

RAO

BULLETIN

1 September 2016



PDF Edition

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1. The page number on which an article can be found is provided to the left of each article's title
2. Numbers contained within brackets [] indicate the number of articles written on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to raoemo@sbcglobal.net.

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- Attachment - Florida Vet State Benefits & Discounts AUG 2016
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Toxic Exposure | Colorado Springs Area ► Drinking Water

An Air Force report issued 17 AUG confirmed earlier accounts that drinking water contamination in Security and Widefield may be tied to firefighting chemicals used at Peterson Air Force Base. The Gazette first reported the link in July and the new 47-page document shows that Peterson firefighters have used the chemicals, called perfluorinated compounds, in fire training areas since the 1970s. The EPA this year tightened its drinking water guidelines, leaving wells supplying water to Security, Widefield and Fountain unsafe to drink. The safety of food grown in soil watered with contaminated water remains unclear. Six sites at Peterson Air Force Base were singled out for follow-up tests, the report submitted by the Army Corps of Engineers found.

The firefighting foam was used most heavily from about 1970 through the early 1990s at two fire training areas, which have since been decommissioned, the report said. A former assistant fire chief, however, told investigators that he remembered it twice being used in a lined basin during the last decade. Also at risk of exposure is the installation's golf course, which sits on a former leach field and is watered from an untreated pond that collects all runoff from the central and western areas of the base, the report said. Investigators were not certain how much firefighting foam made its way into the pond since it was built in 1979. The chemicals also have been used during

equipment tests in two areas, including a dirt-and-grass volleyball court near one fire station and along a concrete road near another, the report said.

The Air Force responded in July with a \$4.3 million program to filter the well water to remove the chemicals, which may cause a host of health ailments. Concerns over the toxicity of the chemicals led manufacturers to phase them out starting in 2002. The EPA says the chemicals are "toxic to laboratory animals and wildlife, producing reproductive, developmental, and systemic effects in laboratory tests." In the new report, investigators say none of the sites on Peterson contaminated with the firefighting chemicals "identified as presenting an imminent risk to public health or the environment." The base has at least 600 gallons of the chemicals in storage. The military has said it's working to find a replacement for the firefighting chemicals. Studies of the contamination, including the drilling of test wells, are expected to continue through the fall. Another report is due in March. This year, the military said 664 sites in the U.S. and elsewhere may have used the toxic firefighting chemicals. They were mixed with water to create a foam used to extinguish fuel fires. [Source: The Gazette | Tom Roeder | August 18, 2016 ++]



DoD Recruitment Concerns ► **Influencing Factors**

Defense Secretary Ash Carter has said many times that the majority of enlisted military recruits come from just six states and that he would like to see a more diverse recruitment pool. Some of his Force of the Future proposals are aimed at this issue. Defense Secretary Ash Carter has launched a national discussion on building the Force of the Future and what the Defense Department must do to change and adapt to maintain its superiority well into the 21st century. Attracting recruits aged 17 to 24 from across the country is an important goal for the secretary, and it's a challenge in light of the composition of today's military.

Southeast -- The military attracts most of its recruits from the southeastern part of the country. Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida and Mississippi are fertile recruiting grounds for the services. Georgia has the highest recruit-to-population ratio in the nation. Those six states, plus Idaho, Arizona, Maine, Hawaii and Alaska are overrepresented in the military when adjusting for differences in population. Vermont, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Minnesota, North Dakota and Utah are underrepresented in the military. The states in the rest of the nation are within the parameters of their recruit-to-population ratio, officials said.

"It's certainly important to reflect the nation we serve, to have a force that's representative of all the states and all the various different populations across the country," said Stephanie Miller, DoD's director of accession policy. "We also need to ensure that from a recruiting perspective we are tapping into all the various populations throughout

the United States. We would quickly run out of eligible recruits if we were concentrating on one area of the country. It is also important for Americans to have a connection with its military, she said

Propensity to Serve -- A phrase heard often in the accession world is “propensity to serve.” Many of the Force of the Future initiatives seek to encourage the propensity to serve. “The millennial generation is hard-wired for service,” said Chris Arendt, the deputy director of accessions policy. “They were encouraged all through school and with organizations in their communities to volunteer. But it hasn’t carried over to military service in many parts of the country.” Youth want to contribute, Miller said, adding that surveys show that fully 70 percent of youth have “making a contribution to society” as a life goal. “There is this interest in serving the community and in serving in some way to better the world around you,” she said. “There are lots of ways to do that. The military is one of those, but there is also the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps [or] Teach for America. There are so many different ways to do that, so our challenge is being able to find those qualified youth and then help interest them in military service as a way to serve your community.”

Force Size -- The military is also smaller than it once was, and this causes its own set of issues. In 1945, 12 million Americans were under arms. In 1973 -- the year the all-volunteer force began -- 2.2 million personnel were on active duty. Today, that number is around 1.3 million. Fewer people joining the military means fewer veterans entering the civilian population. “Fewer veterans means fewer people who are likely to recommend military service based on their personal experience,” Miller said. “We are unfortunately losing The Greatest Generation -- the World War II generation -- and as we lose them, veterans who would talk of the value of military service are no longer there,” she added.

With fewer such veteran-influencers to recommend military service to prospective enlistees, there’s more work for military recruiters -- who may be the only representatives of the armed services in the communities. In 1995, 40 percent of youth had a parent who had served in the military. In 2015, only 16 percent of the youth had a parent who’d served. Miller said that studies show that many young people just don’t know what military service brings in terms of leadership opportunities, education opportunities and learning a skill or profession. “I like to say ... that the youth population is not necessarily saying ‘no’ to the military, it’s that they don’t ‘know’ about the military,” she said. “They just haven’t had the exposure to it, so it doesn’t necessarily enter into their thinking when they start considering their options for a future career path.”

Military Footprint -- The military’s “footprint” in the United States also is shrinking, again giving youth fewer chances to interact with someone from the military. The six states in the Southeast have numerous military bases, and those service members are parts of the communities around the bases. “Part of that may not even have been exposure to service members, but someone who just worked on base,” Miller said. “[When a base is present in a community], there is this general understanding of what the military is and what you can do in the military in uniform or as a civilian.” In the area around Fort Drum, New York, for example, the propensity for military service is higher than it is in the rest of the state, Miller and Arendt said.

Reaching out to the youth cohort is a challenge. “All of us recognize that with the advent of multimedia, social media, the internet, that we all consume information in a very different way,” Miller said. “It used to be ... your television and radio were your primary sources of entertainment and information. Even just advertising for ... the armed services, you had a much greater likelihood of your recruiting or influencing population seeing your advertising content.” But now people are able to tailor their information feeds. They are able to see television programs without commercials, for example. “You avoid a lot that marketing content, and we have to be more creative in how we try to place some of that advertising content just to get the message out,” Miller said. “How do we catch the attention of that prime market?”

Using the Internet to Recruit -- There has been a significant effort over the past year to look at these challenges and to look at the innovative solutions that private companies or nongovernmental agencies use to reach their intended audiences, Miller said. It is a challenge, she added, and the services have to learn “to pound the digital

pavement” to increase awareness and attract qualified recruits. The Force of the Future initiative has some concrete proposals. Expanding the recruiting data bases is one. “Gathering additional information will help us find those qualified individuals,” Miller said.

Officials are also looking at developing better algorithms in terms of that social media content. “How do we figure out what social media sites young people are going to today and how do we figure out the best use of our online presence,” she said. DoD also is working on modernizing the military entrance processing experience. “Many people will say the experience walking into a [Military Entrance Processing Station] is very similar to what their grandparents experienced,” Miller said. “We’re trying to modernize that process through digitizing all our forms, and creating a better medical process.”

Changes in Testing -- Officials also are looking at changes to the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery of tests. “The ASVAB has been around for many years and is one of the best predictors of success in a military career,” Miller said. “But some of the more recent best practices include a personality test and an interest inventory test. We’re examining how to develop those batteries and add them to the ASVAB. This will give us a better ‘fit-fill’ for recruits.” Additional changes are also under discussion, Miller said.

[Source: Dod News Release | Jim Garamone | August 24, 2016 ++]

Commissary Prices Update 06 ► New Savings Calculation Approach

Commissary officials are digging for more details on how much customers are saving on their groceries, compared to local stores. “We hear from our military families that they sometimes find lower prices on selected items outside the gate,” said Joseph H. JEU, director and CEO of the Defense Commissary Agency, in a Defense Department statement. “For the first time through this new approach, we will compare our prices with local grocers on a more frequent basis to better inform our customers of potential cost savings over stores in their nearby community.”

Officials are moving away from using a global method of comparing savings across the board, in a price comparison conducted yearly. The comparisons will focus on stores outside the gate of each commissary and will be conducted more frequently. That likely will be quarterly, according to a statement of work issued by the commissary agency earlier this year, seeking a company to conduct the labor-intensive manual price comparisons between commissaries and local stores.

Information was not immediately available from defense officials about whether individual commissaries will inform their customers about the price differences, and although officials have been exploring a new savings calculation method for months, little detail was available about the new process. “We’ve been saying all along they need to have a better understanding of the savings level before they implement changes [in the commissary pricing structure],” said Eileen Huck, deputy director of government relations for the National Military Family Association. “If this new methodology does that, it’s good, but right now there’s not enough information about it.”

The new process for calculating savings will not in itself impact the prices, JEU said. “Our approach to calculating savings will not impact the prices our customers pay or the dollar benefit that they receive,” he stated. “There will be no change to their out-of-pocket expense.” However, this new approach is a first step in implementing sweeping changes that will affect commissary prices. That includes a system called “variable pricing,” in which officials will mark up or mark down grocery items in order to offset part of the commissary system’s operating costs. Currently, the commissary agency receives \$1.4 billion per year for operating costs — enabling stores to sell groceries at cost from the manufacturer or distributor, plus a 5 percent surcharge at the cash register. That surcharge is used mostly to pay for renovations and construction of commissaries.

The timeline for starting a pilot program to test the idea of variable pricing is not clear, but officials have said the earliest would be November. Details about the new savings calculation were scant at press time. Information was not immediately available from defense officials about whether the new methodology has been started, or how customers at individual stores will be informed about the savings. It's not known whether customers will be informed about savings in individual stores or on individual items, compared to stores outside the gate. In the commissary agency's FAQs about its "transformation," officials state that "today, savings can be very inconsistent across the store, with some categories at very high savings to market, and others cheaper outside the gate. Variable pricing will help us fix some of these inconsistencies."

Generally, meats, produce and other items around the perimeter of the commissary are priced lower than at other grocery stores, so there is some concern that customers might be paying more for fresh items. It's also not clear whether DeCA will use the regional pricing information to raise or lower prices of particular prices in some regions. Currently, commissary customers pay the same for grocery items regardless of where the store is located. The average savings across the country based on the commissary agency's current savings calculation methods is about 30 percent. [Source: Military.com | Karen Jowers | August 19, 2016 ++]

TRICARE Prime Update 37 ► Military Hospital/Clinic Use

According to a report in Military.com, "Shifting military family members back into military hospitals and clinics for health care is a top priority ..." for the Defense Health Agency. For many years, military family members enrolled in TRICARE Prime have been referred to civilian health care providers if they cannot receive primary health care in a military treatment facility. That began to change in 2014 when the Army and Air Force began to move nearly 30,000 TRICARE Prime beneficiaries who had been receiving care from civilian providers near their bases/posts back into the military health care system. The Air Force will now be joining in that effort. Under the Army/Navy effort, TRICARE Prime beneficiaries were either involuntarily brought back into the military system, or were "invited" back in through an advertising campaign effort. Recognizing the fact that location close to a health care provider often made the civilian provider more attractive, DoD health care has set up six areas nationally where beneficiaries can see the military health care provider closest to them, regardless of whether the provider is from their service or not. The Defense Health Agency says it is working on the issues that are of concern to families and their ultimate goal is to have families want to receive their care from a military provider. [Source: TREA | Washington Update | August 22, 2016 ++]

Pentagon Wish List Update 01 ► Security Enhancement

The Senate has not approved funding the Pentagon says it needs to make the main entrance for its 26,000 employees less vulnerable to a terrorist attack. The House has approved the \$12 million request in its version of the fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, so the issue will have to be resolved in negotiations. But Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has not been convinced by the Pentagon's case, according to Politico. Citing Pentagon budget documents, the publication reports the entrance above the subway stop needs "proven state-of-the-art screening, surveillance and detection technologies." This would include an intrusion detection system, new turnstiles and the capability to detect hazardous materials. An aide to the Senate committee said the Pentagon did not make a "compelling case for this new project, especially how the department would mitigate serious logistical and security issues associated with construction." [Source: NGAUS Washington Report | August 23, 2016 ++]

Drones | Bomb Carrying ► Pentagon Concerns

They're cheap, they're light, and they can carry a small bomb: The commercial drone is essentially a new terror gadget for organizations such as Hezbollah, Islamic State, or anyone else looking to wreak havoc on a budget. "That's the same quad copter you can get on Groupon or go down to Sam's Club and buy for \$400," U.S. Marine Corps Commandant General Robert Neller said last week at a Washington forum on future warfare. The elusive nature of small drones is one reason the federal government has designated the District of Columbia a "national defense airspace" and prohibited drone flights there. A recent spate of drone-related incidents, including one last year in which a drone crashed on the White House lawn, probably didn't help, either.

But the problem is no longer about enthusiasts with a bad sense of direction. Weaponized to various degrees of sophistication, such unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are now being used in the Syrian civil war and along parts of Lebanese and Syrian borders with Israel, where Hezbollah holds sway. "There has been an increasing concern in the military and a wider acceptance of how pernicious this problem is going to be, moving forward," says Andrew Metrick, an intelligence security analyst at the Center for Strategic & International Studies. "From a U.S. and allies perspective, we haven't had to think about how to fight where we don't have total aerial supremacy."

The U.S. military has begun studying small drones and how best to respond. Earlier this month, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) issued a request for ideas on how to protect troops from the new threat; it is planning a workshop next month. "We're looking for scalable, modular, and affordable approaches that could be fielded within the next three to four years and could rapidly evolve with threat and tactical advancements," a DARPA program manager, Jean-Charles Ledé, said in a statement. Closer to the battlefield, the Marine Corps has begun integrating small drones into training exercises at the Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, Calif., Neller said.

A Marine or soldier who spots a drone overhead would typically shoot it down, but smaller drones can operate surreptitiously and elude radar since they are barely larger than a bird. Their small motors make acoustic detection enormously hard, and while wide-area camera sensors deployed on the ground might detect a drone, they usually require large computational resources in the field. One solution is an electronic signal jammer to prevent a drone's operator from flying within a certain vicinity, an approach that U.S. forces have studied. Unlike an improvised explosive device (IED), an enemy using a small drone "can't blow up a tank, but you can more easily attack individual war fighters, you can collect intelligence, and you can tie down a lot of resources by forcing U.S. personnel to respond to the danger," said Loren Thompson, a defense analyst with the Lexington Institute. "If you think there's a drone nearby that might be watching you or might be a threat, then you have to be more careful—and that means you're distracted from your primary mission."

It's worth noting that the U.S. also deploys small drones, typically for reconnaissance and surveillance. One of these, called Switchblade (PDF), is a model from California-based Aerovironment Inc. that's been used by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. The 5.5 pound drone can carry a lethal charge and has been flown in Syria, Metrick said. When it comes to large drones, the U.S. has shown itself—somewhat controversially—to have no current peer. Remotely piloted Reaper and Predator drones have been used in thousands of attacks, including "targeted killings" for more than a decade. And the U.S. has major ocean-going drones: The autonomous Echo Voyager from Boeing Co., for example, can patrol underwater for months.

Those drones are all highly advanced platforms, with technology and price tags that put them far out of reach of almost all but the most advanced militaries. For the guerrilla masses, the numerous cheaper, lightweight models are far more accessible. Their easiest use would be simply to monitor U.S. activities. But it's their potential for modified, deadlier use that worries U.S. military tacticians. "When was the last time an American military force

worried about being bombed by enemy air? World War II?” Neller said. “So what capabilities do we have to defend ourselves from enemy air or enemy unmanned air?”

Such drones also represent only one facet of a future battlefield on which the U.S. military will no longer enjoy complete dominance, the general said. Technology has given potential adversaries new advantages, especially as the U.S. has “developed a system of war fighting that is very dependent upon the internet, the network, and space.” All three are vulnerable because they establish an electronic signature as they operate. Mobile phones, for example, put soldiers in harm's way in the new digital conflict zone, because a drone might home in on them and explode. “We just got to change,” Neller said, describing a future battlefield in which fighters must become virtually invisible, a return to a time when electronic detection was impossible because there were no satellite radios, Google Earth maps, or GPS-enabled mobile phones.

In many ways, the new era Neller envisions would replicate the operating environment a soldier in 1916 might have known: “You’re living out of your pack, you’re going to stop at night, you’re going to dig a hole, you’re going to camouflage, and you’re going to turn off all your stuff. And you’re going to sit there and try to sleep. And you’re going to be careful to not make any noise and you’re going to try to have absolutely no signature. Because if you can be seen, you will be attacked. That’s the difference. And that’s what we got to get.” [Source: The Washington Post | Justin Bachman | August 24, 2016 ++]

DoD Bible Display Policy ► IG Requested to Investigate

A religious freedom organization is calling upon the Defense Department Inspector General's Office to investigate an officer who left a Bible open in display upon his desk, and his superiors. Mikey Weinstein, president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation and a retired Air Force lawyer, told Air Force Times that the display is a violation of service regulations that prevent officers from using their rank and position to advocate for a certain religious viewpoint. “This was a blatantly clear example of proselytizing,” Weinstein said. “Anybody that wants to come to talk to you ... you’re making it real clear: Here’s where I stand on everything.”

According to a letter Weinstein sent to the IG, Maj. Steve Lewis with the Reserve National Security Space Institute at Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado, left a Bible open on display upon his desk, with certain passages underlined and highlighted. “We don’t care if someone pulls out a Bible and wants to read it on their own time, even at their desk, but his wasn’t that. This was a static display,” Weinstein said. “What if it had been open to the page that calls it a sin if you’re gay? What if it was the page of the Bible that supports slavery, or talks about ethnic cleansing? ... You can imagine the blood in the streets if that was a copy of the Koran or a Satanist book or Richard Dawkins’ ‘The God Delusion.’ ”

However, Dr. Ron Crews, a retired colonel and military chaplain, told Air Force Times that Lewis did not violate any service regulations. “Major Lewis did nothing wrong,” said Crews, executive director of the Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty. “He was simply living out his faith in a quiet and personal way. No one was required to notice his Bible, much less read it.” Crews pointed to congressional testimony from Air Force leadership that there shouldn’t be a ban for airmen having Bibles on their desks. But Weinstein wants the IG to take action, not just against Lewis but his superiors, Col. Lisa Johnson, the commander of Lewis’ unit, and Col. Damon Feltman, commander of the 310th Space Wing. Feltman tasked Johnson with investigating the Bible display, something Weinstein compared to New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady being asked to investigate the “Deflate Gate” scandal he was himself implicated in. “We’re looking for discipline because discipline changes behavior,” Weinstein said. “If this is not an example of an absolute, quintessential poster-child violation of Air Force religious freedom regulations, then there are none.”

Crews said he believes that Feltman and Johnson reached the correct conclusion when they ruled that Lewis was not breaking any rules. “There are many things that offend me, but that does not mean I have to be protected from them,” Crews said. “Surely, these airmen and airwomen are mature enough to allow someone to live out their faith. If a Bible on a desk offends, then do not look at it.” [Source: Air Force Times | Phillip Swarts | August 27, 2016 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, and Abuse ► **Reported 16 thru 31 AUG 2016**

Federal Prison Industries — A government investigation found "endemic manufacturing problems" at a company that led to the sale of millions of dollars' worth of defective combat helmets. The Justice Department's inspector general on 17 AUG released a scathing report on practices at Federal Prison Industries (FPI), a government-operated group that employed inmates to manufacture nearly 150,000 military helmets. The helmets produced contained serious “deformities,” according to the report, including “ballistic failures,” “blisters” and “expired paint.” They were also manufactured with "unauthorized methods.” “A surprise inspection by the [inspector general’s office] and military personnel uncovered inmates ... openly using improvised tools on the helmets, which damaged the helmets’ ballistic material, and created the potential for the tools’ use as weapons in the prison,” the report found.



The inspector general also discovered "testing and quality control” problems, as FPI “pre-selected helmets for inspection,” violating the terms of a Defense Department contract that called for random testing. The report also alleges the company instructed inmates to forge documents to make it appear helmets had passed inspection. But the inspector general's office said it found no information of any soldiers who had been killed or injured as a result of the defective helmets. Initial reports indicated the military recalled the helmets in 2010 and production stopped at that time, according to a report from CNN. Subsequent reports corrected that figure to 129,000.

FPI had two contracts to manufacture military helmets. The Pentagon had paid ArmorSource, an Ohio-based private military contractor, more than \$30 million to build more than 126,000 helmets. ArmorSource later subcontracted with Federal Prison Industries (FPI). FPI was also hired directly by the Defense Department to build another 23,000 helmets, but it was never paid for these helmets after they were “quarantined.” The FPI manufacturing facility where these helmets were built was shut down and ArmorSource agreed to pay a \$3 million settlement for what the inspector general called a lack of oversight. Criminal charges are not being pursued, according to the investigative summary. The losses to the federal government reached \$19 million, according to the report. ArmorSource remains a significant helmet supplier for the Pentagon with millions in contracts, according to <https://www.usaspending.gov/Pages/Default.aspx>, a government contract database. [Source: The Hill | By Tim Devaney | August 17, 2016 ++]

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Tacoma WA — Federal prosecutors now say a former soldier who lied his way to a Purple Heart by faking injuries from the Iraq war cheated Washington state and the federal government out of more than \$750,000 — about three times what investigators cited when they first charged him with fraud in 2014. **Darryl Wright**, a former Idaho National Guardsman, appeared for sentencing in U.S. District Court in Tacoma on 25 AUG, though Judge Benjamin Settle said it was unlikely the hearing would be finished in one day. He said he wanted to hear additional witnesses

testify about Wright's mental state. Prosecutors are seeking a five-year prison term, arguing that Wright falsified statements from fellow soldiers to obtain two awards — a Combat Action Badge and the Purple Heart, reserved for those wounded in action — and then parlayed those medals into a wide range of disability and other benefits, including forgiveness of more than \$40,000 in student loans.



In applications for benefits, Wright claimed to be so severely disabled that he could only focus on anything for five to 10 seconds, and he said he needed a live-in caregiver. In reality, he served as the chairman of the planning commission in Snoqualmie, the city east of Seattle where he lived; coached high school basketball; and had held a full-time federal government job in Seattle. "Darryl Lee Wright built an entire myth system on these two awards, relying on them to obtain every possible benefit that might be available to a wounded veteran," assistant U.S. attorneys David Reese Jennings and Gregory Gruber wrote in a sentencing memo. "Every time he won or qualified for a benefit, Darryl Lee Wright used the new benefit to bolster his claims for yet another undeserved benefit."

In addition, they argued that he obstructed justice when he accused a co-worker in the U.S. Commerce Department of violating his privacy after she discovered and reported that he submitted fabricated National Guard orders in an effort to be paid for a week of skipped work. The Commerce Department repeatedly tried to punish the whistleblower, Cristina Jackson, who wound up having to hire an employment lawyer to fight off the discipline. The department still has not publicly acknowledged her role in helping uncover Wright's fraud, though Jennings told The Associated Press her actions were "critical to uncovering the truth."

Wright pleaded guilty to two counts of fraud early this year. Wright's attorney, Christopher Black, filed his sentencing recommendation under seal, saying it contained sensitive personal information. But other defense filings suggest that Wright continues to suffer PTSD from his deployment — even if he did exaggerate the circumstances of a rocket attack in which he claimed to have been injured. Black said he is seeking a sentence of one year, and that Wright was entitled to most of the benefits he received. The Veterans Affairs Department has rescinded its earlier determination that Wright should receive benefits for PTSD.

The rocket attack cited by Wright occurred in Kirkuk, Iraq, on Aug. 30, 2005. Then a first lieutenant with the Idaho National Guard, he was near a battalion headquarters building when two rockets landed about 100 yards away. Initial reports filed by him and by others in his unit referenced no casualties. "As far as anyone on our team getting hurt, no, that didn't happen," then-Capt. Mark Moeckli told the AP earlier this year. But in 2010, Wright successfully applied for a Purple Heart. In his paperwork, he claimed he "was violently thrown and knocked unconscious from the percussion of the rockets' impact." Wright also claimed Social Security disability benefits, insisting he was frequently bedridden. The VA paid his sister to be his live-in caregiver, though investigators said she performed no such service. By May 2013, the siblings were bringing in benefits totaling \$10,000 per month, prosecutors said. They said even Wright's mother was in on the fraud, submitting supporting paperwork as a nurse without disclosing her relationship to the veteran.

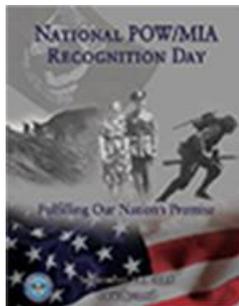
"Darryl Wright has engaged in a long-lasting, persistent, epic offense," the prosecutors wrote. "He sullied the reputations of people, institutions, and agencies. Worst of all, he hurt the heroes who fully deserve recognition,

respect, and honor." Much of Thursday's hearing focused on how much restitution Wright should be ordered to pay, but the judge indicated another issue needed exploration: that a mental health expert hired by the defense had suggested that Wright suffers from a condition in which he concocts his own reality and believes it is acceptable to lie or falsify documents to match that reality. Jennings said he was concerned because that sounded much like an insanity defense, where the defendant is incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong. The judge agreed, saying it could call into question the validity of Wright's guilty plea. Wright's Purple Heart has not been rescinded, prosecutors said. [Source: The Associated Press | Gene Johnson | August 25, 2016 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 16 thru 31 Aug 2016 | Eight

"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 are: World War II (73,515) Korean War (7,841), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,627), 1991 Gulf War (5), and Libya (1). 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 personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/> and click on 'Our Missing'. 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 remains of the following MIA/POW's have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:

Vietnam

None

Korea

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial updates of 2 U.S. serviceman who had been previously listed as missing in action from Vietnam. Returning home for burial with full military honors is:

-- Army Pvt. **Virgil B. Adkins**, of Summers, W.Va., who is scheduled to be buried with full military honors on Sept. 3 in Hinton, W.Va. On July 17, 1953, Adkins was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, on a combat patrol to reconnoiter enemy activity in an area north of the former Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), North Korea, when it came under attack, forcing a withdrawal back to friendly lines. As a result of the fighting, Adkins was reported missing in action. Between 1990 and 1994, North Korea returned to the United States 208 boxes of commingled human remains, which helped account for the remains of at least 600 U.S. servicemen who fought during the war. Lab analysis, in conjunction with the totality of circumstantial evidence available, established Adkins' remains were included.

-- Army Sgt. **James L. Campbell**, 18, is being buried today in his hometown of Waterford, Conn. On the night of Nov. 27, 1950, Campbell, who was assigned to the 31st Regimental Combat Team, was attacked and forced into a fighting withdrawal from their positions on the east side of the Chosin River in North Korea. He would be reported missing after the battle. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/919610/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-campbell> .

World War II

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial updates of 6 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- Navy Fireman 1st Class **Jim H. Johnston** and Seaman 1st Class **Murry R. Cargile**, killed in the attack on the USS Oklahoma on Dec. 7, 1941, have now been accounted for. The USS Oklahoma (BB-37) arrived in Pearl Harbor on Dec. 6, 1940, and spent the next several months participating in exercises and conducting patrols. On the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, a fleet of Japanese carriers launched formations of dive bombers, torpedo planes and fighters against the vessels moored in the shallows of Pearl Harbor. The USS Oklahoma suffered 429 casualties as it quickly capsized due to damages sustained from multiple torpedoes. The majority of the casualties (Sailors and Marines) were never identified. During efforts to salvage the vessel, Navy personnel collected a large number of remains representing as many as 400 individuals. Most of these were later buried as unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. In 2015, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency personnel exhumed these remains and as a result in advances in forensic and analytical capabilities, were able to identify Johnston. Interment services are pending.

-- Marine Pfc. **James F. Mansfield**, 19, will be buried Aug. 27 in his hometown of Plymouth, Mass. In November 1943, Mansfield was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, but the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Mansfield died on the first day of battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/919624/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-mansfield> .

-- Navy Lt. **Julian B. Jordan**, 37, of Dawson, Ga., will be buried Aug. 29 in Bremerton, Wash. On Dec. 7, 1941, Jordan was assigned aboard the USS Oklahoma, which capsized after sustaining multiple torpedo hits as the battleship was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The attack resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. With the exception of the USS Arizona, no single ship at Pearl Harbor suffered more fatalities. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/921305/uss-oklahoma-sailor-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-jordan> .

-- Marine Pfc. **Anthony Brozyna**, 22, of Hartford, Conn. will be buried Aug. 31 in Arlington National Cemetery. In November 1943, Brozyna was assigned to Company G, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands.

Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, but the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Brozyna died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/924174/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-brozyna> .

-- Army Capt. **Elwood J. Euart**, 28, will be buried Aug. 31 in his hometown of Pawtucket, R.I. On Oct. 26, 1942, Euart was assigned to Headquarters, 103rd Field Artillery Battalion, 43rd Infantry Division, aboard an Army transport ship that struck two mines near Espiritu Santo Island, New Hebrides, in the Republic of Vanuatu. The ship was beached on a nearby coral reef and evacuated. Hearing that men were trapped inside, Euart entered the sinking ship to help the men escape. The ship rolled and slid off the reef an hour later. Euart was one of only two crewmen lost out of approximately 5,000 troops aboard. The captain would be posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in 1943. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/924176/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-euart> .



[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | August 31, 2016 ++]

* VA *



VA Blue Water Claims Update 35 ► Limited Benefits Will Continue

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has once again turned down an effort by Navy veterans to get compensation for possible exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. In a document released 12 AUG, the VA said it would continue to limit benefits related to Agent Orange exposure to only those veterans who set foot in Vietnam, where the herbicide was sprayed, and to those who were on boats in inland rivers. The VA compensates these veterans for a litany of associated illnesses, including diabetes, various cancers, Parkinson's Disease, peripheral neuropathy and a type of heart disease.

Advocates for some 90,000 so-called Blue Water Navy veterans who served off the coast of Vietnam have been asking the VA for more than a decade to broaden the policy to include them. They say that they were exposed to Agent Orange because their ships sucked in potentially contaminated water and distilled it for showering, drinking, laundry and cooking. Experts have said the distillation process could have actually concentrated the Agent Orange,

which contained the toxic chemical dioxin and was used to kill vegetation and deny enemy cover. ProPublica and the *Virginian-Pilot* profiled their effort to gain coverage in SEP 2015 as part of an ongoing project to chronicle the impact of Agent Orange on vets and their families.



Agent Orange being sprayed in Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims last April struck down VA rules that denied compensation for sailors whose ships docked at certain harbors in South Vietnam, including Da Nang. Those ports, the court determined, may have been in the Agent Orange spraying area. The court ordered the VA to review its policy. But on Friday, the VA largely stood by its old policy and once again asserted that there's no scientific justification or legal requirement for covering veterans who served off the coast. "Environmental health experts in VA's Veterans Health Administration have reviewed the available scientific information and concluded that it is not sufficient to support a presumption that Blue Water Navy Veterans were exposed to Agent Orange," the VA said in a fact sheet.

U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., the ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, criticized the VA's decision. "Rather than siding with veterans, VA is doubling down on an irrational and inconsistent policy," he said in a statement. "Young sailors risked their lives during the Vietnam War, unaware that decades later, they and their children and grandchildren would still feel the toxic effects of exposure. Veterans who served offshore and in the harbors of Vietnam were exposed and deserve the presumption of service connection for Agent Orange-related diseases." Blumenthal and others are seeking adoption of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, which would ensure that all vets exposed to Agent Orange are compensated. The VA opposes the legislation, as it has several previous iterations dating back to 2008.

The VA's new review rejecting benefits relied on a 2011 report by the respected Institute of Medicine, as well as other published research, according to the agency's fact sheet. The Institute of Medicine report said there was no way to prove Blue Water vets were exposed to the chemicals, but it identified plausible routes that Agent Orange could have traveled out to sea and into a ship's distillation system. Although military policy at the time recommended against distilling water closer than 10 miles to shore — where the chemical concentration would have been highest — veterans said doing so was often unavoidable, and their commanding officers routinely ordered it. The VA said it is working with veterans groups to "initiate a groundbreaking study of Blue Water Navy Veterans health outcomes. We hope to have data gathered and analyses published in 2017."

Veterans called the VA's decision a betrayal. John Wells, a Louisiana lawyer who has spent more than a decade advocating for Blue Water veterans, said his group would continue challenging the VA and push for legislation that would mandate coverage for the Blue Water veterans. "It wasn't completely unexpected. We're used to being

betrayed by the VA,” Wells said. “We’re going to fight this thing until we’re done or dead.” Jim Smith, who served aboard the ammunition ship Butte, has been diagnosed with prostate cancer and believes that Agent Orange exposure may have played a role. “My feeling is the VA is thumbing their nose and sending the middle finger back to the Blue Water people,” he said. “It’s like nobody at the VA has any kind of science background whatsoever.”

Blue Water vets — so named to set the sailors apart from their Brown Water Navy counterparts, who patrolled the murky rivers of South Vietnam — were initially deemed eligible for compensation under the Agent Orange Act of 1991, only to have the VA change its interpretation a decade later. [Source: The Maritime Executive | Charles Ornstein and Terry Parris | August 17, 2016 ++]

VA GEC ► Health and Fitness for Older Veterans

VA’s Geriatrics and Extended Care (GEC) and Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Centers are serious about promoting health and fitness for older Veterans. Gerofit is one example of how GEC honors Veterans’ preferences for health, independence, and well-being even in the face of aging, disability, or serious illness. “Some folks came in here hardly able to walk and now they are running.” September is Healthy Aging Month. There are 46 million Americans over 65 — 14 percent of the U.S. population. Gerofit is a fitness and health promotion program implemented in several VA Medical Centers across the country. Those presently participating include: Durham, N.C.; Baltimore, Md.; Bakersfield, Calif.; Canandaigua, N.Y.; Honolulu, Hawaii; Los Angeles, Calif.; Miami, Fla.; Salem, Va.; and Rochester, N.Y.



Veterans working out

Gerofit is modeled on a long-standing successful program based in Durham, N.C. which has achieved benefits to program participants, including improved fitness, mobility, well-being, longevity, and reduced cardiovascular risk factors. It reduces the need for nursing home care by developing and delivering individually tailored, functionally-based exercise for program participants, in addition to improving physical health. It also helps Veterans develop local networks of social support, enhancing emotional and overall well-being. VA’s Office of Rural Health is partnering with Geriatrics and Extended Care, helping expand the Gerofit program to Veterans in rural areas, using video-based Telehealth to reach VA community based outpatient clinics. VA encourages Veterans everywhere to become more active and stay strong. To listen to Veterans in their 80s and 90s describe their great successes in the program go to http://www.va.gov/geriatrics/gerofit/gerofit_success_stories.asp.

[Source: VA News Release | August 30, 2016 ++]

VA Emergency Treatment Claims ► Court Ruling Impact on 2M Claims

More than two million claims for private sector emergency healthcare services provided to VA-enrolled veterans since February 2010 could be eligible for VA reimbursement if a recent ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for

Veterans Claims is allowed to stand, the VA general counsel has warned. The counsel also has warned in court documents that over the next decade VA could be swamped with an estimated 68.6 million additional claims for emergency care reimbursements, which could drive up VA health costs over that period by as much as \$10.6 billion. Despite these alarms, and VA introducing a new legal argument, a full panel of judges on the claims court voted six-to-one last month to deny VA's motion to rehear the case, and instead made final its ruling of last April in the case of *Richard W. Staab v. Robert A. McDonald*.

VA has 60 days, until 20 SEP, to appeal the decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, a near certainty given what's at stake. Meanwhile, VA officials say they are unable to begin to pay any of the emergency healthcare claims that the Staab decision requires until they can prepare new regulations to support the complex review process. "Even if the Staab decision is upheld," VA officials explained in a statement 17 AUG, "the statutory authority [cited by the court] does not set forth a payment methodology or payment limitations necessary for VA to implement the decision. Therefore, VA must follow legal procedures to [draft, publish for public comment and] implement regulations that would allow it to process payments for claims impacted by Staab."

In Staab, the court agreed with lawyers for an 83-year Air Force veteran that the Department of Veterans Affairs wrongly ignored "plain language" of a 2010 statute meant to protect VA-enrolled veterans from out-of-pocket costs when forced to use outside emergency care. So VA should not have turned down Staab's claim for roughly \$48,000 in healthcare costs he was forced to pay following open-heart surgery in DEC 2010. For many years VA has maintained that, by law, it can reimburse VA-enrolled veterans for outside emergency care only if they have no alternative health insurance. That includes Medicare, TRICARE, employer-provided health insurance or contracted health plans of any kind. The practical effect is that veterans with other health insurance often are stuck paying hefty out-of-pocket costs that their plans won't cover, while veterans with no other insurance see VA routinely pick up their entire emergency care tab.

The logic of this offended some lawmakers and in 2009 they persuaded Congress to clarify the law on VA coverage of outside emergency care. A single provision was changed to say VA could "reimburse veterans for treatment in a non-VA facility if they have a third-party insurance that would pay a portion of the emergency care." To ensure colleagues understood the change, Staab's attorneys noted, Sen. Daniel Akaka, then-chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, said in a floor speech that it would "modify current law so that a veteran who has outside insurance would be eligible for reimbursement in the event that the outside insurance does not cover the full amount of the emergency care."

