to Walmart prices, and how well a shopper does depends on how closely they check the unit price. Sometimes, a dollar gets you less at Dollar Tree than it would somewhere else.

Some Items May Cost More Than \$1

If you see "dollar" in the name, don't expect everything to cost a dollar. While Dollar Tree keeps all of their items at a dollar or below, Dollar General, 99 Cents Only, and Dollar-Tree-owned Family Dollar stores offer goods at multiple price points.

Products Might Be Cheaper Because They're Smaller

Sometimes it's more important to keep a product at the \$1 price mark, even if that means shrinking the size of the container of toothpaste, shaving cream or other item the quantity of what you're selling, according to Clark Howard. We noticed shrinking containers when comparing Walmart to dollar stores, too. As inflation goes up, expect items to get even smaller. It doesn't help your budget if you grab a name-brand detergent or soap at a dollar store that is smaller than what you'd buy at a discount or grocery store, which may undo your savings. But if you like specific cleaning products or bathroom supplies, you can find them here.

They're Cutting Costs — But Still Want You to Spend More

Unfortunately, these stores aren't passing the savings onto consumers. Dollar General has said that it wants to make its more than 31% gross margin even bigger. It's making stores smaller to prevent shoplifting, using anti-theft tags on all items, managing and expanding its own fleet of trucks, expanding its generic product line, and sourcing from places cheaper than China. While most goods will remain below \$5, they're looking to encourage impulse buying on goods with higher price points.

Dollar Stores Bet Against You

The loss of the middle class may have helped dollar stores, but financial analysts say those chains will need things to get worse if they really want to thrive. "What the dollar stores are betting on in a large way is that we are going to have a permanent underclass in America," Garrick Brown, director for retail research at the commercial real estate company Cushman & Wakefield, told Bloomberg. "It's based on the concept that the jobs went away, and the jobs are never coming back, and that things aren't going to get better in any of these places."

They Feed Off of Misery

It's been noted before that the upswing in Americans on food stamps and the continued struggles of millennials after the recession have helped dollar stores find footing. But with Pew Research noting that just 50% of U.S. wealth is held by middle-income households — compared with 61% in 1973 — a rash of retail closings and the decline of malls in middle-class areas have swept more people toward dollar stores.

They Have a Type of Shopper in Mind and They Actively Seek Out That Type

In December 2017, Dollar General CEO Todd Vasos told a Goldman Sachs retailing conference that his stores' average shopper is, typically, a woman living a two-income household, making \$40,000 per year before taxes, and clinging to a stable job with no wage growth. He says that shopper's disposable income is around 2%, so \$800 per year, and her shopping habits don't respond well to price changes of as little as a dime. As CityLab noted, dollar stores tend to flourish in areas where residents are making below the median income and living at high rates of poverty. They also tend to pop up in areas where residents have lower levels of education, higher rates of smoking and obesity. Dollar stores are also more common in communities with higher crime rates.

Even Well-Off Shoppers Hunt for Bargains at Dollar Stores

A few years back, The New York Times Magazine discovered that about 22% of dollar store shoppers make more than \$70,000 a year. They're also the fastest-growing segment of shoppers for the stores, along with millennials.

There Are More Dollar Stores than Walmarts and Costcos

The two biggest dollar chains, Dollar Tree and Dollar General, have more stores combined than the six biggest U.S. retailers — Walmart, Kroger, Costco, Home Depot, CVS and Walgreens — put together, according to Forbes. If you put Macy's, Kohl's, Nordstrom, JCPenney, Dillard's, Saks/Lord & Taylor, Neiman Marcus, and Belk together, they'd be less than 15% of the total number of dollar stores.

The Stores Can Get Messy

Walking into a dollar store in disarray isn't a rarity, but that's by design. These stores run on minimal staff and they're built to move a lot of product quickly. If that product has to sit on floors or in boxes for a bit while a cashier handles the register, so be it.

Wages Are Low at Most Dollar Stores

According to Glassdoor, the average cashier makes \$9 an hour or less than \$18,000 a year. Store managers and assistant managers make between \$45,000 and \$47,000 a year, while district managers can make over \$78,600. If you're stocking shelves, it's \$10 an hour. Dollar General wages fall along the same lines.

It's a Two-Horse Race but There Are Plenty of Little Guys. Their Numbers Are Growing

Dollar Tree (which also owns Family Dollar) has more than 15,000 locations and amassed \$23.6 billion in revenue last year. Its chief competitor, Dollar General, has more than 16,000 locations and made more than \$27.8 billion. By comparison, a second-tier competitor such as Five Below has only 1,000 locations. Aside from Five Below, there are chains as large as the nearly 390-store 99 Cents Only based out of California. Most dollar store chains are much smaller, though. The number of dollar stores in the United States hit 30,000 in 2016. That's 25% higher than it was in 2011 — and numbers are expected to hit nearly 38,000 this year.

Even Dollar Stores Struggle to Keep up With Amazon

Their numbers are growing, but dollar stores face the same struggles as many other retail stores in the current environment. Dollar Tree and Dollar General benefit from a shrinking middle class that is drifting into lower tiers, but they're also pressured by online marketplaces such as Amazon. Even with their great deals, dollar stores feel the same pinch as other retailers when the economy softens.

Wholesalers and Direct Suppliers Save Them Money. They Make Many Dollars

Independent dollar stores and small chains depend heavily on wholesalers with access to overproduced products or inexpensive imports. But some of the larger chains have their own suppliers in place and deal with name-brand clients directly. Last year, Dollar Tree and Dollar General alone made \$51.4 billion in revenue. That's two-thirds more than what Macy's made, but not even half of what Kroger brought in.

They're a Bulk Store in Reverse

They're picking up items in bulk and benefiting from the economics of scale, but dollar stores aren't always passing the bulk of those deals onto the consumer. That's evident from Dollar Tree's Direct to Business program, which lets businesses and charitable organizations pick up items at bulk prices, but doesn't charge them a warehouse fee like Costco or Sam's Club for the privilege. Meanwhile, they can break up cases and sell items for \$1 in stores whether or not that's their unit price in bulk.

They Don't Franchise

All Dollar Tree and Family Dollar stores are operated from their corporate headquarters in Virginia. Dollar General doesn't franchise either, but will let you sell Dollar General products online as an "affiliate" for a 5% commission.

They're High Margin

Dollar stores maintain huge gross margins — larger than discount or supermarket chains — and actually make more money on every item they sell than their competitors. By selling smaller sizes and cheaper goods for a higher unit price, dollar stores are taking in more from consumers by parsing the pain into bite-sized chunks.

[Source: Cheapism | Jason Notte | April 29, 2021 ++]

COVID-19 Scams

Update 06: Scammers Pose as FEMA & Trick Grieving Families

A new United States [federal program](#) is helping to pay funeral expenses of people who died from COVID-19. Unfortunately, scammers are using this as a chance to steal personal information from bereaved family members.

How the Scam Works

- You get a call, email, or text message from someone who claims to be from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or another government agency. The scammer is allegedly reaching out as part of the official COVID-19 Funeral Assistance program.
- This “government official” claims that you qualify for financial assistance. But first they need information to “register” you for the program. Scammers may ask for the name, birth date, and social security number of a deceased family member. Sharing this information can lead to identity theft.
- Not all scammers impersonating FEMA are capitalizing on the funeral program. In another version of this scam, con artists claim to be FEMA representatives following up on your COVID-19 vaccine. This is another ploy to get personal information. “I was called by a man who said he was ‘FEMA,’” reported one person to [BBB Scam Tracker](#). “He wanted me to give him my Social Security number. He claimed I did not fill out all the paperwork when I got vaccinated.”

Protect yourself from this scam:

- Stay calm. No matter what scammers claim, you don’t need to take immediate action. The real version of the FEMA program has no deadline to apply. Also, no cap on funding has been set, so funds are not going to run out.
- Be wary of out-of-the-blue calls, emails or text message claiming to be from the government. In general, the government will not contact you using these methods unless you granted permission. This FEMA program is no exception. They will not contact you unless you called the agency beforehand or applied for funeral assistance.
- Think something seems suspicious? Reach out to the agency directly. If you doubt that a FEMA representative is legitimate, hang up the phone or stop emailing. Then, report the suspicious calls or messages. Contact to the FEMA Helpline at 800-621-3362 or the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline, 866-720-5721. You also may contact local police.
- Check for look-alikes. Research to see if the government agency or organization that contacted you actually exists. Scammers often make up names of agencies and/or grants.

- Do not pay any money for a "free" government grant or program. It is not really free if there is a fee involved. A real government agency will not ask for an advanced processing fee. Instead, find out if the agency is legitimate by checking [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).

