

RAO

BULLETIN

1 December 2017

PDF Edition



**THIS RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE BULLETIN CONTAINS THE
FOLLOWING ARTICLES**

Pg	Article	Subject
* DOD *		

- 05 == NDAA 2018 [17] ---- (Impact on Defense Spending)
07 == DoD Blended Retirement System ---- (Bonus Lowest Allowed By Law)
07 == Transgender Troops [11] ---- (Sex Assignment Surgery Ban Halted)
09 == Transgender Troops [12] ---- (Third Court Injunction Issued)
09 == AFRH [08] ---- (New CEO Named)
10 == N-Zero [01] ---- (Battery Might Not Need A Charge for 10 Years).
11 == DoD Children Schools ---- (47 Under Consideration for Divestiture)
12 == GI Bill Transferability [03] ---- (Policy Change Under Consideration)
13 == GTMO Detainees [01] ---- (Artwork Barred From Further Release)
14 == DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ---- (Reported 16 thru 30 NOV 2017)
15 == POW/MIA Recoveries ---- (Reported 16 thru 30 NOV 2017 | Eleven)

.	* VA *	.
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- 17 == White House VA Hotline [01] ---- (Now Fully Staffed 7/24)

17 == VA Privatization [12] ---- (H.R.4457 Breaks Nation's Promise To Vets)
18 == VA Benefits Reform ---- (Shulkin Calls for Overhaul & Realignment)
19 == VA Benefits Reform [01] ---- (Choice & Tricare Merger Proposal)
22 == VA Benefits Reform [02] ---- (VFW Criticizes Veterans Empowerment Act)
22== VA ID Card [13] ---- (Vets Can Now Apply)
23 == VA Unpaid Obligations ---- (\$226M to Settle 23 Claims)
24 == VA Women Vet Programs [32] ---- (Depression & Heart Disease)
25 == VA Physician Qualifications [03] ---- (Poor Performers Not Reported | 90%)
25 == PTSD [235] ---- (HBOT Treatment Option)
26 == VA Suicide Prevention [45] ---- (NJ Clinic Was Remiss in Vet's Death)
27 == VA EHR [10] ---- (\$800 Million Needed to Begin Overhaul)
28 == VA Appointments [18] ---- (How to Use the Online Scheduling)
29 == VA Sexual Trauma Program [08] ---- (Disability Compensation & Treatment)
30 == VA Loans ---- (Misconceptions)
31 == VA Loan Refinancing [02] ---- (Warning Order)
32 == VA Financial Literacy Resources ---- (What FLEC Can Do for You)
33 == VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ---- (Reported 16 thru 30 NOV 2017)
34 == VA Compensation & Benefits ---- (Problem Solving Program Q&A -- 23 & 24)
35 == VAMC Denver CO [09] ---- (Improper Mental Health Care Wait Lists)
36 == VAMC Jackson MS [02] ---- (Barred Physician Draws \$339,177 Annual Salary)
38 == VAMC Beckley WV [03] ---- (Acupuncture Program on Track)
38 == VA HCS Alaska [01] ---- (Hiring More Employees | Improve Care Access)

* VETS *

39 == Vet Jobs [227] ---- (Alaska HCS Hiring)
39 == Ashford University Lawsuit ---- (Vet Students Deceived & Defrauded CA Alleges)
40 == Vet For-Profit Schools ---- (Why Are they Allowed to Exploit Students?)
42 == Military Records & Medals ---- (Preserving the Past | Tips)
44 == Taps [04] ---- (Detente Reached With Retiree Over Playing)
44 == Vet Deportations [13] ---- (President Asked to Stop It)
45 == Nursing Homes [12] ---- (Lawsuit | Hidden Camera Reveals How Vet Died)
47 == Veterans' Treatment Court [25] ---- (Raleigh County West Virginia)
49 == Vet Prison Inmate Programs [03] ---- (Separate Housing Unit Trend)
51 == Worst States for Retirees ---- (1st thru 5th)
52 == Chem-Bio Agent Tests [01] ---- (How Exposed Apply for Medical Care)
53 == Obit: Fox~Wesley L ---- (24 NOV 2017)
53 == WWII Vets 148 ---- (Kermit Bushur | Merrill's Marauders Member)
54 == AFL Q&A 10 ---- (Benefits Denial Letter)
55 == Retiree Appreciation Days ---- (Scheduled As of 30 NOV 2017)
55 == Vet Hiring Fairs ---- (Scheduled As of 30 NOV 2017)
56 == Veteran's State Benefits & Discounts ---- (Nevada NOV 2017)

* VET LEGISLATION*

56 == DIC [10] ---- (S.1990 | DIC Improvement Act of 2017)
57 == Vet Educational Assistance [01] ---- (H.R.4323 | Vet STEM Careers Act)
58 == Vet Health Insurance ---- (H.R.4457 | Veterans Empowerment Act)
59 == VA Accountability Update 50 ---- (\$0.0000 | VA Provider Accountability Act)

60 == Military Sexual Assault [02] ---- (S.2141 | Military Justice Improvement Act)
62 == Military Museums & Memorials [01] ---- (H.R.4328 Introduced | WWI)
62 == NDAA 2018 [15] ---- (Conference Report Overview)
63 == NDAA 2018 [16] ---- (Senate Voice Vote Approval | Sent to President)
64 == NDAA 2018 [18] ---- (Little Known Provisions)

* MILITARY*

66 == Army Recruiting [03] ---- (No Change to Standards)
67 == Navy Pepper Spray Policy ---- (Once Is Enough)
68 == Navy Name Change ---- (Removed From 2018 NDAA)
68 == Navy Fleet Size [09] ---- (Smaller Warships w/Bigger Punch Needed)
69 == Floating Guantanamos ---- (USCG Onboard Detention of Smugglers)
70 == Afghanistan [01] ---- (Troops Told to Ignore Ongoing Child Sexual Abuse)
71 == Air Force Lasers ---- (Lockheed Martin To Develop for Fighter Jet Use by 2021)
72 == Nuclear Launch Authority ---- (President Soley | Congress is Concerned)
73 == D7R-II Military Bulldozer ---- (Semi-Autonomous or Remote Controlled Design)
74 == USS Cole Attack [04] ---- (Pentagon Suspends Sentence Against Marine 1-Star)
75 == USS Ralph Johnson (DDG-114) ---- (Navy Accepts Delivery from Shipbuilder)
76 == USS Benfold (DDG-65) ---- (Minor Collision With Japanese Tugboat)
76 == USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) [09] ---- (Underway Aboard Transport Transshelf)
77 == USAF Pilot Shortage [02] ---- (Increasing Despite High Retention Bonuses)
78 == Overseas Troops ---- (Gunnery Sgt. Santana Jimenez)
79 == USMC Missile System ---- (Mobile Anti-Ship Coastal Defense System Needed)
80 == USS Little Rock (LCS-9) ---- (Commissioning Plans)

* MILITARY HISTORY*

81 == Marine Corps War Memorial [05] ---- (Afghanistan & Iraq Now Included)
82 == Military History ---- (Nazis Helped China Fight Japan)
82 == Military History ---- (Sgt. Reckless | USMC War Horse)
83 == Military History ---- (WWI | Modane, France Train Derailment)
85 == Battle of Firebase Ripcord ---- (Vietnam | March thru July 1970)
87 == Vietnam Myths ---- (5 Deeply Entrenched Ones)
88 == Alaska Territorial Guard ---- (Natives Defended Their Territory in WWII)
91 == M19 60mm Mortar ---- (Favored By Marines in Nam)
91 == Military History Anniversaries ---- (01 thru 15 DEC)
92 == Abandoned Military Bases [12] ---- (RAF Stenigot, England)
92 == Medal of Honor Citations ---- (Galer-Robert E | WWII)

* HEALTH CARE*

94 == Elderly Parent Care [01] ---- (When It's Time to Leave Home)
95 == TRICARE Changes 2018 [10] ---- (Pregnancy/Birthing User Fee Increases)
96 == TRICARE Changes 2018 [11] ---- (Is Your doctor Still in the Tricare Network?)
97 == Liver Flukes ---- (Cholangiocarcinoma | Vietnam's Silent Bullet)
99 == Liver Disease [01] ---- (Symptoms)
101 == History Of Medicine ---- (Colic)
101 == TRICARE Podcast 424 ---- (TRICARE Select)

102 == TRICARE Podcast 425 ---- (Healthy Eating | Holiday Stress | Holiday Fitness)

* FINANCIAL *

103 == GI Bill Transferability [02] ---- (Payback Required if 4-yr Term Not Met)

104 == Retiree Annual COLAs [04] ---- (FY 2017 | CPI Impact)

105 == Medicare Hospital Coverage ---- (Status Can Cost You \$1000's)

106 == Google Wallet Scam [01] ---- (Bait And Switch Schemes)

107 == Online Shopper Scam ---- (Phony Tracking Numbers)

107 == Tax Burden for Wisconsin Retired Vets ---- (As of NOV 2017)

* GENERAL INTEREST *

110 == Notes of Interest ---- (16 thru 30 NOV 2017)

111 == DPRK Defectors ---- (10" Parasite Found in Stomach of Latest One)

112 == DPRK Nuclear Weapons [20] ---- (Threat to Make Japan & U.S. Bases Disappear)

113 == DPRK Missile Program [02] ---- (Can Now Hit Washington D.C.)

114 == Dishwasher Tips ----(What NOT to Put In Them)

115 == Windows PC Tips ---- (19 Keyboard Shortcuts You May Not Know)

116 == Silica Gel Packet Uses ---- (Don't Throw them Away)

118 == Signs ---- (Have You Seen These Thought Provoking Ones?)

119 == Where There's a Will, There's a Way ---- (05)

119 == Jewelry Tips [01] ---- (The Most Common Mistakes When Buying)

121 == Garage Door Billboards ---- (Making Yours Stand Out (14)

121 == Weird Facts About Your Body ---- (38 thru 50)

122 == Have You Heard? ---- (We Three | A Man Who Knows His Math | Bad Parrot)

Note:

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.*

* ATTACHMENTS *

Attachment - Nevada Vet State Benefits & Discounts NOV 2017

Attachment - Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 DEC

Attachment - Nazis Helped China Fight Japan

* DoD *



NDAA 2018 Update 17 ► Impact on Defense Spending

If you've seen recent headlines like "House passes nearly \$700 billion defense authorization bill," or "Massive U.S. defense bill includes a bevy of research-related provisions," or even "House passes \$700B compromise defense bill," you'd be under the impression that defense spending in the United States is about to go way up. However, as important as the FY 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) is, it does not actually determine funding for the Department of Defense. As has been the case for the past few years, appropriations bills, not the NDAA, will determine spending levels. So far, a major increase in defense appropriations looks a lot less likely.

To explain this, it's worth reviewing the basics of the congressional budget process, particularly as it concerns defense spending. While most government spending funds mandatory programs that are based on eligibility (typically referred to as "entitlement spending") such as Social Security and Medicare, Congress and the White House must also agree on spending for a wide variety of activity each year (known as "discretionary spending"). This ranges from salaries for congressional staff to funds for the Department of Defense. Here's how that process is supposed to work:

- The president is supposed to submit a budget request for the next fiscal year to Congress by the first Monday in February of the current fiscal year. This document lays out proposals for discretionary and entitlement spending for the next year. While a useful source of insight into the priorities of the executive branch, this is not similar in form or function to the congressional budget resolution that is adopted each year.
- Congress then debates and agrees to a budget resolution that includes any proposed changes to entitlement spending and sets a cap on discretionary spending for defense and non-defense activity for the next fiscal year. The budget resolution is an internal document, not a law, so it does not require the president's signature and can be passed with a simple majority in both chambers.
- The appropriations committees in both chambers then debate and agree on twelve different bills — each corresponding to a different part of the government — that fund the government's discretionary spending for the next fiscal year within the context of the caps set in the budget resolution. This legislation goes through regular order and can be filibustered in the Senate, meaning that at least eight Senate Democrats will need to support the appropriations bills this year for them to become law. This is a crucial point, as any legislation that is passed without Democratic input is likely not representative of what a final deal will look like. The appropriations legislation is what actually determines funding for defense programs each fiscal year. Both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees have released defense spending bills for FY 2018 that have significantly lower toplines than the NDAA.

This is the crux of why the FY 2018 National Defense Authorization Act is likely a poor indicator of what the actual funding levels for the Department of Defense will be in the next fiscal year. Right now, the government is operating under a continuing resolution (a temporary funding bill that sustains funding for the government after the start of a new fiscal year) that runs until Dec. 8. At that point, Congress and the White House will need to pass appropriations for FY 2018, pass another continuing resolution, or allow the government to shut down. It is currently unclear whether congressional Republicans, the White House, and congressional Democrats will be able to come to an agreement on FY 2018 appropriations. Even if they can, it seems unlikely that it will reflect the numbers in the FY 2018 NDAA.

Defense spending in the NDAA is far above most of the other proposals made this year. The below table should not be encouraging for those seeking a major increase in defense spending. The congressional budget resolution, the White House budget request, and the Senate appropriations bill have all come in significantly

lower than the NDAA figure. This likely illustrates the tradeoffs that may be made to placate deficit hawks, Democrats, and moderate Republicans in the broader context of funding the government.

FY 2018 Spending Options	Total (\$Billions)
SAC-D Guidance	\$595
FY18 Budget Resolution	\$599
FY18 President's Budget Request	\$640
House Budget Committee	\$665
HASC NDAA	\$667
House Appropriations	\$668
SASC NDAA	\$692
NDAA Conference Agreement	\$692

It's not clear that a major increase in defense spending is a White House priority. Since the passage of the Budget Control Act in 2011, the president's request is usually more than Congress eventually appropriates (see the table below). This year, Trump's budget request includes an increase in defense spending, but it is nowhere near the levels seen in the NDAA agreement. While it's true that in recent years, Congress and the White House were controlled by opposite parties, the trend of appropriating below the president's request may well continue this year.

Although the current White House favors increased defense spending, it has not made it clear where this falls on its list of priorities. Since the budget was released, there has been talk of funding a border wall, some type of increased defense spending, and some sort of resolution for DACA, but the White House has given no clear indication of which specific budget proposals it actually plans to fight for in the upcoming negotiations. Trump has discussed the need for more defense spending and a military build-up, but there certainly hasn't been a concerted campaign to push this message consistently.

Republicans can't agree amongst themselves. The tension between deficit hawks, moderates, and defense hawks in the GOP caucus creates problems for any attempt to significantly increase defense spending. Defense hawks would like to see a major increase in defense spending, deficit hawks want to reduce the deficit by cutting spending, and moderates won't support massive cuts to non-defense spending. This creates a situation where any attempt at increasing defense spending risks offending one of two groups whose support is necessary for passage. Beyond that, a number of members of the far-right House Freedom Caucus will vote against almost any funding bill that doesn't contain sweeping, immediate cuts to government spending.

Twice this year, congressional Republicans have had the opportunity to pass a budget that contained significant defense increases. Both times they have settled for levels that were roughly consistent with current law. The [FY 2017 budget was adopted in January](#) and was geared towards repealing the Affordable Care Act, while [last week Congress adopted a budget for FY 2018](#) that was aimed at facilitating tax reform. In both cases, Republicans could not agree on significant increases in defense spending. Some of this may have been due to issues around parliamentary procedure in the Senate, but fundamentally Republicans have trouble reconciling the goals of deficit hawks, moderates, and defense hawks.

Democrats, as always, will have a say in what happens. While Democratic leadership has not yet announced its goals for the end of the year, the question of how the party will choose to use its limited leverage is important to understanding any potential funding deal. Since appropriations require 60 votes to avoid a filibuster, Democrats in the Senate will need to agree to an eventual appropriations deal. Additionally, many conservatives in the House will not vote for any appropriations legislation that does not contain major cuts to federal spending. This means that Democrats in both chambers will have a say in any year-end funding deal. This puts more pressure on defense spending, as Democrats will want something in exchange for their support.

[Source: War On The Rocks | Matt Vallone | November 17, 2017 ++]

DoD Blended Retirement System ► Bonus Lowest Allowed By Law

All five armed service branches have locked in their mid-career cash-payout plans as part of the military's new retirement system, and they've all done it at the same level — the lowest allowed by law. The Air Force announced 27 NOV that it would provide a one-time payout at the 12-year mark of 2.5 times a service member's monthly basic pay as part of the Blended Retirement System. All troops entering service as 1 JAN will fall under the BRS; active-duty members with less than 12 years of service, along with reserve-component members with less than 4,320 retirement points, can opt into the new setup. The Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard previously had set their payouts, known as "continuation pay," at the minimum level.

The pay is in addition to any other service bonuses and incentives, and requires a commitment to serve an additional four years. Guard and Reserve members would receive 0.5 times their monthly basic pay as if on active duty. More than 1.6 million troops now in service can opt into the BRS or stay with the current system. Only those who opt in will be eligible to receive the continuation pay. The law establishing the BRS allowed the services discretion over the timing and amount of continuation pay. They could set the figure as high as 13 times a service member's monthly basic pay (up to six times basic pay for Guard and Reserve), and award it at any point between the member's eighth and 12th years of service.

Keeping troops on the low end of the scale will save the services tens of thousands of dollars per payout; an E-7 would get nearly \$43,000 more at the top end of the permitted bonus level than at the bottom. Services can change bonus amounts to account for manpower needs, but it wasn't immediately clear how often or when those changes could be made. Rates for Active Guard Reserve or Full-Time Support members are the same as active-duty rates. Guard and Reserve members get half the monthly base pay they'd receive if on active duty; for example, a Guard or Reserve member at E-7 with more than 12 years of service would get \$2,044, half of the \$4,088.70 monthly basic pay.

The continuation pay is designed to encourage experienced service members to remain in uniform under a retirement system that cuts their monthly retirement annuity by 20 percent when compared with the current plan. But unlike the current setup, the BRS allows service members to realize retirement benefits without remaining in uniform for 20 years. The Defense Department will contribute to each service member's Thrift Savings Plan account, which is similar to a private-sector 401(k) plan; DoD will put in 1 percent of a service member's basic pay and will contribute up to 5 percent in matching funds based on service member contributions.

Continuation pay can be paid in four equal installments over four years, which could help mitigate the tax consequences of receiving it in one year. It can also be invested in the TSP, although service members must be mindful of the Internal Revenue Service yearly limits on the amount of money that can be put into these retirement plans. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | November 29, 2017 ++]

Transgender Troops Update 11 ► Sex Assignment Surgery Ban Halted

A second federal judge has halted the Trump administration's proposed transgender military ban finding that active-duty service members are "already suffering harmful consequences" because of the president's

policy. The ruling 21 NOV from U.S. District **Judge Marvin J. Garbis** in the Maryland case comes just weeks after another judge in Washington blocked the administration's proposal that would have stopped military recruitment of transgender men and women and possibly forced the dismissal of current service members starting in March. The preliminary injunction issued by the judge in Baltimore on Tuesday goes further than the earlier ruling by also preventing the administration from denying funding for sex-reassignment surgeries after the order takes effect.

In his 53-page order, Garbis said the transgender service members challenging the ban have "demonstrated that they are already suffering harmful consequences such as the cancellation and postponements of surgeries, the stigma of being set apart as inherently unfit, facing the prospect of discharge and inability to commission as an officer, the inability to move forward with long-term medical plans, and the threat to their prospects of obtaining long-term assignments." In July, President Trump surprised military leaders and members of Congress when he announced the proposal in a series of tweets. The challenge from six active-duty service members in Maryland was filed days after Trump issued a formal order reversing an Obama-era policy allowing transgender men and women to serve openly and to receive funding for sex-reassignment surgery.

Justice Department lawyers asked the court this month to dismiss the lawsuit because the policy is on hold pending a review by the Defense Department. No decisions have been made, government lawyers said, about whether to discharge active-duty service members solely because they are transgender. The military is continuing to provide transition-related medical care. Garbis rejected the government's argument that the challenge was premature. "The only uncertainties are how, not if, the policy will be implemented and whether, in some future context, the president might be persuaded to change his mind and terminate the policies he is now putting into effect," Garbis wrote. In issuing the preliminary injunction, the judge found the challengers likely to succeed in asserting that the president's order violates equal protection guarantees in the Constitution as well as the rights of service members to medical care.

The judge agreed with the government that the courts should generally defer to the president and Congress when it comes to military affairs. But Garbis found that "Trump's tweets did not emerge from a policy review," according to the opinion that featured images of the president's July tweets "A capricious, arbitrary, and unqualified tweet of new policy does not trump the methodical and systematic review by military stakeholders qualified to understand the ramifications of policy changes," wrote Garbis, who was nominated to the bench by president George H.W. Bush.

ACLU attorney Joshua Block, who is representing the service members, called the decision a "victory for transgender service members across the country." "We're pleased that the courts have stepped in to ensure that trans service members are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve," said Block. Justice Department spokeswoman Lauren Ehrsam said, "We disagree with the court's ruling and are currently evaluating the next steps." "None of the plaintiffs have established that they will be impacted by current policies on military service," she said in a statement.

Even though U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly in Washington had already put the broad outlines of the proposal on hold in late October, her decision did not explicitly rule on whether the administration could stop paying for sex-reassignment surgeries. Garbis found that the proposed ban would negatively impact plaintiffs in the Maryland case who are actively trying to schedule transition-related surgical care and will not be able to receive surgery before the policy's March start date.

Estimates vary widely about the number of transgender military members. One recent study by the Rand Corp. put the number on active duty at about 2,500, while another from the Williams Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles School of Law estimated that there were 15,500 on active duty, in the National Guard and in the reserves. Eighteen other countries allow transgender troops to serve. [Source: The Washington Post | Ann E. Marimow | November 21, 1917 ++]

Transgender Troops Update 12 ► Third Court Injunction Issued

New transgender recruits could begin enlisting in the military starting 1 JAN under the latest court victory for advocates opposed to President Donald Trump's policies. The decision by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia follows two earlier federal court injunctions against Trump's announced plans to bar transgender individuals from the ranks but will likely be appealed by administration officials in coming days. In her ruling, District **Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly** said defense leaders must follow transgender policies in place as of 30 JUN until appeals to other White House actions are heard.

That would leave in place Defense Secretary Jim Mattis's order of a six-month delay until 1 JAN in allowing new transgender recruits, but not subsequent instructions by the president for more sweeping restrictions. In October, the same court ruled that military officials could not force transgender troops out of the armed forces while the legal process continues. The move also left in place provisions for those servicemembers to receive specialized medical care for their condition, as promised by military officials in earlier policy changes.

The issue of transgender individuals in the military has been a confusing legal fight since early July, when Trump announced through a series of tweets that the military would no longer "accept or allow transgender individuals to serve in any capacity." His comments came about nine months after former President Barack Obama's administration allowed transgender individuals to serve openly for the first time and offered medical services for gender dysphoria treatments and gender reassignment surgery for the first time. But Trump's initial message didn't include any policy specifics. Those came months later as part of a new, lengthy review of personnel policies by Mattis's administration that is expected to be completed in the spring.

The latest court ruling — which could be overturned by a higher court — appears poised to force Pentagon leaders to move faster on that review. In a statement, officials from the American Military Partner Association praised the ruling and called it further evidence that Trump's transgender policies will eventually be abandoned altogether. A recent Military Times poll of active duty troops found that more than half approved of Trump's plans to reverse the transgender military policies, but 24 percent of respondents strongly disapproved of the move. [Source: AirForceTimes | Leo Shane III | November 28, 2017 ++]

AFRH Update 08 ► New CEO Named

A retired Army major general has been named the new chief executive officer of the financially strapped Armed Forces Retirement Home two months after the previous boss of the home was fired. Retired Army Maj. Gen. Stephen T. Rippe took over as CEO of the home effective Monday. The AFRH has campuses in Washington, D.C., and Gulfport, Mississippi. "Steve Rippe is uniquely qualified to serve as the Home's CEO, having served in a similar capacity for the nonprofit Army Distaff Foundation, which operates the Knollwood life plan community in Washington, D.C., as well as in executive and board roles with several for-profit and nonprofit organizations," said David Tillotson III, assistant deputy chief management officer, in a statement from the Defense Department announcing the appointment. "He is a compassionate and dedicated advocate for veterans who have served our country and has the expertise required to address the future challenges facing the Armed Forces Retirement Home."



Retired Army Maj. Gen. Stephen T. Rippe

Rippe retired after 29 years in the Army. He last served as vice director and director of management of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In addition to serving as the CEO of Knollwood, Rippe spent seven years as chief operating officer and executive vice president of the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation, the governing organization for the Washington National Cathedral, National Cathedral School for Girls, St. Albans School for Boys and Beauvoir Elementary School.

The two campuses of the Armed Forces Retirement Home care for about 1,000 former enlisted members. Most service members' connection with these homes begins and ends with a 50-cent-a-month mandatory deduction from enlisted members' paychecks. The move comes as Defense Department officials look for new ways to pay for the home's two locations, which serve about 1,000 former enlisted members. The origins of AFRH date to the 19th century, with the Naval Home and the U.S. Soldiers' Home. The two were merged into an organization with the name of AFRH.

The AFRH has experienced serious cash flow problems over the that have resulted in nearly depleting the AFRH trust fund. It has been operating at a deficit of about \$20 million a year, with taxpayers having to make up the difference. When he fired the previous director, Tillerson said the operating costs of AFRH "are not grossly out of line," but the path forward should focus on new sources of income. **Whether those sources will include more money from the residents' pockets has yet to be determined.** [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | November 13, 2017++]

N-Zero Update 01 ► Battery Might Not Need A Charge for 10 Years.

Department of Defense planners want to know when enemy troops are on the move, when vehicles are approaching or when other potentially hostile activity is unfolding. Existing sensors can regularly detect those movements, but those sensors often have limited battery life, constraining their usefulness and sometimes need to be changed as often as every three days. Researchers at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) say they are making headway on the problem. Launched in 2015, the project aims to develop sensors that can function in standby mode, lying almost dormant and switching on only when a signal is captured. Such devices could go for 10 years on a single charge. The research agency named the project the Near Zero Power RF and Sensor Operations, or N-ZERO.

DARPA-funded work at the University of California – San Diego last year showed the project's potential. Researchers were able to run a sensor that consumed just 4.5 nanowatts of energy, generated no false alarms, and detected 100 percent of trial events. Phase two, now underway, seeks to achieve far greater levels of sensitivity. "We are ahead of where we wanted to be, but will still have a ways to go," said Troy Olsson, DARPA's Microsystems Technology Office (MTO) Program Manager. The program got a boost in September when a DARPA-backed research team at Northeastern University published its findings in the journal *Nature Nanotechnology*. Their work on a "plasmonically-enhanced micromechanical photoswitch"

moved the N-ZERO concept a step forward, adding to the growing body of fundamental science supporting the emerging capability.

Far from being a theoretical exercise, DARPA officials say N-ZERO could have profound battlefield implications. The ability to sense subtle environmental changes — consistently, without having to worry about the sensor's power drain — can make a material difference to soldiers in the field. The net effect would be a persistent early warning system that warfighters could rely on. "We want to alert people so they have time to put on their personal protective gear, so our soldiers are safe from those kinds of attacks," Olsson said. That's a tall order. Experts in the realm of connected devices, or the Internet of Things (IoT), say the military faces a significant hurdle as it looks to extend the longevity and the sensitivity of its sensor apparatus.

Unlike industrial uses, military planners don't have the luxury of switching on sensors periodically for spot-checks. Rather, "military-grade sensors must be constantly receiving input, yet retain the capacity to enter dormant mode to conserve power," wrote researcher Yitaek Hwang in the industry blog IoT for All. The military has set a high bar for itself, Hwang said. The Defense Department hopes to shrink its sensors' power consumption with a 1,000-times improvement over the current technology. Today's sensor solutions present what Olsson describes as a series of shortfalls, with power supply as a critical factor. In some situations, sensors can be hard-wired into local power, but that approach is expensive and often not portable. "In other cases, they change the batteries every three days, for example in certain chemical sensors that surround our facilities," he said. That's tedious, and not 100 percent reliable.

The proposed solution, a "wake-up" sensor that watches and waits, consuming only a tiny amount of power, brings with it certain technological challenges. A typical sensor will use amplifiers to heighten its signal, in order to enhance detection. But amplification requires energy. "There is no technology that can amplify signal in that way, at these very low power levels," Olsson said. "We have come up with a way to apply voltage gain while consuming zero standby power."

Looking ahead, DARPA will likely seek out expertise from industry, where the rapid rise of IoT has drawn attention to issues around power and persistence. "I want to get a sense from the commercial side about what they are doing in that space. We have seen a number of applications in the commercial sector that do relate to N-ZERO technology," he said. "They may be able to take us to applications that DoD could not achieve on its own because of the expense, and possibly drive down the cost." [Source: C4ISRNET | Adam Stone | November 13, 2017 ++]

DoD Children Schools ► 47 Under Consideration for Divestiture

The Trump administration is considering a plan to end the military's longtime operation of schools for military children on dozens of stateside military bases, part of a broader push to cut costs and reduce the size of the federal workforce, according to information obtained by Military Times. The military currently operates 47 schools on military installations in seven states in the continental U.S., serving a total of about 20,000 students. The proposal, which has support from some parts of the Pentagon, would turn over operation of those schools to local school districts. The proposed "divestiture" of Defense Department stateside schools would not impact the Defense Department-run schools overseas, according to officials familiar with the proposal but who were not authorized to speak publicly about the matter.

The change would be implemented in phases, according to a source familiar with the plan, and officials would first test the idea at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, which has an elementary school and a middle/high school on the installation, with a total enrollment of about 1,000 children. Then officials would

“employ the lessons learned” and turn over the remaining schools in the continental U.S.. The 2017 Defense Department budget included about \$600 million to operate Department of Defense Education Activity schools on 15 installations in the U.S., but that also includes five schools in Cuba and Puerto Rico, which would presumably not be affected by the closures currently under discussion.

“This could cause an uproar in the affected communities, and understandably so,” said Eileen Huck, deputy government relations director for the National Military Family Association. “Military families take their kids’ education very seriously. The DoDEA schools are an important part of the communities where they are operating. “Kids’ education isn’t something that we should be nickel-and-diming or playing games with,” she said. “This is something that should be taken very seriously and not just undertaken as another element of a business case analysis.”

This proposal to stop running schools on military bases is among the reform initiatives that are the result of the Trump Administration’s direction to government agencies in April to develop a plan for reforming the government and reducing the federal workforce. The Pentagon drew up a slate of proposals, including the DoD school proposal, and sent that back to the White House’s Office of Budget and Management in September, according to a defense official. The Pentagon’s deputy chief management officer has led the DoD’s reform effort. Earlier this year, reform teams conducted analyses on a number of proposals that were submitted in June to develop implementation plans and provide estimates of the potential cost savings.

No estimates were provided for transferring the stateside DoD schools to local school districts. Previous studies on the feasibility of transferring DoD schools to local schools have found that there is a cost required to do so. This reform plan suggests shifting the money used to operate stateside DoD schools to support local school districts. It notes that the plan would also affect approximately 36,000 employees employed by or in support of stateside DoD schools. Historically, military families and commanders have been supportive of these schools on U.S. bases which are concentrated in the South, and have even asked for more DoD schools in some locations, citing their high level of quality compared to the local public schools adjacent to some military installations. Others, however, criticize the schools as private academies for the privileged few who live on certain installations or an anachronism dating back to the segregation era, when local school districts would not accept minority children.

There have been four studies considering alternatives to DoD schools on these military bases. The latest, conducted by RAND and published in 2016, found that federal costs for educating military-connected children at these bases would eventually be lower under the options considered, and DoD costs could be reduced – but states and local school districts would be required to provide “significant funding” if they were to take responsibility for military children’s education. The adjacent school districts tend to be low-performing, the RAND researchers reported, “and although military-connected students have favorable characteristics that might help them perform better than these [local education agency] averages, there is a concern that current [students in stateside DoD schools] would experience lower quality if the adjacent LEAs provide their education either under contract or by transfer of responsibility.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | November 13, 2017 ++]

GI Bill Transferability Update 03 ► Policy Change Under Consideration

The Pentagon is weighing a policy change that would limit certain service members from transferring their education benefits to dependents, a Defense Department official said in a written statement this week. In response to questions from the Senate Armed Service Committee about military retention, Anthony Kurta said the Department of Defense “intends to issue a policy change to the Post-9/11 GI Bill,” prohibiting service members with 16 or more years in uniform from transferring the benefit to their dependents.

Current GI Bill policy allows service members with at least six years of service to transfer their benefits to a dependent, provided they agree to serve four more. “This change reflects an emphasis on retention, consistent with the original congressional intent,” wrote Kurta, President Trump’s nominee for under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness. Kurta is already performing the duties of the role, and the Senate committee approved him for the next step in the confirmation process 16 NOV. His testimony said the new restriction would take effect one year from the date DoD finalizes the policy change. A Pentagon spokesperson said the policy change is not yet official, but he did not provide further comment by press time.

The addition of a cap to one aspect of the GI Bill is a sore spot for some in the veterans education space, who recently fought for a provision in the new Forever GI Bill that lifted a 15-year time limit on the benefit. “These are benefits through life,” said Chanin Nuntavong, a spokesman for American Legion, whose members include both veterans and active-duty service members. Joe Plenzler, also a Legion spokesman, said 17 NOV he had not previously heard about the DoD’s plan to change the transfer rules for the GI Bill and is concerned about some of the language in Kurta’s statement. “As a matter of principle, the American Legion is against anything that would degrade a veteran’s current benefit,” he said, later adding, “We’re looking forward to hearing the logic behind that proposal.”

Dan Merry, vice president for government relations at the Military Officers Association of America, said in an email, “Any review or changes to the GI Bill should include discussions with the military and veteran service organization community, Congress, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. We welcome the opportunity to be a part of that process.” Student Veterans of America Vice President of Government Affairs Will Hubbard said because a majority of those using the GI Bill are veterans, and thus not eligible to transfer benefits, the proposed change isn’t a major concern for the organization’s members. [Source: MilitaryTimes | : Natalie Gross | November 1, 2017 ++]

GTMO Detainees Update 01 ► Artwork Barred From Further Release

An art exhibit at a New York City college seemed innocuous enough, mostly seascapes and still-life paintings of flowers and fruit. But it’s the background of the artists — current and former terror suspects at the notorious Guantanamo Bay detention center — that drew protest and prompted the Pentagon to bar the further release of works created at the military-run prison. The exhibit, Ode to the Sea, has been on display since October at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. It shows 36 paintings and sculptures created by eight men during their years being held at the U.S. military facility for terrorism suspects in Cuba. The works were released to the men’s attorneys after being vetted by the U.S. government to make sure they did not contain violent content or hidden messages.

But news coverage of the show, particularly the fact that some of the works were available for purchase, has spurred the Department of Defense to reconsider such releases and redefine who actually owns such works. “Items produced by detainees at Guantanamo Bay remain the property of the U.S. government,” Maj. Ben Sakrisson, a spokesman for the department, said in an email to The Associated Press. Sakrisson said that transfers of any art made by detainees had been suspended pending a policy review, but that the department wouldn’t try to claim art that had already been sent out of Guantanamo.

The show was put together after a lawyer who represents Guantanamo detainees, Beth Jacob, reached out to John Jay professor Erin Thompson to ask generally about how to go about possibly exhibiting one of her client’s work. That led Thompson and two other curators to gather up other detainees’ artistic efforts and display them in a hallway near the office of the public college’s president. Thompson said she was disturbed

at the idea that the government would take detainees' artwork away from them. "I just want to encourage people to look at these paintings. They're flowers and beaches, and not subversive content," Thompson said. "It's not threatening to the United States. I don't think we should burn bouquets."

Jacob said detainees often gave artwork to the attorneys as gifts, to be passed to family members or for safe-keeping. She said she had heard from two men still detained on Guantanamo that they had been told no more artwork would be allowed out, and they would also be limited in how much of what they created they could keep. But it was unclear if that meant works would be stored or simply destroyed. "Art is communication, an artist communicates through his art, and communication is communicating to someone or with somebody," she said. "It seems that the government is trying to silence them, control even this aspect of their life."

Artists in the exhibit include Moath al-Alwi, accused of being one of Osama bin Laden's bodyguards, and Ahmed Rabbani, accused of working with senior leadership of al-Qaida. Of the eight artists in the exhibit, four remain behind bars without having gone to trial and four have been released. Thompson said only those who have been released had their works put up for sale, and she called the prices "modest" — hundreds, rather than thousands, of dollars. Some family members of those killed in the Sept. 11 attacks were outraged such an exhibit was allowed in the city that was target of the nation's deadliest terrorist attack. "This is absolutely absurd that they would allow them to display their artwork," said Alexander Santora, a John Jay graduate whose son, Christopher, was a 23-year-old probationary firefighter when he died in 2001. "Where are their heads?" he asked. "Are they so far in the sand that they don't see what's going on?"

Thompson said she's heard that response from some, but also from those who think the exhibit is useful to help people think about the Guantanamo prison and what it means to the country. Kim Manfredi and Chris Blades, regular visitors to New York City from Palm Desert, California, came out to see the exhibit specifically to see artwork created by detainees. "It seems like a basic human right, to be able to make art," Manfredi said. [Source: The Associated Press | Deepa Hajela | November 28, 2017 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 30 NOV 2017

Fat Leonard Scandal -- The Navy has charged two more active-duty officers in the ever-expanding "Fat Leonard" scandal, bringing the total number of officers awaiting court-martial in the case to five. The scope of the Fat Leonard scandal expanded beyond previous estimates this month when the Navy confirmed it is still investigating about 190 current and retired Navy personnel — mostly officers — to determine what role they may have played in the scandal and whether disciplinary measures are warranted. The corruption centers around a 350-pound Malaysian businessman named Leonard Glenn Francis — widely known among Navy officers as "Fat Leonard" — and his Singapore-based Glenn Defense Marine Asia company, which provided resupply services to Navy ships in Asia.

Now awaiting trial is **Capt. John F. Steinberger**, a surface warfare officer currently assigned to the Navy's Undersea Warfare Development Center Detachment in San Diego. He faces charges and multiple specifications of conspiracy, conduct unbecoming, graft and bribery. He was charged 13 OCT, has waived an Article 32 hearing and now awaits a court-martial date. The charge sheet obtained by Navy Times also states that Steinberger, who was then the commander of Destroyer Squadron 1, embarked on the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson, allegedly conspired with Francis "and others" between January 2011 and April 2012 to "bribe other Navy officials" in an attempt to influence what ports U.S. Navy ships visited.

Francis was trying to help his company to secure lucrative U.S. Navy contracts to provide various resupply services and supplies to those Navy ships while in port. In addition, Steinberger also allegedly provided Francis with “information about Glenn Defense Marine Asia’s competitors performance in the region.” The charges allege that on multiple occasions, Steinberger’s payment for his services to Francis came in the form of “discounted and free hotel rooms, food, beverages and the services of prostitutes.” Steinberger, a native of Mountainview, California, is the former commanding officer of the guided-missile destroyer Decatur and served as executive officer of the guided-missile cruiser Bunker Hill.

The Navy also charged Chief Warrant Officer 4 **Brian T. Ware** on 11 AUG, who is a Navy food service officer currently on board the aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan. He is a native of Sedgwick, Kansas. The Navy charge sheets allege Ware committed multiple offenses by soliciting and accepting gifts over a three-year period, during which he was assigned first to the command ship Blue Ridge and later on the carrier George Washington. In exchange for “lodging, transportation and the use of cellular phones, constituting a total gift value of over \$1,000,” the charge sheet said that Ware allegedly participated in fraudulent contracting practices for food and other supplies being provided by Glenn Defense Marine Asia. As with Steinberger, Ware, too, waived his right to an Article 32 hearing and is awaiting a court-martial date. Navy officials don’t expect any of the trials to start until sometime next spring.. [Source: NavyTimes | November 17, 2017 ++]

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Huntsville, AL -- A federal judge on 28 NOV sentenced a high-ranking Army Reserves officer to four years in prison and ordered him to forfeit \$4.4 million for fraudulently supplying hundreds of thousands of Chinese-produced baseball caps and backpacks to the Army Recruiting Command and passing them off as American-made. Federal authorities say 50-year-old Lt. Col. **Frederick Burnett**, of Madison, Alabama, received millions under contracts with the Army stating he must supply promotional items for the Recruiting Command that were “100% U.S. Made.” A federal jury convicted Burnett in April on three counts of wire fraud for using his Huntsville-based company, Lamar International Inc., in the scheme to defraud the Defense Department on three contracts, worth \$6.2 million, between 2005 and 2009. [Source: The Associated Press | November 28, 2017 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 16 thru 30 NOV 2017 | Eleven

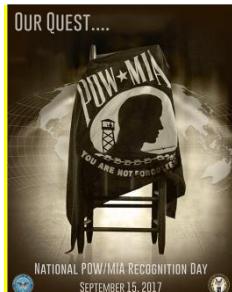
“Keeping the Promise”, “Fulfill their Trust” and “No one left behind” are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II 73,025, Korean War 7730, Vietnam War 1604, Cold War (126), Iraq and other conflicts (5). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD’s personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home.