The change took effect Feb. 1, 2010. But in preparing new regulations, VA officials interpreted the revised law as still preserving its way of screening most emergency care claims. The revised regulation said VA would continue to cover outside emergency care only if the "veteran has no coverage under a health-plan contract." That was wrong, a three-judge panel on the appellate claims court ruled last April, citing the "plain language" of the revised statute. It deemed the revised regulation as invalid and vacated a Board of Veterans' Appeals decision that had upheld VA denial of Staab's claim. The board, it said, had relied on a faulty rule rather than the revised statute.

VA's general counsel immediately asked the three-judge panel to reconsider its decision but also asked the full appellate court to review the case. Reconsideration was denied in late June. On 14JUL, while a decision on full court review was pending, VA filed a motion to "stay the precedential effect" of Staab, that is, to not require payment of previously denied emergency claims given the "strong likelihood" the decision will be reversed. In the same motion, VA argued that the claims court erred by not focusing on language in the statute Congress didn't change in 2010, which VA believes still bars reimbursement if the veteran has a separate health-plan contract. Instead, the claims court based its decision on changes to another section of the statute. VA argues the intent of that change was only to address situations where veterans benefit from third party insurance coverage, not their own alternative health plans.

VA appears to be saying that the 2010 law was intended to allow VA only to cover emergency costs not fully covered, for example, by the insurance of a driver at fault in an accident that injured a veteran. But to be eligible, the veteran still can't have other health insurance. This was not an argument VA previously had made, said Bart

Stichman, one of Staab’s attorneys. VA declined interview requests about the case and gave only limited written responses to questions, noting Staab is active litigation that could be overturned. But documents filed since we first reported on this decision last April show VA wants judges to know the magnitude of the burden on VA if the decision is allowed to stand.

From April through 6 JUL, VA has had to suspend consideration of almost 85,000 claims for emergency care that it previously would have denied. They can’t be adjudicated “until VA has promulgated payment regulations necessitated by the Court’s decision and established the technological or other means to confirm the amounts paid by the veterans’ health-plan contracts,” VA lawyers explained in their filing. VA estimates that, looking back six years, more than two million claims could be impacted by Staab, and 68 million more claims could be eligible for reimbursement over the next 10 years. Numbers are so large, VA reported, because emergency room visits generate multiple claims, given the acuity of care required. The averages are four claims per outpatient emergency room visit and eight per emergency hospital admission.

The administrative costs alone of handling these claims, which would require more employees, new technology and other support needs, would be \$182 million over the next 10 years, raising total VA costs to \$10.8 billion. Within a week of receiving these estimates, six of seven judges on the claims court still signaled it was VA that erred in interpreting the 2010 law. [Source: The Military Advantage Blog | Tom Philpott | August 11, 2016 ++]



VA Flu Shots Update 04 ► VA Retail Immunization Program 2016

From now through March 31, 2017, all veterans enrolled in the VA health care system can receive free flu shots at any Walgreens or Duane Reade pharmacy. The joint outreach health initiative is designed to help serve veterans closer to where they reside. Veterans must bring their VA identification cards with them, as well as another photo ID, and complete a short four-question application, which will be used to automatically update their VA Electronic Health Records. No appointments are necessary. [Source: VFW Action corps Weekly| August 26, 2016 ++]

VA Whistleblowers Update 45 ► Greater Los Angeles VA Firing

A Veterans Affairs hospital driver was fired shortly after exposing credit card misuse and the bizarre disappearance of 30 vehicles. The House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations is demanding to know how 30 of 88 vehicles at a VA in Los Angeles disappeared, along with details surrounding the

firing of whistleblower Anthony Salazar. Robert Benkeser, a manager at the Greater Los Angeles VA who makes more than \$140,000 per year, terminated Mr. Salazar in February 2015, not long after the whistleblower exposed theft and mismanagement at the hospital. The Office of Special Counsel (OSC), a government agency created to protect whistleblowers, said earlier this month that the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) imposed upon Mr. Salazar “an overly rigorous” standard of proof to show prohibited retaliation, The Daily Caller reported 24 AUG The driver had been placed on a “performance improvement plan” shortly before Mr. Benkeser terminated his employment. Rep. Mike Coffman, chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, addressed the issue during an 18 AUG hearing, The Daily Caller reported. The Colorado Republican demanded to know why an Administrative Investigation Board (AIB) only saw fit to issue Mr. Benkeser a “letter of counseling” for mismanaging the hospital’s motor pool. [Source: The Washington Times | Douglas Ernst | August 25, 2016++]



VA Spinal Cord Research ► Bone Loss and Fracture Risk Issues

Breaking a bone is a common problem for patients with spinal cord injuries and research at the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center is hoping to help clinicians identify those at most risk and help prevent it. Research at the Augusta Veterans Affairs hospital and others across the country is an often overlooked aspect of the VA’s mission, an official said. With a specialized and much-recognized Spinal Cord Injury unit and access to a database of spinal cord injury patients at VAs across the country, the VA researchers are well-positioned to study those patients. The Augusta Spinal Cord Injury unit itself has about 1,500 patients with various degrees of injury that it follows, said Dr. Michael Priebe, the acting chief of spinal cord injury.

“It’s a sizable population,” he said. “That’s one of the advantages of doing research in a center like this is we can go through our registry and identify those people who would be the best targets for intervention and study.” For instance, spinal cord injury patients tend to suffer from bone loss and many are at increased risk of fractures, Priebe said. “It’s a huge problem because people with spinal cord injury, they can break their leg just while they are trying to put their shoe on,” he said. “These things are very important.”

Dr. Laura Carbone at the Augusta VA recently received a grant from the Department of Defense to look at who might be at increased risk for these fractures, and what might be the best way to screen patients for risk factors such as bone loss. Carbone is studying whether bone density tests would be useful and whether the traditional site for such scans, which includes the hip, is relevant for patients who most often suffer lower leg injuries. She has already shown that a previous fracture puts these patients at higher risk for future fractures and has looked at the characteristics of those patients. “Now what we’re trying to understand is, how can we directly translate this to patient care?” she said. “Are the drugs that we use for osteoporosis in the general population, do they work in a spinal cord injured population?”

Spinal cord injury patients lose bone rapidly after the injury and then continue to lose bone over time, Priebe said. Part of that is losing the benefits of weight-bearing movement for many of these patients but there might also be other changes because of the loss of nerves and nerve activity, he said. There is a difference in bone loss according to the degree of spinal injury, Carbone said, “Patients who have a ‘complete’ spinal cord injury have a

much higher degree of bone loss and a much greater risk of fracture,” she said. Research at the Augusta VA might not rival that at nearby Augusta University, but it is actually part of the VA’s mission and is made possible by the patients who come there, said Dr. Thomas Hartney, associate chief of staff for research. “Patient care of the veterans is why they are here,” he said. “But they are an altruistic category of individuals who want to serve and so, when approached about a research protocol, are willing to give their time and extra efforts to be a participant in that.” [Source: The Augusta Chronicle | Tom Corwin | August 22, 2016 ++]

VA Ghost Panels ▶ Reported in Iowa, South Dakota & Minnesota

More than 1,200 veterans receiving care at the Iowa City Veterans Affairs Hospital were assigned to “ghost panels” — primary care doctors who was not actively providing care — in early 2016, a new report by the watchdog arm of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs found. (The report is available for review at <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3011874/Review-of-Primary-Care-Ghost-Panels.pdf>. And while the Iowa City VA has taken efforts to ensure ongoing patient care, the Inspector General’s office in Washington, D.C., reminded the hospitals in the report released 11 AUG that it is required that patients be reassigned to other primary care teams when physicians leave.

The Iowa City hospital — along with the Black Hills, S.D., facility — was one of two in the Midwestern VA health network listed in the report as using so-called ghost panels. Those 1,245 patients at the Iowa City VA listed as having been in ghost panels represented nearly 3 percent of the system’s active primary care patients. “The use of ghost panels at any Veterans Administration facility to misrepresent the true panel size is disconcerting,” U.S. Rep. Dave Loebsack, D-Iowa City, said in a statement. “The fact that the VA has created an environment where the use of ghost panels appears to be in use across the nation is unacceptable. ... VA leadership must be held accountable for their actions.”



Congressman Dave Loebsack addresses the media outside the Iowa City VA.

Ghost panels gained national attention over the past several years as VA hospitals were widely reported to have tried to game the system to make patient loads and wait lists appear smaller. The recent inspection was done after U.S. Rep. Timothy Walz (D-MN) heard from multiple providers about ongoing issues at the St. Cloud, Minn., VA hospital. Walz requested the Inspector General’s office review the use of ghost panels at all VA hospitals in the Upper Midwest Veterans Integrated Service Network, which includes Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota and North Dakota as well as parts of Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, Wisconsin and Wyoming. The region serves about 300,000 veterans.

The review was conducted between Dec. 29, 2015, through Feb. 11, 2016. In total, only about 2,300 of the 287,095 active primary care patients, or .8 percent, were assigned to ghost panels. The Inspector General’s report concluded the use of ghost panels was not “pervasive,” but noted the existence of them is inconsistent with Veterans

Health Administration policy. The report continued that the Inspector General’s office did not identify “a negative impact on patients since the facilities had enacted efforts to ensure ongoing patient care.”

Iowa City staff told the Inspector General’s office that the panels were from two primary care physicians who accepted positions at other VA facilities — one in August 2015 and the other in November 2015. Recruitment efforts to fill these vacancies were not expected to have exceeded six months, the report said. “Staff told us that they employed several different strategies to meet ongoing patient care needs for patients assigned to those (primary care) panels,” the report said. “Efforts included reassigning acutely ill patients to other (primary care physicians) with panel capacity, assigning surrogate providers to receive and manage electronic health record alerts on a weekly basis, and using a pool of providers to see patients assigned to these panels.”

The Iowa City VA confirmed that explanation in a statement to The Gazette, saying the Health Care System experienced a staffing change last fall that left two Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) temporarily without assigned providers. “Those two patient panels remained with the PACT during the vacancy period in an effort to create a seamless customer experience for the veterans being served,” Jonathan Pruett, a hospital spokesman, said in an email. “By doing this, veterans on each panel could continue their relationship with the nurse care manager, clinical associate and administrative clerk they were accustomed to — and only a temporary change in provider would be experienced.” [Source: Gazette | Chelsea Keenan | August 12, 2016 ++]

VA Medical Foster Homes Update 02 ► Caregiver Applicants Needed

The Veterans Health Care System of the Ozarks is searching for caregivers in the Northwest Arkansas area for the VA Medical Foster home program. The program gets veterans into a privately owned/rented residence with a caregiver where they receive 24 hour care and supervision. The foster home program is a long-term commitment; Veterans may live there for the remainder of his or her life. "The Northwest Arkansas Veteran Community has embraced the VA Medical Foster Home concept and it's now time to expand to serve more Veterans. In a VA Medical Foster Home, the veteran stays in charge of their life and is provided assistance with personal care, meds, safety and transportation by a caregiver trained and monitored by the VHSO," said Michael Stracener, LCSW Program Coordinator.

Currently, the Medical Foster Home Program has five approved homes. There is a need for homes in the Fayetteville, Springdale, Elkins, West Fork and Farmington area. Applicants for the program must have caregiver experience, complete an application and provide references. The home must also be within a 50 mile radius of the Fayetteville VA Medical Center. Interested applicants can call Dr. Stracener at 479-443-4301, ext. 63467. Go to http://www.va.gov/geriatrics/guide/longtermcare/medical_foster_homes.asp For additional info on VA's Foster Home Program. [Source: Northwest Arkansas News | August 15 ++]

PTSD Update 218 ► EMDR Legitimacy is Getting VA Recognition

A local veterans advocacy group celebrated a big victory over the weekend: The recent announcement by the Department of Veterans Affairs that it will encourage the use of a therapy called EMDR for veterans suffering from trauma. The Veteran Resilience Project, the brainchild of Minnesota EMDR therapist of Elaine Wynne, has been at the forefront of pushing for recognition of the therapy. EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a therapy designed to help the brain unlock traumatic memories and reprocess them into more positive thoughts. During a session, the client is asked to focus on a memory while stimulation is used such as eye movements, tapping or sounds. After each association is processed, the "bilateral" stimulation continues until the original issue is no longer disturbing.

While the VA has acknowledged the treatment is effective, it was not one of the department's top choices for addressing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The VA had no objection to the therapy, but it seldom would refer patients for treatment because the VA had the resources — and covered the expenses — for other therapies. Advocates said the VA's lackluster response to EMDR discouraged funders and has cost them clients and resources. Wynne tried for six years to start an EMDR project focusing on veterans, but found the VA and the Defense Department resistant because of concerns that the treatment was not evidence-based. Undaunted, she won a grant from a national EMDR program and set off on her own in 2013 to conduct a 20-month pilot project. Using 25 therapists to serve 30 veterans, she documented that 74 percent of the respondents after treatment no longer showed signs of PTSD and that 100 percent had significantly reduced symptoms.

In 2015, Wynne took \$10,000 she had left from the project and put it toward the newly formed nonprofit, with most of the money going to reimburse therapists for their work. Paul Riedner, an Iraq veteran with a penchant for social media and marketing, was brought in as executive director. Since then Riedner, a former Army diver, has been directing outreach with podcasts and seeking funding through crowdsourcing and grant writing. The Star Tribune wrote a story about the group's efforts in May. Word got back to officials at the VA, and things started rolling in a way seldom seen in a bureaucracy used to glacial movement. Now VA clinicians interested in being trained will be encouraged to take EMDR training when it is available. And the VA says it wants to make sure veterans have access to EMDR when it is their preferred choice or when the treatment team believes it to be their best option.

Most VA facilities have at least one clinician who has EMDR training. But if there aren't enough clinicians, the VA said it will be directing facilities to pay for EMDR treatment in the community. Riedner, wearing shorts, combat boots, and a baseball hat emblazoned with the flag, addressed several hundred EMDR practitioners 27 AUG at a convention in Minneapolis. "To be honest, I wrote off the VA," he told the crowd. "I was committed to inspiring the community to do it ourselves, since that's what EMDR taught me, that we have everything we need already to heal. "But people are waking up. It's working. People are responding. They are starving for a legitimate solution, not just awareness. People love to be on the winning side. Let's give them something to get behind." He got a standing ovation. [Source: Minnesota Star Tribune | Mark Brunswick | August 29, 2016 ++]

Women Veterans Call Center ► New Chat Function Implemented



Calling All Women Who Served in the United States Military! Do you know your Veteran status? Do you have a Veteran ID card? Should you receive any benefits from VA, like the GI Bill? Do you know what health care benefits you have earned? If you do not know the answer to even one of these questions, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has established the Women Veterans Call Center (WVCC) just for you. The WVCC staff is trained to provide women Veterans, their families, and caregivers about VA services and resources. They are ready to respond to your concerns. The call is free, and you can call as often as you like until you have the answers to your questions. The Call Center is available M-F 08-2000 EST, and on Saturdays from 08-1830 EST..

The WVCC is expanding its outreach to women Veterans with a new online, one-to-one Chat Function. The new service enables women Veterans to go online and anonymously chat via real-time text messaging with a trained WVCC representative. The new feature provides women Veterans with another avenue to ask general questions

about benefits, eligibility and services specifically for women Veterans. WVCC chat is available by visiting the Women Veterans Health Care webpage at www.womenshealth.va.gov and clicking the "Chat with the Women Veterans Call Center" icon. As the Chat Function is anonymous; please do not use personally identifiable information such as social security numbers.

All the representatives at the Women Veterans Call Center are women, and many are Veterans themselves. In addition to linking women Veterans to information, the Women Veterans Call Center makes direct referrals to Women Veteran Program Managers (WVPM) located at every VA medical center. The Women Veteran Program Manager helps the woman Veteran coordinate services. When you call the WVCC:

- You will be connected to a trained VA woman staff member.
- Call center staff will conduct a brief screening to assess your needs.
- Women Veterans will be provided personalized information regarding health care services, VA benefits and services, and a package of information will be sent to their home.
- You can call for yourself or for a women Veteran you know.
- The call is free and confidential.
- Contact information will be requested so staff may follow-up.

Any women veteran can use the WVCC, even if they are not registered with the VA or enrolled in VA health care and/or receiving care. You do not need to have wartime or combat experience to be considered a Veteran. Women Veterans should enroll for health care benefits to ensure they receive the comprehensive benefits package offered through VA's national health care system. A review of the 33,000 calls received to date found the most common reasons people call in to the Call Center are to learn about benefits and eligibility and to discuss issues they face like homelessness, maternity care, Military Sexual Trauma, and environmental exposures. At times, there are issues that the Call Center cannot immediately resolve. In those cases, they research the best course of action/ locate the appropriate resources, and call the Veteran back to help her address her issues and concerns.

VA offers comprehensive medical care, including any necessary medical outpatient and inpatient services. The VA provides a full continuum of health care, including comprehensive primary care (care for acute and chronic illness and gender-specific care), specialty care, mental health care, disease prevention and screening, emergency care, and women's health specialty care (e.g., advanced breast and gynecological care, maternity care, and some infertility treatments). In addition, VA offers services such as inpatient medical/surgical/mental health care, physical rehabilitation, substance abuse treatment, long-term care, and pharmacy benefits. For more information on VA services provided to women Veterans, call 1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636).

If you are in crises call the Veterans Crisis Line. This is a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) resource that connects Veterans and Service members in crisis and their families and friends with information and qualified, caring VA responders through a confidential, toll-free hotline, online chat, and text messaging service. Veterans and their families and friends can call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net, or send a text message to 838255 to receive support from specially trained professionals, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

[Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | August 19, 2016 ++]

VA EUL Program ► Provides Homeless Vets A New Lease on Life

Veterans are being touched by the Enhanced-Use-Lease EUL program, a “portfolio management tool” that VA deploys to revitalize underused VA properties—and change the lives of thousands of formerly homeless Veterans. It is operated by the Office of Asset Enterprise Management. The EUL program enables VA to solve two issues: affordable, permanent housing for homeless Veterans and their families and the surplus of idle or underused VA

property in communities across the United States. The EUL program allows VA to lease its property to the private sector for approved supportive housing and related projects for Veterans who do not have safe, stable housing.



VA-leased apartment building

EUL projects must provide Veterans with a well-rounded and integrated experience, and so in addition to supportive housing, VA's EUL partners often offer Veterans services such as job training, financial management, haircuts, computer and laundry facilities, fitness centers and more. Veterans and their families are prioritized for EUL developments, which are also convenient to VA health care facilities. So far, through the EUL program over 2,200 units of housing for homeless Veterans, Veterans at-risk of homeless, and their families have been constructed nationwide and an additional 500 units are under construction to serve Veterans and their families within the next one to two years. Moreover, we continue working to develop more than 1,500 additional units that in the future will serve Veterans and their families. In addition to the services and amenities available through EUL housing, Veterans benefit from regular opportunities to interact with each other. For more information check out:

- EUL Program <http://www.va.gov/ASSETMANAGEMENT/index.asp>.
- VA's Office of Asset Enterprise Management <http://www.va.gov/oaem/index.asp>.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-IyHQqC1E:%20http://www.va.gov/ASSETMANAGEMENT> EUL Program Video.
- VA's homeless programs <http://www.va.gov/homeless>.
- Encourage Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless to call or visit their local VA Medical Center (<http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isflash=1>) where VA staff are ready to assist, or ask them to call **1-877-4AID-VET** (1-877-424-3838).

[Source: VAntage Point Blog | July 29, 2016 ++]

VA Million Veteran Program Update 06 ► 500,000+ Now enrolled

With more than 500,000 Veteran Partners enrolled, MVP is now the largest genomic database in the world, placing VA Healthcare at the forefront of the Precision Medicine revolution. Sponsored by VHA's Office of Research & Development, the program links genetic, clinical, lifestyle, and military-exposure information and will help researchers learn about the role genes play in a variety of diseases relevant to Veterans and the population at large, leading to better treatment and prevention strategies. Early studies are focusing on PTSD, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, Gulf War Illness, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, multi-substance use and age-related macular degeneration. For more information, visit www.research.va.gov/mvp. [Source: DVA Office of Research & Development | August 3, 2016 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 AUG 2016



Frisco, Tx — A Frisco man who used his father's identity to qualify for lucrative federal government contracts under a set-aside program for disabled veterans was sentenced to almost six years in federal prison, authorities said 15 AUG. **Sean C. Page**, 45, was sentenced on 11 AUG in federal court in Sherman for theft of government property and two counts of aggravated identity theft. He was convicted by a jury in February. Page never served in the military, but he used his father's name and Social Security number to cash in on his veteran disability status, prosecutors said. His father, a combat veteran, served in the U.S. Army from 1964 to 1981 and was deemed to be 100 percent disabled when he was honorably discharged, authorities said. The elder Page received two Bronze Stars during his service in Vietnam. And he did not know about his son's scheme, investigators said.

Page scammed the federal contracting program out of about \$1.2 million with 14 contracts from 2009 to 2013 using two companies he formed, according to officials. U.S. Attorney John M. Bales, of the Eastern District of Texas, said such programs are paid for by American taxpayers and benefit veterans with "injuries incurred as a result of their sacrifices for this country." Stopping such fraud, he said, is a top priority. "Those who steal and attempt to steal monies from these programs will be vigorously prosecuted," Bales said. When reached at home prior to the trial, Page's father, Dalton Page, said he knew his son committed the crime. "We got all the proof that he did it," he said. "Sean is my son, but those programs are set aside for GIs such as myself. I am very disappointed in him getting those contracts like that. The contracts were put in my name. He had me backed in a corner."

The senior Page has said he did two tours of duty in Vietnam and saw "all the body bags." He said he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. "I do not appreciate people using veterans' benefits," Dalton Page said. "It shows disrespect for me." Page created 12G Resources Group in 2009 and Premier Building Maintenance in 2008 to provide general services such as cleaning and landscape work for veteran-owned facilities, the indictment said. He won five Veterans Affairs contracts after using his father's information to certify his businesses. Page continued to do federal contract work after his October 2014 arraignment in violation of a federal judge's order, court records show. He earned \$35,175 from a landscaping and snow removal job with the Veterans Medical Center of Salt Lake City while he was out on bond. [Source: The Dallas morning News | Kevin Krause | 15 August 2016 ++]

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Morganton, NC — An Army deserter from Morganton is accused of receiving tens of thousands of dollars in veteran benefits by faking war wounds and military honors. **Roy Lee Ross Jr.**, 64, faces up to 35 years in prison on charges of executing a scheme to defraud the Veterans Administration, making false statements in connection with the delivery of VA health care benefits, stealing from the VA and making a false claim for travel benefits from the VA. According to a federal indictment released on Friday, Ross enlisted in the Army in 1973 and was stationed stateside and in West Germany. But he never served in Vietnam or Korea, was not in the Special Forces and never was wounded as he claimed, according to the indictment. While stationed in Hawaii in 1978, he went AWOL, was caught and then discharged instead of undergoing a court-martial, prosecutors said.

By 2007, the indictment says, Ross began to falsely represent himself to the Charles George VA Medical Center in Asheville as a U.S. Army veteran named Daniel Alfred Sullivan Jr. He claimed to have served in the Special Forces, been wounded in combat and honorably discharged. Ross claimed he suffered from nightmares caused by his wartime service and combat injuries, prosecutors said. As a result, Ross was diagnosed in 2007 with service-related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and began receiving health benefits from the VA. In 2012, based on the PTSD diagnosis and his numerous false claims about war wounds and military honors, Ross filed for and received disability-based compensation at a rate of 60 percent and a retroactive lump sum of \$18,349, according to the indictment. He also began receiving a monthly tax-free compensation of \$1,026. In 2014, he filed for more compensation, claiming he suffered pain from being shot in the neck during combat. His disability rating was increased, reflecting an increase in his monthly tax-free compensation to \$1,743.

In 2015, still falsely claiming to be Daniel Sullivan, he filed a third claim for “increased evaluation,” claiming he was suffering from neck pain due to wounds he received on active duty, according to the indictment. He was awarded \$3,490 in back payment, and his monthly disability payment was increased to \$2,906. The indictment says Ross also received about \$57,000 in health care benefits from the VA to which he was not lawfully entitled. Ross also defrauded the VA’s Beneficiary Travel Program by filing for mileage reimbursement in connection with his medical appointments, according to the indictment. He defrauded the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program by receiving \$10,218 in payments from the program, which offers training assistance to unemployed veterans. Ross could not be reached for comment by the Observer. “The actions of the defendant are contrary to the code of military conduct,” U.S. Attorney Jill Rose said in announcing the charges. “Now, the scheme has been exposed and Ross, a disgraced deserter, must answer for his actions in a federal court.” [Source: The Charlotte Observer | Joe Marusak | August 19, 2016 ++]

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Lynn, MA — John Lass, 73, pleaded guilty 25 AUG U.S. District Court in Boston to stealing nearly \$80,000 in veterans benefits. In 2009, Ladd’s neighbor was receiving monthly veterans benefits when she died; however, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs was not properly notified of the death, so it continued to deposit her benefits each month into her bank account. Ladd had been assisting his neighbor before her death, and this enabled him to access her checkbook. Although Ladd was not entitled to his neighbor’s veterans benefits, he routinely wrote checks to himself from his neighbor’s account after her death, forging her signature on each check. Ladd then deposited the checks into his own bank accounts. Ladd ultimately wrote himself 70 checks totaling \$79,958. The charge of theft of public money provides for a sentence of no greater than 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000 or twice the gross gain or loss, whichever is greater. Actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors. [Source: DoJ District of MA News Release | August 25, 2016 ++]

VA Crisis Hotline Update 05 ► Has It Been Outsourced to India?

According to one veteran, the Department of Veterans Affairs outsourced its Veterans Crisis Line to non-US operators likely located in India. On the footsteps of September, suicide awareness month, the Veterans Crisis Line remains a sharp concern for Americans. At 20 suicides per day, veterans are at a much higher risk than average citizens for suicide. VA claims it is implementing fixes, but those fixes apparently include outsourcing the help to a different continent to non-Americans. One veteran has contacted the VA Is Lying Facebook group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/VA.is.LYING> about his unusual experience over the weekend regarding his veterans crisis line call.

Rob Matthews, a disabled veteran, called the crisis hotline to get help with a family emergency. Someone who admitted to not being an American and not being located in the continental United States greeted him on the phone. According to Matthews, he called the crisis hotline to get help about a personal matter. He immediately noticed the person had a thick foreign accent. After growing suspicious, given his expectation that he would be speaking to an American working for VA within the continental United States, he asked more questions.

- “Are you in the United States?”
- The operator responded, “No sir, I am not American and not in the US, but I am here to help you.”

While some may think this is an innocent outsourcing of what could and should be a quality American job, Matthews had a sharp reaction. “It made me feel like I was sold out, and I have a loss of hope due to the response I received.” Normally, for a non-crisis issue, getting tech support from a call center in India would not be a big deal. If I were calling tech support for a low-cost item, I would expect non-American tech support from India or somewhere similar. If I am calling about my Mac computer, a high-cost item, I better get a US based operator that knows what they are doing. What about a person’s life? What about a veteran in crisis? Is that the equivalent of a low-cost item? Assuming this was not an isolated incident, why are veterans getting this low-cost help? Why is VA hiring call centers for crisis hotlines overseas?

Matthews said the experience left him more puzzled than anything given his expectation was to speak with a VA employee and not a non-American individual overseas. Generally speaking, veterans assume a non-American not located in the US would not ‘get’ what it’s like to be a vet or to understand what we go through. This move, if accurately relayed here, would indicate VA has failed to understand a basic cultural bias within the veteran community it is supposed to serve. This move, if accurately relayed here, would indicate VA has failed to understand a basic cultural bias within the veteran community it is supposed to serve. We do not think non-Americans will ‘get’ what our experience is like. Hell, most of us do not like even talking to non-veterans about it, must less foreigners at a non-US center.

For some background, the Veterans Crisis Line has been a hot button issue ever since VA was caught not answering its phones or voice messages or text messages despite promising to always respond to veterans in crisis in that manner. This failure to follow through with promises like this exacerbates veterans’ anxiety during periods of intense frustration or confusion. To resolve the staffing shortage, Secretary Bob McDonald promised to build a new call center located in Atlanta to help create a redundant system. Apparently, that is the part of the plan that was public knowledge. But the plan seems to have also included outsourcing call center help for this vital service to non-American operators who will likely not be able to relate to the veteran experience. [Source: <http://www.disabledveterans.org> | Benjamin Krause | August 29, 2016 ++]



VAMC Tomah WI Update 16 ► Wrongful Death Lawsuit

The family of a former Marine who died at the Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center in 2014 from a mixture of drugs that included opioids filed a wrongful death lawsuit Monday against the federal government, writing that

despite accepting responsibility for his death, the VA has done nothing to act on a claim filed by the family nearly a year ago. Jason Simcakoski, 35, died on Aug. 30, 2014, at the Short Stay Mental Health Recovery Unit in the Tomah VA's Community Living Center, where he was getting treatment for mental health-related problems, according to the lawsuit, filed by his wife, Heather Simcakoski, in U.S. District Court in Madison.

Simcakoski's death led to the firing of the Tomah VA's chief of staff, Dr. David Houlihan. The medical center's director also was reassigned to another job away from Tomah. According to the lawsuit, VA representatives repeatedly told Simcakoski's family that the VA intended to take full responsibility for his death. The lawsuit quotes the acting director of the Tomah VA telling reporters a year ago, "We accept responsibility for any action or inaction that contributed to this man's death." "The VA has failed to follow its words with deeds," according to the lawsuit, which seeks unspecified compensation for alleged negligence by the VA, along with other costs. The Tomah VA has come under fire after an Inspector General's report, not released until after Simcakoski's death, found that opioid painkillers were being overprescribed by doctors at the medical facility, which some called "Candy Land."

Simcakoski, of Stevens Point, who was honorably discharged from the Marines in 2002, was a patient at VA facilities from 2006 to 2014 for a variety of conditions. He was admitted on Aug. 10, 2014, to the Tomah VA Acute Psychiatric Unit, then transferred four days later to the Short Stay Mental Health Recovery Unit. On Aug. 28, 2014, according to the lawsuit, Simcakoski met with Dr. Rhonda Davis, who after consulting with Houlihan, recommended starting Simcakoski on Suboxone, which is a combination of two drugs, one of which is an opioid, to relieve his chronic pain and potentially decrease his level of anxiety. It was an off-label use for the drug combination, which is approved to treat people with opioid addiction.

According to the lawsuit, the dispensing pharmacist should have warned Davis and Houlihan that Suboxone would interact with other drugs Simcakoski was already taking. When Simcakoski's family visited the morning of Aug. 30, 2014, his father, Marv Simcakoski, was concerned because his son was so sedated he could barely speak, but was told that he would be fine in a few hours. Early that afternoon, Simcakoski was seen asleep and snoring, and had not gotten up for lunch or taken his noon medications. About 1½ hours later, a nursing staff member found him unresponsive. CPR wasn't started for another 10 minutes and was unsuccessful. Simcakoski was pronounced dead. The Monroe County Medical Examiner's Office said Simcakoski died from mixed drug toxicity.

A later review by the VA Office of Inspector General found that the respiratory depressant effects of the drugs that make up Suboxone, together with diazepam, was the plausible cause of his death. The review also found that both doctors who prescribed Suboxone failed to talk with Simcakoski about the risks of the treatment. The Inspector General's report also noted delays in the initiation of CPR and the lack of medication at the Tomah VA to reverse drug overdoses. The lawsuit alleges that the VA failed to diagnose and treat Simcakoski's bipolar disorder and depression, and failed to competently diagnose and treat his substance abuse problem. It also alleges that the VA allowed Simcakoski to influence the choice and level of drugs he received, even to take an entire month's supply in a week or two. "The VA, at times, would even send opioids and other drugs to Jason's home through the mail, allowing him to have access to large amounts of opioids even though he had a known opioid abuse problem," the lawsuit states. [Source: Wisconsin State Journal | Ed Treleven | August 29, 2016 ++]

VA HCS Phoenix Update 23 ► Yet Another Boss

Deborah Amdur announces retirement as hospital leader just 9 months after taking the helm. The Phoenix VA Medical Center is about to get its fifth new boss since former Director Sharon Helman was removed in mid-2014 amid the nationwide veterans health-care crisis that was first exposed in Arizona. Director Deborah Amdur, who has led the hospital for the past nine months, announced 26 AUG that she is retiring for health reasons and will be replaced by Barbara Fallen, director of the VA Loma Linda Healthcare System covering parts of California and Nevada. Fallen is expected to serve as an interim director until a permanent replacement for Amdur can be found.

The transition accentuates long-term instability at the Phoenix VA Health Care System, which operates seven outpatient clinics throughout Arizona in addition to the hospital in central Phoenix.

After Arizona whistleblowers triggered a 2014 VA furor over delayed care, mismanagement and other systemic flaws, four administrators at the Carl T. Hayden Medical Center in Phoenix were suspended and eventually fired. Others retired, resigned or transferred. Not one of Phoenix VA's top five administrators today was in place when the scandal broke in April 2014. Most of them, known collectively as the hospital's PENTAD, are on temporary assignment. Many second-tier managers also abandoned the Phoenix medical center, leaving voids in departmental leadership. Although the hospital at Seventh Street and Indian School Road has been a focal point for VA reform efforts — visited by President Barack Obama and VA Secretary Bob McDonald — the executive suite has been a revolving door of temporary leaders assigned to 90-day shifts.

The southwest regional office of the Veterans Health Administration, based in Gilbert, also has been through a series of fill-in bosses — four in the past 2½ years. Marie Weldon, currently listed as acting regional director, also oversees the Los Angeles-based VA Desert Pacific Healthcare System. Weldon described Fallen as “an experienced leader who will continue the tremendous effort being made to improve access to high quality health care for veterans in the Phoenix area.” The Phoenix VA Health Care System has about 86,000 enrolled veterans, about 3,400 employees and a \$650 million operating budget.

Its new director, Fallen, could not immediately be reached. She rose through the VA system from a career as a clinical nutritionist and has been in charge of the Loma Linda VA Medical Center since 2013, according to her official biography. Amdur, who began her VA career as a social worker and arrived in December from a directorship in White River Junction, Vermont, declared her top priority was to regain trust of veterans by delivering timely, high-quality service. Helman was suspended in May 2014, later fired and convicted of filing a false financial disclosure. She is pursuing a lawsuit to overturn her termination. Three subordinates who also got fired are believed to be pursuing legal actions related to their terminations. Since Helman left, no Phoenix VA hospital boss has served more than 13 months. Here are the past four Phoenix hospital directors:

- Steve Young, appointed interim director in May 2014, is now acting deputy undersecretary for health at VA headquarters.
- Glenn Costie, appointed interim director in June 2014, is now director at the VA hospital in Cincinnati.
- Glen Grippen, came out of retirement to serve as interim director in November 2015 and re-retired a year later.
- Deborah Amdur, appointed director in December 2015, is retiring next week.



Deborah Amdur



Barbara Fallen

[Source: The Arizona Republic | Dennis Wagner | August 26, 2016 ++]

GI Bill Update 207 ► 6,842 Vets Will be Impacted if ITT Fails

The Veterans Affairs Department is warning thousands of U.S. military veterans enrolled at ITT Tech to brace for the possibility the for-profit college franchise "goes out of business," according to a recent notice. The parent company, ITT Educational Services Inc., based in Carmel, Indiana, on Monday suspended all new enrollments after the U.S. Education Department barred the college, which has about 130 campuses in 38 states, from accepting students who use federal financial aid. States such as California and Washington have followed suit.

While the moves don't affect veterans' GI Bill benefits, "these actions do raise significant concerns about the financial viability of ITT," the VA wrote in a recent message on its Facebook page. "It's important that you understand that if ITT goes out of business before you complete your education, you will not be able to use your GI Bill benefits to keep attending that school and under this scenario, you would no longer be able to pursue your education at that school." The message continues, "As you know, finding another school where you can complete your educational objectives may take time as not every school offers the same programs as ITT. Also, it is not guaranteed that another school offering the program you are pursuing will accept transfer credits from ITT."

State and federal officials have been investigating ITT's recruiting and accounting practices. The federal government in 2014 launched its investigation into the company after allegations surfaced that school employees persuaded students to take out high-interest private loans, often with high risk of default and high rates of interest, when their federal loans failed to cover all of their costs ITT has long catered to military veterans, a demographic that makes up close to a fifth of its enrollment, which is falling fast, according to corporate financial documents. Overall enrollment at the school was 40,015 students as of June -- a decrease of 16.4 percent from the same period a year ago, according to the company's quarterly filings. A total of 6,842 GI Bill recipients either attend ITT Tech or plan to do so during an upcoming term, according to an email on Tuesday from Terry Jemison, a spokesperson for the VA's Veterans Benefits Administration, which oversees the educational program.

Revenue at the parent company totaled almost \$850 million in 2015, down 11 percent from \$962 million the previous year, according to financial documents. The company is now a penny stock, trading at 40 cents a share on 30 AUG on the New York Stock Exchange, down from a high of \$127 a share in 2007. Just a few years ago, in October 2013, it traded as high as \$40 a share. "ITT is effectively out of business," Peter Appert, managing director and senior research analyst at Piper Jaffray & Co., who follows ITT, told CNN. "I don't see any way they survive this." If it does file for bankruptcy, ITT wouldn't be the first. Corinthian Colleges, a for-profit chain, last year shut down its 28 locations and more recently was ordered to pay a nearly \$1.2 billion fine for false advertising and misleading lending practices. [Source: Military.com | Brendan McGarry | August 30, 2016 ++]

* Vets *



College Credits for Military Service ► How to Obtain

Just because you are not technically in academia when you are in the service doesn't mean you aren't learning enough to earn college credit. The G.I. Bill is one thing, but let's face it: you have skills. It seems unfair for you not to get college credit in, say, engineering for your practical study if you act as an engineer for your military occupational specialty (MOS). Yet many schools simply don't acknowledge equivalent credit from what may be hands-on work in higher stress situations than any other kind of freshman has ever faced. So how can you position yourself to find the credits you deserve? Here's what you can do to receive credit where it's due.