For More Information

You can learn more about FEMA's [COVID-19 funeral assistance program](#) and [read more about scams](#). Learn more about [government grant scams](#) in this BBB tip. If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](https://www.BBB.org/ScamTracker). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](https://www.BBB.org/AvoidScams). [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | June 4, 2021 ++]

Package Delivery Scam

Update 01: New Spin

In a new spin on the package delivery scheme, scammers are no longer posing as mail carriers. Instead, they're impersonating US Customs and Border Protection, claiming to have intercepted a package addressed to the victim. Even if they sound official or make threats, don't let these scammers fool you. The person who contacted you is simply impersonating an agent and trying to gain access to your personal information and bank accounts.

How the Scam Works

- Consumers have reported two versions of this scheme to BBB Scam Tracker.
- The suspicious package scheme: You receive a call, email or text saying US Customs and Border Patrol has intercepted a suspicious package addressed to you. You're instructed to respond immediately, or a warrant will be issued for your arrest. When you reach out, you learn they seized the package because it contained drugs, weapons, cash, or other contraband. The "officer" asks for your personal information in order to "verify your identity," but it's just a ruse to steal your identity.
- The sweepstakes scheme: In another version of this scam, you're contacted by someone claiming to be associated with US Customs and Border Protection. This time, they don't threaten you with arrest. Instead, they claim to have intercepted a package containing a massive sweepstakes prize. To receive your winnings, you need to pay a huge fee for special shipping labels.

Protect yourself from this scam:

- Beware of unsolicited calls, texts and emails. No matter who they say they are, stay cautious, and don't give out your personal information.
- Think it's a government official calling? Think again. Government agencies typically reach out by mail, so they're unlikely to contact you by phone, email, or text message.
- Do not trust a name or badge number. Multiple consumers told Scam Tracker that the scammer provided a name and badge number. This is just an attempt to gain your trust.
- Ignore it! The US Customs and Border Protection advises anyone who encounters this scam to hang up or ignore the message.

For More Information

US Customs and Border Protection issued a public [warning](#) about this scam. If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](https://www.bbb.org/scamtracker). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](https://www.bbb.org/avoidscams). [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | May 21, 2021 ++]

Medicare Telephone Scam

Update 03: Free Genetic Test is Really Medicare Fraud

This Medicare scam is back! Con artists are claiming to offer “free” genetic testing kits that allegedly screen for heart conditions or cancer. It's really a ruse to steal your Medicare information for fraudulent billing and/or identity theft.

How the Scam Works

- You get a call from someone claiming to be from Medicare or an official-sounding organization. (One victim reported to BBB Scam Tracker receiving a call from “the Cardiac Test Center.”) The caller claims to be providing free genetic testing kits. All you need to do is agree to receive a kit in the mail, swab your cheek, and return the vial. The test will tell you if you have a genetic predisposition to heart disease, cancer, or another common condition. The caller insists that the test will be totally covered by Medicare.
- This sounds like a useful (and free) test, so you agree. Of course, there's a catch! Before the company can mail your kit, they need your Medicare ID number and a lot of personal information. Targets of this scam report being asked extensive questions about their health, such as their family medical history and previous diagnoses.
- As always, there are several variations of this con. Previous versions involved scammers going door-to-door or setting up tables at health fairs. Con artists may even provide gift cards or other giveaways in exchange for your participation.
- While genetic testing is a legitimate service—some victims do actually receive a genetic testing kit—the scammers are trying to commit fraud by billing Medicare for the unnecessary tests. For the victims, these cons can lead to medical identity theft and, in some instances, a bill for thousands of dollars. Consumers should always consult with their primary care doctor before agreeing to tests.

Protect yourself from this scam:

- Be wary of any lab tests at senior centers, health fairs, or in your home. Be suspicious of anyone claiming that genetic tests and cancer screenings are “free” or “covered by Medicare.” If a product or test is truly “free,” you will not have to provide your Medicare number.
- Don't share your Medicare number. If anyone other than your physician's office requests your Medicare information, do not provide it. Also, protect your Medicare card by keeping it in a safe place (not your wallet).

- Do not trust a name or phone number. Con artist often use official-sounding names or appear to be calling from a government agency or related area code. Medicare [will never call you](#) to confirm your personal information, your Medicare number, or ask questions about your personal health.
- Report Medicare fraud. If you think you are a victim of Medicare fraud, be sure to report it. [Go here](#) on Medicare.gov to get started.

For More Information

Learn more about the [Medicare back brace scam and durable medical equipment fraud](#). Read more about [healthcare scams](#) and how to [protect yourself from Medicare fraud](#). 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 June 11, 2021 ++]

Tax Burden for North Dakota Vets

As of JUN 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 Dakota** in 2021.

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 5% (food and prescription drugs exempt), 6% on lodging, and 7% on alcoholic beverages. Cities or counties which have adopted home rule charters may levy additional sales and use taxes up to 3.5%.

Gasoline Tax: 41.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 47.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: 44 cents/pack of 20

Sales Taxes

The North Dakota state sales tax rate is %, and the average ND sales tax after local surtaxes is 656% which is higher state sales tax than 57.7% of states

- Groceries are exempt from the North Dakota sales tax
- Counties and cities can charge an additional local sales tax of up to 3%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 8%
- North Dakota has 126 special sales tax jurisdictions with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax
- Counties and cities in North Dakota are allowed to charge an additional local sales tax on top of the North Dakota state sales tax. The local sales tax in the state capitol Bismarck, for example, is 1% for a total sales tax of 6%.

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 Dakota'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 \$597 in yearly excise taxes per capita is collected, higher than 62% of the other 50 states. Unlike the North Dakota Sales Tax, excise taxes are not generally deductible on North Dakota income tax returns or on your federal tax return. However, the IRS occasionally allows certain excise taxes to be deducted for certain tax years

- **Alcohol:** Beer: \$0.39 per gal | Wine: \$1.04 per gal | Liquor \$4.66 per gal. The excise tax on beer is higher than 68% of the other 50 states and is ranked #16 out of all states. The excise tax on wine is higher than 64% of all states and is ranked #18 out of the 50 states. The excise tax on Spirits is lower than 60% of all states and is ranked #30 out of the 50 states. Note that the IRS also collects a federal excise taxes on alcoholic beverages, which are included separately from this state's alcohol taxes in the final purchase price
- **Cannabis:** none
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans in North Dakota is \$10.68 per phone service plan, higher than 64% of the other 50 states. North Dakota's average cellphone tax is ranked #18 out of the 50 states. The North Dakota 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 \$0.44 per 20 cigarettes, one of the lowest cigarettes taxes in the country. North Carolina's excise tax on cigarettes is ranked #45 out of the 50 states. The North Carolina cigarette tax is applied to every 20 cigarettes sold (the size of an average pack of cigarettes). If a pack contains more than 20 cigarettes, a higher excise tax will be collected.
- **Fuel:** The North Dakota excise tax on gasoline is 23.00¢ per gallon, lower than 64% of the other 50 states. North Dakota's excise tax on gasoline is ranked #32 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 \$ 434 in income taxes which is ranked 42nd of all 51 states.

Tax Rate Range: Low – 1.1%; High – 2.9%

Income Brackets: Five. Single Lowest – \$0 to \$39,449; Highest – \$433,200+

Couple Lowest – \$0 to \$65,899; Highest – \$433,200+

Personal Exemptions: None

Standard Deduction: None

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security is exempt.

Retired Military Pay: Bpth retirement pa and SBP are exempt.

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.

Website: North Dakota State Government <https://www.nd.gov/tax>

Tax Forms:

- <https://www.nd.gov/tax/data/upfiles/media/individual-income-tax-booklet-2020.pdf> Tax Instruction
- <https://www.nd.gov/tax/data/upfiles/media/form-nd-1-2020.pdf> Form ND-1 Individual Income Tax Return
- <https://www.nd.gov/tax/individualincome/forms> All Tax forms

Property Taxes

All real property in the state is subject to tax by the state, counties, townships, and municipalities. Residential property is taxed as 9% of assessed value. A 5% discount is allowed for taxes paid in full by February 15 ahead of the 1 MAR deadline. For the most part, personal property is exempt from property tax. Personal property of utility companies that are assessed by the State Board of Equalization is subject to property tax. Household personal property, inventories, and machinery and equipment used in trade or manufacture are exempt from property taxes. Machinery and equipment used in refining products from oil or gas extracted from the earth is deemed to be real property and therefore subject to property taxes. A mobile home used as a residence or place of business is also subject to a property tax.