For a listing of all missing or unaccounted for personnel to date refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil> and click on ‘Our Missing’. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Year/2017> for a listing and details of those accounted for in 2017. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

== Mail: Public Affairs Office, 2300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20301-2300, Attn: External Affairs

== Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420

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



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

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

LOOK FOR

- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Homer A. Spence**, 22, of Manteca, Calif., assigned to the 96th Fighter Squadron, 82nd Fighter Group in 1944.
- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Donald E. Underwood**, 23, of River Rouge, Mich. assigned to the 38th Bombardment Squadron, (Heavy), 30th Bombardment Group in 1944.
- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. William H. Harth, Jr.** assigned to the 329th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy), 93rd Bombardment Group (Heavy) in 1943.
- **Army Sgt. Gerald J. Mueller**, 20, of Saint Paul, Minn, assigned to Battery D, 82nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion (Automatic Weapons), 2nd Infantry Division in 1951.
- **Army Sgt. Ollie E. Shepard** assigned to Company I, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division in 1950.
- **Marine Corps Pvt. Vernon P. Keaton**, 18, of Lubbock, Texas, assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor in 1941.
- **Marine Corps Reserve Assistant Cook Frank L. Masoni**, 21, of Gilroy, Calif., assigned to Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Division in 1943.
- **Marine Corps Sgt. William D. Ball**, 21, of Hollywood, Calif., assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. Ball's in 1943.
- **Marine Cpl. Anthony G. Guerriero**, 22, of Boston, Mass assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, 2nd Marine Division in 1943.
- **Navy Fireman 2nd Class Martin A. Gara** assigned to the USS Oklahoma in 1941.
- **Navy Reserve Radioman 2nd Class Julius H.O. Pieper** assigned to Landing Ship Tank Number 523 (LST-523) off the coast of Normandy, France, in 1944.

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | November 30, 2017 ++]

* VA *



White House VA Hotline Update 01 ► Now Fully Staffed 7/24

On 29 NOV the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that the White House VA Hotline, first launched in June as part of President Donald J. Trump's commitment to reforming VA, is now fully staffed with live agents working to serve Veterans 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. The hotline, which became 24-hour operational in mid-October, is now staffed by a team consisting of 90 percent Veterans or employees who have a Veteran family member, and is in response to Veterans' requests to talk to agents who could relate to their experiences.

"The White House VA Hotline provides our nation's Veterans with a direct, dedicated contact line that allows them to interact with highly trained, live agents to answer their needs and concerns," said VA Secretary David J. Shulkin. "Since the initial launch of the hotline in June, we listened to our Veterans, who indicated that they prefer speaking with other Veterans and Veteran family members, and we adjusted our hiring based on that feedback," added Shulkin. "We're proud that the hotline is now staffed 24/7 by a team of mostly Veterans or Veteran family members who have direct knowledge of their particular concerns and can use their experience to address them in the best way possible with the resources of the VA. This represents a true win-win for Veterans and their loved ones." Since 24/7 coverage began in October, the hotline has served more than 10,000 callers.

Hotline agents answer inquiries, provide directory assistance, document concerns about VA care, benefits and services, and expedite the referral and resolution of those concerns. Agents undergo regular updates and training on VA services based on hotline trends and are assisted by newly implemented tracking software to help VA capture and improve its response, referral and resolution processes to best support Veterans. The hotline can be accessed at 855-948-2311 and is VA's first non-clinical, non-emergency around-the-clock call center. It provides Veterans a supplemental option to report issues if they are not being addressed through VA's normal customer service channels. The hotline's agents are located at a VA facility in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Agents have access to a multitude of resources and contact information to help Veterans. The hotline also generates real-time reports to VA experts who can help address the specific issues of Veterans as well as make better-informed decisions on where program improvements are needed.

[Source: VA News Release | November 29, 2017 ++]

VA Privatization Update 12 ► H.R.4457 Breaks Nation's Promise To Vets

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is absolutely opposed to the latest congressional attempt to fix the Department of Veterans Affairs. The "fix," as introduced last week by Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.), "throws out the idea of acceptable patient wait times and eliminates the requirement of the veteran to ask for VA permission to use civilian medical providers," he said in a press release. His Veterans Empowerment Act (H.R.4457), which is cosponsored by Reps. Mark Meadows (R-NC) and Trent Franks

(R-AZ), would also erode the VA's health care system and charge veterans for care related to their service-connected wounds, illnesses and injuries.

"Giving veterans access to high quality care isn't the issue," said VFW National Commander Keith Harman. "Veterans enrolled in the VA already have access to the best integrated health care system in the world, as well as access to the best outside providers. The issue is whether VA's role should be limited to being an insurance provider, which is how you dismantle the VA, not fix it," he said. "You cannot dangle promises of better access and care while stripping funding from VA health accounts to pay outside providers at far greater costs, and with zero guarantee of better access or quality. The only thing this proposal will accomplish is kill the VA as a provider of care to America's veterans while shifting the cost of care on to veterans."

Aside from false promises, Lamborn's bill would also establish a tiered premium support system that would force disabled veterans rated less than 100 percent to pay a certain percentage of their service-connected health care cost, whereas no copayments currently exist. "The VFW has long held that if our nation cannot afford to take care of veterans, then our nation should quit creating them," said Harman. The VFW has conducted multiple surveys that reflect nearly 80 percent of VFW members who are eligible for VA care choose to use their earned VA care, despite the overwhelming majority of them having other options, such as employer-sponsored health insurance, the military's TRICARE plan, or Medicare. "Veterans appreciate options," said Harman, "and ultimately they choose whichever health plan best fits their individual circumstances, but having unregulated choice puts the onus on veterans to find their own care — and that decision needs to be made between doctors and their patients, not by Washington."

The VFW national commander explained that it took years for the VA's internal problems to boil over, yet politicians, new administration appointees and surrogates continue to believe they have a solution where in fact all they want to do is shift an inherent government responsibility into a civilian marketplace. Harman said the civilian marketplace also has waiting lists, can't match the VA's continuity and continuum of care, and doesn't have the VA's institutional knowledge and ability to address every malady that wounded, ill and injured veterans age 18 to 110 might have. "Money isn't the VA's problem insomuch as effective leadership, management and accountability are," said Harman. "Shifting finite resources to the private sector will only signal the beginning of the end of a federal department that was created for the sole purpose of caring for America's veterans," he said. "The private sector can augment the VA but never replace it, which is a message the VFW will continue to carry to Congress and VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin as we work together to fix what's broken and restore the faith of veterans in their VA."

The VFW national commander is now asking all 1.7 million members of the VFW and its Auxiliary to contact their elected officials in the House and Senate to help ensure the Veterans Empowerment Act — and any others like it — never sees the light of day. Veterans who agree with the VFW National Commander's conclusion are encouraged to go to <http://capwiz.com/vfw/issues/alert/?alertid=79204626> and send their legislators the preformatted editable message asking them to oppose this legislation. [Source: VFW Action Alert | November 27, 2017 ++]

VA Benefits Reform ► Shulkin Calls for Overhaul & Realignment

It is looking very likely that we will be facing dramatic proposals to change the present VA benefits structure. Last week VA Secretary David Sulkin, while celebrating Veterans Day, called for an overhaul and realignment of the present system. At the National Press Club, he said: "Today ... I call for a new way of

thinking about benefits. I want to see an ongoing dialogue with stakeholders about rationalizing veterans benefits - a veterans benefit advisory board that can bring clarity to what we're trying to do for veterans and what's best and how we can do that in the best way."

He complained that in the last 150 years various veterans were created at different times, by different Administrations and Congresses reacting to many different wars and situations." A Veterans Advisory Board" could focus on what he said was the main goals of the Veterans Benefits Administrations programs: "providing financial security for those who are severely disabled, providing mental and physical wellbeing to veterans, offering economic and professional opportunities and helping them reintegrate back into civilian life."

This sounds like another call for disability payments to go only to "the severely disabled." Later in the speech he said: "We have to emphasize service-connection for disabilities so we aren't compensating veterans for age-related issues." TREA has heard suggestions like these for at least the last 20 years. Why do we need to pay for small disabilities of 10% or 20%? Why should there be service connected presumptions for exposure to chemicals that cause illnesses like cancers that become more common as people age? Instead of payments the Secretary says that:" We need more incentives for achieving wellness and independence. This should be a system that focuses on veterans' abilities, not on their disabilities. VA needs to transform into an organization where we are veterans' advocates and we facilitate them getting benefits, not being the gatekeeper of benefits decisions."

He tried to reassure us that this will not focus on saving money but on effective service by saying: "Let me be clear though, this is not about taking away benefits from veterans. This is about making benefits work better for veterans and transforming the Department of Veterans Affairs to do better for years and for generations for future veterans. I think they deserve no less than that." But then he correctly mentioned that the estimated costs of new programs throughout history have been low.

He went on to note that before we started to successfully chip away at DoD retired pay and VA disability pay offset no DoD retirees could receive their retired pay and VA disability and that "by 2013 59,000 DoD retirees received concurrent benefits, along with Social Security, which totaled more than \$3.5 billion"That "Mandatory VA benefits spending has risen by more than \$80 billion over the past 30-to-40 years. The department spent \$95.3 billion on mandatory benefits in 2017, well above the \$13.7 billion total in 1980."..... And that "Administrative costs of the Veterans Benefits Administration have gone up by \$4 billion --- from \$1 billion in 2000 to \$5 billion in 2017."

This surely looks like at least one cause for this proposal is to save money. You should know that TREA's Washington Office is focused on this possible threat to your earned benefits. TREA also urges you to make sure that both your Congressional representatives and the Administration know what programs are important to you and what you and your fellow servicemembers did to earn these benefits. [Source: TREA Washington Update | November 15, 2017 ++]

VA Benefits Reform Update 01 ► Choice & Tricare Merger Proposal

As part of its effort to expand private health care, the Department of Veterans Affairs has been developing plans to merge its health system with the Pentagon's, a cost-saving measure that veterans groups say could threaten the viability of VA hospitals and clinics. VA spokesman Curt Cashour called the plan a potential "game-changer" that would "provide better care for veterans at a lower cost to taxpayers," but he provided no specific details. Griffin Anderson, a spokesman for the Democrats on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said the proposal — developed without input from Congress — would amount to a merger of

the VA's Choice and the military's Tricare private health care programs. Committee Democrats independently confirmed the discussions involved Tricare.

News of the plan stirred alarm from veterans groups, who said they had not been consulted, even as VA urges a long-term legislative fix for Choice by year's end. Health care experts also expressed surprise that VA would consider a Tricare merger to provide private care for millions of active-duty troops, military retirees and veterans. The two departments generally serve very different patient groups —older, sicker veterans treated by VA and generally healthier service members, retirees and their families covered by Tricare.

Tricare is insurance that is paid by the government, but uses private doctors and hospitals. The VA provides most of its care via medical centers and clinics owned and run by the federal government, though veterans can also see private doctors through VA's Choice program with referrals by VA if appointments aren't readily available. "My overarching concern is these are very dramatic changes in the way health care is delivered to veterans," said Carrie Farmer, a senior policy researcher on military care at Rand Corp., who has conducted wide-ranging research for VA. "There haven't been studies on what the consequences are in terms of both costs and quality of care."

Navy Commander Sarah Higgins, a Pentagon spokeswoman, confirmed it was exploring with VA "many possible opportunities to strengthen and streamline the health of our service members and veterans." She declined to comment on specifics "unless and until there is something to announce." In its statement to The Associated Press, Cashour explained that VA Secretary David Shulkin was working with the White House and the Pentagon to explore "the general concept" of integrating VA and Pentagon health care, building upon an already planned merger of electronic health care records between VA and the Pentagon. Because Shulkin has said an overhaul of VA's electronic medical records won't be completed for another seven to eight years, an effort such as a Tricare merger couldn't likely happen before then. "This is part of the president's efforts to transform how government works and is precisely the type of businesslike, commonsense approach that rarely exists in Washington," Cashour said.

At least four of the nation's largest veterans' organizations — The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, AMVETS and Disabled American Veterans — called a Tricare merger a likely "non-starter" if it sought to transform VA care into an insurance plan. "VA is a health care provider and the VFW would oppose any effort to erode the system specifically created to serve the health care needs of our nation's veterans by reducing VA's role to a payer of care for veterans," said Bob Wallace, executive director of VFW's Washington office.

Louis Celli, director of veterans' affairs and rehabilitation for The American Legion, said any attempts to outsource services away from VA medical centers and clinics would be financially unsustainable and likely shift costs unfairly onto veterans with service-connected disabilities. He noted something similar occurred with Tricare — military retirees were promised free care from military base hospitals. But then Tricare began offering insurance to use private-sector care and Tricare beneficiary co-pays are now rising. "The precedent the Tricare model sets is not something we would accept on the VA side," Celli said. During the 2016 campaign, President Donald Trump pledged to fix VA by expanding access to private doctors. In July, he promised to triple the number of veterans "seeing the doctor of their choice." More than 30 percent of VA appointments are made in the private sector.

Some groups have drawn political battle lines, with the left-leaning VoteVets and the American Federation of Government Employees warning of privatization and Concerned Veterans for America, backed by the billionaire conservative Koch brothers, pledging a well-funded campaign to give veterans wide freedom to see private doctors. Rep. Tim Walz of Minnesota, the top Democrat on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said the quiet discussions to integrate Tricare with VA's Choice were evidence "the White House was taking steps to force unprecedented numbers of veterans into the private sector for their

care." "The fact that the Trump administration has been having these secret conversations behind the backs of Congress and our nation's veterans is absolutely unacceptable," said Walz, the highest-ranking enlisted service member to serve in Congress. He called for an immediate public explanation "without delay."

A spokeswoman for Rep. Phil Roe of Tennessee, the Republican chairman of the House committee, said he planned to continue proceeding with his bipartisan legislative plan to fix Choice without integrating Tricare. [Source: Associated Press | Hope Yen | November 17, 2017 ++]

VA Benefits Reform Update 02 ► VFW Criticizes Veterans Empowerment Act

The Veterans of Foreign Wars criticized legislation introduced by a Colorado congressman 22 NOV as a distraction from the real work of reforming how veterans receive health care from private medical facilities. The Veterans Empowerment Act, introduced by Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-CO) would allow veterans to bypass the Department of Veterans Affairs and receive treatment from private-sector doctors with taxpayers money. It mirrors a proposal from the conservative group Concerned Veterans for America, which is part of the Koch brothers' political network, to create a government-chartered organization to operate a new veterans health insurance system. "We hope that it has absolutely no chance of becoming law," said Carlos Fuentes, legislative director for the VFW, a group that boasts roughly 1.3 million members.

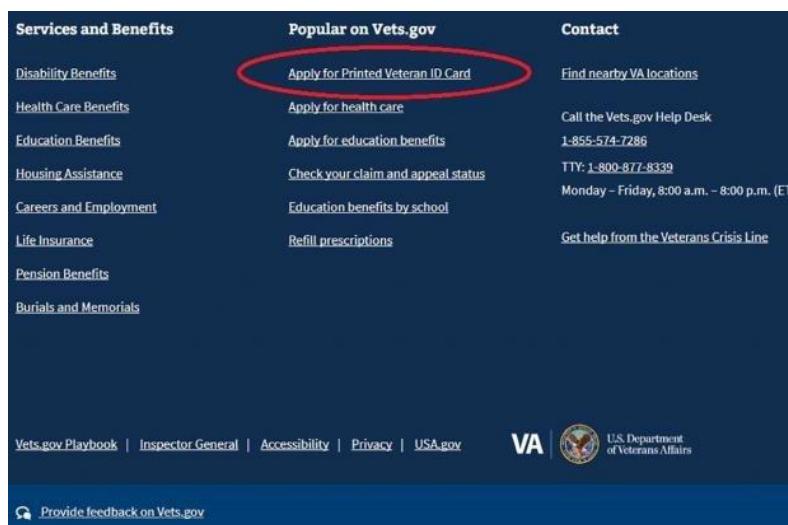
The bill comes at a time when Congress is deciding on major changes to the role of private-sector treatment in veterans' health care. Members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs will soon consider another bill, the VA Care in the Community Act (H.R. 4242), to overhaul the process veterans use to receive private-sector care. That legislation, led by committee chairman Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) has been negotiated by Democrats, Republicans and veterans service organizations for nearly a year and is expected to advance with bipartisan support in late NOV. The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee is also scheduled to meet next week to advance legislation to reform the VA's community care programs. "In terms of how this all plays out, Chairman Roe has the right intentions and is working on a very good bill," Fuentes said. "Our hope is Congress does not get distracted by these misguided and not well-thought-out proposals and really focus on providing care to veterans through proposals like the one the chairman is working on."

Lawmakers, veterans organizations and conservative groups, such as Concerned Veterans for America, have been debating for months how to replace the VA Choice program -- the current system veterans use to receive private sector care that's been described as bureaucratic and confusing. Multiple Koch brothers subgroups sent letters to Congress advocating for veterans to have complete choice to go into the private sector for care. A Koch representative told the Wall Street Journal earlier this month that they were planning to spend millions of dollars to influence the debate. On 22 NOV, The Hill published an op-ed by Dan Caldwell, executive director for Concerned Veterans for America, that praised Lamborn's bill as a bold transformation of veterans' health care. "We can't leave the VA medical system in its current state and expect results to improve for our veterans," Caldwell said. "This is a historic opportunity to finally go beyond the failed status quo at the VA and provide veterans with the best care possible."

The House VA Care in the Community Act does away with current restrictions on who's eligible to seek health care in the private sector but maintains the VA as veterans' primary coordinator of care. When discussed at a public hearing last month, Democrats and some veterans groups cited concerns about Roe's proposal taking resources from the VA health care system. Lawmakers on the House veterans committee are waiting for the Congressional Budget Office to issue a cost estimate on the bill before advancing it. Fuentes said the VFW hasn't officially supported the legislation, but the group is close. "Ultimately we'll get to the point where we're going to support it," he said. "We're still going through some concerns, and they're very receptive. We feel they have a very veteran-centric approach. This bill, Lamborn's, is the wrong approach."

Representatives with the VFW and another major veterans organization, AMVETS, said their groups weren't consulted by Lamborn or the bill's cosponsors -- Rep. Mark Meadows (R-NC) and Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ) -- before the Veteran Empowerment Act was introduced. "Lawmakers know to work with veterans organizations when addressing veterans issues," AMVETS Director Joe Chenelly wrote Wednesday in a statement. "When they don't, it is not only unwise, it is insulting to the millions of veterans we represent." He also said the bill is "for profit" and would "starve the VA of needed resources." In a news release that accompanied the bill's introduction 21 NOV, Lamborn asserted any claims that his system would privatize the VA were inaccurate. "This bill throws out the idea of acceptable patient wait times and eliminates the requirement of the veteran to ask for VA permission to use civilian medical providers," Lamborn said in a statement. "It gives veterans full authority to use the existing VA system or not." [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | November 22, 2017 ++]

VA ID Card Update 13 ► Vets Can Now Apply



A screen shot of the link on the Vets.gov website users can visit to apply for the new VA ID card

Honorably discharged veterans of all eras can now apply for a new veterans ID card, officials with the Department of Veterans Affairs said 29 NOV. To receive the card veterans must log in to Vets.gov using either the ID.me verification system or a DS log-in. Users will then be able to apply for the hard-copy card by verifying their personal details through the website and by submitting a copy of a valid government issued-ID as well as a shoulders-up photo to the site. Once the application is complete, users can expect to receive their new ID card within 60 days, officials said in a release. Officials said users will also be able to receive a digital copy of the card by mid-December.

The link for the application is found at the bottom of the Vets.gov homepage under the words "Apply for Printed Veteran ID Card." After multiple failed attempts and error messages, reporters with Military.com were able to fully test the new application system and request an ID card using their own VA log-ins and military service credentials. Among those errors was a message that said the VA was unable to confirm that the reporter served in the military, despite the fact that the reporter actively receives VA benefits. A separate error incident blocked the reporter from submitting his uploaded government-issued ID card or ID card photo.

The ID cards are meant to offer a way for veterans to prove their service without carrying a copy of their DD-214 form, which contains sensitive personal information, such as veterans' Social Security numbers. The new IDs will not, however, qualify as official government-issued identification for air travel or other uses.

The ID card program is voluntary. The VA was ordered to provide the cards in a law passed by Congress in 2015. Some veterans, such as those who receive health benefits from the VA and military retirees, already have IDs that can provide proof of service.

An early prototype of the card provided to the veteran service organization AMVETS by the VA shows the VA logo on the front and an Office Depot logo and advertising message on the back. Although VA officials said the design of the card is still being finalized, the Military.com reporter who successfully tested the system was shown a copy of an ID card. That ID card example did not include an Office Depot logo. VA officials told Task & Purpose last month that Office Depot is printing and providing the cards to veterans for the VA free of charge, but a spokesperson with Office Depot was not aware of the arrangement at the time, according to Task & Purpose. [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | November 29, 2017 ++]

VA Unpaid Obligations ► \$226M to Settle 23 Claims

The Department of Veterans Affairs owes \$226 million to the Treasury Department and has no immediate plans to repay it, according to an internal watchdog report released 28 NOV. The VA office of inspector general found the agency has not repaid funds taken from the Treasury's Judgment Fund during the past six years to pay settlements from contract disputes on 10 major construction projects. The lack of reimbursement goes against federal regulations and VA policy, inspectors said. "By not reimbursing the Judgment Fund timely, VA has continued to maintain significant liabilities," inspectors wrote. "VA will require significant future funding to satisfy the outstanding claims."

The Treasury paid to settle 23 claims arising from contract disputes on major VA projects in Maryland, Florida, Colorado, Nevada, California and Pennsylvania. Federal laws require agencies to reimburse the Treasury within 45 days or create a repayment plan in that time. Inspectors found the VA had been delinquent for 221 days on average and the agency had no documented plans to repay the money.

- Three claims were related to the VA hospital near Denver, which is under construction and experiencing massive cost overruns. Reimbursement for one of those claims is \$4.5 million and 411 days past due.
- Nine claims came from construction of the new VA hospital in Orlando, Florida. Five of those claims are 340 days delinquent.
- As older claims go unpaid, new ones are piling on. One claim, for \$1.4 million for the Orlando project, was five days delinquent when inspectors began their review.

The inspector general's office conducted its review from January to September, following a request from Congress to look into the issue. As of Jan. 31, 2017, the VA had reimbursed the Treasury fund for only \$21.4 million of the \$247.7 million that it owed, inspectors found, bringing its outstanding balance to \$226.3 million. The Treasury does not assess interest on the VA. The VA hasn't been requesting enough money from Congress to pay back the Treasury, the report also stated. From fiscal 2012 to 2017, the VA asked Congress for only \$29 million to go toward the reimbursements.

The inspector general's office is recommending the VA update its policies and ensure it reimburses the Treasury or comes up with a repayment plan within the allotted 45-day window. In a written response to the report, Edward Murray, the VA's acting assistant secretary for management and budget, wrote the VA would establish a repayment plan. According to the report, Murray told inspectors that reimbursing the Treasury wasn't as urgent as other department needs. "Replacing Judgment Funds was considered a lower priority than other requirements that support veterans' access and safety," inspectors wrote. [Source: Nikki Wentling | Stars And Stripes | November 28, 2017 ++]

VA Women Vet Programs Update 32 ► Depression & Heart Disease

Cardiovascular disease kills approximately one woman every 80 seconds! Are you a female Veteran who's anxious or depressed? Then chances are you may be at a higher risk for heart disease. Not exactly an uplifting thought, but it's the conclusion of a recent study conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Boston University School of Medicine. The study appears in the Journal of Women's Health. "We found that midlife and older women Veterans with depression had a 60 percent greater chance of having coronary artery disease than those without depression," said Dr. Megan Gerber, medical director of women's health at the VA Boston Healthcare System. "And that's regardless of whether they smoked or not." She added: "We also found that with each additional mental health condition — say anxiety, for example — your risk for heart disease goes up by another 40 percent."

Gerber and her team studied the data of 157,000 women Veterans over the age of 45 to examine the relationship between coronary artery disease and the presence of one or more mental health conditions. (Coronary artery disease causes a waxy substance called plaque — cholesterol deposits — to build up on the inside of your coronary arteries. These are the arteries that supply oxygen-rich blood to your heart.) "Our study suggests that women may be able to reduce their risk for heart disease by getting the help they need for depression or other mental health issues, along with traditional health and lifestyle interventions," Gerber said. "This is good news for women Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system. That's because here at VA we're focusing more and more on women's heart health. We've also entered into a unique partnership with the American Heart Association."

The researcher noted that VA is also increasingly focused on treating the whole person, not just a collection of symptoms. "This means that if we're treating you for depression, we're also going to be taking a close look at your cardiovascular health, the stress factors in your life and your lifestyle choices in general," she explained. "Everything's connected." Gerber noted that women in general tend to be nurturers and caregivers, prioritizing the needs of others and often putting their own self-care on the back burner. "Women take care of their spouses and children," she said. "They take care of their grandchildren. They take care of their aging parents or siblings who have fallen ill. They do this out of love, but it can make for a stressful life. Prolonged stress affects your mental well-being and, ultimately, your physical well-being."

The physician said she always talks to her female patients about the enormous benefits of exercise and other stress reducing activities. "Women in the military have their exercise program automatically baked into their daily routine," she observed. "But once they leave the military, routine exercise becomes optional and can sometimes fall by the wayside. That's why I try to impress upon my patients the enormous importance of taking care of themselves... "Good diet and regular exercise is a big part of that," she said. "And so is emotional well-being." Following is contact data women vets should be aware of:

- To learn more about health care and other resources available to women Veterans, visit www.womenshealth.va.gov.
- Need to talk with someone about how you're feeling? Call the Women Veterans Call Center at 1.855.VA.WOMEN. All the representatives there are women, and many are Veterans themselves. They can connect you with the resources you need to start feeling better again.
- Need immediate help? Call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1) or visit www.veteranscrisisline.net.

[Source: VHA Update | November 28, 2017 ++]

VA Physician Qualifications Update 03 ► Poor Performers Not Reported | 90%

The Department of Veterans Affairs fails to report 90 percent of poor-performing doctors to national and state databases intended to alert other hospitals of misconduct, according to findings released 27 NOV by the Government Accountability Office. The government watchdog found VA officials were slow to investigate when concerns were raised about the performance of certain doctors. Further, in eight out of nine cases, the VA failed to report doctors who didn't meet health care standards. "Until [the Veterans Health Administration] strengthens its oversight of these processes, veterans may be at increased risk of receiving unsafe care through the VA health care system," the GAO concluded.

The findings were based on reviews of 148 instances of complaints against VA medical providers at five hospitals from 2013 to 2017. The concerns ranged from unsafe or inconsistent practices to doctors incorrectly recording patient visits. The VA failed to document about half of those cases, the GAO found. For 16 doctors, the VA waited multiple months or years to initiate reviews of complaints. During that time, nine doctors were disciplined by the VA for possible professional incompetence or misconduct, or they resigned to avoid disciplinary action. But the VA didn't report any of them to state licensing boards, and only one was reported to the National Practitioner Data Bank. Those databases are designed to inform other health care facilities about doctors' past performance. In one instance, a doctor who resigned from the VA while under investigation was not reported, and later hired to another, non-VA hospital in the same city. Two years later, that hospital disciplined the doctor for the same conduct that prompted the VA investigation, the GAO reported.

The GAO is recommending the VA improve oversight of how concerns raised about doctors are reviewed and documented. In response to the watchdog report, VA Deputy Chief of Staff Gina Farrisee wrote the agency agreed with the recommendations and would comply with them by October 2018. "Without documentation and timely reviews of providers' clinical care, [VA] officials may lack information needed to reasonably ensure that providers are competent to provide safe, high quality care to veterans," the GAO report reads. The U.S. Office of Special Counsel has recently received complaints from whistleblowers that seem to back up the GAO findings of VA leadership failing to address concerns about doctors, inspectors wrote. A subcommittee of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs is planning to meet 29 NOV to discuss the report publicly. [Source: Stars And Stripes | Nikki Wentling | November 27, 2017 ++]

PTSD Update 235 ► HBOT Treatment Option

On 29 NOV the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it will offer Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) as a treatment option for a small number of Veterans with persistent post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms resistant to standard options. Providers from the Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System and the VA Northern California Health Care System will partner with HBOT providers at the Tulsa Wound Care and Hyperbaric Center at Oklahoma State Medical Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the David Grant Medical Center on Travis Air Force Base, California, respectively, to provide this care.

"There is nothing more important to us than caring for our nation's Veterans, and that care must include finding different approaches that work best for them," said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. "We have to explore every avenue, particularly for our most medically vulnerable Veterans, and be open to new ideas and strategies for their optimal health and well-being." HBOT is a procedure that increases oxygen in the body, under pressure, to encourage healing. Currently, HBOT is commonly used to treat carbon monoxide poisoning, divers' sickness, enhanced healing of some wound problems, skin grafts, heat burns, crush

injuries and other acute health-care issues that involve too little blood flow to a part of the body. This use of HBOT for treatment of PTSD is considered an “off-label” use and will occur under the supervision of a trained physician. Separately, VA and the Department of Defense are planning a multisite research study to examine more fully the use of HBOT for patients diagnosed with PTSD.

As health-care leaders interested in innovative approaches to care, the VA Center for Compassionate Innovation (CCI) is facilitating use of HBOT for a subset of Veterans who have noticed no decrease of symptoms after receiving at least two evidenced-based treatments. CCI uses innovative approaches to treat conditions where traditional methods have been unsuccessful. VA will monitor the HBOT clinical demonstration project and the HBOT research study to help inform the potential for HBOT usage to treat a larger number of Veterans with PTSD. For more information about VA’s Center for Compassionate Innovation, go to <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships>. [Source: VA News Release | November 29, 2017 ++]

VA Suicide Prevention Update 45 ► NJ Clinic Was Remiss in Vet's Death

A Gulf War veteran who set himself on fire outside a Veterans Affairs clinic and later died went nearly a year without a mental health appointment or medication, one of several serious problems government investigators found with the clinic in a report released 16 NOV. The Veterans Affairs Department’s inspector general found Charles Ingram III went almost a year without seeing a counselor or taking medications for his mental health problems before his death in March 2016. He requested an appointment to see his psychologist at the Northfield clinic and was given an appointment date more than three months later. He had lost his job and was on the verge of a divorce. The report found the clinic did not provide appropriate supervision and oversight in the 11 months before his death.



In this March 23, 2016 photo, a couple who identified themselves as the parents-in-law of Navy veteran Charles R. Ingram visit the memorial at the site where Ingram set himself ablaze outside the VA Outpatient Clinic in Northfield, N.J.

U.S. Sen Cory Booker, a New Jersey Democrat, said the report “makes clear that important policies and procedures weren’t followed in the lead-up to Charles Ingram’s death last year. Ingram’s death was a tragedy that shook us to the core and reminded us of what’s at stake when it comes to providing care for veterans suffering from mental health issues.” Booker, fellow Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez and Republican U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo all acknowledged improvements have been made at the clinic since then, including new leadership in the Delaware office that oversaw the New Jersey clinic and the hiring of additional staff.

VA spokesman David Cowgill said the report highlighted “unacceptable problems” that the agency is addressing by replacing the clinic’s director; establishing same-day services for urgent mental health cases; hiring additional staff; and prioritizing suicide prevention efforts. Ingram’s mother and sister declined to comment on the report. According to the report, Ingram walked into the clinic in 2015 asking for an appointment with his psychologist, who assessed him in the waiting room, determined he was not in distress and sent him to the front desk to make an appointment. A date was set more than three months hence.

While he was waiting, the report said, Ingram was experiencing stress including the loss of a job and the deterioration of his marriage. He killed himself shortly before the appointment date by setting himself on fire outside the clinic, which was closed at the time. “We found that staff failed to follow up on clinic cancellations, patient no-shows, and appointments for approved care in the community, leaving the patient without follow up appointments and refills for prescribed medications,” the report read. “We found that clinical staff failed to acknowledge and document the lack of appointments for this patient and failed to reach out to the patient to re-engage him in therapy as required.”

They also found that clinic staff failed to make appointments for his care in non-VA community facilities, even though such care had been authorized. “We were unable to determine whether addressing these issues during the course of treatment would have resulted in a different outcome for the patient,” the report concluded. “However, addressing these issues now will help facilitate a more patient-centered environment, especially for veterans with complex (mental health) and psychosocial issues such as the patient discussed in this report.” [Source: AP | Wayne Parry | November 16, 2017 ++]

VA EHR Update 10 ► \$800 Million Needed to Begin Overhaul

Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin went to Capitol Hill on 15 NOV seeking \$800 million to begin an overhaul of the VA’s electronic health records -- an initiative nearly 20 years in the making. The VA is close to entering into a contract with Cerner Corp., the health information technology company it chose to implement a new electronic health records system. But first, Congress must allow the VA to reappropriate \$782 million in other department funds. If the VA doesn’t secure funding by the end of the year, the contract will cost more, and a 10-year implementation timeline will be thrown off, Shulkin told a House Appropriations subcommittee Wednesday. "We have to do this quickly," he said. "The right thing to do is act with urgency, be aggressive and implement strict timelines."

Lawmakers on the subcommittee were skeptical. "When I think about the time and resources wasted over the years on this endeavor, it is easy to see why members have such frustration on this issue," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL). "It's been an unbelievably lengthy process, even for government." Since 2000, members of Congress have pushed the VA to create a system capable of sharing patient data seamlessly with the Defense Department. Soon after former President Barack Obama took office in 2009, he charged the VA and DOD with creating an integrated system. The plan was abandoned in 2013 because of cost concerns after the agencies had already spent about \$1 billion. "If we get your support moving forward, we won't allow that to happen," Shulkin insisted. "We'll stick at this. It's going to be hard, and there will be stumbles, but this is something we have to get done for the country."

The VA has continued to spend money to fix its in-house system, called VistA, described by the Government Accountability Office as "old, inefficient and difficult to maintain." Bringing VistA up to health industry standards would cost \$19 billion over 10 years, Shulkin said. In June, Shulkin announced the VA would buy an off-the-shelf system from Cerner -- the same one the Defense Department uses. The overhaul would allow transitioning servicemembers' medical records to immediately be shared with the VA, Shulkin said. It would also allow the VA to share health records with its private-sector health care providers.

The \$782 million is just the start. Shulkin did not say in the public hearing Wednesday how much implementing a new commercial system would cost over time, only that it was "billions less" than the \$19 billion it would take to fix VistA. The initial contract for the Defense Department's commercial system in 2015 totaled \$4.3 billion. "This is the first step down a long and expensive road," said Rep. Charlie Dent, (R-PA), chairman of the subcommittee. The subcommittee met with Shulkin in a closed session later Wednesday to discuss specifics that Dent said could affect contract negotiations. Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ) said that agreeing to the \$782 million transfer would "commit this congress and future congresses to this plan."

Shulkin wants the \$782 million approved as part of VA's fiscal 2018 budget, but work on congressional appropriations isn't likely to start until after the Thanksgiving break. "Absent an appropriation bill by the end of the calendar year, we ask Congress to consider approving our transfer request so we can promptly approve the contract," Shulkin said. Once a contract with Cerner is signed, the new system is expected to be operational at the first locations in 18 months. [Source: Stars and Stripes | Nikki Wentling | November 15, 2017 ++]

VA Appointments Update 18 ► How to Use the Online Scheduling

You can now manage your primary care and certain specialty care VA appointments online at participating VA facilities. You will need a Premium My HealtheVet Account to use online scheduling. If you do not have a Premium account, please visit My HealtheVet or contact the My HealtheVet Coordinator at your nearest VA facility. U.S. Army Veteran G. Paul Moffett, who helped test online scheduling at the VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System in Murfreesboro, TN, says it's about giving Veterans greater control over scheduling their care. "Rather than making a phone call and playing go fish, now I can [go online and] pick the date that best fits my schedule," he says. "You can use it anytime, anywhere – on whatever Internet-access device you have. I'm excited about it. It's great stuff."

Currently, online scheduling is available at more than 100 VA facilities and their associated Community Based Outpatient Clinics. VA plans to add more appointment types in the future and is working to make online scheduling available at nearly all VA facilities next year. You check to see if your VA facility offers online scheduling at <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/web/myhealthevet/keeping-up-with-all-your-va-appointments>.

If you are eligible to use online scheduling, you will see a "Schedule a VA Appointment" option when you log in to your My HealtheVet Premium Account. To make an appointment online, you need to be registered as a patient in My HealtheVet and have a Premium Account. To schedule a primary care appointment, you must have had a primary care appointment at that facility within the last two years. Contact your facility for information about available specialty care appointments. At <https://www.vets.gov/facilities> you can locate their contact info. With the online scheduling tool you can:

- Self-schedule primary care appointments at participating VA facilities where you have had a primary care appointment in the past two years.
- Request help scheduling primary care appointments at participating VA facilities where you receive care.
- Self-schedule or request help scheduling specialty appointments, such as outpatient mental health, optometry and audiology, at participating facilities.
- View or cancel appointments and requests.
- Track the status of appointment requests.

- Send messages about requested appointments.
- Get notifications about appointments.

If your VAMC does not currently participate in online scheduling, know that VA is working to expand access to additional medical centers. If you need to make an appointment immediately, call the VA facility where you want to receive care. Remember, you can find your VA health facility's phone number at <https://www.vets.gov/facilities>. To summarize, to use VA Online Scheduling today, you will need to:

- Be a current VA patient
- Have a Premium My HealtheVet Account
- Check if your VA facility offers online scheduling at this time
- Have had a primary care appointment at your participating facility within the last two years

...and that's it! If you need help with online scheduling, dial 1-877-470-5947. For TTY assistance, dial 711. The Help Desk is open weekdays from 7:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m. CT. [Source: Veterans Health | Alan Greilsamer and Treva Lutes | November 14, 2017 ++]

VA Sexual Trauma Program Update 08 ► Disability Compensation & Treatment

A number of veterans, both women and men, may have experienced sexual trauma while they served on active military duty. Law defines sexual trauma as: *Sexual harassment, Sexual Assault, Rape and other acts of violence*. It further defines sexual harassment as *repeated unsolicited*, verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature, which is *threatening* in nature. Many veterans have never discussed the incident or their medical or psychological condition with anyone. Yet, these women and men know that they have "not felt the same" since the trauma occurred. Unfortunately, this is a common reaction to an incident of sexual trauma.

Only 16% of rapes that occur in this country are ever officially reported. Many of the victims base their reactions on social misconceptions about those who have experienced sexual trauma. Nearly one-third of all trauma victims develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during their lifetime. These kinds of experiences can affect Veterans' mental and physical health, even many years later. Veterans can apply for disability compensation for any current difficulties that are related to their service, including difficulties related to Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Disabilities determined by VA to be related to your military service can lead to monthly non-taxable compensation, enrollment in the VA health care system, and other important benefits .

Veterans are not granted compensation for the traumatic event itself, but can be granted disability compensation for conditions that result from MST . Exposure to any trauma can potentially result in PTSD or another mental health disorder. Evidence required can be forms used in reporting incidents of sexual assault or harassment , as well as investigative reports during military service. However, VA knows that events involving sexual trauma are not always officially reported. Therefore, for PTSD claims related to MST , VA has relaxed the evidentiary requirements and looks for "markers" (i.e., signs, events, or circumstances) that provide some indication that the traumatic event happened. Because military service records may lack corroborating evidence that a stressful event occurred,

VA regulations make clear that evidence from non-military sources may be used to corroborate the Veteran's account of the MST . Further, when direct evidence of an MST is not available, VA may request a medical opinion to consider a Veteran's account and any "markers" to corroborate the occurrence of the MST event as related to current PTSD symptoms. Many veterans who experience an incident of

sexual trauma have had no professional counseling and may have misgivings about the need or purpose for talking about the incident so long after it occurred. VA counselors know that people who have been traumatized can be successfully treated and that it is important to the overall health of the survivor to talk through these upsetting and terrifying experiences.

In addition to counseling, related healthcare services are also available at VA medical facilities. It is important to know that sexual trauma counseling can be provided regardless if the veteran ever reported the incident. The after-effects of a sexual trauma can include:

- Avoidance of places or objects which recall memories of the traumatic incident.
- Feelings that something is missing or not right.
- Depression, alcohol and./or substance abuse.
- Suicidal thoughts.
- Recurring and intrusive thoughts and dreams about the trauma incident.
- Non-specific health problems.
- Relationship problems.