Start with your transcript - As you probably know, the Joint Services Transcript (JST) provides a detailed assessment of your professional military education, training and occupation experiences and puts them on an official document. The American Council on Education gives instruction on how to apply for and receive a JST and is a wonderful resource for those looking to align their military experience and convert that into college credits. More than 2,300 colleges and universities take the JST document and use it to apply toward credits. To augment your JST, make sure you use your Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) properly. This includes any college credits or AP exams. Also be certain that you retain any documentation that might assist in your credit development, including commendations, sample work, training certificates, recommendations and evaluations. Schools will take all this into account when assessing how your JST will translate into credits.

Take the tests - There are several kinds of exams offered that allow Veterans to test out of college level courses using the knowledge built up during time in the service. The College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) includes 33 standardized tests in many subjects, and many Veterans and their families can take these tests for free. The DSST exam process is another way that Veterans can earn college credit. Exams are available for everything from Astronomy to American History. However, before you apply to take these exams, make sure institutions that interest you will take the credits these tests claim to earn for you.

Portfolio analysis - Some institutions will allow Veterans to submit documentation including their JST, as well as written narratives and other supporting material. Corresponding faculty members will assess the portfolio and make a judgment on what this experience may correspond to in credits.

Do Your Research - There are many institutions that say they offer credit to incoming Veterans but do not assign those credits to associated skill sets. For example, if you had an engineering MOS, you might get some college credit, but it wouldn't be for engineering, just for general studies—which won't help you toward your major and would mean you might still be stuck taking remedial classes, even though you should have passed out of them. Make sure your credits will be taken for what they are worth.

More resources:

- Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) helps Servicemembers with counseling and exam preparation (<http://www.dantes.doded.mil/#sthash.dn9o2TIQ.X9kxoWRn.dpbs>).
- Service Members Opportunity Colleges (<http://soc.aascu.org/socgen/MissionHistory.html>) serves to help create academic opportunities for Servicemembers and is tied directly to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities <http://soc.aascu.org> .

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There is truly no shortage of resources to help servicemen and women take advantage of their time and education in the military and translate that to college credit. Increasingly, non-traditional students are being courted by universities, and many schools particularly embrace Veterans because their leadership training is so desirable. The very best way to make sure you are getting all the credit you deserve is to rely on your training and take the initiative. Check in on your credits, talk to your advisors, do your research and be persistent. You'll find that you can take years off of your college education, enter the workforce earlier and save a great deal of money in the process. [Source: GovExec.com | Kellie Lunney | August 4, 2016 ++]

Vet Suicide Update 13 ► Northport VAMC Parking Lot Suicide

A pair of New York lawmakers are demanding answers after a veteran committed suicide in the parking lot of a Department of Veterans Affairs hospital on Long Island earlier this week. Peter Kaisen, a 76-year-old who lived just a short drive from the Northport Veterans Affairs Medical Center, killed himself 21 AUG. Two facility workers told the New York Times earlier this week that the man had been turned away from the hospital's emergency room while seeking care, but hospital officials have said they have not found any record of that incident. In a statement, medical center director Philip Moschitta said they will cooperate in any investigation of the death but "at no point did the staff in this facility fail to do the right thing by our patients." It could not be immediately determined in which branch of service Kaisen served.

On 25 AUG, Democratic Rep. Steve Israel and Republican Rep. Peter King sent a letter to VA Secretary Bob McDonald and FBI Director James Comey demanding "a thorough, expeditious and transparent investigation into this incident" and "that the VA is transparent and fully cooperative in every aspect" of the investigation. "It is critical that our nation's veterans feel they can trust the services provided by their VA medical facilities, and that their health and well-being is of the utmost priority," the pair wrote. "This trust must extend not only to medical treatment provided in operating rooms and primary care facilities, but also to the mental health services provided by all VA facilities. "Mental health treatment is critical to the overall health of our veterans, and every effort must be made to provide for their needs."

VA emergency room care and mental health response have received extra scrutiny in recent years since scandals surrounding veterans wait times for medical care forced the resignation of former department Secretary Eric Shinseki in 2014. Lawmakers have questioned whether front-line hospital staffers are adequately trained and prepared for initial contact with veterans suffering a mental or emotional trauma. In addition, the VA Inspector General's Office found that calls to the Veterans Crisis Line in fiscal 2014 were transferred to voicemail instead of being routed to immediate response. VA officials have spent much of the last few years bolstering their mental health care staff and training, and have publicly pledged to continue to make that work a priority.

Neither King nor Israel blame the local VA hospital staff for Kaisen's suicide in the letter, but they state that "only a thorough and transparent report on the cause of this incident will ensure that the VA maintains the confidence of our veterans." Roughly 20 veterans a day commit suicide nationwide, according to data released by the Department of Veterans Affairs earlier this summer. About 65 percent of those are individuals 50 years or older. [Source: Military Times | Leo Shane | August 26, 2016 ++]

Vet Suicide Update 14 ► Facts And Data

September is Suicide Prevention Month. The Department of Veterans Affairs has provided the following information on the sensitive issue of suicide. VA encourages those writing about this important issue to visit www.ReportingOnSuicide.Org for guidance on ways to communicate suicide from the independent National Action Alliance on Suicide Reporting.

VETERAN SUICIDE FACTS AND DATA

Suicide is an issue that affects all Americans. Recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data reported in April 2016 show that from 1999 through 2014 (the most recent year with data available from CDC), suicide rates increased 24 percent in the general population for both males and females. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention reports on average that there are 117 suicides per day, making suicide a nationwide public health issue. Previously, it was reported that 22 Veterans die by suicide per day. A new VA study released 3 AUG representing the most comprehensive analysis of Veteran suicide rates in the United States, examining more than 55 million Veterans' records from 1979 to 2014 from every state in the nation, shows an average of 20 Veterans a day died from suicide.

The effort advances VA's knowledge from the previous report in 2012, which was primarily limited to information on Veterans who used Veterans Health Administration health services or from mortality records obtained directly from 20 states and approximately 3 million records. The complete report may be found at <http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/2016suicidedatareport.pdf>.

- Approximately 65 percent of all Veterans who died from suicide in 2014 were 50 years of age or older.
- Veterans accounted for 18 percent of all deaths from suicide among U.S. adults. This is a decrease from 22 percent in 2010.
- Since 2001, U.S. adult civilian suicides increased 23 percent, while Veteran suicides increased 32 percent in the same time period. After controlling for age and gender, this makes the risk of suicide 21 percent greater for Veterans.
- Since 2001, the rate of suicide among U.S. Veterans who use VA services increased by 8.8 percent, while the rate of suicide among Veterans who do not use VA services increased by 38.6 percent.
- In the same time period, the rate of suicide among male Veterans who use VA services increased 11 percent, while the rate of suicide increased 35 percent among male Veterans who do not use VA services.
- In the same time period, the rate of suicide among female Veterans who use VA services increased 4.6 percent while the rate of suicide increased 98 percent among female Veterans who do not use VA services.

SUICIDE PREVENTION MEASURES BY VA: VA is aggressively undertaking a number of new measures to prevent suicide, including:

- VA has implemented comprehensive, broad-ranging suicide prevention initiatives, including a toll-free Veterans Crisis Line, placement of Suicide Prevention Coordinators at all VA Medical Centers and large outpatient facilities and improvements in case management and tracking. In addition, VA recently announced the creation of a satellite Veterans Crisis Line site in Atlanta, Georgia, for increased staffing capability and geographic redundancy; the satellite site is expected to operational in October 2016 with 200 additional responders.
- Ensuring same-day access for Veterans with urgent mental health needs at over 1,000 points of care by the end of calendar year 2016. In fiscal year 2015, more than 1.6 million Veterans received mental health treatment from VA, including at over 150 medical centers, 820 community-based outpatient clinics and 300

Vet Centers that provide readjustment counseling. Veterans also enter VA health care through the Veterans Crisis Line, VA staff on college and university campuses, or other outreach points.

- Using predictive modeling to determine which Veterans may be at highest risk of suicide, so providers can intervene early. Veterans in the top 0.1% of risk, who have a 43-fold increased risk of death from suicide within a month, can be identified before clinical signs of suicide are evident in order to save lives before a crisis occurs.
- Expanding telemental health care by establishing four new regional telemental health hubs across the VA healthcare system.
- Hiring over 60 new crisis intervention responders for the Veterans Crisis Line. Each responder receives intensive training on a wide variety of topics in crisis intervention, substance use disorders, screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment.
- Building new collaborations between Veteran programs in VA and those working in community settings, such as Give an Hour, Psych Armor Institute, University of Michigan's Peer Advisors for Veterans Education Program (PAVE), and the Cohen Veterans Network.
- Creating stronger inter-agency (e.g. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Department of Defense, National Institutes of Health) and new public-private partnerships (e.g., Johnson & Johnson Healthcare System, Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation, Walgreen's, and many more) focused on preventing suicide among Veterans.

Suicide is a public issue that affects all Americans. Recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data reported in April 2016 that from 1999 through 2014 (the most recent year with data available from CDC), suicide rates increased 24 percent in the general population for both males and females. A link to the report may be found at: <http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/2016suicidedatareport.pdf>. Other VA mental health information can be found on the VA Mental Health page at: www.mentalhealth.va.gov. Information about the Crisis Line is available at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net; Veterans in crisis can call Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 or texting 838255. At www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/Suicide_Prevention_FactSheet_New_VA_Stats_070616_1400.pdf can be found the Suicide prevention fact sheet.

[Source: VA News Release | August 2, 016 ++]

Vet Tix ► Free Tickets for 13 Major SEPT Events

Vet Tix has tickets to 13 major events around the U.S. in September for vets, service members, and their families. Early September, including Labor Day weekend, is a great chance to spend time with your family and get out in your community while the weather is perfect and summer is wrapping up. The nonprofit Veteran Tickets Foundation, or Vet Tix, is currently distributing tickets for just some of the hundreds of events available at VetTix.org. Every event included on this list has at least 100 donated tickets available for our veteran and military members. How do you get these tickets? Visit <https://www.vettix.org/ref/26> , sign up, and request tickets to the below and hundreds of other events at no charge:

Sept. 2 Cincinnati, Ohio: Cincinnati Reds vs. St. Louis Cardinals baseball game

Sept. 3 Tucson, Arizona: Tucson Speedway, Modified Hot Shot 50

Sept. 3 Glendale, Arizona: BYU vs. University of Arizona football game

Sept. 3 Indianapolis, Indiana: Chevrolet Performance U.S. Nationals – NHRA Mello Yello drag racing series

Sept. 3 Sterling Heights, Michigan: 5th annual Summerland Tour with Sugar Ray, Everclear and Lit

Sept. 4 Dallas, Texas: Time Warp Tour with Tributes To P!nk, Alice in Chains, Prince and Fleetwood Mac

Sept. 4 Nichols, New York: Kenny Rogers: The Gambler concert
Sept. 5 Chicago, Illinois: Chicago White Sox vs. Detroit Tigers baseball game
Sept. 5 Minneapolis, Minnesota: Minnesota Twins vs. Kansas City Royals baseball game
Sept. 8 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: There Goes the Neighborhood Comedy Tour with the Reverend Bob Levy
Sept. 10 Auburn, Washington: Prophets of Rage – Make America Rage Again Tour
Sept. 10 Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State vs. Texas Tech college football game
Sept. 10 Maryland Heights, Missouri: Toby Keith Interstates and Tailgates Tour
[Source: Tack & Purpose | Steven Weintraub | August 24, 2016 ++]

Vet Cemetery Flags Update 01 ► Confederate Large-Scale Display Ban

The Department of Veterans Affairs has decided to ban the large-scale display of the Confederate flag in cemeteries overseen by the agency, following a House vote to do so earlier this year. In a letter to Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA) this month, the VA said it will no longer allow the Confederate flag to fly on any flagpole in national cemeteries. However, groups will still be permitted to adorn individual graves with small Confederate flags on two days of the year: Memorial Day and Confederate Memorial Day.



The VA said that after a yearlong review of its policies surrounding the flag's display in its cemeteries, it would change them in accordance with an amendment authored by Huffman that the House adopted in May. “We are aware of the concerns of those who wish to see Confederate flags removed from public venues because they are perceived by many as a symbol of racial intolerance. We are also aware that the national cemeteries originated during the Civil War and that they are the final resting places of those who served on both sides of that conflict and, as such, flags of the Confederacy are also viewed by some merely as historical symbols,” the VA's interim undersecretary for memorial affairs, Ronald Walters, wrote in a letter to Huffman.

While Huffman’s amendment to a VA spending bill passed on a bipartisan vote, a majority of House Republicans voted against the measure. A total of 84 Republicans voted with all but one Democrat in favor of Huffman's proposal, while 158 opposed it. The provision was ultimately left out of the final bicameral compromise VA appropriations legislation. Its exclusion from the final bill led Huffman and other House Democrats to urge the VA to change the policy regarding Confederate flag displays on its own in the absence of policy enacted by Congress. “While racist individuals and groups continue to embrace the Confederate battle flag, it has never been more clear that this anachronistic symbol of hatred, slavery, and insurrection should not be promoted or gratuitously displayed on federal property,” Huffman said in a statement 23 AUG. “That's why I am so grateful that the Department of

Veterans Affairs responded to our letter and to public concerns and decided to prohibit the large-scale display of Confederate flags on our national veterans cemeteries."

Debate flared over displaying the Confederate flag in the immediate aftermath of the racially motivated shooting at a historic black church in Charleston, S.C., last year. The National Park Service and multiple businesses subsequently announced they would stop selling items emblazoned with the Confederate flag as the nation reeled from the massacre. [Source: The Hill | Cristina Marcos | August 23, 2016 ++]

Vet Cemetery Grave Restrictions ► Gold Star Wife's Opinion

A Gold Star wife visiting loved ones at a cemetery in Augusta was told the items she left at headstones would be taken down. She says the cemetery's grave restrictions are disrespectful. "Driving in here and not seeing flags and not seeing balloons that loved ones leave for their heroes is not okay," said Balduf. Amy Balduf visits four graves every week at the Maine Veteran's Memorial Cemetery in Augusta. Her husband Marine Corps Sergeant Kevin Brian Balduf is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. She says she often finds herself wandering among the headstones to feel closer to her fallen hero. "I feel like he's here with me when I'm walking around here and not being able to go to Arlington all the time, this is where I can feel close to him when I can't get there," said Balduf.



Balduf participates in military support programs like the Summit Project, where she meets families suffering the same reality of losing a loved one. She often brings her children to the cemetery to share the stories of fallen veterans of gold star families. But when she was leaving balloons, pinwheels, and American flags on their headstones 23 AUG, she was informed that they'd be taken down. "This is a place where we're supposed to be able to grieve and we're supposed to leave these mementos, and they're not allowing it. I mean there's nothing in the policy that says you can't leave a balloon here. There's nothing in the policy that says you can't leave a token or memento here," said Balduf.

The policy Balduf is referring to does state that no structure of any type may be placed in the cemetery by family and that prohibited structures and objects will be removed by staff. According to Andria Horn, director of the bureau of veteran services, personal items are left on the headstones despite the policy, and staff usually leaves them for a week before collecting them for families to retrieve. There are four Maine Veteran's Cemeteries in the state, one in Caribou, another in Springvale, and two here in Augusta, and each must adhere to the guidelines of the National Cemetery Administration.

Horn says that veteran cemeteries are much more strict than municipal cemeteries. Due to maintenance issues and the differences in how people grieve, some may see flags and balloons as celebratory, others could be offended.

But Balduf believes families should have the right to leave more than flowers with their loved ones. "How is that fair to the families who come out here to the only place where they can spend family time around these marble headstones? That's it. There is no other family time. There's no one more hug, there's no one more kiss, there's no one more 'I love you.' This is it," said Balduf. [Source: WABI TV-5 | Brandon Doyen | August 24, 2016 ++]

Stolen Valor ► **Reported 160815 thru 160831**

Delaware Legislation. People seeking benefits by posing as veterans or active duty military personnel could now face a stiff fine under a measure just signed into law by Gov. Jack Markell. Sponsored by Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro, House Bill 80 (as amended) expands the crime of criminal impersonation to include those who falsely claim to be current or past members of the U.S. military for the purpose of "obtaining money, property, or other tangible benefit." The legislation also applies to veterans who try to benefit by deceptively claiming a higher rank than they achieved. Those found guilty of the new Class A misdemeanor will pay a steep price for their transgression. "The penalty is \$1,000 and the judge is not allowed to reduce or suspend that fine," Collins said. "I think veterans deserve all the respect we can possibly give them. This law will serve to help protect the legacy they worked so hard to create."

More than a dozen legislators and members of veterans' organizations recently attended a signing ceremony for the law in Markell's Dover office, with many sharing stories of scams perpetrated by individuals who could now be found guilty of violating the new statute. "I think there is more of this than is being reported," said Sen. Bruce Ennis, D-Smyrna, the co-prime sponsor of the bill. Commissioner Ronald Sarg, with the Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs, said it is an easy crime to perpetrate since it is not difficult for someone "to put on fatigues and pretend to be a veteran." Collins said the law will hopefully give authorities a tool to crack down on such acts and potentially curtail them. Rep. Ruth Briggs King, R-Georgetown, a co-sponsor of the bill, said she believes the law will raise public awareness, making it more difficult to commit this type of fraud. The measure passed the General Assembly unanimously. It takes effect immediately. [Source: Cape Gazette | August 22, 2016 ++]

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Davenport, IA. A 70-year-old veteran has sentenced to five years' probation and fined \$5,000 for buying or trying to buy congressional military decorations and medals without proper authorization. The U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Iowa says **Robert Ellsworth Brooks** was sentenced 30 AUG after earlier pleading guilty under the Stolen Valor Act. Brooks served in both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army in the 1960s and at times in the Army Reserves and Navy in the 1970s and 1980s. Prosecutors say Brooks earned a number of medals by 1970, including the Distinguished Flying Cross and Bronze Star Medal. But prosecutors say he claimed various other medals throughout the years, including Purple Hearts and Silver Stars, which he knew he had not earned and had bought. [Source: Quad City Times | August 30, 2016 ++]

Vet Service Dogs Update 19 ► **VA | Mental Health Disorder Eligibility**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced 18 AUG that it is piloting a protocol to implement veterinary health benefits for mobility service dogs approved for Veterans with a chronic impairment that substantially limits mobility associated with mental health disorders. "We take our responsibility for the care and safety of Veterans very seriously," said VA Under Secretary for Health, Dr. David J. Shulkin. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to providing appropriate, safe and effective, compassionate care to all Veterans. Implementing the veterinary health benefit for mobility service dogs approved for Veterans with a chronic impairment that

substantially limits mobility associated with mental health disorders may prove to be significantly beneficial for some Veterans. The Service Dog Benefits Pilot will evaluate this premise.”

VA has been providing veterinary benefits to Veterans diagnosed as having visual, hearing or substantial mobility impairments and whose rehabilitation and restorative care is clinically determined to be optimized through the assistance of a guide dog or service dog. With this pilot, this benefit is being provided to Veterans with a chronic impairment that substantially limits mobility associated with a mental health disorder for whom the service dog has been identified as the optimal way for the Veteran to manage the mobility impairment and live independently. Service dogs are distinguished from pets and comfort animals because they are specially trained to perform tasks or work for a specific individual with a disability who cannot perform the task or accomplish the work independently. To be eligible for the veterinary health benefit, the service dog must be trained by an organization accredited by Assistance Dogs International in accordance with VA regulations.

Currently, 652 Veterans with approved guide or service dogs receive the veterinary service benefit. This Pilot is anticipated to provide the veterinary service benefit to up to 100 additional Veterans with a chronic impairment that substantially limits mobility associated with a mental health disorder. The VA veterinary service benefit includes comprehensive wellness and sick care (annual visits for preventive care, maintenance care, immunizations, dental cleanings, screenings, etc.), urgent/emergent care, prescription medications, and care for illnesses or disorders when treatment enables the dog to perform its duties in service to the Veteran. Additional information about VA’s service dog program can be found at <http://www.prosthetics.va.gov/ServiceAndGuideDogs.asp>. [Source: VA News Release | August 18, 2016 ++]



Vet Cemetery California Update 15 ► Golden Gate Gravesites Vandalized

A 29-year-old Berkeley man was arrested for drunken driving Sunday night (14 AUG) after he drove over dozens of gravesites at Golden Gate National Cemetery, according to police. Officers went to the cemetery at 1300 Sneath Lane around 9:20 p.m. to check out a report of a vehicle collision. Pierce Jagger was found on the grounds inside his severely damaged vehicle. Police said an investigation determined Jagger intentionally drove through the gates to the cemetery, which was closed at the time, and over dozens of gravesites on a grassy hill. He also tried to drive up a series of granite steps, but his vehicle became disabled. Jagger was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs and driving with a suspended license. Police said he also could face felony vandalism charges. Constructed in 1937, Golden Gate National Cemetery is the final resting place for scores of veterans and their family members. Notable persons interred there include Navy Adm. Chester W. Nimitz and Medal of Honor recipient Army Cpl. Edward A. Bennett. Anyone with information about the case can contact the San Bruno Police Department at 650-616-7100 or sbpd@sanbruno.ca.gov. Information can be left anonymously. [Source: The Mercury News | Jason Green | August 16, 2016 ++]



CT Veterans Hall of Fame Update 01 ► Nominations Sought | 2016

Connecticut officials are seeking nominations for this year's class of inductees to the state Veterans Hall of Fame. Democratic Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman and Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Sean Connolly are urging the public to submit their nominations before the 23 SEP deadline. The Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame recognizes veterans who have made significant contributions to their communities after leaving military service. The hall inducts at least 10 Connecticut veterans every year based on nominations, recommendations by an executive committee and final selection by the lieutenant governor. Nominees must have lived in Connecticut for at least five years, received an honorable discharge from the military, be of good moral character and have no felony convictions. Information on how to submit nominations is available at www.ct.gov/ctva . [Source: The Day | August 13, 2016 ++]

Gold Star Families Memorial ► Ground Broken in Annapolis

For all too many families every day is Memorial Day. On 15 AUG dignitaries and others gathered outside Annapolis to break ground for a memorial monument honoring Gold Star families who bear the burden of losing a loved one in war. “We are here on their behalf to break ground on something no one wants, but that all of America needs,” Maryland Secretary of Veterans Affairs George Owings told those gathered at the monument site, just uphill from the World War II Memorial on Route 450 across the Severn River from the city.

When men and women choose to serve in the military their families can display a Blue Star service banner to denote their loved one’s service. Not one of them wants to become a Gold Star family, denoting that a family member has died in war. “Thousands of Marylanders have made the ultimate sacrifice and countless others bear visible and invisible wounds of war,” Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford said. “With this monument we continue to vow never to forget the loved ones who are left behind and bear the wounds of their own,” Rutherford continued. “We remember their bravery and the tremendous debt we owe them.” Several of the organizers pushing the event credited Owings and Gov. Larry Hogan for relatively quick action to get the monument rolling.

“We had our first meeting last December,” said Annapolis resident and Iraq war veteran Chase Savage. “I can’t believe we are here already.” Savage, who lost part of his right arm in an IED explosion in 2004, told the gathering that he was shocked to learn there was not a monument already honoring Gold Star families. “My sacrifice is nothing compared to what Gold Star families have given our country,” he said. “Maryland has a lot of monuments. There are monuments to watermen, athletes who could swing a baseball bat, and the great work of firefighters. How is it possible there is no monument to honor Gold Star families?” He and others hooked up with the Hershel

“Woody” Williams Medal of Honor Foundation, named for the World War II Medal of Honor winner. After meeting with Owings, they were off and running.

Gary Swanson, of Rose Haven, who ten years ago lost his son, Staff Sgt. Christopher Swanson, killed by a sniper in Iraq while serving his third tour, was moved by the effort. He has been active in the Gold Star community and pushed for Maryland to issue Gold Star license plates. “I am so thankful for all those who came out to support this effort,” he said. “This memorial will allow all Gold Star families and residents of the state of Maryland to reflect on the great sacrifice our men and women make. “Sometimes we get complacent. But with men like Chase, a wounded and decorated Iraq veteran, and others (working to do this), we are humbled they want to give back to us.”

The monument is being built under the auspices of the Williams foundation. Williams earned the Medal of Honor on Iwo Jima when he single handedly took out several enemy pillboxes with a flame thrower over four hours. The foundation has built eight memorials, the first in Williams’ native West Virginia. Four more are in the works, including the one in Annapolis. “It is a privilege for me to be associated with the Gold Star families and an opportunity to do a service, or another service, for my country and communities across the country,” the spry 92-year-old said, with the distinctive blue ribbon bearing his medal around his neck. He sees it as doing more work for the real heroes, those left behind on the battlefield, a notion impressed upon him the day after he and 10 other Marines were presented medals by President Harry Truman.

“We got orders to report to the office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps,” Williams said after the ceremony. The commandant was Gen. A.A. Vandergrift, himself a Medal of Honor winner for leading the Marine assaults on Guadalcanal. “We had to talk to him individually,” Williams said. “He told me this, ‘That medal does not belong to you. It belongs to all the Marines who did not get to come home. Never do anything to tarnish their honor.’” Williams has tried to live up to that notion literally and figuratively. He is in the midst of the campaign to erect memorials across the country to honor the families of the fallen. “We have a vision to have one in every state, in communities like this one. And it is rolling all over the country,” he said. He takes special care of the medal, too. “I keep this medal shined,” he said. “It will never tarnish.”

The four-panel granite memorial will sit in an area recently donated for the cause by the State Highway Administration, said Dennis Brant, spokesman for the foundation. The 14,000-pound, \$55,000 memorial is two-sided. One side has a gold star and reads “A tribute to mothers and fathers and relatives who have sacrificed a loved one for our freedom” across the four panels. On the other side four images will be etched into the granite with images relating to Maryland. Organizers say it could be completed in the next several weeks. [Source: Task & Purpose | E.B. Furgurson | August 16, 2016 ++]



Korean War Vets ► Ronald M. Sparks | Homecoming

US Army Corporal Ronald M. Sparks spent his last night in Cambridge more than 65 years ago, baby-sitting for his three young nephews before he left to fight in the Korean War. The night made a lasting impression on one of the boys, 3-year-old Bob, who woke up and found Sparks reading a newspaper in his family's living room. Sparks, who was 19 then, never returned. But Bob, who met Sparks for the first and only time that night, has found his lost uncle and is bringing him home decades after he died in a prisoner-of-war camp in North Korea. "I'm so pleased to have brought an American hero home," said Bob Sparks. "I feel like I've done something for Ron."



US Army Corporal Ronald M. Sparks.

The remains of the soldier, who died in May 1951 at age 20, are being flown Tuesday to Logan International Airport from Hawaii, where Sparks had been interred until scientists at a military lab recently identified his body through DNA testing. Sparks, who received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart, will be honored with a procession passing by his former home on River Street in Cambridge followed by a ceremony at Cambridge City Hall, said Neil MacInnes-Barker, director of the city's Veterans' Services Department.



A banner honoring US Army Corporal Ronald M. Sparks, who died in a prisoner-of-war camp in North Korea, was placed over Massachusetts Avenue in front of Cambridge City Hall.

Bob Sparks said he began searching for the lost soldier 11 years ago. His father, Bill, was dying and left his son with a mission: Find your Uncle Ron. "On his death bed, he squeezed my hand and he said, 'I know you will do everything,' " said Sparks, 68, who lives in Edgartown. "Then he breathed his last breath, and he was gone." At the time, Sparks said his family knew little about what had become of his uncle. Initially, his relatives were told that Ronald Sparks went missing in 1951 when his unit was overrun by Chinese forces who backed the North Koreans. After the war, the family learned he had been wounded in that confrontation and was last seen being led away by Chinese troops. Ronald Sparks was presumed dead.

Bob Sparks said his grandparents, Herbert and Betty, contacted their son's Army pals to try to learn more about what happened to him. They bought an extra grave at Woodlawn Cemetery in Everett so Ronald could be buried with them and his brother, Clifford, who had been struck and killed by a car as a child. "His parents died heartbroken," Bob Sparks said. "Up until the very end that's what they asked [my father]: 'Bill, Don't give up on Ron.'" A few months after his father's death, Bob Sparks said he visited the Pentagon and got assistance from the Army's Past Conflict Repatriations Branch, which is devoted to identifying unaccounted-for soldiers. The organization runs a DNA database, and a few years ago, Bob Sparks said he and his 41-year-old son, Jared, submitted samples for testing.

In June, the military called and said Jared's DNA matched an unknown soldier whose remains had been buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii after the Korean War. Bob Sparks had found the uncle who had saluted him in his family's Fairmont Street apartment before tucking him into bed during their only meeting decades before. "It's a bittersweet feeling," he said. "We're going to have a funeral, and it's going to be sad and there'll be lots of tears, but there's so much joy to bringing Ron home." Among those who plan to attend the ceremony in Cambridge is Moses Moore, 84, who went to the former Houghton Grammar School with Sparks. Moore said he knew his childhood friend, who was nicknamed Sparky, had died in the Korean War, but had no idea that his body had been missing for 65 years. "I'm just so happy that he's going to be coming home," Moore said. "They always said they will leave no one behind."

The ceremony in Cambridge is also expected to draw members of the area's South Korean community and South Korea's consul general in Boston, who plans to present Sparks's family with an award, according to the Rev. Paul Kim, pastor emeritus at Antioch Baptist Church in Cambridge. "We are all indebted to someone like Ronald Sparks who gave his life for our country's freedom," said Kim, an Army veteran who was born in South Korea. "His life is so special to us." A wake was planned for Thursday evening at DeVito Funeral Home in Arlington, followed by burial on Friday at Woodlawn Cemetery, according to Sparks's obituary. His siblings, Irene and Lawrence, plan to attend, Bob Sparks said.

MacInnes-Barker said 190 Massachusetts soldiers who served in the Korean War remain unaccounted for, including two Marines from Cambridge. Bob Sparks encouraged the families of unaccounted-for service members to ask the military for help. "One thing I learned is that they never, never gave up," he said. "These are not forgotten soldiers." [Source: Boston Globe | Laura Crimaldi | August 15, 2016 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 193 ► Student Vets & Transitioning Service Members

Finding employment as a student veteran or a transitioning service member can be difficult. Many companies don't know how to translate your service into a career within their company, and others don't accommodate students — but these Hirpurpose partners do both. These companies are actively seeking student veterans and transitioning service members.

Walgreens

Walgreens is one of the nation's top pharmacies and wellness and beauty companies. Walgreens is currently looking for transitioning service members or student veterans to fill their store manager-in-training positions. The company provides in-depth leadership training through their two-year program that will equip interested candidates with the experience to move into higher levels of retail management.

[See all jobs with Walgreens ».](#)



Comerica Bank is a financial services company headquartered in Dallas, Texas, strategically arranged into three major business segments: the Business Bank, the Retail Bank, and Wealth Management. In addition to Texas, Comerica Bank has locations in Arizona, California, Florida, and Michigan, with select businesses operating in several other states, as well as in Canada and Mexico. The company is looking for qualified transitioning service members or student veterans for their 18-to-24-month rotational training program to prepare them to become relationship managers. [See all jobs with Comerica Bank »](#).



The Home Depot, the world’s largest home improvement specialty retailer, is seeking motivated individuals with military experience to fill their tool rental technician and distribution center office positions. The company has been recognized for its support of military members and their families through its commitment to hire 55,000 veterans in five years. [See all jobs with The Home Depot »](#).



Mohawk Industries, the world’s largest flooring company, has a variety of openings that are a great fit for transitioning service members or student veterans. The company values military service and experience, and operates a robust veterans recruiting program that offers a military skills-matching tool on its website. Current job opportunities include positions in warehouse management, supply chain, materials handling, and sales. [See all jobs with Mohawk Industries »](#).



If you are a veteran or family member who has considered sales, but who may not have a degree — you should definitely explore the hundreds of roles available with Kellogg’s. Kellogg’s is a food products company that is well known for its commitment to those who have served in our armed forces. The company is looking for individuals with communication, leadership, negotiation, problem-solving and at least intermediate technology skills. [See all jobs with Kellogg’s »](#).

[Source: Task & Purpose | Hirepurpose | August 16, 2016] ++]

Vet Jobs Update 194 ► Cybersecurity Training

[The Department of Homeland Security](#) (DHS) and [Hire Our Heroes](#) have teamed up to offer training for Veterans in cybersecurity, in support of Veterans join our nation’s cybersecurity workforce. DHS’s Federal Virtual Training Environment (Fed VTE) offers free online, on-demand cyber security training to government employees and Veterans. Veterans can sign up for an account through the [Hire Our Heroes website](#) and follow instructions through “ID me” to verify veteran status and register for a FedVTE account. DHS also offers a Veterans Cybersecurity Training and Education Guide to help Veterans assess their readiness and interest in a cyber security career, prepare and plan for the necessary training, and engage by developing cybersecurity skills and abilities. (https://niccs.us-cert.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Veterans_Guide.pdf?trackDocs=Veterans_Guide.pdf).

Fed VTE has over 100,000 users and contains more than 800 hours of training. Users can take [courses](#) in risk management, malware analysis, mobile and device security and ethical hacking.

According to the training website (<https://hireourheroes.org/veterans-training>), cybersecurity professionals report an average salary of \$116,000, nearly three times the national average. The demand for cybersecurity experts is growing 12 times faster than the current U.S. job market, making cybersecurity one of the most highly sought-after careers in the country. In addition to these resources and in hopes of developing a technically skilled workforce and a pipeline for future employees, DHS and the National Security Agency (NSA) jointly sponsor the National Centers of Academic Excellence program. Through this program, Veterans interested in pursuing a degree in cybersecurity or a related field can attend a college or university designated as a Center of Academic Excellence and recognized for aligning their programs with skills needed to work in the career field.

Veterans enrolled in select cybersecurity academic programs may want to apply for the [CyberCorps@: Scholarship for Service \(SFS\)](#). This program provides scholarships for college students studying cybersecurity in return for Federal, State, local or tribal government service upon graduation. Have questions? Contact vets@HQ.DHS.GOV. [Source: Vantage Point | August 16, 2016++]



Vet Jobs Update 195 ► Agriculture

Federal officials have spent the last few years developing new resources to help put veterans into agriculture jobs. Now, they're working to make those jobs look cool. Officials from the Department of Agriculture on 23 AUG unveiled new plans to better explain and market a host of industry jobs to recently separated service members, calling it a growth area that fits nicely with the skills and training of those veterans. "People need to know this is about more than just handling livestock," said Lanon Baccam, deputy undersecretary for agricultural services at USDA. "This is about engineering, drone technology, data analysis and more. Breaking down the walls is key."

Earlier this year, department officials partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on promoting agriculture as a potential career path for troops after they leave the military. Now, the officials are shifting that work to highlight many of the industry's cutting-edge agriculture jobs, through a new web portal and jobs site. The goal is both to help veterans find work and to help industry officials find workers. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, who spoke to corporate officials and veterans advocates during an unveiling event Tuesday, said that current training programs and job applicants are expected to fill only about half of the industry's open jobs in the next decade.

Meanwhile, department officials have raised concerns about the long-term viability of domestic food production in the country and the significant drop in America's rural population in recent decades. The average age of farmers in America is 58, according to USDA data. There are twice as many farmers in America older than 65 than farmers

under the age of 35. Vilsack said those challenges point toward encouraging veterans to take an opportunity to serve their country again, in an agriculture career. "These folks understand duty, responsibility and teamwork," he said. "Anyone who hires them benefits from the training they received."

Mike Michaud , assistant secretary of labor for veterans employment and training, said his agency has worked to help connect veterans to those openings. But chamber officials acknowledged that most veterans' perception of agriculture jobs involves shovels and dirt. Industry leaders want to redefine the potential opportunities as careers with flexibility and plenty of cool gadgets. That includes jobs like drone operators, who help collect data on crop growth and spray pesticides for farms. The new effort will also include collection more stories of veterans in agriculture, to better relate how their skills and experiences translate into the civilian work. Additional information on veteran careers in agriculture will be posted on the Chamber's Hiring Our Heroes web site. <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/hiring-our-heroes>. [Source: Military Times | Leo Shane | August 24, 2016 ++]

Vet Charity Watch Update 62 ► Report on VSO Operations

The spirit of charity was in front of Publix on 26 AUG in Sebring FL. Before they went into the grocery store or after they left, customer after customer pitched a dollar or two in a gallon bucket marked, "Please Help." At 3:30 p.m., the bucket was 75 percent full. One lady spoke to the young man in a tan khaki T-shirt and green khaki pants behind the table before pulling all the coins from her blouse pocket. Muscular, with a high-and-tight haircut, he looked ex-military. Except for the black tennis shoes. One donor was a corrections officer in uniform, wearing the same green pants. The corrections officer got into a Ford pickup truck with a U.S. Marines emblem on the Florida tag.