There is also a Homestead Tax Credit available to senior citizens (65+) or disabled persons who own or rent their home. Your income, plus the income of your spouse and any dependents, may not exceed \$42,000 for the calendar year preceding the assessment date. Your assets may not exceed \$500,000. The maximum homestead credit is \$400 (income \$0 to \$18,000) which decreases as your income increases. Submit application available at <https://www.nd.gov/tax/data/upfiles/media/homestead-credit-application-for-senior-citizens-and-disabled-persons.pdf>.

A disabled veteran of the United States armed forces with an armed forces service-connected disability of 50% or greater or a disabled veteran who has an extra-schedular rating to include individual

unemployability that brings the veteran's total disability rating to one 100% as determined by the department of veterans' affairs, who was discharged under honorable conditions or who has been retired from the armed forces of the United States, or the unremarried surviving spouse if the disabled veteran is deceased, is eligible for a credit applied against the first \$6,750 of taxable valuation of the person's homestead owned and occupied by the disabled veteran or unremarried surviving spouse equal to the percentage of the disabled veteran's disability compensation rating or unemployability rating for service-connected disabilities as certified by the department of veterans' affairs for the purpose of applying for a property tax credit. An unremarried surviving spouse who is receiving department of veterans' affairs dependency and indemnity compensation receives a one hundred percent credit as described in this subsection. Submission of an application is required to obtain this credit which can be downloaded at <https://www.nd.gov/tax/data/upfiles/media/application-for-disabled-veterans-property-tax-credit.pdf>.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

North Dakota does not have an inheritance tax. There is an estate tax based on a decedent's total gross estate and limited to the credit for state death taxes allowed on the Federal 706 estate tax return. North Dakota's definition of a deceased person's taxable estate is identical to the federal definition and North Dakota recognizes all federal exemptions and deductions. For further information, visit the North Dakota State Tax Department site or call (701) 328-3657.

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 Dakota Tax Commissioner's website <https://www.nd.gov/tax>.
[Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#NORTHDAKOTA> | June 2021 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest
JUN 01 thru 15, 2021

- **Air Force Two.** The Pentagon is abandoning plans to replace its small fleet of Boeing 757s that serve as Air Force Two—the jetliners that fly the vice president and other top-level cabinet officials. Funding for the project has been eliminated in the Air Force’s fiscal 2022 budget request.
- **Iron Dome.** Having depleted much of its stockpiles in the Gaza strikes, Israel is asking the U.S for an emergency \$1 billion grant to replenish its stock of the Iron Dome rocket interceptor and some “special air launched weapon systems,” mainly JDAMS.
- **Coffee Grounds.** In an effort to recycle more and reduce waste, Starbucks started a program in 1995 called Grounds for Your Garden. Baristas scoop used coffee grounds into empty bags from their espresso beans. Bags of grounds are available for free at many Starbucks locations to use for your compost bin or garden.
- **Epic TV Battles.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXzy-YDieCo> to view clips of the top 10 most TV Epic battles.
- **Bloodiest Battles.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTe-ty1LSrY> to learn about 10 Of The Bloodiest Battles In History

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

Afghan Withdrawal

Update 06: U.S. Pledges \$3.3 Billion to Kabul over the Next Two Years



Afghan National Soldiers

The U.S. peace envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, along with a high-level delegation, met 6 JUN with leaders in Kabul to discuss bilateral cooperation after U.S. and coalition troops leave the country by the Sept. 11 deadline. The discussions come as Taliban insurgents have intensified battlefield attacks against government forces, capturing nine Afghan districts, including six in the past week, since the foreign military withdrawal began a month ago. Hundreds of combatants on both sides and Afghan civilians have also been killed.

A spokesman for Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said the talks with Khalilzad’s team focused on three sectors, including defense, economy and humanitarian assistance. Mohammad Amiri said the U.S. envoy told Ghani that Washington will annually provide \$3.3 billion to Kabul over the next two years to support Afghan security forces battling the Taliban. Amiri noted that more U.S. facilities and equipment, including aircraft, to strengthen the Afghan Air Force, will be among the main topics of bilateral talks in coming days. There has been no response from the U.S. embassy in Kabul regarding Khalilzad’s discussions with Afghan officials.

The Afghan government has long relied on close U.S. air support in battling the Taliban. Afghan officials dismiss concerns their forces may not be able to take on the insurgents in the absence of foreign military support. Khalilzad and his delegation also held a meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, who oversees Kabul’s peace process with the insurgents. The two sides discussed the Afghan peace process and “the new chapter of corporation” between two countries, Abdullah, who heads the High Council for National Reconciliation, wrote on Twitter. “We reiterated our commitment for a just & durable peace with (the) Taliban through negotiations using the available opportunity,” Abdullah added.

A U.S. statement issued 5 JUN prior to Khalilzad’s visit said his delegation would include representatives from the Department of Defense, the National Security Council and USAID. It said the inter-agency delegation would underscore enduring U.S. support for Afghanistan’s development and a political settlement that will end the war. The statement added that Khalilzad will also travel to Doha, Qatar, to encourage the Taliban and Afghan government peace negotiators “to make tangible progress towards of a political settlement that protects the gains of the last two decades.”

Taliban and Kabul negotiators have held multiple rounds of peace talks in the Qatari capital since last September, but the slow-moving process has mostly been deadlocked, with each side blaming the other for stalling it. The U.S. military withdrawal, along with NATO allies, and the ensuing peace talks between the two Afghan advisories stemmed from an agreement Washington negotiated with the Taliban in February 2020 to end nearly two decades of involvement in the Afghan war. Khalilzad negotiated and signed the landmark deal.

Last week, the U.S. announced more than \$266 million in humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, where an estimated 18 million people are in need of it. The money, an official statement said, will provide lifesaving protection, shelter, livelihoods opportunities, essential health care, emergency food aid, water, sanitation, and hygiene services. [Source: VOA | Ayaz Gul | June 6, 2021 ++]

Afghan Withdrawal

U.S. Troops Can Do What Is Needed To Go Out With Our Heads Held High



During his first two years in command in America’s longest war, Army Gen. Austin “Scott” Miller oversaw a partial withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan that came in waves under President Donald Trump. Now he was meeting with the new president for the first time, via video feed from the White House. Miller and other senior military officers had urged Trump to leave a couple thousand U.S. troops in Afghanistan

to counter threats posed by terrorist groups, and they were recommending roughly the same to President Biden. While Biden and Trump disagreed on many issues, both had vowed to end U.S. involvement in a conflict that Pentagon officials said they could not win on the battlefield. Biden and Miller would meet only that one time before the president announced in April that he would withdraw all U.S. troops from the country by September, U.S. officials said.

After 2,400 U.S. military deaths, more than \$2 trillion spent and about a dozen generals under four presidents, Miller expects to be the last U.S. commander in the war. He won't be able to rewrite history. But he'll command the departure. Miller, 60, said U.S. troops can do what is needed to "go out with our heads held high." "There's a sense of obligation to get this as close to right as possible," he said in an interview. "And in this case, as close to right as possible is to protect our force, but it's also to make sure the Afghans are in the best possible posture." This account of Miller's time in command in Afghanistan is based on interviews with more than a dozen people, including U.S. and Afghan military officers, current and former senior civilian officials, and members of Miller's staff in Kabul.

What emerges is a portrait of a battle-hardened officer who was steady through chaos and open to trying new approaches as time ran out on the U.S. military in Afghanistan. Restricted by the realities of a 20-year-old conflict, Miller boosted airstrikes to numbers not seen in a decade, and threw his support behind a possible political settlement with the Taliban — even as he privately questioned the group's willingness to follow through, several officials said. During his tour, the longest for a U.S. commander in Afghanistan, violence surged in the war and upheaval erupted in Washington amid concerns that Trump would order a rapid departure or fire key officials. Meanwhile, distrust persisted among the warring parties as U.S. officials negotiated the deal with the Taliban.

Despite his concerns, Miller did not pressure either administration. Instead, officials said, he adhered to the principle of civilian control. He worked with other senior officials and built a partnership with Zalmay Khalilzad, the Afghan-born U.S. diplomat who was tapped by the Trump administration to negotiate with the Taliban days after Miller took command. The White House did not address questions about how much Biden consulted Miller. Biden, who also conferred with senior defense officials at the Pentagon, has "the utmost respect and admiration" for the general and values his "pressure-tested wisdom and counsel," Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security adviser, said in a statement. Miller, who colleagues expect will retire this year, declined to disclose his recommendations, saying they are "something I share with my chain of command." But the general, who previously led the secretive Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), acknowledged that he knew from the start that he could be the last U.S. commander, even if he didn't have "such clarity on it that you really understand how this would transpire."

Retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who commanded Special Operations troops at war alongside Miller, said Miller is someone who will "respect the decision and move on, whether he agrees," and is not prone to "go in the corner and pout." "What leaders like Scott are having to do is go through is a pretty bitter, difficult situation at the end of a career after they've done all that sacrifice," said McChrystal, who resigned as the top commander in Afghanistan in 2010 after members of his staff disparaged members of the Obama administration. "I'm sure that, you know, in some cases still water runs deeper than we think," McChrystal said. "But the reality is, there is a maturity and a self-control that Scott Miller has that at the end of the day drives his behavior."

Assassination and uncertainty

When Miller took command in Afghanistan, the Taliban was on the offensive, launching periodic attacks in cities, killing scores of Afghan troops each month, and controlling or contesting territory that was home to about a third of the population, according to U.S. government assessments. Within weeks, he survived a shocking attack in Kandahar province. A rogue Afghan security guard opened fire as a group of Americans prepared to leave the provincial governor's compound, killing Lt. Gen. Abdul Raziq, a powerful Afghan police chief, along with two other senior Afghan officials. Miller was a few feet from Raziq when the shooting began. The general took cover behind a vehicle and drew his pistol, directing others amid the violence, said four people who survived the firefight.

The scene was a gruesome mess, with blood mixing with the deep red of smashed pomegranates that had just been offered as gifts to the Americans, the survivors said. The October 2018 attack was an early reality check. The shooter also killed Kandahar's provincial intelligence chief, Abdul Momin, and wounded the governor, Zalmay Wesa, Army Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Smiley and two other Americans. "If he was targeting Miller, he would have killed him," said one Army officer who was present. The officer and several others interviewed for this story spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issues involved or concerns about complicating Miller's job.

The attack came as uncertainty hung over Trump's plans for the war. About a year earlier, Trump authorized sending several thousand more troops to Afghanistan. At the time, 11,000 were already there. He acknowledged that the increase went against his instincts to end foreign wars and said, "I heard decisions are much different when you sit behind the desk of the Oval Office." But Trump soured on the plan as the Taliban continued to make advances under Miller's predecessor, Army Gen. John W. Nicholson Jr. Miller, who had commanded the elite Delta Force at the height of the Iraq War, took over in September 2018 with about 15,000 U.S. troops under his command.

He began cutting staff, and rotating in other officers from his former JSOC headquarters at Fort Bragg, N.C. He also reduced the number of internal reports that his staff was producing, and the officers compiling them. One Army officer recalled that at one point, Miller questioned why someone had set out nice dishes for an internal meeting at their headquarters, and whether that job was necessary. Ultimately, Miller trimmed about 2,000 U.S. troops. "He went in and I think he knew ahead of time that cuts were possible," said Carter Malkasian, who served as a senior adviser to Marine Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and helped Miller prepare for his Senate confirmation process.

On the battlefield, Miller focused on making the coalition more unpredictable and efficient. His early innovations included an "operational design" that kept U.S. aircraft and Special Operations troops on the move, inflicting significant losses on the Taliban as Khalilzad's efforts to negotiate with the group commenced. At the same time, Miller was monitoring the turbulence in Washington. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, seen as a moderating force in the administration, was increasingly at odds with Trump on numerous issues, including Afghanistan. The president openly began musing about replacing him. Mattis told Miller that it was best for the general to stay in Kabul and focus on the mission, as opposed to making occasional, customary visits to Washington to give congressional testimony and briefings with journalists, several officials said.

"Mattis sensed nothing good could be gained from the military commander speaking based on where we were in the war. And I think that part General Miller probably agreed with," said Kim Field, a retired Army general whom Miller brought on as a civilian adviser. "What do you want me to say? That we're winning militarily? That's not where we are anymore." Other senior defense officials also thought that

Miller should limit his role in Washington, officials said. “There has been a common policy that the chairman and the secretary should be bearing the brunt and the burden of those public duties, as much as is possible and correct,” Malkasian said. Miller declined to comment on the issue. But he pointed out that he has done interviews with numerous journalists in Kabul, including from The Washington Post. He has not yet briefed the Pentagon press corps, but two defense officials said discussions are underway for him to do so soon.

Miller also has not testified before Congress in an open hearing since taking his job, a point that Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, raised recently. But the general privately briefed lawmakers in a classified setting in December 2019. Mattis said in a text message that he could not remember telling Miller to avoid speaking publicly. “I had/have total confidence in Gen Miller’s competence and judgment, so I would not have given him such directions,” he said. Mattis acknowledged that he “didn’t like” battlefield commanders being called to Washington to testify before Congress or meet with journalists. “That was because I needed them in-country focused on their duties,” he said.

Image without a caption

A dangerous moment

Weeks after the attack in Kandahar, political turmoil erupted at home. The president ordered a U.S. withdrawal from Syria in late 2018 and wanted to cut the number of troops in Afghanistan nearly in half, even though negotiations with the Taliban were ongoing. Mattis resigned afterward, saying Trump deserved a defense secretary with views in line with his. Miller reassured Afghan partners and his own staff that Trump had issued no withdrawal orders. “A lot of commanders will just talk to run their mouths. But when he spoke, it was important,” said one Army officer who served under him in Kabul. “People trusted that if something really was going to happen, they were going to hear it from him.”

In the ensuing months, Khalilzad met with senior Taliban officials, sometimes with Miller. Miller informed Taliban leaders that even if the U.S. military were to begin withdrawing, they would continue to conduct airstrikes in support of Afghan forces as needed, two senior U.S. officials said. The deal that the Trump administration ultimately signed with the Taliban in February 2020 called for all U.S. troops to leave Afghanistan by May 2021. But the requirements on the Taliban were minimal. The agreement required Taliban leaders to begin separate negotiations with the Afghan government, but it did not say they had to make any progress in those talks. The Taliban also agreed to hold fire on U.S. troops, but soon returned to its bloody campaign against Afghan soldiers. The deal also called for the Afghan government to release Taliban prisoners as a condition for further negotiations — a requirement that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani was reluctant to accept.

Khalilzad and Miller met Ghani and discussed the issue, said U.S. officials familiar with the meeting. Ghani asked Miller what he thought, and Miller suggested it might be one of the only ways to continue forward, one of the officials said. Months later, in August, Ghani agreed to release the last group of 400 high-value Taliban members, paving the way for negotiations between the Taliban and Afghan government. The talks have sputtered since. Miller and several people who served under his command declined to describe the deal in detail. But one former staff member said it was a struggle to “not be embarrassed” after seeing the specifics and how tough it would be for Miller to stop Taliban violence. “When you see something written like that and you have an analytic brain, a curious brain, my initial reaction is: ‘Is this it? Really?’ ” the official said.

Several staff members described Miller's deep commitment to the welfare of his soldiers, shaped in part by the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu. The two-day clash, punctuated by the downing of two Black Hawk helicopters by Somali militiamen, killed 18 U.S. troops and wounded dozens of others, including Miller, and exposed gaps in U.S. military preparation. Miller, who also was wounded later in Iraq, is now doing everything he can to prevent the loss of any more members of the coalition in Afghanistan, officials said. Michèle Flournoy, a senior defense official during the Obama administration, said military literature suggests that "one of the most dangerous moments in any campaign is during a retrograde or a withdrawal under fire." "We don't know if they'll be under fire, but it's possible given the way the Taliban is behaving," said Flournoy, who has known Miller for years. "I think that has got to be the focus right now, is how to do this in a way that reduces risk to our forces that are pulling out."

Miller, who will have spent a total of about seven years in Afghanistan by the completion of the withdrawal, said the military has the means to protect itself if attacked. "To date — and it's to date — we have not seen that. But that's only as good as until somebody decides to attack coalition forces," Miller said. "We do think it's very dangerous, and we take it seriously and it's something we talk about every single day." [Source: Washington Post | Dan Lamothe | June 7, 2021 ++]

China/Russia Military Budgets

Exceed U.S. When Combined



China and Russia's combined military spending exceeds that of the United States when adjusted for purchasing power, which has allowed China to shorten capability gaps in its quest to become the top superpower by midcentury, the top U.S. military officer said Thursday. "Combined, the Russian and Chinese budgets exceed our budgets if all the cards are put on the table," Joint Chiefs Chairman General Mark Milley told the Senate Armed Services Committee. He called China's increased spending trend "disturbing."

China and Russia are the U.S. military's two biggest competitors. Defense secretaries from Jim Mattis to Lloyd Austin have identified China as the "pacing challenge" for the U.S. military. Senator Jim Inhofe, the ranking member of the Armed Services Committee, wrote in a recent article that the Chinese defense budget was \$604 billion when adjusted for purchasing power, and the Russian defense budget was about \$200 billion after adjustments. The gaps that used to exist two or three decades ago between U.S. and Chinese military capabilities have narrowed, according to officials. "We've been asking our military to do too much with too little for too long," said Inhofe, a Republican from Oklahoma.