VA medical centers have made structural changes and renovated areas to assure privacy for veterans. VA healthcare professionals can help veterans better cope with the aftereffects of a trauma experience and help veterans regain their confidence, self-esteem, and quality of life. For information regarding sexual trauma services, contact the Military Sexual Trauma Coordinator or Women Veterans Program Manager at your nearest VA facility or call toll free (800) 827-1000. [Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | November 14, 2017 ++]

VA Loans ► Misconceptions

Home sellers and their agents may be limiting their potential base of buyers by ignoring a growing pool of them. Inside Mortgage Finance recently noted that loans acquired through the Veterans Affairs (VA) Department are rapidly increasing, reaching a holding level of one-quarter of primary insured home loans. This tops the number of loans backed by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

It is easy to see why VA backing is preferable from a buyer's point of view. If you qualify, you can purchase a house with no money down (up to a particular loan limit that varies by market) and no Private Mortgage Insurance (PMI) requirement. Yet, sellers shy away from buyers with VA loans, and seller's agents may serve as a screen to exclude VA-backed offers from ever reaching the seller. Why is this so? It makes little sense, since the risk of default is borne by the lending institution and not the buyer. In addition, foreclosures on VA homes are less than the default rate of either standard or FHA mortgages.

The main reason appears to be lingering myths associated with VA loans – some with elements of truth from the past and some that simply never had a basis in fact. Let's take a closer look at some of these misconceptions.

- **Slow Process** – While the VA is not known for their rapid response to many issues, their record is not bad with respect to loans. Paperwork is involved, but it is comparable to the paperwork necessary to close a standard mortgage. The Veterans Association of Real Estate Professionals (VAREP) states that VA loans can actually close faster than conventional mortgages by up to two days. In general, closing times are comparable between VA and non-VA backed loans.
- **Loan Limits** – The basic entitlement for every eligible veteran is \$36,000, and lenders will typically allow a loan of up to four times that amount (\$144,000) without having to apply any down

payment. Thus, some home sellers assume that VA applicants cannot afford their more expensive homes and exclude them from the pool of potential buyers. However, veterans may add some of their own down payment money and qualify for higher loan amounts up to the limits of “conforming loans” (generally \$424,100 but higher in some counties with unusually high average home prices). Terms of these larger VA loans are still favorable for qualifying buyers compared to the open market.

- **Qualification Concerns** – Historically, minimum credit scores are lower for VA loans than for conventional loans. In times of tighter credit (like today), VA loans become an even better deal as conventional loans become harder to get.
- **Limited Buyers** – If you do not live near a military base, you may not even consider that many qualified service members live nearby. There are around 22 million combined veterans and active duty military in the U.S., according to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. The National Association of Realtors estimates that around 16.4 million of these service members have mortgage loans, with 12% of those as VA loans.

That leaves a potential of over 6 million veterans as buyers, not to mention those who hold non-VA loans and may retain their entitlement for the purchase of a different home. If you are selling your home, do not exclude VA-backed loan applicants from your pool of buyers. They have put up with enough during their service time to our country and do not need any added difficulty in finding the home of their dreams. [Source: Huffpost | November 8, 2017 ++]

VA Loan Refinancing Update 02 ► Warning Order

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and VA are issuing their first, “Warning Order,” to service members and Veterans with VA home loans. If you have a VA home loan, then there is a good chance that you have already come into contact with unsolicited offers to refinance your mortgage that appear official and may sound too good to be true. Many of these solicitations promise:

- Extremely low interest rates
- Thousands of dollars in cash back
- Skipped mortgage payments
- No out-of-pocket costs
- No waiting period

Don’t be fooled. Before responding to any unsolicited offers, here is what you need to know.

Operational environment

Some lenders marketing VA mortgage refinances may use aggressive and potentially misleading advertising and sales tactics. Lenders may advertise a rate just to get you to respond, or you may receive a VA mortgage refinance offer that provides limited benefit to you while adding thousands of dollars to your loan balance. How will you know if the offer is too good to be true? Here are some offers and tactics to watch out for:

- *Offers to skip one or two mortgage payments* – Lenders sometimes advertise this as a benefit of a VA mortgage refinance; in fact, VA prohibits a lender from advertising the skipping of payments as a means of obtaining cash in an Interest Rate Reduction Refinance Loan (IRRRL). Certain lenders nevertheless use this as a selling point when they are unable to offer cash-out or a significantly lower interest rate.

- *Offers to receive an escrow refund* – Lenders may promise that you will receive a certain amount of cash as a refund from your escrow account; however, the amount you may receive is dependent on how much is left in your account at the time the loan closes, which may be much less than you were promised. We have heard from service members who were promised a certain refund amount and received a much lower amount at closing. We have also heard from service members who have experienced problems with their new escrow accounts after closing and have had to make higher monthly payments to make up for the shortfall.
- *Low-interest rates without specific terms* – Lenders may advertise a low-interest rate to get you to respond to an advertisement. You might assume these rates are for a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage, but in many cases, the rates are for a 15-year fixed-rate mortgage or an adjustable-rate mortgage, or you may have to pay discount points to receive the advertised rate.
- *Aggressive sales tactics* – Certain lenders may try to push you into a VA mortgage refinance. For example, you may be called by a lender multiple times or receive VA mortgage refinance offers in the mail that look like a check or bill to get you to open it. You may be pressured to refinance your VA loan only a month or two after you closed on your current VA loan.

Be prepared to: Understand that certain advertised benefits, such as no out-of-pocket closing costs, skipped mortgage payments, and escrow refunds, are costs that are generally added to your loan and increase the overall principal balance. These are all red flags that may indicate that the loan is less likely to benefit you. Before you proceed with a VA mortgage refinance, be sure to consider the long-term and short-term benefits and consequences of refinancing your loan.

Friendly forces

The CFPB and VA are working hard, along with other government agencies, to identify, stop, and prevent illegal and misleading advertising related to VA mortgages and refinancing. If you are considering mortgage or refinancing through a VA loan, VA loan specialists are available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday, to assist you. If you have questions about your current VA loan, contact VA at (877) 827-3702. If you have a problem with a VA mortgage refinance or other mortgage issues, you can submit a complaint to the CFPB online at <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/complaint> or by calling (855) 411-CFPB (2372).

If you would like to stop or reduce the amount of the offers you receive, you can call 888-5-OPTOUT (888-567-8688) or visit www.optoutprescreen.com. You can also put your phone number on the federal government's National Do Not Call Registry to reduce the telemarketing calls you get at home. Visit www.donotcall.gov or call 888-382-1222 from the phone number you want to register. Whether you're thinking of buying a home, already have a home loan, or are having trouble paying your mortgage, the CFPB has mortgage resources to help you every step of the way.

If you currently have a VA loan and are having issues repaying your mortgage, you should call a VA loan technician at (877) 827-3702 to explore potential options that can assist you. For help handling financial challenges at every step of your military career and beyond, visit the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's guide through the military lifecycle. <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/military-financial-lifecycle>. [Source: VAntage Point| Leo Shane III | November 8, 2017 ++]

VA Financial Literacy Resources ► What FLEC Can Do for You

VA's Veterans Benefits Administration often writes about the VA benefits that Veterans, service members and dependents can take advantage of. While there are many of those, there are also many financial

programs and services and benefits extended to Veterans and their families from partner agencies outside of VA. Foremost among these is the Financial Literacy and Education Commission (FLEC) from the Treasury Department. The Commission was established under the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003 to develop the national financial education web site <https://www.mymoney.gov/Pages/default.aspx> and a national strategy on financial education. Presently, there are 19 contributing agencies under the commission, including the Federal Reserve, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Securities and Exchange Commission; Departments of Education, Agriculture, Defense, Interior, Labor, Veterans Affairs; Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Federal Trade Commission, Small Business Administration, and Social Security Administration.

So, what can these agencies and FLEC do for you? Think of FLEC as an outline or table of contents (<https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/financial-education/Pages/commission-index.aspx>) where each “chapter” is a link to a different resource. At MyMoney.gov, you can learn about the programs designed for young people, for educators, researchers, or for different stages in one’s life. There’s a resource guide on financial institutions; a guide for youth employment; savings programs; college funding resources; and investing. Among VA’s contribution include:

- VA home buying loan | https://www.benefits.va.gov/HOMELOANS/purchaseco_buy_process.asp.
- Locating a housing counselor | https://www.hud.gov/i_want_to/talk_to_a_housing_counselor.
- Starting a small business | <https://www.sba.gov/offices/headquarters/ovbd/resources/1526572>.
- Automobile Shopping | <https://www.militaryconsumer.gov/spend/car-shopping>.
- Answers to Student Loan debt questions | <https://www.militaryconsumer.gov/earn/finding-and-paying-school/paying-your-education>.
- Credit counseling | <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0153-choosing-credit-counselor>.
- Find a new job | <https://www.usajobs.gov>.
- Specialized job-hunting assistance (<https://www.ssa.gov/people/materials/pdfs/EN-05-10282.pdf>) if you have a disability

Above are just some of the assistance and resources you can find at FLEC. Of course, if you have questions about VA’s financial benefits and resources, the experts would be happy to assist you. Just enter your question in the comments section of <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/43313/43313>. [Source: VAntage Point | Jason Davis | November 7, 2017 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 30 NOV 2017

Temple, TX -- Veterans in the Vocational Training, Rehabilitation and Employment (VRE) program at the Department of Veterans Affairs' Temple, Texas campus had complained for roughly a decade about being assigned to the motor pool. The complaints, made by veterans undergoing drug and alcohol rehabilitation as they tried to get their lives back on track, claimed that in the motor pool they were subjected to verbal abuse and tirades. Additionally, VA equipment like lawnmowers and expensive tools regularly disappeared, and sometimes veterans were told to take equipment off of the VA campus to the homes of high-ranking VA officials where they said they were ordered to do work. As the complaints piled up, administrators took no action until this past spring, when Central Texas VA Director Christopher Sandles said that he initiated an investigation after hearing concerns from employees at the motor pool during focus groups he convened when the VA appointed him to the top position in the region, which includes Austin, nine months ago.

This is one of the reforms that grew out of the 2014 Phoenix VAMC wait list scandal - that administrators simply needed to listen to the complaints of the veterans that they were supposed to be serving. Hopefully problems are resolved this way in the future, instead of waiting for Inspector General report, or worse, local police or FBI investigation finds out about alleged wrongdoing. Veterans had lodged nearly 50 grievances over a decade-long time period, finally prompting the Central Texas VA to launch an internal investigation into the motor pool. In August, the three-person administrative board confirmed much of what the veterans had long alleged - and more.

The American-Statesman obtained a preliminary, unsigned version of the board's report. It found that: "Some VA supervisors had stolen equipment from the agency and benefited personally from the labor of veterans in the vocational training program. Current and former veterans in the program testified that they had been told to build fences, repair sprinkler systems and perform other landscaping work at the homes of certain supervisors and their family members. The veterans also testified that while they were being paid by the government, they were forced to repair personal vehicles and do other odd jobs for supervisors.

And in a finding that has sparked a wider VA inquiry, the investigators said they had uncovered a complex scheme at the motor pool to secretly profit from VA purchase orders. The board concluded employees at the motor pool had funneled business to a small Killeen firm that investigators said made at least \$400,000 by padding purchases with 30 percent surcharges. In all, the report found, more than \$1.3 million was "funneled through" the business, Whitetail Industrial Parts and Service, in recent years." For more detail's go to <http://www.mystatesman.com/news/local-military/investigation-finds-corruption-intimidation-temple-campus/K1PQFY0lDPgPnKfOZQmgPM> [Source: TREA Washington Update | November 22, 2017 ++]

VA Compensation & Benefits ► Problem Solving Program Q&A -- 23 & 24

Question #23: I recently retrieved my DD-214 proof of military service, and noticed that the yeoman who typed the document when I was discharged made a mistake in typing my birth date. I was discharged from active duty on 9/24/63, and when he typed my birth date, which was 7/25/37, the yeoman typed 7/25/63. I never noticed until I started receiving VA information and I wanted to apply for my Veteran ID Card. **I am just wondering how I correct the error.** I received my commission in October 1960 from Naval OCS in Newport RI, and I was discharged 3 years later in 1963.

A1: On active duty, the problem is simple. A DD-215 would be issued that specifies the error and is attached to the DD-214. Since you were discharged, my opinion would be that you would have to submit a Board of Corrections of Naval Records (BCNR) Review. You would include your DD-214, Birth Certificate and personally, I would submit a cover letter with those documents as attachments. I hope this helps to get your error corrected. (RC) 4/4/2016

A2: You have to file a DD 149 to request correction of your military record. (AP) 4/4/2016

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Question #22: I am a retired E-8, 24yrs service, combat vet. I am rated 60% disabled. I receive retirement/disability pay & family dependent pay. I have been battling the VA on an Agent Orange Claim cancer for which they are denying. **If approved, would this be considered a combat disability? If so, how is compensation awarded and is there any literature on this?**

A1: This could be considered a combat disability that would make you eligible for CRSC. Since you are retired and above 50% disability, you should already be receiving CRDP. You cannot receive both. You have to request one or the other from DFAS. (They usually pay the one that is the highest). (AP) 4/4/2016

A2: Yes, it would be considered a combat disability. DFAS and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) manage the CRDP/CRSC Processing program (formerly known as VA Retro) to pay eligible military retirees any retroactive CRSC, CRDP and/or VA disability compensation they are owed. A retroactive payment will include any money you may have been entitled to before you received your first monthly payment. A retiree may be due funds from DFAS, the VA or from both agencies. DFAS and the VA remain

in communication with each other to successfully establish and process CRDP and CRSC accounts. DFAS will audit your account to determine whether or not you are due retroactive payment. An audit of your account requires researching pay information from both DFAS and VA. If you are due any money from DFAS, you will receive it within 30-60 days of receipt of your first CRSC or CRDP monthly payment. If DFAS finds that you are also due a retroactive payment from the VA, we will forward an audit to the VA. They are responsible for paying any money they may owe you. For more information from DFAS, call toll free at 800-321-1080. Customer service representatives are available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (ET). Questions concerning disability ratings or payments due from the VA should be directed to the VA at 800-827-1000. (RJ) 4/4/2016 <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/disability/payment.html>

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Problem Solving Program (PSP)

Have a question about the VA? Need help with benefit questions? Need answers to your compensation questions? Use the Problem Solving Program (PSP) to get answers. Submit your question at <http://www.veteranprograms.com/compensation.html> and allow an experienced veteran(s) or VSO to answer your question. Use the PSP as often as you like. Your question will be sent to over 125,000+ registered USVCP veterans, government employees, veteran organizations, and military supporters.

[Source: USVCP | <http://www.veteranprograms.com/id2460.html> | November 30, 2017 ++]

VAMC Denver CO Update 09 ► Improper Mental Health Care Wait Lists

A watchdog arm of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs said 16 NOV that the agency's Denver-area hospital violated policy by keeping improper wait lists to track veterans' mental health care. Investigators with the VA Office of Inspector General confirmed a whistleblower's claim that staff kept unauthorized lists instead of using the department's official wait list system. That made it impossible to know if veterans who needed referrals for group therapy and other mental health care were getting timely assistance, according to the report.

The internal investigation also criticized record-keeping in PTSD cases at the VA's facility in Colorado Springs. Patients there often went longer than the department's stated goals of getting an initial consult within a week and treatment within 30 days, investigators found. In one case, a veteran killed himself 13 days after contacting the clinic, which was supposed to see him within a week.

Investigators said the unofficial lists did not always identify the veteran or requested date of care, and they could not determine how many veterans were waiting to receive help and for how long, even with the help of staff at the facilities. "As a result, facility and mental health managers did not have access to accurate wait time data to help make informed staffing decisions and did not have assurance that all requests for care were adequately addressed," the report said.

Rep. Mike Coffman, who along with another Colorado congressman, the state's two senators and Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) requested the investigation, said in an interview that the local VA's behavior reminded him of the 2014 VA scandal in Phoenix. Investigators there found that at least 35 patients died while waiting for care and medical staff falsified records to make it seem veterans were being seen promptly. "At the end of the day it's the veterans who suffer," said Coffman, adding he was going to talk to the Secretary of the VA about the Colorado situation. The VA Eastern Colorado Health Care system said in a statement that while it

agreed with much of the report's findings it bristled at the idea that its wait lists were "secret." The statement says that "nothing about this process was secret" and that it was discontinued once staff became aware it violated VA policies.

Brian Smothers, the former VA employee whose complaints got the investigation underway, said he was disappointed the report didn't make clearer that VA staff knew full well what they were doing. "We renamed the files 'interest lists' so people wouldn't know we were breaking the rules" on how to maintain wait lists, Smothers said. Smothers said the lists hid how long it takes for veterans to get treatment and made the demand for mental health care appear lower than it really was. Smothers, 38 was a peer support specialist on the VA's post-traumatic stress disorder clinical support team in Denver. Smothers said he started the job in April 2015 but quit last November after he was subjected to retaliation for speaking out. He said he's now working in graphic design and considering graduate school.

Johnson, chairman of the senate's Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs committee, said in a statement: "Putting veterans on secret wait lists is not acceptable. The VA should implement changes to provide the highest quality care for our veterans and hold wrongdoers accountable." [Source: Associated Press | Nicholas Riccardi & Colleen Slevin | November 16, 2017 ++]

VAMC Jackson MS Update 02 ► Barred Physician Draws \$339,177 Annual Salary

G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Jackson Mississippi barred one of its doctors from seeing patients years ago but continues to pay him a \$339,177 annual salary. The Jackson VA fired neurosurgeon Dr. Mohamed Eleraky in August 2016 following questions about his treatment of five anonymous patients, but he's back on staff today. Eleraky and the VA are in ongoing litigation, in which Eleraky's attorney subpoenaed the medical records of a patient we'll call John, who agreed to be interviewed but not identified by name.

In 2013, Eleraky performed a spinal fusion on John. "Things did not turn out well for me at all," John told the Clarion Ledger. The veteran first got an infection, then the VA sent him to the University of Mississippi Medical Center "for them to redo something that had went wrong," John said. "I couldn't move my head. I couldn't turn my head to the side very far ... For the longest, I couldn't lift my arms over my shoulder," John said. "I seem to be slowly getting better but there's some problems I'm still having." He's just now regaining feeling in his right hand, his dominant hand, four years later. John, who is in his 60s, said he couldn't recall what doctors told him went wrong in surgery, nor does he know if Eleraky is at fault for the adverse events he experienced.

Eleraky returned to work at the medical center in April after the VA Disciplinary Appeals Board found local officials did not prove their claims that Eleraky failed to properly assess patients or failed to follow surgical rules. Still, "(Eleraky) is not in a patient care position, nor will he ever be until it is clear he has the requisite skills to practice neurosurgery," Jackson VA Director David Walker said in a statement. After weeks of inquiry by the Clarion Ledger, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs provided a statement saying if local officials do not believe Eleraky can resume surgical duties, he should be transferred to a nonsurgical clinical position with a lower salary. If medical center leaders believe he cannot provide patient care altogether, the statement continued, he should be terminated or given an administrative, non-clinical position with corresponding pay.

This situation isn't necessarily unique. In February 2016, the Clarion Ledger found VA medical centers across the country, including in Mississippi, dole out millions in paid administrative leave for doctors with questionable track records. Retired Maj. Gen. Erik Hearon, former assistant adjutant general and commander

of the Mississippi Air National Guard, told the Clarion Ledger then that veterans are hurt by this because they can't see these surgeons and taxpayers are hurt because they have to pay for veterans to receive care elsewhere. VA officials are continuing to explore whether they can pursue other disciplinary actions against Eleraky. In 2015, the doctor filed a complaint in federal court against the medical center, alleging the discipline he's received — an initial suspension of his operating privileges in 2013 and a second suspension of his entire clinical privileges in 2014 — was improper.

It's clear the VA doesn't want Eleraky as a doctor on its medical staff, treating patients, but officials won't say exactly what happened in the operating room to warrant multiple disciplinary actions or why the medical center was "forced to reinstate him" earlier this year. After repeated requests, a VA spokesperson said ongoing litigation prevents the center from providing the justification for Eleraky's termination, other than "reason having to do with clinical care." The VA has paid Eleraky more than \$1 million over the course of 3½ years, during which he has not performed any surgeries. For three of those years, he didn't even see patients, relegated instead to "sitting in his office with no job responsibilities," according to the lawsuit.

The VA first suspended Eleraky's operating privileges in July 2013, less than two years after he was hired as a neurosurgeon to the center's medical staff. Eleraky claims in his lawsuit that officials did not explain the reason for his suspension, nor did he receive a fair disciplinary hearing. Eleraky's attorney said the initial suspension arose out of an alleged surgical complication that is "actually a common outcome for this type of procedure." Eleraky remained on staff for almost a year until the VA suspended him from seeing patients altogether in April 2014. "Dr. Eleraky's privileges remained suspended with no results or action taken for over 2 years. During that time, he was relegated to sitting in his office with no job responsibilities, effectively stigmatizing him," reads Eleraky's amended complaint, filed 6 NOV. Eleraky's lawyer Whitman Johnson claims in the lawsuit the VA "intentionally held Dr. Eleraky in limbo by progressively expanding and extending his 'temporary' suspensions with no apparent intent to reach a decision in the hope that he eventually resigns on his own."

The VA eventually fired him in August 2016 after Eleraky complained to VA headquarters about his inability to resolve the suspension. During this time, Eleraky's hospital privileges expired, so he's awaiting direction from the VA on taking a skills assessment so he can regain privileges that allow him to conduct surgery. Veteran Affairs Secretary David Shulkin has instructed the VA to perform a review to see if there are doctors across the system being paid clinical salaries while not performing clinical duties. Though Eleraky's suspension was based on his care of five patients, an October letter from Johnson to VA Human Resource representative Wilmino Sainbert, reveals the VA attempted to use additional patient stories in the case against him. Emails to a personal address listed for Eleraky went unanswered. Counsel for the Jackson VA, Assistant U.S. Attorney Angela Williams, also would not comment.

Eleraky claims in his complaint he was inappropriately disciplined for "his initial refusal to amend certain patient records until ordered to do so, his ethnicity and any related speech pattern issues, and in retaliation for his filing of an EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) complaint." Eleraky, 52, is originally from Egypt, where he received his medical degree from Tanta University in 1988. He received his master in general surgery in 1993 and his doctor of philosophy in neurosurgery in 1999 from the University of Arizona. Before arriving at the Jackson VA, Eleraky completed a complex spine surgery fellowship at University of California at Davis and three years of neuro-oncology training at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute in Florida.

Eleraky is not a licensed doctor in the state of Mississippi, but in Florida. The Florida Health Department has no record of complaints or discipline against Eleraky. VA medical centers do not require doctors to be licensed in the state in which they are employed. Because Eleraky is not licensed in Mississippi, the Mississippi State Board of Medical Licensure has no jurisdiction to investigate Eleraky. In July, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs began publishing a list of employee terminations, demotions and suspensions

in an effort to increase transparency. "Veterans and taxpayers have a right to know what we're doing to hold our employees accountable and make our personnel actions transparent," Shulkin said in written statement. [Source: Clarion Ledger | Anna Wolfe| November 25, 2017 ++]

VAMC Beckley WV Update 03 ► Acupuncture Program on Track

On October 27, the letter "**Beckley VA Hospital's acupuncturist decision hurts vets**" was published was published in the Charleston Gazette-Mail as a result of a patient's letter to the Editor. It contained false information regarding the status of acupuncture care available through the Beckley VA Medical Center. The Beckley VAMC Director would like to address the inaccuracies included in that letter. The Beckley VA Medical Center still continues to provide acupuncture treatments, and that has never changed. In addition to offering consultations to outside acupuncturists in the area, 12 providers, including mid-level providers, in the medical facility were trained in battlefield acupuncture during the past year. Acupuncturists do not need to be a medical doctor to care for veterans.

Last year, Beckley spent more than \$1.08 million on chiropractic, massage and acupuncture care — \$525,785 of that amount was on acupuncture care alone. We are exploring options to provide in-house medical acupuncture and osteopathic manipulation very soon. Beckley was recently selected for a \$3.3 million Whole Health Grant to create a holistic pain management program and are moving forward with the development of this plan throughout the 11 West Virginia counties Beckley serves. The Whole Health Steering Committee includes representation of veteran advisers. Beckley is in the process of recruiting a Whole Health director who will assist with integrating these services.

A contract is being developed with a local fitness instructor to offer yoga, t'ai chi and meditation. A dedicated Whole Health space in the Beckley hospital is going under renovation. Beckley is furthering such alternative therapies that are proven to decrease opioid use, stress levels, improve coping skills and overall well-being of veterans. These alternative therapies are important pain management options and crucial in combating the opioid drug epidemic. As the Whole Health Plan evolves, we will able to offer a menu of alternative healthcare options that are integrative and patient-centered.

VAMC Director Stacy Vasquez said, "The quality of health care received by the veterans we serve is my utmost priority. We are constantly striving to improve the access and availability of health care services. With help from community partners, the Beckley VA can create change in Southern West Virginia by bringing the best health care options available to Veterans without interruption." [Source: Charleston Gazette-Mail | Stacy Vasquez | November 17, 2017 ++]

VA HCS Alaska Update 01 ► Hiring More Employees | Improve Care Access

The Alaska agency that provides health care services to all veterans in the state is planning to expand its workforce. The agency is looking to expand its staff from about 550 employees to 650, Alaska Veterans Health Care System Director Dr. Timothy Ballard said. Ballard met last week with staff at the Kenai VA clinic where he hosted a town hall for veterans, the Peninsula Clarion reported . President Donald Trump's administration increased the Veterans Affairs budget by about 6 percent, which provided Alaska with the funds to hire more workers, Ballard said. The hiring focus will be on primary care physicians, but the agency will also hire support staff to help it continue tackling long wait times that Alaska veterans have complained about, he said.

The agency needs more physicians so it can avoid reimbursing non-VA hospitals that veterans might have to go to when appointments are booked. Paying back those outside clinics is a significant expense for the agency. Last year, the Alaska VA health care system purchased about \$130 million in care, Ballard said, adding that the agency probably could have saved about \$10 million if it had more physicians. Ballard, who has been on the job 16 months, said the Alaska VA has been chipping away at the issues veterans brought up concerning appointment wait times and access to care. [Source: Associated Press | November 21, 2017 ++]

* Vets *



Vet Jobs Update 227 ► Alaska HCS Hiring

The Alaska Veterans Affairs Healthcare System recently announced plans to hire almost 100 new staff members by July 2018. This will bring the total number of VA employees in the state to around 650, enabling the team to enroll more patients and expand health care access for Veterans in areas where additional medical professionals – including physicians, nurses and psychiatrists – are needed. Currently, they have already hired roughly 40 of the 100 positions desired.

Another advantage of this hiring push is that it will help decrease the workload of current personnel, which in turn can boost morale and performance. This is just one of several reasons why now is a great time to join us as we serve Veterans in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Fort Wainwright, Juneau, Kenai and Wasilla. As a destination state for many Veterans, Alaska has a lot to offer everyone, from an affordable cost of living to beautiful scenery and countless outdoor activities to enjoy. And with the outstanding benefits VA provides, you'll have what you need to make the most of life – both on and off the job. Ready to experience Alaska with VA? Explore our available positions and pursue one today at <https://www.vacareers.va.gov>. [Source: VAntage Point Blog | November 15, 2017 ++]

Ashford University Lawsuit ► Vet Students Deceived & Defrauded CA Allege

California's attorney general sued an online, for-profit university Wednesday, alleging officials made false promises to entice students and illegally tried to collect their overdue debt. The suit filed by Attorney General Xavier Becerra against San Diego-based Ashford University alleges the school and its publicly traded parent company, Bridgepoint Education Inc., used illegal business practices to deceive and defraud students. Ashford is one of the top enrollers of students with military ties, federal data show. The university enrolled more than 15,000 active-duty military students and nearly 8,000 veterans and other students using GI Bill benefits in fiscal 2016.

The suit filed in Alameda County Superior Court says school representatives lied to prospective students over how much financial aid they could get, the costs of attending, how many academic credits from other

schools would transfer to Ashford or from Ashford to other institutions, and about Ashford's ability to prepare students for careers including teaching, medical billing and social work. It says many of the school's roughly 40,000 students had low incomes and were unable to pay their tuition and other debts, yet Ashford threatened students and imposed unlawful debt collection fees. More than two-thirds received federal student aid, according to the lawsuit. Nearly three-quarters of its students never graduated. The suit asks a judge to reimburse students, impose civil penalties, and bar the school from similar practices in the future.

Anna Davison, the school's vice president of corporate communications and investor relations, said Bridgepoint institutions serve as a model for how online education can better the lives of people who did not, or who were unable to, pursue more traditional avenues to degrees. She said Ashford has improved the lives of thousands of students "by providing a high-quality education that serves communities and gives families the opportunity to succeed." The school will fight the lawsuit, Davison wrote. Meanwhile, Ashford is also fighting to maintain its eligibility to educate GI Bill students in an ongoing clash with the Department of Veterans Affairs. The university has been unable to procure the appropriate state-level approval required for federal approval to receive VA funds, and earlier this month, VA officials gave Ashford 60 days to comply with the law. If they do not, veteran students will no longer be able to use GI Bill benefits to attend the school.

Attorney General Becerra said in a statement about the lawsuit that Ashford had stolen the American Dream from its students. "This for-profit college illegally misled students about their educational prospects and unfairly saddled them with debt," he wrote. Students only later learned that their degrees would take months or years longer and cost much more than they had been promised, and might not advance their careers, the lawsuit says. Students owe billions of dollars in federal loans, and the school says it is owed hundreds of millions of dollars directly, the suit says. A bachelor's degree at Ashford is currently expected to cost more than \$60,000 including tuition and fees, books and supplies, the suit says, nearly double the cost at San Diego State University or California State University-East Bay, the suit says.

The lawsuit alleges the university used "admissions counselors" who were really salespeople working out of a call center under pressure to meet enrollment targets. Ashford is also accused of misleading investors and the public in Securities and Exchange Commission filings by overstating the rate of graduates who said that their Ashford degree adequately prepared them for their current job. [Source: The Associated Press | Richard Vogel | November 29, 2017 ++]

Vet For-Profit Schools ► Why Are they Allowed to Exploit Students?

This article is not about how for-profit schools exploit veterans, although that is certainly part of the problem. This article is about why. And, why you, as an American taxpayer, should care. You see, veterans are merely the first step in a two-step game to win billions in federal taxpayer dollars — dollars that many for-profit colleges should not be eligible to receive. This story starts with a federal protection referred to as the "90/10 rule." The 90/10 rule requires that, for a for-profit school to be eligible to receive any federal student aid, it must generate at least 10% of its revenue from sources other than federal student aid. The other 90% of its revenue can come directly from the federal government.

Despite the 90/10 rule, 192 for-profit schools are receiving more than 90% of their revenue from federally backed sources (as of fiscal year 2013). This finding comes from a new analysis of federal data (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/556718b2e4b02e470eb1b186/t/5a043bdfc8302533629884f/1510226911840/VES+90%3A10+Report+-+FINAL.pdf>) by Veterans Education Success, a nonprofit that provides legal services to student veterans. How, you might ask? There is a loophole in the 90/10 rule. Tuition dollars provided to veterans under the post-9/11 GI Bill (passed in 2008) do not count as part of the 90%. Even

though those dollars also come from federal funding, such potential dollars for veterans' benefits were omitted, as an oversight, from the original 1992 law when drafted.

In 2013, the 192 for-profit schools collected a combined \$1.15 billion from the Veterans Affairs and Defense departments and another \$6.79 billion from federal student aid, equaling a total of almost \$8 billion of federal funding in just one fiscal year. If all of these funds actually counted towards the 90% federal limit, these schools would need to generate almost \$900 million from private market-sources, which they are not. Without the loophole in the 90/10 rule, these for-profit schools would not have been eligible for even one penny of the \$8 billion of federal taxpayer dollars received.

To see what this means on a smaller scale, let's take just one of these schools as an example. According to the Veterans Education Success report, Apollo Education Group (which owns the online University of Phoenix) collected 96.2% of its 2013 fiscal year revenue from federal sources: \$423 million from VA and DOD benefits and another \$2.582 billion from federal student aid — about \$3 billion overall. If the \$423 million in veterans' benefits had instead counted towards the 90% federal funds portion of the 90/10 rule, Apollo schools would have been approximately \$215 million short of the 10% private market funding requirement (not a small gap). Without this loophole, it would be hard for schools like these to stay in business (and, for “private, for-profit” schools, it’s a bit ironic to consider how little the private free-market actually affects their success).

So what's going on here? Veterans are being poached, yes. But, that 10% of gap-filling revenue coming from exploited veterans is just part of the much bigger ploy. The real goal is continuing to be able to grab the remaining 90% of federal funded, taxpayer-backed, dollars from non-military students, without actually being able to raise those funds legitimately.

It's important to briefly discuss the history of the 90% federal revenue requirement: it is a market viability test. The 90/10 rule was supposed to ensure that “Taxpayers [do] not prop up low-quality schools that could not survive in the open market,” according to Veterans Education Success. “Institutions offering a quality education at a competitive price should [presumably] be able to attract at least 10 percent of their revenue from employers, scholarship providers, or students who are willing to pay the tuition.” If a school can't convince people to risk at least some private money on the tuition — a mere 10% of overall revenue — then the school will be ineligible to receive any public funding. Making the 10% threshold even softer, it could theoretically include student loans from private lenders. Think about that: these for-profit schools who evade the 10% threshold, using veterans' benefits, have trouble proving they are not too risky to justify private bank-backed student loans for a mere 10% revenue shortfall.

In the 1990s, the 90/10 rule was originally enacted to help curb senseless borrowing of federal money to pay for low-quality for-profit schools, where students were defaulting in droves and leaving taxpayers with an ever-growing unpaid bill. Considering today's \$1.4 trillion student debt crisis, it's an important reminder: As students succumb to the burden of heavily-inflated debts, it is the American public — the taxpayer — who ends up picking up the tab. This is why the student debt crisis should worry all Americans, not just student debtors.

In 2008, a new GI Bill was passed providing any veteran who served since September 11, 2001 the potential to use tens of thousands of dollars to pursue higher education. But, when the 90/10 rule was originally drafted in 1992, there was no generous GI Bill. Because veterans were not actively pursued by for-profit schools, the congressional drafters did not include in the definition of “federal funding” (subject to the 90% cap in the 90/10 rule) any potential GI Bill or Department of Defense money. According to congressional staffers speaking to Bloomberg in 2009, the omission, in retrospect, was a simple oversight.

When the GI Bill was expanded in 2008, but not considered part of the 90% “federal funding” in the 90/10 rule, it created a loophole. For-profit schools quickly realized that if they could get funding from

veterans who were eligible for the new GI Bill, they could evade the market-viability test requiring at least 10% of revenues to come from non-federal sources, without technically violating the 90/10 rule. A few years ago, PBS News Hour ran a heartbreaking video segment (<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/gi-bill-benefiting-profit-colleges-instead-helping-veterans>) titled “Is GI Bill benefitting for-profit colleges instead of helping veterans?” The answer, in part, is yes, but it’s important to realize that the exploitation only starts with veterans.

What the 90/10 loophole really does is keep market-failing schools in business. It also exploits the non-veteran students who provide the other 90% of revenue through federal student loan borrowing (which they assume the government is monitoring for at least a minimal level of quality – why else would the government so freely provide the funds?). And, eventually, the flawed system exploits us all. As American taxpayers, we are the ones who end up having to pay the bill for these federally-backed loans, hundreds of billions of which will never be repaid. [Source: Forbes | Michael Durkheimer | November 29, 2017 ++]

Military Records & Medals ► Preserving the Past | Tips

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, it’s expected that about a half-million will be alive at the end of 2017. Many veterans of this and other conflicts will take with them stories of service that can’t be replaced. Some will have earned commendations they mentioned only in passing, or ignored out of modesty, or locked away alongside painful memories. Family members who want to learn more about their relative’s service, even those in service themselves, may have limited knowledge when it comes to navigating an archive process that, with a bit of persistence, can provide more than just a few dates and places. Military Times sought advice from the National Personnel Records Center, as well as in-house expert Doug Sterner, curator of the Military Times Hall of Valor, to provide some basic steps on the path to piecing together a personal history.

1. First thing's first. Veterans or next of kin seeking records can visit this National Archives website <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records> to learn the basics. Many requests can be filed electronically; be sure to have a Social Security number, service number, dates of service and other basic information at the ready. You can also get a printable version of Standard Form 180, Request Pertaining to Military Records (<https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/standard-form-180.html>). This form most likely will grant eventual access to all relevant information, provided it can be filled out as completely as possible. As Sterner pointed out, “With more than 60 million records at NRPC, even what one considers a unique name may not be unique.”

2. What will I get? More than half of the 1.2 million military records requests received by NRPC involve separation documents: DD-214s or older equivalents. Because these documents are key to receiving various benefits, they are prioritized by the center: Officials said nearly 94 percent of these requests that didn’t involve records destroyed or damaged in a 1973 fire were processed in less than 10 days. Other requests averaged about 24 days. If you’re seeking more than the separation documents, be sure to request specific records via the online submission process or SF-180. If you’re after an entire Official Military Personnel File, make that request clear on the form. If your request takes longer than 10 days, you can request a status update online at <https://www.archives.gov/st-louis/forms> or via phone (314-801-0800). In their online guidance, NRPC officials say sending a follow-up request in less than 90 days “may cause further delays.”

3. The “entire” file. If you’re after materials such as clothing issuances, leave requests or similar documents, you may have to re-submit your request after receiving the OMPF in question. Under a policy outlined at Archives.gov, the NRPC provides “only copies of key documents and extracts of vital information, rather than a copy of ev`ery document in a personnel and/or medical file.” Requests since late

2009 have included an explanation of this policy, per the website.

4. Rush requests. NRPC tasks some of its staff exclusively with high-priority requests, such as veterans facing a medical emergency or family members seeking replacement awards prior to a funeral. Online submission portals and the SF-180 include sections where these requests can be explained fully; be sure to include such details if they apply. (Veterans who lost critical separation documents as a result of recent hurricanes can also take advantage of this expedited process by including the word “Hurricane” in the comments section of their online request or under the “Purpose” field in Section II of their SF-180.)

5. Old actions, new honors. Even service members who’ve retained complete military records from their time of discharge may be missing honors and awards they earned without realizing it. Sterner cited three examples of high-level honors that came after the recipients took off the uniform:

- The *Silver Star* didn’t exist as a medal until 1932. Prior to 1932, distinguished service members received “Citation Stars” from their commanding general to denote their accomplishments. Those awards are upgradable to Silver Stars, but the service member had to request it. The same goes for next of kin.
- Soldiers who earned the *Combat Infantryman Badge* or *Combat Medic Badge* during World War II are eligible for a Bronze Star Medal thanks to a directive from Gen. George C. Marshall … in 1947. By that point, many troops covered by the directive had left service. Troops or next of kin can request issuance of the award and request their military records be updated.
- The *Prisoner of War Medal*, established in 1985, targeted Vietnam War-era POWs but any service member who spent time in captivity back to World War I was retroactively eligible. Many World War II and Korean War POWs may not be aware of the change, and family members of deceased former POWs also may request the honor for their relative.

6. About that fire ... A July 12, 1973, blaze at the NRPC’s military personnel records building in St. Louis took out up to 18 million personnel files, including 80 percent of those belonging to soldiers discharged between Nov. 1, 1912, and Jan. 1, 1960, and 3 in 4 airmen discharged prior to Jan. 1, 1964, whose names came after James E. Hubbard in the alphabet. Salvage efforts began immediately, both on site and via a bulletin that required government agencies to maintain any other records that might be used to reconstruct military personnel files. They continue to this day. About 3,000 requests for records affected by the fire are processed by the center each week, NRPC officials said.

Even if the file you’re seeking was lost entirely, that doesn’t mean at least some of the information it contained can’t be recovered, Sterner explained. “While individual records were lost in that fire, the unit records — including histories, action and morning reports, and general orders for awards to individuals within that unit — are warehoused at the National Archives,” he said. “The caveat is that there is no index for these records … one must generally know exactly what general orders or report they are looking for, or sift through thousands of pages of documents.” These general orders are especially useful in assembling lists of award recipients. Sterner pointed to the work of Air Force Col. Albert Gleim, who, among other archival efforts he undertook after retiring from service, published an index of all Navy Cross recipients. Gleim died in 1997; his work, and that of many others, provided a foundation for the Hall of Valor database at <http://valor.militarytimes.com>.

7. Medical confusion. NRPC officials said outpatient and inpatient medical records can be the most troublesome of the 1 million-plus annual requests they receive. If NRPC has the records, they can be obtained using the SF-180 or eVetRecs (online request) methods outlined above. But NRPC likely won’t have the records if inpatient treatment took place within the last three years (the records remain with the treatment facility), or if outpatient treatment involves a veteran discharged from the mid-1990s through 2014. The proper record system will vary depending on when the treatment was obtained and what service was involved. NRPC aims to provide proper contacts, officials said; learn about the Department of Veterans

Affairs Records Management Center, and get links to other record-request sites, here.

8. Do I need my congressman? No, said the NRPC: Online submissions and standard forms make outside help unnecessary, especially for requests involving separation documents. Maybe, said Sterner: While you should include a request for unissued or lost medals along with your NRPC request, he said, “In the case of awards never received, it is best to work through a congressional office.” These offices generally have staffers who’ve become well-versed in the awards and records process. Successful requests can result in the lawmaker presenting the award(s) to veterans and/or family members in ceremonial fashion. Congressional offices also may offer assistance when it comes to third-party requests, those involving distant relatives, or others that aren’t as easily processed through NRPC’s online portal.