Most read the big sign on the flag-decorated card table: "**Veterans Support Organization.**" What they should have read was the small type on his flag-decorated name tag: "NOT A VETERAN." "They just start giving their money out," said Gene Brown, first vice commander the American Legion Post in Sebring. "I'm proud of Highlands County for doing that, but it's not going to be used here." That's despite what the sign said: "Money raised helps local veterans." The man wouldn't give his name, but he said higher-ups at the VSO would choose a local charity later. How much will go to Highlands County? He couldn't say, but page after page in the notebook on the table described the VSO or copied news reports or letters from the attorney general. One says 78 percent goes to the VSO itself. "Are you a veteran?" Denise Williams demanded to know Friday. "I never said I was," the man said, and then he pointed out his name tag. "I've been in combat. Twice," said Williams, an Army sergeant who has served two Middle East tours. "Where is your organization from?" She is the official veterans service officer for Highlands County.

According to Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi, VSO is a Rhode Island non-profit with its principal place of business at 4245 SW High Meadows Ave., Palm City. Two Publix managers came outside. Unaware of who the man was and who Williams was, they assured her that VSO had cleared the man to be there and set up a table on Friday and Saturday. WPTV, the NBC channel 5 in West Palm Beach, reported on July 2, 2015 that Richard VanHouten admitted while some of the money VSO collects goes to veteran grants, most of the millions pay for his own veteran's work program, which puts veterans on the streets to collect money for his charity. "Why give the work to other professional for-profit companies?" he told the TV station. "Give it to the local veteran..." Charitywatch.org didn't buy that. "What are you doing to help veterans, putting them on the streets to beg?" asked Daniel Borochoff.

Others say VSO does good. A May 2012 post on courtantblogs.com said, "Richard Bittleman, my dad ... worked for VSO as a substance abuse relapse prevention specialist for about 14 months. While at VSO, he and Ms. Giron

build a 8,500 sq. ft. center in NY and were running programs there that changed the lives of homeless veterans. One veteran even was about to kill himself when he got a call from America Works sending him to VSO. He told his story at the grand opening and everyone was in tears. It was filmed.” Williams pointed Friday to the sign on the card table at Publix. “We want to know if the money will go to help local veterans, that’s what we want to know.” A Google search turned up dozens of stories about VSO.

- On Dec. 17, 2012, the Associated Press reported VSO, “a charity already under scrutiny for how it raised hundreds of thousands of dollars in Tennessee, handed out only a fraction of the money in the form of gift cards, and threatened to fire workers if they didn’t meet fundraising quotas.”
- On Feb. 28, 2014, FOX 4 tracked “the VSO across the country and found South Carolina kicked out the charity, Connecticut suspended the VSO after members of Congress complained to the Federal Trade On June 22, 2015, ABC Local 10 News published an article titled, "Veteran questions legitimacy of fundraiser claiming to be veteran"
- On July 8, 2015, WPTV published an article titled, "Veteran records run in with veterans charity under nationwide scrutiny: Veterans Support Organization under investigation"
- On July 10, 2015, WPBF News posted a video titled, "Bad reputation follows veteran charity"
- On November 18, 2015, myStatesman.com published an article titled, "Veterans Support Organization shut down by Texas attorney general."Commission ... Florida slapped the company with a fine for hiring felons and misleading the public, and North Carolina is now investigating.”

In Florida, Attorney General Pam Bondi has an online file: “Beginning at least November 2005 through the (Aug. 11, 2015), respondents have engaged in the business of soliciting donations from consumers in Florida and elsewhere in order to provide financial support and work programs for financially distressed and/or homeless veterans.” The attorney general “has investigated allegations that, when promoting its organization and soliciting donations from the general public, respondents have misrepresented the amount and type of financial and non-monetary support that it provides to veterans. Respondents deny these allegations.”

Charity Navigator, www.charitynavigator.org, an impartial evaluator of publicly reported financial information, listed several reputable charitable organizations, included the Honor Flight Network, the Wounded Warrior Project and Disabled American Veterans. “Seventy-eight percent,” Brown repeated in a telephone conversation Saturday morning. That’s how much will go to VSO. He and two other members of local veterans organizations planned to meet at Publix on Saturday morning (27 AUG). “We’re going to see what this guy is all about. We’re going to be dressed up in uniform.” But the man and the card table were gone.

Charity Navigator, as an impartial evaluator of publicly reported financial information, takes no position on allegations made or issues raised by third parties, nor does Charity Navigator seek to confirm or verify the accuracy of allegations made or the merits of issues raised by third parties that may be referred to in the Donor Advisory. Charity Navigator, as an impartial evaluator of publicly reported financial information, takes no position on allegations made or issues raised by third parties, nor does Charity Navigator seek to confirm or verify the accuracy of allegations made or the merits of issues raised by third parties that may be referred to in the Donor Advisory.

[Source: Task & Purpose | Gary Pinnell | August 28, 2016 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | Lejeune Update 62 ► Senator's OMB Letter

on 18 AUG US Senators Richard Burr and Thom Tillis sent a letter to Office of Management and Budget Director Shaun Donovan urging the Department of Veterans Affairs to grant presumptive disability status to veterans suffering from diseases caused by poisoned water at Camp Lejeune, including Parkinson’s Disease, Bladder Cancer and Leukemia, among others. It was one year ago, August of 2015, that the Department of Veterans Affairs first

announced those victims would receive disability benefits. “While affected veterans are receiving health care, many have lost their homes and their ability to work and financially support themselves because of the disabilities caused by the illnesses they developed from toxic exposure,” the Senators wrote. “Many more are teetering on the brink of losing their homes and bankruptcy. This is not just a North Carolina problem; this is a national problem.”

Read the full letter below:

Dear Director Donovan:

We write to you with concerns about the Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) proposed rule that addresses diseases associated with exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, NC (RIN: 2900-AP66). This proposed rule is currently pending review with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and we are concerned about further delays in approving this rule. Please understand that further delay in approving this rule will cause significant harm to the well-being of thousands of disabled veterans.

From 1953 to 1987, nearly one million servicemembers and their family members were poisoned by contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune, NC. In 2012, Congress passed, and the President signed into law, H.R. 1627, the Honoring America’s Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-154). This law provides health care for Camp Lejeune veterans and their families who are suffering from a variety of medical conditions associated with exposure to the contaminated water. However, the law did not address disability compensation and presumptions of service-connected disabilities because VA had to address those issues internally and through the federal rule making process. With the submission of RIN: 2900-AP66, the VA is proposing to amend its adjudication regulations relating to presumptive service connection for certain diseases associated with contaminants present in the base water supply at Camp Lejeune and finally provide some financial relief to these veterans. We ask that OMB approve this rule immediately and allow it to proceed to the public comment period.

While affected veterans are receiving health care, many have lost their homes and their ability to work and financially support themselves because of the disabilities caused by the illnesses they developed from toxic exposure. Many more are teetering on the brink of losing their homes and bankruptcy. This is not just a North Carolina problem; this is a national problem. One Camp Lejeune veteran said it well when he said, “It’s great they are getting health care, too bad they are living in their Buick.” The current process the VA has in place for evaluating disability claims from Camp Lejeune veterans is insufficient and mired in bureaucracy. This is leading to many disabled veterans, some terminally ill, being continually denied disability compensation from the VA despite exhaustive scientific research showing a clear causal connection between their medical conditions and the exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune. The bureaucratic mistreatment of these veterans is unacceptable, and it cannot be allowed to continue.

We are not of the opinion that scientific research on this issue is lacking or should give OMB pause in approving this rule. To the contrary, the research that has been conducted on the contaminated water at Camp Lejeune by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is exhaustive. The recent Public Health Assessment conducted by ATSDR shows clear causal connection between the contaminated water and the nine conditions that are under consideration in this rule for presumption of service connection.

Again, we urge OMB to immediately approve this proposed rule and allow it to proceed to the public comment period. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Richard Burr
United States Senator

Thom Tillis
United States Senator

[Source: Washington Post | Karoun Demirjian | August 2, 2016 ++]

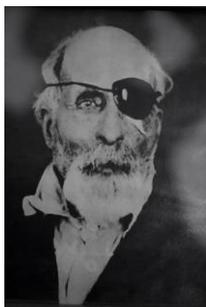


Vet Cremains Update 33 ► Civil War Pvt. Jewett Williams

Pvt. Jewett Williams, a Civil War soldier who fought with the 20th Maine Volunteer Infantry regiment, will never be forgotten again. This month, Williams' cremains were claimed after 94 years then transported across the country from Oregon to Maine by the Patriot Guard Riders, a volunteer motorcycle group with members from across the nation whose mission is to honor U.S. military Veterans both living and dead.

The Patriot Guard began its journey with Williams's cremains on 1 AUG in Portland, Oregon. Members of the guard have traveled by motorcycle with Williams' remains roughly 3,500 miles, across 19 states with transfers at each state line. The escort made a stop at the Appomattox Court House National Historical Park in Virginia, where a ceremony was held in Williams' honor August 18. As part of the 20th Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiment, Williams was at Appomattox Court House for the end of the Civil War, as Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered to Gen. Ulysses Grant in a ceremony on April 12, 1865.

Over 100 motorcyclists participated in the segments of Williams' journey through Virginia alone. Riders from states that were not a part of the route, such as Florida, Georgia and South Carolina, traveled north to participate at Appomattox. "That's who we are. We are the patriots, we are the guard of our Veterans and we want to make sure to get them back home to their resting places," said Virginia Patriot Guard rider James Tennant, who carried Williams' cremains during the ceremony at Appomattox. Tennant, a Navy Veteran and a ten-year member of the Patriot Guard Rider, described the ride as the highlight of his life. He said the Patriot Guard Riders have participated in numerous escorts. However, he acknowledged the history that was made during this particular mission. When discussing the receipt of Williams' cremains for the leg of the mission that led to Appomattox, Tennant said, "that's a body, it's a person, a Veteran, a soldier... that touches my heart. To be able to put him on my motorcycle with my wife and ride here, it's an experience I can't describe. It's unbelievable."



Jewett Williams

Jewett Williams was born in 1843 in the small farming community of Hodgdon in northern Maine. He was drafted into the U.S. Army at Bangor, Maine, on Oct. 12, 1864. Williams served his last six months with the 20th Maine Infantry regiment fighting during the siege of Petersburg, Virginia, the Stony Creek (or “Applejack”) Raid and other battles, such as Peebles Farm, Hatcher’s Run, White Oak Road, Quaker Road, Five Forks and Appomattox. After the war, Williams returned home to Maine before living in several different states. Upon moving to Michigan, he and his wife had their first child, who died at 19 months. They then moved to Minnesota where they had five more children before settling in Washington and then Oregon in the 1890s. Up until about 1919, Williams frequently spoke to local school groups during Memorial Day events. His wife died in 1920.

Williams died in 1922, at the age of 78, after a three-month stay in the Oregon State Hospital for the Insane in Salem, Oregon. There, he was diagnosed with senility. His ashes were discovered in a copper can in 2004, shelved in a shed on the hospital’s property alongside the remains of more than 3,600 other people. No one claimed Williams’ cremains until Maine historian Tom Desjardin, who was researching members of the 20th Maine stumbled across an online archive that housed Williams’ record.

The effort to transport Williams to his final resting place in Maine was a joint effort coordinated by volunteers, including the historian who found him, the Patriot Guard Riders, the Maine Living History Association, with support from the Togus National Cemetery, the adjutant general of the Maine National Guard and the Oregon and Maine state departments of Veterans affairs. The Patriot Guard Riders delivered Williams’ cremains on August 22 to his surviving family members in Maine. [Source: Vantage Point | August 22, 2016 ++]

Vet Cross Country Run ► 93-year-old Ernie Andrus

After two years and 10 months, 93-year-old Ernie Andrus has made it across America. The World War II Navy veteran dipped his toes in the Atlantic Ocean Saturday morning 20 AUG, ending a cross-country run that started in San Diego. Local media reported that Andrus was surrounded by hundreds of people including family members and friends who have joined him at different parts along his journey. He started his trek Oct. 7, 2013 on the sands of San Diego, weaving his way over the months and years through the southern United States until he reached St. Simon's Island in Georgia on Saturday morning. "Oh, it's great," Andrus told The Brunswick News after the run was over. "I'm glad to have finished and met the goal. But I wish it wasn't over."

People traveled from as far away as Arizona and New York to be there at the end of his journey. A marching band welcomed him, and the crowds shouted his name. "All these people, it's so wonderful," he said. "This is great, this is the biggest crowd I have had, ever." John and Michelle Crosby met Andrus when he ran through Madisonville, La., last year and went on to accompany him on 15 legs of his journey, including his trek through Mobile, Ala., in February. Along the way they have helped him with police escorts. But this was the first time they had seen him since Mobile. Mobile City Councilman John Williams met Andrus when he ran into the district Williams represents. "It didn't take long after his arrival to know we had a special person in our city," Williams told AL.com. Andrus turned 93 on Friday.

He was running to raise money to return a WWII-era ship in Indiana to Normandy, France, for the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landing. He was a medic on a similar ship during the war. Now that this epic run is

finished, Andrus has already planned a new adventure. He's going to drive his motor home to Alaska where his stepdaughter lives and drive the Alaska Highway. [Source: Associated Press | August 21, 2016 ++]

Photo # 80-G-252795 USS LST-325 stranded at low tide during the Normandy invasion, 12 June 1944



June 12, 1944: The U.S. Navy's LST 325 sits on Normandy Beach at low tide. Ernie Andrus has just run across America to raise money for it.

Obit: John William Vessey Jr. ► 18 AUG 2016

On Aug. 18, a great man died in his home in North Oaks, Minn. – retired U.S. Army Gen. John William Vessey Jr. He was 94. If any senior officer could be included in a “Grunt Hall of Fame” or in a “Best Person Hall of Honor,” it would be Vessey. Gen. Vessey faked his birth records to join the Minnesota National Guard at the age of 16 in 1939. During the Battle of Anzio in World War II, he made his first great mark. The German panzers had broken through and portions of the assault force made it to part of the beach. This was a moment when Commanding Gen. Mark Clark considered withdrawing from the lodgment. 1st Sgt. Vessey was acting as chief of smoke in his artillery battery, which was directly astride the German advance. With the bulk of the leadership dead or wounded, he took charge of his position, lowered the guns to zero elevation and broke the back of the tank attack. Vessey was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions and commissioned as a second lieutenant.

During his service in Vietnam, then Lt. Col. Vessey performed a near re-enactment of Anzio at Suoi Tre (LZ Gold) on March 21, 1967. The following is written from a first person observation as related to me.

- Lt. Col. Vessey commanded a 105 artillery battalion that was inserted at Suoi Tre on 19 MAR. The location was in the center of a Viet Cong main force element and both sides immediately began exchanging fire throughout the period. On the night of March 20-21, the fire support base was hit with a reinforced regiment of main force Viet Cong, augmented by a heavy weapons regiment and additional infantry. The base was entirely isolated from reinforcements at the time.
- 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor (M48s), opcon to 25th Infantry Division and part of the 4th Infantry Division, conducted a forced march through the jungle the entire night to relieve Gold.

- The tanks, without accompanying infantry, made a trail through the dense spongy jungle as there was no road. Finally around 7:30 a.m. on the 21st, the lead tanks of Commanding 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor broke through into Gold.
- The base was at the point of being overrun from 360 degrees and the bad guys were inside the wire. All the 105s were at zero elevation firing beehive as fast as they could be loaded. Vessey went to each gun position and instructed the gunners on how to crimp the fuses on high-explosive rounds so they would explode less than 30 meters from the barrel.
- Vessey, in coordination with the infantry leadership, went to the infantry bunkers moving troops to compensate for the casualties and encourage them. The infantry battalion security force was reduced to less than half strength and many of the gun bunnies were using their small arms close in.
- The armor, attacking without infantry, fired canister in the rear of the attackers with the armor company commander, Cpt. Kimmerling, determining that the risk to the fire support base troops was greater if he did not use canister in their direction.

The after action report of the 25th Infantry Division summarized the situation. The situation inside Fire Support Base Gold had by this time become so critical that howitzers within the perimeter were lowered to fire directly into the waves of advancing enemy soldiers. The tenaciously held perimeter of the fire support base had been penetrated in the north and southeast by 7:51 a.m. During this penetration, the enemy succeeded in overrunning and destroying one M-55 Quad .50 caliber machine gun and actually penetrating one of the howitzer positions. The other Quad .50 MG had been destroyed by an anti-tank round during the initial attack. In all, two howitzers were destroyed by mortar and anti-tank rounds, and nine others were damaged. Additionally, many of the more than 500 rocket-propelled grenade anti-tank rounds, which were fired into the support base, landed in the ammunition stores.

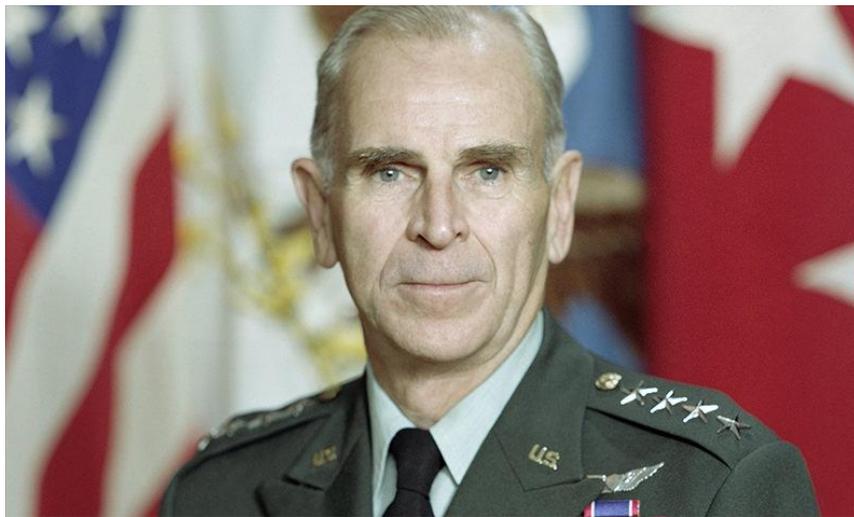
In spite of the withering small arms fire and the exploding stores of 105mm ammunition, the gun crews remained at their guns, cannibalizing the destroyed howitzers to keep the damaged ones firing. Crew members from destroyed guns carried ammunition and stepped in to fill vacancies as casualties occurred in the operation crews. All cooks, clerks and other available personnel of the artillery battalion, which had been formed into a preplanned reaction force, moved to block the penetration of the infantry's perimeter. By this time the infantry soldiers on the perimeter of the fire support base, who were subjected to the brunt of the assault, were fighting from isolated positions as the determined enemy force penetrated and encircled the United States defensive positions.

Small elements of the U.S. soldiers fighting fiercely in hand-to-hand combat continued to resist the assaulting enemy. As the fighting intensified and ammunition stocks depleted, friendly troops reacted quickly to the situation, seizing weapons and ammunition from the dead and wounded enemy. During the course of the action, the penetrating Viet Cong threatened the command post of the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry and the Fire Direction Center of the 2nd Battalion, 77th Artillery. These positions were successfully defended, however, and the enemy assault was repulsed after suffering numerous casualties.

Twenty-six dead Viet Cong soldiers were found within 50 meters of the artillery Fire Direction Center. By the time the relief force reached the scene of the battle it was estimated that over half of the troops on the eastern portion of the perimeter had exhausted their own ammunition and were using captured AK-47s and Chicom carbines. The Viet Cong attacked the moving armor with satchel charges and by mounting on the passing tanks, attempting to blind the drivers and gunners. The tanks mutually cleaned off each other by firing flechette rounds and 7.62 sweeping the tanks clear. Finally, they ground up and drove off the attackers and surrounded the fire support base. Cpt. Kimmerling was greeted by Lt. Col. Vessey carrying an M16 and thanking him for arriving like the cavalry in the movies.

The Distinguished Service Cross was awarded to Vessey "for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations involving conflict with an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam, while serving with 2nd Battalion, 77th Artillery, 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division. Lt. Col. Vessey distinguished himself by exceptionally

valorous actions on March 21, 1967, while serving as a battalion commander during a combat mission near Suoi Tre. During the early morning hours, Col. Vessey's battalion received a massive assault by a Viet Cong regiment. Although more than 200 mortar rounds fell, Col. Vessey fearlessly moved through his unit area, first to alert his men, then to direct various phases of the defense. When vital howitzer positions were destroyed by hostile fire, he rallied men from other sections to man the guns, and he himself assisted as a cannoneer. He was wounded during this action, but continued to lead and fire the artillery pieces. At one point, he spotted Viet Cong rocket launchers that were placing devastating fire into the battery perimeter. He seized a grenade launcher, moved into an open area and knocked out three of the insurgents' weapons. When an enemy tracer round ignited a drum of diesel oil and threatened to set off two drums of explosives nearby, Colonel Vessey ran to that highly dangerous point and helped move the drums to safety. His professional command and courageous fighting throughout the battle were instrumental in turning back the numerically superior enemy force and killing more than 600 Viet Cong. Lt. Col. Vessey's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.”



On numerous occasions and under great personal risk and stress, Vessey demonstrated his care and affection not only for soldiers but also for doing the right thing – difficult as that was with less productive choices available. In his time as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff he cared little for the senior meetings and briefings; he cared a great deal of how each soldier was doing and what he or she needed to do their job better. And he was 100 percent sincere. Above all, Jack Vessey was a great soldier and a truly great man. He is and was a man every grunt in uniform would welcome to his perimeter.

He was America's top military officer when he retired to his home on Little Whitefish Lake near Garrison in 1985. Funeral services are scheduled for 31 AUG at the Fort Snelling Memorial Chapel at Fort Snelling. He'll be interred 2 SEP at the Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery at Camp Ripley. Gov. Mark Dayton has ordered flags flown at half-staff on the day of his interment. [Source: www.legion.org | Keith Nightingale | August 23, 2016 ++]

POW/MIA Update 74 ► USS Oklahoma Lieutenant Returned to Family

After 75 years, the remains of a Navy lieutenant who died during the attack on Pearl Harbor have been identified and will be buried with full military honors at a Bremerton cemetery. Lt. Julian Jordan, a 1925 Naval Academy graduate, served as assistant engineering officer aboard the USS Oklahoma. The 37-year-old Georgian was likely

below deck in the engine room on the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, said Julian "Jay" Remers, who was named after the grandfather he never knew. Japanese planes delivered several torpedo hits that caused the ship to quickly capsize. Jordan and 428 shipmates died.

While salvaging the Oklahoma, the Navy recovered the remains of "unknown" sailors and Marines and buried them in two cemeteries. They were disinterred in 1947 and 35 were identified. The other 388 were placed in 61 caskets in 46 plots at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. In 2015, after great improvements in technology, the remains were ordered to be disinterred again for analysis. In nine months, more than 30 men have been identified. Scientists from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory identified Jordan by matching DNA to three cousins and through circumstantial evidence and laboratory analysis, including dental records. Jordan's family was notified April 27, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency spokeswoman Staff Sgt. Kristen Duus said. "I am very happy that we finally have identification and can properly bury him as a family," said Remers, a Cheyenne, Wyoming, police officer.

Though Jordan's family hailed from Georgia and his widow, Lucy, and a daughter, Nancy, are buried in Florida, and another daughter, Ann Jordan Remers, lives in Tucson, he'll be laid to rest at Bremerton's Forest Lawn Cemetery. Why? "Because we don't go there anymore," Remers said of the Southeast. He and others do visit sister Laurel Remers Pardee's home in Poulsbo. Jordan also was stationed in Bremerton during the 1930s. "We have proximity to family and a little bit of personal connection between him and Bremerton," Remers, 53, said. "If we travel, we go to see my sister in Poulsbo, so we have the opportunity to visit the grave on a regular basis."



Julian Jordan in 1925

Jordan's daughter Ann Jordan Remers says it's hard to remember what happened 75 years ago, when she was 8 years old. She can picture a little Bremerton bungalow the family rented one summer on a hill that sloped down to the bay. She also recalls her father going to sea and the family moving a lot. Pearl Harbor was hard on them. "It was this long period of waiting to see what had happened and see who survived and who didn't," the 83-year-old said. "I don't think we got the actual notice for 10 days." She's glad the Oklahoma victims are being identified. "I'm very pleased that these personnel have been recognized and are being given memorial services all over the country in various little towns and cities," she said. "It seems like a form of justice that they aren't just cast aside and commingled with other remains."

Though he never met his grandfather, Julian Remers admires him. "He loved his country, he loved the Navy. I'm sure he was proud of his ship, and he died with his crew," he said. "I consider him to be a hero and a patriot and part of the family's legacy of service." [Source: Kitsap Sun | Ed Friedrich | August 22, 2016 ++]

WWII Vets [116] ► Robert L. Taylor

Taylor was born in Winter Garden, spent his teens in Sarasota Florida and was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1943. He served overseas as a truck driver in North Africa and Italy with the 3565th Truck Company, 125th Quartermaster Battalion. After the war, he continued his business administration studies at Morehouse College before returning post-graduation to Sarasota to develop the activities and offerings at “The Rec.” Taylor planned programs, taught classes and created a positive environment for the families in Newtown until he retired in 1986. Now 92, Taylor is a Bradenton resident who continues to be an active volunteer and Bible studies instructor.



The living namesake behind the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex in Sarasota, Robert L. Taylor

“My job during World War II was to drive trucks in Oran, North Africa, and Naples, Italy, hauling supplies and transporting personnel to ports. When we first got overseas to North Africa, we were transferred to a trucking outfit. I had gone to a radio operator school during training, but never ended up using that. When we were assigned to trucking, none of us knew how to drive anything other than cars. I learned to drive a 2½-ton truck and I managed to pass the driving test.

“We hauled supplies all around North Africa to different outfits and took personnel wherever they needed to go. During that time, we were living in wood-frame, canvas-covered tents when we weren’t driving. We worked during the day mostly. Sometimes, we were working one week during the day and one week in the nighttime. We were never close to the combat zones, fortunately. We were in North Africa for about a year, then we went to Naples with the same trucking outfit and stayed there until the end of the war.

“We drove in a convoy with about 10 or 15 trucks. There was only one person in the truck: the driver. There wasn’t a radio in the truck, but you were just busy watching the road and where you were going. You had to be on your toes because a lot of times you didn’t even know where you were going. Only the sergeant in the lead truck knew where we were going. We didn’t even know what we were hauling. After our trucks were loaded, we just got in line and followed the lead truck. You couldn’t lag behind in the convoy.

“We did a lot of night driving up in the mountains and, at the time, you couldn’t have your headlights on more than just a little slit. It was important that we didn’t know all the details of where we were going and that the enemy couldn’t see us in the dark, so we had to be careful and we had to focus on what we were doing.

“After the war, I came home, finished college and came back to Sarasota. After I graduated from college in 1950, I started with The Rec. Back then, it was just me and the janitor; we were the only two employees there. Everything was brand new then. You had to feel your way through it and try things. For the first five or six years, we’d visit whatever cities we could nearby and see what they had. We were trying to get the programs going for the kids. I

went and got certified as a water safety instructor. I did whatever needed to be done. I worked some days for 16 to 18 hours, just trying to get things going for the kids. It was a good feeling, watching the center grow, and I've done a lot of work in the community since. I don't know, once I started helping people, I guess I couldn't stop." [Source: <http://veterans.heraldtribune.com> | Abby Weingarten| June 16, 2016 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 29 AUG 2016

Retiree Appreciation Days (RADs) are designed with all veterans in mind. They're a great source of the latest information for retirees and Family members in your area. RADs vary from installation to installation, but, in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups, and various other services. Some RADs include special events such as dinners or golf tournaments. Due to budget constraints, some RADs may be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, scheduled appearances of DFAS representatives may not be possible. If you plan to travel long distances to attend a RAD, before traveling, you should call the sponsoring RSO to ensure the RAD will held as scheduled and, if applicable, whether or not DFAS reps will be available. The current updated schedule for 2016 is available at:

- 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 this schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\veteterans related events such as town hall meetings, resource fairs, stand downs, etc. To get more info about a particular event, mouseover or click on the event under Event Location. (NOTE: Attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. "@" indicates event requires registration\RSVP.)For more information call the phone numbers indicated on the schedule of the Retirement Services Officer (RSO) sponsoring the RAD.

To quickly locate events in your geographic area just click on the appropriate State\Territory\Country listed at the top of the schedule. They will look like this:

AK AL AR AS AZ CA CO CT DC DE FL GA GU HI IA ID IL IN KS KY LA MA MD ME MI MN MO MS MT NC ND NE NH NJ NM NV NY OH OK OR PA PR RI SC SD TN TX UT VA VI VT WA WI WV WY Belgium Germany Italy Japan Korea Netherlands Thailand

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | August 30, 2016 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 1 thru 30 SEP 2016

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. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date in the below list. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown below for the six weeks. For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. visit the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's website at <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events> .

Minneapolis, MN - [Twin Cities MOH Convention Hiring Expo w/Minnesota Twins](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

September 1 - 11:00 am to 2:00 pm

Quantico, VA - [Quantico Transition Summit](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

September 7 to September 8

Fort Carson, CO - [Fort Carson Transition Summit](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

September 13 to September 14

Pinellas Park, FL - [Tampa Hiring Fair](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

September 16 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

Arlington, TX - [Arlington Hiring Expo with Texas Rangers](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

September 16 - 11:00 am to 2:00 pm

Rochester, NY - [Rochester Hiring Fair](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

September 22 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

Nellis AFB, NV - [Nellis Air Force Base Military Spouse Hiring Fair](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

September 22 - 10:00 am to 1:00 pm

Newport, RI - [Newport Military Spouse Workshop](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

September 22 - 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Philadelphia, PA - [Philadelphia Hiring Fair](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

September 26 - 11:30 am to 2:30 pm

Camp Pendleton South, CA - [Camp Pendleton Transition Summit](#) [Details](#) [Register](#)

September 28 to September 29

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In addition, the following are upcoming job fairs for service members, veterans and/or military spouses. Go to the website for an event before attending to find out whether you should register in advance. In some cases, you'll be able to see which employers have signed up. Others are by invitation only.

SOUTH

- **Pentagon City, VA - [Mojo Career Event](#)**, Sept. 8-9, Ritz-Carlton Pentagon City, www.militarymojo.org
- **Dallas, TX - [South Central Regional Hiring Conference](#)**, Sept. 11-12, register online, www.orioninternational.com
- **Dallas, TX - [BMI ConferenceHire](#)**, Sept. 26, register online, www.bradley-morris.com
- **Raleigh, NC - [Southeast Regional Hiring Conference](#)**, Sept. 12-13, register online, www.orioninternational.com
- **Huntsville, AL - [Military Job Fair](#)**, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sept. 14, Holiday Inn Research Park, www.civilianjobs.com
- **Linthicum Heights, MD - [CI or FS Polygraph Only Cleared Job Fair](#)**, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Sept. 15, Linthicum, Md., www.clearedjobs.net
- **Linthicum Heights, MD - [TechExpo Top Secret Hiring Event](#)**, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Sept. 22, BWI Marriott, security clearance required, www.techexpousa.com
- **McLean, VA - [TechExpo Top Secret Hiring Event](#)**, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Sept. 15, Ritz-Carlton Tysons Corner, security clearance required, www.techexpousa.com
- **Springfield, VA - [Military Friendly Job Fair](#)**, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Sept. 15, Waterford at Springfield, www.corporategray.com
- **Houston TX - [South Central Regional Hiring Conference](#)**, Sept. 18-19, register online, www.orioninternational.com

- Norfolk, VA - [Military Hiring Conference](#), Sept. 12-13, register online, www.lucasgroup.com
- Norfolk, VA - [BMI ConferenceHire](#), Sept. 19, register online, www.bradley-morris.com
- Norfolk, VA - [Northeast Regional Hiring Conference](#), Sept. 25-26, register online, www.orioninternational.com
- Fort Bliss, TX - [Military Job Fair](#), 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sept. 21, The Centennial Conference Center, www.civilianjobs.com
- Dahlgren, VA - [Dahlgren Job Fair at University of Mary Washington-Dahlgren Campus](#), 3-7 p.m. Sept. 22, University Hall Room 11, www.jobzoneonline.com
- Reston, VA - [Reston Job Fair](#), 3-7 p.m. Sept. 27, Bechtel Conference Center, www.jobzoneonline.com

MIDWEST

- Chicago - [Military Hiring Conference](#), Sept. 30, register online, www.lucasgroup.com

WEST

- Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ - [NCOA Career Expo](#), 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Sept. 7, Club Ironwood, www.ncoacareerexpos.org
- Luke AFB, AZ - [NCOA Career Expo](#), 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Sept. 8, Club Five Six, www.ncoacareerexpos.org
- San Diego - [BMI ConferenceHire](#), Sept. 12, register online, www.bradley-morris.com
- San Diego - [Military Hiring Conference](#), Sept. 23, register online, www.lucasgroup.com
- Portland, OR - [Northwestern Regional Hiring Conference](#), Sept. 15-16, register online, www.orioninternational.com
- Nellis AFB, NV - [Nellis Air Force Base Military Spouse Hiring Fair](#), 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Sept. 22, The Club, www.hiringourheroes.org
- Las Vegas, NV - [Military Job Fair](#), 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sept. 29, Cannery Casino & Hotel, www.civilianjobs.com
- Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA - [Warriors to the Workforce](#), Sept. 29, American Lake Conference Center, www.hiregi.org

[Source: Military Times & U.S. Chamber of Commerce Assn August 27 & 30, 2016 ++]

Veteran State Benefits & Discounts ► Florida 2016

The state of Delaware provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these plus discounts listed on the Military and Veterans Discount Center (MCVDC) website, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits & Discounts – FL**” for an overview of the below those benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the following refer to <http://floridavets.org> and <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/delaware.html>

- Housing Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/florida.html> August 2016 ++]

*** Vet Legislation ***



Vet Appeals Legislation ► H.R.5260

VA convened a workgroup in March consisting of DAV, other stakeholders and VA officials in order to seek common ground on a new framework for appeals. After months of intensive efforts, the workgroup was able to reach consensus on a framework of a new appeals system that could offer veterans quicker decisions, while protecting their rights and prerogatives. The number of appeals awaiting decisions has risen dramatically – to almost 450,000 – and the average time for an appeal decision is between three and five years, a delay that is simply unacceptable.

Before Congress took recess in July, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Congressman Jeff Miller of Florida, introduced H.R.5620, the “VA Accountability First and Appeals Modernization Act of 2016” to the Committee. This legislation could significantly improve the ability of veterans to receive more timely and accurate decisions on their claims and appeals for earned benefits. H.R. 5620, which contains the new appeals framework, would make fundamental changes to the appeals process by creating multiple options to appeal or reconsider claims’ decisions, either formally to the Board or informally within the Veterans Benefits Administration. The central feature of the legislation would provide veterans three options, or “lanes,” to appeal unfavorable claims decisions; and if they were not satisfied with their decisions, they could continue to pursue one of the other two options.

- As long as a veteran continuously pursues a new appeals option within one year of the last decision, they would be able to preserve their earliest effective date.
- This legislation also allows veterans to present new evidence and
- This legislation also allows veterans to have a hearing before the Board or VBA if they so desire.

“If faithfully implemented as designed by the workgroup, and if fully funded by Congress and VA in the years ahead, H.R.5620 would make a marked improvement in the ability of veterans to get timely and accurate decisions on appeals of their claims,” said DAV Washington Headquarters Executive Director Garry Augustine. “We urge the House to swiftly approve this legislation and then work with the Senate to reach agreement on final legislation that can be sent to the President to sign this year.” [Source: NCOA Advocate | Mary Dever | August 24, 2016 ++]

Vet Bills Submitted to 114th Congress ► 160816 thru 160831

Refer to this Bulletin’s “**House & Senate Veteran Legislation**” attachment for a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 114th Congress. The list contains the bill’s number, name, and what it is intended to do, it’s sponsor, any related bills, and the committees it has been assigned to. Support of these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indication of that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At

<https://beta.congress.gov> you can review a copy of each bill's content, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor/cosponsor of it by entering its number in the site's search engine. To determine what your Congressman has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on go to: <https://beta.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22legislation%22%5D%7D>, Select the 'Sponsor' tab, and click on your congress person's name.

Grassroots lobbying is the most effective way to let your Congressional representatives know your wants and dislikes. If you are not sure who is your Congressman go to <https://beta.congress.gov/members>. Members of Congress are receptive and open to suggestions from their constituents. The key to increasing cosponsorship support on veteran related bills and subsequent passage into law is letting legislators know of veteran's feelings on issues. You can reach their Washington office via the Capital Operator direct at (866) 272-6622, (800) 828-0498, or (866) 340-9281 to express your views. Otherwise, you can locate their phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making at either:

- ✓ http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm or
- ✓ <http://www.house.gov/representatives>

FOLLOWING IS THE ONE VETERAN RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED IN THE HOUSE SINCE THE LAST BULLETIN WAS PUBLISHED

- **Congress in Recess**

FOLLOWING ARE THE 2 VETERAN RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED IN THE SENATE SINCE THE LAST BULLETIN WAS PUBLISHED

- **Congress in Recess**

[Source: <https://beta.congress.gov> [Legislation] & <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills> | August 31, 2016 ++]

*** Military ***



Military Divorce & Separation Update 04 ► Proposed Law Change

When a service member gets divorced, any future retirement pay is viewed as a “marital asset” – just as if you had actual cash in an actual bank account. While exactly how that asset is divided is up to individual states and courts, it is often divided 50-50 thanks to a law known as the “Former Spouses Protection Act.” It’s not fair, service members say, that their long-divorced spouses get to cash in on their pensions now that they are out, even if they divorced

long before retirement. Also, second wives don't understand why someone who divorced their husband 15 years ago is receiving up to half of his pension. Now that could be about to change.