"It is our obligation to defend this nation, and this proposed budget does not do so," added Senator Roger Wicker, a Republican from Mississippi. Other senators, including Marsha Blackburn, a Republican from Tennessee, pointed to funding gaps between what was requested by several military leaders for Pacific defense and what was in the administration's current budget request. Milley and Austin said the defense budget, which amounts to \$715 billion, required the department to make tough choices, but it was a means to provide the U.S. with "an adequate defense." "We're going after the capabilities that can match the operational concepts that we're putting into play and allow us to be not only competitive but actually dominant in this competition," Austin said.

Senator Tim Kaine, a Democrat from Virginia, defended the budget, telling his Republican colleagues that while the Biden budget is \$6 billion smaller than the proposed Trump administration budget for this year, Trump's military budgets actually ended up being lower as he repeatedly took money out of the Pentagon budget for "nonmilitary emergencies" such as building a wall along the southern U.S. border.

With the U.S. focus on the growing Chinese threat, Senator Angus King of Maine said 10 JUN that "one of the most serious risks" was an "accidental conflict with China." The registered independent pointed to tensions over Taiwan and in the South China Sea, saying the U.S. needed an effective communication line to prevent such a conflict. "There needs to be a direct line of communication between the military and also between government officials as well," Austin agreed. "I'm concerned about something that could happen that could spark a crisis [with China], and I think we need the ability to be able to talk with both our allies and partners, but also our adversaries or potential adversaries," he said. [Source: VOA | Carla Babb | June 10, 2021

Law of the Sea Convention

Update 01: Why the U.S. Can't Touch Iran's Atlantic-Bound Warships



In early JUN, Politico reported the movement of two Iranian warships apparently on their way to the Atlantic Ocean. U.S. national security officials expressed concern that these ships were bound for Venezuela with cargoes that violate U.S. sanctions on Caracas. Already, Sen. Marco Rubio has called for the United States to prevent the ships' arrival. However, any U.S. action against these vessels would be unlawful and undermine a core tenet of the international order: sovereign immunity. The costs of direct action would be severe, exposing the United States to charges of hypocrisy toward the rules-based order and potentially opening U.S. naval vessels to similar treatment by adversaries.

Caracas and Tehran have grown close over the past decade as each has found relief in the other as a safety valve from U.S. sanctions. Trade in oil has been particularly important for the duo, and the United States and its allies have, in recent years, interdicted several cargo vessels under flags of convenience suspected of ferrying Iranian oil in violation of U.S. and European Union sanctions. This time is different. These vessels are part of the Iranian navy. Under international law, Tehran can channel rapper MC Hammer's song and tell the United States, "you can't touch this."

The law of the sea, whether customary or conventional, grants warships and other government ships sovereign immunity. In times of peace, sovereign immunity is a practically all-powerful ward against a foreign state's jurisdiction. Exceptions may apply in extreme circumstances involving failed states, fake warships, or weapons of mass destruction. This case, however, is textbook. The U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines warships as vessels "belonging to the armed forces" under the command of an officer in the service list and manned by a crew in good order. Both Iranian vessels, an unnamed frigate and the IRINS Makran, both clearly meet the definition of a warship under the U.N. convention.

The U.N. Convention, which the United States believes reflects customary international law, explicitly spells out some of sovereign immunity's power. And on the high seas, sovereign immunity is absolute. Article 95 simply reads: "Warships on the high seas have complete immunity from the jurisdiction of any State other than the flag State." Article 96 provides the same absolute immunity to government-owned or operated vessels on the high seas. This right also applies in exclusive economic zones (EEZ) since nothing in that section overrules the provisions.

Even in the territorial sea, sovereign immunity remains a powerful protection. Warships enjoy the right of innocent passage in foreign territorial seas. The coastal state may establish rules for navigational safety but has essentially no power to enforce these regulations on foreign warships that flout traffic separation schemes or the like. As long as the warship is engaged in innocent passage, not threatening the coastal state, the coastal state can, at most, order the warship to leave the territorial sea. Interdiction or arrest are out of the question unless the warship threatens the coastal state, at which point self-defense would be permitted.

Internal waters, such as ports, are not substantially different. A warship would, of course, need the coastal state's permission to enter internal waters. Yet even here, where the coastal state has its greatest authority, sovereign immunity retains its power under well-accepted, customary international law. The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) affirmed this in 2012's "ARA Libertad" case. The Libertad is an Argentinian naval vessel that called at Tema, a Ghanaian port, in late 2012. As part of enforcing a U.S. court order over unpaid Argentine sovereign debts, Ghanaian courts ordered the vessel to remain in the harbor, and Ghanaian authorities attempted to board the vessel. In December 2012, ITLOS's judges unanimously ordered Ghana to release the vessel immediately. The majority reasoning noted "a warship is an expression of the sovereignty" of its flag state and "in accordance with general international law, a warship enjoys immunity, including in internal waters."

ITLOS judges Rüdiger Wolfrum and Jean-Pierre Cot built an even more robust argument in their concurring opinion. There, they took issue with the majority's summary reasoning and instead closely examined both proposals relating to internal waters and warships prior to UNCLOS and the language of that convention itself. They ultimately concluded "that warships in internal waters enjoy immunity from the exercise of coastal state jurisdiction, which includes immunity from judicial proceedings or any enforcement measure, [and] is well established in customary international law." This principle, the judges

noted, was recognized not only by the Institut de Droit International as early as 1898 and again in 1928 but also by various national court cases, including the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Schooner Exchange v. McFaddon and Others*.

Nothing changes even if U.S. officials ascertain the vessels are carrying conventional arms that violate U.S. sanctions on Caracas. Consider U.N. Security Council-endorsed sanctions on North Korea. That system includes perhaps the most robust system of sanctions on ship-borne materials and comes with the backing of the five permanent Security Council members (even if China’s enforcement has been lukewarm). Although silent on sovereign immune vessels, the most recent resolution in 2017 allowed member states to “seize, inspect, and freeze any vessel subject to its jurisdiction in its territorial waters.” Since customary international law holds that warships during peacetime are never under the jurisdiction of a foreign state, foreign warships are arguably not subject to foreign enforcement actions under these U.N. sanctions.

In this case, so long as the Iranian warships do not threaten use of force, sovereign immunity protects them wherever they are—whether in the high seas, an EEZ, a territorial sea, or internal waters. If conventional arms are aboard, the U.S. enforcement action would merely rest on national sanctions while even the most robust U.N. sanctions may not cover sovereign immune vessels. Likewise, the “*ARA Libertad*” precedent clearly demonstrates even if these vessels are forced to request and receive permission to call at a port to replenish their supplies, the United States gains no legal options. The port state remains bound by customary international law.

The United States could ignore the law, as Iran does in the Persian Gulf, but this comes with significant costs. If an attempted enforcement action leads to a U.S. loss before an international court, the United States suffers a humiliating defeat that may embolden Iran. If the enforcement action succeeds both operationally and legally, the United States could put U.S. naval vessels at jeopardy, if, say, China decided U.S. naval vessels supplying arms to Taiwan violated future Chinese sanctions.

A success or failure, U.S. action directly against the Iranian vessels steaming across the Atlantic Ocean will complicate efforts to secure U.S. interests and position the United States as a champion of the international rules-based order. To prevent Iran’s naval vessels from reaching Venezuela and to advance U.S. interests, the United States should employ diplomacy rather than force and encourage states along the route to deny the Iranian vessels port access if requested. But policymakers and elected officials itching to send in the U.S. Navy or Coast Guard would do well to remember MC Hammer’s basic rule of sovereign immunity: “You can’t touch this.” [Source: CAN | Cornell Overfield (Opinion) | June 10, 2021 ++]

U.S. Sanctions on Iran

Update 03: U.S. Lifts Some s in Overture to Iran

The Biden administration lifted sanctions on three former Iranian officials and several energy companies amid stalled nuclear negotiations, signaling Washington's willingness to further ease economic pressure on Iran if the country changes course. The U.S. Treasury Department on 10 JUN repealed sanctions on former senior National Iranian Oil Co. officials and several companies involved in shipping and trading petrochemical products. The administration described the moves as routine administrative actions, saying

the officials were removed from U.S. blacklists because they no longer held positions in the sanctioned entities.

But officials familiar with talks under way in Vienna on the future of the 2015 multilateral Iran nuclear agreement said the Biden administration has been looking at how it could inject momentum into the negotiations. Oil prices declined nearly 2% after the news, but quickly regained their losses, continuing to trade over \$70 a barrel. "These actions demonstrate our commitment to lifting sanctions in the event of a change in status or behavior by sanctioned persons," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement accompanying the notice of the action.