9. Arlington honors. Full details on burial and inurnment eligibility at Arlington National Cemetery are available at the cemetery’s official website at <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil>. They include eligibility for service members who received the Medal of Honor, a service cross, a Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star or a Purple Heart.

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Separation documents (DD-214 or similar) nearly always reflect these awards and will serve as proof of eligibility. Requesting these documents are the first step, Sterner said, though more research may be required if the documents are not available or do not include relevant information that can be corroborated via other sources, such as general orders. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Kevin Lilley | November 15, 2017 ++]

Taps Update 04 ► Detente Reached With Retiree Over Playing

A Pennsylvania town has reached a detente over a former councilman’s broadcast of taps through loudspeakers at his home, which had caused complaints and lawsuit threats. The Glen Rock Borough Council voted 15 NOV to move the nightly playing of “Taps” to a public park as part of a veteran’s memorial. Joshua Corney, a lieutenant commander in the Navy, has been playing a recording of ”Taps” from his home nightly for about two years. Last spring, he added loudspeakers. Several neighbors complained it created a disturbance. Over the summer, the council restricted Corney’s broadcast to Sunday nights and certain flag holidays. The York Dispatch reports the American Civil Liberties Union threatened to sue if Corney wasn’t allowed to play it. Corney says he’ll continue playing taps at home until the speakers at the Glen Rock Park are installed. It’s not clear when that will happen. [Source: The Associated Press | November 21, 2017 ++]

Vet Deportations Update 13 ► President Asked to Stop It

Rep. Mark Takano on 16 NOV joined members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs at a press conference to call on the Trump administration to stop deporting veterans. “We don’t have one day to waste,” said Takano, D-Riverside. “We know that there are veterans who died in Mexico waiting to get the care they needed.” “That is a stain on America’s conscience,” said Takano, vice ranking member of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. Takano said the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the House Committee on Veteran’s Affairs are requesting the Department of Homeland Security to issue an immediate moratorium on deporting veterans.

Veterans who are not U.S. citizens can be deported for criminal convictions. Some veterans are not fully aware of the process they need to go through to become citizens after serving in the military. A common assumption is that citizenship is automatic. Congressional members also are asking the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide deported veterans access to health care and benefits they are legally entitled to receive. Additionally, they're calling for key committees to hold hearings to consider permanent solutions for these veterans. Letters with the requests were sent to these agencies. Takano said these are all steps that could be taken by the end of the year.

There are at least 239 deported veterans from about 34 countries, according to a July 2016 report by the American Civil Liberties Union of California. Other estimates put the number of deported veterans at more than 1,000. In June, members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus visited the Deported Veterans Support House in Tijuana, which serves as a resource center and shelter for deported veterans. Last month, Takano led a delegation of members from the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs to visit the support house to highlight specific needs of deported veterans. "Despite the injustices that they have suffered ... every deported veteran I met told me the same thing, they still love America," Takano said. [Source: The Press-Enterprise | Alejandra Molina | November 16, 2017 ++]

Nursing Homes Update 12 ► Lawsuit | Hidden Camera Reveals How Vet Died

A WXIA TV 11Alive investigation uncovered hidden camera video catching nursing home staff laughing while an elderly veteran patient dies in front of them. The incident happened at the Northeast Atlanta Health and Rehabilitation in 2014, but the video was recently released as part of a lawsuit filed by the family. Attorneys representing the Atlanta nursing home tried to prevent 11Alive from obtaining the video. They asked a DeKalb County judge to keep the video sealed and then attempted to appeal to the Georgia State Supreme Court. The judge ruled in favor of 11Alive and the nursing home eventually dropped its appeal to the state's highest court.



James Dempsey

The video includes almost six hours of video court deposition from a nursing supervisor explaining how she responded to the patient before she knew the hidden camera video existed. The video shows a completely different response. The deceased patient is 89-year-old James Dempsey, a decorated World War II veteran from Woodstock, Georgia. In the video deposition, former nursing supervisor **Wanda Nuckles** tells the family's attorney, **Mike Prieto**, how she rushed to Dempsey's room when a nurse alerted her he had stopped breathing.

Prieto: "From the time you came in, you took over doing chest compressions...correct?"

Nuckles : "Yes."

Prieto: "Until the time paramedics arrive, you were giving CPR continuously?"

Nuckles : "Yes."

The video, however, shows no one doing CPR when Nuckles entered the room. She also did not immediately start doing CPR. "Sir, that was an honest mistake," said Nuckles in the deposition. "I was just basing everything on what I normally do." Watch the extended deposition <https://youtu.be/iVVZwBLZ8i4> where her story changes after watching the hidden video which can be viewed at <http://www.11alive.com/article/news/investigations/hidden-camera-tells-true-story-of-how-veteran-died-after-calling-for-help-gasping-for-air/85-490859558>. The video shows the veteran calling for help six times before he goes unconscious while gasping for air. State records show nursing home staff found Dempsey unresponsive at 5:28 am. It took almost an hour for the staff to call 911 at 6:25a.m.

When a different nurse does respond, she fails to check any of his vital signs. Nuckles says she would have reprimanded the nurse for the way she responded to Dempsey. She called the video "sick." When nurses had difficulty getting Dempsey's oxygen machine operational during, you can hear Nuckles and others laughing.

Prieto: "Ma'am, was there something funny that was happening?"

Nuckles : "I can't even remember all that as you can see."

WXIA TV 11Alive showed the video to Elaine Harris, a retired nursing professor and expert in adult critical care. "In 43 years in nursing, I have never seen such disregard for human life in a healthcare setting, is what I witnessed," said Harris. Harris says she identified several violations of care in the video, including failure to respond, failure to assess and failure to act. In the video, nursing staff repeatedly start and stop doing CPR on Dempsey. Harris says once you start doing CPR, it should not be stopped until a doctor makes the decision not to resuscitate. "That is absolutely inappropriate. You never stop compressions," said Harris. Dempsey's family declined to be interviewed due to a settlement agreement recently reached with the nursing home.

The nursing home operators, owned by Sava Senior Care, declined interview requests. In a prepared statement, a spokesperson wrote they were "saddened by the events, which occurred more than three years ago." The letter also notes it has "new leadership and the leadership team and the staff have worked very diligently to improve quality care and the quality of life for our residents....The facility recently was deficiency-free during our recent annual inspection conducted by the Georgia Department of Health on May 25, 2017." The nursing facility was made aware of the video in November 2015, but according to state inspection reports, the nursing home did not fire the nurses until 10 months later.

According to the Georgia Board of Nursing, Nuckles and another nurse seen in the video, surrendered their licenses in September – about three years after the incident. Nursing board president Janice Izlar says she cannot confirm when the state knew about the video, but the board's action came shortly after 11Alive sent her and other board staff a link to view the video. On average, it currently takes the nursing board 427 days to fully investigate a nursing complaint. Izlar says that's an improvement from about 2,000 days. "There is a lot of the process that we absolute do not have control over. For example, if we refer to a different division, a different agency, we have no absolutely no control over the timeline," said Izlar.

State health inspection records show Northeast Atlanta Health and Rehabilitation continued to have a history of problems after Dempsey's death. Medicare records show the nursing home facility was cited at least two dozen times for serious health and safety violations, including "immediate jeopardy" levels, the worst violation. Medicare withdrew one payment and the facility has been fined \$813,113 since 2015. While the facility recently received a good inspection this past May, it still has a one-star rating from Medicare, the lowest score the agency can give. The nursing facility remains open today. [Source: WXIA TV 11Alive | Andy Pierrotti | November 18, 2017 ++]

Veterans' Treatment Court Update 25 ► Raleigh County West Virginia

In an office outside Judge Andrew Dimlich's chambers on the bottom floor of the Raleigh County Judicial Annex, nine men and women in professional attire sit at a boardroom table. At the center of the table, among their legal pads and coffee cups, is a landline telephone dialed into the Martinsburg VA Medical Center. With the call on speakerphone, Judge Dimlich asks, "How have you been?" A veteran on the other line responds, "I've been doing great." He shares an update about his health and some exciting news about an invitation to a speaking event. The judge offers congratulations, and asks if there are any issues or problems he or other members at the table need to address. The man says no, and the judge adds, "All right, well, you keep up the good work."



The first Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) was started in 2008 in Buffalo, N.Y. There are 220 operational VTCs in the United States with approximately 11,000 veterans currently participating.

Another veteran, this one much more soft spoken than the last, picks up the line. He, too, shares an update with the team. A woman at the left side of the boardroom table smiles broadly and says to the man, "You're doing everything we're asking of you. We're really proud of you." These men, along with two others, are the first participants of the Raleigh County Veterans Court — a specialty court offering veterans who have committed a nonviolent crime in Raleigh County a chance to get their lives back on track.

To qualify for the program, their crime must in some way be attributable to their military service. Judge Dimlich said the issue does not have to be combat-related for a veteran to be approved. For example, one veteran in the program was tasked with delivering the news to families that their loved one had died. "You can look at a guy's service and what he's been through," said Brandon Steele, Raleigh County assistant prosecuting attorney. "We have to ask ourselves, 'Is this person ready to face the problem head on? Or are they looking for a free pass?'" Dimlich emphasizes that Veterans Court is not a free pass: "It takes a lot more time getting through the process than just dealing with criminal charges." Raleigh County Magistrate Steve Massie said the U.S. wouldn't be the country it is today without the service of veterans. "If we can attribute their problems to what they did for us, we owe them the opportunity for this."

Getting started

When someone is arrested, one of the first questions a defense attorney will ask is, "Are you a veteran?" If the answer is yes, and the individual was honorably discharged, that person may be a candidate for Veterans Court. Their service will be confirmed by the VA, and the Veterans Court team will assemble, every other Thursday at 3 p.m., to review the standing of current participants and consider new applicants. Applicants are asked, "How did you get from honorably discharged to here? Tell us what's going on in your life." If veterans are accepted into the program, their criminal charges are placed on hold while the court helps them

address underlying issues — everything from housing and employment to substance abuse and PTSD treatment.

Steele said the program varies in duration based on the needs of the individual. If veterans successfully complete the program, charges can be completely dismissed or dropped to a misdemeanor, at the discretion of the prosecutor. If they do not complete the program, they go back to square one, with charges still pending. “I’ve found these veterans are not just receptive to the program because of the reduced charges,” Steele said. “They don’t want to be the person they’ve become and they’re asking for help.” He said the program’s administrators want to help the veterans meet their personal, career and family goals.

The first Veterans Court in the U.S. was established in 2008 in Buffalo, N.Y. Since then, programs have followed suit across the country. Aside from Raleigh County, three other programs are available in West Virginia — in Putnam, Wayne and Kanawha counties. Mercer County is in the early stages of creating a program. Most of the Raleigh County cases have involved drug use, Steele said, which requires long-term rehabilitation. Although the Beckley VA Medical Center does not offer long-term rehabilitation for substance use, facilities in Martinsburg and Salem, Virginia, do. Steele said some veterans simply do not know what services are available to them through the VA. But Veterans Court works with participants to match them with the appropriate tools and resources.

Coordinating benefits

Jackie Hartsog, Veterans Justice Outreach coordinator, is the Veterans Court go-to for all things benefits-related. First, she helps determine whether applicants qualify for VA health care benefits. If they do, she shares with them what services are available and makes recommendations based on her initial assessment. The VA has a tremendous number of services, she said, including residential and out-patient mental health services. Some diagnoses treated include PTSD, traumatic brain injuries and substance use disorder. Oftentimes, mental health issues will manifest themselves through the commission of crimes or illegal activities, Hartsog said.

She also said mental health is sometimes associated with homelessness. She and a team at the VA help connect veterans who qualify with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s VA Supportive Housing voucher program. If approved, the veterans not only get a housing voucher, but also a case manager who works with them in all aspects of their care. “They make sure they’re making all their appointments, getting their medications and the utilities are staying on.”

Hartsog said once mental health and housing are addressed, employment is needed to help veterans support themselves. The VA offers employment specialists to help veterans locate jobs. Supported employment and compensated work therapy programs are also available. Through supported employment, an advocate for the veteran goes to his or her job site and works with the employer to discuss the veteran’s limitations, and to ensure the work schedule isn’t overwhelming. Through the transitional work therapy program, veterans are hired for jobs within the VA with the goal of moving into stable employment. This program is especially conducive for the scheduling of other needed appointments at the facility. “What’s so great about my job is having all of these resources I can connect people with,” Hartsog said. “Every piece of the puzzle can come together for them.”

Even if a veteran isn’t accepted into Veterans Court, the services at the VA are still available to them, Hartsog noted. “I’m going to be working with them, either way.”

Accountability

Veterans Court team members say the program is intense. “Only the people who truly desire to change their lives are going to be successful in it,” Steele said. Every two weeks, the participants have to answer to the court for everything they’ve been doing — getting treatment for substance use disorder, taking care of their families, managing their therapy, going to work, checking in at Day Report and more. “They get a touch

from the state, the VA or a mentor every day,” Steele said. “We talk to them on a daily basis, sometimes multiple times per day.” Currently, the program welcomes veterans to volunteer as mentors for the program, but as the program progresses, graduates will be asked to become mentors.

Hartsog said working with veterans, she hears a lot about the camaraderie veterans share and the support they receive from one another. “They can’t get that same connection with their loved ones, but in Veterans Court, they’re together and able to support each other.” Magistrate Massie, too, said the transition from military life to civilian life can be difficult. So when they get a piece of that brotherhood back, they appreciate it. Steele agreed that’s sometimes the missing link — “They need to know somebody is there to help me out, that I’m not alone.” All Veterans Court team members are volunteers — the judge, defense attorneys, prosecutors, mentors and others — and many of them are veterans themselves. “It’s veterans taking care of veterans,” Massie said. “This is us guys taking care of our men. And those who aren’t veterans, they’re patriots.”

Love of country

Raleigh County Veterans Court participants are also part of a special demographic, as West Virginia has the highest number of veterans per capita in the nation. “We’re a very patriotic people,” Steele said. “We believe in America and in serving our country.” He continued, “At some point in this participant’s life, for nothing in return, they have been willing to give up their life for their country. That’s a special moment for a guy, when he has said, ‘My country is greater than me.’ That takes a lot of courage.” Implementing Veterans Court was one of the first tasks Judge Dimlich set off to accomplish when he took office Jan. 1, 2017. “They fought for our country. They fought for our freedoms,” Dimlich said. “It’s not a break. They deserve our help. It’s an easy call.”

For more information about Veterans Court, call 304-252-2417. Massie also invites veterans to Bible Baptist Church, at 2071 Robert C. Byrd Drive in Beckley, at 7 p.m. Wednesdays for a program called Discipled Veterans. He said veterans of all ages gather to talk about transitioning into civilian life and more. [Source: The Register-Herald | Wendy Holdren | November 19, 2017 ++]

Vet Prison Inmate Programs Update 03 ► Separate Housing Unit Trend

What began as a simple idea in Middlesex, Mass., is now a trend being adopted quickly by county jails across the country: the creation of separate housing units solely for veterans. “I felt like this was an opportunity to not only help reduce recidivism in my jail, but at the same time, give some honor and respect back to people who deserve it, regardless if they’ve made mistakes or not,” Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb told the Washington Examiner. Pinal County, just southeast of Phoenix, Ariz., is one of the latest adopters of this practice that’s been quietly building for two years or more.

The origins of the program can be traced back to a small number of county jails, one of them under the direction of Sheriff Peter Koutoujian in Massachusetts. His own family history led him to be interested in veterans assistance programs, but that took a leap forward once he became sheriff. Through his own research, Koutoujian came across the Veterans Re-entry Search Service (VRSS) program, a service from the Department of Veterans Affairs that helps identify defendants or inmates in correctional facilities. Koutoujian knew that one of the biggest problems in helping veterans in jail was a matter of simple identification. For several reasons, many who find themselves on the wrong side of the law never identify themselves as veterans. But the depth of this self-reporting phenomenon struck the sheriff when he first used the database.

Using the VRSS program for the first time in the summer of 2013 with a population of about 1,100 inmates, Koutoujian says he knew he had 19 vets. "When we ran our names through the system, through the VA database, we found out there were another 44 in the system who had never self-identified." The sheer number alone began to suggest the idea of housing them together. "At the same time that some of our administrators were thinking, 'You know, that's enough population perhaps we could actually create a unit' – at the very same time, the veterans that we began working with more closely who were distributed throughout the institution ... also raised the possibility of creating a unit for those who were incarcerated," Koutoujian explained. The end product of the "veterans pod" was among the first of the kind in the nation.

The model quickly became successful. Grouping the veterans together facilitated mentoring from local vets, and fast-tracked the paperwork process on many of the services the vets were previously missing out on or would need soon after being turned out. And group therapies for PTSD, psychological counseling, and other group projects also became easier to organize and deliver. "We bring in the VA to help us get appointments set up for these guys, whether it's for mental health, or physical issues they've got."

The VA's been great about helping us with that as well," Lamb said. It also helped improve the behavior of the incarcerated veterans, and other prisons in the neighborhood began sending some of their veterans to the Middlesex jail. "You're inside a prison, where there's a lot of shame, and embarrassment, and in this unit you can feel the self-respect and integrity of this unit," Koutoujian said. It's a very different feel than the rest of the places in there. You almost feel a sense of pride in this unit."

When Middlesex created the separate housing area, the veterans painted the cell block, created a creed and motto, and began even breaking up their prison chores into platoon-like assignments. And they named the unit the Housing Unit for Military Veterans – or HUMV for short – giving it a distinctive military ring. The Middlesex jail also got a waiver from the state to mix veterans who have already been sentenced and those still in pre-trial. Shortly after Lamb's unit was created, one veteran spent a week in the unit but then was moved to the state prison. "Unsolicited, we got a letter from him saying even in that week how much it had impacted his life, and he was very thankful," Lamb said. "He said he felt like he kind of got that rejuvenation to be able to do things right once he got out of prison and make changes in his life."

Koutoujian has a similar story. He said as he was walking in a Labor Day parade, someone along the route shouted out "HUMV!" to him, and he immediately ran over to meet the man who had been in the unit. "The guy looked great, he was squared away, he was healthy-looking," Koutoujian said. Koutoujian said many veterans who might have been sentenced to state prison were instead sent to serve out their time in the HUMV unit, based largely on the progress the individuals had made in their time there. In some cases, the veterans who have left the jail have created their own support networks with "alumni" once back on the outside.

Lamb is quick to credit Koutoujian, and says it's proof bipartisan work still accomplishes great things. "It's kind of funny, because we're like the 'Odd Couple,'" Lamb said of the partnership. "He's a Democrat, liberal from Massachusetts. And I'm a conservative cowboy sheriff out of Arizona. But together as sheriffs, it shows how we work together across this country." Koutoujian says he remains inspired by what he sees in the HUMV unit. "They raised a hand and swore an oath. And one of the elements of their motto was 'Leave no man behind.' And that was what we attempted to do here. Leave no man behind."

Additional information on the VA's Veterans Re-Entry Search Service program and guidance for inmates can be found at <https://www.va.gov/homeless/reentry.asp>. [Source: Washington Examiner| Todd Shepherd | November 19, 2017 ++]

Worst States for Retirees ► 1st thru 5th

Before you sink your toes into the white sand beaches of that alluring state or cash into the real estate market in that super cheap one, check out these rankings. In the end, you'll have to weigh your own priorities, of course. Your concern about the crime rate, weather, or quality of care might not be the same as mine. And you might decide being near family (or far from them!) makes everything else irrelevant. But this ranking will help you jump-start your retirement planning. Review the 15 states [Bankrate deemed the worst for retirees](#) and how they square with other rankings, starting with the best of the worst first:

5. Louisiana -- The mild climate, casual lifestyle and eclectic mix of residents make Louisiana attractive to many retirees. But make sure you're financially healthy if you move there. It's no secret that residents often endure hurricanes that may destroy or damage property. Plus, the state has a hefty 9.88 percent sales tax, note [analysts at The Street](#). And despite its reputation for good times, the state gets poor marks for cultural vitality (despite New Orleans jazz and Cajun cooking), health care quality and crime (only New Mexico and Alaska have higher crime rates), according to [Bankrate](#). Louisiana ranked 46th on the Bankrate list. [Wallet Hub](#) found more positives in the state, ranking it 33rd out of the 50 states and District of Columbia. Although WalletHub only ranked it 43rd on quality of life and 46th on health care, it ranked Louisiana ninth for affordability, despite the high sales tax. Not budging from your commitment to retire there? Take a look at rankings for the best Louisiana communities [according to Niche](#).

4. New Mexico -- [Bankrate](#) gives high ratings to New Mexico for weather (third) and taxes (14th), plus the Land of Enchantment has a decent cost of living ranking (23rd). But poor health care quality (47th), and high crime (50th), add up to a near-bottom overall ranking. The state doesn't fare much better with [WalletHub](#), coming in at 45th in a field of 51. If you still want to move to New Mexico, review the most affordable cities as ranked [by Livability](#).

3. Arkansas -- Arkansas is a mecca for some retirees, but you may want to think twice before joining them. [Bankrate](#) ranked it in the bottom three states for retirees to live. While the site found cost of living was among the least expensive in the U.S.— a ranking of second, just behind Mississippi — it got low rankings for its crime rate (45th), senior citizens' well-being (47th), health care quality (45th) and tax rate (34th). The rating is similar to that of [WalletHub](#), which placed it 42nd out of 51. Still want to retire there? Find the best places in the state [as reported by Niche](#).

2. West Virginia -- West Virginia has a lot of negatives for retirees, as evidenced by the second-to-last overall rating as a place for retirees by [Bankrate](#). Senior citizens' well-being came in dead last, and the quality of its health care was ranked at 48th (Mississippi and Nevada scored worse). The tax rate is also a bit high (31st). Cultural vitality ranked nearly rock bottom (at 49th, second only to Mississippi). [WalletHub](#) ranked the state low (39th out of 51) but not bottom of the heap because of its affordability (13th out of 51). For a breakdown of communities, check out [Niche](#).

1. Alaska -- Think the last great frontier would be a great place to spend your later years? Bankrate puts it at the bottom of its rankings for retirees. One reason is the crime rate (49th), second only to New Mexico. Other low scores were for weather (50th), cost of living (48th) and health care quality (46th). An analysis by [WalletHub](#) ranked Alaska 50th out of 51, ahead only of Rhode Island as a poor place for retirees. But don't rule Alaska out altogether. Alaska doesn't tax Social Security or pension income. There's also no inheritance tax. The bad news: a "relatively high" cost of living. Do you wonder what that means? We did too. [Check Expatsian](#) for some clues — like a \$4.31 price tag for a dozen eggs — and an analysis of the income required to live there. But maybe for you, it's all about the fishing. In that case, well, cast all ratings aside!

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Nancy Dunham | October 20, 2017 ++]

Chem-Bio Agent Tests Update 01 ► How Exposed Apply for Medical Care

The U.S. Army is notifying Veterans that they may be eligible to receive medical care if they participated in U.S. Army chemical or biological substance testing from 1942 to 1975 and have an injury or disease that they believe was proximately caused by their participation. Recently a class action lawsuit filed by the Vietnam Veterans of America required the U.S. Army to provide medical care to veterans who volunteered to contribute to the advancement of the U.S. biological and chemical programs. To apply, eligible Veterans must have

- A Department of Defense Form 214 or War Department discharge/separation form(s) or the functional equivalent.
- Served as a volunteer medical research subject in a U.S. Army chemical or biological substance testing program from 1942 to 1975, including the receipt of medications or vaccines under the U.S. Army investigational drug review.
- A diagnosed medical condition they believe to be a direct result of their participation in a U.S. Army chemical or biological substance testing program.

If you received a notification packet through the mail and you wish to apply for medical care under this program, submit your application packet to: U.S. Army Public Health Center, ATTN: Benefits Application, Panel, 5158 BLACKHAWK ROAD, APG MD 21010-5403. Include in the application packet submission, the following documents:

- MEDCOM Form 840, Application for Medical Care.
- Copies of documents issued by the military reflecting your participation in U.S. Army chemical or biological substance testing.
- Medical documentation to include a diagnosis for all medical conditions believed to be a direct result of your participation in U.S. Army chemical or biological substance testing.
- The final Department of Veterans Affairs service connection decision on these medical conditions, if applicable.

If you have not received a notification packet, please contact the Army Medical Command Hotline at 1-800-984-8523 for assistance. The following links can provide additional info if desired:

- <http://armymedicine.mil/Pages/CBTPFAQ.aspx> -- Frequently Asked Questions.
- <https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/Applying.asp> -- Information on applying for health care benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records> -- Information on obtaining copies of Military Service Records.
- <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/medical-records.html> -- Information on obtaining copies of Service Medical Records.
- <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/categories/warfare-agents.asp> -- Information on Chemical and Biological Warfare Agents.
- <https://health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Health-Readiness/Environmental-Exposures/Chemical-and-Biological-Exposures> -- Information on DoD Chemical and Biological Exposures:

[Source: Military.com | Matthew Cox | November 6, 2017 ++]

Obit: Wesley L. Fox ► 24 NOV 2017

The Congressional Medal of Honor Society announces that Colonel Wesley L. Fox, Medal of Honor recipient, passed away the evening of 24 NOV in Blacksburg, Virginia, at the age of 86. Colonel Fox was born September 30, 1931, in Herndon, Virginia. He attended Warren County High School in Front Royal, VA, and enlisted in the Marines at age 19 during the Korean War. He was wounded while serving as a rifleman with the 5th Marines in Korea, but returned to his unit after stateside treatment. He served two tours of duty during the Korean War. After the war, he remained in the Marine Corps, working through the ranks and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in 1966.



In February 1969, during the Vietnam War, Fox was company commander and First Lieutenant of Company A, 9th Marines, when his company was attacked by a large force of North Vietnamese troops. Although wounded himself, Fox continued to direct his men and air support throughout the assault. He personally moved forward through intense fire to eliminate a sniper position, and refused medical treatment for his wounds while coordinating the medical evacuation of casualties. He was presented his Medal of Honor by President Richard Nixon in 1971. Colonel Fox retired in 1993 after 43 years of service – holding every enlisted rank except Sergeant Major and every officer rank except General. He is survived by his wife Dotti Lou and family. Funeral services are pending. With Colonel Fox's passing, only 71 recipients remain alive today. [Source: ArmyTimes | Charlsy Panzino | October 31, 2017 ++]

WWII VETS 148 ► Kermit Bushur | Merrill's Marauders Member

U.S. Army Veteran Kermit "Tony" Bushur. Tony served from 1943 to 1945 during World War II and attained the rank of private. In an interview with Veteran's History Project, Tony discussed his life and time in the military. He was born March 22, 1924 in Neoga, Illinois. While Tony was a freshman in college, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He finished his first year of college before completing a government-provided machine shop school followed by a job in a Chicago plant. Tony never received notice of being drafted, and upon visiting the draft board he was told he was needed in the factory to support the war effort. After the news, Tony quit his job, wishing to serve in the military. However, he was again passed over when the draft board determined he should work on his family's farm. This time Tony decided to enlist in the Army. He completed basic training in Little Rock, Arkansas, and was assigned to Sharon, Pennsylvania.

Tony saved money by ironing his fellow soldiers' clothes and bought a train ticket to attend his brother's wedding in Chicago. Upon returning to Sharon, he discovered that his unit had been shipped to Europe. Tony was assigned to a new unit and while sailing to the Mediterranean, their ship was attacked by German bombers. Their ship was sunk by a torpedo, killing over a thousand men. Tony was rescued from the attack

and was sent to a new convoy in India. While in Calcutta, he volunteered for a combat mission in Burma and joined the famous 5307th Composite Unit, also known as Merrill's Marauders.



Tony's unit saw frequent combat in the jungles of Burma and during a successful mission to rescue a surrounded unit under siege, he was hit in the right thigh with over a dozen bullets. He was flown to a nearby hospital and feared he would lose his leg. The surgeon was instructed to amputate the leg, but instead decided he could save it. Tony's bones and muscles were completely repaired and he was soon walking again. After surgery, he was sent back to the United States. Upon return, Tony met and married a member of the Women's Army Corps. Tony passed away on July 11, 2009 in Clermont, Florida. [Source: VAntage Point | October 22, 2017 ++]

AFL Q&A 10 ► Benefits Denial Letter

Q. How do I get the original benefits denial letter from the VA? I keep getting denied by VA for my request for retroactive compensation. My contention has been that VA never gave me options when they denied my original application for medical benefits based on my income. In order to support my claim, I have repeatedly requested a copy of the original denial and so far VA has not produced it.

-o-o-O-o-o-

A1: If you filed your claim yourself, then the VA is the only agency with the letter. If you used the DAV, then they would have a copy at the regional office. This is why the DAV does not recommend sending anything to the VA directly. You can also try going to the local county veteran service officer. (AP)
12/3/16

A2: Submit a VA Form 3288 to the VA Regional Office through Janesville Wisconsin for release of your records to you. You will get one copy and make sure that you make copies and keep somewhere safe. Or go to the County Veteran Service Office and have them help by requesting a copy of your C-file. (CP)
12/19/16

-o-o-O-o-o-

If you have a question you want answered you can submit it at <http://www.armedforceslocator.com/ask-a-question.html>. Armed Forces Locator was developed to help veterans, active duty, servicemembers, Reservists, National Guard members and ROTC members locate old friends, current colleagues, and family members who serve or have served in the armed forces. Their mission is to

provide an opportunity for those who served to reconnect again with war buddies. Also, locate many topics that are of interest to veterans, active duty servicemembers, and veterans organizations. [Source: <http://www.armedforceslocator.com> | October 15, 2017 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► Scheduled As of 30 NOV 2017

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 2017 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

This schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\veternans activity related events such as Seminars, Veterans Town Hall Meetings, Stand Downs, Resource\Career Fairs and Other Military Retiree & Veterans Related Events for all military services. To get more info about a particular event, mouse over or click on the event under Event Location. Please report comments, changes, corrections, new RADs and other military retiree\veternans related events to the Events Schedule Manager at milton.bell126@gmail.com.

(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 & Army Echoes | Milton Bell | November 30, 2017 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 30 NOV 2017

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 next month. For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition

Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. refer to the Hiring Our Heroes website <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events>. Listings of up upcoming Vet Job Fairs nationwide providing location, times, events, and registration info if required can be found at the following websites. You will need to review each site below to locate Job Fairs in your location:

- <https://events.recruitmilitary.com>
- <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs>
- <https://www.legend.org/careers/jobfairs>

[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | November 30, 2017 ++]

Veteran's State Benefits & Discounts ► Nevada | 2017

The state of Nevada provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Veteran State Benefits – NV**” 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 refer to <http://montanadma.org/montana-veterans-affairs>.

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Assistance Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Recreation Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/nevada-state-veterans-benefits> | November 2017 ++]

* Vet Legislation *



Note: To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 115th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate. Bills are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole.

DIC Update 10 ► S.1990 | DIC Improvement Act of 2017.

On October 19, 2017, Senator Jon Tester, Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, introduced S. 1990, the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Improvement Act of 2017. This bill

would increase dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) for surviving dependents and would lower the threshold of eligibility to allow certain survivors to receive this benefit who currently do not meet the requirements. This measure:

- Increases DIC so that the base rate is equal to 55 percent of the rate of compensation paid to a totally disabled veteran, making it more equitable with rates provided to federal civilian employee survivors.
- Eases the 10 year rule for eligibility and replace it with a graduated scale of benefits that begins after 5 years and increases by percentage until reaching the full amount at the 10 year mark. If a veteran is rated as totally disabled for five years and dies as a result of a non-service-connected cause, a survivor would be entitled to 50 percent of total DIC benefits. This scale continues until the 10-year threshold and the maximum DIC amount is awarded.
- Reduces the age allowed for a surviving spouse to remarry and maintain their benefits from 57 to 55, consistent with other Federal survivor benefit programs.

If enacted, this bill would fulfill one of Disabled American Veterans' legislative goals in accordance with Resolution No. 036 that was approved by their members during their most recent National Convention. Veterans are encouraged to use the prepared editable e-mail available on the DAV Commander's Action Network <https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/C5L6X9cXnVQ0Rd3UrCBbxQ> or draft your own message to request that your Senators support this important legislation. [Source: DAV Commander's Action Network | November 29, 2017 ++]

Vet Educational Assistance Update 01 ► H.R.4323 | Vet STEM Careers Act

On 9 NOV, Congressman Neal Dunn (FL-02) introduced the Supporting Veterans in STEM Careers Act, a bill to expand veterans' job and educational opportunities in the sciences. H.R. 4323 requires the National Science Foundation (NSF) to develop a veterans outreach plan and publish data on veterans' participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields in its annual "Indicators" report. The bill updates the NSF Noyce Teacher Scholarship program, fellowship program, and cyber grant programs to include outreach to veterans. Additionally, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy is tasked with examining how to increase veteran participation in STEM career fields.

"Our service members should have every opportunity to succeed when they transition to civilian life," said Dr. Dunn. "This bill ensures our government goes above and beyond to bring STEM career opportunities to our veterans. By educating more veterans to become STEM professionals, we help keep our promise to those who serve and also maintain America's competitive edge as a global technology leader. I appreciate Chairman Smith's leadership and support for this effort." The Supporting Veterans in STEM Careers Act is cosponsored by House Science, Space, and Technology Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (TX-21), as well as several veterans who serve on the committee, including Reps. Barry Loudermilk (GA-11), Mark Takano (CA-41), Jim Banks (IN-03), Brian Babin (TX-36), Ralph Abraham (LA-05), Steve Knight (CA-25), and Roger Marshall (KS-01).

"Encouraging veterans to enter careers in STEM, including computer science, will help them better transition to civilian life. They will be able to put their training and experience in military service to new and important uses. They will help America stay competitive in research and innovation on a global scale. I look forward to approving Rep. Dunn's bipartisan bill in the Science Committee soon," said House Science, Space, and Technology Committee Chairman Lamar Smith. The legislation was referred to the House

Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, where it is expected to be reviewed in the coming weeks.
[Source: Neal Dunn | Press Release | November 9, 2017 ++]

Vet Health Insurance ► H.R.4457 | Veterans Empowerment Act

A Colorado lawmaker on 21 NOV introduced legislation to create a veterans health insurance program to allow them to skip the Department of Veterans Affairs entirely and get private-sector medical care at taxpayers' expense. "This bill throws out the idea of acceptable patient wait times and eliminates the requirement of the veteran to ask for VA permission to use civilian medical providers," said Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-CO) and former member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. "It gives veterans full authority to use the existing VA system or not."

The move comes amid a fierce debate on Capitol Hill among veterans groups, conservative activists and VA officials over the future role of federal veterans' health care and how to fulfill federal responsibilities. Next week, lawmakers from the House veterans committee are expected to advance with bipartisan support a new proposal to overhaul the VA's community care programs, giving more access to veterans to go outside the department for medical appointments with federal dollars. With that plan, which has received criticism from some veterans groups for pulling away money from existing VA health services, VA doctors would still be the primary care coordinator for veteran patients.

VA Secretary David Shulkin has proposed going even further, lifting limits on walk-in services for a host of ailments in an effort to alleviate pressure on VA systems and free up private-sector access for veterans. In an interview with the Wall Street Journal this week, Shulkin said he wants to make the VA's hospital system compete with private-sector providers. "The direction I'm taking this is to give veterans more choice in their care and be the decision maker for their care, which I fundamentally believe is a concept that has to be implemented," Shulkin told the newspaper. It's a position advanced by conservative activists in recent years but derided by Democratic lawmakers and major veterans organizations as "privatizing" the department. Shulkin has pushed back on the accusation repeatedly, saying he still envisions a critical and enduring role for VA.

Lamborn's legislation would take a step beyond Shulkin's proposal. The legislation creates a new health insurance system similar to the military's Tricare Standard program, allowing them to go to doctors outside the VA to receive a wide range of care. "Giving them options to choose their health care plans and doctors is empowering," Lamborn said in a statement. "This bill means veterans, especially those with extreme disabilities, can expect to have their needs taken care of quickly and efficiently. It's good policy and makes sense."

Whether veterans will receive faster — or better — medical appointments outside the VA system has been a key point of disagreement among veterans' advocates. Critics argue that private-sector physicians will not be able to easily accept tens of thousands of new veterans as patients and that many doctors unfamiliar with war wounds like traumatic brain injury and burn pit exposure are ill-equipped to offer the same full spectrum of health monitoring of trained VA staff. And there are also concerns about the cost. Veterans groups like Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans and the American Legion have testified before Congress they are concerned that shifting federal funding from internal VA programs to outside medical offices will limit resources for patients who remain in the VA system.

But a coalition of conservative groups — led by organizations with ties to the Koch brothers network of activists — has pushed for that type of complete divorce from VA as the center of veterans care efforts. "We can't leave the VA medical system in its current state and expect results to improve for our veterans," said

Concerned Veterans for America Executive Director Dan Caldwell, whose group has blasted the department as a failing health care system for years. "This is a historic opportunity to finally go beyond the failed status quo at the VA and provide veterans with the best care possible. We applaud Rep. Lamborn for introducing this bill and strongly urge Congress to pass it into law." The measure faces a difficult path to become law. Democratic lawmakers in the House and Senate have strongly objected to similar proposals in the past, including an idea from House leadership last year.

Meanwhile, House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-TN) has said he is confident the bipartisan-backed measure on his committee's schedule is the proper compromise to improve veterans care and VA operations. Senate lawmakers have not yet weighed in on the proposal but based on past comments are more likely to back that measure than Lamborn's idea. Last week, White House officials received criticism for exploring a proposal behind closed doors to link some VA services with Tricare programs in the future. Administration officials held multiple meetings and drew up preliminary implementation plans without discussing the idea with lawmakers and stakeholders, prompting concerns about transparency. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | November 21, 2017 ++]

VA Accountability Update 50 ► S.0000 | VA Provider Accountability Act

Two key senators intend to introduce legislation to force the Department of Veterans Affairs to report disciplinary actions against medical providers to a national database designed to prevent them from crossing state lines to escape their pasts and keep practicing. The bill, co-sponsored by Sens. Dean Heller (R-NV) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) would also require the VA to report discipline within 30 days to state medical boards and bar the agency from purging negative records from clinicians' personnel files as part of severance deals. The bipartisan measure follows an investigation by USA TODAY that found the VA has for years concealed poor care and mistakes by its medical workers. The agency has routinely agreed to scrap firing orders and other records of poor performance in secret settlement agreements with departing clinicians.

Under a nearly 30-year-old policy, the VA only reports discipline against medical doctors and dentists to the national database — not nurses, podiatrists, physicians' assistants or countless other types of practitioners. And the agency can take several months, or even years, to report any providers to state boards responsible for regulating licenses and yanking them when necessary. VA Secretary David Shulkin vowed after USA TODAY's report last month to overhaul agency policies for reporting problem health care providers to state regulators and the national database. Heller and Manchin's legislation would require expedited and expanded reporting by law. "This commonsense piece of legislation ensures that incidences of malpractice do not go unreported to state licensing boards and the National Practitioner Data Bank," Manchin said. "It also stops those who commit malpractice from receiving a settlement so they will quietly resign and become a provider outside of the VA."

VA Press Secretary Curt Cashour said 8 NOV that new state reporting requirements are "undergoing final revisions" and the agency has formed a working group to revise a regulation governing national database reporting. "VA is working to complete both policy revisions as soon as possible," he said. USA TODAY analyzed more than 200 secret agreements the VA struck with departing employees in 2014 and 2015. In more than 125 cases, the agency initially found the workers' mistakes or misdeeds were so serious that they should be fired but allowed them to resign or retire instead.

Sen. Manchin, a member of the U.S. Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said the VA Provider Accountability Act is a commonsense piece of legislation to ensure that incidences of malpractice do not go

unreported to state licensing boards and the National Practitioner Data Bank. “It also stops those who commit malpractice from receiving a settlement so they will quietly resign and become a provider outside of the VA. By imposing these oversight measures on the Department of Veterans Affairs, we are ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all Americans.”

Heller added that the USA Today investigation findings were “downright shameful.” “We need action immediately to ensure that the VA does not hide medical mistakes or inadequate care.” He continued, “It is our responsibility to stand up for those who put their lives on the line for this country and provide them with the world class medical care they expect and deserve. The VA lists integrity as its first core value, and VA employees make the promise to act with high moral principle and adhere to the highest professional standards. Our legislation will make sure of it by holding the VA’s feet to the fire so that the veterans the agency exists to serve have trust in their caretakers.” [Source: USA TODAY | Donovan Slack | November 9, 2017 ++]

Military Sexual Assault Update 02 ► S.2141 | Military Justice Improvement Act

U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand on 16 NOV stood with a bipartisan group of colleagues, survivors, and advocates to re-introduce the *Military Justice Improvement Act*. In recent months, scandal after scandal has shown that despite years of efforts and small reforms, sexual assault and harassment remain pervasive in the military. Top officials in the military continue to assert that they alone will fix this, but little has changed.