The law change, which is a part of the annual Defense spending bill still being hammered out between the House and Senate, would make a major change to the retirement-splitting rules. Instead of dividing the pension based on whatever it is when he or she retires, it would require payments to be based on the rank of the service member at the time of divorce. So, for example, right now if you divorce your service member, and he retires in another 15 years as a 0-9, what you receive in the divorce settlement will be based on his 0-9 grade. But let's say at the time of your divorce he is a Major. Under the proposal, the amount of his 0-9 retirement pay you receive will be capped at the rank and years in service at the time of the divorce, not at the time of retirement.

That proposal makes a lot of sense to a lot of people. Why would a spouse receive retirement pay for a period of time he or she was not married to the service member? It also could be more equitable to the future spouse — allowing them to have more retirement cash to live off, too. It's worth noting that the pension payout lasts only as long as the service member is alive. When he or she dies, that benefit ends regardless of who is receiving portions of it. Whether or not the proposal actually makes it into the final version of the bill remains to be seen. [Source: Military.com Spouse Buzz | Amy Bushatz | August 17, 2016 ++]

USMC Infantry Officer Course ► Standards Will Not Be Changed

A female Marine officer who was dropped from the Infantry Officer Course in April has failed the course on her second try. "At this time, there are no female officers enrolled or slated to attend IOC," Capt. Joshua Pena, a spokesman for Training and Education Command, said. TECOM is not identifying the woman, who has been given a new military occupational specialty, Pena told Marine Corps Times. The woman began the 84-day course on July 6 and failed to complete two conditioning hikes on July 18, Pena said. Marines trying to complete the course may not fall out of more than one hike during the entire course. She and 33 male officers, out of an initial class of 97 Marines, have failed to complete the course so far, Pena said. That class is slated to finish the course on Sept. 20.



A female lieutenant attempting the Infantry Officer course in 2013 hangs during the obstacle course portion of the initial Combat Endurance Test at the Marine Corps Base Quantico VA.

The woman was dropped during her first attempt to get through IOC class on April 21 after 11 training days. At the time, she was the 30th woman to give it a try. Military.com first reported on 12 AUG that she had failed the course again. Like the other services, the Marine Corps has opened all jobs to women, but service leaders initially asked that some combat jobs remain restricted to men only. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter ultimately overruled the service. Male Marines have still voiced reservations that female Marines will not be strong enough to drag them if they are wounded in combat, or perform other life-and-death tasks under fire.

Navy Secretary Ray Mabus sought to assuage those concerns when he told Marines in April that he will never lower the demanding physical standards that Marines have to pass in order to serve in combat jobs. "Let me repeat that: Standards will not be lowered for any group to get through " Mabus told Marines and sailors on 12 APR at Camp Pendleton, California. "Standards may be changed as circumstances in the world change, but they'll be changed for everybody." Mabus also said that when visited IOC, he was asked what would happen if no woman has been able to pass the course five years from now. "My response was: No woman made it through IOC," he said. "Standards aren't going to change." [Source: Marine Corps Times | Jeff Schogol | August 12, 2016++]

Navy Crewless Ships ► Not If, But When

A team of senior Navy officials is examining the future makeup of the U.S. fleet at a time of growing demands and squeezed budgets. One of the expected takeaways is the idea that the Navy can't continue to do business as usual and will have to turn over some jobs to unmanned vessels and submarines. How to insert autonomous systems into the fleet is indeed one of the subjects of debate, says naval analyst Bryan Clark, of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. Clark and other outside experts have participated in a series of "fleet architecture studies" led by the office of the chief of naval operations. Their findings will shape decisions on how to size and organize the future fleet.

Industry insiders see this review as a potential turning point in the modernization of the Navy's fleet. "We have these things now," says a retired Navy officer speaking about autonomous surface ships and underwater vehicles. Prototypes have been developed and tested, but crewless ships are still considered odd novelties, says the retired officer, who spoke on condition that he not be quoted by name. "These are disruptive technologies" that do not fit neatly into current Defense Department funding lines, he says. "We worship at the altar of the big program of record. It's not easy to buy one thing at a time and expect it to realize its full potential. We need an architecture that says 'here's the future mix of manned and unmanned, and let's migrate to that.'" Technologists and executives in the robotics industry, he says, are optimistic that the fleet studies will "open the door for autonomous systems to become mainstream."

The issue of whether the military should develop its own autonomous systems or buy them from the private sector has been a contentious topic of debate. The retired officer describes it as a "religious argument" within the services: Do you want small underwater vehicles to scum in and out of submarines? If you do, you have to spend a lot of money to make them safe so they do not put submarines at risk. If the mission can be met with vehicles that can be launched from a pier and operate independently, the focus would be less on safety and more on the actual mission. His take: "You probably need a mix of both."

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency has offered a glimpse into what might be possible. In April it deployed a 132-foot autonomous trimaran — known as anti-submarine warfare continuous trail unmanned vessel — off the coast of San Diego. "The ball is in the Navy's court," the retired officer says. After the experiments are finished, the next conversation has to be "What missions can it do?" Executives from the contractor firm that built the ship for DARPA, Leidos, told industry analysts that they are confident that the performance of this prototype will motivate the Navy to buy more ships. The drone ship, dubbed Sea Hunter, can stay deployed for months at a

time at a cost of \$15,000 to \$20,000 per day, compared to \$700,000 for a Navy destroyer, estimates defense analyst Byron Callan, of Capital Alpha Partners.

Leidos announced in July it completed initial trials of the vessel. "Sea Hunter is designed to operate for extended periods at sea with no person on board and only sparse supervisory control," the company stated. While initial tests require a pilot on board the ship, later tests are planned to have no human operators. The two-year program is funded by DARPA and the Office of Naval Research. Upcoming tests will dig deeper into the performance of sensors, the vessel's autonomy suite and compliance with maritime collision regulations. Top defense contractor Boeing is making a huge bet on autonomous naval vehicles. It opened an 8,100 square-foot research facility in St. Charles, Missouri, to showcase innovations. The company struck a partnership with a Silicon Valley firm to develop a commercial maritime surveillance autonomous ship that it is marketing to U.S. and other nations' navies and coast guards.

The SHARC, or sensor hosting autonomous remote craft, collects data and shares it in real time. It has been sold to oil and gas companies and other industries for ocean exploration. Thirteen vehicles are now swimming off the coast of Hawaii, streaming data to command centers ashore. "The vision is to have large numbers of low-cost autonomous systems conducting missions that traditionally have required manned fleets," says Egan Greenstein, senior director of autonomous maritime systems at Boeing Military Aircraft. The target customers are the U.S. Navy and forces from allies countries that face increased demands for maritime security, he says in an interview. The SHARC will participate in a naval exercise in the United Kingdom this fall. "We want to show can we integrate data and broadcast it to decision makers," Greenstein says.

The day is not far off when navies will start turning over duties to ocean-going robots, he says. "It's really about embracing the path. Technologies will emerge to solve maritime problems." Boeing signed a research agreement with the Naval Research Laboratory for the development of payloads for autonomous vehicles. "We want to see what's possible," says Greenstein. "The services recognize that the path into the future is going to have autonomous systems." Like other technologies that promise to transform how the military does business, autonomy is not a panacea. "We are on a journey," Greenstein says. There are significant questions out there about the capability and "self-awareness" of autonomous ships. Today, they can self deploy from point to point, swim, compensate for weather, currents, waves and winds. If a cargo ship gets in the way, they go into self-protection mode, moving out of the way and then resuming their mission. Small vehicles like the SHARC can be deployed in large numbers, he adds. "They work as a fleet to maintain positioning, they communicate their position to each other."

Technology is advancing quickly, and the levels of autonomy will increase, Greenstein says. Naval drones soon enough will be smart enough to use tactical information to make decisions about where they swim, for instance. "Today it is more about self protection. How do I get out of the way so I'm not run over? Eventually they will understand where the ships are and react to the tactical situation." Autonomy has progressed from vehicles that just do what they are told and have enough brainpower to stay out of danger, to where they are able to take on more complex missions such as surveillance of enemy waters. "In the future, instead of telling them where to go, we give them a task, and tell them go do it, and call home when you find something."

Conceivably, the military could deploy autonomous surface ships, submarines and aircraft and have them work together as a surveillance network. "If you can raise the level of autonomy to command all assets and say, 'search an area and report back if you find something,' that is the vision of where all this goes: Large numbers of autonomous systems relieving people from having to monitor in real time, continuously." In theory, Greenstein explains, one could turn over the task of detection and reporting to the autonomous system and only bring the decision maker when there is a need to act on a piece of information.

The burgeoning debate over the use of autonomous ships illustrates the blessings and curse of technology. The Navy, increasingly overextended and under pressure to do more with less, sees robots as a potential "force multiplier." In the larger U.S. civilian economy, robots can be double-edged swords that increase productivity but also leave millions of people out of work. In a recent Washington Post editorial, David Ignatius warns that the

“automation bomb” could destroy 45 percent of the work activities currently performed in the United States. Currently, only 5 percent of occupations can be entirely automated, but 60 percent of occupations could soon see machines doing 30 percent or more of the work. [Source: NDIA | Sandra I. Erwin | August 14, 2016 ++]

USS Detroit (LCS-7) ► Delivered ahead of Schedule

The fourth Freedom-class Littoral Combat Ship has delivered to the U.S. Navy ahead of an October commissioning, according to a 15 AUG announcement from the service. The Lockheed Martin Detroit (LCS-7) delivered to the service on Aug. 12 and is the eighth LCS to deliver to the service. The ship is now in the hands of commander, LCS Squadron One, according to NAVSEA. The San Diego-based, “COMLCSRON supports the operational commanders with warships ready for tasking by manning, training, equipping and maintaining littoral combat ships in the fleet,” read the Monday statement. “Delivery marks the official transfer of LCS 7 from the shipbuilder, part of a Lockheed Martin-led team, to the Navy.”



The future USS Detroit (LCS 7) conducts acceptance trials on July 14, 2016. Lockheed Martin Photo

The delivery follows the completion of acceptance trials in July where the Navy tested, “the performance of the propulsion plant, ship handling and auxiliary systems. While underway, the ship successfully performed launch and recovery operations of the 11-meter rigid-hull inflatable boat, conducted surface and air self-defense detect-to-engage exercises, and demonstrated the ship’s maneuverability,” according to the service. The ship will commission in Detroit. “The Lockheed Martin-led industry team is currently in full-rate production of the Freedom-variant, with six ships under construction at Fincantieri Marinette Marine (FMM) and three more in long-lead material procurement,” read a Monday statement from Lockheed Martin. Little Rock (LCS-9) is set to undergo trials this fall while Sioux City (LCS-11) will undergo trails in 2017. The 3,500-ton class, along with Austal USA’s Independence-class LCS, is a finalist for the Navy’s selection of the LCS follow-on frigate design in 2019. [Source: USNI News | Sam LaGrone | August 15, 2016 ++]

Navy LCS Program Woes ► 4th Breakdown This Year

In yet another incident in what is turning out to be a bad year for the US Navy's littoral combat ship program, the LCS Coronado is reported to have suffered a propulsion problem in the mid-Pacific and has turned back to return to Hawaii. The latest issue, this time with an Independence-class LCS variant, follows a series of problems striking ships of the Freedom class. Sources said the Coronado is about 800 nautical miles west of Hawaii, proceeding at about 10 knots. The Military Sealift Command oiler Henry J. Kaiser is accompanying the ship. About 70 sailors are aboard the LCS.



The Coronado left Pearl Harbor on 26 AUG for the western Pacific, where it was to operate for at least 16 months based from Singapore. The ship recently completed several weeks of operations with the Rim of the Pacific exercises, operating from Pearl Harbor. "The extent of repairs and any operational impact is unknown at this time. An assessment of the casualty will be completed upon return to Pearl Harbor and additional details will be made available when possible," the San-Diego-based Third Fleet said in a statement. The Coronado becomes the fourth LCS to suffer a major incident since December.

Navy officials revealed over the weekend that Freedom, the first LCS, has a damaged main propulsion diesel engine that will either have to be rebuilt or replaced. An investigation into the incident has yet to be completed, but indications are pointing to crew error rather than a mechanical problem. The ship is at San Diego awaiting a decision on the repairs. Two other Freedom-class ships have suffered recent embarrassments in recent months. In December, the brand-new Milwaukee broke down at sea and had to be towed to a Virginian port. The problem was traced to a software issue that reportedly has been fixed. In January, the Fort Worth, on deployment in Singapore, was severely damaged by an in-port accident to its propulsion system. The ship languished the last seven months in Singapore and only got underway on 22 AUG to return to San Diego for an overhaul and full repairs.

In its statement, the US Third Fleet said the Coronado's problems appear unrelated to the Freedom and Fort Worth events. The Navy's top leadership is vexed by the continuation of LCS issues. "Last night's problem is the fourth issue in the last year," Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. John Richardson said 23 AUG in a statement.

- "Some of these were caused by personnel and some were due to design and engineering. These issues are all receiving our full and immediate attention, both individually and in the aggregate."
- "To address the personnel and training issues," Richardson continued, "I established a program-wide review earlier this summer to incorporate deployment lessons learned and identify systemic problems with how the program was structured. Vice Adm. Tom Rowden has completed the review, which recommends changes to the crewing, deployment, mission module, training and testing concepts. These changes will provide more ownership and stability, while also allowing for more forward presence."
- "In light of recent problems, we also recognize more immediate action needs to be taken as well," the CNO added. "The review is being briefed to leadership before implementation. I also support Vice Adm. Rowden's decision to improve oversight class-wide, which will result in the retraining and certifying of all LCS sailors who work in engineering."
- "With respect to the engineering issues, we are reviewing each one and making the appropriate corrections. For instance, the software problem on the USS Milwaukee has been corrected for all ships. Naval Sea Systems Command and Commander Naval Surface Forces will review this most recent problem to determine the cause, and we will respond as needed to correct it."
- "The entire leadership team is focused on ensuring our ships are properly designed and built and that our sailors have the tools and training they need to safely and effectively operate these ships," Richardson concluded. "These ships bring needed capability to our combatant and theater commanders — we must get these problems fixed now."

[Source: Defense News | Christopher P. Cavas | August 30, 2016 ++]

Guard & Reserve Spouse's Guide ► **Benefits After Active Duty**

Here's what you need to know.

If your service member is getting out of active duty and moving into the Guard or Reserves, you're about to start a journey into a whole new set of military benefits — and probably a lot of confusion. If you've ever thought that the active-duty military's personnel system doesn't know what's going on, you're about to enter a higher level realm of disorganization and confusion. Instead of getting frustrated over navigating what your benefits should be and how to get them, be informed. This guide is based on experience. Yes, we've been there and done that.

Health benefits.

You may have heard of transitional Tricare coverage, known as Transitional Assistance Management Program (TAMP). That program gives your family 180 days of Tricare Prime or Standard coverage after your spouse leaves active duty. Service members and their families qualify for it in a variety of ways, such as if they leave the military as the result of a forced separation or a medical board. Usually, service members who simply get out of active duty at the end of their contract don't qualify for TAMP. But if you're moving directly from active duty into the National Guard or Reserve with no break in service, you do. To make that work, your service member must leave active duty on July 31, for example, and officially join the Guard or Reserve on 1 AUG. In other words, there cannot be a gap between active duty and Guard or Reserve service.

It is possible that your spouse may not sign in to his or her new Guard or Reserve unit until several days after the first of the month. In that case, his or her new unit can backdate the paperwork to reflect that your spouse entered the day after leaving active duty so that you can take advantage of the TAMP benefit. If you do not qualify for TAMP, you can purchase Tricare through the Tricare Reserve Select program, which is a lot like Tricare Standard. That coverage kicks in on the first of the month after you join. That means if you join the Reserves or Guard during July, Tricare Reserve Select can start Aug. 1. If you join on Aug. 1, however, it cannot start until 1 SEP.

If you're used to using Tricare Prime, which has no co-pays or deductibles, Tricare Reserve Select may bring a few cost surprises, as you are required to pay out of pocket for things such as eye exams and sick appointments. If you've been enrolled in Tricare's dental program, your coverage will end on the first day of the month following whenever you leave active duty. That means if you leave the military 1 JUL, your coverage will go through 31 JUL. You can continue your Tricare dental coverage while Guard or Reserve, but the premium is almost three times higher than you paid on active duty.

Shopping and recreation benefits.

Guard and Reserve members can still shop in the commissary and exchange. If you are a spouse who loves the commissary, or you live in a high cost-of-living area where the commissary prices do make a big difference to your bottom line, this is great news. To shop there, you simply need to present your ID card when requested, just as you did before your family left active duty.

ID Cards.

Now that you're a Guard or Reserve family, you'll need to get new ID cards. Instead of the brown one you've had before, your Guard or Reserve card will be red. It still identifies you as a military family member and it still works at the commissary or exchange. However, unless you are purchasing Tricare Reserve Select or Tricare's dental plan, you should not use this ID card for any health care. If you qualify for TAMP, you'll also get a second ID card that is only for medical needs and has an expiration date that reflects your health care end date. It will not scan at the commissary, but it will let you get on base and it is what you should give your doctor's office when they ask for your military ID or health insurance card. Some ID card issuing facilities and DEERS offices may be confused about giving you two ID cards if you are both in the Guard or Reserve and using TAMP benefits. If you have TAMP and are Guard or Reserve, insist on receiving two cards so that you will be able to access all of your benefits.

Shopping discounts.

Most businesses that offer military discounts won't know the difference between your new red Guard or Reserve ID card and the brown active-duty one you had before. But it's possible that some businesses will no longer extend discounts you're used to receiving because your family is no longer active duty. Military discounts are totally at the discretion of individual businesses. If you're refused a discount because you are no longer active duty, just let it go and move on.

[Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | August 15, 2016++]

E-Cigarettes ► Fleetwide Ban Under Consideration

Sailors vaping on ships and bases may soon be a thing of the past. A string of incidents since last year has prompted Navy safety officials to recommend putting the e-smoking lamp out fleetwide. E-cigarettes are battery-operated devices that heat up a nicotine liquid and deliver it to the user as a flavored vapor. In an Aug. 11 memo, the Naval Safety Center detailed growing safety concerns as exploding batteries in the devices have led to a dozen injuries since 2015. When the lithium-ion batteries overheat, the memo says, the seal surrounding them can fail and turn an e-cigarette into a small bomb. "The Naval Safety Center concludes that these devices pose a significant and unacceptable risk to Navy personnel, facilities, submarines, ships, vessels and aircraft," the memo reads, going on to recommend a full ban of the products on Navy property.

The report notes that while laptops and cellphones also run on lithium-ion batteries, extensive testing has shown that they don't tend to explode when they fail. The Navy is taking a hard look at the recommendation, which would ultimately have to be implemented by Fleet Forces Command and U.S.

Pacific Fleet. “Leadership is reviewing the Naval Safety Center's recommendation regarding e-cigarettes, weighing both the safety and health-related risks,” said Navy spokeswoman Lt. Marycate Walsh.

The Safety Center recorded 12 incidents between October and May and allowed that there are probably more incidents that were not reported. There were no incidents recorded before October 2015, the memo said. Seven of the incidents occurred on Navy ships and at least two required the use of shipboard firefighting equipment to extinguish fires. Eight of the incidents occurred while the e-cigarette was in a sailor’s pocket, resulting in first- and second-degree burns. Two sailors had their e-cigarettes blow up in their mouths, resulting in facial and dental injuries. All told, e-cigarettes have resulted in three days of hospitalization and more than 150 days of reduced duties for sailors, the report said.

Naval Sea Systems Command has issued a partial ban on the lithium-ion batteries at the center of the report. The Safety Center is recommending that the ban be extended to e-cigarettes. “It is strongly recommended that action be taken to prohibit these devices from use, transport, or storage on Navy facilities, submarines, ships, vessels, and aircraft,” the memo reads. “In conjunction with these efforts, it is recommended that the Navy launch a dedicated safety campaign to inform service members about the potential danger of these products.” The problem of exploding e-cigarettes hasn’t been limited to the Navy. The report notes that the injury and failure statistics from the civilian sector track with what the Navy is seeing in its data. [Source: NavyTimes | David Larter | August 17, 2016 ++]



Fort Hood House Rentals ► Rents Start at \$995 Per Month

Rents start at \$995 per month. The schools are good. And the neighborhood is safe — after all, it’s on one of the largest U.S. military installations in the world. In the mornings, residents driving along Tank Destroyer Boulevard or Hell on Wheels Avenue will see “TROOP CROSSING” signs and might come across columns of jogging soldiers. In the evenings, they’ll be serenaded by taps playing from loudspeakers, plus the occasional explosion in the distance. Dealing with a low occupancy rate as the Army shrinks after the peak of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Fort Hood has, for the first time, opened up rental units on the post to people unaffiliated with the military.

The shift, triggered by a provision in the Army’s contract with a private company that runs the post’s family housing program, has caused concern among some soldiers about whether the presence of outsiders will introduce a new security risk at Fort Hood, home to two high-profile shootings in the last decade. Brian Dosa, Fort Hood’s director of public works, said the Army has received “mixed reactions” from soldiers. “We would prefer to have strictly military families living in our villages,” Dosa said. “But I don’t think it’s a major impact ... that we now have some civilians. The numbers are pretty small.” Just like their soldier-neighbors in the family housing areas, the newcomers are allowed to keep guns in their homes, Fort Hood spokesman Chris Haug said. (Single soldiers living in the barracks cannot keep guns in their residences.)



Fort Hood Family Housing. A private company hired by the military, is opening up on-post rental units like these to nonmilitary

Haug said the gun policy isn't a security risk because there are rigorous safeguards for the new residents, who must go through two layers of background checks — one by the housing company and another by the Fort Hood Directorate of Emergency Services — and register any firearms they bring on post with Fort Hood authorities. "They've had two background checks for everyone in their family over the age of 18. That's more than your neighbor has," Haug said. Thirty-four other U.S. military installations have already brought in nonmilitary residents, and there have been no major security issues, said Mack Quinney, project director for the housing company. Two families who are currently unaffiliated with the military have already moved in at Fort Hood, Quinney said. Many more have applied and been rejected, mainly for financial reasons, he said. Among the new tenants is a former service member who is a reservist, Dosa said. He expects most civilians who are interested in living on the post will have some kind of indirect military connection.

Housing privatization

In 2001, Fort Hood became the first U.S. military installation to hand over housing to a private operator when it entered into a deal with the Australia-based Lendlease Group to form the Fort Hood Family Housing company. The deal has facilitated the building of hundreds of new homes on Fort Hood, where soldiers have complained about the quality of the housing stock, by allowing them to be financed with private construction bonds, Fort Hood and Lendlease officials said. About 5,500 military families live in the family quarters that vary in size from two-bedroom townhouses to five-bedroom single-family houses. (Separately, an additional 14,000 single soldiers live in the post's barracks, which are still operated by Fort Hood.)

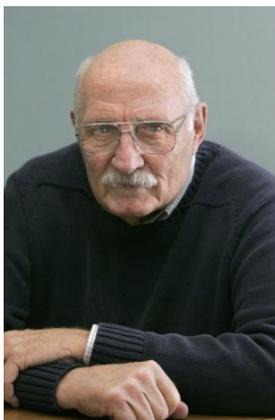
The contract allows the company to rent to nonmilitary residents once the occupancy rate falls below 96 percent. As U.S. military involvement in the Middle East has wound down, the total active-duty force at Fort Hood, which includes deployed soldiers based at the post, has fallen from 50,000 in 2011 to about 40,000, Dosa said. The current occupancy rate is now 88 percent, Quinney said. In the meantime, new housing in nearby communities is luring soldiers off post. Only about 50 senior officers are required to live on Fort Hood. The newer houses constructed by Lendlease are popular with the soldiers, and there is a waiting list for them. Consequently, the units that will be available to nonmilitary residents will be the older ones passed over by the soldiers and their families.

[Source: Austin American Statesman | Sean Collins | August 17, 2016 ++]



Chosin Reservoir ► Korea | Survivors Have not Forgotten

Don't tell them theirs is the Forgotten War. "I sure as hell haven't forgotten it," said Jean White, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel from Oceanside California who fought in the Korean War 66 years ago and was at its most-storied battle, Chosin Reservoir, where outnumbered and surrounded U.S. troops fought their way out of a snowy death trap. White's feet froze. Now he has to wrap them in something warm at night to sleep, a constant reminder of "where we were and what we did." What they did is so revered it's taught in the Marines' officer candidates school, right alongside tales about Belleau Wood in World War I and Iwo Jima in World War II. It's been used in Iraq and Afghanistan by platoon leaders trying to rally their units against difficult odds. The USS Chosin, a guided-missile cruiser home ported in San Diego, is named after the battle.



Survivors Ret. Lt. Col. Gene White (left) and veteran Bob Weishan (right)

In mid August, Chosin survivors came to a hotel in Mission Valley for a reunion. They went to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot to watch graduation, visited Camp Pendleton, and toured the USS Midway. But mostly they were together again, sharing what they remembered, the good and the bad. They talked about

- The infantryman who, at the height of the battle, when things looked hopeless, was asked by a Life magazine photographer what he wanted for Christmas. "Give me tomorrow," he said.
- The Marine general who put his own particular spin on the withdrawal: "Retreat, hell. We're not retreating, we're just advancing in another direction."
- How the troops somehow carved out an airstrip so supplies could be brought in and the wounded taken out. How engineers replaced a blown-up bridge with portable sections dropped by parachute, enabling them to cross a 1,500-foot gorge.

“It’s interesting to hear how much better some of the stories have gotten over the years,” quipped Robert Weishan, one of the veterans who lives in El Cajon and attended the reunion. To listen to a Weishan video of his experience go to <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/76006cc0-ce47-44b8-a792-9cb442516a2c>. The survivors held their first get-together — also in San Diego — in 1985, and since then their numbers have dwindled. About 1,400 of the roughly 30,000 who survived the battle remain, and of those 160 were expected in San Diego for the reunion. “We’re all getting pretty old,” White said. The youngest is 83. They call themselves the Chosin Few. “We realize it has a correct name,” White said, “but it was Chosin when we were there and it will be Chosin until we die.”

The Korean War started in June 1950, when North Korea invaded South Korea. The U.S. intervened, under the auspices of the United Nations, to help South Korea. American Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the popular hero of World War I and II, was put in charge of the U.N. forces. He engineered an audacious amphibious landing at Inchon in September 1950 that surprised the North Korean Army and turned the tide of the war. Soon Seoul, the capital of South Korea, had been recaptured by U.N. forces, who pushed on. MacArthur wanted to end the war quickly and decisively and reunite Korea. The troops, he said, would be home by Christmas. That was wishful thinking. In advancing through North Korea toward the Yalu River at the Chinese border, he divided his forces, sending some up the west side of the Taebaek Mountains and others up the east side. They were too far apart to be of much help to each other. MacArthur also disregarded warnings from China that it would, if provoked, join the war.



U.S. Marines rest during the Chosin Reservoir battle in December 1950

The Chinese had amassed an estimated 120,000 soldiers around the reservoir, disguising the size of the army by moving at night. Weishan remembers how surprised he and the other Marines were when the Chinese attacked in the dark on 27 NOV. “There were bugles and whistles and yelling and then we heard them coming down the hill,” he said. “They just kept coming, wave after wave.” Field commanders soon realized they were surrounded, and the order came to retreat 78 miles down a narrow, winding road to Hungnam, at the Sea of Japan. But first they had to get past the Chinese, a breakout that lasted two weeks, the fighting so ferocious it sometimes involved hand-to-hand combat with whatever weapons either side could find.

Temperatures routinely fell to 25 degrees below zero. To stay warm, troops would go every hour or so into tents warmed by diesel stoves. They stashed canteens under their clothes to keep the water from freezing. Medics kept vials of morphine in their mouths for the same reason. The dead, though, had no protection and froze in place; sometimes the bodies were used as shields during the next day’s combat. “You can describe cold, but you couldn’t describe that,” Weishan said. “It was brutal.” Word of the battle and the desperate conditions surrounding it reached

the United States and caused alarm in the nation's capital. One Marine colonel was quoted in the Washington Post saying, "I'm afraid we're all part of a sad piece of history. A withdrawal on this scale is certainly something new in Marine Corps history."

They were outside Koto-ri, White remembered, heading south. They'd fought the Chinese all day, in a blizzard, and his rifle company was decimated, reduced from what had been about 190 Marines to about 30. "We finally took a hill and dug in for the night," he said. "Around midnight, the sky cleared, and we could see one bright star. We took it as a sign. We knew the next day would be clear. The fighting would continue, but we'd have air support."

Jean White survived the Chosin battle and spent 30 years in the Marines, retiring as a lieutenant colonel. — Charlie Neuman All these years later, it's still an emotional moment for him. He chokes up a bit in the retelling. The skies did clear, the air support came, and the troops slowly made it to Hungnam. A 190-ship armada was waiting to take them and thousands of civilian refugees to South Korea.

U.N. casualties at Chosin were about 10,500, with some 7,000 more damaged by frostbite. A heavy toll, but nothing like what they inflicted on the Chinese: up to 80,000 killed and injured, according to some estimates. More than a dozen U.S service members were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions during the battle. "They tore the Chinese Army apart," said military writer Patrick O'Donnell, whose 2010 book, "Give Me Tomorrow," is about the battle. "These were just average Americans, many who had not even been to boot camp, who were modeled into incredible combat soldiers. It's an amazing story of survival."

The Korean War went on for another two years and ended pretty much where it had started, with North and South Korea divided at the 38th Parallel. Today troops on either side eye each other from guard towers separated by a buffer zone and barbed wire. Because of the way the war ended, it's not as celebrated as World War II is in American memory and popular culture, but when the Chosin survivors meet in San Diego, there wasn't much grumbling about that. Other things were more important to them. "It's a chance to be together again with guys I haven't seen in a while," Weishan said. A chance to remember. The Chosin Few have a symbol that decorates their shirts, jackets and banners. It's on the memorial they have at Camp Pendleton that says "Retreat Hell" at the top. The symbol is a star. It reminds them of the one they saw that night when the battle seemed almost hopeless, shining in the dark sky, promising all they dared hoped for at that moment: A better tomorrow. [Source: San Diego Union-Tribune | August 14, 2016 ++]

Monocacy ► Civil War Battlefield w/Major Significance

It's a Civil War battlefield that few people have heard of and even fewer visit. But the July 9, 1864, fighting at the Monocacy (pronounced "min-AH-ka-see") railroad junction just outside Frederick, Md., was "the battle that saved Washington," fought at a time when morale in the North was low and President Abraham Lincoln was facing electoral defeat from a growing peace movement. A force of about 5,800 Union troops, most with no combat experience and led by a discredited general, held off 14,000 battle-hardened Confederates for a full day, buying time for reinforcements to rush to Washington, less than two days' march from Confederate lines.

"Monocacy saved Washington from capture or burning and helped bring about the re-election of Abraham Lincoln," said park ranger Brian Dankmeyer. "It was a tactical defeat for the United States, but a strategic victory." Despite its relative obscurity, Monocacy offers military history buffs a chance to wander at leisure through the battle sites without fighting the crowds of better-known parks such as Gettysburg in Pennsylvania. In 2013 about 43,000 people visited Monocacy, the National Park Service says, compared to more than 1 million visitors at Gettysburg or more than 370,000 at nearby Antietam. Located only an hour northwest of Washington by car, the park offers a small museum with uniforms, weapon and relics as well as an interactive map of the fighting.

Visitors can take a self-driving tour around the 1,600-acre park or hike along trails through the rolling hills and along the banks of the Monocacy River, where Union troops first confronted the Confederates. When the rival forces squared off at Monocacy, the outcome of the Civil War remained in doubt. Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg a year earlier doomed chances for an outright Southern victory. But Confederate forces roared back in 1864, inflicting 65,000 Union casualties in the first three months compared with 108,000 in the first three years of the war.

With war weariness on the rise in the North and a presidential election looming in November 1864, the peace wing of the Democrats nominated Gen. George B. McClellan, who wanted a negotiated settlement with the South. Lincoln himself feared the popular McClellan, the hero of the Battle of Antietam, would win. In hopes of exploiting anti-war sentiment and relieving pressure on the Confederate capital Richmond, Gen. Robert E. Lee sent Gen. Jubal Early and up to 15,000 troops into the Shenandoah Valley with orders to move north into Maryland and threaten Washington. Union commanders, focused on the fighting around Richmond, were barely conscious of the threat they faced. At first, Union generals dismissed the Confederates as a small raiding party. It took civilian railroad officials to raise the alarm, prompting the commander of the military district around Baltimore, Maj. Gen. Lew Wallace, to rush to Monocacy for his own reconnaissance.

The rival commanders could not have been more different. Wallace had been exiled to a rear guard administrative job after criticism of his performance at the Battle of Shiloh in 1862. After the war, he became rich after writing the biblical novel “Ben-Hur,” the most successful American work of fiction of the 19th century. Early was a profane, hard-charging career soldier who extorted more than \$200,000 from the citizens of Frederick to spare their town. He is largely credited with propagating the “Lost Cause” myth that romanticized the Confederacy for generations.

Realizing he was facing a formidable enemy, Wallace ordered inexperienced garrison troops to Monocacy and pleaded with Gen. Ulysses S. Grant for veteran reinforcements, some of which were quickly dispatched from the front lines around Petersburg, Va. The battle began on the morning of July 9 near John Best’s farm when the Confederates advanced toward three bridges over the Monocacy, successfully defended by Union militia and green regulars. Realizing his troops were bogged down, Early ordered his cavalry to ford the Monocacy and flank the Union lines. The Confederates ran head-on into intense musket fire from veterans of the Union Sixth Corps who had been rushed to the scene. Early then ordered his best troops — veterans from Georgia and Louisiana — into the attack, finally turning the Union flank after a series of bloody assaults across the fields of Thomas Farm.

“The battle itself was a bare-knuckles soldiers’ fight,” historian Benjamin Franklin Cooling III of the National Defense University wrote. “Human will and firepower, not fancy maneuvers or brilliant generalship, determined the outcome.” Overwhelmed by Confederate numerical superiority and intense artillery fire from the front yard of the Worthington family home, Union troops withdrew toward Baltimore after suffering 1,294 killed or wounded. Confederate losses were estimated between 700 and 1,000 killed or wounded. Lt. George Davis of Vermont was awarded the Medal of Honor for his defense of the railroad bridge. Cpl. Alexander Scott was awarded a second Medal of Honor for rescuing national and state colors under fire when the Union defenses collapsed.

The road to Washington was open, but the Confederates had lost a full day. The exhausted Confederates reached northwestern Washington on 11 JUL and launched an attack the next day on Union troops at Fort Stevens, less than five miles from the White House. But the Confederates were too late. The delay at Monocacy enabled fresh Union troops to reach the capital. Exhausted by the heat, the long march and the losses at Monocacy, the Confederates withdrew and returned to Virginia. It was the last time the Confederates would threaten Washington. With the capital secured and Union victories in Georgia, the political tide shifted. Lincoln won re-election, the first president to win a second term since Andrew Jackson in 1833.

Monocacy proved a Confederate tactical win but a strategic victory for the Union. “These men stubbornly opposed the Confederate troops to assure the safety of the national capital,” Wallace wrote. “These men died to save the national capital, and they did save it.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Robert Reid | August 18, 2016 ++]

Normandy Tank Museum ► Entire Collection to be Auctioned Off

The Normandy Tank Museum is selling its entire collection at auction next month before closing its doors because it failed to attract enough visitors. The sale includes tanks, military vehicles, trucks, aircraft and motorcycles, many of which have been restored to working order. More than 40 armored vehicles, along with thousands of military items used during World War II and dozens of mannequins in full battle dress, will be sold on 18 SEP by Artcurial, a Paris-based luxury auction house. The sale will be held in Catz, a town a few kilometers from Normandy’s Utah beach, where the Allies landed to liberate German-occupied northwestern Europe in June 1944. “We thought the museum would attract more people,” the museum’s co-founder Stephane Nerrant said in a phone interview. “The terrorist attacks had a considerable impact on visitor attendance,” he said, declining to provide numbers. French refinery-workers strikes that caused fuel shortages in May and June throughout the country also dented ticket sales, he said.

The museum opened in 2013, based on the private collection of founder Patrick Nerrant, Stephane’s father, who started buying WWII armored vehicles in the eighties. WWII was the first major conflict that extensively used engines and motor vehicles. Compared to WWI, “the use of tanks increased greatly during WWII after a formidable industrial effort,” said Frederic Sommier, who manages the nearby D-Day museum of Arromanches-les-bains. By 1939, tanks had replaced most of the horses used during WWI, he said. Airplanes also became far more widespread and were used to couple air and battlefield attacks, Sommier said.

In addition to its collection, the venue offers tank rides and flights over D-Day landmarks such as the beaches where as many as 4,400 allied troopers lost their lives on June 6, 1944. The 33,000 square-foot museum also has its own repair shop. It estimates the cost of refurbishing a Sherman tank at 150,000 euros (\$160,000), plus labor.

Here are some highlights of the auction:

- The 1944 **M4 Sherman tank** Price estimated by Artcurial: 280,000 to \$450,000. The M4 was the most produced American tank during World War II, with 50,000 units made. It was nicknamed Sherman by the British—it was distributed through a U.S. war supply program to Allies including the British Commonwealth—after William Tecumseh Sherman, an American general in the Union Army during the U.S. civil war. This model was restored by the museum and is in running condition.
- The 1943 **Jeep Willys M** Price estimated by Artcurial: 17,000 to \$28,000. This 4x4 is equipped with a bar on the front bumper to cut barbed wire set by the German Army in Normandy. It also boasts a chemical decontaminator, a jerrican, a water bucket, a machine gun mount and a rear rack designed to transport GIs’ equipment.
- The 1943 **M26 Pacific tank** (The ‘Dragon Wagon’) Price estimated by Artcurial: (\$34,000 to \$56,000). Nicknamed the “Dragon Wagon” by GIs because of its bulk—it weighs 22 tons—and its transportation capacity—7 people—the M26 was used to recover damaged tanks from combat zones.
- The 1943 **Harley Davidson WLA**. Price estimated by Artcurial: \$17,000 to \$28,000. American, British and Soviet forces rode Harley Davidson WLA motorcycles during WWII. This one was restored.