The actions came as U.S., Iranian, European and Chinese negotiators in Vienna are preparing to start a sixth round of talks to restore the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, the U.S. and five other world powers. Discussions are expected to start up again this weekend in Vienna, according to people involved in the negotiations. State Department spokesman Ned Price said later 10 JUN that the actions have "absolutely no connection" to ongoing negotiations on the nuclear agreement. A Treasury official also said, "This is not a wider easing of sanctions on the oil sector of Iran." The Iranian mission to the United Nations didn't respond to a request for comment.

U.S. and European officials have said significant differences remain between Washington and Tehran over how to restore the nuclear deal, including the extent of any potential sanctions relief. Completed in 2015, the nuclear agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action lifted international economic sanctions on Iran in exchange for temporary constraints on the country's nuclear program. In 2018, President Donald Trump, a Republican, withdrew the U.S. from the deal, calling it one-sided and arguing it supplied Iran with funding Tehran directed to its military, weapons programs and to militant groups elsewhere in the region.

In an effort to push Iran back to the negotiating table for a stricter deal, the Trump administration reimposed sweeping sanctions on Tehran, hitting every major export sector and helping pitch the country into a deep economic depression. Besides the oil and banking sectors, the sanctions also included the shipping, construction, auto, and metal industries and targeted hundreds of Iranian officials, financial trusts and companies by name. They effectively froze most international business dealings with Iran, threatening U.S. and foreign companies if they traded with Iran, including purchasing Iranian oil, natural gas or petrochemical products. Iran has remained a party to the deal, even while steadily breaching many of its limits, including on uranium enrichment. The country has consistently demanded the U.S. lift nearly all sanctions upfront before it brings its nuclear activities back in line with the 2015 agreement. The other parties to the deal, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United Kingdom, remain in it.

The Vienna negotiations now look very likely to drift past Iran's presidential elections on 18 JUN, which some Western officials saw as a target date to complete the talks because of their potential effect on Iran's position. U.S. officials have said they would be prepared to lift most sanctions on Iran's oil, petrochemical and shipping sectors as part of a deal to restore the 2015 nuclear agreement. So far, the U.S. has insisted it will maintain other antiterrorism sanctions, including on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, a paramilitary group that retains significant influence on Iran's government, economy and foreign policy. Indeed, on Thursday, even as it lifted some sanctions the U.S. also levied new ones against a group of men and companies that U.S. officials said are helping fund the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Critics of the administration's Iran policy said the 10 JUN lifting of sanctions would undermine Washington's leverage over Iran in the talks. "Lifting sanctions during negotiations shows weakness to Iran and tells Tehran to continue its nefarious activities, including nuclear extortion and sending conventional arms to U.S. adversaries," said Anthony Ruggiero, a former top national security adviser to Mr. Trump now at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a think tank that advocated for tougher sanctions. Several Republican lawmakers said the action confirmed their fears about the Biden administration's Iran policy. "The Biden admin is rushing to dismantle sanctions on Iran, including and especially their oil industry and shipping, before even the pretense of a deal," wrote Sen. Ted Cruz, (R., Texas), in a tweet. "What happened to Biden's promise not to give the Ayatollah unilateral concessions?"

The 10 JUN moves represent a sliver of the broad spectrum of Iranian sanctions and aren't expected to yield any significant financial or economic relief to the country. Still, deletions from Iran sanction rolls are relatively rare, according to data available on the Treasury Department's website. The action, therefore, signals to Iran that the Biden administration not only has a willingness to act, but the administrative and legal capability to do so, analysts said. The United States on 9 JUN said it was deeply concerned Iran has yet to provide the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) with information the agency needs regarding its potential undeclared nuclear material, State Department spokesman Ned Price said. The IAEA and Iran reached a three-month agreement in February cushioning the blow of Tehran's decision to reduce its cooperation with the agency by ending extra monitoring measures introduced by the 2015 deal. [Source: Wall Street Journal | Ian Talley & Laurence Norman | June 11, 2021 ++]

Hacks & Gadgets

Update 01: 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!



Flat Takeout Boxes

We've all ordered Chinese takeout before, brought it home, and dumped it out onto our own plates. Either that, or we just eat it straight out of the carton. However, we're sad to inform you that you're doing it all wrong. The reason that Chinese (and other food) takeout boxes are flat is that they are designed to be their own plate. While the food is still inside the container, you can (easily but carefully) pull the sides apart and set it flat on the table. If you did everything correctly, your meal will be sitting on a flat and perfectly usable plate. It's crazy how easy it is to pull this off and even crazier that more people don't realize why takeout containers are shaped as they are.

Long Neck Bottles

For fans of adult beverages, it's no accident that the drinks you like often come in bottles that have long necks. For starters, the shape of beer bottles makes them comfortable to hold for extended periods of time. It also makes them easier for pouring into that ice-cold glass or mug you pulled out of the freezer. Some long-neck bottles will also have a more bulbous neck to help collect particles and sediment in unfiltered beers. If that weren't enough, long necks also help to distribute heat throughout the entire bottle when your warm hand clutches it. Essentially, the long neck plays a role in making sure your beverage stays cold, which is what you want, right?

Metal and Black Diamond Markers On Measuring Tape

There comes a time in every person's life when a parent or guardian has forced them to hold the end of measuring tape. At this time, you probably noticed a small piece of metal at the end of the measuring tape. Well, technically at the beginning. In any event, there are multiple reasons why that metal end exists. For starters, there's a little slot that can be placed around a nail to help hold the measuring tape in place on the off chance that no one is around to hold the other end. Also, you probably noticed that the edge is a little serrated. This makes it easy to mark a wall or other surface in case you can't seem to locate the pencil that's tucked behind your ear to mark your measurement that way.

As for those black diamonds you see printed on nearly all standard measuring tape? Consider them "Stud Finders". They can show you the exact center between 2 studs in your wall. The first black diamond is at 19.2" on the tape measure, and then repeats at 38.4", 57.6", 76.8" and finally 96" inches. In other words, if you know your home was built using standard 16" stud spacing, you can simply pull out a tape measure instead of an electronic stud finder!

Extra Fabric with Clothing

We've all bought clothes that come with a tiny bag that has an extra patch of fabric inside. For most people, their first instinct is to think that it's there in case the shirt or pants get a rip. With a little extra fabric, you could just sew up the hole. But that's not why clothes come with extra fabric. Think about it, unless you're a professional seamstress, it would be obvious that you patched a hole. Instead, that extra fabric is so you can test out washing the material a certain way to know if it'll shrink or the colors will bleed. After all, you don't want to wash a new shirt without knowing how it'll react in the machine. With the extra fabric, you can test it out ahead of time. Neat, huh?

Colored Squares on Toothpaste Tubes

Ever take a close look at a tube of toothpaste and noticed a colored block toward the bottom? Most of the time it's blue, red, green, or black. It's not an aesthetic choice by the toothpaste manufacturer, nor is it a hidden signal about the chemicals used to make the toothpaste. Those are two of the more popular explanations. However, these colored blocks on the tube are actually called "eye marks." They tell the machines on the assembly line where to cut and fold the packaging. Without it, tubes of toothpaste would be attached to one another, making it awfully difficult to apply any to your toothbrush. If you're worried about any toxic chemicals being in your toothpaste, the colored block tells you nothing, just read the ingredients on the back.

Keyboard Bumps

If you look at a computer keyboard, any keyboard, you'll notice two little bumps on both the F and J keys. If you ever took a class in high school on how to type, you probably know why those bumps exist on those keys. For the rest of you, those bumps are there so users can find their way on the keyboard while keeping their eyes on the screen. If you are typing with two hands the proper way, your hands will be set up so that

your left pointer finger is on F and your right pointer finger is on J. Without having to look at the keyboard, you just have to feel these bumps with your fingers to know that your hands are aligned properly and ready to get to work.

Holes in Padlock

At a certain point in our lives, we've all used a padlock for one reason or another. You may or may not have noticed that there's a little hole, sometimes two, at the bottom of the padlock. These holes actually serve two important purposes for the lock itself. First, they allow any water that gets inside to drain out of the lock. Often times, locks are used outside, so they have to be prepared to handle the elements. If water couldn't drain out and it ended up freezing, the lock would suffer some serious damage since water expands when it freezes. Second, the holes allow you to pour oil or WD-40 into the lock in case it gets jammed and won't open up. Without the hole for pouring oil, once the lock became stuck, it'd be useless.