“Congress should finally be out of excuses to continue protecting the status quo that harms our service members and protects predators,” said Senator Gillibrand. “How much longer do we need to wait for Congress to do the right thing when the facts about sexual assault in the military remain the same? It is unacceptable that Congress has allowed this utter lack of accountability and transparency to continue. The Military Justice Improvement Act would professionalize how the military prosecutes serious crimes like sexual assault and remove the systemic fear that survivors of military sexual assault describe in deciding whether to report the crimes committed against them. I urge all of my colleagues who want to do something to combat sexual violence in our society to join me in cosponsoring this bipartisan bill to create a justice system worthy of the sacrifice of our service members. To do less is to knowingly perpetuate a failed system.”

On October 26th, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) published their results, which were equally troubling:

- Only 19% of women and 33% of men think the Department of Defense is doing a good job of addressing military sexual assault.
- 71% of female respondents said they experienced retaliation when they reported, as did 64% of men.
- 46% of women and 35% of men said they would be more likely to report being assaulted if, instead of a commander, a trained military prosecutor made the decision to move forward with the case, as the *Military Justice Improvement Act* would do.

The bipartisan *Military Justice Improvement Act* would remove the sole decision-making authority over whether serious crimes are prosecuted from the military chain-of-command and give it to independent, trained military prosecutors. Specifically, the bill would do the following:

- Grant the authority to send criminal charges to trial (disposition authority) to designated judge advocates (military lawyers) in the rank of O-6 or higher who possess significant criminal justice experience.

- Judge advocates vested with disposition authority will
 - Be outside the chain of command of the accused.
 - Exercise professional prosecutorial discretion when deciding whether to proceed to court martial.
 - Render decisions to proceed to trial that are free from outside influence and binding upon the Convening Authority.

Gillibrand, Ranking Member of the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee, has introduced the *Military Justice Improvement Act* every year since 2013. The bill has been voted on twice on the floor of the Senate, winning a bipartisan majority vote both times but failing to overcome a filibuster threshold of 60 votes. Gillibrand today called for another vote on the *Military Justice Improvement Act* to hold the military accountable for sexual assault against American service members.

Unfortunately, each year, thousands of service members are raped and sexually assaulted. In many of those cases, the assailant is someone in the survivor's own chain of command. Only a small fraction of the perpetrators are ever held accountable for their heinous, violent crimes. Last year, the Department of Defense announced a record number of sexual assaults reported against service members, and the lowest conviction rates for their assailants on record, at just 9%. Worse yet, despite repeated efforts to stamp out the scourge of retaliation against military sexual assault survivors, the most recent Pentagon survey found that nearly 6 out of 10 survivors say they have experienced some form of retaliation for reporting the crime. The amount of retaliation remains essentially unchanged from 2012 to 2014, while fewer cases are moving forward to prosecution and conviction.

Over the last five years, there has been a stream of national headlines and new investigative reports exposing the military's failure to combat sexual assault in the ranks or provide a military justice system that holds assailants accountable in order to maintain good order and discipline. Despite incremental reforms passed in the last four National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA), and a sharp focus in Congress on the issue of military sexual assault, Congress has not done enough to protect our service members from sexual assault in the ranks and punish the perpetrators who commit these violent crimes. Congress owes it to the brave men and women who defend our country to fix a broken system deliver a system of justice worthy of their sacrifice. By the Numbers, from the latest annual Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) Report, FY2016 reported:

- The Department of Defense estimated that there were nearly **15,000** sexual assaults against service members in fiscal year 2016
- **7 out of 10 service members did not report their assault** in an “unrestricted” (actionable) manner to their chain of command, showing a severe lack of confidence in the current system
- Of those 30% who were brave enough to make an unrestricted report, **approximately 60% of them told the Department of Defense that they had experienced some form of retaliation for reporting**
- More than **70% of cases considered for court martial were never even referred to court martial proceedings**
- Just 9% of cases ended in conviction
- Only **20% of survey respondents indicated that they were satisfied with official action(s)** taken against their alleged perpetrator
- The odds of being sexually assaulted are approximately **16 times higher for active duty women** and **50 times higher for active duty men** who indicated experiencing sexual harassment than for their counterparts who did not

The Military Justice Improvement Act has been endorsed by Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), Service Women's Action Network (SWAN), National

Women's Law Center (NWLC), Protect Our Defenders, and the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women, just to name a few. The bill is also supported by dozens of U.S. military flag officers, including the first female three-star General of the Army, Claudia Kennedy; UCMJ experts; and major newspaper editorial boards across the country.

For more on this sexual abuse problem and how the military is handling it go to the video at <https://youtu.be/ZcmGgSK6tqo>. [Source: Press Release | U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand | November 16, 2017 ++]

Military Museums & Memorials Update 01 ► H.R.4328 Introduced | WWI

On 9 NOV U.S. Representative Tulsi Gabbard introduced H.R. 4328, the **Honoring World War I Memorials Act of 2017**. This piece of legislation would authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide \$50 million in grants to rehabilitate and restore WWI memorials that have fallen into a state of disrepair. The VFW endorses this legislation and believes that on the eve of the centennial anniversary of the close of WWI, this is an important step in ensuring that the monuments built to honor the sacrifices of the more than 4.7 million service members who served during "The Great War," are restored to their original condition. Go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/4328/text> to read the bill's text. [Source: VFW Action corps Weekly | November 17, 2017 ++]

NDAA 2018 Update 15 ► Conference Report Overview

On November 9, 2017, the U.S. House and Senate Armed Services Conference Committee released the Conference Report for H.R. 2810, the Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The FY18 NDAA authorizes approximately \$700 billion in total defense spending, which is an increase of \$26.1 billion above the President's budget request. The bill provides \$634.2 billion in base and discretionary funding, as well as \$65.8 billion in Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding. Visit <http://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20171113/HRPT-115-HR2810.pdf> to view the full text of the legislation and report language. Bill highlights are

General Provisions -- Funds a 2.4 percent pay raise for military personnel. (SEC. 601)

Joint-Personnel Provisions

- Authorizes an annual report on personnel, training, and equipment needs of non-federalized National Guard. (SEC. 333)
- Authorizes Reserve Component servicemembers activated under 12304a or 12304b orders to receive pre-mobilization and transitional TRICARE health care. (SEC. 511)
- Authorizes a review and report on effects of personnel requirements and limitations on the availability of members of the National Guard for the performance of funeral honors duty for veterans. (SEC. 573)
- Authorizes a review and report on authorities for the employment, use, and status of National Guard and Reserve technicians. (SEC. 574)
- Authorizes a feasibility study on conduct of a pilot program on the mental health readiness of Reserve Component servicemembers. (SEC. 732)
- Amends conversion requirement of dual-status technicians to Title 5 civilians from 20 percent to 12.6 percent. (SEC. 1083)

Army National Guard -- Authorizes \$108.0 million for five (5) additional UH-60M Blackhawks for the Army National Guard. (SEC. 4101)

Air National Guard -- Addresses administrative deficiencies related to National Guard access to Department of Defense-owned and allocated unmanned aircraft systems that support an individual State's disaster response and other operational and training missions. (SEC. 1084)

[Source: NGAUS | Issues & Advocacy | November 16, 2017 ++]

NDAA 2018 Update 16 ► Senate Voice Vote Approval | Sent to President

In a quick voice vote, the Senate on Thursday approved a massive defense bill, sending a nearly \$700 billion plan that would enact raises for servicemembers, increase the size of the military, fund new ships and aircraft and authorize new spending on missile defense, to the president's desk ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday. Though the plan overcame a significant hurdle 16 NOV, it sets the stage for a new fight on how to fund the major increase in military spending. The plan busts budgetary caps and would need special legislative action to fund all the new priorities.

The 2018 fiscal year plan includes a 2.4 percent pay increase for servicemembers, necessary retention pay and bonuses and covers costly repairs for two Navy ships involved recently in deadly crashes. Majority Leader Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., lauded the effort Thursday. "Not only will this legislation authorize the resources, capabilities, pay and benefits that our men and women in uniform need to perform their missions, but this year's bill also goes further," he said. The measure "takes a notable step toward authorizing the resources needed to start rebuilding our military and restoring combat readiness. It will help improve our missile defense capabilities and better prepare us to deal with cyberthreats."

The plan was approved by a conference committee of Senate and House members last week, sending it to the lower chamber for approval on 14 NOV and its subsequent passage in the upper chamber. "The overwhelming, bipartisan support for this defense budget should serve as a reminder of the troubling state of our military today," said Senate Armed Services Committee Chair John McCain (R-AZ), who helped shepherd the bill. "I call upon the president to sign this important legislation into law — and in doing so acknowledge that this is the level of defense spending necessary to meet current threats, prepare for the challenges of an increasingly dangerous world, and keep faith with our men and women in uniform."

Congressional conference committee members who negotiated the deal have lauded the plans under the defense bill, also known as the National Defense Authorization Act or NDAA. It authorizes funding for the Department of Defense and national security programs through the Department of Energy. "Unfortunately, as the world has become more dangerous, we have cut the resources for our troops," House Armed Services Committee Chairman Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX) said in a statement following the bill's House passage Tuesday. "It will take more than one year and more than one bill to rebuild the strength that we have squandered, but the Constitution explicitly tasks the Congress with doing just that. This (bill) is an important start. It begins to rebuild our military strength; it gives our troops a much-needed pay raise; it replaces equipment that is just too broken to keep fixing."

However, the proposal surpasses the budget cap of \$549 billion for defense spending and will require new congressional action to be enacted. Otherwise, the proposed budget could trigger automatic, across-the-board spending cuts. "Unless we follow the NDAA with an appropriations bill at the same levels, none of this work can begin," Thornberry warned. "Securing those appropriations must be Congress's top priority before the year ends." The bill is comprised of a base budget of more than \$620 billion, with \$66 billion in a

warfighting account not subject to budget caps called the Overseas Contingency Operations fund and another \$8 billion for other defense activities.

It surpassed President Donald Trump's defense funding request by \$26 billion. Earlier this year, the administration proposed a defense budget of \$668 billion, a 5 percent increase to last year's spending plan. Last week, Trump asked to boost his original military funding request. The budget also passed on some proposals, declining on a House plan for the creation of a Space Corps, a new military service that would be an arm of the Air Force. The defense budget also directs \$26.2 billion for 14 new ships and \$10.1 billion for the purchase of 90 Joint Strike Fighters, which is 20 more than the administration's request. It directs another \$5.9 billion for Virginia-class submarines, \$5.6 billion for Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, \$4.4 billion for aircraft carriers, \$3.1 billion for Army helicopters and \$1.9 billion for procuring 24 F/A-18 Super Hornets. The plan also:

- Increases the military force by adding 7,500 soldiers to the Army and another 1,000 to the Marine Corps. It also increases the Army Reserve force by 500 and adds 500 to the Army National Guard.
- Authorizes \$141.8 billion for military personnel, including the cost of pay, allowances, bonuses, death benefits and change-of-station moves.
- Authorizes another \$33.7 billion for the Defense Health Program and reauthorizes 30 types of bonuses and payments linked to recruiting.
- Streamlines the Pentagon administration and details a new No. 3 position that goes into effect at the Pentagon next year for a chief management officer to direct business reforms.
- Formalizes a first-time auditing process for the department and it directs the secretary of defense to address a backlog of 700,000 departmental security clearances.
- Directs for the funding of repairs to the destroyers USS Fitzgerald and the USS John S. McCain. Both ships were badly damaged in separate, deadly crashes during the summer that left 17 sailors dead.

The overall boost in military funding request comes in the wake of a deadly year for the U.S. military when it comes to readiness and safety concerns. McCain said during the bill's previous debate on the Senate floor that 185 servicemembers have died in military accidents in the last three years. "We are killing more of our own people in training than our enemies are in combat," McCain said during the September debate. In July, the House approved a \$696 billion defense budget, while the Senate approved a nearly \$700 billion plan in September. Still, many of the efforts must overcome budget caps to move forward.

In September, Congress approved a temporary funding measure that gave Congress at least three months to approve a new overall spending plan for fiscal 2018, which started 1 OCT. But that also meant a new military budget was on the clock: Congress has until December to come up with a deal to fund its \$700 billion defense proposal or it might have to delay its spending plans again. Congress has been here before. Former President Barack Obama signed the 2017 defense policy plan on Dec. 23, 2016. But faced with another round of delays, a \$1.1 trillion omnibus government spending bill that included the defense budget wasn't approved until May. Until then, military operations were kept afloat by a short-term funding bill — as is the case now. [Source: Stars And Stripes | Claudia Grisales | November 16, 2017 ++]

NDAA 2018 [18] ► Little Known Provisions

You wouldn't call them secrets, but some provisions in the annual defense bill (NDAA) don't receive the same visibility as others. Some issues don't make the headlines because they don't have the same potential impact as pay cuts, housing allowance changes, and new health care fees. But that doesn't mean MOAA

doesn't keep track of them or that our members shouldn't be aware. These provisions tend to affect more specific segments of the military community than the big name issues that make up the preponderance of MOAA messaging. Nonetheless, they highlight the complexity and all-encompassing nature of the NDAA every year. As the NDAA reaches its final stages of approval, expect more of these features to come out of the shadows. Here are a few lesser-known provisions included in H.R. 2810, the FY 2018 National Defense Authorization Act:

Section 543 - Prohibition on Release of Military Service Academy Graduates to Participate in Professional Athletics.

This provision requires revision of service academy agreements to preclude release from service agreements to pursue professional sports. It would apply to current and future cadets, but it does allow for an exception after completion of two consecutive years of commissioned service.

Section 560 - Pilot program on public-private partnerships for telework facilities on military installations outside the U.S.

This provision would require the secretary of Defense to carry out a pilot program to assess the feasibility and advisability of providing telework facilities for military spouses on military installations outside the U.S., to the extent space is available for such facilities. The provision would require the pilot program be conducted at no fewer than two military installations outside the U.S. selected by the secretary for up to three years' duration, in consultation with the host nation. The pilot program would be conducted as one or more public-private partnerships between DoD and a U.S.-based private corporation or partnership of private corporations.

Section 505 - Repeal of requirement for specification of number of officers who may be recommended for early retirement by a Selective Early Retirement Board

This provision would limit the number of officers who may be recommended for early retirement to not more than 30 percent of the number of officers considered in each grade in each competitive category.

Section 510 - Service credit for cyberspace experience or advanced education upon original appointment as a commissioned officer

This provision authorizes up to three years of constructive service credit for periods of cyberspace-related experience, training, or education directly related to the service's operational needs. This authority would expire at the end of 2023.

Section 1045 - Prohibition on lobbying activities with respect to the Department of Defense by certain officers of the Armed Forces and civilian employees of the Department within two years of separation from military service or employment with the Department

This provision applies a two-year limitation on officers at the O-9 or higher level and their civilian grade equivalents at DoD from engaging in any lobbying activity with respect to DoD; it imposes a similar one-year limitation on officers at the O-7 and O-8 levels and their civilian counterparts.

[Source: MOAA Legislative Update | November 21, 2017 ++]

* Military *



Army Recruiting Update 03 ► No Change to Standards

The Army is in full damage-control mode following an explosive story that the service had in August lifted a ban on granting waivers to potential recruits with a history of mental health disorders and substance abuse. On 15 NOV, in a rare appearance together, the acting Army secretary, the chief of staff and the sergeant major of the Army told reporters that the original USA Today story misconstrued an administrative change that shifted the authority to grant those waivers from Army headquarters down to Army Recruiting Command. “There’s been no change in standards. The Army hasn’t reduced standards or changed standards,” said Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley. “And oh, by the way, the Army couldn’t do that even if it wanted to, because the standards are Department of Defense standards.”

What did occur in August, he explained, is that the Army moved the waiver approval authority back down to the commander in charge of Army accessions, where it was before 2009 and where it is for the Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. The Army’s chain of command starts with the president, Milley said, and goes down to the defense secretary, the Army secretary and down to commanders. Senior officials like himself, he added, are considered staff. “Commanders are people who should be authorized with the authorities to make decisions within the United States military,” Milley said. “So a decision was made in August to go ahead and re-empower the commanding general with the authority to consider, grant and waive things.” But the standards are the same, he added, so giving approval authority back to Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Snow, the current commander of U.S. Army Recruiting Command, would not make it easier to get a waiver.

The Army has long accepted waiver applications for a host of generally disqualifying factors, from sub-optimal hearing to violent felonies. The Army has not, however, approved all of them, based on a list of hard-stops, Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey said. “There are waivers. There have been, there always will be,” Dailey said. “Your sergeant major of the Army is on a waiver, when I came in 30 years ago.” Dailey’s waiver pertained to his hearing, he added. To clarify, Milley read off a list of factors that will automatically disqualify someone seeking a waiver from service:

- Conviction or adverse adjudication for a sexual offense.
- Any felony committed as an adult.
- Juvenile criminal drug use, other than marijuana.
- Mood disorders, including major depression, cyclothemia and bipolar disorder.
- Drug or alcohol dependence not in remission, with at least a year sober.
- Any condition involving self-mutilation.
- Any suicide attempt or ideations with a plan to carry them out.

“Considering a waiver is not the same as granting a waiver,” Milley said. “Since August of ’17 there has been no one [who has] come in the Army who has not met the Department of Defense standards for behavioral health and personal conduct.” However, as Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel Lt. Gen. Thomas Seamands said in a statement 13 NOV, the Army still considers waivers and will grant them where appropriate.

“If a young man or woman was taken to a hospital because they cut themselves, and a doctor said that was some form of self-mutilation, and it never happened again — then we’ll look at that case, and we’ll make a determination with medical professionals, with behavioral health professionals, and, ultimately, command,” he said. “To be automatically exclusionary, ladies and gentlemen — to the American public, on certain conditions — is unfair,” Dailey added. “That’s what the chief of staff of the Army is saying. We have to give it due diligence.” Milley added that a brand — technically a form of self-mutilation — could be allowed in certain circumstances, such as a fraternity initiation rite. “Is that self-mutilation?” he said. “Or is that a brand in lieu of a tattoo?”

All of these issues go through multiple layers of screening with experts from Army Medical Command and others before a final determination from USAREC, officials said. As far as the Senate holding up any defense nominations based on the waiver controversy, acting Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy said he had a lengthy discussion with Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) at a Twilight Tattoo in the senator's honor on 14 NOV. "They just wanted us to send them back a note in writing, which I believe will be sent today," McCarthy said. "Immediately after this session," Milley said. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Meghann Myers | November 15, 2017 ++]

Navy Pepper Spray Policy ► Once Is Enough

The Navy wants its sailors to feel the burn -- just not more than once. The Navy will no longer require sailors to be pepper sprayed every three years after the chief of naval operations received complaints that it wasn't necessary to repeatedly undergo the painful experience after the first time it's done as part of force protection training. Adm. John Richardson announced the policy change 21 NOV in a video posted on Facebook. Richardson said he was responding to conversations he had with the crew aboard the destroyer USS Gridley in Everett, Wash., a few days earlier.

"You have to get pepper sprayed in the face every three years, and as I was talking with the team on Gridley, it seemed to me that once is enough there," Richardson said in the video. "Once you get that experience you'll never forget it, and you'll be able to fight through pepper spray for the rest of your career." Sailors who carry pepper spray as part of their duties are required to experience what being sprayed with it feels like.



A sailor with the security department of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz (CVN 68) is sprayed with pepper spray during a security academy qualification at Naval Station Everett, Wash.

Pepper spray can cause breathing difficulty, tears, temporary blindness and eyes to close. The effects of the spray typically last for about 30 to 45 minutes after initial contact, according to the Navy. A Navy video about the pepper spray training shows one sailor saying that being sprayed with it felt like there was a blow torch next to her face and that she couldn't breathe. Navy photographs show sailors aboard ships being sprayed directly in the eyes and then having to perform self-defense moves against an attacker. Richardson said the policy change is evidence that he listens to sailors when he meets with them, and that sometimes changes can occur quickly as a result. "If there are any of these requirements out there that you think don't make sense or are ridiculous just let me know," he said. "Some of these things are quick kills." [Source: The Virginian-Pilot | Brock Vergakis | November 22, 2017 ++]

Navy Name Change ► Removed From 2018 NDAA

Since 2001, Rep. Walter Jones has been trying to rename the Department of the Navy to include the Marine Corps. But with the release of the conference version of the National Defense Authorization Act earlier this month absent Jones' provision, one thing is clear: 2017 won't be the year. Nonetheless, the North Carolina Republican told Military.com this week that he plans to continue fighting for the cause. And he's convinced that one day, he'll get the support he needs to make it law. Jones, an outspoken lawmaker who has criticized the Iraq war but doggedly supported the causes of military families in his district, says it's important to redesignate the Department of the Navy as "The Department of the Navy and Marine Corps" because it properly acknowledges the service and sacrifice of Marines. "It's one fighting team," he said.

The Marine Corps is considered a department of the Navy; while the service has its own uniformed leadership and structure, it answers to the secretary of the Navy and relies on the Navy for support elements such as medical providers and chaplains. Jones said the importance of the name was brought home to him when he attended the 2003 funeral of 31-year-old Marine Sgt. Michael Bitz, who was killed in action in Nasiriyah, Iraq. It was among the first of many military funerals he would attend as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wound on. The Secretary of the Navy's condolence letter to Bitz's family, like that sent to the families of all fallen Marines, bore the name and seal of the Department of the Navy, but no explicit reference to the Marine Corps, Jones found. "I've always felt, as a matter of respect, that the name, Department of the Navy and Marine Corps, is proper," he said.

Through the years, Jones has come close. In 2010, his amendment gained some 425 co-sponsors in the House and another 80 in the Senate, thanks to a companion bill authored by Sen. Pat Roberts, a Kansas Republican. Jones also touts a positive Congressional Budget Office report that found enacting his amendment would cost less than \$500,000, with expenses mainly consisting of stationery redesign and sign updates. But the primary obstacle to the move is still very much in place: Sen. John McCain, a Navy veteran and the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "Sen. McCain has never been in favor of this [effort to] respect the Marine Corps since he says the Navy and Marine Corps is one fighting team," he said.

Jones said he continues to lobby senators despite McCain's opposition, meeting recently with Sens. Dan Sullivan and Todd Young, both Marine veterans. "Nobody knows what the future holds," Jones said. "At some point in time, [passage of the measure] needs to be done as a matter of respect." For those who are loathe to challenge established military tradition, Jones likes to bring up a major change from the not-so-distant past: the 1947 effort to rename the United States Army Air Corps to the U.S. Air Force, a move that created a new military service branch. "There's certain things that do change," Jones said. "Good Lord, well, we'll keep trying." [Source: Military.com | Hope Hodge Seck | 16 November 2017 ++]

Navy Fleet Size Update 09 ► Smaller Warships w/Bigger Punch Needed

The Navy's fast-and-maneuverable littoral combat ship was criticized for lacking enough firepower and armor to survive a maritime battle. The Navy is addressing those concerns with a new class of small-but-powerful frigates that will pack a bigger punch. The Navy asked in NOV for concept proposals for multi-mission warships that would be bigger and more heavily armed — and slower — than the littoral combat ships. They would be capable of shooting down airplanes, attacking other ships and countering submarines

"The Navy has decided that speed is less important than having a warship with sufficient weapons to defend itself," said Loren Thompson, a defense analyst with the Lexington Institute.

The Navy, which wants to build 20 frigates, is seeking an affordable design, and its directive calls for shipbuilders to use an existing design to expedite the process. The aggressive timetable calls for conceptual proposals next month. The first two ships are to be procured in 2020 and 2021. Large Navy shipbuilders like Maine's Bath Iron Works and Mississippi's Ingalls Shipbuilding are among a half-dozen defense contractors expected to bid on the work. Smaller shipyards like Fincantieri Marinette Marine in Wisconsin and Austal USA in Alabama are also expected to compete.

The proposal marks a new direction for the Navy at a time when the Trump administration has vowed to increase the size of the fleet. The Navy has a goal of 355 ships. It addresses lessons learned from the littoral combat ships, which were supposed to be an affordable way of countering post-Cold War threats including pirates and swarm boats. The Navy envisioned speedy ships that could be transformed with mission modules to serve different roles. But the mission modules have been delayed and the ships' cost grew. Then the Government Accountability Office questioned the ships' survivability in battle. There are two versions of the littoral combat ship, both capable of topping 50 mph and utilizing steerable waterjets to operate in shallow water.

When all is said and done, the Navy is expected to take delivery of more than two dozen littoral combat ships. A combination of LCS and frigates would comprise more than half of the Navy's deployed surface combatants by 2030, said Lt. Seth Clarke, a Navy spokesman. The Congressional Research Service said the Navy wants to spend no more than \$950 million per frigate, while Clarke put the target at \$800 million per ship after the first ship. Working in the ship's favor in terms of affordability: The proposal calls for no new technologies. That's a far cry from littoral combat ships and larger, stealthy Zumwalt-class destroyers that incorporated new designs and technologies that contributed to significant cost overruns.

At Bath Iron Works, a General Dynamics subsidiary, officials examined U.S. and foreign designs to meet Navy requirements and partnered with a Spanish company, Navantia, to utilize an existing design from a Spanish navy frigate, said Dirk Lesko, the shipyard's president. Bath Iron Works helped to design the Navy's Oliver Hazard Perry-class frigates, the last of which were retired from duty in 2015. The shipyard's 5,700 workers who currently build Arleigh Burke-class and Zumwalt-class destroyers are eager for the opportunity to build the frigates. "We know how to build them. We're ready to build more," said Mike Keenan, president of the Machinists Union Local S6, the shipyard's largest union. [Source: The Associated Press | David Sharp | November 26, 2017 ++]

Floating Guantanamos ► USCG Onboard Detention of Smugglers



In this Feb. 23, 2017, photo, a US Coast Guard law enforcement team from the USCGC Stratton boards a small fishing boat that was stopped carrying close to 700 kilos of pure cocaine in the Pacific Ocean

A story, which includes one Ecuadorian man's tale of being detained for 70 days before ultimately landing in a US federal prison, was written 20 NOV for the New York Times magazine describing the ongoing occurrence of "real terror ... on the high seas". In what amounts to "floating Guantanamos" in the Pacific, Coast Guard cutters are sent far from US shores to bust smugglers trying to transport drugs from South America to Central America. From there the drugs move up to Mexico and, in all likelihood, to the United States. Thanks to US maritime laws, drug smuggling in international waters is seen as a crime against the U.S. (even if there's no proof the drugs are coming here), making the detention operation legal. But notable are the conditions the smugglers are often kept in on the US vessels as they're brought here to be prosecuted

Captives are often chained to ships' decks and exposed to the elements, fed meager portions, and given buckets to use as toilets, which they have to clean out themselves. The Coast Guard blames these conditions, and the length of the smugglers' onboard journeys (on average 18 days) on the fact that the cutters aren't equipped as detention centers. There are other logistical challenges. As USCG ship's transport these smugglers back to the US, they keep busting others along the way. One possible solution is when cutters dock to refuel or give the crew a break the detainees could be flown to the U.S. from those ports. Many of the Coast Guard officials spoken to on the subject are "really uncomfortable" with the detention conditions, as well as how long they've had to hold people. More of the interview with Public Radio International (PRI), as well as the original story in the Times can be read at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/20/magazine/the-coast-guards-floating-guantanamos.html?_r=0. [Source: PRI | Traci Tong | November 20, 2017 ++]

Afghanistan Update 01 ► Troops Told to Ignore Ongoing Child Sexual Abuse

American troops were told to ignore the rape and abuse of children by Afghan security forces they were partnered with, according to a report released 16 NOV by the Pentagon's inspector general. "In some cases, the interviewees explained that they, or someone whom they knew, were told that nothing could be done about child sexual abuse because of Afghanistan's status as a sovereign nation, that it was not a priority for the command, or that it was best to ignore the situation and to let the local police handle it," the report reads.

Although the report found that there was no written guidance telling U.S. troops to ignore abuse allegations, cultural-awareness training for U.S. personnel deploying to Afghanistan identified child sexual abuse as a culturally accepted practice in Afghanistan. "There were a couple cases where service members brought it to commanders' attention, and they said there's nothing we can do," according to an anonymous interviewee quoted in the report. "There's no recourse to stop them from **bacha bazi**. Soldiers [were] told to ignore it and drive on." Bacha bazi, which translates as "boy play," is a cultural practice in which "powerful or wealthy local figures and businessmen sexually abuse young boys who are trained to dance in female clothes," the report reads.

In 2015, findings by the Labor Department on "The Worst Forms of Child Labor" stated that "reports indicate that some government officials, including members of the Afghan National Police, Afghan Local Police, and the Afghan Border Police, have boys for bacha bazi and also have them work as tea servers or cooks in police camps." This most recent Defense Department investigation began in February 2016 at the behest of Congress, after reports surfaced in the media that Afghan forces had engaged in crimes such as rape, kidnapping, sex slavery, beatings, and pedophilia from 2011 and 2012, according to the report.

One incident that gained media attention involved Army Sgt. 1st Class Charles Martland, a Green Beret who admitted he lost his cool during a 2011 deployment to Kunduz province. Martland and his captain struck an Afghan police officer, who allegedly had confessed to raping a boy and then beating the child's mother for telling authorities. Martland said that he and the detachment commander, Capt. Daniel Quinn,

received a “relief for cause” from that 2011 deployment for the assault, according to documentation provided to Military Times.

One recommendation from the report asks that the Defense Department determine whether child rape committed by Afghan security forces qualifies as gross violations of human rights. If so, a law already on the books called the Leahy Amendment would prohibit the United States “from using funds for assistance to units of foreign security forces” that have committed such violations. The report concludes that while “it is difficult to determine the actual extent of child sexual abuse due to a cultural taboo against reporting these crimes, both the [State Department] and the UN reported that the sexual abuse of children is pervasive throughout Afghanistan.” In all, 16 cases of child sexual abuse involving Afghan officials were reported to the Pentagon between 2010 and 2016. However, the inspector general explains that more incidents may have been reported, but not confirmed because of the lack of guidance on the issue.

The problem stems from the fact that there is still no specific guidance from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy on reporting gross violations of human rights such as child sexual abuse, according to the report. As a result, the report cautions that “there is no certainty” that all allegations of child sexual abuse involving Afghan security forces were properly reported. [Source: ArmyTimes | Kyle Rempfer | November 17, 2017 ++]

Air Force Lasers ► Lockheed Martin To Develop for Fighter Jet Use by 2021

U.S. Air Force fighter jets may soon be able to instantly disable enemy targets using invisible, energized beams of light shot from a small, compact laser cannon. The laser-equipped vehicles might call to mind the heavily armed “helicarriers” from Marvel’s “Captain America” films. On 6 NOV), the U.S. Air Force Research Lab signed a \$26.3 million contract with Lockheed Martin to develop high-energy laser weapons that are lightweight and compact enough to be mounted on fighter jets. Lockheed Martin is a defense, aerospace and technology company headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland.

There's nothing new about laser weaponry, but most laser systems that are powerful enough to be effective are too heavy and bulky to be carried by a plane. Rather, most of these lasers are limited to ground and sea use. But now, that's changing. Lockheed Martin conducted flight tests in 2015 with laser-equipped research planes to determine whether mounting powerful lasers on planes was feasible. "Earlier this year, we delivered a 60-kW [kilowatt]-class laser to be installed on a U.S. Army ground vehicle," Rob Afzal, a senior fellow of laser weapon systems at Lockheed Martin, said in a statement. "It's a completely new and different challenge to get a laser system into a smaller, airborne test platform. It's exciting to see this technology mature enough to embed in an aircraft."

The new contract is part of the LANCE program, or Laser Advancements for Next-generation Compact Environments, which seeks to develop a high-power laser that can disable military targets without weighing down the plane carrying the weapon. LANCE, along with research developing targeting and cooling systems, falls within the Air Force Research Laboratory's Self-Protect High Energy Laser Demonstrator (SHiELD) initiative. Unlike the colorful, bullet-like lasers that fly back and forth between Stormtroopers and Rebel soldiers in the “Star Wars” films, real-life laser weapons are invisible and travel to their targets at the speed of light. The weapons can be used to destroy or disable rockets, drones and vehicles, sometimes without leaving any external sign of the damage — although some lasers can burn holes into their targets.

Lockheed Martin said that it envisions that lasers, once they become more commonplace and lightweight, better equipping soldiers to disable new threats that didn't exist a few years ago. For instance, lasers could help U.S. armed forces target small, cheap drones or explosives that are hard to hit with traditional guns and

defense systems. The company refers to those traditional systems as kinetic weapons, because they launch physical projectiles, such as bullets or missiles. "I really see laser weapons and kinetic weapons being side by side on the battlefield, and together providing the defense that our forces need against traditional threats — kinetic weapons — emerging, inexpensive proliferated threats — laser weapons," Iain McKinnie, the business development lead for laser sensors and systems at Lockheed Martin said in a video the company produced about laser weaponry.

"This advanced turret design will enable tactical aircraft to have the same laser-weapon-system advantages as ground vehicles and ships," Doug Graham, the vice president of missile systems and advanced programs at Lockheed Martin Space Systems, said in a statement after the 2015 test flights. Under the terms of the contract, Lockheed Martin plans to test a high-energy laser weapon mounted on a fighter jet by 2021. [Source: Live Science | Dan Robitzski | November 7, 2017 ++]

Nuclear Launch Authority ► President Soley | Congress is Concerned

It is dawning on Congress that no one can stop President Trump from ordering a nuclear attack. There is an emerging bipartisan consensus that the president has the sole authority to launch U.S. nuclear weapons at the time of his choosing, with no real checks or balances from anyone. Now the question is what to do about it. On 14 NOV, the U.S. Senate held its first hearing in 41 years on the president's authority to launch nuclear weapons. There are three questions to consider regarding the holding of the hearings:

- Is this about Trump?
- Does it matter why a president is launching them?
- How much authority can Congress actually wield?

Why now? As Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT) put it, Americans are concerned that President Trump "is so unstable, is so volatile" that he might order a nuclear strike that is "wildly out of step" with our national security interests. "Let's just recognize the exceptional nature of this moment in the discussion that we're having today," he said.

In a rare bipartisan consensus, Senate Foreign Relations Committee chair Bob Corker (R-TN) and ranking member Ben Cardin (D-MD) agreed that the president has the ability to launch U.S. nuclear weapons on his own authority. "The president has the sole authority to give that order, whether we are responding to a nuclear attack or not," said Corker. "Once that order is given and verified, there is no way to revoke it." Sen. Cardin said, "Based on my understanding of the nuclear command-and-control protocol, there are no checks—no checks—on the President's authority. The system as it is set up today provides the President with the sole and ultimate authority to use nuclear weapons."

This agreement is important, because most Americans do not realize that President Donald Trump, all by himself, can order a civilization-ending nuclear attack. No one can stop him, and the weapons once launched cannot be recalled. This makes Trump the most dangerous man in the world—not just to others, but to the United States itself. Sen. Corker has been worried about Trump and nuclear weapons for some time. Earlier this fall, he said, "We could be heading towards World War III with the kinds of comments that he's making." This weekend, Trump tweeted that he would never call Kim Jong-Un "short and fat," the latest salvo in a war of words with nuclear-armed North Korea. As John Oliver put it, "This would be the stupidest possible reason for all of us to die."

In hearing, Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA) pointed out that Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, the national security advisor, has threatened a preventive attack against North Korea. (On Oct. 16, McMaster told Fox News that the U.S. president "is not going to permit this rogue regime, Kim Jong-Un, to threaten the United States with

a nuclear weapon. And so he is willing to do anything necessary to prevent that from happening.”) Sen. Markey added that “we should not be trusting the generals to be a check on the president,” and said that if there is a preemptive nuclear attack in the works, Congress must approve it. But lawmakers’ actual role in approving a nuclear strike has long been left in ambiguity.

The senators pressed the witnesses for ways that Congress could responsibly restrict presidential authority. Bills have been offered by Sen. Markey and Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA) to prohibit the first use of nuclear weapons without a declaration of war by Congress, and by Markey, Murphy, and Rep. John Conyers (D-MI) to prohibit funding for a preemptive attack on North Korea without congressional consent. Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA) is also planning to introduce a bill that would make it the policy of the United States to never use nuclear weapons first, with the support of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). The witnesses, however, represented a narrow range of opinions best described as the “no worries, all is well” crowd. The status quo panel said they did not support congressional efforts to limit presidential authority, arguing that this might undermine deterrence.

Gen. C. Robert Kehler, former head of Strategic Command, agreed that the president has sole launch authority, but sought to reassure the senators that “the military does not blindly follow orders” and that illegal orders would not be carried out. Those officers that might be tempted to question a presidential order of this kind should be reminded of Harold Hering. In 1973, Hering was training to be an Air Force nuclear missile launch officer. He asked his instructors: How can I be certain that any launch order I receive comes from a sane president? He was fired. And, as Dr. Peter Feaver from Duke University put it, among military officers, “there is a presumption that the orders are legal.”

Meanwhile, Brian McKeon, a former acting defense undersecretary for policy, argued that the president was already barred from using nuclear weapons first, as this would be an act of war under the U.S. Constitution, and only Congress can declare war. However, given past statements, it appears that President Trump would find a way around this, perhaps by ordering a “preemptive” strike to stop an “imminent” attack.

The fact that the Senate held this hearing at all is a clear sign that some senators, at least, are unnerved by the fact that President Trump has his finger on the nuclear button. Doing something about it is another matter. The “do nothing” caucus is formidable. But so are the risks. “The statements the President makes through his Twitter account no doubt cause concern and confusion on the other side of the Pacific,” said McKeon. “I would be very worried about a miscalculation based on continuing use of his Twitter account with regard to North Korea.” [Source: Defense One | Tom Z. Collina | November 14, 2017 ++]

D7R-II Military Bulldozer ► Semi-Autonomous or Remote Controlled Design

Caterpillar is redesigning one of its military dozers to be semi-autonomous or remote controlled, in a development that will aid in urban battlefield explosives removal and breaching, according to Nic Hoffman, the lead engineer on the project. The bulldozer, known as the D7R-II, will be semi-autonomous and controlled by a user with a remote control that has a 400-meter line of sight reach, according to Hoffman. The remote control function means operators can move and drive the dozer behind covered and concealed positions or out of harm’s way.

The new dozer took a couple months to design, Hoffman said. Engineers working on the project had to change the hydraulics and the control system. Bulldozers have been vital for the U.S. military and its partner forces in Iraq and Syria battling ISIS militants. The U.S. military has provided up-armored Caterpillar dozers to Iraqi forces and Syrian partner forces known as the Syrian Democratic Forces. Videos on social

media show U.S.-backed SDF fighters using the tractors to clear routes, remove explosives, and as makeshift defensive positions in the tense street-to-street urban warfare ongoing in Raqqa. Because of the increasing importance of bulldozers in urban conflict, the tractors are also a major target of enemy forces, meaning drivers and operators of the bulldozers are at increased risk.



D7R-II



Remote Control

The new semi-autonomous dozers will also be important for post-war reconstruction in Iraq and Syria, where thousands of unexploded ordnance and booby traps still line streets and buildings of formerly held ISIS territories. Caterpillar is still working with the U.S. Army to start testing and evaluation of the new remote-controlled dozers, Hoffman said. [Source: ArmyTimes | Shawn Snow | October 10, 2017 ++]

USS Cole Attack Update 04 ► Pentagon Suspends Sentence Against Marine 1-Star

A Pentagon spokesman says a Marine Corps general is no longer confined to quarters for contempt at the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The Pentagon suspended a sentence that found Brig. Gen. John Baker should be confined to quarters for 21 days and fined \$1,000, pending a review by a Defense Department legal official, Air Force Maj. Ben Sakrisson said. Baker was informed of the decision 17 NOV while awaiting a ruling to a legal challenge filed in civilian federal court in Washington. Baker is in charge of the defense teams for war crimes cases at Guantanamo. A military judge ruled he was in contempt of court for dismissing three defense lawyers without court permission in the case of a prisoner charged in the 2000 attack on the destroyer Cole.

Baker refused to testify or return lawyers to the case, attempting to tell the judge, Air Force Col. Vance Spath, that the war court's attempt to try alleged terrorists who are not U.S. citizens had no jurisdiction over him, the Miami Herald originally reported. Spath disagreed and issued the ruling against Baker on 1 NOV, shocking the general's colleagues by having him led out of the courtroom by guards and confined immediately to his quarters inside a small trailer on the base.

Seventeen sailors were killed and 39 injured when a small, fiberglass boat piloted by two suicide bombers exploded near the hull of the Cole in October 2000. The ship was refueling at the Aden harbor in Yemen. The three civilian attorneys, Rick Kammen, Rosa Eliades and Mary Spears, quit the case in October. Kammen had represented the defendant, Saudi Abd al Rahim al Nashiri, since 2008. The trio withdrew because they believed the government was listening in on their legal meetings. Some information discussed in the meetings was classified so they could not explain it to Nashiri or the public. In June, Baker told the attorneys he had "lost confidence" in the integrity of "all potential attorney-client meeting locations" at Guantanamo.