[Source: Bloomberg | Ania Nussbaum | August 17, 2016 ++]

USS Independence (CVL-22) ► First Images in 60 Years

Famed oceanographer Robert Ballard discovered the Titanic, the Bismarck, the USS Yorktown and John F. Kennedy's PT-109. On 23 AUG, he added another accomplishment to his list of documenting the world's greatest shipwrecks: the first images in more than six decades of the USS Independence, an iconic World War II aircraft carrier scuttled in 1951 off the California coast, half a mile under the sea. In a 20-hour-long expedition, Ballard's team, working with officials from the Navy and NOAA -- the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration -- revealed breathtaking images of the lost carrier's flight deck, a Hellcat fighter plane, anti-aircraft guns, hatches, ladders and even the letters of the ship's name still visible on the hull, all submerged 30 miles west of Half Moon Bay. Thousands of viewers in more than 30 countries watched the discoveries live over the Internet.

"What's so wonderful about the wrecks in deeper water, like this ship, the Titanic and the Bismarck, is that they are in amazing states of preservation," Ballard said while still at sea. "There's very little change from when the Navy scuttled it," he said. "The deep sea is the largest museum on Earth." Ballard, a retired Navy officer, and his organization, the Ocean Exploration Trust, based in Connecticut, plan to build a detailed 3-D digital image of the Independence from the thousands of photographs they took with two unmanned submersibles on 22 and 23 AUG. "It was really nice to read the name on the side," he joked. "You think, 'Good, I found the right ship'."



USS Independence on anchor near San Francisco after being towed from Bikini Atoll. The ship sustained damage as part of atomic testing in Bikini Atoll, and towed back to Pearl Harbor and then San Francisco for decontamination.

For hours as the images streamed in at www.nautiluslive.org, the adventure riveted viewers who were discovering the fate of the ship, not seen in 65 years, at the same moments as the 31 researchers aboard the Nautilus, Ballard's ship. Classrooms of school children emailed questions that the researchers answered in a running commentary, as huge white sponges covered the Independence decks, and deep sea sole and orange thornyhead fish swam by. Large fishing nets could be seen draped across the ship's bow and stern. "We're pleased and surprised," said James Delgado, director of maritime heritage for NOAA, and lead scientist on the mission. "Independence is in much better condition than I had expected. It looks as it did in the 1946 photographs. It is a frozen moment in time." Delgado said the discovery of a Grumman Hellcat fighter plane was among the most significant findings. "It's damaged, but the star, the insignia, is still there on the wing and the 50-caliber guns are still in place," he said.

Afterward, the Navy towed the vessel back to Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco. Then to dispose of it, Naval officials towed it out to sea, placed two torpedoes in the ship, and detonated them, sinking the ship on Jan. 26, 1951. The ship was all but lost until 1990 when the U.S. Geological Survey found it while mapping the seafloor. Sonar scans taken by NOAA last year provided more detail. But until now, there were no photos or video of the Independence in its final resting place. When the ship was sunk, Navy records show, it carried an unknown number of 50-gallon barrels that contained low-level nuclear waste such as gloves, tools and boots. The barrels were

filled with concrete and put in a former engine room space that was sealed. Delgado said that Tuesday's expedition found no trace of the barrels.

Kai Vetter, a professor of nuclear engineering at UC Berkeley, said Monday that the ship and its contents pose virtually no risk to ocean wildlife or the public. The reason, he said, is that the half-life of radioactive material that the steel of the ship was exposed to is seven years, meaning it degrades by half in that time period, and 70 years has passed, leaving far less than 1 percent of the original radioactivity. Nevertheless, a scientist from Vetter's lab was on board the expedition, and the two submersibles took samples of sediments and small creatures from the ship, such as sponges, for testing.

Ballard said there are as many as 3 million shipwrecks at the bottom of the world's oceans. Ships in shallower water are covered with sediment that washes down from rivers, he said. Because sunlight can reach them, plants grow and cover them, breaking them down faster than the ships, like the Independence, lost in the icy, pitch-black waters of the deep oceans. With every expedition, said Ballard, 74, he takes great care never to set submersibles on the ship or to remove any artifacts, particularly if people died when the vessel sank, which was not the case with the Independence. "I left everything on the Titanic and the Bismarck," he said. "Taking things off would be like bringing a shovel to Gettysburg." Go to <http://www.nautiluslive.org/album/2016/08/21/rediscovering-wreck-uss-independence> to view images of the carrier as she sits on the bottom of the ocean. [Source: The Mercury News | Paul Rogers| August 23, 2016 ++]

Iwo Jima Flag Raising Update 01 ► 2 Vice 1 Participants Misidentified

Marine Corps officials have determined that two men pictured in the first flag raising on Iwo Jima were misidentified just months after they found mistakes in another famous photo from that day. More than 70 years after the iconic moment during one of the deadliest battles in World War II, the Marines who raised the flag atop the Pacific island are getting their due. Staff Sgt. Louis Lowery, a combat photographer assigned to the 5th Marine Division, captured the scene moments after the first flag was raised on Feb. 23, 1945. The official record has for seven decades identified Pfc. Louis C. Charlo and James R. Michels as part of the six-man team that lifted the stars and stripes.



It was originally believed that Pfc. Louis Charlo, second from left, and Pfc. James Michels, forefront, were pictured in this photo of the original flag raising on Iwo Jima on Feb. 23, 1945. Marine officials have now determined that Pharmacist's Mate 2nd Class John Bradley and Pvt. Philip Ward were actually in the photo.

Officials changed that record on 24 AUG, though, replacing those names with Pharmacist's Mate 2nd Class John H. Bradley and Pvt. Philip L. Ward. They were joined by 1st Lt. Harold G. Shrier; Plt. Sgt. Ernest I. Thomas, Jr.; Sgt. Henry O. Hansen; and Cpl. Charles W. Lindberg. Charles Neimeyer, director of the Corps' History Division and member of the review board, told Marine Corps Times that the service owes it to the men who fought on Iwo Jima to set the record straight. "Most of them have passed on, but the legacy will live on," Neimeyer said. "There was nothing tougher, nor more horrific, than the fight for Iwo Jima." It was long believed that Bradley was captured in Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal's photo, the famous shot taken later that day and on which the Marine Corps Memorial is based. When researchers working on a Smithsonian Channel documentary noted the individual's gear and uniform didn't line up, Commandant Gen. Robert Neller formed a review panel to find the truth. That nine-member board, led by retired Lt. Gen. Jan Huly, released its findings on that photo in June: The sixth man captured in the timeless photo was Pfc. Harold Schultz, not Bradley.

At Neller's command, the board then turned its attention to photos of the first flag raising. "Our history is important, and we owe it to our Marines and their families to ensure it is as accurate as possible," Neller said in a Wednesday press release. "After we reviewed the second flag raising and found inconsistencies, we wanted to take another look at the first flag raising to make sure we had it correct." But Bradley's son, James, who wrote "Flags of Our Fathers," said he was made aware of the discrepancies more than a decade ago when Dustin Spence, a California-based historian, made a documentary about the events. "I'm afraid there's no 'news' here for me," James Bradley said in an email. "This is 'news' for the USMC, but not for the Bradley family, nor the other families involved. ...I changed 'Flags of Our Fathers' a decade ago in light of Dustin's news."

The significance

Though not known by most Americans, Marines are well aware that Rosenthal's iconic image captured the second flag to be raised atop Mt. Suribachi. While the second flag raising impacted a nation, it was the first flag raising that impacted the Marines. The first flag was a symbol of hope for the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions, which fought tirelessly for every inch gained from the volcanic island's black sands to Suribachi's 554-foot peak. Raised on the fourth day of battle, the flag signaled to everyone on the island that a key enemy position had been silenced. Marines were taking the high ground, and there was now little doubt they would eventually take Iwo Jima from the 23,000 Japanese troops entrenched in an elaborate network of caves and tunnels.

The sight of that first flag drew a cheer that roared over the deafening sounds of war that had covered the tiny island. The cheer was so loud it captured the attention of Navy Secretary James Forrestal, who had just come ashore. He looked up to see the flag on a 20-foot water pipe, then turned to Lt. Gen. Holland "Howlin' Mad" Smith and famously said "the raising of that flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years." In its report, the Huly's review board noted that "[previous] attempts to accurately identify individuals involved in the first flag raising were complicated by the stress of combat, the lack of popular recognition as to the significance of the first flag raising, and the subsequent passage of time." None of the flag raisers remain, so Huly's team, which met from July 5-8, scoured through eye witness accounts, service records and hundreds of photos.

There were challenges, Neimeyer said. Lowery snapped a shot of the team preparing the flag, but had to reload his camera and didn't capture the actual flag raising. Additionally, the first flag raising was not filmed like the second flag raising that Rosenthal photographed had been. But Lowery took a shot of the flag pole being planted in the ground, and went on to take photos from every possible angle around the first flag. This proved critical, Neimeyer said. While some faces were obscured in key photos, which captured a number of Marines in the first flag's vicinity. Some are on the radio while others were communicating with one another or providing over watch.

The board was not content to know who was nearby — the team wanted to know who actually raised the flag. The verdict: Charlo and Michels did not help raise the first flag, as previously believed. The board gave props to Charlo, however, noting that he was a member of the reconnaissance team that pioneered a path to the site, and later returned to the summit as security reinforcement prior to the raising of the second flag. Michels was thought to have

helped raise the first flag due to his prominent positioning in Lowery's photo. He can be seen providing security in the immediate foreground.

Though he now knows the six men who lifted the flag pole, Neimeyer said all 70,000 Marines on the island — where uncommon valor was a common virtue — had a hand in the effort. "It is emblematic of the Marines, and their sheer grit and determination to overcome all odds," he said. "To physically demonstrate that by raising a flag on the most prominent terrain feature on that island was such a psychological and morale boost for everybody below who was literally hanging on by their fingernails, fighting the Japanese yard by yard. Every Marine who served on Iwo Jima can consider themselves, indirectly, to be a flag raiser." Neller echoed the sentiment.

"In my mind, all of the Marines involved in getting the flags flying above Mt. Suribachi could rightfully consider themselves 'flag raisers,'" the commandant said. "Although Marines like Cpl. Raymond Jacobs, Pfc. Louis Charlo and Pfc. James Michels may not have been directly involved in the physical act of the first flag raising, their presence on Mt. Suribachi is irrefutable and their contributions were instrumental in raising the flags that inspired thousands of Marines to keep fighting."

None of the six-man team to raise that first flag are living. Thomas and Hansen never made it off the island. Cpl. Raymond Jacobs, the last surviving member, died in January 2008 at the age of 82. The commandant's office reached out to the next of kin for each Marine to let them know of the board's findings. "I regret that we didn't get to it sooner, but I am very happy that we did such a thorough job," Neimeyer said. "We used hard physical evidence to back up our findings of fact, and we did the best job we could. I am very satisfied with the outcome of both boards." [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Lance M. Bacon | August 24, 2016 ++]

Papahānaumokuākea Marine Monument ► Quadrupling in Size

The White House says that President Barack Obama will expand a national monument off the coast of Hawaii, creating the world's largest marine protected area. Shipwrecks and downed aircraft from the Battle of Midway in World War II dot the expansion area. The battle marked a major shift in the war. Obama will travel to the Midway Atoll to discuss the expansion. Obama's proclamation will quadruple in size a monument created by President George W. Bush in 2006. The Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument will contain some 582,578 square miles, more than twice the size of Texas.



Obama will travel to the monument next week to mark the designation and cite the need to protect public lands and waters from climate change. The designation bans commercial fishing and any new mining, as is the case within the existing monument. Recreational fishing will be allowed through a permit, as will be scientific research and the removal of fish and other resources for Native Hawaiian cultural practices. Some fishing groups have voiced concerns about what an expansion of the marine national monument would mean for their industry. Sean Martin, the president of the Hawaii Longline Association, said he was "disappointed" by Hawaii Gov. David Ige's decision to support expanding the monument. He said the monument's expansion would be based on political and not scientific reasons. Hawaii's longline fishing fleet supplies a large portion of the fresh tuna and other fish consumed in Hawaii.

Martin has previously estimated the fleet catches about 2 million pounds of fish annually from the proposed expansion area.

The White House is describing the expansion as helping to protect more than 7,000 species and improving the resiliency of an ecosystem dealing with ocean acidification and warming. A fact sheet previewing the announcement states that the expanded area is considered a sacred place for Native Hawaiians. With the announcement, Obama will have created or expanded 26 national monuments. The administration said Obama has protected more acreage through national monument designations than any other president. The White House said the expansion is a response to a proposal from Democratic Sen. Brian Schatz and prominent Native Hawaiian leaders. The federal government will also give Hawaii's Department of Natural Resources and Office of Hawaiian Affairs a greater role in managing the monument, an arrangement requested by Schatz and Gov. David Ige. [Source: Associated Press | Kevin Freking | August 26, 2016 ++]

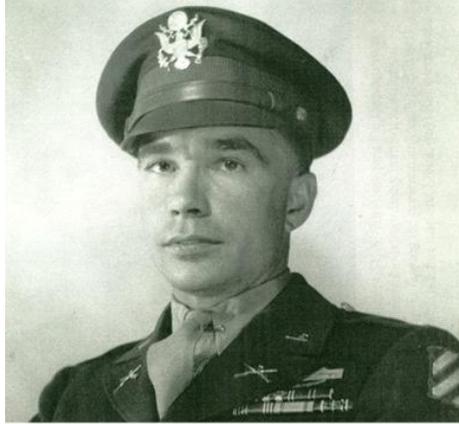
Military History ► **2nd Most Decorated WWII Soldier**

The 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division (known as "The Cottonbalers" from their use of a cotton bale breastworks during the Battle of New Orleans under Andrew Jackson), has served in more campaigns than any other infantry unit in the United States Army. In World War II, the regiment fought German forces on three fronts, North Africa, Italy, and Northwest Europe, quite probably serving more time in combat than any other regiment in the U.S. Army during the war.

The regiment's numerous WWII actions include four separate amphibious landings against enemy beach defenses, earning the coveted spearhead device on the campaign streamers awarded for each of these operations: Morocco in November, 1942 as part of Operation Torch (the Allied campaign to clear the Axis powers from North Africa); Sicily in July, 1943 as part of Operation Husky, and Anzio in January, 1944 as part of Operation Shingle - where the regiment conducted a breakout and drove towards Rome (both landings in the Allied campaign to clear the Axis powers from Italy); and Southern France in August, 1944 as part of Operation Dragoon, advancing up the Rhone River Valley and driving the German forces back to the German frontier.

After fighting the retreating Germans in the Vosges Mountains near the German border in eastern France, and pushing them back to Colmar, central Alsace, France, where the 7th helped clear the bitterly-defended Colmar Pocket in January, 1945, the regiment finally crossed the Rhine River into Germany in March, 1945. They took part in the seizure of Munich in April, 1945, and then headed for Austria, reaching the Salzburg area where elements of the 7th helped capture Hitler's retreat at Berchtesgaden as the war ended. One of the Soldiers fighting in those battles was Garlin Murl Conner. Conner was born June 2, 1919 on a several-hundred-acre family farm in Clinton County, Kentucky, where his family raised livestock and grew hemp, cotton, tobacco, and corn. Drafted into the Army like so many other young men, he was sent to Fort Lewis for basic training in March, 1941. Following basic training, he was then assigned to K Company, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, and deployed overseas to fight the Germans in North Africa, and ended up serving in French Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Sicily, Italy, and France.

Not surprisingly, the farm boy was also a good soldier, easily rising through the ranks from private to sergeant, earning a battlefield commission to 2nd Lieutenant, and then a promotion to 1st Lieutenant. And by the time the war was over, he was the "second most decorated soldier" of World War II. Audie Murphy, also a member of the 3rd Infantry Division, was recognized as America's most decorated hero of World War II. By the spring of 1945, Conner had earned four Silver Stars, four Bronze Stars, seven Purple Hearts and the second highest military award for extreme gallantry, the Distinguished Service Cross. He also received the French Croix de Guerre or "Cross of War."



Garlin Murl Conner

Conner earned his Distinguished Service Cross in action against enemy forces on January 24, 1945, in the vicinity of Houssen, France where the division Soldiers battled two enemies: German forces and icy, bone-chilling weather where daily temperatures averaged 10 degrees below zero. The night was equally cold with no moonlight. Earlier that day, Conner, who had been badly wounded in the hip, sneaked away from a field hospital and made his way back to his unit's camp. Around 8 am, his commanding officer was seeking a volunteer for a suicide mission: Run 400 yards directly toward the enemy while unreeling telephone wire all the way to the front-line trenches, in order to establish an observation post and call in targeting coordinates for mortar and artillery fire. Disregarding his injured hip, Conner volunteered and ran the 400 yards through intense enemy fire and established a forward artillery observation post and began calling in artillery strikes against attacking Germans.

During his dash, he crossed the impact zone of a heavy concentration of enemy artillery fire, with shells exploding a mere 25 yards away. For three hours, he held his position against wave after wave of German attackers who came at times within 15 feet, holding off 600 enemy Soldiers and 6 German Mark VI tanks. Ordered to vacate his position, he instead ordered artillery to concentrate their fire on his location. During the battle, Conner was responsible for 150 German casualties, including 50 killed, with a combination of his machine gun fire and artillery fire, and was credited with saving the 3rd Battalion from being overrun. After his unit was sent to occupy Austria, Conner was sent back to the United States a well-deserved rest after 800 days of fighting in a war zone prior to being sent to fight in the Pacific theater. The war ended before he could be sent overseas a second time.

Conner returned home to Kentucky as a genuine war hero. Awaiting him was public eager to see a real war hero. According to a news article, on a beautiful spring day in May 1945, residents of Clinton and surrounding counties traveled from the hills of south-central Kentucky by foot, wagon, and automobile to see and honor the hometown soldier from Aaron, Kentucky, who had just returned from the war with numerous military decorations. A parade featuring prominent locals and the guest of honor, Garlin Murl Conner, wound through Albany to the town square and then to a ceremony in a large second-floor room in the courthouse. With the room filled to capacity, several dignitaries, including Alvin York, the renowned World War I Medal of Honor recipient, addressed the audience. Fifteen-year-old Pauline Wells, standing on a bench in the back of the crowded room and frustrated by the long wait, asked her mother repeatedly, "Where is he?" Each time her mother admonished Pauline to be patient. When the guest of honor finally rose to speak, Pauline exclaimed, rather matter-of-factly, "That little wharf rat? Why, he couldn't have done all those things!" She later characterized Conner as a "cocky little fellow, but humble and yet proud of what he had accomplished."

Only two months after this homecoming celebration, twenty-six-year-old Conner enjoyed a brief courtship with the much-younger Pauline, married her, and immediately returned to his familiar rural community. Eager to put the war behind him and focus on his future, Conner and his young bride leased from his father a mule, some farming tools, and thirty-six acres along Indian Creek in Clinton County. There he embarked on life as a farmer. As the years

passed, his close friends and associates indicated that Conner seldom talked about his war service, and each time someone suggested that he pursue efforts to add the deserved Medal of Honor to his list of decorations, he emphatically dismissed the idea. His usual reply was, "I'd done what I had to do and come home, and that's all there is to it," or "It is in the past and in the past let it remain," refusing to consider it further. Pauline said her husband "thought people would say he was bragging, and he didn't want that." His response was typical of many returning veterans, who believed they had done nothing extraordinary. Conner farmed all his life and for seventeen years served as president of the local Kentucky Farm Bureau. In addition, he and his wife worked tirelessly helping disabled veterans receive their pension benefits, a service his wife continued. He died in 1998 at the age of seventy-nine after battling kidney failure and diabetes, which in his last years left him bedridden and unable to speak.

Approximately two years before Conner's death, Richard Chilton of Genoa City, Wisconsin, learned of Conner while corresponding with veterans who may have known his uncle Gordon Roberts who died during the Anzio campaign. Chilton was a decorated Green Beret veteran of Korea who later trained Israeli fighters. Unfortunately, out of nearly three hundred veterans of the Third Infantry Division, only two or three remembered his uncle, but several mentioned Conner. With what seemed his last option, Chilton wrote to Conner, who replied that he had been, in fact, Gordon Robert's Platoon Sergeant at the time he was killed. However, the promised follow-up letter with more details never arrived.

Among those who pushed for the Medal of Honor was his former commander in World War II, retired Maj. Gen. Lloyd B. Ramsey, who filed an affidavit in which he wrote, "There is no doubt that Lt. Conner should have been awarded a Medal of Honor for his actions. One of the most disappointing regrets of my career is not having the Medal of Honor awarded to the most outstanding Soldier I've ever had the privilege of commanding." Before he died, the late Maj. Gen. Ramsey signed the necessary documents for awarding the Medal of Honor to Conner. Conner's death only strengthened the resolve of his friends and advocates, for they now no longer needed to be concerned with Conner's sensitivity to the subject of the Medal of Honor. Pauline fully supported the effort and believed that her husband, so quiet and unassuming, would have been less averse to a posthumous award.

Paperwork was sent to U.S. Army Board of Correction of Military Records which first rejected Conner's application in 1997 on its merits and turned away an appeal in June 2000, saying at the time that no new evidence warranted a hearing or a new decoration despite more than a dozen letters of support from Soldiers who served with 1st Lt. Conner that were included in the retroactive petition. In the years that followed, lawmakers in Kentucky, Tennessee and three other states passed resolutions backing the effort to see Conner receive the Medal of Honor. Conner's fellow Soldiers also filed affidavits crediting Conner not only with helping save the lives of fellow Soldiers, but also with being key to defeating the Germans in the battle.

A bipartisan group of current and former members of Congress has backed Conner's application in the past, including retired Sen. Bob Dole, a Kansas Republican and World War II veteran; retired Sen. Wendell Ford, a Democrat from Kentucky; current Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky; and Whitfield, who represents Conner's home town near the Tennessee line. Noted World War II historian Steven Ambrose, who died in 2002, wrote in November 2000 to support Conner's application, saying his actions were "far above the call of duty."

The Rhode Island Senate offered a resolution on June 1, 2005 that called on Congress to award the Medal of Honor to Conner. The resolution states, in part, that Conner served over 800 days on the front lines. In the same resolution, seven former generals voiced support for Conner to receive the Medal of Honor. After Chilton found three eyewitness accounts to Conner's deeds in 2006, Pauline Conner resubmitted the case to the board in 2008 - two years after the statute of limitations expired. The review board remained unmoved by Conner's submission. "The most recent information received December 22, 2008 is not new evidence and does not warrant granting an exception to the above cited regulation and a formal hearing," wrote Conrad V. Meyer, the director of the Army Board for Correction of Military Records on Feb. 9, 2009.

While the military board has upgraded other recipients of the Distinguished Service Cross to a Medal of Honor, the action is rare. As of 2012, the last year available, 178 Distinguished Service Crosses had been elevated to Medal

of Honor status out of 13,000 issued since 1917. Military policy dictates that the first decoration must be re-examined, re-justified, and then re-evaluated with new evidence before any action can be taken. Photo is Bernie Atkins whose DSC was upgraded to a Medal of Honor in 2015. Although an effort was made to secure a Medal of Honor for Conner, the award of the medal was denied in 2014 by a U.S. District Judge on a technicality. U.S. District Judge Thomas B. Russell, in an 11-page opinion said a technicality will prevent Pauline Conner of Albany, Ky., from continuing her campaign on behalf of her husband, who died in 1998. Russell concluded that Pauline Conner waited too long to present new evidence to the U.S. Army Board of Correction of Military Records, which rejected her bid to alter her husband's service record. Russell praised Conner's "extraordinary courage and patriotic service," but said there was nothing he could do for the family. "Dismissing this claim as required by technical limitations in no way diminishes Lt. Conner's exemplary service and sacrifice," Russell wrote.

The Conner family history, buried in military service, does not begin with 1st Lt. Conner; but dates back to the early beginnings of America with Lawrence Conner, according to their family's historical records. Lawrence Conner arrived in America as an indentured servant emigrating from Dublin, Ireland. Family historical documents state that he served with the 8th and 12th Virginia Regiments during the Revolutionary War. Murl was never awarded the Medal of Honor due to an oversight and failure to process the paperwork. However, there is still a glimmer of hope for Conner to receive the Medal of Honor. In 2015, the issue was ordered into mediation by a circuit court and the award is now under consideration. Also, keep in mind that the military can also conduct a further review at the behest of Congress. [Source: Together we Served | May 2016 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 1 thru 15 SEP

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, **“Military History Anniversaries 1 thru 15 SEP”**. [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | August 2016 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Drowley, Jesse R.



*The President of the United States in the name of The Congress
takes pleasure in presenting the
Medal of Honor
to*

Jesse R. Drowley

Rank and organization: Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army, Americal Infantry Division

Place and date: Bougainville, Solomon Islands, 30 January 1944

Entered service: Spokane, Wash.

Born: St. Charles, Michigan on September 9, 1919

Citation

For gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action with the enemy at Bougainville, Solomon Islands, 30 January 1944. S/Sgt. Drowley, a squad leader in a platoon whose mission during an attack was to remain under cover while holding the perimeter defense and acting as a reserve for assaulting echelon, saw 3 members of the assault company fall badly wounded. When intense hostile fire prevented aid from reaching the casualties, he fearlessly rushed forward to carry the wounded to cover. After rescuing 2 men, S/Sgt. Drowley discovered an enemy pillbox undetected by assaulting tanks that was inflicting heavy casualties upon the attacking force and was a chief obstacle to the success of the advance. Delegating the rescue of the third man to an assistant, he ran across open terrain to 1 of the tanks. Signaling to the crew, he climbed to the turret, exchanged his weapon for a submachine gun and voluntarily rode the deck of the tank directing it toward the pillbox by tracer fire. The tank, under constant heavy enemy fire, continued to within 20 feet of the pillbox where S/Sgt. Drowley received a severe bullet wound in the chest. Refusing to return for medical treatment, he remained on the tank and continued to direct its progress until the enemy box was definitely located by the crew. At this point he again was wounded by small arms fire, losing his left eye and falling to the ground. He remained alongside the tank until the pillbox had been completely demolished and another directly behind the first destroyed. S/Sgt. Drowley, his voluntary mission successfully accomplished, returned alone for medical treatment.



Drowley joined the Army from Spokane, Washington, and by was serving as a Staff Sergeant in the Americal Division 132nd Inf. 1st Batt. Comp. B . On January 30, 1944, on Bougainville in the Solomon Islands, he discovered an enemy bunker which was firing on attacking American troops. He ran across open terrain to reach a friendly tank, climbed on board, and personally led them towards the bunker. Although twice wounded while on the tank, he

refused medical evacuation until the bunker was destroyed. For these actions, he was awarded the Medal of Honor eight months later, by President Franklin Roosevelt in the White House on September 6, 1944.

After he left the U.S. Army he became a Federal Civil Servant and worked at Fairchild Air Force Base as a mechanic and welder. Drowley died on May 20, 1996 at age 76 and was buried in Fairmount Memorial Park, Spokane, Washington.



Memorial in St. Charles honoring Jesse R. Drowley

[Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/moh/wwII-a-f.html#DOSS> | August 2016 ++]

Famous Civil War Battles Quiz 3 ► Do You Know?

1. Which battle is often considered the most pivotal in the Western theater of the war?
 - Battle of Grand Gulf
 - Battle of Chancellorsville
 - Battle of Champion Hill. The Confederate defeat soon led to a major (and terrible) confrontation at Vicksburg.
2. The Battle of Pittsburg Landing is better known as what?
 - The Battle of Shiloh. This large-scale battle featured tens of thousands of soldiers on each side.
 - Battle of Drewry's Bluff
 - Battle of Gaines' Mill
3. During the Battle of Shiloh, Union Brig. Gen. Prentiss and his men made a critical stand that became known as what?
 - The Iron Wall
 - The Hornet's Nest. Their ferocious resistance eventually collapsed but they bought the rest of the army time to regroup and ultimately win the battle.
 - The Devil's Den
4. Which battle pitted the South's Robert E. Lee versus the Union's Joseph Hooker?

- Battle of Champion Hill
 - Battle of Chancellorsville. This Confederate victory was the second bloodiest day of the entire war.
 - Battle of Gettysburg
5. How long did the Confederates hold out during the Siege of Vicksburg?
 - three months
 - 40 days. Food shortages in Vicksburg became so dire that people resorted to eating shoe leather.
 - three weeks
 6. Which battle still stands as the single bloodiest day in the history of American warfare?
 - Battle of Gettysburg
 - Battle of Shiloh
 - Battle of Antietam. By the end of the battle, nearly 23,000 men were dead, wounded or missing.
 7. How long did the Battle of Gettysburg last?
 - three days. For such a monumental battle, it was a relatively short-lived event.
 - three weeks
 - nearly a month
 8. Which victory gave President Lincoln the political capital to sign the Emancipation Proclamation?
 - Battle of Antietam. The Union did win the battle but an overabundance of caution cost them a chance to destroy Gen. Lee's army.
 - Battle of Gettysburg
 - Battle of Fredericksburg
 9. President Lincoln relieved Gen. Hooker of duty just days before which battle?
 - Battle of Gettysburg. Hooker's poor showing at the Battle of Chancellorsville led Lincoln to believe he couldn't handle such important tasks.
 - Siege of Vicksburg
 - Siege of Port Hudson
 10. How did Stonewall Jackson die at the Battle of Chancellorsville?
 - Shot by one of his own men. He was killed by friendly fire; his death was a tremendous blow to Southern military prowess.
 - He fell off of his horse.
 - He refused to surrender and was bayoneted.

[Source: How Stuff Works - Historical Events | Nathan Chandler | July 2016 ++]

Famous Civil War Battles Quiz 3 ► Did You Answer Correctly?

1. Which battle is often considered the most pivotal in the Western theater of the war?
 - Battle of Champion Hill. The Confederate defeat soon led to a major (and terrible) confrontation at Vicksburg.
2. The Battle of Pittsburg Landing is better known as what?
 - The Battle of Shiloh. This large-scale battle featured tens of thousands of soldiers on each side.

3. During the Battle of Shiloh, Union Brig. Gen. Prentiss and his men made a critical stand that became known as what?
 - The Hornet's Nest. Their ferocious resistance eventually collapsed but they bought the rest of the army time to regroup and ultimately win the battle.
4. Which battle pitted the South's Robert E. Lee versus the Union's Joseph Hooker?
 - Battle of Chancellorsville. This Confederate victory was the second bloodiest day of the entire war.
5. How long did the Confederates hold out during the Siege of Vicksburg?
 - 40 days. Food shortages in Vicksburg became so dire that people resorted to eating shoe leather.
6. Which battle still stands as the single bloodiest day in the history of American warfare?
 - Battle of Antietam. By the end of the battle, nearly 23,000 men were dead, wounded or missing.
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[Source: How Stuff Works - Historical Events | Nathan Chandler | July 2016 ++]

*** Health Care ***



Zika Virus Update 02 ► What you Need to Know

As of early August, 1,825 cases of Zika virus had been reported in the U.S., including 16 cases with documented sexual transmission. Of the total reported U.S. cases, 1,818 were travel-associated cases, which means they were linked to travel to areas with local mosquito transmission; six cases were acquired from mosquito bites in the U.S. (all in Florida); and one case was a laboratory worker. Additional cases have been reported from U.S. territories - 5,460 locally acquired cases in Puerto Rico, 44 in America Samoa, and 21 in the U.S. Virgin Islands. All of these are reported cases and do not include the larger number of asymptomatic unrecognized cases.

The routes of transmission of the virus include mosquito bites, blood transfusions (though not documented in the U.S.), from mother to unborn child, sexual transmission, and laboratory exposure. Diagnosis remains a challenge because no commercially available diagnostic tests have been cleared by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for Zika virus. However, the FDA has used its Emergency Use Authorization authorities to make several assays available for clinical diagnosis. These are used on a regular basis.



Symptoms, complications, and treatment

About 80 percent of those infected have no symptoms. Most of the 20 percent who have symptoms have a very mild disease that might include some combination of fever, rash, joint pain, and red eyes. Treatment is supportive care - managing the symptoms.

The primary threat of disease is to pregnant women because Zika is associated with the serious birth defect microcephaly - in which the infant's brain does not develop fully, with resulting lifelong intellectual and neurological problems. This necessitates prevention in women who are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. Preventing mosquito bites is key (see tips below), as is preventing sexual transmission. Zika virus can be sexually transmitted by people (male or female) who never get symptoms from the infection; it also can be transmitted before symptoms begin, while symptomatic, and after symptoms resolve. The virus can be transmitted in semen for some weeks after infection. Preventing sexual exposure is critical, especially in anyone who might become pregnant. Barriers, such as condoms, are one way to minimize the risk of disease.

A complication of Zika infection, though rare, is Guillain-Barre syndrome - a neurologic disease in which the body's own immune system attacks nerve cells and causes muscle weakness and sometimes paralysis and can affect the muscles necessary for breathing. Of the 1,825 U.S. cases, five also have had Guillain-Barre syndrome; of the 5,548 cases in U.S. territories, 18 cases of Guillain-Barre syndrome have been reported. Treatment requires aggressive supportive care, often in an intensive care unit with a respirator to assist with breathing. With appropriate care, the disease generally resolves over a few weeks to months, though there might be some residual neurologic problems.

Prevention

Vaccines can be an effective way to prevent infectious disease. Though there are no FDA-approved vaccines to prevent Zika virus infections, several vaccines are under development. Therefore, other prevention methods are critical. Because the mosquito remains the primary route of transmission, a field trial with genetically engineered mosquitoes is being considered to see whether these mosquitoes will mate with local mosquitoes and thus reduce the mosquito population. It currently is making its way through the regulatory and approval processes. Much is being done in the U.S. to protect the blood supply. Donations from those at risk of infection are being deferred. Further, blood from the U.S. is being provided to Puerto Rico because of the risk in potential blood donors there. In the U.S., no cases of Zika virus infection have been associated with blood transfusions.

Various public health recommendations also are focused on preventing Zika infection. Many communities are initiating aggressive programs to reduce mosquito populations. Travel advisories are continuing in areas where mosquito-borne Zika transmission is widespread. Individuals should continue to take precautions to reduce mosquito bites, such as:

- Avoiding mosquito-infested areas;
- Eliminating stagnant water where mosquitoes breed;
- Using FDA-registered insect repellents on skin as directed (but not under clothing) or wear clothing impregnated with repellents;
- Wearing long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and hats;
- Tucking pants into boots, and avoiding sandals;
- Staying in air-conditioned buildings and using window screens; and
- When camping, using a mosquito net.

[Source: MOAA | Rear Adm. Joyce Johnson, USPHS (Ret), D.O., M.A. | August 17, 2016 ++]

TRICARE Transgender Treatment ► Options Now Covered

The U.S. military's Tricare health care system now covers transgender military family members and retirees, despite the official policy not yet going live, a top official said. "I'm not going to wait for the final policy," Navy Vice Adm. Raquel Bono, head of the Defense Health Agency, said in a wide-ranging interview with Military.com on 18 AUG at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. "We're going to go ahead and do that because that's what our patients need," she said. The policy, published for public comment in the Federal Register in February, will allow for hormone therapy and mental health counseling for "gender dysphoria," the clinical term for those who identify as a different gender than the sex they were assigned at birth. Tricare is prohibited by law from covering sex-change surgery.

A ban on openly serving transgender troops was lifted by Defense Department officials in June. By 1 OCT officials will issue a handbook for commanders and all those affected by the new policy, as well as medical guidance for providing transition care to transgender troops. As part of the new policy, military medical facilities will provide hormone treatment, counseling and sex-change surgery when deemed "medically necessary." Bono said Tricare's official policy should go live by 1 OCT "DHA and the Tricare plan have been working hand in glove with the services so that we're able to roll this out in the same time frame," Bono said. "We'll be lock-step with what the services are doing. There should not be any lag; the whole goal is that we're going to make this as seamless as we can."

In the meantime, Bono said, Tricare is working with its regional contractors to grant approval for transgender treatment that will be covered under the new policy. If the contractor will not approve it, the admiral said she will do so herself. "What I'm trying to do right now is give that approval level to the contractors, and if that's still not in place, then it comes up to me and I wave it," she said. "I don't think we need to wait for the actual policy to be signed and wait for the ink to be dried. It's something we can do." Advocates with the American Military Partner Association, which supports gay and transgender military families, said that families deserve care, regardless of their medical needs. "All service members and their family members, including those who happen to be transgender, deserve access to quality medical care -- care they have earned serving our nation," said Ashley Broadway, AMPA's president. "We look forward to reviewing the new regulations and hope they provide the full range of appropriate and medically necessary care." [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | Aug 21, 2016 ++]

TFL Funding Update 04 ► Impact on Retention

Todd Harrison, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, in a 1 AUG op-ed on <http://www.politico.com/> rightly took the Senate to task for proposing very large housing-allowance cuts for

thousands of servicemembers. It called the Senate initiative “perhaps the most misguided proposal with the greatest potential for unintended consequences.” Rather than highlighting the devastating financial impact of the plan for various types of servicemembers, the op-ed cited other downsides, including potential effects on local housing markets and the possibility of raising DoD housing costs. It didn’t take issue with making significant cuts in personnel accounts. Indeed, it cited bogus arguments to the effect “rising personnel costs are squeezing out investments in new technologies and weapon systems.” In fact:

- (a) Personnel costs are no longer growing,
- (b) The growth in the first decade of the century was a necessary correction for more than a decade of previous cutbacks that caused retention and readiness problems in the late 1990s, and
- (c) personnel costs have remained steady at a little over 30 percent of the DoD budget for the past 30 years. (What’s actually squeezing new technologies and weapon systems is exploding cost overruns in both acquisition and operations and maintenance accounts.)