Hole in Cap of Ballpoint Pens

At first glance, there appears to be something wrong with your pen's cap because it has a hole in it. Fear not, because this was totally done on purpose, and no it's not because the company wants the pen to dry out and force you to buy more. They are actually there so that air can flow through in the event the cap is swallowed accidentally by a child or adult. Remember, a lot of adults have the bad habit of putting pen caps in their mouth and it only takes one bad move until the cap ends up in the back of their throat. Feel free to keep your conspiracy theories about companies drying out pens on purpose; that hole in the cap is all about safety.

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

Home Pests

Update 01: 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. Following are some more of them.

Got Ants?

- *Stop the Line:* Step one in addressing that eerie line of ants is to clean up the source of attraction — food left out, unnoticed spill residue, crumbs, or stickiness. If the sink and counter areas are free of food detritus and standing water, try natural ant repellants such as cucumber, mint, cinnamon, cloves, cayenne pepper, coffee grounds, and lemon juice. If the marching ants' origin point becomes apparent, dab one of those items (on a watery cotton ball) at the spot and along the ant line. Spray the area with a mix of water and a natural repellant from the list. Afterward, leave a nightlight on in the room for three nights to confuse their foraging habits.
- *Invite Ants into a Cup:* One option to stop ants in their tracks is to place cotton balls soaked in a mixture of 1 liter of water, 1 teaspoon of borax, and 1 cup of sugar inside an empty yogurt cup.

Cover with plastic wrap and punch holes. The ants will enjoy the bait inside and return through the holes to their colonies, which will die out. Don't use this trick outdoors or in reach of kids or other animals, though.

Deter (Harmless) House Centipedes

With wormy bodies, giant antennae, and many fuzzy legs, these creatures are creepy, crawly, and lightning fast, but they're good guys in the fight on pests. Like spiders, they kill other bugs in the home — even bedbugs, termites, and roaches — and they don't carry diseases or hurt people. Like silverfish (which house centipedes eat), they enjoy dank, dark spots, so use bathroom fans and dehumidifiers to ward them off. Keep the house's perimeter and basement free of wet leaves, damp lumber, or other wet debris. Addressing other pests (the house centipede's food) also helps keep away these unwanted residents.

If you really want to get rid of house centipedes, sprinkle silica and borate dust in affected areas. Aerosol cans of hairspray, shellac, and the like will immobilize a single house centipede so it can be removed, but that's not a long-term solution. This is one pest we should perhaps learn to live with.

Beat the Mosquito Blues

Skeeter ladies (only female mosquitoes bite) are attracted to light, heat, perspiration, body odor, and carbon dioxide, which draw them to feed by sucking blood. Keeping doors and windows closed helps, but there are many other natural solutions that don't involve an arsenal of toxic sprays.

- Cheap candles that work well include citronella, beeswax, and soy.
- Neem oil, or Indian violet, repels mosquitos, as does garlic oil, so try spraying water-and-oil mixtures around (or on your skin; they're harmless).
- One sure way for an outdoor event to end early is for mosquitos to show up as uninvited guests. When barbecuing, place rosemary or sage on the coals to keep mosquitos away. Surprisingly, planting marigolds can have the same effect — mosquitos hate the fragrance.
- Folks who don't mind having harmless bats around can set up a cheap bat house (\$12 at Home Depot). Some species consume 500 to 1,000 insects a night.

Adopt a Cat

Rescue a pet, gain a companion, and solve a pest problem in one fell swoop by adopting a mousing cat. The term "mouser" refers to a cat naturally adept at hunting and killing rodents. According to the industry site Pest Web, the best feline breeds for mousing include the American shorthair (ubiquitous in shelters), Maine coon, Siberian, Siamese, and Chartreux.

Adoption fees through the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals vary by age of the animal, but they tend to be fairly low. Of course, there's the cost of owning a cat to consider, but for those open to pet ownership already, the whole not-dealing-with-pests thing becomes a bonus perk. A cat's prowling and hunting instincts just might rid the house of pests altogether. Be sure follow certain precautions, though: Don't use a kitten for pest control, be sure to spay or neuter the cat, and stay up to date on vaccinations and annual checkups.

Prevent Infestation Indoors

Ideally, preventive measures keep homes safe from pest infestations, saving money and stress in the long term. Routine cleaning is essential. Clutter and stacks of papers or boxes become pest palaces, and a dirty kitchen and exposed food become buffets. Take out garbage and recycling regularly, pick up pet food

overnight, fix leaky faucets (and generally keep close tabs on plumbing functionality), and seal caulk cracks or crevices around baseboards.

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.

Get Earthy to Kill Pests

Diatomaceous earth, a natural product available on Amazon for about \$22, degrades insects' exoskeletons, so it can take out ants, fleas, cockroaches, silverfish, beetles, crickets, and pretty much any crawling insect without harming humans or pets (fun fact: you can add it to water — as long as it's food-grade diatomaceous earth — and drink it to improve cholesterol levels and aid digestion). For bedbugs, sprinkle this dust along the bed frame as well as cracks in the floor or use a puffing tool to spread it throughout the home.

Prevent Termites

- *Prevent Early:* For prevention, orange oil and neem oil have been shown to be somewhat effective, but won't work if termites have taken over. Measures taken when building and maintaining a home can go a long way toward preventing a future termite invasion: Be sure the crawl space has good ventilation, without shrubbery or anything else blocking vents, and don't let dirt pile up under porches and steps. Regularly inspecting for termite signs such as discarded wings and mud tubes can help catch a problem early.
- **Destroy Termites Populations:** Termites can destroy buildings and cost tens of thousands of dollars, and a whole lot of inconvenience, to eradicate. It's generally worth trying cheaper solutions before going to professionals. A bait station (\$53 at Lowe's) houses boric acid, which is attractive but fatal to termites. Get rid of wood mulch, tree stumps, rotten wood, and fallen trees in the yard, and ideally the termites will find elsewhere to thrive. Finally, termites can't tolerate extreme heat or cold. Liquid nitrogen, which could cost a few hundred dollars to buy or rent, still may be far cheaper than a professional extermination. Alternatively, nematodes have proved effective in destroying termite populations.

Fleas

The best fleas are the ones that never bother you. To prevent fleas, wash your pet's bedding at least once a week in hot water. Vacuum your carpet, curtains and furniture frequently. Groom your pet regularly and be on the lookout for irritated skin, excessive scratching and, of course, fleas. Consult your vet about preventative treatment and don't make the mistake of thinking fleas are only a summertime problem -- be vigilant all year round. To get rid of them is much more involved. Refer to <https://blog.cheapism.com/best-ways-to-get-rid-of-fleas>.

Keep Invaders From Entering

Outdoors, ensure any crawl spaces are ventilated and don't overwater the lawn — standing water attracts flies and other pests. After returning home from a hotel stay, consider leaving luggage in the sun (hot car, perhaps) for a few days, or throw everything in a dryer that exceeds 118 degrees for 90 minutes (hot and

long enough to kill any bedbug eggs). Know your area and understand which pests are most likely to terrorize your life, so you can have a natural repellent at the ready.

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

Airline Logic Spacing



News of the Weird JUN 01 thru 15, 2021

Sports – The World Toe Wrestling Federation has announced that the 2021 championship matches will go ahead in August in Derbyshire, England (what a relief!) and organizers are looking for people who want to dip their toes in the water of pro competition. Toe wrestling, The Northern Echo reported, takes place sitting down and barefoot, with the competitors' toes linked. But matches are no tiptoe through the tulips: Ben "Total Destruction" Woodroffe, who is ranked second in the world (and had his toenails surgically removed to give him a competitive edge), had his ankle snapped in two places by 16-time champion Alan "Nasty" Nash -- during a practice session. "It's a people's sport; there are no levels or qualifiers, and anyone can join," Woodroffe said encouragingly. [The Northern Echo, 4/24/2021]

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Right Under Your Nose – A woman known only as Sajitha from Kerala, India, disappeared in 2010, when she was just 18 years old, reported Newsweek. But about three months ago, the mystery of her disappearance began to come to light. Sajitha had left her home 11 years ago and walked just 1,600 feet to the home of her neighbor, Alinchuvattil Rahman, who at the time was 24 years old. Reportedly, the couple believed their romantic relationship was threatened by their differing religions, so Rahman settled her in a locked spare bedroom in his parents' home, where she spent the next decade watching a small TV using headphones. Rahman's brother, Basheer, said Rahman was intensely secretive about the room and kept it locked at all times; his bad temper discouraged his family from asking about what was going on. "During the day, as everyone was at work, Rahman and Sajitha would have the house to themselves," Basheer said. The room had no bathroom; Sajitha would crawl out a window at night to relieve herself. This spring, Sajitha left the home and Rahman followed shortly after; his family reported him missing, but Basheer soon