While Baker is no longer confined, “the Office of Military Commissions Convening Authority has reviewed the contempt proceedings against Brig. Gen. John G. Baker … and determined that the findings of the military judge are correct in law and fact,” Sakrisson said in a statement released 21 NOV. The findings are being forwarded to “the appropriate authority overseeing Brig. Gen. Baker’s service as a Judge Advocate within the Department of the Navy, the DoD Standards of Conduct Office, and the DoD General Counsel’s Office, and the Staff Judge Advocate to the Commandant of the United States Marine Corps for an administrative ethics review,” Sakrisson said.

Sakrisson added that the convening authority ”is not requiring that Brig. Gen. Baker pay the original \$1,000 fine or serve the remaining confinement term, which was initially 21 days.” He also addressed the security concerns that led to the civilian attorneys to withdraw. “The [convening authority] will also recommend to the Joint Detention Group at Guantanamo Bay that a ‘clean’ facility be designated or constructed which would provide continued assurances and confidence that attorney-client meeting spaces are not subject to monitoring, as the commission proceeds,” Sakrisson said. [Source: The Associated Press November 22, 2017 ++]

USS Ralph Johnson (DDG-114) ► Navy Accepts Delivery from Shipbuilder

The Navy accepted delivery of guided-missile destroyer Ralph Johnson (DDG-114) from shipbuilder Huntington Ingalls Industries after the ship successfully completed a series trials at sea and in port. Ralph Johnson is the 64th Arleigh Burke class destroyer built for the Navy. Johnson is the third of four DDG-51 Flight IIA destroyers built under a 2008 restart of the line by then-Secretary of Defense Bob Gates. The ship is equipped with Aegis Baseline 9 combat system, which includes an Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) capability incorporating Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) 5.0 and Naval Integrated Fire Control-Counter Air, according to a Navy statement.



The ship is named for Pfc. Ralph Johnson, a 19-year-old Marine who was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions in Vietnam. In March 1968, Johnson shouted a warning to fellow Marines after a grenade landed in their fighting hole. Johnson then jumped on a grenade, absorbing the blast with his body, dying instantly, but saving the Marines near him. President Richard Nixon awarded Johnson the Medal of Honor in 1970, according to the Navy. The Veterans Affairs hospital in Johnson’s home town Charleston, S.C., was named for him in 1991, according to the VA.

The Huntington Ingalls Industries shipyard in Pascagoula, Miss., where Ralph Johnson was constructed, is currently working on future destroyers Paul Ignatius (DDG-117), Delbert D. Black (DDG-119), Frank E. Petersen, Jr. (DDG-121), Lenah H. Sutcliffe Higbee (DDG-123), and is under contract for the future USS Jack H. Lucas (DDG-125) which will be the first Flight III ship. Ralph Johnson is scheduled for commissioning March 24, in Charleston, S.C. [Source: USNI News | Ben Werner | November 16, 2017 ++]

USS Benfold (DDG-65) ► Minor Collision With Japanese Tugboat

A U.S. Navy destroyer sustained minimal damage after colliding with a Japanese tugboat off the coast of Japan, the service said. The guided-missile destroyer USS Benfold (DDG 65) was participating in a towing exercise in Sagami Wan when the tugboat lost propulsion and drifted into the ship, according to a release from U.S. 7th Fleet. "No one was injured on either vessel and Benfold sustained minimal damage, including scrapes on its side, pending a full damage assessment," the statement reads. The destroyer remains at sea under her own power, while the Japanese commercial tug was towed by another vessel to a port in Yokosuka, according to the Navy. The incident will be investigated, the Navy said.

It marks the latest collision involving a naval destroyer in the Pacific area of operations. Two other destroyer collisions this summer claimed the lives of 17 sailors. The destroyer Fitzgerald collided with the Philippine-flagged tanker ACX Crystal off the coast of Japan on June 17, claiming the lives of seven sailors when compartments flooded. Two months later, on Aug. 21, the destroyer John S. McCain and Liberian-flagged container ship Alnic MC collided near the Straits of Malacca, causing the deaths of another 10 sailors. After the deadly accidents, the Navy sacked a number of leaders in the 7th Fleet, including the commander, Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin, "due to a loss of confidence in his ability to command.

Also relieved were Rear Adm. Charles Williams, the commander of Task Force 70, and Capt. Jeffrey Bennett, commander of Destroyer Squadron 15; the McCain's commanding officer, Cmdr. Alfredo Sanchez, and executive officer, Cmdr. Jessie Sanchez; and the Fitzgerald's commanding officer, Cmdr. Bryce Benson, and Cmdr. Sean Babbitt, the executive officer. Pacific Fleet Commander Adm. Scott Swift also announced he would retire after learning he would not be tapped to lead U.S. Pacific Command. [Source: Military.com | Brendan McGarry | November 18, 2017 ++]

USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) Update 09 ► Underway Aboard Transport Transshelf.

The damaged guided-missile destroyer USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) has left the U.S. naval base in Yokosuka, Japan on 24 JUN to begin the trip to the U.S. Gulf Coast for more than a year of repairs. Huntington Ingalls Industries was chosen to repair the Fitzgerald because the company would be able to restore the ship in the shortest amount of time, Naval Sea Systems Command said in August. Fitzgerald was towed from Yokosuka and is being loaded aboard the heavy lift transport Transshelf. The process is expected to take several days. "In the months prior to her departure from Yokosuka, technicians and shipbuilders at Ship Repair Facility Yokosuka made significant progress in preparing the ship for the journey, including dewatering, defueling, hull and superstructure repairs, and placing key systems in layup maintenance," read a statement from U.S. 7th Fleet. Only about 50 sailors from the Fitzgerald's crew of about 300 will remain aboard the ship as it travels back to the U.S., 7th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Clay Doss previously told Stars and Stripes. "In October, she was moved from dry dock to a pier side location in anticipation of the move." Fitzgerald has been at Yokosuka since 17 JUN, following a fatal collision with the merchant ship ACX

Crystal off the coast of Japan. Seven sailors were killed. The cost of the repairs is estimated at about \$367 million, according to a Navy cost estimate. [Source: USNI News | Sam LaGrone | November 24, 2017 ++]



USAF Pilot Shortage Update 02 ► Increasing Despite High Retention Bonuses

Despite offering fat retention bonuses to entice pilots to stay in the Air Force, the percentage of eligible pilots accepting them is plummeting. The Air Force said it typically hopes about 65 percent of eligible pilots will accept the retention bonuses. But in fiscal 2015, only 55 percent took the bonuses and signed up for longer stints. And the so-called “take rate” has plunged even further since then, to 48 percent in fiscal 2016, and 44 percent in fiscal 2017, according to figures released by the Air Force. In all, 476 pilots accepted retention bonuses last year.

The dramatically increased bonuses — once called Aviator Retention Pay and earlier this year renamed the Aviation Bonus Program — are one of several tools the Air Force is rolling out to try to stem an exodus that has contributed to an almost 2,000-pilot shortfall. Commercial airlines are aggressively recruiting Air Force pilots and can offer salaries that are far higher than what the military offers. In June, the Air Force for the first time began offering retention bonuses of up to \$455,000 to fighter pilots who agree to extend their service 13 more years, at \$35,000 per year. Until then, the most a fighter pilot could get was a retention bonus of \$225,000, or \$25,000 per year for a nine-year extension. Fighter pilots are also eligible for \$35,000 annual bonuses for extensions of one, two, five or nine years. Only five out of about 200 eligible fighter pilots accepted the 13-year extension in 2017, although it was only available for the last four months of the fiscal year. In all, 122 fighter pilots accepted retention bonuses last year.

Although the increased bonuses have not been enough to turn things around, the Air Force says it's encouraged that the decline appears to be slowing. “Any time we're short of that [65 percent] target, it's an area of concern,” Air Force spokeswoman Capt. Kate Atanasoff said in an email. “However, given the continued increase in airline hiring, which is historically our biggest challenge to retention, we're encouraged that the take rate has not continued to decline at the same rate. We'll continue to pursue programs that incentivize retention both through quality of life and monetary incentive programs.”

For most categories of pilots, the decline in take rates between 2016 and 2017 was indeed smaller than the previous year's decline. For example, the take rate for 11F fighter pilots dropped from 47.8 percent in 2015 to 39.5 percent in 2016, a decline of 8.3 percentage points. It fell further to 34.6 percent last year, which represented a 4.9 percentage point drop. But not all categories of pilots are slowing down. For some, the decline is accelerating.

- The 11H rescue pilots' take rate actually ticked up 0.2 percentage points in 2016, to 78.6 percent, before falling 2.9 percentage points to 75.7 percent in 2017.
- 11R C2ISR pilots saw an increase from 55.3 percent in 2015 to 58.5 percent in 2016, before recording a 19.4 percentage point decline to 39.1 percent in 2017.
- 11S special operations pilots' take rates increased in 2017 by 10.5 percentage points, to 59.2 percent, and 11U and 18X unmanned pilots' rates went up 7.1 percentage points to 62.3 percent.

Atanasoff said that many factors may have contributed to the C2ISR decline. It is a relatively small community — just 23 11R pilots accepted retention bonuses in 2017 — so small fluctuations in the actual number of pilots could have larger effects on the percentages, she said. Also, Atanasoff said, the Air Force cut the maximum bonus C2ISR pilots could receive in 2017. They previously were eligible for up to a nine-year extension at \$25,000 annually, or a maximum bonus of \$225,000. But in 2017, the maximum extension was cut to five years at \$28,000 annually, or \$140,000. “The Air Force is working diligently to explore and implement new retention initiatives to keep our skilled aviators,” Atanasoff said. Most other categories of pilots saw increases in their maximum possible bonus in 2017. For example, bomber, special operations and mobility pilots for the first time became eligible for up to nine-year extensions at \$30,000 annually, or a total of \$270,000, up from the maximum \$225,000 some of those pilots could have received in 2016.

When asked why take rates continue to decline, Atanasoff pointed to the continuous combat operations the Air Force has been maintaining since the Gulf War 26 years ago, as well as the shrinkage of the service's aircraft and manning levels. “These two opposing forces have put a strain on our airmen’s ability to maintain a work-life balance,” Atanasoff said. “At the same [time], airlines are hiring at record levels, offering our airmen stability for their families and financial compensation that the Air Force can’t compete with.”

[Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | November 19, 2017 ++]

Overseas Troops ► Gunnery Sgt. Santana Jimenez



U.S. Marine platoon sergeant for Tank Platoon and an Arizona native, stands in front one of the Abrams Tank.

USMC Missile System ► Mobile Anti-Ship Coastal Defense System Needed

The Marines Corps is looking to counter a threat not faced since World War II — enemy navies capable of firing at Marines ashore. Marines need a mobile anti-ship, coastal defense system that can fire at moving, sea-based targets and also pack up and move before being detected. Oh, and it needs to fit on a C-130 aircraft. Now the Corps is asking the defense industry for just such a missile system, capable of a range of 80 miles or more. “A complete coastal defense system would be composed of a command and control center, and a surveillance and Over the Horizon (OTH) target acquisition capability, in addition to the kinetic launch system,” according to the formal Request For Information (RFI) recently issued by Marine Corps Systems Command.

The missile may attract the most attention. But for planners, the most important aspect is how that missile will integrate into the larger sea control mission that the Marines, Navy and in many ways the Army is developing. The RFI is an effort to see what the defense industry might have to offer now or soon as the various missile projects proceed, said Kevin McConnell, deputy director of fires and maneuver for the Corps’ combat development and integration team. Being the smallest military service with the lowest budget, the Marines are dependent on the Army’s current effort to improve and extend its high-mobility rocket system, known as HIMARS.

HIMARS is a vehicle-mounted light rocket launcher already in use by both the Army and Marines. It fits on a C-130 and fires artillery rockets, either a single Army Tactical Missile System or six Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System. The Army’s HIMARS improvements, including some of those to make it anti-ship capable, are between five and seven years away, McConnell said. Nearly a year ago, Marine Commandant Gen. Robert B. Neller said he wanted an anti-ship, coastal defense missile in the Marine’s arsenal. And he wanted to use existing platforms such as HIMARS. Benefits of using the existing platform are lower costs and the already available trained soldiers and Marines who can fire them.

Firing from land at a moving ship with air defense systems would require a guided missile capable of redirecting its flight, not simply striking a preprogrammed grid location. The missile would also need warheads capable of coming in horizontally near the water’s surface amid waves and then puncturing the ship’s hulls. But Marines can’t just fire at will into the ocean. Their targeting must coordinate with friendly ships and aircraft in the same battle space. That requires integrating the fire system into the Navy’s broader network for command and control at sea.

McConnell said Marines are monitoring developments both from the Army’s HIMARS program and from missiles traditionally fired from Navy ship platforms to the coast, namely the Harpoon and Naval Strike Missile. Both have been or will soon be demonstrated capable of being mounted on a land platform and fired, he said. But costs are prohibitive. McConnell told Breaking Defense that the GMLRS missiles both Marines and Army use run \$100,000 to \$200,000 each while the ATACMS run \$750,000 to \$820,000 apiece. The entry-level Harpoon or Naval Strike Missile price tag starts at \$1 million, McConnell said.

Marines have been finding novel ways to use HIMARS from the other direction, ship to shore. On 24 OCT the Marine Corps successfully fired a HIMARS from the flight deck of the amphibious transport dock Anchorage, destroying a target the size of a speaker’s podium on land 70 kilometers away. The test came shortly after Neller said that amphibious ships would be equipped with precision fires to make sure they could destroy enemy coastal defenses.

Having a HIMARS aboard an amphibious ship gives commanders a weapon that can attack targets ashore when weather is too bad for aircraft to fly, said Lt. Col. Matt Hawkins, the fires and effects coordinator with the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade. “I would certainly think that it has lots of utility in the future,” said Hawkins, who was one of the lead planners for the HIMARS shoot. “It allows commanders to keep standoff

from where that enemy is. It can allow the capability to fire mass fires that strike the enemy prior to an amphibious operation. Really, I could go on and on. The possibilities are endless."

For the test, the Marines fired a single rocket, which destroyed a simulated enemy radar station, he said. The waves were between six and eight feet high at the time, but the Marines have developed software that allows the HIMARS to compensate for a ship's forward movement and the waves' side-to-side movement. Having a HIMARS aboard a ship has some tradeoffs, Hawkins said. Because ships have a finite amount of space, commanders would likely need to leave other gear behind to bring a HIMARS aboard. And aircraft can't when a HIMARS is on the flight deck, he said. [Source: DefenseNews | Jen Judson | October 9, 2017 ++]

USS Little Rock (LCS-9) ► Commissioning Plans

The chances of getting a tour of the new USS Little Rock when it arrives in Buffalo early next month for its commissioning are not good. But if a close look at the ship at Canalside will satisfy your curiosity, that's doable. In order to get near the ship, you'll first have to pass through an airport-style security checkpoint at Canalside. Security is a high priority for the Navy's newest \$440 million warship, according to officials involved in arranging for the historic commissioning. It's the first time in the Navy's 242-year history that a new ship is being commissioned adjacent to its decommissioned namesake. The old Little Rock is anchored at the Buffalo & Erie County Naval and Military Park.



The future littoral combat ship USS Little Rock (LCS 9) is underway during a high-speed run in Lake Michigan during acceptance trials, Aug. 25, 2017.

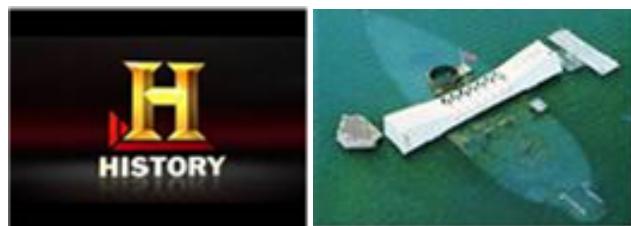
When the ship arrives at noon 8 DEC for the start of commissioning week festivities, a temporary fence will be in place around the perimeter of Canalside, where streets in the vicinity will be closed to vehicular traffic. Marine Drive, however, will remain open, except on 16 DEC, the day of the commissioning. Throughout the week, there will be prearranged tours for Buffalo school students and members of veteran organizations, according to Daniel Mecca, vice chairman of the local USS Little Rock LCS9 Commissioning Committee. Will Keresztes, the Buffalo school's chief of intergovernmental affairs and community engagement, said students enrolled in the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps at public and charter schools will receive priority for the tours. "For students who have demonstrated their interest in a military career through JROTC, this is a very meaningful opportunity," he said.

The district, Keresztes added, will have the chance to showcase the talent of the Buffalo Academy for Visual and Performing Arts Choir whose members will sing the national anthem at the commissioning

ceremony, which starts at 11 a.m. "This will be a profound moment for our students and remembered by them for their entire lives," he said of the upcoming performance. When the commissioning ceremony concludes at about 12:30 p.m., there will be public tours of the ship, but Mecca cautioned that with an estimated 9,000 people already planning on attending the commissioning, it will be unlikely that everyone who wants a tour will be accommodated. USS Little Rock Commander Todd Peters said his crew will do its best to accommodate everyone who wants a tour, but, "we will have to stop at some point in the afternoon, evening."

Earlier this week, the commissioning committee closed its website function for registering for tickets to attend the ceremony "due to an overwhelming demand for tickets," Mecca said. Commissioning committee members also say they are planning a busy week for the ship's crew. It includes attendance at the Buffalo Bills game 10 DEC, a Sabres game 12 DEC, and several receptions and social gatherings. "We are trying to live up to our moniker, the City of Good Neighbors," Mecca said. The public is invited to a "watch party" for an Army-Navy football game from 2 to 6 p.m. Dec. 9 at Buffalo RiverWorks, 359 Ganson St. And for those who want to get an extra good view of the ship on the morning of the commissioning, officials at the Naval & Military Park said tickets are on sale for a buffet at the Liberty Hound restaurant and museum, which is close to the site of the commissioning. Tickets can be purchased by calling 847-1773, Ext. 10. [Source: The Buffalo News | Lou Michel | November 28, 2017 ++]

* Military History *



Marine Corps War Memorial Update 05 ► Afghanistan & Iraq Now Included

After 16 years the Marine Corps War Memorial at last recognizes the sacrifices of Marines who have fought and died in Afghanistan and Iraq. On 21 NOV, new engravings for Iraq and Afghanistan were dedicated to the 1,481 Marines killed in those conflicts. "Because they are no longer with us in the flesh, we must take a moment to thank their families — their sons, their daughters, their spouses, their fathers, their mothers, cousins — for what they did and what they represent," Marine Commandant Gen. Robert Neller said in a ceremony at the memorial. "We must keep those who have given all in our thoughts. Their sacrifice and their efforts and the things that they did make us all better."

The Marine Corps War Memorial commemorates all Marines who have been killed since 1775. Tuesday's ceremony marked the first time the memorial has been updated since October 1996, when engravings for Panama, the Gulf War and Somalia were added, according to the National Park Service. The memorial is a place where all Marines can think about their service and what it means to be a Marine, Neller said. But, when Iraq and Afghanistan veterans came to the memorial, he said, family members would ask: "You said you were in Iraq; how come it's not on here?"



"For the thousands and thousands of men and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, until today they would come down here and they'd be like: 'Hey, where's ours?'" Neller said. "They don't say that to be self-serving. They just want to be able to come down here with their families and show them that what they've done and where they've served has now made the memorial. "Hopefully, one day there will be an end date on it." With Thanksgiving approaching, Neller said his message to Marines now in Iraq and Afghanistan is: "You know what your mission is. Do your job. Look out for each other. Don't ever cut any corners. Stay ready all the time. We'll see you when you get home."

Because Marines continue to serve in both countries, the Afghanistan and Iraq engravings have no end dates, officials said. The end dates could be added five years after Marines are no longer in those countries, unless there is a definitive end to the conflicts sooner than that. When asked if he thinks the wars in both countries will ever end, Neller replied: "I hope so. Right now, I wouldn't speculate on an end. One day it will end and, sadly, maybe there will be other places that go up there." [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Jeff Schogol | November 21, 2017 ++]

Military History ► Nazis Helped China Fight Japan

Most people who stayed awake for at least half of their high school history class knows that the Axis Powers in World War II consisted of Germany, Italy and Japan. But few know that German tactics and weapons—not to mention some actual Germans—helped the Chinese Nationalists stall Imperial Japan's conquest of China. For about a decade, German soldiers advised Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek in his campaigns against Chinese Communists ... and also against Germany's future allies, the Japanese. It's one of history's most unexpected—and frankly unknown—wartime partnerships. It all began in the aftermath of the Chinese revolution of 1911, as warlords carved up the country and battled each other for power. To read how Germany got involved and ultimately helped China in their fight against Japan refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Nazis Help China Fight Japan**". [Source: War Is boring | Kevin Knodell | January 3, 2014 ++]

Military History ► Sgt. Reckless | USMC War Horse

Sgt Reckless was a Marine Corps Horse who served heroically in the Korean War. Sgt Reckless was featured in The Saturday Evening Post and Life Magazine for her heroic actions during the war. Sgt Reckless was promoted to Staff Sergeant by the Commandant of the US Marine Corps after the war ended and served out her final days with the 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, CA. Life Magazine named

her as one of 100 American Heroes. Go to <https://biggeekdad.com/2011/07/sgt-reckless> to view the video on Sgt. Reckless and <http://www.sgtreckless.com> to read more.



[Source: Big Geek Daddy | November 2017 ++]

Military History ► WWI | Modane, France Train Derailment

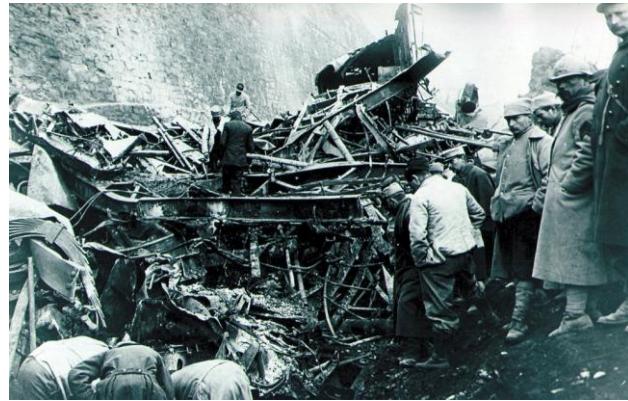
On the night of December 12/13, 1917, military train number 612 was returning from Italy filled with French soldiers who had spent a month helping Italian troops in the aftermath of the Battle of Caporetto. After passing through the Mont Cenis Tunnel the train reached Modane station, where two additional cars were coupled to the train before the journey onward to Chambéry. From there they were to disperse to join their families throughout France for 15 days of leave covering the year-end holidays. The train stopped at Modane for 1 hour to allow other trains to pass. Most of the officers left the train during this stop, to take the Modane-Paris express.

The train consisted of 19 cars of Italian construction: one baggage van at each end, 15 cars with bogies, and two fixed-axle cars added at Modane, for a total length of 350 metres and total weight of 526 tons. By official count it was carrying 982 enlisted men. The cars were of wooden construction with metal chassis. The train departed from Modane station at 11:15 pm. The downhill descent started normally, but from Freney onwards, a short distance from Modane, the train began accelerating to an eventual uncontrollable speed of 84 mph as measured by the locomotive's speed indicator. The authorized speed for the section of the line was 40 km/h.

The train may have been carrying more than the official number of soldiers, and was overloaded for operation on the steep 3.3% grade between Modane and Saint Michel de Maurienne), with too many cars relative to the braking power of the single locomotive. Such a train normally would have had two engines. However, the second assigned locomotive had been requisitioned for a munitions train by the officer in charge of dispatching. The engineer, Adjudant Girard, who knew the route well, had refused to let the train depart on account of the risks involved, but acquiesced after being threatened at gunpoint by an officer, General Émile Fayolle, who was the overall commander in chief of the six French divisions supporting the Italians. The officer was especially anxious to get the men home for Christmas.

The compressed-air brakes worked on only the first three cars of the train, and seven brakemen (two of whom died in the derailment) had been distributed throughout the train, to set the brakes when signaled to do

so by the locomotive whistle. The first car derailed while going at 60 mph where the authorized speed was 25 mph and its coupler broke only 1,300 metres from Saint Michel de Maurienne station shortly after crossing the metal highway bridge at Saussaz, over the river Arc. The wooden cars smashed into one another and promptly caught fire, triggered by the overheated brakes and lit candles which had been brought on board due to defective electric lighting. The fire was also fed by grenades and other explosives carried without authorization by the soldiers returning home.



The fire did not burn out until the evening of the following day. The derailment occurred at a point where the railway line passed through a narrow gap in the mountain terrain, leaving little room for heat from the fire to escape. The driver (engineer) of the locomotive had been too preoccupied with his failed brakes to notice the absence of the cars until he reached the station at Saint Jean de Maurienne. Here he finally succeeded in stopping his locomotive and its tender. Together with some Scottish soldiers waiting to depart for Modane (two British divisions had also been sent to the Italian front in October) and railway employees from both stations, he went immediately to the accident site to assist. Their task was made more difficult by the rocky terrain where the wrecked cars lay, by the heat from the fires, and by the height of the piled-up wreckage.

The station master at La Praz, seeing the train passing at an out-of-control speed, had notified the station master of the next station, Saint Jean de Maurienne, who held the departure of a train full of British soldiers, thereby preventing a second catastrophe. Both the military hospital at Saint Jean de Maurienne and the Bozon-Verduraz pasta factory nearby were transformed into makeshift field hospitals—and mortuaries—for the victims. Rescue teams pulled more than 424 corpses from the wreckage that could be officially identified. A further 135 could not be identified. Thirty-seven more bodies were found strewn along the ballast of the railway or the right-of-way, between La Praz and the metal bridge, belonging to soldiers who had jumped off the out-of-control train, or had been thrown off as it tossed wildly. They were interred in a communal grave next to the cemetery.

Only 183 men who had been on the train reported for roll-call on the next morning of December 13. More than 100 others either died in hospitals in the region, or while being transported to them, during the next 15 days. The number of fatalities came to approximately 700. The accident remained a classified military secret for many years. At the time, the French military enforced silence on the French press, which reported little or nothing about the accident because it implicated French officers. The daily 'Le Figaro' devoted only 21 lines to the accident on December 17, four days after the accident.

A court-martial was called to try six employees of the PLM (Paris–Lyon–Méditerranée) railway. They were acquitted. In June 1923 the Minister of Defense, André Maginot, inaugurated a monument to the victims in the cemetery of Saint Michel de Maurienne. In 1961 the remains of the victims were transferred to the national military cemetery of Lyon-La Doua. On December 12, 1998, a monument was inaugurated at

the La Saussaz site, near the site of the accident. The derailment remains the greatest rail catastrophe in French history. [Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint-Michel-de-Maurienne_derailment | November 18, 2017 ++]

Battle of Firebase Ripcord ► Vietnam | March thru July 1970

Tet Offensive. Siege of the Khe Sanh. Battle of Hue. Fall of Saigon. These are just a few of the names a person might hear when discussing famous battles of the Vietnam War. Less likely to be mentioned is the final high-casualty engagement between units of the U.S. infantry and the North Vietnamese Army. Taking place between March and July 1970, the Battle of Fire Support Base Ripcord would stay tucked into a hidden chapter of the war's history for decades.



At the same time, President Richard Nixon was secretly withdrawing troops from Vietnam, leaving only the 101st Airborne Division fully operational which he tasked with regaining initiative of the A Shau Valley, a key strategic focal point for the NVA. So it was that members of the 187th and 506th Infantry Regiments, along with supporting units under the command of 3rd Brigade, were sent to the abandoned Fire Support Base Ripcord to set the stage for the planned offensive 'Operation Texas Star.' The plan was to rebuild the abandoned fire support base set on four hilltops to be used as outposts for the planned offensive by the U.S. Marines to search and destroy the NVA supply lines in the mountains overlooking the valley.

The operation was held with as little press coverage as possible since it was happening during the time of the Cambodian incursion in May and June 1970. This was a series of 13 major missions conducted covertly in neutral Cambodia but Cambodian communists were helping North Vietnam with logistics and other types of support. It was also one year after the media disaster of Hamburger Hill, the battle known for its questionable use of infantry instead of firepower which led to 75 Soldiers losing their lives and another 372 wounded.

The Cambodian campaign was aimed to disrupt the Ho Chi Minh supply trail which spanned outside Vietnam borders, through Laos and Cambodia. The mission was of similar nature as the 'Texas Star Operation' and even though the latter was not secret, it was still on the certain level of "Need to Know Basis". While the members of the 101st Division were rebuilding the base and preparing the attack on the enemy supply lines, the NVA was secretly gathering intelligence. They also launched sporadic attacks from March 12th and lasted until June 30th. It is estimated that as many as 25,000 NVA troops were positioned in

the A Shau Valley area at the time. After weeks of reconnaissance, on the morning of July 1, 1970, the North Vietnamese started firing mortars at the firebase.

The battle for the hilltops raged for days. The 101st was surrounded, outnumbered almost ten to one and running low on supplies. It was only the high ground and the bravery of its defenders that kept the enemy from overrunning the FSB Ripcord. The heaviest of these attacks took place between July 1st and 23rd. During those 23-days, 75 U.S. Soldiers were killed in action, making the Battle of FSB Ripcord one of the deadliest battles in the Vietnam War for the United States. Col. Ben Harrison (later Maj. Gen.), the Commander of the 3rd Brigade, claimed the NVA losses at Ripcord were one of the reasons why the North postponed their Easter Offensive that finally happened in 1972 since they had to resupply and reorganize after the attacks on the firebase.

Denny Kirkham was 18 years old at the time. Drafted only one month out of high school, he served in Vietnam as a Spec. 4 Radio Operator for 3rd Brigade's Tactical Operations Center at Camp Evans. Working in the lines of communication, his MOS was to be picked up and placed where needed. This is how he came to be part of FSB Ripcord history. "I woke up one night out of my bunk and was thrown into a Huey with a Spec 5 Radio Repairman," reported Kirkham. "Next thing I know, we're flying in the dark, jumping off and skidding onto the hillside. That's how it all started. Tactical operations bunker on Ripcord had been partially hit, and there was some wounded personnel. A couple of those were signalmen, radio operators. We were there to resupply and support communications."

Though only there for a week and a half, Kirkham was inundated with the siege and all of the pandemonium that went along with it. "It kind of just dragged on and on," recalled Kirkham. "I was there for several of the attempts of the NVA to come through the wall. We were surrounded most of the time. It was my first time being under mortar and artillery fire. I witnessed several of the B-52 strikes." Kirkham was also there when anti-aircraft fire from enemy forces dealt one of the biggest blows to FSB Ripcord's supply cache. "A helicopter was shot down right above the ammo dump," said Kirkham. "It was like the whole top of the hill was coming off. That hurt us for several days. We had to depend on other bases around Ripcord to really help cover us until we could be resupplied."

Though young and in awe of his surroundings, Kirkham was aware that, like everyone else, he was placed on the hill to do a job. "It was a counter-insurgency operation," he said. "I was a radio operator with secure information. We had classified information coming in. At one time, my radio was the only one that was transmitting. I was able to keep it going, and I was kept busy for a little farm boy from Indiana. I stayed on my toes; leaning up against sandbags to sleep for an hour, then staying up for another 12. I don't remember a bunk at all. I don't remember sleeping." That feeling was echoed throughout the base, from the grunts in the foxholes working to diminish the strength of the NVA battalions to the "Shake n' Bake Sergeants" who had risen through the ranks in the blink of an eye to satisfy a growing need for NCOs to lead the way.

As an offensive quickly dissolved into a standoff and a fight for survival, it was decided that defending the base was not going to accomplish anything in the long run. Immediate and swift lifeline withdrawals soon followed. On July 23, after the helicopters withdrew the survivors under heavy mortar, anti-aircraft and small arms fire. After the evacuation, the U.S. Air Force B-52 bombers were called in for carpet bombing. "The withdrawals began happening so fast that a specialist and I were put onto a Huey that had body bags on it that were filled. We were getting off that mountain any way we possibly could toward the end. I was glad to get off there, but riding off with the KIAs was hard. I witnessed several of the B-52 strikes" said Kirkham. "With what was happening back in the states with the anti-war situation, they didn't want to bring up another Hamburger Hill to throw into the mix," added Kirkham. "Newspapers and TV back in the States didn't want to see those body counts."

When the FSB Ripcord Association emerged in 1985, the American public began to learn more and more about the battle. With the emergence of the story came a surprise for Kirkham: a Bronze Star in honor of his actions. Following the war, Kirkham returned to the States and lived the civilian life for a few years. In 1975, he rejoined the Army voluntarily, serving until his retirement in 1993. He returned to his hometown of Corydon, IN, in 2005 after the passing of his wife. Though more than 47 years separate his initial connection to the Screaming Eagles, his ties to the community remain strong.

The final death toll of the FSB Ripcord battle from March 12 to July 23, was 138 American Soldiers. There were also 3 men missing in action. Among the men killed in action were the professional football player Bob Kalsu, who played for the Buffalo Bills, before being drafted and Weiland Norris, the brother of Chuck Norris. Three Medals of Honor and five Distinguished Service Crosses were awarded to the men who fought at Ripcord. One of the Medals of Honor was awarded to Lt. Col. Andre Lucas, who died on the last day of the battle after directing the successful retreat of his men. Lt. Col. Lucas on one occasion during the battle flew in a helicopter at a treetop level above an entrenched enemy directing fire for over 3 hours. He remained in an exposed position as long as he could, and after that swapped his damaged helicopter for another one, and immediately resumed his perilous mission. On another occasion he attempted to rescue a crewman trapped in a burning helicopter, all by himself, risking his life under heavy fire.

The Battle of FSB Ripcord was not very known to the public, mostly because the Nixon administration wanted to avoid any media coverage of the last major battle in the Vietnam War. The memory of the battle was revived in 1985 when The FSB Ripcord Association was established to honor the fallen and remember the survivors. "When a free nation sends men and women to war, their sacrifice must be honored and rewarded. Regardless of the outcome, these people deserve our thanks, respect, support and more importantly a place in our memories." [Source: Together We Served Newsletter | Martin Hinton | November 2017 ++]

Vietnam Myths ► 5 Deeply Entrenched Ones

Ken Burns and Lynn Novick say their multi-part PBS documentary about the Vietnam War, which concluded at the end of September 2017, was intended to unpack a complex conflict and to embark upon the process of healing and reconciliation. The series has catapulted the Vietnam War back into the national consciousness. But despite thousands of books, articles, and films about this moment in our history, there remain many deeply entrenched myths.

MYTH NO. 1 -- The Viet Cong was a scrappy guerrilla force fighting a superpower. "Vastly superior in tools and techniques, and militarily dominant over much of the world," historian Ronald Aronson wrote about the hegemonic United States and the impudent rebels, "the Goliath sought to impose on David a peace favorable to his vision of the world." Recode recently compared the Viet Cong to Uber: "young, scrappy and hungry troops break rules and create new norms, shocking the enemy." In reality, the Viet Cong, the pro-North force in South Vietnam, was armed by both North Vietnam - which planned, controlled and directed Viet Cong campaigns in the South - and the Soviet Union.

According to the CIA, from 1954 to 1968, communist nations (primarily the Soviet Union and China) provided the North with \$3.2 billion in military and economic aid, mostly coming after 1964 as the war accelerated. Other sources suggest the number was more than double that figure. The Viet Cong had powerful and modern AK-47s, a Soviet-made automatic rifle that was the equivalent of the M-16 used by American troops. Its fighters were also equipped with submachine guns, grenades, rocket launchers and an array of other weapons. By contrast, the U.S. military gave the South Vietnamese armed forces old World War II-era castoffs, such as M-1 rifles, until the late 1970s.

MYTH NO. 2 -- The Vietnamese refugees who came to the United States represented the elite. As the Immigration Policy Center's Alicia Campi has put it, the 130,000 Vietnamese who came to the United States at the end of the conflict "were generally high-skilled and well-educated" people. Sociologist Carl Bankston described this group as "the elite of South Vietnam." Although the group that fled in 1975, referred to as the first wave, was more educated and middle-class, many who arrived through the U.S.-sponsored evacuation efforts were also people with close ties to the Americans in Vietnam whom Washington had promised to rescue. They were not necessarily "elite." These included ordinary soldiers of South Vietnam as well as people who had worked as clerks or secretaries in the U.S. Embassy.

The second wave of refugees who left Vietnam after 1975 numbered approximately 2 million. They came from rural areas and were often less educated. Most escaped on rickety wooden boats and became known as "boat people"; they deluged neighboring countries of "first asylum" - Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Indonesia - at a rate of 2,000 to 50,000 per month. More than 400,000 were admitted into the United States. The third wave of refugees, of which an estimated 159,000 came to the United States beginning in 1989, were offspring of American fathers and Vietnamese mothers, as well as political prisoners and those who had been put in "reeducation camps."

MYTH NO. 3 -- The American fighting force in Vietnam relied on the draft. Popular culture is rife with examples of poor and minority soldiers arriving in Vietnam via the draft and then dying. The idea runs through the heart of Robert Zemeckis's "Forrest Gump," Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried" and Michael Cimino's "The Deer Hunter," among other movies and books. Vietnam was "the most blatant class war since the Civil War," as James Fallows put it in his 1989 book "More Like Us."

The facts show otherwise. Findings from the Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force in February 1970 show that 78 percent of active-duty troops in 1965 were volunteers. Nor did the military rely primarily on disadvantaged citizens or African Americans. According to the commission's report, African Americans "constituted only 12.7 percent of nearly 1.7 million enlisted men serving voluntarily in 1969." Seventy-nine percent of troops had at least a high school education (compared with 63 percent of Korean War veterans and 45 percent of World War II veterans). And according to VFW Magazine, 50 percent were from middle-income backgrounds, and 88 percent were white (representing 86 percent of the deaths).

MYTH NO. 4 -- Communist forces breached the U.S. Embassy in Saigon during the Tet Offensive. One of the most pivotal events of the Vietnam War was the attack by the Viet Cong on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in 1968. Retired ambassador David F. Lambertson, who served as a political officer there, said in one account that "it was a shock to American and world opinion. The attack on the Embassy, the single most powerful symbol of U.S. presence signaled that something was badly wrong in Vietnam. The Tet Offensive broke the back of American public opinion." Early reports by the Associated Press said the Viet Cong had occupied the building. UPI claimed that the fighters had taken over five floors.

In fact, communist forces had blasted a hole through an outer wall of the compound and hunkered down in a six-hour battle against U.S. and South Vietnamese forces. The embassy was never occupied, and the Viet Cong attackers were killed. The Tet Offensive's other coordinated attacks by 60,000 enemy troops against South Vietnamese targets were repelled. Don Oberdorfer, writing for Smithsonian Magazine, observed that Tet was a military disaster for the North, yet it was "a battlefield defeat that ultimately yielded victory" for the enemy. In part, that was because the erroneous reports about the embassy assault were searing and humiliating to Americans, and no subsequent military victories during Tet could dislodge the powerful notion that the war effort was doomed.

MYTH NO. 5 -- South Vietnamese soldiers were unwilling and unable to fight. Some contend that the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), the South's army, was not up to the job. Andy Walpole,

formerly of Liverpool John Moores University, wrote that "they were unwilling to engage in combat with their guerrilla counterparts and were more interested in surviving than winning." Harry F. Noyes, who served in Vietnam, complained about this widespread belief: "Everybody 'knows' they were incompetent, treacherous and cowardly."

But those who fought alongside the ARVN tell a different story. Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, an adviser to the South Vietnamese Airborne Division, bemoaned that "the sacrifice and valor and commitment of the South Vietnamese Army largely disappeared from the American political and media consciousness." He wrote of the tenacious fighting spirit of those troops, particularly at the Battle of Dong Ha, where they were charged with supporting American Marine units. "In combat, the South Vietnamese refused to leave their own dead or wounded troopers on the field or abandon a weapon," he recalled.

South Vietnamese forces also fought off the surprise communist assaults on Saigon and elsewhere during the Tet Offensive of 1968. In August and September of that year, according to Gen. Creighton Abrams, commander of U.S. military operations from 1968 to 1972, "the ARVN killed more enemy than all other allied forces combined, and suffered more KIA, both actual and on the basis of the ratio of enemy to friendly killed in action," because it received less air and other tactical support than U.S. forces. In March 1972, during the Easter Offensive, South Vietnamese forces, with American air support, also prevailed against a conventional enemy invasion consisting of 20 divisions. And in April 1975, the 18th Division defending Xuan Loc "held off massive attacks by an entire North Vietnamese Army corps," according to one report. In the end, those soldiers had even more at stake than the Americans did.

[Source: Together We Served Newsletter | Lan Cao | November 2017 ++]

Alaska Territorial Guard ► Natives Defended Their Territory in WWII

When the Japanese raided and occupied parts of Alaska during World War II, the Army called on native Alaskans to defend the northern territory. Alaskans voluntarily joined the territorial guard to defend their homeland against a potential invasion from Japanese forces. Given no pay, more than 6,300 Alaskans from 12 to 80 years old signed on to be sentries for the newly created Alaska Territorial Guard.