But the author’s main argument against cutting housing allowances is that “immediate cash compensation is what employees value most — more than noncash forms of compensation (like health care) and deferred benefits (like retirement pensions).” So the author’s recommended alternative is to cut “benefits many servicemembers don’t even know they have and therefore do not value, like the Medicare-Eligible Retiree Health Care benefit [TRICARE For Life (TFL)].” In effect, this is the old argument that we could gut retirement benefits and give the troops a pickup truck and they’d be happier. If we only checked first-termers, this might prove true. But the longer people serve, the more value they place on those longer-term benefits — and the stronger the benefits get as retention incentives.

Twenty years ago, Congress and DoD went down the “let’s cut future benefits” path by cutting retired pay value 20 percent (remember the “Redux” retirement change?), closing large numbers of military hospitals and clinics, and effectively locking Medicare-eligible retirees out of any military health care. In the ensuing years, declining career retention and exit surveys indicating the main difference was Redux led the Joint Chiefs to urge its repeal. Concerned that angry retirees were influencing younger friends and family members not to enlist/reenlist over broken promises of “lifetime health care,” the Chiefs also urged a health care fix for Medicare-eligibles. These were major factors in Congress’ repeal of Redux and subsequent enactment of TFL.

So op-ed authors can make all the assertions they please that troops don’t know or care about retirement and health care. History shows those who pursue a military career care about them — a lot. [Source: MOAA As I See It | Col. Steve Strobridge, USAF (Ret) | August 18, 2016 ++]

VADIP Update 03 ► Dental Program for Vets

The VA Dental Insurance Reauthorization Act, which effectively keeps the VADIP going for another 5 years has been signed by the President. Eligible beneficiaries include any veteran enrolled in VA health care and any individual enrolled in VA’s Civilian Health and Medical Program (CHAMPVA). Dependents who do not qualify as a CHAMPVA beneficiary are not eligible. To enroll in VA health care or for VADIP eligibility questions, visit the Veterans Affairs website call 877-222-VETS (8387) or visit www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vadip. To learn about CHAMPVA, visit the CHAMPVA website www.va.gov/PURCHASEDCARE/programs/dependents/champva. or call 800-733-VETS (8387).

Covered services include diagnostic, preventative, surgical, emergency and endodontic/restorative treatment. [Delta Dental](#) and [MetLife](#) are offering multiple plans. Each participant pays the fixed monthly premiums for coverage and any copayments required, depending on the type of plan selected. Rate vary by geographic area and zip code. refer to the websites below for the rates in your area.

You can enroll in VADIP online. You can also enroll by completing a paper enrollment application and mailing it to Delta Dental or Met Life with your initial one-month premium payment. Once you're enrolled, you'll receive a "welcome" letter with program information and links to your benefits booklet and enrollment cards. You don't need an enrollment card to receive dental care. However, if you prefer to have a card, once you're enrolled and registered, you can view and print your card through the Consumer Toolkit.

Enrollment in VADIP is voluntary, and each enrolled beneficiary must fulfill an initial enrollment period of 12 consecutive months. After the initial 12-month period, you can continue enrollment on a month-to-month basis as long as you remain eligible for coverage. There is a grace period of 30 days from your coverage effective date during which you may cancel your enrollment without any further obligation, as long as you haven't used any program services. Otherwise, you must remain enrolled for the duration of the initial 12-month period. Refer to the website <http://deltadentalvadip.org> or <https://www.metlife.com/VADIP/index.html> for full program information. [Source: Various | August 2016 ++]

PTSD Marijuana Treatment ▶ Army Surgeon General Skeptical

Lt. Gen. Nadja Y. West, the Army Surgeon General, on 18 AUG was wary of endorsing the first trials approved by the government for using marijuana to treat veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. West noted she was an Army officer and the military still considers marijuana an illegal substance despite growing public support for its decriminalization. If service members test positive for marijuana, they can be subject to a "wide range of actions," she said. In addition, research has found "that using marijuana has a lot of adverse health effects," West said at a breakfast with defense reporters.



In this photo taken Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2015, marijuana is measured in 3.5-gram amounts and placed in cans for packaging at the Pioneer Production and Processing marijuana growing facility in Arlington, Wash.

Marijuana "is more dangerous, with some of the carcinogens that are in it, than tobacco," West said. "The impact that it has long-term on certain areas of the brain, especially young people developing, that's been proven -- irreversible damage to the hippocampus and things like that that can really have impacts on individuals long-term," she said. However, the surgeon general, who succeeded Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho in the position last December, said

she would look at the results of the government-approved trials of marijuana for PTSD treatment "so long as it's evidence-based." She said some chemical components of marijuana short of a full dose might prove useful in treating PTSD. "I'm for looking at that," she said. "We're looking at all modalities," but "I don't know if we need to have the full spectrum of what's in marijuana as it's typically administered -- if that's necessary," she said.

"We should always, at least, have an open mind to look at things in an evidence-based way for something that could be useful for our soldiers," West said. Currently, the various therapies available in the military have proven to be about 80 percent effective in easing the symptoms of PTSD, she said. In April, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Food and Drug Administration, approved the first-ever clinical trials backed by the government of marijuana as a treatment for PTSD in veterans. The trials were expected to begin next month with combat veteran volunteers at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and at the Scottsdale Research Institute in Phoenix. In June, Quinnipiac University reported that 87 percent of 1,561 voters polled nationwide supported giving veterans marijuana for PTSD. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | August 19, 2016 ++]

Quirky Health Hacks Update 01 ► Do You Know These 8

These offbeat tricks really will make for a better season:

Eat your sunshine

Don't want to risk getting a sunburn? Fill up on these vitamin D-rich foods. Aim for 600 IU daily. Sockeye salmon, baked or broiled, 570 IU; Ready-to-eat fortified cereal, 1 cup, 40 IU; Yolk of 1 large egg, 40 IU; Swiss cheese, 1 ounce, 6 IU; Mushrooms, 1 cup of pieces, 5 IU; Cod-liver oil, 1 tablespoon, 1,360 IU

Rev up your engine

Burn extra calories by chugging an extra glass or two of cool water. The body uses energy to warm up the H2O to body temperature, researchers say.

Go to the tape

Here's a remedy to protect your heels: Tape your feet. Stanford researchers say it's the easiest and most effective way to prevent blisters. Their new study, published in the Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine, found that surgical paper tape, which is found at most drugstores, reduced the instance of blisters by 40 percent.

Stop shoe odor

Tea bags in your footwear? This sounds wacky, but believe it or not, it's a great way to reduce odor in sneakers and other shoes. The tea bags absorb the moisture — and the stink. First, wipe the inside of each shoe with a cotton ball moistened with rubbing alcohol, to kill

The way to spray

It's not enough to apply bug spray and sunscreen for protection against summer hazards. You need to make sure you do this in the right order. Tip: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says sunscreen goes on first, then the insect repellent. That's because bug sprays work "by creating a field of repellency as they evaporate and leave the skin," says the CDC's Kate Fowlie. Avoid combo repellent-sunscreen products, no matter how convenient they may seem; sunscreen usually needs to be reapplied more often than bug spray.

Cut clutter, cut cravings

Your messy kitchen could be more of a problem than you think: It may be causing you to overeat. A Cornell University study showed that participants in a cluttered kitchen snacked on twice as many calories as people in a more orderly one, often reaching for sweets instead of healthier offerings such as carrots. One possible reason? The stress you experience in a chaotic environment may interfere with your ability to exercise self-control, researchers suggest.

Cook first, then shuck

Peeling uncooked corn can be a pain, and there's a great reason not to do it: The husks on those fresh ears help keep nutrients intact. Instead, keep the ears in their jackets and steam, grill or microwave, then shuck.

Garden to your health

Think health can't come from your backyard? Check out these easy-to-grow summer plants that offer all kinds of benefits, from warding off disease-carrying mosquitoes to helping you sleep.

[Source: AARP | Jessica Migala | September 8, 2015 ++]

Tinnitus Update 02 ► Options

In most cases, there is no specific cure for tinnitus. For some people, tinnitus is just a nuisance. For others, it is a life altering condition. However, if your doctor finds a specific cause of your tinnitus, they may be able to eliminate it. One of the options for treating tinnitus is wearing a hearing aid. If you experience hearing loss, a hearing aid may reduce or temporarily eliminate head noise. It is important to set the hearing aid at moderate levels, because excessively loud levels can worsen tinnitus in some cases. You should always discuss the use of a hearing aid with your VA doctor. The VA may be able to provide you with one for free.

However, if that is not an option, there is now an option for a low-cost hearing aid. Advances in technology now make hearing aids into high-tech medical devices. The best hearing aids ever made are now in production. Military retirees from active duty, Guard, and Reserve units who have hearing loss and/or tinnitus are eligible to participate in the RACHAP/RHAPP programs. Retirees can obtain hearing aids at significant savings by using these programs. Retired Commissioned Officers of the US Public Health Service are also eligible for these programs at military treatment facilities, under certain conditions. Dependents of military retirees are ineligible to participate in this program throughout the US.

Two hearing aids can usually be purchased for less than \$2,000. Exact costs are variable and subject to change at any time without notice. Contact your nearest audiology clinic for further details. Not every medical facility is able to provide this program. Care of active duty members takes precedent at all MTFs. It is recommended that you contact the appropriate military facility before incurring significant travel expenses. Facilities may discontinue this program for any reason without notice to us. [**Note:** Your closest clinic could be located hundreds of miles away from your home. The costs to travel for this program need to be considered versus the availability of an audiologist in your local community to assist you with repairs, warranty repairs, re-programming, etc.]

Retirees can use any military treatment facility which will accept them; you don't need to return to your service affiliation to participate in this program. This program is not a TRICARE benefit. A current list of sites which provide this program is available at <http://militaryaudiology.org/rachap-rhapp-locations> . It contains contact details on the 16 stateside and 14 overseas sites. [Source: TREA Washington Update | August 22, 2016 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 363 ► Contractors, Immunizations & Appointments

Regional Contractors. TRICARE has many contractor partners to help deliver health care benefits to beneficiaries around the world. The regional contractors provide health care services and support beyond what's available at military hospitals and clinics for all health plan options except TRICARE For Life in the U.S. and U.S. Territories, and the US Family Health Plan. In each region they manage provider networks, toll-free customer service call centers, enrollment, referrals, authorizations and claims processing, as well as beneficiary and provider education.

TRICARE is managed in four separate geographical regions. The three U.S. regions are North, South, and West. Anywhere outside the U.S. is considered Overseas. You can find the find phone numbers and web site information at www.TRICARE.mil/Regions .

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Immunization Questions. Do you have questions about immunizations such as Where to get them? And are they necessary? If so, you should attend the Immunization Health Branch Facebook Town Hall 31 AUG at 1pm EST. . Go to the IHB Facebook page for more information at <https://www.facebook.com/DHAImmunizationHealthcare> and join us on August 31st with your questions.

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Missing Appointments. It’s happened to many of us. We call and set up an appointment with our doctor. We even write it down. But, life happens and we remember the appointment about an hour after we were supposed to check-in. We are now officially “no shows.” A no-show occurs when a patient misses an appointment without making any attempt to cancel or reschedule 24 hours in advance. When you miss an appointment, it keeps another patient from using that appointment slot for care they need. When you miss an appointment, the office can’t move all the rest of the day’s appointments up to fill your space. The time slot goes unused. Your provider may charge you because you didn’t show up for your appointment. The American Medical Association policy says a doctor may charge for a missed appointment – or failing to cancel 24 hours in advance – if the office advises them they will be charged if they miss an appointment. The fee can range from \$20 to \$40 and isn’t covered by TRICARE.

It’s best to keep your appointments or reschedule them at least 24 hours in advance. If you’re being seen at a military hospital or clinic, you can do this through www.tricareonline.com . TOL is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can use this portal to set appointment notifications and set up email and text message reminders. If you know you can’t make the appointment, you can cancel your appointments right then. Missed appointments can result in reduced continuity of care and possibly late identification of other health problems. Take care of your health and your wallet and keep your appointments.

[Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | August 25, 2016 ++]

*** Finances ***



Divorce ► Hazards When Older | 10

A wave of “gray divorce” threatens to wash away financial security for people who find themselves suddenly single late in life. Baby boomers, now ages 52 to 70, are driving divorce rates so high that half of all marriages still end in divorce even though the rate is falling for younger couples. In a recent survey by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, nearly 2 in 3 attorneys said they see an increase in divorce cases among couples who are over 50 years old. “A rising divorce rate is becoming a very consistent trend with the baby boomer generation,” said

Joslin Davis, academy president, in a press release. “Spouses in this age range need to be extremely mindful about the complexities of negotiating key issues involving spousal support and retirement accounts.”

The divorce lawyers’ findings are backed up by Bowling Green State University’s National Center for Family and Marriage Research, which found that married people age 50 and up are twice as likely to experience a divorce today as they were in 1990. Tenure didn’t help much. More than half of gray divorces are to couples in first marriages. And the old seven-year itch? Forget it, they say: 55 percent of gray divorces involve couples married more than 20 years. “Going through a divorce can be difficult at any age, but older couples face unique challenges in retirement planning as a result of later-in-life separations,” Christine van Cauwenberghe, assistant vice president of tax and estate planning with the Investors Group financial advisory firm in Winnipeg, Manitoba, told Advisor.ca. Here are 10 things to be prepared for if your relationship ruptures late in life.

1. Expectations may not square with reality. People split for many reasons, but Susan L. Brown and I-Fen Lin, lead matrimony researchers at Bowling Green, say: “For individuals in their prime, people who are healthy and financially secure, divorce can bring a new lease on life. Spouses who felt tied down and constrained are now able to pursue their own goals, reinventing themselves in their third age.” However, they note, late-life divorce too often leads to poverty. Among their findings:

- People from gray divorces on average have only 20 percent as much wealth as older married couples.
- Their Social Security benefits are less than married couples or widowed spouses.
- More than 1 in 4 gray-divorced women live below the poverty line.
- “People who divorce later in life and remain single typically do not enjoy the economic cushion that married folk and widowed spouses experience,” Brown and Lin said.

2. Two apart don’t live as cheaply as two together. A divorced couple will spend 30 percent to 50 percent more than a couple who stay together, financial planners told USA Today. They’ll need two homes and likely two cars, separately titled and insured. They’ll take separate vacations if they can afford any at all. They’ll spend money on twice as many trips to see the kids. And medical expenses could be higher, because if one partner gets sick, the other will no longer be there to help. If an older couple is divorcing, and if one spouse was the sole breadwinner, he or she should consider sharing more assets and retirement funds upfront to work out an agreement that may not include alimony, suggests Davis, the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers president. For a dependent spouse, she said, “the prospect of long-term alimony can serve as a very powerful negotiating tool.”

3. Adjusting to a new retirement reality. Gray divorce deals a heavier financial blow than separations earlier in life, says Jeff Landers, a financial planner writing in Forbes. People who divorce later in life have less time to recover financially than those who divorce early. With fewer years left to work, rebuilding wealth is tougher. Alimony is often granted when a spouse is still employed, but don’t count on an ex-spouse working until age 75 or 80 to pay it, analysts warn. Women need to make their sure retirement savings last longer than men’s. A man reaching age 65 today is expected to live until age 84.3 on average; a woman, 86.6, says the Social Security Administration. Even if you’ve saved \$1 million as a couple, splitting it in half means each will need to stretch \$500,000 over 20 to 30 years. At 20 years, assuming no interest earning, that’s only \$25,000 a year, a daunting prospect divorce lawyers say.

4. Changes to Social Security. If you are divorced, but your marriage lasted 10 years or longer, you can receive benefits on your ex-spouse’s record even if he or she has remarried if you meet these requirements, says the Social Security Administration:

- You are unmarried.
- You are age 62 or older.
- Your ex-spouse is entitled to Social Security retirement or disability benefits.
- The benefit you are entitled to receive based on your own work is less than the benefit you would receive based on your ex-spouse’s work.

If you remarry, usually your ex-spouse benefit stops unless your later marriage ends, whether by death, divorce or annulment.

5. Tax implications. Not all retirement accounts were created equal when it comes time to withdraw money, analysts warn. Don't forget the tax implications when divvying up those accounts, which will likely be split evenly if you were married a long time. With a pre-tax account, like a 401(k), 403(b) or Individual Retirement Account (IRA), Uncle Sam will take his share when you withdraw money. Withdrawals from after-tax accounts, like a Roth IRA, aren't taxed when you draw money out during retirement. So, say one spouse will get a \$500,000 401(k); the other, a \$500,000 Roth IRA. The Roth IRA will provide \$500,000. Say the 401(k) withdrawals are subject to a typical effective tax rate of 15 percent, and the spouse with that account will see only \$425,000.

6. Insurance considerations. If your spouse handled insurance and other financial matters, you'll have to learn how quickly. Getting your own health insurance if, say, you were covered on your spouse's, may seem obvious. Through COBRA you might be able to continue coverage from the ex-spouse's work policy, if he or she is employed when you split. Alternatively, you can enroll for health insurance through the government insurance exchanges even though it may not be the general enrollment period, because divorce is considered a "qualifying event." You may also need your own car insurance and homeowners or renters policy. You may want to consider disability and long-term care. If you do receive alimony, or child support is still part of the picture, you might also consider life insurance on the ex-spouse should something happen to him or her.

7. Financial fine print. If you're a new divorcee nearing or in retirement, pay attention to some finer points, financial planners advise. Make sure the beneficiaries on policies, retirement accounts, bank accounts, pensions, insurance policies and similar documents are up to date. And don't forget medical forms such as living wills, power of attorney documents and, where applicable, trustees for revocable trusts. You'll likely want to designate adult children if appropriate rather than let your former spouse continue making medical and financial decisions for you, advisers say.

8. Surprise debt. Watch out for a spouse's secret debt. In the nine states with community property laws — Arizona, California, Idaho, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin — half your spouse's debt is yours, even if it isn't in your name, lawyers said. (Alaska is an opt-in community property state that gives both parties the option to make their property community property.)

9. Handling the house. Women often are more attached to the family home than men, financial advisers say. But a home can also become expensive and difficult to maintain after a late-in-life divorce. A Securion Financial survey of 546 people who divorced after 10 years or more of marriage found that in more than half the cases, one spouse kept the home. If paying for upkeep is too much of a stretch, many advise selling and using the proceeds to get a smaller home. One potential source of relief for people splitting up is a "divorce mortgage," which are expected to become available in the United Kingdom later this year, and perhaps also in the United States after that, the Telegraph reported. It would work this way: If you keep the home, you borrow enough to buy out the departing spouse. The bank would also lend you extra money to pay the loan interest over a set period of time, say, if children are still present, while they are in school. At the end of the loan's term, pay the lender back by selling the property or take on a traditional mortgage if you can handle it.

10. Telling your adult kids. Divorce is hard on kids no matter what their age, says Dr. Karen Finn, CEO and owner of The Functional Divorce. "They never want the dream of their parents staying together swept away," says Finn, a divorce coach. Don't overshare and don't make them take sides, she says. "Your divorce will impact your children," she cautions. "Your job as a parent is to understand that your adult kids will need to have your support as they come to terms with your divorce because a parent's job is never really done."

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Jom Gold | August 17, 2016 ++]

USFSPA & Divorce Update 26 ► A Rare Disability Pay Victory in Illinois

Due to the dedication of a disabled veteran, state courts' seizure of federally funded VA disability compensation for alimony/support payments, in violation of 38 U.S. Code 5301, has finally been broken. The legal specifics provided by disabled veteran Lt. Greg Parsons helped Illinois disabled veteran Antoine Smith succeed in court. Said Smith, "The judge was stunned to see the information and the points I made about my compensation benefits ... being 100 percent from the VA, and that VA compensation cannot be garnished or used as income." Why was this judge stunned? Because Smith went to court prepared. He presented his case in affidavit form and cited the specific laws that apply to disability compensation.

For many disabled veterans, protecting their VA disability benefits from seizure in divorce cases seemed impossible, facing state court systems that often ignored the U.S. Code's clear statements about the "nonassignability and exempt status of [VA disability] benefits." A state court that overrides federal law regarding these exemptions violates the intent of Congress, as explained in Title 31, Part 212, of the Code of Federal Regulations (31 CFR 212). Disabled veterans facing divorce or child-support issues need to fight the injustice of state courts' control over their earned VA disability compensation. The following link has the tools you need: www.facebook.com/groups/VeteranChildSupportGroup.

The group members are not attorneys, but provide the research and written strategies that are winning in court. Only you can prepare yourself for those unknowns. Protect what belongs to every veteran from those who want to take away your right to your earned VA disability compensation. [Source: Air Force times | Unsung Hero Former Navy AD3 William Heino Sr. | August 28, 2016 ++]

VA Loans ► Be Open To Other Options

A VA home loan is the best loan choice on the market -- usually. There are exceptions to every rule. VA loans come with unparalleled advantages: no downpayment, no mortgage insurance, and mortgage rates that are around 0.25% lower than those of conventional loans. But they also come with requirements that could make other financing options better. Veterans with eligible military experience should check VA loan terms first. Here are reasons to look beyond VA loans as a veteran.

1. You Have Good Credit And 20 Percent Down. A primary advantage to VA home loans is the lack of a mortgage insurance requirement. However, the VA guarantee does not come free of charge. Borrowers pay an upfront funding fee, which they usually choose to add to their loan amount. The fee ranges from 1.25 to 3.3 percent, depending on the buyer's military status, the downpayment percentage and whether the home buyer has previously used his or her VA mortgage eligibility. The most common fee is 2.15 percent. On a \$200,000 purchase, it equals \$4,300. However, buyers who choose a conventional (non-government-backed) mortgage, and put 20 percent down, avoid mortgage insurance and the upfront fee. For these military home buyers, the VA funding fee might be an unnecessary expense. **The Exception:** Mortgage applicants whose credit rating or income meets VA guidelines but not those of conventional mortgages may still opt for VA.

2. You Landed On The "CAIVRS" List. To qualify for a VA loan, you must prove that you have made good on previous government-backed debts, and that you have paid taxes. The Credit Alert Verification Reporting System, or "CAIVRS," is a database of consumers who have defaulted on government obligations. These individuals are not eligible for a VA home loan. The lender will check the database when you apply. If your name shows up, you must clear up the problem. Usually this involves repaying the amount owed, which many are not in the position to do. Otherwise, they would have done so already. The good news is that home buyers on the CAIVRS list can still apply

for a conventional mortgage. You will need at least a 3% downpayment, and credit requirements could be tougher, but a conventional program is a viable solution. Your first step: apply for a VA loan, which will trigger a CAIVRS check to verify your eligibility. **The exception:** Some consumers end up on CAIVRS by mistake and this can be corrected. Others may fall under CAIVRS exceptions for loan assumptions, divorce or bankruptcy.

3. You Have A Non-Veteran Co-Borrower. Veterans often apply to buy a home with a non-veteran who is not their spouse. This is okay. However, it might not be their best choice.

- As the veteran, your income must cover your half of the loan payment. The non-veteran's income cannot be used to compensate for the veteran's insufficient income. For instance, if the proposed home payment is \$1,000 per month, the veteran's income must be able to support \$500 per month, based on VA's stated debt-to-income and residual income requirements. In addition, only half of the guarantee can be used if one of two joint buyers isn't eligible. That means you'll probably have to put at least 12.5 percent down on the loan.
- With a veteran-only or veteran-plus-spouse loan, the VA issues a 25 percent "guarantee" on the loan. The guarantee is not your downpayment, but an insurance policy on the loan, due to the lack of downpayment. When a non-veteran owns half the loan, the VA only guarantees half that amount. The lender will require a 12.5 percent downpayment for the non-guaranteed portion.
- The Conventional 97 mortgage, on the other hand, allows downpayments as low as three percent. Another low-downpayment mortgage option is the FHA home loan, for which 3.5 percent down is acceptable. The USDA home loan is another option that requires zero downpayment and offers VA-similar rates. The property must be within USDA-eligible areas, but there is no requirement for any applicant to have military experience.

If you plan to borrow with a non-veteran, one of these loan types might be your better choice. **The exception:** The relative cost of conventional or other financing depends on your credit scores. Have your loan professional work up the numbers for VA and conventional programs and choose the cheaper one.

4. You Apply With Your Credit-Challenged Spouse. In community property states, VA lenders must consider the credit rating and financial obligations of your spouse. This rule applies even if he or she will not be on the home's title or even on the mortgage. Such states are as follows: AZ, CA, ID, LA, NV, NM, TX, WA, and WI. A spouse with less-than-perfect credit or who owes alimony, child support, or other maintenance can make your VA approval more challenging. Apply for a conventional loan if you qualify for the mortgage by yourself. The spouse's financial history and status need not be considered if he or she is not on the loan application. **The exception:** You may still qualify a VA loan, even with a low-credit co-borrower. VA credit score requirements are more lenient, as are debt-to-income ratios.

5. You Want To Buy Vacation Or Investment Property. The purpose of VA financing is to help veterans and active service members buy and live in their own home. They are not meant to build real estate portfolios. These loans are for primary residences only, so if you want a ski cabin or rental, you'll have to get a conventional loan. **The exception:** You can purchase multi-unit property (a duplex, for example) and rent out the surplus units as long as you live in one as your primary residence.

6. You Want To Purchase A High-End Home. The VA loan was not meant for extravagant home purchases. Still, it can be used to purchase a home above VA loan limits. There are no limits to the size of mortgage a lender can approve. But the veteran must come up with a downpayment for any loan size above published VA limits. Loan limits range from \$417,000 to \$721,050, based on housing costs in a geographical area. You may have to shop lenders to find one that will approve a very large VA loan. **The exception:** Some lenders are willing to fund larger loans if you make a partial downpayment. For instance, you're in an area with a maximum VA loan of \$417,000. The home costs \$517,000. You can finance it with a VA loan by making a 25 percent downpayment on the difference, or \$25,000. That's less than five percent down.

[Source: NCOA Advocate | August 29, 2016 ++]

Political Donation Scam ► How it Works

Scammers love to take advantage of major news events. This year, nothing is a bigger story in the United States than the 2016 presidential election. Watch out for cons that prey on would-be political donors.

How the Scam Works:

- You get a call from someone claiming to represent a political candidate, raising money to support the campaign. They may be collecting funds for a specific cause, such as a healthcare reform, or on behalf of a group of people, such as veterans.
- The caller asks if you will donate and specifies an amount of money. Targets report that callers are typically pushy and demand immediate action. You've been planning to give to the campaign, so you provide your name, address, and credit card number.
- Don't do it! Some of these calls are outright scams, and providing your credit card number and personal information opens you up to the risk of fraudulent charges and identity theft. Even if the caller is not a scammer, some groups may be poorly managed and not actually spend the money the way they describe on the phone.

How to Avoid a Campaign Con: This campaign season, cons abound. Here are some BBB tips to avoid getting scammed:

- **Donate directly to the campaign office:** Donations made over the phone can be valid, but any wary donor should give to campaigns either through the candidates' official website or at a local campaign office.
- **Watched for spoofed calls:** Your Caller ID may say that someone from Washington DC is contacting you, but scammers can fake this using phone number spoofing technology.
- **Polling companies don't offer prizes:** Just hang up on any political pollster who claims that you can win a prize for participating in a survey
- **Polls won't ask for personal or banking information:** Political pollsters may ask for information about your vote or political affiliation, but they don't need your Social Security number or credit card information.

For More Information

- Check out this article from Politico at <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/01/super-pac-scams-114581> and this piece from the Washington Post at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/05/16/the-blurry-line-between-political-fundraising-and-political-scams-explained> about campaign fundraising scams in this presidential election.
- For more information on a variety of consumer topics or to check out a business, go to bbb.org. To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker (bbb.org/scamtracker).

[Source: BBB | August 19, 2016 ++]



Louisiana Flood Scam ► How it Works

Donors must be extra vigilant when donating to charities claiming to aid victims of Louisiana's devastating floods because they could be fraudulent entities, a federal alert said. It's common for scam charities to send email donation requests after major natural disasters, and their emails could contain malware, according to alerts from both the Federal Trade Commission and the U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team, a component of the Homeland Security Department. Scam emails often send potential donors emails with attachments or links that lead to malware-infected sites or other phishing attempts, US-CERT's alert said. US-CERT recommended that before they donate, potential donors:

- Keep software, especially antivirus programs, updated.
- Don't click on links or attachments in emails, especially if the email is unsolicited.
- Verify that an organization is legitimate by calling a trusted contact number, often listed on the Better Business Bureau's National Charity Report Index <http://give.org/charity-reviews/national>.

FTC's alerts on Charity Scams note potential donors shouldn't assume social media postings from charity organizations are legitimate and before participating in a text-to-donate campaign, they should first confirm the phone number with the recipient charity. [Source: NextGov.com | Mohana Ravindranath | August 24, 2016 ++]

Home Prices ► 5 Ways to Ride the Rising Tide

Home prices grew 5 percent between May 2015 and May 2016, says the respected S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller U.S. National Home Price NSA Index. As home prices grow, new opportunities open up for homeowners, buyers and sellers. The surge in home values was “further proof that the U.S. housing market had its strongest spring since the recession,” The Wall Street Journal says. The growth was led by cities in the West. Portland (12.5 percent price gains), Seattle (10.7 percent) and Denver (9.5 percent) had the biggest increases among 20 cities studied. The boom-and-bust-and-boom-again U.S. housing market has many heads spinning. Here's a quick review, with data from the U.S. Census Bureau. These numbers — which are calculated using a different method than the Case-Shiller index — are for a median-priced home. Remember, “median” means that half the prices in the market were higher and half were lower:

- Boom: November 2007. The median price of existing (not new) U.S. homes hits an all-time high: \$249,100.
- Bust: March 2009. Home prices plummet by nearly 18 percent. The median price falls to \$205,100 in a just over two years.
- Inching back: December 2012. By fits and starts, prices crawl upward. Around five years after the crash, home prices finally exceed the 2007 record.
- Boom: April 2016. Prices hit a new high, \$320,000 — up 28 percent from the 2007 high.
- Wobbles: May and June 2016. After peaking, home prices fall back down to \$288,800 in May. Then, they move back up again, to \$306,700 in June.

Here are five opportunities that this moment offers, depending on where you are in life:

Option No. 1: Become a homeowner. If you want to buy a home, you may be relieved to know that the growth in prices has begun to slow. No one is expecting prices to fall but the intense competition for homes in a market with limited inventory for sale should ease a bit as higher prices prompt more property owners to sell.

Zillow — whose home value estimates differ from Case-Shiller’s — predicts home prices will rise less than 3 percent by this time next year. Still, demand should stay strong: Three-quarters of renters want to become homeowners — up from 68.5 percent in 2015, say researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

If you want to be a homeowner, get moving, economist Robert Shiller told Bloomberg recently. “People should be buying a house if they want a house and not speculating that these price increases will continue,” said Shiller, one of the creators of the Case-Shiller Index. He emphasized that house price appreciation has averaged less than 1 percent a year over the past century. Before you buy, find out whether it is better to rent or buy where you live. Rent-or-buy calculators like this one on Zillow can show you which of these two options makes the most sense strictly from a financial point of view. Of course, so much else is involved in the decision, including stability — the ability to stay put and keep kids in their schools without fear of being bumped out or priced out by rent increases. Here’s help thinking the question through: “To Buy or Rent? How to Find the Answer to That Million-Dollar

A word of caution: It’s reassuring to know that since the recession, the federal government has installed consumer protections that stop lenders and borrowers from committing most of the crazy mortgage excesses that caused the housing crash. But it’s still important to be careful when taking on debt. Other stuff could happen. There’s no guarantee we won’t have another recession. You could lose your job, or become injured and unable to work. It is also possible you will wake up one day and realize you hate your job and need to return to school or retrain. Or maybe your spouse might need to step away from work to care for elderly parents or stay home with the kids. The safest plans take into account what may go wrong. Here’s how to cover your bases:

- Don’t let housing eat up more than 30 percent of your income — 40 percent if you are determined to go out on a limb.
- Don’t live on credit or go without an emergency fund that could cover three to six months of expenses or more.
- Finally, be sure to shop around for the best deal on mortgages. Rates are very low in historical terms. But remember that a difference of a percentage point in interest can mean tens of thousands of dollars over the life of a 30-year mortgage.

Option No. 2: Move up to a better home. Rising home prices are freeing many homeowners from their underwater home mortgages. A home is “underwater” — also called “negative equity” — when its mortgage is bigger than the home’s market value. Nearly one-third of home mortgages were underwater in 2012 after home values sank precipitously. Owners couldn’t sell these homes for enough money to pay off the mortgage, which contributed to a shortage of homes for sale. In January, a far smaller proportion — 12.7 percent — of U.S. homes had negative equity, Zillow reported. Owners who are no longer underwater are now in a position to sell, and to move to a better home or better location.

Option No. 3: Pull out cash. With the rising prices, homeowners with median-priced homes have seen their own equity increase by \$14,000 or \$15,000 in the last year. If you need some cash, you have an opportunity to pull cash out with a refinance of your home loan, or with a home equity line of credit. “Mortgage lenders have been inundated with refinance requests,” CNBC’s Reality Check reports. If you have enough equity in your home to refinance the mortgage, this is an excellent time to do it, since mortgage rates remain near all-time lows. Refinance borrowers paid, on average, 3.48 percent (with an average 0.5 point) for a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage in late July, according to Freddie Mac. An important tip: Leave plenty of equity untouched if you borrow. It’s insurance that, in case of another big price drop, you won’t be stuck with negative equity.

Option No. 4: Take the money and run. For some, rising home prices offer a chance to make dreams come true. In the hottest markets — most of them in the West — high demand and high prices have prompted some homeowners to cash out and use the money to retire, or to change their lives entirely. The Orange County Register reported on homeowners such as Bob and Jennifer Hochstadter, who sold the five-bedroom Laguna Niguel, California, home they’d owned for 35 years and pocketed the cash — more than \$1 million. They moved into a

smaller rental property they owned and have been traveling: “We just got back from a cruise on the Danube River,” Bob said. “The time we get to spend together we never had before, so it’s really nice.” Of course, the beauty of the Hochstadters’ story is that they still had a place to live after selling their primary residence, and they were empty-nesters in a good position to downsize.

Option No. 5: Do nothing. If you’re happy and see no big reason to make a change, sit tight, enjoy your home and see where the market takes you. Chances are good that home values will keep growing and your rising home equity will accumulate until you need it.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | July 29, 2016 ++]

SSA Retirement Age Update 03 ► 62-65 or Later

Financial advisors say that one of the biggest mistakes that most people make is retiring too early. If you claim at age 62, your benefit will be permanently reduced by 25% and may leave you at risk of having an inadequate income in retirement. But there are a few times when it makes sense to start benefits early. Here are steps to take to help you make the right decision:

- Calculate all available retirement income and assess adequacy. You and your spouse need to determine income from all sources, Social Security, pensions, IRA(s), 401(k)s, real estate, other assets, and jobs, and work up a realistic retirement budget. Don’t be tempted to assume your household budget will stay the same or go down in retirement, even if you pay off your mortgage. If you own your own home, you will still need to budget for real estate taxes, homeowners insurance, maintenance, and over time, big expenses like painting or replacing the roof. In addition, you need to budget a growing portion of your budget to medical expenses, which tend to grow several times faster than inflation and the Social Security cost-of-living adjustment (COLA). Your medical costs alone are likely to take from one-third to one-half of your Social Security benefits when you retire, and can require as much as \$245,000 for married couples age 65 and over, according to Fidelity Investments research on healthcare costs.
- Do the math. In addition to reducing your Social Security benefit, by retiring before your full retirement age, you also lose several years to build up retirement savings and instead increase the length of time you will be drawing down savings. And if you start benefits before you and your spouse are at full retirement age (66), earnings from work could reduce some or even all of your benefit. To add insult to injury, up to 85% of your benefits may be subject to taxation.
- Evaluate your health. Many people worry they will die before they get back what they would receive if they start benefits at 62. But if you start benefits at 62, it will take about 13 years — until you are age 74 — for your monthly benefit to reach the amount you would start with at age 66 and that assumes a more typical rate of inflation than we actually had over the past seven years. On the other hand you may find that health problems force you to stop working. You may want to consider working part-time. A 65-year old man can expect to live to 84, while a 65 year old woman can expect to live to 86.6, according to the Social Security Administration
- How much longer can you work? Among the best reasons to start Social Security benefits prior to turning full retirement age, are the loss of a job, problems finding new employment, and the need for the money to pay for food, shelter and the basic necessities.

Plan carefully before starting benefits by basing your decisions on facts — thinking through how you would go about spending down your savings. You can find plenty of retirement calculators online. Here is one easy

one to use: <http://www.bankrate.com/calculators/retirement/retirement-plan-calculator.aspx>. [Source: TSCL Advisor <http://seniorsleague.org/frequently-asked-questions-faqs> | July 2016 ++]

Elderly Parent Care ► Paid Family Leave Programs | CA, NJ & RI

Nearly 25 million American workers provide informal care for an elderly family member or friend who needs help with basic personal needs and daily activities. This number will probably grow as the post-World War II baby boomers – all 76 million of them – continue to age. Yet cobbling together time off from work is a real challenge for many caregivers. Some don't have sufficient leave or the ability to take it when they need it. Others simply can't afford to take leave without pay. Without job protections, others risk losing their jobs if they take time off to deal with these common caregiving demands.