"spotted Rahman by chance" in another village, where he and his beloved have set up their new home. [Newsweek, 6/10/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Wait, What! – The Tail Company, based in the United Kingdom, is starting production of its newest offering, miTail -- a Bluetooth-enabled animatronic tail that wearers can control with a phone app, Nerdist reported on May 13. For example, a wearer might want to express emotions such as "frustrated and tense" or "calm and relaxed." Other moves include the Short Wag, the Happy Wag and the Erect Tremble. The company plans to start delivering the Kickstarter-supported products in August. [Nerdist, 5/13/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Weird Animals – In Victoria, British Columbia, photographer Tony Austin was out for a nature walk on May 31 when he ran across an inexplicable sight: A group of crows had landed close by, and one was sort of flopping around in the dirt. "It would sort of ... hop into the air and ... then hop back onto the gravel," Austin said. As Austin grew nearer, he saw that the bird was covered with ants. He was concerned for the bird's welfare, but when he posted a picture on a Facebook page for bird enthusiasts, he was relieved, NPR reported. The crow was "anting" -- spreading ants on its feathers and wings. Experts aren't clear about why birds do this; it may be related to cleanliness or to share the ants' defensive secretions of fungicides, miticides and insecticides. [NPR, 6/7/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Inappropriate Behavior – Jerry Detrick, 70, was cited by Greenville, Ohio, police on May 30 for "littering," The Smoking Gun reported. What he actually was doing was defecating and urinating on his neighbor's lawn when the homeowner discovered him around 3:15 a.m. Matthew Guyette called 911 after spotting Detrick relieving himself next to a hedge. Detrick, a self-described "Trump man" who lives a couple of blocks away, told police that he targeted Guyette's home because he and his partner "are Democrats and support Joe Biden." Reportedly, Detrick had been leaving his mark on the lawn for about 10 years, along with restaurant napkins he used to wipe. He is scheduled to appear in court on June 8. [The Smoking Gun, 6/3/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Low-Tech Solution – During the COVID-19 pandemic, grounded planes were often parked in deserts -- ideal conditions for storing them. But aircraft maintenance crews also discovered unwanted guests: snakes. So Australian airline Qantas added one more item to its engineering kit: a "wheel whacker," also known as a broom handle. Before crews begin their landing gear inspections, they circle the plane, stomping their feet and whacking the wheels to scare off sleepy snakes, said engineering manager Tim Heywood. The "feisty rattlers love to curl up around the warm rubber tires and in the aircraft wheels and brakes," he said, according to CNN. "We've encountered a few rattlesnakes and also some scorpions, but the wheel whacker does its job and they scuttle off." [CNN, 6/3/2021]

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Don't Go There – A papier-mache statue of a stegosaurus, placed outside the Cubic Building in a suburb of Barcelona, Spain, had an odorous secret, The Washington Post reported. On May 22, a father and son who were admiring the statue noticed a foul stench coming from it and peered into a crack in the dinosaur's leg. There they saw the body of a man. The 39-year-old was reported missing just hours before he was

discovered; the local police said they don't suspect foul play. Instead, they believe the man dropped his phone in the statue's leg and tried to retrieve it, becoming stuck headfirst. He may have been in the statue for a couple of days, authorities said. [Washington Post, 5/25/2021]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/news-of-the-weird> | June 15, 2021 ++]

Vocabulary

Some Words to Enhance Yours | 210615

- **Antipathy** [an-tip-uh-thee] a deep-seated feeling of dislike.
- **Austere** [aw-steer] (of living conditions or a way of life) having no comforts or luxuries; harsh or ascetic.
- **Breviloquent** [bre-vil-uh-kwuhnt] speaking or expressed in a concise or terse style; using brevity of speech.
- **Chiaroscuro** [kee-ahr-uh-skyoor-oh] the treatment of light and shade in drawing and painting.
- **Demagogue** [dem-uh-gog] a political leader who seeks support by appealing to the desires and prejudices of ordinary people rather than by using rational argument
- **Gorp** [gawrp] a mixture of nuts, raisins, dried fruits, seeds, or the like eaten as a high-energy snack, as by hikers and climbers.
- **Haughty** [haw-tee] arrogantly superior and disdainful.
- **Ignominious** [ig-nuh-min-ee-uhs] marked by or attended with ignominy; discreditable, humiliating.
- **Inimitable** [ih-nim-i-tuh-buhl] incapable of being imitated or copied; surpassing imitation; matchless.
- **Logorrhea** [law-guh-ree-uh] pathologically incoherent, repetitious speech; incessant or compulsive talkativeness.
- **Recapitulate** [ree-kuh-pich-uh-leyt] summarize and state again the main points of,
- **Synecdoche** [si-nek-duh-kee] a figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole or the whole for a part, the special for the general or the general for the special, as in Texas won by six runs (meaning "Texas's baseball team").

Have You Heard or Seen?

Getting Older Insights | Military Humor 21 | Think Toons

Getting Older Insights

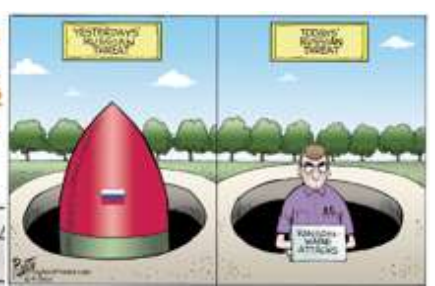
1. Sometimes I'll look down at my watch 3 consecutive times and still not know what time it is.
2. Nothing sucks more than that moment during an argument when you realize you're wrong.
3. I totally take back all those times I didn't want to nap when I was younger.
4. There is great need for a sarcasm font.
5. How on earth are you supposed to fold a fitted sheet?
6. Was learning cursive really necessary?
7. Map Quest really needs to start their directions on # 5. I'm pretty sure I know how to get out of my neighborhood.
8. Obituaries would be a lot more interesting if they told you how the person died.
9. I can't remember the last time I wasn't at least kind-of tired.
10. Bad decisions make good stories.
11. You never know when it will strike, but there comes a moment at work when you know that you just aren't going to do anything productive for the rest of the day.
12. Can we all just agree to ignore whatever comes after Blue Ray? I don't want to have to restart my collection ... again.
13. I'm always slightly terrified when I exit out of Word and it asks me if I want to save any changes to my ten-page technical report that I swear I did not make any changes to.
14. I keep some people's phone numbers in my phone just so I know not to answer when they call.
15. I think the freezer deserves a light as well.
16. I disagree with Kay Jewelers. I would bet on any given Friday or Saturday night more kisses begin with Miller Light than Kay.
17. I wish Google Maps had an "Avoid Ghetto" routing option.
18. I have a hard time deciphering the fine line between boredom and hunger.
19. How many times is it appropriate to say "What?" before you just nod and smile because you still didn't hear or understand a word they said?
20. I love the sense of camaraderie when an entire line of cars team up to prevent a jerk from cutting in at the front. Stay strong, brothers and sisters!
21. Shirts get dirty. Underwear gets dirty. Pants? Pants never get dirty, and you can wear them forever.
22. Even under ideal conditions people have trouble locating their car keys in a pocket, finding their cell phone, and Pinning the Tail on the Donkey - but I'd bet everyone can find and push the snooze button from 3 feet away, in about 1.7 seconds, eyes closed, first time, every time.
23. The first testicular guard, the "Cup," was used in Hockey in 1874 and the first helmet was used in 1974. That means it only took 100 years for men to realize that their brain is also important.

Military Humor 21

1. What grades do you need to join the Navy? Seven Cs
2. What do you call an American Naval ship hijacked by pirates? USS-Arrrr!
3. I've never understood the Navy's color being Navy blue.
I thought they were the aqua-marines.
4. A kid fresh from high school wants to join the Navy.
"Can you swim?" asks the recruiter.
"Why? Don't y'all have boats?"
5. Air Force Pilot to a Seaman:
"You're telling me that you're in the Navy but can't swim?"
Seaman: "You're in the Air Force. Can you fly?"
6. What's the difference between a Navy Aircrewman and an otter?
The otter knows he's not a seal.
7. What do you call a snail aboard a ship? A snailor.
8. My Niece asked me if they have to swim to get in the Navy.
I couldn't figure it out, but I guessed she thought about it after my nephew declared that he was going into the Marines and stole her crayons.
9. I'm about to lose my job in the Navy unless I make some drastic changes.
I have to take a course in anchor management.
10. Why does the Norwegian Navy put bar codes on their ships?
So when they return to port, they can Scandinavian.

Think Toons





Thought of the Week

“Battles are won by slaughter and maneuver. The greater the general, the more he contributes in maneuver, the less he demands in slaughter.”

— *Winston S. Churchill*

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