Kwethluk, Alaska - Retired Sgt. 1st Class Sam Jackson, who served in the Alaska Territorial Guard during World War II

Retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Sam Jackson, who still lives in Kwethluk, a small village in southwestern Alaska, was one of them. Now 93, the veteran recalled when Maj. Marvin Marston, an Army officer who formed the first units of the ATG reserve component, asked him and others to join the cause. "They called us

the ears for the Army and eyes for the Army," said Jackson, who served in the Alaska National Guard after the territorial guard disbanded in 1947. When Japanese forces invaded some of the Aleutian Islands in June 1942, Marston was tasked to travel to Alaska and recruit members for the new Army mission. He trekked across the tundra, often by dog sled in the winter, to spread the word and round up troops for the Alaska Territorial Guard, who were known as Eskimo Scouts.

Once enlisted, the Alaskan natives trained on Army tactics so they could defend the territory from an attack, if needed. They even made decoys using barrels and logs to resemble cannons to Japanese aircraft flying overhead. At night, a blackout was practiced throughout the villages to deter an enemy invasion. As a young man, Jackson said he helped keep the windows of buildings covered so no light could be seen from the outside. "They told us to follow your training and it will save your life," Jackson said of his Army instructors, who supplied the scouts with a rifle, uniform, snowshoes and other gear. "That's how we trained."

Years later, Marston wrote in his book, "Men of the Tundra: Alaska Eskimos at War," that the scouts proved helpful in safeguarding terrain around the lend-lease air route, which the United States used to supply aircraft to its Russian ally. They also secured Platinum, an Alaskan village south of Kwethluk, which was the only source of the strategic metal with the same name in the Western Hemisphere. In addition, he wrote, they stockpiled survival caches along vital transportation routes.

In 2010, the scouts were finally recognized for their efforts and given veteran status when President George W. Bush signed a bill into law that ordered the defense secretary to issue honorable discharges to the Alaskan natives. Alaska's Department of Military and Veterans Affairs then set up a task force to notify and assist former members, their families and dependents on how to obtain the benefits entitled to them. "Our goal is to locate 100 percent of the ATG members, begin correcting the oversight of the past, and allow future generations access to their ancestors' service records," according to the department's website. Soon after, federal funds were allocated to ensure the actions of the thousands of Alaskans who volunteered to protect the territory would not be forgotten.

As statues and plaques began to be unveiled across the state, a group of U.S. military veterans in nearby Bethel used the funds to build a memorial park to enshrine the ATG veterans in 2012. "They volunteered, some of them as young as 12, to guard the people of western Alaska. There was no military presence here," said Stanley Rodgers, a former Army sergeant who served in the Vietnam War. Born and raised in Bethel, Rodgers said he is related to probably 70 former ATG members. Those relatives, he said, would tell him stories of Japanese ships off the Bering Sea coast or of spies who had come ashore. "Whatever they saw that was not appropriate, they would report it," he added. "Everyone was a sentry." If the Japanese had invaded, he said, they would have faced heavy resistance in a harsh land. "They would have never made it," he said. "The ATG would have beaten them back."

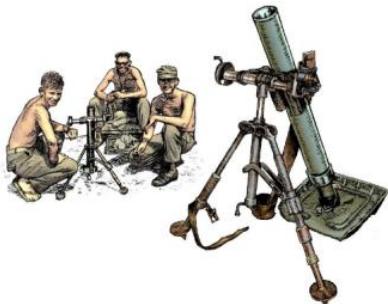
As he stood next to a statue of an Eskimo Scout overlooking a wall of plaques inside the memorial park, Rodgers said the place is not only to honor what the scouts, like Jackson, did. It can also serve as a reminder of selfless service for generations to come, he noted. "It will be here forever," he said. "The people may be gone, but the names will still be there." For additional info the ATG and the culture of the native Alaskans which it was composed of go to:

- https://cdn.dvidshub.net/media/video/1705/DOD_104410961/DOD_104410961-640x480-922k.mp4; and
- https://cdn.dvidshub.net/media/video/1705/DOD_104411005/DOD_104411005-640x480-922k.mp4

[Source: Army News Service | Sean Kimmons | November 16, 2017 ++]

M19 60mm Mortar ► Favored By Marines in Nam

The 1st and 2nd platoons of B Company, 9th Marine Regiment, attacked North Vietnamese Army positions on Hill 861 near Khe Sanh on April 24, 1967, and came under heavy fire as they moved into position. The Americans responded by deploying the company's 60 mm mortars, but the difficult terrain complicated mortar placement. Lance Cpl. Dana Darnell placed his helmet between his legs and set his mortar tube's base upon it, using his hands to steady the weapon. The Marine maintained a steady rain of fire on the enemy throughout the engagement, pausing only to gather more ammunition. Darnell, killed in action two days later, was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions on April 24. His M19 60 mm mortar had been designed to replace the M2 mortar of World War II and fired the same ammunition. Rejected by the Army, the M19 was favored by the Marines — even though 10 pounds heavier, shorter-ranged and less accurate than the M2 — because it had sights and a manual trigger that enabled the crew to aim it at a specific target for "direct fire" and not just lob shells at an unseen target using "indirect fire."



The M19 had an M5 rectangular base plate and a bipod that supported the muzzle-loaded smoothbore barrel. Crewmen could anchor the mortar tube in a helmet if a base plate wasn't available. The sight was an M4 collimator sight, which allows the viewer to see an illuminated aiming point aligned with the weapon, regardless of eye position. The mortar was fired manually using a "firing lever" trigger for direct fire at low angles of elevation. When the tube elevation exceeded 60 degrees, the projectile was dropped into the tube and fired when its ignition cartridge struck the firing pin. Range was set by adjusting the tube's elevation and clipping "booster charges" to the tail fin — four for maximum range. The M19 was a company-level weapon for U.S. and South Vietnamese marines, filling the indirect-fire gap between the M79 grenade launcher and the 81 mm battalion-level mortars. Never as popular as its M2 predecessor, the M19 gave way to the M224 60 mm mortar by the early 1980s. [Source: Military.com | Carl O. Schuster | November 23, 2017 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 15 DEC

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 December**". [Source: This Day in History [*****](http://www.history.com>this-day-in-history | November 2017 ++]</p></div><div data-bbox=)

Abandoned Military Bases [12] ► RAF Stenigot, England



The remains of RAF Stenigot, a World War II radar station located at Stenigot in Lincolnshire, England. It provided long range early warning detection during World War II, and was later upgraded in 1959 to a communications relay site. Decommissioned in the late 1980s, most of the site was demolished by 1996.

Medal of Honor Citations ► Robert E. Galer | WWII & Korea



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

Robert Edward Galer

Rank and organization: Major, U.S. Marine Corps, Marine Fighter Sqdn. 224

Place and date: Solomon Islands Area, August-September 1942

Entered service: June 1936 Seattle, Washington

Born: Seattle, Washington, 24 October 1913

Citation

For conspicuous heroism and courage above and beyond the call of duty as leader of a marine fighter squadron in aerial combat with enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands area. Leading his squadron repeatedly in daring and aggressive raids against Japanese aerial forces, vastly superior in numbers, Maj. Galer availed himself of every favorable attack opportunity, individually shooting down 11 enemy bomber and fighter aircraft over a period of 29 days. Though suffering the extreme physical strain attendant upon protracted fighter operations at an altitude above 25,000 feet, the squadron under his zealous and inspiring

leadership shot down a total of 27 Japanese planes. His superb airmanship, his outstanding skill and personal valor reflect great credit upon Maj. Galer's gallant fighting spirit and upon the U.S. Naval Service.



Robert Edward Galer, a combat aviator and Medal of Honor recipient for heroism in aerial combat during the Guadalcanal campaign of World War II, was born in Seattle, Washington, 24 October 1913. He attended the University of Washington and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in commercial engineering in 1935, at which time he began elimination flight training at the Naval Reserve Aviation Base, Seattle. In June 1936, he began his Aviation Cadet flight training at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps, 1 July 1936.

Following his designation as a Naval Aviator in April 1937, he was transferred to the 1st Marine Brigade in Quantico, Virginia, for duty with Aircraft One. In July of the same year he was assigned to a course of instruction at the Basic School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Following the completion of his studies in June 1938, he was ordered to the New York Navy Yard, but shortly thereafter was transferred to the Virgin Islands where he served with Marine Scouting Squadron-3 in St. Thomas. He was advanced to first lieutenant in July 1939.

First Lieutenant Galer was returned to the United States in June 1940 and in July reported to the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing in San Diego, California. In January 1941, he was ordered to Hawaii and was appointed a captain in March 1941. He was serving at the Marine Corps Air Station, Ewa, Oahu, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941.

In May 1942, he assumed command of Marine Fighting Squadron-224. It was while in command of this unit that he received the Nation's highest award, shortly after his promotion to the rank of major. He also received the British Distinguished Flying Cross for the same act of heroism.

Following the presentation of the Medal of Honor by President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House on 24 March 1943, Maj Galer was ordered to Marine Forces, Air, West Coast, Miramar, California, where he served as Assistant Operations Officer. Shortly after advancement to the rank of lieutenant colonel in November 1943, he was ordered to return to the Hawaiian Islands, where he became Chief of Staff, Marine Air, Hawaiian Area.

In May 1944, LtCol Galer was named as Operations Officer, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing. He served as an observer during the Palau Islands campaign while on temporary duty from the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing. His next assignment found him as Training Officer of Provisional Air Support Command, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.

He again returned to the United States in June 1945 and reported to the Marine Barracks, Naval Air Training Base, Corpus Christi, Texas, in July as officer in charge of a cadet regiment. He remained in that capacity until August 1947, at which time he was assigned as a student at the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia.

In June 1948, he reported to Marine Aircraft Wing, at the Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina, where he served as Operations and Training Officer. He joined Headquarters Squadron-2 at that station in April 1949 and was transferred 26 April 1950 to the Naval Air Station, San Diego, California. He served there as Marine Planning Officer and, later, as Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans, on the Staff of the Commander, Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet. During his assignment, he was promoted to colonel in March 1951.

Colonel Galer sailed in March 1952 for Korea, where he saw duty as Assistant Chief of Staff, G-4 (Supply), of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing until the following May. He was then named Commanding Officer of Marine Aircraft Group 12, and, for extraordinary achievement on 11 July 1952 was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of a second Distinguished Flying Cross. According to the citation accompanying this medal, he "led a maximum effort strike of Marine attack aircraft against a heavily defended industrial area in the North Korean capitol city of Pyongyang."

Colonel Galer was also awarded the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" for his service in Korea from 24 May to 5 August 1952, when he was shot down behind enemy lines by anti-aircraft fire and later rescued by helicopter.

After a period of hospitalization, he returned to duty at El Toro, California, in October 1952, as Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1 (Personnel), and later, G-3 (Operations), of Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. He was enrolled as a student in the Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama, in July 1953. Upon graduation from the College the following June, he was transferred to Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., where he became Assistant Director, Guided Missiles Division, Bureau of Aeronautics, Department of the Navy. He served in that capacity until January 1956, when he became Acting Director. The following June he was awarded a Masters Degree in Engineering Administration from the George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

For exceptionally meritorious service in combat, he was advanced to brigadier general upon his retirement, 31 July 1957. Brigadier General Galer passed away on 27 June 2005 in Dallas, Texas.

[Source: <https://history.army.mil/moh/wwII-g-1.html> | November 2017 ++]

* Health Care *



Elderly Parent Care Update 01 ► When It's Time to Leave Home

The decision about whether your parents should move is often tricky and emotional. Each family will have its own reasons for wanting (or not wanting) to take such a step. One family may decide a move is right

because the parents can no longer manage the home. For another family, the need for hands-on care in a long-term care facility motivates a change. In the case of long-distance caregivers, the notion of moving can seem like a solution to the problem of not being close enough to help. For some caregivers, moving a sick or aging parent to their own home or community can be a viable alternative. Some families decide to have an adult child move back to the parent's home to become the primary caregiver.

Keep in mind that leaving a home, community, and familiar medical care can be very disruptive and difficult for the older parent, especially if they are not enthusiastic about the change. You might first want to explore what services are available in your parents' community to help them in their home—including home health care, housekeeping, personal care, and transportation services. Older adults and their families have some options when it comes to deciding where to live, but these choices can be limited by factors such as illness, ability to perform activities of daily living (for example, eating, bathing, using the toilet, dressing, walking, and moving from bed to chair), financial resources, and personal preferences.

Making a decision that is best for your parent—and making that decision with your parent—can be difficult. Try to learn as much as you can about possible housing options. Older adults, or those with serious illness, can choose to:

- Stay in their own home or move to a smaller one
- Move to an assisted-living facility
- Move to a long-term care facility
- Move in with a family member

Some families find a conference call is a good way to talk together about the pros and cons of each option. The goal of this call is to come up with a plan that works for everyone, especially your parent. If the decision involves a move for your mom or dad, you could, even from a distance, offer to arrange tours of some places for their consideration. Experts advise families to think carefully before moving an aging adult into an adult child's home. There are a lot of questions to consider, for example:

Is there space in your home?

- Is someone around to help the older person during the whole day?
- What are your parents able to do for themselves?
- What personal care are you willing and able to provide—moving your parent from a chair to a bed or toilet, changing adult diapers, or using a feeding tube, for example?
- What kinds of home care services are available in your community?
- What kind of specialized medical care is available nearby?

For More Information About Housing Options refer to:

- Eldercare Locator -- Tel: 1(800) 677-1116 or www.eldercare.gov
- National Clearinghouse for Long Term Care Information -- Tel: 1(202) 619-0724 or aclinfo@acl.hhs.gov or www.longtermcare.gov.
- Administration for Community Living -- 1(202) 401-4634, aclinfo@acl.hhs.gov, or www.acl.gov.

[Source: National Institute on Aging | November 28, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Changes 2018 Update 10 ► Pregnancy/Birthing User Fee Increases

The cost of having a baby will skyrocket more than twenty-fold for many military families next year. A flat-rate maternity fee system currently used by all non-Tricare Prime active-duty and Guard or Reserve beneficiaries will be eliminated in 2018, causing the cost of childbirth to skyrocket from about \$25 to about

\$535 -- more than 2,000 percent -- for many users. The increase comes with a series of other changes to the Tricare system scheduled to take effect 1 JAN. On that date, Tricare Standard and Extra will be known as Tricare Select, while the system's three regions consolidate into two. Simultaneously, all non-Prime users except those on Tricare for Life will move to a system that charges flat fees for in-network specialty and primary care after annual deductibles are met rather than the "percentage of allowable charges" system used today.

Currently, assuming the deductible is reached, prenatal office visits are free while pregnancy and childbirth at in-patient Tricare network hospitals carry a flat "global" fee of \$25 for the first day and \$18.60 for each subsequent day for active-duty users on Tricare Standard or Extra as well as Guard or Reserve users on Tricare Reserve Select. But that flat-fee system will be eliminated starting 1 JAN, Tricare officials confirmed 28 NOV. Instead, pregnant active-duty family members who plan to deliver in a traditional in-patient hospital on what will be known as Tricare Select as well as Guard and Reserve Tricare users will pay \$34 per prenatal visit after meeting the annual deductible, plus the \$25 minimum hospital fee. That translates into about \$535 for a pregnant woman on Tricare Select who has already met her annual deductible: She'll pay about \$510 in prenatal visits -- 15 outpatient obstetrician appointments at \$34 per visit -- plus \$25 for the first day of delivery at the hospital. (She will also pay an additional \$18.60 for each subsequent day.)

Those out-of-pocket fees will only end if the beneficiary hits her family's annual fee ceiling of \$1,000 for active-duty users, and \$3,000 for those on Reserve Select, known as the "catastrophic cap," officials said. And those fees will differ for Tricare beneficiaries whose service member joins after Jan. 1. Instead, those users will instead pay \$25 per in-network prenatal specialist visit, and \$60 for hospital delivery admission and stay thanks to a system order by Congress in 2016. Users who want to deliver at a non-hospital birthing center or at home will face yet another fee structure, with costs instead based on the \$34 or \$25 specialists outpatient visit cost, depending on when the sponsor joined the military, and "ambulatory surgery" fees. Those fees are based on a percentage of allowable charges for currently serving troops, much like the fee system used today, but are a flat rate of \$25 for those who join after January 1.

Other changes coming to the system after the new year include an expansion to no-cost annual preventative care for Tricare Select and Reserve Select users and a new policy that will block users from switching between Tricare plans outside of the annual open enrollment period or without a "qualifying life event" starting in 2019. Officials with the National Military Family Association (NMFA) said the changes are disappointing. Officials with the organization had hoped the upcoming changes would improve care for users. Instead, the changes could be harmful, they said.

The new Tricare Select maternity care copays are yet another unpleasant surprise for military families," said Karen Ruedisueli, a deputy director of government relations for the organization. "This is a huge cost increase compared to Tricare Standard and it's more complicated than the current single global fee for prenatal care and delivery to boot. ... We were assured Tricare Select would be an improvement but so far all we've seen is higher out of pocket costs. It has been very disappointing to say the least." [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | November 28, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Changes 2018 Update 11 ► Is Your Doctor Still In the Tricare Network?

Military families can now check to see whether they'll be able to keep their current doctors and other health care providers after the change in Tricare contractors on 1 JAN. New 2018 network provider directories for Tricare East and for Tricare West are up and running at:

- East: <https://www.humanamilitary.com/provider-locator>

- West: <https://tricare-west.com/content/hnfs/home/tw/bene/provider-directory.html>

As of Jan. 1, Tricare in the U.S. will shrink from three regions to two, as Tricare North and Tricare South combine to become Tricare East. The contractor for Tricare East will be Humana Military, which currently has the contract for Tricare South. The geographic area of Tricare West won't change, but the contractor will: Health Net Federal Services takes over as of 1 JAN.

These moves have their pros and cons, family advocates say. One positive: Fewer regions could mean less of a chance you'll have to switch regions when you make a permanent change-of-station move. On the other hand, past changes in Tricare contractors have meant changes in health care providers. That's why families should check the new directory for their region to make sure their provider is still in the network. If you choose a health care provider that is not in the Tricare network, you may incur higher out-of-pocket costs. If an ongoing treatment required pre-approval, families should find out whether the new contractor accepts that authorization from the previous contractor. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | November 29, 2017 ++]

Liver Flukes ► Cholangiocarcinoma | Vietnam's Silent Bullet

A half a century after serving in Vietnam, hundreds of veterans have a new reason to believe they may be dying from a silent bullet — test results show some men may have been infected by a slow-killing parasite while fighting in the jungles of Southeast Asia. The Department of Veterans Affairs this spring commissioned a small pilot study to look into the link between liver flukes ingested through raw or undercooked fish and a rare bile duct cancer. It can take decades for symptoms to appear. By then, patients are often in tremendous pain, with just a few months to live.



This Sept. 7, 2016, photo shows a display of preserved liver fluke parasites at the Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand.

Of the 50 blood samples submitted, more than 20 percent came back positive or bordering positive for liver fluke antibodies, said Sung-Tae Hong, the tropical medicine specialist who carried out the tests at Seoul National University in South Korea. "It was surprising," he said, stressing the preliminary results could include false positives and that the research is ongoing. Northport VA Medical Center spokesman Christopher Goodman confirmed the New York facility collected the samples and sent them to the lab. He would not comment on the findings, but said everyone who tested positive was notified.

Gerry Wiggins, who served in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969, has already lost friends to the disease. He was among those who got the call. "I was in a state of shock," he said. "I didn't think it would be me." The 69-year-old, who lives in Port Jefferson Station, New York, didn't have any symptoms when he agreed to take part in the study, but hoped his participation could help save lives. He immediately scheduled further tests, discovering he had two cysts on his bile duct, which had the potential to develop into the cancer, known as cholangiocarcinoma. They have since been removed and — for now — he's doing well.

Though rarely found in Americans, the parasites infect an estimated 25 million people worldwide. Endemic in the rivers of Vietnam, the worms can easily be wiped out with a handful of pills early on, but left untreated they can live for decades without making their hosts sick. Over time, swelling and inflammation of the bile duct can lead to cancer. Jaundice, itchy skin, weight loss and other symptoms appear only when the disease is in its final stages.



This combination of file photos provided by their families shows some of the hundreds of U.S. veterans of the Vietnam War who suffered from cholangiocarcinoma

The VA study, along with a call by Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer of New York for broader research into liver flukes and cancer-stricken veterans, began after The Associated Press raised the issue in a story last year. The reporting found that about 700 veterans with cholangiocarcinoma have been seen by the VA in the past 15 years. Less than half of them submitted claims for service-related benefits, mostly because they were not aware of a possible connection to Vietnam. The VA rejected 80 percent of the requests, but decisions often appeared to be haphazard or contradictory, depending on what desks they landed on, the AP found.

The numbers of claims submitted reached 60 in 2017, up from 41 last year. Nearly three out of four of those cases were also denied, even though the government posted a warning on its website this year saying veterans who ate raw or undercooked freshwater fish while in Vietnam might be at risk. It stopped short of urging them to get ultrasounds or other tests, saying there was currently no evidence the vets had higher infection rates than the general population. "We are taking this seriously," said Curt Cashour, a spokesman with the Department of Veterans Affairs. "But until further research, a recommendation cannot be made either way."

Veteran Mike Baughman, 65, who was featured in the previous AP article, said his claim was granted early this year after being denied three times. He said the approval came right after his doctor wrote a letter saying his bile duct cancer was "more likely than not" caused by liver flukes from the uncooked fish he and his unit in Vietnam ate when they ran out of rations in the jungle. He now gets about \$3,100 a month and says he's relieved to know his wife will continue to receive benefits after he dies. But he remains angry that other veterans' last days are consumed by fighting the same government they went to war for as young men. "In the best of all worlds, if you came down with cholangiocarcinoma, just like Agent Orange, you automatically were in," he said, referring to benefits granted to veterans exposed to the toxic defoliant sprayed in Vietnam. "You didn't have to go fighting."

Baughman, who is thin and weak, wishes the VA would do more to raise awareness about liver flukes and to encourage Vietnam veterans to get an ultrasound that can detect inflammation. "Personally, I got what I needed, but if you look at the bigger picture with all these other veterans, they don't know what necessarily to do," he said. "None of them have even heard of it before. A lot of them give me that blank stare like, 'You've got what?'" [Source: Associated Press | Margie Mason & Robin McDowell | November 22, 2017 ++]

Liver Disease Update 01 ► Symptoms

There are over 100 types of liver diseases that can be caused by a multitude of factors ranging from viral infections to genetic disorders. The liver is the largest organ in the body and it plays a vital role in our body's ability to detox, digest food, and regulate energy. If the liver is not properly functioning, it means that our body's ability to eliminate waste is compromised which can lead to many health problems, liver failure, and, in extreme cases, death. Many liver diseases do not show symptoms for years, so keeping a close eye on your body's health may reveal some early signs that indicate your liver is not functioning properly. Being aware of these 10 early signs and symptoms can help you catch a liver disease before it progresses.

1) Abdominal pain -- The liver sits on the right side of your body just below your rib cage. Pain in this sector may be related to your liver, although it can easily be confused with kidney pain, back pain, or other abdominal pain because of its location in the body. Liver pain will be felt in the upper right quadrant of the abdominal area and may show itself as a dull backache, sharp or severe pain, or simply as a general tenderness in this region. While abdominal pain in the upper right quadrant does not necessarily mean you have a liver disease, any persistent pain or discomfort that is out of the ordinary should be examined by a medical doctor.

2) Jaundice -- Jaundice is common for someone having problems with their liver because of elevated levels of bilirubin in the blood. Bilirubin has a yellowish pigment and normally flows through the liver where it is then moved through the digestive tract and eliminated. When the yellow pigment is not removed, it is circulated throughout the body and it is commonly indicative of some type of liver disease. There is no mistaking the effects of jaundice--elevated bilirubin in the blood causes people with jaundice to have yellow tinted skin and eyes. People with jaundice may also experience darker urine and lighter colored stools.

3) Bruising or bleeding -- If the liver is damaged and is not producing enough proteins that cause the blood to clot, the body can bruise easily and excessive bleeding may occur. People with a liver disease may find that they bruise often, bleed more profusely when injured, or suffer from regular nosebleeds.

4) Fatigue and weakness -- When the liver is compromised, toxins are not eliminated as efficiently. This leads to higher levels of toxins in the blood stream which inhibits the blood's ability to carry oxygen and assist with the production of energy. Healthy livers produce healthy, clean blood which means more oxygen is circulating throughout the body. Fatigue that is out of the ordinary can be indicative of many illnesses with liver disease being just one. If you find yourself experiencing more fatigue than is normal, it is important to consult with your medical doctor.

5) Nausea, vomiting, and other digestive issues -- Nausea and vomiting are two symptoms that can be indicative of a wide range of health problems. Sometimes it is as simple as eating a food that did not agree with you while other prognoses are more severe. Nausea, vomiting, and other digestive issues such as acid reflux can be a sign of liver disease. Digestive issues that persist or are recurring (obviously not a bout of the stomach flu or food poisoning), should be explored.

6) Itching -- Itching may seem like a strange symptom to come about from liver problems, but it is quite common. Itching, like other signs and symptoms of liver disease, can be caused when there is a build up of toxins in the body. While many people dismiss itching skin to dryness, allergies, or other skin irritation, excessive or persistent itching may be a sign that your liver is not functioning properly. Itching that relates to liver problems will be especially hard to relieve and it can lead to thick, flaky skin. Other liver related skin problems include reddening of the hands and feet and, in some people, veins will begin to show through the skin.

7) Loss of appetite -- A loss of appetite is a symptom that should never be overlooked. While loss of appetite can be caused by many different illnesses or conditions, liver disease should not be ruled out as a cause. Loss of appetite often appears at a later stage of liver disease, so if one has loss of appetite coupled with other symptoms of a poorly functioning liver, it should be an immediate concern.

8) Swollen abdomen -- A swollen abdomen, known as ascites, is usually caused by some form of liver disease. When you suffer from ascites, you can become very bloated around your waistline and have a feeling of fullness. If liver disease is present, there can also be swelling in the lower legs down to the feet which is a result of fluid retention.

9) Confusion, forgetfulness, or other types of personality changes -- A decrease in brain function in someone suffering from liver disease is called hepatic encephalopathy and it occurs because of a buildup of toxins in the blood which negatively affects the brain. If you experience these symptoms for an unknown reason, it could be a sign that your liver is not properly functioning.

10) A general unwell feeling -- Because the liver plays such a vital role in our body's ability to rid itself of toxins, a build up of toxins due to a poorly functioning liver can effect our bodies in many ways. This toxic buildup can show itself through the symptoms listed above, but can also cause more vague feelings of being unwell. If you have strange symptoms or feel under the weather for no apparent reason for an unusual length of time, it could be a sign of a poorly functioning liver.

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Unfortunately, many liver diseases can go undetected and do not show symptoms for many years. Because of this, it is important to take proper care of your liver and be aware of any abnormal changes to your body. Regular check ups with your doctor, avoiding excessive alcohol consumption, eating a well balanced diet, and regular exercise will help to keep your body and your liver healthy.

A report from Coffee and Health, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to research on the health benefits of coffee, has suggested that overall coffee might reduce the risk of liver diseases as much as 70 percent, based on research into the relationship between coffee and liver cancer, cirrhosis and chronic liver disease. It adds that moderate coffee intake, which is defined as being between three and five cups a day, might reduce the risk of liver damage and cancer. That reduced risk is measured as 40 percent for cancer, depending on how much coffee is consumed, and between 25 percent and 70 percent for cirrhosis. Cirrhosis is when scar tissue slowly takes over the liver, replacing healthy tissue and blocking blood flow in that organ and impeding function, the U.S. National Institutes of Health explain.

According to Coffee and Health, the new report stemmed from a roundtable with liver experts at London's Royal Society of Medicine. "Liver disease is a silent killer as often there are no symptoms until it's too late," Judi Rhys, chief executive of the British Liver Trust, said in the organization statement. "Coffee is something that is easily accessible to everyone and regularly drinking it — filtered, instant or espresso — may make a difference in preventing and, in some cases, slowing down the progression of liver disease. It is an easy lifestyle choice to make."

[Source: www.informedhealth.org | November 1, 2017 ++]

History Of Medicine ► Colic



A woman suffering the pain of colic, illustrated by demons tugging on a rope wound around her stomach.
Colored etching by Frederick Marryat after George Cruikshank.

TRICARE Podcast 424 ► TRICARE Select

On January 1, 2018, TRICARE Select will replace TRICARE Standard and TRICARE Extra. As a result, beneficiaries will notice improved coverage for preventive services with TRICARE Select. Preventive care helps you take command of your health and manage potential issues before you experience symptoms. This type of health care allows you to address health problems before they become life threatening. Examples of TRICARE-covered preventive services include cancer screenings and vaccines, in addition to well-woman and well-child exams.

If you currently use TRICARE Standard and TRICARE Extra, you do not pay anything for certain free preventive services. But for all other preventive services, beneficiaries pay between 15–25 percent after the yearly deductible, depending on the plan and beneficiary category. With TRICARE Select, beneficiaries won't pay any out-of-pocket expenses for covered preventive services if they are provided by a network provider.

The additional, no-cost preventive services beneficiaries can receive under TRICARE Prime that will be covered under TRICARE Select beginning in 2018 include:

- **One Health Promotion and Disease Prevention examination:** This is covered annually for beneficiaries age 6 and older. In 2018, it will no longer be a requirement that this exam will only be covered when performed with a covered cancer screening or immunization if you see a network provider.
- **Lung cancer screening:** This is covered annually for persons ages 55-80 with a 30 pack-per-year history of smoking who are currently smoking or have quit within the past 15 years. Screening

should be discontinued once the individual has not smoked for 15 years or develops a health problem significantly limiting life expectancy or ability or willingness to undergo curative lung surgery.

- **Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm:** This is a one-time screening using ultrasonography for men ages 65-75 who have ever smoked.

A new preventive service added this year for both TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select is aimed at adults with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 kg/m² or higher and children or adolescents with a BMI value greater than the 95th percentile. Intensive, multi-component behavioral interventions to promote sustained weight loss are covered when rendered by a TRICARE-authorized provider. Types of behavioral management interventions include diet and physical activity guidance, strategies to promote and maintain lifestyle changes and more. This addition is a covered benefit regardless of whether the beneficiary uses a network or non-network provider, though costs are typically lower with a network provider.

Are you ready for the changes coming to TRICARE in January? Learn more about upcoming changes and sign up for email alerts. This can be accomplished by going to the USMHSTMA site at https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USMHSTMA/subscriber/new?topic_id=USMHSTMA_336.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | November 16, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 425 ► Healthy Eating | Holiday Stress | Holiday Fitness

Healthy Eating -- The holidays are here, and with it the temptations that come with everyone's favorite dishes. As we gather with friends and family to celebrate, we should be mindful of portion sizes. According to the National Institutes of Health, a portion is an amount of food you choose to eat for a meal or snack, while a serving is a measured amount of food or drink, such as one slice of bread. This means a single portion can actually consist of multiple servings. Over the past 20 years average portion sizes have grown so much that sometimes there's enough food for two or three people on one plate. You can practice portion control in a number of ways. When eating out you can split an entrée with a friend or eat half of the food on your plate and take the rest home. When eating at home, serve food on individual plates instead of putting the serving dishes on the table to discourage overeating. When you eat in front of the TV, put the amount you plan to eat in a bowl or container instead of eating directly from the package. For more information on portion control and nutrition, check out www.choosemyplate.gov and visit www.TRICARE.mil/LiveWell for tips and resources to help you live a healthier life.

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Managing Holiday Stress -- Holidays are a time when families come together to eat good food and spend quality time together. They're also a time of additional stress—whether you're worried about money, hosting the largest family get-together of the year, or travelling long distances. The American Psychological Association has helpful tips to help you stay mentally healthy through the holidays. First, you can't do everything, and you'll benefit from taking some time for self-care. Your break can be as simple as taking a walk, going for a massage, or taking time to read a new book. Make sure to get a full night's rest as often as possible. Slowing down will actually give you more energy. No holiday celebration is perfect, so make sure your expectations are realistic. A burned dinner can be an opportunity to show your resilience and

flexibility. Mistakes are often what makes memories! Remember that holidays are special because you're with your loved ones. You don't need elaborate decoration or gourmet food to create a cherished memory.

If you are feeling anxious, talk to your friends and family. Open and honest communication will help you find a solution for your stress. Also consider seeing a psychologist or other trained mental health professional if holiday stress is getting you down. Learn more about mental health coverage at www.TRICARE.mil/mentalhealth. As always, if you have a mental health emergency, go to the nearest emergency room or call 911.

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Holiday Fitness -- The holidays sometimes seem like a long tempting food-fest designed to make you gain weight, but it is possible to maintain your weight over the holidays.

- First, weigh yourself in the morning one to two times a week during the holidays and try jumpstarting your metabolism by getting up earlier than normal to exercise.
- Next, spend your calories wisely. Eat special holiday foods in moderation and skip junk food that you can eat any time of the year. Make sure to eat throughout the day, instead of starving yourself during the day and binge eating at night.
- You can also intensify your workouts during the holidays. When time is scarce, bumping up the intensity allows you to work out more intensely for shorter bursts. If you need more time for shopping, find ways to be more active, such as by taking the stairs, parking further from the stores and walking faster.
- Finally, don't keep leftover holiday food. If it's not in your house, then it won't tempt you and your family. Instead, keep healthy snacks like fresh fruit or nuts readily available so that you will reach for them first.

Learn more about healthy living at www.TRICARE.mil/healthyliving.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | November 22, 2017 ++]

* Finances *



GI Bill Transferability Update 02 ► Payback Required if 4-yr Term Not Met

In 2012, Sgt. Desmond Watson's daughter Jordan Bigbee turned 17, and he transferred his Post-9/11 GI Bill to her in the hopes that she'd never have to shoulder a student debt burden. "When you get the news that

someone can pay for your entire college, you're not worrying about anything else," Bigbee told Jacksonville, Florida-based First Coast News, adding that "she felt safe." But the feeling didn't last. Five years later, Bigbee is being forced to repay \$50,000 to the Department of Veterans Affairs, according to First Coast News, which broke the story 13 NOV.

Service members can transfer their GI Bill benefits to a dependent once they've served at least six years in the military, and after they agree to serve a further four years, according to the Department of Veteran Affairs. But the Army in 2015 cut 40,000 troops from the service, and Watson, in his 17th year of service, was one of them. He was involuntarily separated from the Army, just six months shy of completing the four years he'd incurred for transferring his GI Bill to Bigbee, according to First Coast News. As a result, the VA determined that the money had to be paid back. After attending Santa Monica Community College in California for three years on the GI Bill, Bigbee has to recoup the tuition and send it to the VA — \$50,000 now, First Coast News reports.

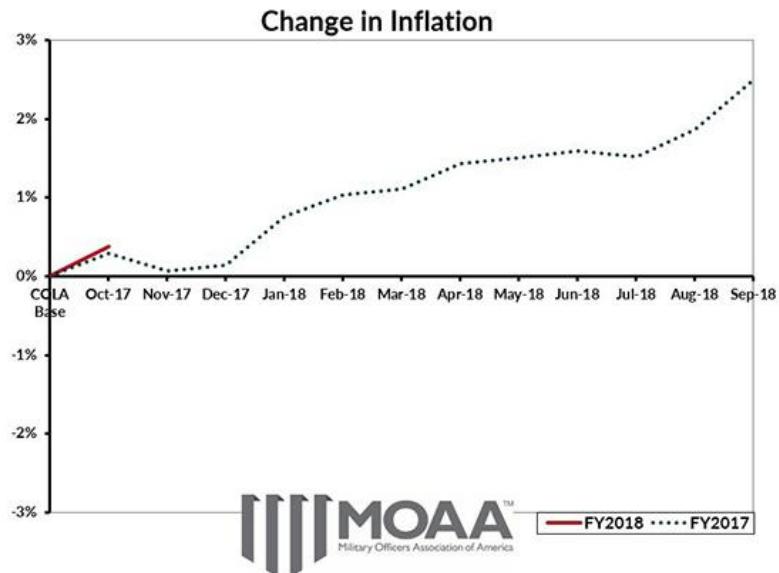
"Once you sign that transfer over, you've got to serve four years no matter what," John Karim, the American Legion's assistant director for Veterans Employment & Education Division told Task & Purpose. If a service member fails to complete that obligation, "it's as if the entire eligibility was wiped out and [the VA] will have to collect on everything that had already been used. They'll recoup the benefits and take them all away if you don't match those four years." A beneficiary or dependent having to repay the VA for an overpayment isn't an entirely new affair. In 2015, the Government Accountability Office reported that in fiscal year 2014, one in four GI Bill beneficiaries was hit with a bill for overpayments — \$416 million owed by beneficiaries attending nearly 6,000 schools. [Source: Task & Purpose | James Clark | November 14, 2017 ++]

Retiree Annual COLAs Update 04 ► FY 2017 | CPI Impact

The final COLA for the 2017 fiscal year is 2 percent. This means retired pay will be increased by 2 percent starting in January of 2018. In other words, you will see a \$20 increase for every \$1000 of retired pay received. The final COLA is determined by comparing the average CPI of the final three months of the fiscal year to the same quarter of the prior year.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is a measure of the average change over time in the prices paid by urban consumers from around the country for a market basket of consumer goods and services. The market basket includes the prices of food, clothing, shelter, and fuels, transportation fares, charges for doctors' dentists' services, drugs, and other things people buy for day-to-day living. Prices are collected from about 50,000 housing units and approximately 23,000 retail establishments - department stores, supermarkets, hospitals, filling stations, and other types of stores. All taxes directly associated with the purchase and use of items are included the index. Prices of most goods and services are obtained by personal visits or telephone calls of the Bureau of Labor and Statistics' (BLS) trained representatives.

Collectively, the CPI is also used to adjust annuities for other federal retirees, survivors, and Social Security recipients. As noted in the chart above the October CPI for FY 2018 is 240.573, 0.4 percent above the FY 2017 COLA baseline. The CPI for November 2017 is scheduled to be released on December 13, 2017. To learn more about the CPI go to the Bureau of Labor Statistics "Frequently Asked Questions" at <https://www.bls.gov/cpi/questions-and-answers.htm>. [Source: MOAA Legislative Update | November 17, 2017 ++]



Medicare Hospital Coverage ► Status Can Cost You \$1000's

When Medicare beneficiaries are treated in a hospital, whether they are labeled “inpatient” or “outpatient” can make a costly difference in the bill — potentially increasing out-of-pocket costs by thousands of dollars. You probably think these two terms simply define whether the person spent the night in the hospital. But Medicare uses the words differently. For example, for 95-year-old Mary Higgins of Wilmington, Delaware, was admitted to a hospital for “observation” last year. After the visit, she received care at a skilled nursing facility — and was hit with a \$2,340-per-week bill (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/medicare-billing-hospital-observation-can-cost-you>).

Why did it happen? Because Higgins was admitted for “observation.” So, despite being in the hospital for five days, Medicare labeled her as receiving outpatient care. The explanation: “Although Medicare doesn’t cover general custodial nursing home care — such as help with daily living, administering medicine, etc. — it does pay for prescribed follow-up treatment in a skilled nursing facility with specialized care. To qualify for this benefit, though, Medicare patients must have previously stayed in a hospital [as an inpatient] for three days, not counting the day of discharge.”

Your classification as an inpatient or outpatient is what Medicare calls your “hospital status,” and it can affect your out-of-pocket costs for a variety of services. As Medicare defines these terms:

- “You’re an inpatient starting when you’re formally admitted to the hospital with a doctor’s order. The day before you’re discharged is your last inpatient day.
- You’re an outpatient if you’re getting emergency department services, observation services, outpatient surgery, lab tests, or X-rays, or any other hospital services, and the doctor hasn’t written an order to admit you to a hospital as an inpatient. In these cases, you’re an outpatient even if you spend the night in the hospital.”

Note that the difference between these two statuses can be nuanced, essentially coming down to what a doctor writes in your chart. As Medicare puts it, “your doctor must order [inpatient] admission and the hospital must formally admit you in order for you to become an inpatient.” So, you don’t want to make any

assumptions about your hospital status. Ideally, you should educate yourself about Medicare terminology before you next find yourself in the hospital. Perhaps start by reading:

- <https://www.medicare.gov/what-medicare-covers/part-a/inpatient-or-outpatient.html> -- The federal government's Medicare.gov webpage "Inpatient or outpatient hospital status affects your costs"
- <http://www.medicareadvocacy.org/medicare-info/observation-status> -- The nonprofit Center for Medicare Advocacy's webpage "Outpatient Observation Status"
- <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/7-things-you-need-to-know-about-medicare> -- MoneyTalksNews article "7 Things You Need to Know About Medicare"

Once you're in the hospital, ask about your Medicare hospital status as soon as possible. The Center for Medicare Advocacy notes that, under a federal law that took effect in March 2017, hospitals must provide Medicare beneficiaries with what's known as a Medicare Outpatient Observation Notice, or MOON, within 36 hours if they are receiving observation services as an outpatient for 24 hours. As CBS reports, however, even 36 hours might be too long to go without knowing your Medicare hospital status, considering the possible financial repercussions of your status. The publication advises:

"Make sure you or whoever is assisting you in the hospital finds out what your admission status is. If it's observation, ask if it can be changed. This isn't easy to do. You may need to enlist the help of your general practitioner or family doctor. He or she knows your medical background and can help convince the hospital doctors that you need inpatient coverage because you may require follow-up care."