Three states – California, New Jersey and Rhode Island – have paid family leave programs for workers who are temporarily disabled, or bonding with new children (sometimes called parental leave), and for workers caring for elderly parents and other family members. New York will join them in 2018. These are important policies: workers receive more financial security, and employers could benefit from, lower staff turnover or other business factors. The Department of Labor has released two research briefs from ongoing commissioned studies examining these programs and how they are working, especially for workers caring for elderly parents.

One brief reports that more than 230,000 workers a year receive paid leave benefits in these three states under the programs. The researchers also explain that family leave benefits for eldercare comprise a small share of overall family leave. For example, in California, 90 percent or more of those receiving state paid family leave benefits do so for bonding with a new child, and less than 10 percent are caring for a family member. This is surprising given the number of working Americans who report caring for an elderly parent, and an issue on which additional research is needed. The surprisingly low take-up may be related to a general lack of awareness.

A second brief, based on discussions with working caregivers in several communities in California, New Jersey and Rhode Island, explains there is low awareness of paid family leave programs, and confusion about the benefits provided and how they interact with other kinds of leave. For example, many workers in the discussion groups didn't understand the differences between an employer's leave benefits, the state paid leave programs, and the federal program Family and Medical Leave Act, which provides for unpaid, but job-protected, leave. These findings confirm those from earlier research, which found that over 50 percent of California workers did not know about the program two years after it started. And a nationwide survey in 2011 found that while about two-thirds of U.S. workers had heard of the FMLA, many were not sure about eligibility and benefits.

While program awareness and understanding seems relatively low, when caregivers in the discussion groups heard about what the programs offered, nearly all said the benefits would be valuable to them and their families. One person quoted in the brief said, "It's hard enough to know you have to take care of someone, and now you won't have to have the worry of losing your job or losing money." Several workers in the group who were caring for an elderly parent also mentioned their reluctance to tell employers they were taking time off to provide eldercare, let alone apply for paid family leave benefits, because they worried about repercussions at work.

The experiences in states that have made paid family leave a reality provide an important policy lesson: The number of workers using the benefits is growing, but the programs may be underused in part because many workers don't know about them. Getting the word out more broadly could have short and long-term benefits for both workers and employers. [Source: DOL Blog | Dr. Demetra Smith Nightingale and & Dr. Christina Yancey | August 18, 2016 ++]

TSA PreCheck Price ► Waiver/Discount Request for Vets

A House Democrat is pushing the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to lower the price of its PreCheck program for veterans. In a letter to TSA Administrator Peter Neffenger this week, Rep. Bill Pascrell urged the agency to either scrap or discount the expedited screening program's \$85 enrollment fee for veterans. The New Jersey Democrat raised concern that it may be "prohibitively expensive" for many of them. "These brave men and women have a long, well documented history of service to our nation," Pascrell wrote. "Given the sacrifice that our nation's veterans have made, I urge you to examine the feasibility of instituting a program that would allow veterans to participate in the TSA PreCheck program free of charge or with a discounted application fee."

The PreCheck program allows passengers who have undergone background checks to move through expedited security lanes without taking off their shoes or removing electronics from their bags. The price of the program covers five years. TSA officials have heavily relied on PreCheck to ease long airport security lines, which caused major headaches for passengers this spring. An increasing number of companies have offered to reimburse their employees for the program, while some air carriers have allowed travelers to purchase PreCheck with airline points. The TSA is in the process of seeking additional vendors to help manage the PreCheck program, which could spur more competition and eventually bring down the cost of enrollment. Pascrell acknowledged that the application fee covers the administrative costs of conducting background checks. But he pointed out that many veterans have already received security clearances and undergone periodic reinvestigations, which "should make the background process simpler to complete." [Source: The Hill | Melaine Zanona | August 25, 2016 ++]

Tax Burden for Louisiana Retired Vets ► As of AUG 2016

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. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retire in Louisiana:

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 4.0%; [3.8% for electricity, water utility services and steam; Interstate telecommunication services are taxable at 2%.] Political subdivisions also levy their own sales tax that could bring the total to 10.75%. Food for home consumption and residential utilities are exempt from state sales tax. Drugs, wheelchairs and prosthetic devices are fully taxed. Go to <http://www.revenue.louisiana.gov/FAQ?type=gen&cat=SLS#faq-102> for more information.

Gasoline Tax: 38.41 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 44.41 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: 86 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low - 2%; High - 6%

Income Brackets: Three: \$0 to \$12,500 at 2%; 4% on next \$37,500, and 6% above \$50,000. For joint returns, the taxes are twice the tax imposed on half the income.

Personal Exemptions: Single - \$4,500; Married - \$9,000; Dependents - \$1,000, blind, and 65 and older - \$1,000. Combined personal exemption and standard deduction.

Standard Deduction: Included in personal exemptions

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: Full

Retirement Income Taxes: Persons 65 years or older may exclude up to \$6,000 of annual retirement income from their taxable income. Taxpayers that are married filing jointly and are both age 65 or older can each exclude up to \$6,000 of annual retirement income. If only one spouse has retirement income, the exclusion is limited to \$6,000. Federal retirement benefits received by federal retirees, both military and nonmilitary, may be excluded from Louisiana taxable income. Individuals receiving benefits from certain retirement systems (shown when you click the link) are allowed to exclude those benefits from their Louisiana tax-table income. In addition, deferred income from the municipal and state police employee's retirement is exempt from state income tax. For details or more information <http://www.rev.state.la.us/sections/FAQ/default.aspx?type=GEN&cat=PER#faq-277> or call 225-219-0102.

Retired Military Pay: Not taxed.

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

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

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

Property Taxes

Taxes are assessed and collected at the local level — 64 parishes and 7 municipal districts. The Louisiana State Tax Commission has a regulatory role regarding property assessments. Property assessments are based on 10% of the fair market value of the property. Homeowners receive a homestead exemption in the amount of \$7,500. Exemption is applied against the assessed value of the home which is equal to 10% of the fair market value. Therefore, only homes with a market value over \$75,000 would be subject to the parish (county) property tax. However, this exemption does not generally apply to municipal taxes.

A Special Assessment applies to the homestead of persons who are 65 years of age and older if the adjusted gross household income is below a certain level. For the tax year 2006, that level was \$58,531. The level may change from year to year, so it is advisable to check with the assessor's office to determine whether you qualify. This special assessment will freeze the assessed value of the homestead for as long as the applicant owns and resides in the home and income does not exceed the maximum allowed. It will be lost if improvements in excess of 25% of the home's value are added. Call 225-925-7830 for details.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

Effective January 1, 2008, the inheritance tax is not applicable to deaths that occur after June 30, 2004. See [Acts 2008, No. 822](#). Louisiana does levy an estate transfer tax. [Revised Statute 47.2436](#) requires that an estate transfer tax return be filed by or on behalf of the heirs or legatees in every case where estate transfer tax is due or where the value of the deceased's net estate is \$60,000.00 or more. See <http://www.legis.state.la.us/lss/lss.asp?doc=101637>. For more information call 225-219-7462.

For further information, visit the Louisiana Department of Revenue site <http://www.rev.state.la.us> or call 255-219-0102. Additional information can be found at the [Louisiana Tax Commission](#) site <http://www.latax.state.la.us> and in the Louisiana Tax Fact Booklet at [http://www.revenue.louisiana.gov/forms/publications/20162\(11_11\)BR.pdf](http://www.revenue.louisiana.gov/forms/publications/20162(11_11)BR.pdf).

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#LOUISIANA> August 2016 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 AUG 2016

- **Wedding Photographers.** It's no easy task for a wedding photographer at a large wedding so it's important that all the right descriptions are used to determine who should appear in each photo. At <https://youtu.be/jLI6VA40oUs> is an example of how one photographer handles this.
- **Dementia.** Are you or your spouse experiencing unusual behavioral episodes. Check out these seven early signs of dementia at <http://newsletter.biggeekdad.com/t/i-l-kjhijyt-bhukrhuhd-i>.
- **COLA.** The July CPI is 234.789, and .2 percent above the FY 2014 COLA baseline. Because there was not a positive COLA in FY 2015, the FY 2014 baseline is used. The CPI for August 2016 is scheduled to be released on September 16, 2016.
- **Afghanistan.** Defense Department contractors in Afghanistan still outnumber U.S. troops by a 3-to-1 margin according to new research released this week, raising questions again about the role those workers play in the ongoing wars overseas and the oversight they receive.
- **Card Trick.** Check this amazing one out at https://youtu.be/4fdrNRoG_hs.
- **Country & Western.** Willie Nelson fans can go to <https://youtu.be/nxge1cvgy6I> to see his 29 JAN 1999 Woodstock concert.
- **Amazing Grace.** Andy Andrews sings Amazing Grace for us like you've never heard before in this hilarious story at <https://youtu.be/2cINrWlfCPI>
- **Dance.** The video <https://www.facebook.com/LeifAtmanFanPage/videos/262080024174813> shows the talent, the glamour of yesteryear.
- **Tinnitus.** The sounds of gunfire, machinery, aircraft, and much more are part of the everyday lives of servicemembers and they can leave many Veterans with permanent hearing damage. As a result, tinnitus is the number one disability among Veterans and it affects at least one in every 10 American adults. Over 150,000 veterans were diagnosed with tinnitus in 2015 and nearly 1.5 million veterans are currently receiving disability benefits for it.
- **LGBT.** A jury convicted a Georgia man on 24 AUG for throwing boiled water on a same-sex couple sleeping in an apartment, leaving them with severe burns that required surgery. Jurors deliberated for about 90 minutes before finding Martin Blackwell guilty of eight counts of aggravated battery and two counts of aggravated assault in the attack. He was sentenced to 40 years in prison.
- **Lucky Escape.** Go to <https://youtu.be/E3piq0WAupc> to see one reason why it is always wiser to let a women speak first the next time you go out with one.
- **Rentals.** The property management company operating family housing at Minot AFB is opening homes for lease to the general public. Occupancy in the 1,600 homes the company manages on base has dropped below 95 percent, precipitating the move.
- **Drone Base.** Key West is on the U.S. Navy's short list to become its East Coast home base for a drone system, a project requiring up to 400 military personnel. Locals have a 30-day period starting 1 SEP to weigh in with any objections.
- **CVA-62.** The decommissioned USS Independence will be towed from Washington to South Texas for dismantling. The retired aircraft carrier will depart later this year from the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in

Bremerton, Washington. Officials with a recycling company, International Shipbreaking Ltd., say the mothballed 61,000-ton ship should arrive at the Port of Brownsville by March. The Navy will pay the company around \$6 million to tow and dismantle the Independence.

National Anthem Update 01 ► QB Protest Riles Some, But Not All Vets

San Francisco 49ers QB Colin Kaepernick's decision to sit during the national anthem before NFL games this season drew immediate passionate reaction from fans, including veterans and military families who feel personally affected by the decision. Kaepernick began sitting out the pregame anthem tradition during the team's preseason contests earlier this month, and last week told reporters he was doing so to protest racial inequality in America. "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color," he said. "To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder."



NFL officials and personnel offered a mixed reaction to the protest. His team issued a statement late last week calling the anthem singing "an opportunity to honor our country and reflect on the great liberties we are afforded as its citizens." Several players said they supported his decision. But others saw it as a sign of disrespect, not just for America as a whole but for the men and women who serve in the armed forces. Buffalo Bills Coach Rex Ryan told the Associated Press that standing for the national anthem is a way for NFL players to honor the military. "You've got to look at the gifts that we have, the opportunity that we have to play a great game is through the men and women that serve our country," he said Sunday. "And I think that's an opportunity right there just to show respect."

In a statement the same day, Kaepernick said he has "great respect for the men and women that have fought for this country" and said the protest should not be taken as any insult to them. "I have family, I have friends that have gone and fought for this country," he said. "And they fight for freedom, they fight for the people, they fight for liberty and justice, for everyone. "That's not happening. People are dying in vain because this country isn't holding their end of the bargain up, as far as giving freedom and justice, liberty to everybody. That's something that's not happening."

Keenan Reynolds, a former Navy quarterback trying to make the fall roster with the Baltimore Ravens, told ESPN this weekend that Kaepernick's refusal to stand for the anthem is a protected form of protest. "Obviously, being in the military, I'm proud of that position, I'm proud of being able to defend the country, so humbled [by] other people that came before me and gave their lives so I can play on the field and run around and we can live freely in this country," he said. "But like I said, that's his right, and he's going to do what he has to do." Some people who identify themselves as veterans have tweeted pictures of themselves in uniform and messages of support

under the hashtag VeteransForKaepernick . One says he served to protect freedoms, not a song. Another says protesting is every American's right. Kaepernick says he will continue his protest ahead of Thursday's preseason game in San Diego. [Source: Military times & AP | August 29 & 31, 2016 ++]

Mail Theft ► USPS Southern California Employees

Federal authorities have charged dozens of Southern California postal workers and their associates with mail theft, embezzlement and an array of other crimes as part of a sweeping investigation into criminal activity at the U.S. Postal Service. A total of 33 defendants were charged in 28 cases, including one individual who was found to have had tens of thousands of pieces of mail in her possession, according to a statement released Friday by the United States attorney's office for the Central District of California. Arrest warrants were issued for six of the 33 defendants, officials said.

In addition to mail theft and embezzlement by postal workers and contractors, some of the cases involve bank fraud and false statements; a few allege crimes by people who are not USPS employees. "The mail system plays an important role in our country's commerce and social communication. Maintaining its integrity is vital," United States Attorney Eileen M. Decker said in a statement. "Mail theft across Southern California has increased recently, which is significant since this type of crime tends to be a precursor to other crimes like identity theft and drug offenses. As a result, we are stepping up enforcement." The alleged mail theft manifested itself in a variety of bizarre and disturbing forms, according to prosecutors.

- Postal carrier Sherry Naomi Watanabe, 48, was found to have more than 48,000 pieces of mail at her Sawtelle residence, the Justice Department said. That mail was supposed to have been delivered on her route in Placentia.
- In another case, Nicole Elwood, 45, was charged with mail theft for allegedly stealing medications sent by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to veterans.
- Justin Brewster, a 25-year-old USPS mail processing clerk, is accused of stealing video games that were mailed to or from the video game rental service Gamefly; Michael Smith, 43, allegedly took money orders from a mail envelope; and prosecutors say Jarol Garcia, 33, stole at least 166 mobile phones from parcels as they went through the Moreno Valley Delivery Distribution Center.

"The overwhelming majority of Postal Service employees are honest and dedicated public servants who are worthy of our trust," said Brian Washington, special agent in charge of the Postal Service's Office of Inspector General. "However, when employees engage in criminal activity, our agency will aggressively investigate these matters to protect the overall integrity of the Postal Service." Most of the defendants were charged in indictments that were returned by federal grand juries last week, officials said. Defendants charged as part of the sweep will be arraigned in the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles, Santa Ana and Riverside, they said. [Source: LA Times | Matt Stevens | 29 August 2016 ++]

Passwords Update 01 ► Paraphrase Replacements

Complicated passwords might soon give way to simplicity. A growing body of research — including recent studies out of Carnegie Mellon University — shows simpler but longer passwords known as "passphrases" are as effective as more complicated but shorter passwords, according to a recent report in the Washington Post. The length — usually 16 to 64 characters — and randomness of passphrases throw off hacking programs. One example: mycatlikesreadinggarfieldinthewashingtonpost instead of W@5hPo5t! The advantages of passphrases include that they:

- Don't need to be changed as often.
- Are easier to remember because they do not require combinations of uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers and special characters.

Michelle Mazurek, a former Carnegie Mellon researcher who is now an assistant professor at the University of Maryland, tells the Washington Post passphrases are becoming more common: "For equivalent amounts of security, longer tends to be more useful for people." This new standard for passwords is catching on with businesses and government agencies like the National Institute of Standards and Technology, which is in the process of formally updating its password guidelines contained in NIST special publication 800-63. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has also partnered with Carnegie Mellon University's CyLab to improve its password security.

NATO program manager John Boyd noted a commonly cited problem with shorter passwords that require more frequent changes: "We're giving people mixed messages. We're telling them to create great, strong passwords, but don't fall in love with them because you're going to have to change them again in a few months. People end up making bad passwords because they have no incentive to make good ones." Before you adopt passphrases, however, the Washington Post notes:

- Experts warn against using popular song lyrics or poetry lines in passphrases, as hackers can download libraries of common phrases.
- Many experts also advocate two-factor verification.

To learn more about two-factor verification, check out <http://www.moneytalksnews.com/free-and-easy-way-shop-the-web-more-securely>. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | August 17, 2016 ++]

Annoying Communications ► **What you Can do to Reduce Them**

Junk Snail Mail. Crushing the credit offers

Hopefully you don't pick your plastic by responding to "preapproved" credit card offers you get in the mail. The way to get a credit card isn't to fall for a sales pitch, it's to invest a few minutes and shop them. Do that by going to Solutions Center <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/solutions>, clicking on "Credit Cards," then comparing competing offers.

Any unsolicited offer saying you're preapproved is most likely a lie anyway. Banks buy lists of people with certain credit characteristics, then send them all offers saying they're "preapproved." You're not preapproved. You still have to apply, and the bank can still turn you down. There are two ways to stop this mail. In either case, you'll have to provide personal information, like your name, phone number, Social Security number and date of birth. Not to worry. According to the Federal Trade Commission, your information will be kept private. You can either opt out for five years, or forever.

- To opt out for five years: go to <https://www.optoutprescreen.com/?rf=t> or call 888-5-OPT-OUT (888-567-8688)
- To opt out forever: Go to OptOutPrescreen.com and jump through an extra hoop by completing a form, which you'll then have to mail in.

If you'd prefer not to use the internet, you can send a written request to permanently opt out. But you'll have to send it to four consumer reporting agencies, which will otherwise sell your name. You'll need to include the same information required online: name, phone number, Social Security number and date of birth. Here are the addresses:

- *Experian*, Opt Out, P.O. Box 919, Allen, TX 75013
- *TransUnion*, Name Removal Option, P.O. Box 505, Woodlyn, PA 19094

- *Equifax, Options*, P.O. Box 740123, Atlanta, GA 30374
- *Innovis Consumer Assistance*, P.O. Box 495, Pittsburgh, PA 15230

Freezing the cold calls. The good news: You can stop many unsolicited calls simply by registering your phone number (cell or landline) with the National Do Not Call Registry. The bad news: You won't stop them all. Political organizations, charities, telephone surveyors, business to business callers and debt collectors aren't affected by the Do Not Call Registry. This is also true of companies you have a current business relationship with, although they're required to stop if you request it. The other category of caller you can't stop unless you request it is those you've given written consent to call you.

Stop other calls by going to <http://www.donotcall.gov> and registering your personal number(s). You'll only need to provide a phone number and email address. Your number will appear in the registry forever, or until you remove it. If you'd prefer to register by phone, you can call 888-382-1222 from the number you're registering. Your number will show up on the registry the next day, but telemarketers have 31 days to stop calling. If you've forgotten whether you already registered your number, it's easy to check. Just go to the website, put in your number and email address, and they'll send you an email confirming your status. If you get unauthorized calls after you've been on the registry for 31 days, file a complaint here. You can learn more about the Do Not Call Registry here.

Unplugging robocalls. Nearly all robocalls are illegal, whether or not your name is in the Do Not Call Registry. Unless you've given written permission to the caller, or the call is from a nonprofit, school or political campaign, it's against the law. If you get a robocall, you can report it, although if you get as many robocalls as I do, you'll spend all day reporting calls and they won't stop anyway. A better idea is to fight back with a call-blocking app. There are tons on the market.

- If you have a VoIP phone, Nomorobo at <http://www.nomorobo.com> is a free tool you can use to block robocalls. You tell it who your carrier is, provide an email address and, from that point forward, an algorithm blocks robocalls. It's available for most large VoIP providers; you can see the list at <https://nomorobo.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/205761775-What-Phone-Carriers-Are-Supported-> Unfortunately, it isn't yet available for cellphones.
- There are cellphone apps, however, that can help. CTIA (formerly known as the Cellular Telephone Industry Association) has a list of apps. Some cost, but most are free. Go to:
 - **Android** phones <http://www.ctia.org/your-wireless-life/consumer-tips/blocking-robocalls/android-robocall-blocking>
 - **Apple** phones <http://www.ctia.org/your-wireless-life/consumer-tips/blocking-robocalls/ios-robocall-blocking>
 - **Windows** phones <http://www.ctia.org/your-wireless-life/consumer-tips/blocking-robocalls/windows-robocall-blocking>
 - **Blackberry** phones <http://www.ctia.org/your-wireless-life/consumer-tips/blocking-robocalls/blackberry-robocall-blocking>

You may have wondered why lawmakers and the big phone companies aren't doing more to stop the flood of illegal robocalls. Consumer groups, notably Consumers Union (publisher of Consumer Reports) are pressuring congress and companies to act. Add your voice and join more than 600,000 fed-up consumers by signing the Consumers Union petition at <https://consumersunion.org/end-robocalls>

Slowing snail mail to a crawl. Like unsolicited sales calls, you can slow, but not stop, junk mail. A private organization, the Direct Marketing Association, maintains a kind of "do not mail" list. It's called the Mail Preference Service. Putting your name on the list will keep DMA members from sending you unsolicited mail for five years. Mail from nonmembers, however, will continue. There are two ways to register with DMA's Mail Preference Service. Either do it free at <https://dmachoice.thedma.org>, or send a written request, along with \$1, to: DMAchoice, Direct Marketing Association, P.O. Box 643, Carmel, NY 10512

Banning spam. In addition to snail mail, the DMA also has an Email Preference Service. You register at the same site, and it's good for six years. As we all know only too well, however, we get unsolicited email, also known as spam, from lots of companies that aren't members of DMA or any other reputable organization. Like the robocallers, spammers are willing to ignore the law in hopes of selling you something or ripping you off. There's no way to eliminate all spam, but there are two things you can do to reduce the flood to a trickle.

- *Rev up your spam filter.* Nearly all popular email programs have filters for spam that can be adjusted. If you're getting a lot, check your settings and see if you can increase the sensitivity. To learn how, use the "help" function of your program, or simply search online for "reducing junk mail with (the name of your email program)."
- *Use "disposable" email addresses.* A lot of spam comes from using your email address at websites that turn around and sell your name and other personal information. Solution? Have one main email address for friends, family, work, etc., but have another for everything else. For example, if your regular email address is JaneDoe@gmail.com, create a new email address called JaneDoeShops@gmail.com. If you start getting a lot of spam to that address, simply delete it and start again with a new one.

As for the spam you're already getting at your main address, use the "help" on your email program or search the web for instructions on how to block the sender of offending emails. (On Outlook, it's as simple as right-clicking on the email, then clicking "junk.") If you're subscribed to email newsletters or get other regular emails you no longer wish to receive, the law requires that they contain an "unsubscribe" button at the bottom of every email like the RAO Bulletin Availability Notices have. If they do, unsubscribe. If they don't, they're illegal. Block them.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | August 19, 2016 ++]

Legacy Lager ► Toast A Hero

Beginning this fall, Dog Tag Brewing's "Legacy Lager" will be distributed nationally by Pabst Brewing Company. Dog Tag Brewing donates 100% of its after-tax profits to the Dog Tag Brewing Foundation, which benefits charities created or selected by Gold Star Families. Seth Jordan, a Marine combat veteran, founded Dog Tag Brewing in 2014 with an invitation for the American public to "Toast a Hero" as they read the name of a fallen warrior printed on each can. Today, Seth serves as Chairman of the Dog Tag Brewing Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting legacy building projects started or selected by Gold Star Families, the families of fallen military personnel.

Dog Tag Foundation will provide grants to Gold Star family charities and offer free consulting services to help families create impactful, sustainable organizations in honor of their loved ones. "The partnership with Pabst will ensure that millions of Americans will have a chance to try our beer and to join us in helping Gold Star families build the legacies of our nation's fallen military heroes," said Jordan. "Our mission is simple: to help Gold Star families make sure their loved one is never forgotten."



Legacy Lager Cans Feature Fallen Warriors

Dog Tag’s “Legacy Lager” is brewed with premium quality 2-row pale and specialty malts, Magnum and Saaz hops, and is fermented with a timeless American lager yeast. It is a 5% ABV brew with 22 IBUs, and will be available in 4-pack 16oz cans. Dog Tag utilizes a groundbreaking can printing technology to dedicate each can within a 4-pack to a different fallen warrior. Eugene Kashper, CEO of Pabst Brewing Company stated: “We are really excited to partner with Seth and Dog Tag. Seth’s passion for remembering, honoring, and celebrating our nation’s heroes is inspiring. We are truly honored to have the opportunity to support Gold Star families in their charitable endeavors and to help spread Dog Tag’s message nationwide.” Dog Tag’s Legacy Lager will be available in 26 states beginning September 1, 2016, with national distribution in 2017.

About Dog Tag Brewing Foundation

Dog Tag Brewing Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is dedicated to building the legacies of America’s Fallen Warriors by partnering with Gold Star Families – the families of our fallen military – on legacy-building projects that carry on the memory of their loved ones. Dog Tag Brewing Foundation supports these projects through grants and free consulting services, and then aims to inspire Americans to get involved by sharing stories of service and sacrifice through social media and on individualized dedication cans of Dog Tag Legacy Lager. Founded in late 2015, Dog Tag Brewing Foundation is supported by the generosity of the public and by its subsidiary, Dog Tag Brewing, LLC, which donates 100% of its profits to Dog Tag Brewing Foundation. To date, Dog Tag Brewing Foundation has amassed a social media following of over 125,000, has given away \$120,000 in grants and services, and expects to eventually grow to support up to 1000 different Gold Star charities after the beer’s successful national rollout. To learn more visit www.dogtagbrewing.org .

[Source: KUSI News San Diego | August 22, 2016 ++]

Bread ► Why it Goes Bad & How to Make it Last Longer

Nothing ruins a sandwich quite like stale (or moldy) bread. Yuck. If you love bread, buns and rolls — especially when they’re fresh-baked — then pay attention because you’re going to love this simple trick to keep your bread fresh for as long as possible. But first, a quick lesson on how bread goes from fresh and delicious to moldy or tough:

- **Moldy bread:** Mold needs nutrients (in this example, a piece of bread), warmth and moisture to thrive. “If you store your bread in plastic (which traps moisture) and keep it in a warm place (like on top of the refrigerator or over the dishwasher), you’re giving mold everything it needs to grow unchecked,” according to Tasting Table.
- **Stale bread:** As soon as bread is taken out of the oven to cool, its starch molecules begin to crystallize, which forces water out of the bread and makes it stale, says Chatelaine Kitchen. The process is known as starch retrogradation. Exposing bread to air also leads to loss of moisture and results in staling.

Now that you know how and why your bread goes bad, here are some things you can do to prolong its freshness:

Avoid pre-sliced bread: “Pre-sliced bread has many more exposed surface areas, which allows air to work its way into the bread,” Laura Holman writes on Food Hacks.

Slice into the middle of your bread rather than the ends: Holman also recommends that you slice your bread from the center of the loaf, then remove the slices you plan to eat and push the two cut pieces back together. “The two heels act as a barrier against the air, preventing air from having ready access to the crumb (which is much more susceptible to staling),” Holman writes.

Don't put your bread in the refrigerator: Although storing your bread in the fridge does delay the development of mold, it is the absolute worst environment for preventing staleness because starch retrogradation occurs rapidly in the refrigerator. "The fridge is your enemy when it comes to bread," says Chatelaine Kitchen.

Freezing. If you want to keep your bread fresh for up to a month, bakers and food experts recommend one thing: Put it in the freezer. It prevents staling as freezer temperatures arrest starch retrogradation, holding the bread in a stable state. To get the most out of your frozen bread, freeze it as soon as possible after baking and cooling, and consume it equally as fast after thawing. Bread needs to be properly wrapped in plastic and it's also a good idea to slice your bread into portions prior to freezing.

Taste. You may also want to keep in mind that bread tastes its best when it's eaten right out of the oven. "Bread is best when just baked," baking master Eric Kayser told the Tasting Table. "It can have a shelf life of two or three days, but it will taste best within hours of coming out of the oven."

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | June 15, 2016 ++]



Keyless Ignitions ► Safety Hazard

One of the most dangerous new technologies on cars is also one of the most celebrated — keyless ignitions. There were at least 13 carbon monoxide deaths linked to keyless ignitions and enough other incidents to prompt the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to post a public notice in the National Register reporting that the technology poses a “clear safety problem,” according to Scripps news service. Richard Reina, product training director at CARiD.com and an auto expert with over 30 years of experience, said his recent experiences with keyless ignition convinced him the systems are more dangerous than most people realize. “I was shocked by what the car will allow you to do,” he said. “And you are taking an action [of using a key in an ignition] that has been ingrained in drivers and... changed the protocol....That can lead to accidents.” Here are four reasons to think twice before you buy a car with keyless ignition



1. **It's easy to leave the car running.** We all hear that cars with keyless ignitions are silent, but we might not realize how that impacts us until we drive one. One Florida man was left gravely ill and his girlfriend died after she inadvertently left a keyless ignition car running in a garage attached at her home, according to a Florida ABC-TV affiliate. The incident isn't isolated. A class action lawsuit has been brought against 10 automakers due to carbon monoxide deaths in such cars, reported the Consumerist.

2. **Safety features don't prevent some accidents.** Reina put a car with keyless ignition into drive, engaged the parking brake, and then exited the car without hitting the button to shut down the engine. "In fairness to the [automaker] there was a read-out on the dashboard that noted the power is on," said Reina, adding that soft beeps also sounded. "But I was still able to open the door and walk away. A roll-a-way incident could have occurred."

3. **It's difficult to change your driving habits.** No matter how sure you are that you will understand the process of shutting off a keyless ignition car, emergencies happen. If you are late to work or to get your child from daycare, your past driving patterns might kick in, he said. That means you could fail to shut down the car and injure or kill yourself or others

4. **Valets and others may not be keyless ignition savvy.** Reina tells the story of valets who have inadvertently not shut down a keyless ignition car. The result could be anything from an accident to a dead battery.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Nancy Dunham | June 13, 2016 ++]

Soda Consumption ► Tax Impact

Berkeley, California, is winning the so-called fight against big soda. It's been nearly two years since 3 out of 4 Berkeley voters approved a 1-cent-an-ounce tax on soda and other sugary drinks. The "soda tax," which was implemented in March 2015, is now being credited with a significant drop in the consumption of sugary drinks in that city. According to a new study published in the American Journal of Public Health, lower-income Berkeley residents reduced their sugar-sweetened beverage consumption by a whopping 21 percent in the first five months after the tax was put into effect. Instead of swigging soda and sports drinks, these Berkeley residents increased their water consumption by 63 percent, says the Los Angeles Times.

Although other municipalities across the U.S. have considered taxing sugary drinks, Berkeley was the first city in the nation to endorse a soda tax. Philadelphia followed suit in June, when its City Council approved a 1.5 cent-per-ounce tax that will go into effect Jan. 1, 2017. San Francisco had a similar measure on its ballot in November 2014, when residents in Berkeley, just across San Francisco Bay, passed their city's soda tax. But the San Francisco initiative failed to pass.

Kristine Madsen, a researcher at the University of California, Berkeley's School of Public Health and senior author of the study, tells NPR the juxtaposition of Berkeley and San Francisco provided a "perfect natural experiment." San Franciscans and Berkeley residents reported drinking similar amounts of sugary drinks before they voted on the tax. But since the soda tax was implemented in Berkeley, soda consumption in San Francisco and neighboring Oakland actually increased by 4 percent, says the Times' report on the study. Madsen says reducing sugar-sweetened beverage consumption by 21 percent is enough to lower the rates of obesity and Type 2 diabetes for many years to come. This would have a huge public health impact if it were sustained," she tells NPR. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | August 24, 2016 ++]

McCain's Reelection Fight ► Retired General's Concerns

A group of 56 retired military general and flag officers offered a strong endorsement of Republican Arizona Sen. John McCain on 23 AUG, calling for his re-election and labeling him an invaluable leader in Congress on defense issues. "Today's world is an exceedingly dangerous place," the group wrote in a piece for the Arizona Republic. "It is clear to us that our country and the United States Senate can ill afford to lose the benefit of Sen. McCain's battle-

tested experience; his grasp of the needs of our military personnel, America’s veterans and their families; his internationally respected voice; and the model of service and inspiration he provides to our young men and women in uniform.”

The endorsement comes amid a difficult re-election fight for McCain, a five-term senator who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee. McCain has sparred publicly with Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump over the last year, but he has also backed him to be the next commander in chief, creating ire from voters from all sides in his home state. The endorsement letter on Tuesday included a number of notable signers. Retired Marine Corps Gen. John Allen, who spoke on behalf of Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton at her party’s convention last month, leads the list. Retired Army Gen. Keith Alexander and Air Force Gen. Michael Hayden, who both served as National Security Agency director, also signed on, as did former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno, who publicly sparred with McCain on a number of defense issues during his time at the Pentagon.

The group praised McCain’s career as “one of service and sacrifice for our common good, and of accumulated experience that our next president will need during moments of national challenge and peril.” They also said that McCain will “continue championing needed reform in the Defense Department” if re-elected, a key focus point of the Senate Armed Services Committee under his leadership the last two years. McCain faces a pair of Republican challengers in his primary race later this month, and would square off against Democratic Arizona Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick in the general election if he advances. Recent polls have shown a close battle in each contest. At <http://www.azcentral.com/story/opinion/letters/2016/08/23/reelect-john-mccain/89221540> can be seen the full list of signers. [Source: Military Times | Leo Shane | August 24, 2016 ++]

Dumb Smart Device ► Electronic Fork

HAPIfork ‘coaches you into better eating habits’. Forget conscious eating. Hapifork, an electronic fork, monitors and tracks your eating habits. The forks’ indicator lights and gentle vibrations alert you when you’re eating too fast. The readout tells you how long it takes to eat your meal, the amount of “fork servings” taken per minute and intervals between “fork servings.” Use it and you’ll lose weight and improve digestion — except if you’re one of the horribly disappointed Amazon buyers including those who invested in the Kickstarter campaign to fund it. Cost: \$79.



<https://www.amazon.com/HAPILABS-102-HAPIfork-Bluetooth-Enabled-Smart/dp/B00FRPCPEC>

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Nancy Dunham on August 16, 2016 ++]

Brain Teaser ► Water in the Cup

A man in a restaurant asked a waiter for a juice glass, a dinner plate, water, a match, and a lemon wedge. The man then poured enough water onto the plate to cover it.

"If you can get the water on the plate into this glass without touching or moving this plate, I will give you \$100," the man said. "You can use the match and lemon to do this."

A few minutes later, the waiter walked away with \$100 in his pocket. How did the waiter get the water into the glass?

Hint

The glass will be upside-down when the water is in it.

Have You Heard? ► Teacher Interview || Father O'Malley

After being interviewed by the school administration, the prospective teacher said: 'Let me see if I've got this right.

- 'You want me to go into that room with all those kids, correct their disruptive behavior, observe them for signs of abuse, monitor their dress habits, censor their T-shirt messages, and instill in them a love for learning.
- 'You want me to check their backpacks for weapons, wage war on drugs and sexually transmitted diseases, and raise their sense of self-esteem and personal pride.
- 'You want me to teach them patriotism and good citizenship, sportsmanship and fair play, and how to register to vote, balance a checkbook, and apply for a job.
- 'You want me to check their heads for lice, recognize signs of antisocial behavior, and make sure that they all pass the final exams.
- 'You also want me to provide them with an equal education regardless of their handicaps, and communicate regularly with their parents in English, Spanish or any other language, by letter, telephone, newsletter, and report card.
- 'You want me to do all this with a piece of chalk, a blackboard, a bulletin board, a few books, a big smile, and a starting salary that qualifies me for food stamps.

'You want me to do all this, and then you tell me..... **I CAN'T PRAY?**

-o-o-O-o-o-

A golfer is in a competitive match with a friend, who is ahead by a couple of strokes.. "Boy, I'd give anything to sink this putt", the golfer mumbles to himself..

Just then, a stranger walks up beside him and whispers, "Would you be willing to give up one-fourth of your sex life?" Thinking the man is crazy and his answer will be meaningless, the Golfer also feels that maybe this is a good omen, so he says, "Sure," and sinks the putt.

Two holes later, he mumbles to himself again, "Gee, I sure would like to get an eagle on this one." The same stranger is at his side again and whispers, "Would it be worth giving up another fourth of your sex life?" Shrugging, the golfer replies, "Okay." And he makes an eagle.

On the final hole, the golfer needs another eagle to win. Without waiting for him to say anything, the stranger quickly moves to his side and says, "Would winning this match be worth giving up the rest of your sex life?" "Definitely," the golfer replies, and he makes the eagle.

As the golfer is walking to the club house, the stranger walks alongside him and says, "I haven't really been fair with you because you don't know who I am. I'm Satan, and from this day forward you will have no sex life."

"Nice to meet you," the golfer replies, "**I'm Father O'Malley.**"

Brain Teaser Answer ► Water In the Cup

First, the waiter stuck the match into the lemon wedge, so that it would stand straight. Then he lit the match, and put it in the middle of the plate with the lemon. Then, he placed the glass upside-down over the match. As the flame used up the oxygen in the glass, it created a small vacuum, which sucked in the water through the space between the glass and the plate.

Thus, the waiter got the water into the glass without touching or moving the plate.

You can try this experiment at home with appropriate supervision.



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