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | November 13, 2017 ++]

Google Wallet Scam Update 01 ► Bait And Switch Schemes

Google Wallet was designed as an easy way for friends and family members to send each other money. But if someone you don't know asks you to pay for a product or service through Google Wallet, be careful! BBB Scam Tracker has received several reports of bait and switch schemes claiming to be part of Google Wallet.

How the Scam Works:

- You are looking to buy a car, RV, concert tickets, or another item online when you find the perfect listing at an incredible price. You contact the seller, and they make the sale seem urgent. The seller will often claim to be moving or deployed. If you agree to purchase, they tell you to complete the transaction using Google Wallet.
- But instead of making the payment directly through Google, the scammer will ask for your name and contact information. Then, they will say that Google will contact you with further instructions.
- You get an email from "Google Wallet" with instructions to buy a prepaid debit card or wire the money. This is not how Google Wallet works! These methods are like paying cash. Once the money has been sent or the prepaid card information passed along, the scammer disappears, and it's impossible to get your money back

Protect Yourself from Google Wallet Scams:

- *Understand how Google Wallet works.* A legitimate Google Payments transaction requires that you sign in to your Google Account and complete the payment using the Google Payments interface. Google Payments never accepts wire transfers or bank transfers.
- *Don't send money using Google Wallet to someone you don't know.* If you don't know the seller and are asked to pay outside of a reputable purchasing platform, it's best to pay in person and only after you've received the product or service.

- *Review BBB online shopping tips.* The type of payment requested may vary, but most online purchase scammers use similar tactics. See www.BBB.org/shoppingonline for more advice.

To learn more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips (www.BBB.org/scamtips). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker ([BBB.org/scamtracker](http://www.BBB.org/scamtracker)). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | November 17, 2017 ++]

Online Shopper Scam ► Phony Tracking Numbers

It's the Holidays! If you are browsing online for shopping deals, make sure you vet websites before purchasing. Scammers are using phony UPS and FedEx tracking numbers to fool shoppers into thinking their package is on the way, according to recent BBB Scam Tracker reports.

How the Scam Works:

- You are shopping online and find a site with amazing deals. The website and the products look legitimate, so you decide to take a chance and make a purchase. After checkout, you get a confirmation email that contains a tracking number from UPS, FedEx, or another shipping service.
- What happens next depends on the scam. In some versions, the tracking number provided is completely fake. In other variations, the number is real and appears to work at first... until "your" item is delivered somewhere else.
- Either way, the outcome is the same. Providing a phony tracking number allows scammers to stall and shift blame for the missing package to the shipping service. In reality, your purchase never existed in the first place.

Protect Yourself from an Online Shopping Scam

- Before buying online, confirm the site has real contact information. Make sure the seller has a working phone number and address on the website, so you can contact them in case of problems.
- If the price seems too good to be true, there's probably something wrong. Be wary if the item is selling for significantly lower than what you've seen elsewhere.
- Review BBB online shopping tips. Many online purchase scams use similar tactics. See www.BBB.org/shoppingonline/ for more advice .

For more resources on shipping fraud, see FedEx's website <http://www.fedex.com/us/security/report-fraud.html> and UPS's online resource center website <https://www.ups.com/us/en/help-center/legal-terms-conditions/fight-fraud.page>. To learn more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips (www.BBB.org/scamtips). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker (www.BBB.org/scamtracker). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | November 24, 2017 ++]

Tax Burden for Wisconsin Retired Vets ► As of November 2017

Many veterans planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. States raise revenue in many ways including sales taxes, excise taxes, license taxes, income taxes, intangible taxes, property taxes, estate taxes and inheritance taxes. Depending on where you live, you may end up paying all of them or just a few. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay as a VA rated disabled veteran or military retiree if you retire in Wisconsin.

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 5% (food and prescription drugs exempt). Most counties have adopted a 1.5% sales tax which is added to the state tax.

Gasoline Tax: 51.3 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 57.3 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$2.52 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 4.0%; High – 7.65%. The tax brackets reported are for single individuals.

Income Brackets: Four. Lowest \$0 thru \$11,229 & Highest \$247,350+

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$700; Married – \$1,400; Dependents – \$700

Additional Exemption: Each taxpayer and spouse over 65 – \$250

Standard Deduction: Single – \$10,380; Married – \$19,210. The standard deduction phases out by 12% at \$14,800 for single filers and by 19.778% at \$21,360 for married filing jointly. The standard deduction phases out to zero at \$100,383 for single filers, \$117,477 for joint filers.

Medical/Dental Deduction: 5% credit for expenses in excess of standard deduction.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Generally the same amount of your pension and annuity income that is taxable for federal tax purposes is taxable by Wisconsin. Social Security and Railroad Retirement benefits are not taxable. Certain Wisconsin state and local government retirees qualify for a tax exemption. Out-of-state government pensions are fully taxed. All retirement payments from the U.S. military employee retirement system, the Coast Guard, the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Public Health Service are exempt. Retired persons whose income is less than \$10,000 (\$19,000 if married filing a joint return) are also eligible for a “working families tax credit.” This credit reduces or completely eliminates the Wisconsin income tax for persons, including retirees, who are full-year residents of Wisconsin. It is not necessary that you be employed, or that you have more than one person in your household, in order to claim this credit. Go to <https://www.revenue.wi.gov/pages/faqs/pcs-retired.aspx> & <https://www.revenue.wi.gov/DOR%20Publications/pb106.pdf> for more details.

Individuals who receive income from a qualified retirement plan or an individual retirement account (IRA) may be able to subtract up to \$5,000 of such retirement benefits when computing their Wisconsin income tax. To qualify for the subtraction the individual must be at least 65 years of age before the close of the taxable year for which the subtraction is being claimed, and meet the following income limitations for that year. If the individual is single or files as head of household, his or her federal adjusted gross income is less than \$15,000. If the individual is married and files a joint return, the couple’s federal adjusted gross income is less than \$30,000. If the individual is married and files a separate return, the sum of both spouses’ federal adjusted gross income is less than \$30,000.

The subtraction does not apply to retirement benefits that are otherwise exempt from Wisconsin income tax. For example, an individual is receiving military retirement benefits that are exempt from Wisconsin income tax. The individual may not claim the \$5,000 subtraction based on the military retirement benefits. Individuals who will qualify for the subtraction may want to consider the subtraction when determining the amount of their estimated tax payments.

Retired Military Pay: All military retirement pay is exempt.

Military Disability Retired Pay: Retirees who entered the military before Sept. 24, 1975, and members receiving disability retirements based on combat injuries or who could receive disability payments from the

VA are covered by laws giving disability broad exemption from federal income tax. Most military retired pay based on service-related disabilities also is free from federal income tax, but there is no guarantee of total protection.

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

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

Homeowners and renters whose household income is less than \$24,680 can benefit from the homestead credit program that is designed to soften the impact of property taxes on persons with low income. The credit is based on the relationship of household income to the amount of allowable property taxes and/or rent for the calendar year. Wisconsin also has a school property tax credit that is available to homeowners. It is actually a credit against Wisconsin income tax liability. Details on the state's property tax system can be found here. Go to <https://www.revenue.wi.gov/Pages/FAQS/ise-home.aspx> for information on the Homestead Credit.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax but Wisconsin does have an estate tax. As a result of the Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010, approved by Congress and signed into law by President Obama on December 17, 2010, there is no Wisconsin estate tax for deaths in 2011 and 2012 unless action is taken by the Wisconsin Legislature to impose an estate tax. A federal estate tax is imposed on estates of \$5,000,000 or more. The credit for state death taxes paid has been eliminated for deaths in 2011 and 2012, which would have been the basis for Wisconsin's estate tax. The Act allows a deduction for state death taxes paid. On January 1, 2013, EGTRRA (Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act) sunset provisions would again apply with federal or state legislative action necessary to eliminate the Wisconsin estate tax for 2013.

Other State Tax Rates

To compare the above sales, income, and property tax rates to those accessed in other states go to:

- Sales Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/sales-tax-by-state>.
- Personal Income Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/income-tax-by-state>.
- Property Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/property-tax-by-state>.

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For further information, visit the Wisconsin Department of Revenue site <https://revenue.wi.gov> or call 608-266-2772. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com> | November 2017 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 30 NOV 2017

- **The Last Bomb.** Go to <https://archive.org/details/TheLastBomb1945> to view the 36 minute color Academy Award-nominated documentary, which shows the 21st Bombing Command and its role in the B-29 bombing of Japan and the Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO). To date his film has received 1,069,640 views.
- **Math Riddle.** Go to <https://youtu.be/7Vd1dTBVbFg> and see if you can solve the passcode riddle provided.
- **Navy Enlistment.** Starting Jan. 1, 2018, the service will implement an initial run test that all recruits will have to pass in order to begin recruit training. A mile and a half will have to be covered, for men, in under 16 minutes and 10 seconds, and under 18 minutes and 7 seconds for women, the Navy said. After passing the test, eligible recruits will be grouped according to fitness abilities and will begin working toward the standards of the Navy's physical fitness assessment. Eligibility to ship out to Marine Corps boot camp requires male poolees to complete a mile and a half run in 13 minutes and 30 seconds, whereas women have 15 minutes to cover the same distance.
- **Solar Power.** Solar power grew at a record-breaking pace in 2016, as the United States now has enough solar photovoltaic energy capacity to power 8.3 million homes.
- **Special Ops K-9s:** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojVq2Sa-PD0> to view HBO's 2 hour 42 minute full documentary **War Dog: A Soldier's Best Friend.** It highlights the intimate relationship between U.S. Special Operations soldiers and their K9s, who serve together as human-animal teams in combat.
- **Title Insurance.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji4ilvfmTEw> to see why you or your lender needs it.
- **Home Hiding Places.** Seniors are often viewed as easy targets by criminals and burglars. If you have valuables that need protecting, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjrMTvmlC9s> and try hiding them in the ten unlikely places shown. If you don't like those for ten more hiding places go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkkYNTgHa3I>.
- **Okinawa.** The U.S. military has ordered servicemembers in Japan not to buy or consume alcohol until further notice after a fatal vehicle accident involving a 21-year-old Marine on Okinawa.
- **GTMO.** The military has decided that art made by wartime captives is U.S. government property and has stopped releases of security-screened prisoner art to the public. One attorney says the U.S. military intends to burn cellblock art
- **Sexual Assault.** A summary released by the Department of Defense shows reports of sexual assault from Fort Bragg increased by 28 percent in 2016 over the year before. The summary says Fort Bragg received 146 reports of sexual assault in 2016 compared to 114 reports in 2015.
- **USCG.** In an almost unimaginable drug seizure - but real nonetheless Coast Guard crews confiscated a ton of cocaine off the west coast of Florida in mid-NOV. The massive bust was valued at an estimated \$23 million and offloaded in St. Petersburg on 20 NOV.
- **Military Pay Raise.** Being on Welfare in Indiana pays better than being a Lance Corporal with two years Service and a combat deployment under his/her belt ... in Hawaii, welfare pays better than a Master Sergeant with 12 years in Service and multiple tours in combat. See Welfare payments by state ...<http://thefederalistpapers.org/us/welfare-payout-numbers-state-by-state-that-you-might-find-stunning>
- **Battle of Chosin.** Go to <https://youtu.be/1OI40GsNiHk> & https://youtu.be/zYfWhb_YNEA to listen to the song and view the photos and film of this 1950 battle in Korea.

- **Nostalgia.** How many of the 66 movie clips at <https://youtu.be/M1F0lBnsnkE> of dance routines do you remember that us older vets faithfully went and saw at the Saturday matinees for \$0.10 admission.
- **Armed Forces Salute.** Check out the extremely impressive presentation by the 2011 West Virginia University Marching Band at <https://www.youtube.com/embed/MjPmmCtHmfE?rel=0>.

[Source: Various | November 30, 2017 ++]

DPRK Defectors ► 10" Parasite Found in Stomach of Latest One

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) soldier who escaped into South Korea at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) 13 NOV is in critical condition at a South Korean hospital after suffering multiple gunshot wounds by his comrades. He drove a jeep to the highly militarized border between the two Koreas but was forced to abandoned the vehicle, according to Reuters. The unarmed man jumped from the car and made a mad dash to the border while North Korean guards let loose a hail of gunfire. Korean border guards, which are handpicked for their loyalty, were believed to have fired around 40 bullets presumably using both handguns and AK-47s. The North Korean guards chosen to stand watch at the JSA are required to have a "mental armor that cannot be pierced."



View from North Korea side of the Demilitarized Zone earlier this year, at Panmungak, looking towards Freedom House.

Only handguns are allowed in the Joint Security Area, a small-strip of land where North and South Korean guards stand face-to-face day in and day out. As the North Korean soldier who bolted across the line drove to the JSA and defected, he is probably not one of the dedicated loyalists. The defector was hit five times in the first shooting incident at the JSA in three decades and the first time North Koreans have shot into the South since the armistice, according to the South Korean military, which noticed a "flurry of action" on the northern side as the soldier made his way to the border.

An experienced South Korean surgeon operating on a defector from North Korea has described his shock upon finding dozens of unusual parasites inside the man's stomach, suggesting widespread health issues among the population of the secretive state. Doctor Lee Guk-jong has now operated twice on the man to

treat his injuries, with the presence of parasites adding complications to the surgery. "We are struggling with treatment as we found a large number of parasites in the soldier's stomach, invading and eating into the wounded areas," Lee said at a press briefing following a three-and-a-half-hour operation on 15 NOV, quoted in the Korea Biomedical Review.

The doctor described the patient as been 5 feet 5 inches tall and weighing 132 pounds, suggesting he may suffer from malnutrition. Among the parasites was a species of roundworm that can be contracted by eating vegetables fertilized with human faeces or, more generally, in areas with poor sanitation. The longest parasite found in the North Korean soldiers' stomach measured 27 centimetres (10 inches), local media reported. Experts say that many North Koreans could be infected with the same kind of parasites. "I have been doing surgery for more than 20 years, but I have not seen such parasites. I will not be able to find them in [South] Korea," said Lee, who is a respected trauma specialist in the country.

The abdomen wounds were only some of the injuries suffered by the North Korean soldier, who was also hit on his elbow, shoulder and chest area and has not yet fully regained consciousness. According to Lee, it was only thanks to the U.S. air medics applying first aid treatment while he was being airlifted on a Black Hawk helicopter that the man is still alive. The technique used to evacuate the soldier from the JSA to the specialized trauma center at the Ajou University Hospital south of Seoul, is known as MEDEVAC or "Dust Off," an acronym for "Dedicated Unhesitating Service To Our Fighting Forces." First devised to rescue soldiers in Vietnam in 1962, U.S. forces still regularly practice these air casualty evacuations.

Monday's defection is the third by a member of the North Korean military this year, following two soldiers who fled to South Korea separately in June. Prior to 2017, there had only been four military defectors from North Korea over the past five years: one in 2016, one in 2015 and two in 2012. The DPRK military has more than 1.2 million active soldiers and a further 7.7 million in reserves. It is one of the largest ground forces in the world. [Source: AFP | November 15, 2017 ++]

DPRK Nuclear Weapons Update 20 ► Threat to Make Japan & U.S. Bases Disappear

North Korea on 20 NOV issued veiled threat of a nuclear strike on Japan, vowing to make the country "disappear at once" if Tokyo continues with what Pyongyang termed "war hysteria." "Japan itself will not be safe once a war breaks out on the Korean Peninsula," the North's state-run Korean Central News Agency said in a commentary. "Everything of Japan to be involved in the war may disappear at once together with the U.S. military bases in Japan. "Japan's crazy ride on a militarist chariot will only make it fall into a pitfall of ruin," it added.

The North often threatens to target Japan and U.S. bases on Japanese territory. In October, it said it would bring "nuclear clouds" to the Japanese archipelago and in March it launched a barrage of missiles it claimed was training for a strike on U.S. military bases in the country. Last week, in a powerful display of ever-improving U.S.-Japan military ties, Japanese vessels, including the Ise helicopter destroyer — one of the largest warships in its fleet — trained with three U.S. aircraft carriers in what the Maritime Self-Defense Force said was a "natural" part of efforts to "stabilize" the regional security situation. It was the first time the MSDF had drilled with so many carriers.

That military muscle-flexing came during the tail end of Donald Trump's inaugural trip to Asia as the U.S. president. Trump used the tour to corral further support for isolating North Korea, which conducted its largest-ever nuclear test in September and has test-fired dozens of missiles this year — including some thought capable of striking the mainland United States. Two of those missiles, intermediate-range weapons designed to carry a nuclear payload, also flew over Japan. Those flights, the first of such a missile, have

done much to galvanize support for Japan beefing up its defensive arsenal, including the purchase of more advanced U.S. weaponry pitched by Trump during his stop in Japan earlier this month.

Citing the joint exercises and potential arms deals in its commentary, the North said Japan's leaders had "gone beyond the red line in their risky military moves." "Although over seven decades have passed since Japan's defeat, the Japan militarists' wild ambition has never changed but is being revived by their descendants," it added in an apparent dig at Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose grandfather Nobusuke Kishi was a key figure in the World War II-era government. Abe has worked closely with Trump to ramp up United Nations and unilateral sanctions on Pyongyang, part of the two countries' "maximum pressure" approach to reining in its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. [Source: The Japan Times | Jesse Johnson | November 20, 2017 ++]

DPRK Missile Program Update 02 ► Can Now Hit Washington D.C.

After months of quiet, North Korea resumed testing of its ballistic missile program 28 NOV, launching its highest missile to date, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Tuesday. "North Korea launched an intercontinental ballistic missile. It went higher, frankly, than any previous shot they've taken," said Mattis, who was at the White House meeting with President Donald Trump. "It's a research and development effort on their part to continue building ballistic missiles that can threaten everywhere in the world basically." The missile was launched from Sain Ni, North Korea, and traveled about 1,000 km [or 621 miles] before splashing down in the Sea of Japan, within Japan's Economic Exclusion Zone, said Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Rob Manning.

Mattis said the South Koreans launched missiles in response, but did not target North Korea. "In response the South Koreans have fired some pinpoint missiles out into the water to make certain North Korea understands that they could be taken under fire by our ally," Mattis said. "The bottom line is it's a continued effort to build a ballistic missile threat that endangers world peace, regional peace and certainly the United States." Initial estimates for the launch put the ICBM's apogee, or highest point, at 4,500 kilometers, or almost 2,800 miles, with a flight time of about 50 minutes. For comparison, the International Space Station sits about 250 miles above Earth.

Expert analysis of North Korea's 24 JUL launch, which had a flight time of 45 minutes with an apogee of 3,700 kilometers, concluded that those numbers would have Los Angeles, Denver and Chicago well within range of the weapon, with Boston and New York City on the outskirts of the range. If the initial numbers for Tuesday's launch prove accurate, a wider range of U.S. cities could now be at risk. David Wright, a well regarded analyst with the Union of Concerned Scientists, wrote shortly after the missile test that the qualities of the missile mean North Korea can now hold the United States fully at risk of missile range. "Such a missile would have more than enough range to reach Washington, D.C., and, in fact, any part of the continental United States," Wright wrote.

North Korea's display of ever-increasing capabilities comes as the Trump administration continues to look for ways to dissuade the regime from completing its nuclear weapons program. "I will only tell you we will take care of it," Trump told reporters in the same White House media availability where Mattis spoke. "We have Gen. Mattis in the room with us, and we've had a long discussion on it. It is a situation that we will handle." For those looking for better news, Wright believes that "given the increase in range, it seems likely that it carried a very light mock warhead. If true, that means it would not be capable of carrying a nuclear warhead to this long distance, since such a warhead would be much heavier."

Mira Rapp-Hooper, a regional expert currently serving as senior fellow at Paul Tsai China Center, says the test changes perception more than reality. “The biggest substantive difference is that they’ll be able to claim they can hold all of [the continental United States] at risk,” she said. “Which was only a matter of time, but matters a great deal in both countries’ political narratives. Don’t get me wrong — it’s shaping up to be a technically impressive test, but for all intents and purposes, they’ve had us deterred for a nice long while.” For Rapp-Hooper, the big question now is whether the Trump administration moves beyond the idea that a nuclear-capable ICBM from North Korea can be deterred. Much of the White House policy on North Korea revolves around the idea that such a window exists, and Pyongyang just “just slammed it for emphasis,” she said.

The North American Aerospace Defense Command on 28 NOV determined the missile launch did not pose a threat to North America, our territories or our allies, Manning said, “Our commitment to the defense of our allies, including the Republic of Korea and Japan, in the face of these threats, remains ironclad,” he said. “We remain prepared to defend ourselves and our allies from any attack or provocation.” The launch would be North Korea’s first since mid-September. Hawaii on 1 DEC will test its emergency alert siren system across its eight islands in preparation for a possible attack by North Korea, according to a report published 28 NOV. Similar tests will take place on the first business day of each month following Friday’s inaugural test. The warning system was first used during the Cold War with Russia and is meant to notify residents they should “get inside, stay inside, and stay tuned.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Tara Copp & Aaron Mehta | November 28, 2017 ++]

Dishwasher Tips ► What NOT to Put In Them

With Thanksgiving over and around the corner, let us all give thanks for dishwashers. These modern marvels can handle gravy-smeared plates, coffee mugs and eggnog cups, bowls that once teemed with stuffing, pie-flecked forks and more. No question, dishwashers are a host or hostess’s best friend, and help make cleanup a breeze. But not everything should go in your dishwasher, as anyone who’ve ever ruefully retrieved a melted takeout container will tell you. Home-appliance maker Whirlpool offers a page at http://producthelp.whirlpool.com/Dishwashers/Dishwasher_Product_Assistance/How_to_know_if_an_Item_is_dishwasher_safe of general dishwasher tips and it’s careful to note that the dishwasher is a fickle friend. Some items, especially plasticware, are fine on the top shelf, but will twist and turn like molten lava if washed on the bottom rack.

So review these tips before you wash, and everything will come clean after the big meal. For those items that just have to be hand-washed, take heart. There are worse things than taking a few minutes to immerse your hands in warm soapy water, device-free for once, and catch up with whoever’s doing the drying.

- Cast-iron skillets
- Wooden cutting boards
- Moscow mule mugs
- High-quality knives
- Fancy china
- Certain reusable plastic containers
- Aluminum bakeware
- Crystal barware
- Gold-plated cutlery
- Anything with a label
- Anything repaired with glue
- Items with printed measurements or words

- Nonstick pans
- Flour sifters
- Hand-painted items
- Insulated coffee mugs

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Gael F. Cooper | November 24, 2017 ++]

Windows PC Tips ► 19 PC Keyboard Shortcuts You May Not Know

There are lots of little (and sometimes not so little) tips and techniques that can shave a few of seconds off frequently used procedures or maybe even completely change how you work. No compilation like this can possibly be comprehensive, but here are a few Windows tips and tricks worth doing if you're not already. If you're a Mac user, a good source of shortcuts is support.apple.com/en-us/HT201236.

- **Lock your computer:** Windows-L locks it, requiring your password to resume, which can be handy if you don't want a coworker or roommate posting for you on Facebook.
- **Shut down:** Program the Power button to shut down your PC. Press the Windows key and begin typing Power Options. Once there, select "Choose what the power buttons do," then for "When I press the power button" select "Shut down."
- **Launch a program:** Pressing the Windows key is a quick way to launch programs. Begin typing the name of the program until it's displayed. An even quicker way is to create a keyboard shortcut. Find the program on the desktop or in the Start menu. Press the right mouse button, select Properties, click in the field after "Shortcut key," and press a keyboard shortcut such as Ctrl-Alt and the first letter of the program's name.
- **Move among programs:** Alt-Tab moves you forward from one open program to another. Repeating reverses this. Holding down the Alt key as you repeatedly hit Tab shows you which programs are running and lets you move to the one you want to work with.
- **Close a program:** Alt-F4 closes the program you're in. Ctrl-F4 or Ctrl-W closes just the tab or window you're in.
- **Go to the desktop:** Windows-D hides all open programs and takes you to the desktop. Repeating reverses this.
- **Minimize or maximize the window:** Windows-Down Arrow minimizes the window you're in, while Windows-Up Arrow maximizes it.
- **Move or copy files:** To move a file from one folder to another, open File Explorer twice, creating two instances. In one File Explorer instance, select the file and drag it to the folder where you want it using the other instance. To copy it, hold down the Ctrl key while doing this. Or you can drag with the right mouse key and select copy.
- **Batch rename files:** In File Explorer, select the files you want to rename, right click the first one, and type a name. File Explorer renames the rest with a 1, 2, and so on. To select all the files, press Ctrl-A.
- **Save a document:** This is the most basic trick of all. If you don't want to lose a document you're working on, save it periodically. The fastest way is Ctrl-S. If you're working off the cloud or on a smartphone, your files automatically are saved for you.
- **Delete a word:** Within a document, Ctrl-Backspace deletes the entire word behind the cursor.

- **Move to the next word:** Ctrl-Right Arrow moves one word ahead, while Ctrl-Left Arrow moves one word behind.
- **Undo a mistake:** Ctrl-Z not only undoes your most recent typing, it also can bring a file back if you accidentally deleted it or moved it where you don't want it.
- **Paste without formatting:** If you've copied text and don't want the original formatting, hit Ctrl-Shift-V instead of Ctrl-V. To select from a menu of paste options, hit Ctrl-Alt-V or press the right mouse button and look under Paste Options.
- **Insert a symbol:** No matter what program you're in, you can access Character Map for symbols such as copyright and registered trademark by pressing the Windows key and beginning to type Character Map. Find the symbol you want, click Copy, return to your program, and paste it in.
- **Type in a site's address:** From within your browser, F6, Ctrl-L, and Alt-D all take you to the address bar.
- **Navigate webpages:** Hitting the spacebar scrolls down a full screen, while Shift-Space bar scrolls up. Your mouse's scroll wheel is excellent at taking you down or up in smaller increments.
- **Make text more readable:** Ctrl-Plus magnifies the webpage you're on, while Ctrl-Minus reverses this. To reset a page to its original magnification, press Ctrl-Zero.
- **Move among browser windows:** Ctrl-T opens up a new tab, Ctrl-Tab moves you forward among open windows, and Ctrl-Shift-Tab moves you backward.

[Sopource: MOAA News Exchange | Reid Goldsborough | November 19, 2017 ++]

Silica Gel Packet Uses ► Don't Throw them Away

I am sure you have many of these Silica Gel packets from a new purse, shoes, headache medicine, beef jerky or any other random item. Don't throw them away. They have multiple uses. Although they are not toxic to pets – cats or dogs –they are toxic to humans so keep an eye on your kids or babies around them. You can use them to:

Keep Underwater Cameras Dry – Waterproof cameras are super fun but sometimes the condensation can end up damaging the camera or leave a fog streak across your lens. Stop this from happening by storing a packet or two of silica-gel packets in the camera case or with the camera. It will dry all of the excess water out.

Dry Out A Wet Cell Phone – This one is much needed knowledge. How many times have we accidentally dropped our phone in some water like a pool, toilet or the kids or yourself spilled a drink on your phone? It always seems to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Here is how you can fix it fast. Remove the battery and any memory cards from the phone, then toss it in a bowl filled with silica gel packets (dry rice will work, too, in an emergency). Leave it there at least overnight before powering it on again.

Stop Camera Condensation – As a blogger, I take my camera everywhere. It is a must for most of us ladies nowadays. Here is a great photography trick to stop lens or camera condensations. If you're taking your camera out into the cold, it can face serious condensation when you bring it back into a warm room. Remove the battery, memory card, and lens if applicable, and place the camera in a bowl of silica gel to suck up the moisture.

Extend the Life Of Razor Blades – Oxidation and moisture is the reason that razor blades fall to premature dulling. A good tip is to keep a Tupperware half full of silica gel near by and after shaving, blot dry your razor and store the razor in the closed Tupperware that has 4 -5 silica gel packets.

Dry Makeup or Travel Bag – If you toss a few packets of silica gels into a Ziplock bag, it has enough water and moisture fighting ability to withstand any spills.

Keep Fabric Dry – If you like to sew, or use fabric for craft projects, keep a few of the silica packets with the fabric in a plastic or Ziplock bag to keep the moisture out.

Wet Vacations Clothes – Sometimes when we go on vacation, there is swimming involved. Most of the time we are enjoying the water up until the vacation is over. The worst is putting wet clothes in your suitcase. Put your clothes or wet towel into a bag with a bunch of silica gels and it will help to remove some of the moisture. The more gel packets the better.

Protect Your Photos – Put silica gel packet in the boxes where you store your photos to keep them safe and dry.

Protect Silver – Moisture can lead to tarnish and corrosion on silver and jewelry. Slip a silica gel packet in your silver chest or jewelry box to keep those items tarnish free and looking great!

Keep Luggage Dry – These tiny packets can do a great job of keeping luggage dry. You can simply toss a few silica gel packets into your luggage to keep it moisture and odor-free. This could really help to extend the life of your luggage.

Gardening – If you save your own seeds for planting next year, storing them so they don't mold is important. Add a silica gel packet to your container, making sure it's airtight. Store the different seeds in small envelopes and then put them all in an airtight container together with the silica gel packet. You only need one per shoe box-sized container.

Pills and Vitamins – You will often find Silica Gel packets enclosed with packets of dried foods, pills, and vitamins. This is because moisture can lead to mold, decomposition, and spoilage of these items. Storing these items with a packet of Silica Gel can help preserve their freshness. Vitamins and pills are often stored in bathrooms, a very humid environment. Moisture can get into the container each time it is opened, which can lead to any coatings being prematurely dissolved.

Protect Documents – Protect personal papers and important documents by putting some gel in a baggie wherever these are stored.

Flowers – If you love to dry flowers, these can be used in a cinch to help the process go faster. Store in a paper bag with the a couple packets.

Windows – If you notice that the windows in your house seem to have formed some condensation in between panes, store some packets on the sill to absorb that moisture. (Careful of your children with this one.)

Bulk Pet Food – Have you noticed that if you buy a big bag of pet food, it can get soggy? Store your kibble in a bin and tape some silica packs to the bottom of the lid.

Foggy Windshield – Stash some packets away in your car, especially on your dashboard. This will help maintain a clear windshield and leave it less foggy during times of high humidity.

Pumpkins – Protect your pumpkin from mold. Remove the top of the pumpkin. Take a silica bead and embed it into the interior of the pumpkin. Don't stick the bead in so far that it changes the appearance of the pumpkin's exterior. When applying the beads, use 3/4 grams of silica for every 100 cubic inches of pumpkin.

Xmas Ornaments – Help preserve your ornaments and Christmas decorations. These get pulled out of boxes only once a year, so using silica gel packets in your Christmas boxes is a smart idea.

Vitamins and Medicine Tablets – Silica gel packets are often stored with this initially, as it helps retain freshness and to prevent mold and deterioration. Make sure to keep them together, as the removal of these helpful packets could keep them from living as long as they should.

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Tip: If your silica gel packets don't seem to be working any more, put them on a cookie sheet in a 100 degree oven for an hour to recharge! When you're not using the packets, keep them in an airtight container to protect them from surrounding moisture.

Signs ► Have You Seen These Thought Provoking Ones?

- Ants are healthy because they have little antibodies.
- Dear naps, I'm sorry I was a jerk to you as a kid.
- Is there every a day that mattresses are not on sale.
- If attacked by a mob of clowns, go for the juggler.
- I child proofed my house but the kids still get in.
- Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.
- The first five days after the weekend are the hardest.
- Ban pre-shredded cheese. Make America grate again.
- The past, present, and future walk into a bar. It was tense.
- They're not going to make yardsticks any longer.
- Practice safe eating. Always use condiments.
- If you think education is costly, try ignorance.
- I checked into the hokey pokey clinic and turned myself around.
- What happens if you get scared to death teice?
- I want to grow my own food but I can't find bacon seeds.
- When in doubt mumble.
- The second mouse gets the cheese.
- I used to think I was indecisive. Now I'm not so sure.
- Procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday.
- My husband said I never listen to him. Or something like that.
- No one knows what you think they do.
- This is my step ladder. I never knew my real ladder.
- Abstinence is a good thing if practiced in moderation.
- Frog parking only. All others will be toad.
- A clear conscience is a sign of a foggy memory.
- Ever stop to think and forget to start again.
- What do atheists say when someone sneezes?
- Does seven days without meat make one week?
- Went to the air and space museum but there was nothing there.

[Source: <https://www.facebook.com/wallingfordsign> | November 16, 2017 ++]

Where There's a Will, There's a Way ► 05



Jewelry Tips Update 01 ► The Most Common Mistakes When Buying

Many people — traditionally men — view both shopping and jewelry as foreign territories filled with expensive landmines. Combining the two seems like a recipe for personal anxiety and financial disaster. If the thought of buying jewelry for your honey fills you with dread, this article is for you. Money Talks News founder Stacy Johnson has a simple but vital rule to help avoid jewelry-buying mistakes: “Go with your eyes” (<https://youtu.be/YGURivnRvMc>). That is, do not listen uncritically to what the clerk is insisting that you need. You know what you find appealing, and should trust your judgment as you begin to browse. Of course, if you’re like most of us, you likely don’t have the money to choose some of the pieces that you find most alluring. That’s OK. You can still buy gorgeous jewelry your loved one will cherish without sabotaging your budget. Just follow these guidelines to avoid common stumbles:

- 1. Set a realistic budget --** There is a wide variety of fine jewelry at a huge array of price points — including many lovely pieces that cost less than \$100. Before you find yourself peering into a glass case while a salesperson grills you, decide what you can actually afford. Then if the salesperson shows you things that cost more, just say “I’m sorry. That was more than I was planning to spend.” If that means you are guided to another counter, or need to go to a different store to find something within your budget, so be it.
- 2. Educate yourself --** Are you looking for diamond jewelry or something with another gemstone? What will the setting be made of? Not only do those specifics impact the look and cost of jewelry, but they also tell you what it will require to care for the purchase. Sterling silver needs regular polishing, for instance, and gemstone settings should be examined by a jeweler occasionally to ensure they remain secure. The Better Business Bureau at <https://www.bbb.org/new-york-city/get-consumer-help/articles/tips-on-buying-jewelry> offers a rundown of factors to ponder if you are shopping for diamonds, colored gemstones and pearls, as well as considerations for metals of various purity, or “karatage,” which can greatly affect the price:

Note that jewelry made of higher-karat gold is more yellow in color and slightly softer than gold jewelry made of lower-karat gold, which may include copper, silver, zinc, or other metals. Consumers also need to be concerned with the alloys if they are allergic to certain metals or have a high acid content in their bodies. Acid can turn the jewelry you wear black, appearing to be of poor quality when it actually is not. If you’re

shopping for a diamond, here's another idea to ponder at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/why-your-next-diamond-should-be-from-a-lab>.

3. Separate fact from fiction -- You've likely heard some of the conventional wisdom and lore about jewelry: Opals bring bad luck (it depends on which historical reference you choose); diamonds are indestructible (not quite); vinegar destroys pearls (sorta); and biting gold will allow you to determine if it's genuine (maybe, but it's not a good idea). Do a little myth-busting research on the piece you are eyeing. It could be fun and may save you from sending an unintended message. There's a fun and informative read on the myths and legends of gemstones in Vogue at <https://www.vogue.com/article/meaning-history-gemstones-rubies-emeralds-diamonds>.

4. Don't guess on ring size -- Sure, rings can be resized, but it's fairly easy to secretly determine someone's ring size and look like a hero when it easily slips onto your love's finger. If you can get a ring your intended currently is not wearing (one worn on the same finger as the one for which you're shopping), you can match it to a ring-sizing chart. Zales has one at https://www.zales.com/_ui/v1963/responsive/theme-zales/documents/ringsizer.pdf. Or just trace around the ring on a piece of paper and bring it to a jeweler to help you determine the correct size. Another way to get close — at least a step above guessing — is to consider the average size of rings (7 for women and 10 for men) and go up or down a size from there, accordingly.

5. Study the recipient's tastes -- The most common jewelry-shopping mistakes are made when the giver wings it without knowing the recipient's preferences. Sure, we told you to start with what you like, but as you winnow your choices you'll naturally make the final selection based on what you believe your significant other would most enjoy. Some general rules of thumb: A hopeless romantic will likely enjoy heart-shaped jewelry, while conservative and casual types might enjoy basic hoop earrings, diamond stud earrings, or link chains. In general, it's best to stay away from glitzy and unusual designs unless you're confident that is your significant other's preference. Need more clues about those preferences? Look carefully. If the intended recipient never wears earrings, there is likely little point in giving them. Does the recipient tend to choose geometric designs on clothing and home decor, or veer consistently toward natural shapes like flowers?

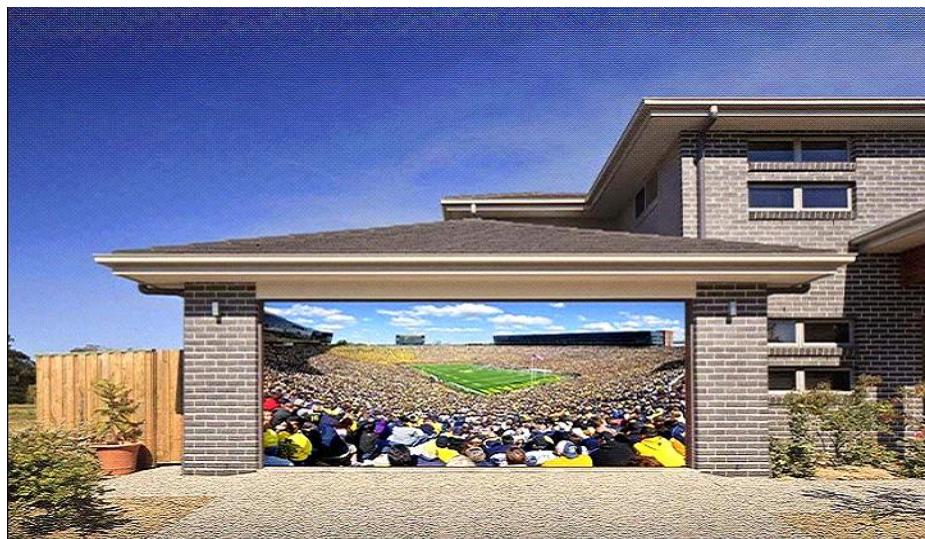
6. Become an online sleuth -- Sure, you regularly peruse your loved one's Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest accounts but consider scouring them for likes or follows of any certain types of jewelry brands. Beware, though: Your research may well lead to online advertisements that will be emailed to or displayed on your computer. Clear your browser history and block the site from collecting cookies on your computer so the surprise isn't unearthed.

7. Choose your jeweler carefully -- True, you don't want to blindly follow a sales consultant's advice, but you should consider his or her expertise. And, of course, the expertise — like the jewelry — hinges in large part on the ethics and mastery of the jeweler. **Overpriced and fake gems are impossible for untrained shoppers to** spot. The best way to ensure you buy from a reputable source is to find those recommended by The American Gem Society (<https://www.americangemsociety.org/find-a-jeweler>) and the Jeweler's Vigilance Committee (<http://www.jvclegal.org>). Both have information on certified jewelers from which you can start to choose.

8. Read the fine print -- What if your gift is something that, despite your best efforts, just doesn't work? What if a stone falls out or a clasp breaks? Can you get your money back? Can you exchange it for a different piece of jewelry? What about a store credit? Make sure you understand the jeweler's return, refund and exchange policies before you walk out the door. Some jewelers will prompt you to buy a high-priced extended warranty. Before you agree to that, consider the likelihood of needing to repair the piece versus the cost of doing so. And check to see if your credit card offers extended-warranty coverage on this type of purchase. Many do, and can save you from forking over even more money to the jeweler.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Nancy Dunham | November 23, 2017 ++]

Garage Door Billboards ► Making Yours Stand Out (14)



Weird Facts About Your Body ► 38 thru 50

38. Human lips have a reddish color because of the great concentration of tiny capillaries just below the skin.
39. Three hundred million cells die in the human body every minute.
40. Like fingerprints, every individual has an unique tongue print that can be used for identification.
41. A human head remains conscious for about 15 to 20 seconds after it has been decapitated.
42. It takes 17 muscles to smile and 43 to frown.
43. Humans can make do longer without food than sleep. Provided there is water, the average human could survive a month to two months without food depending on their body fat and other factors. Sleep deprived people, however, start experiencing radical personality and psychological changes after only a few sleepless days. The longest recorded time anyone has ever gone without sleep is 11 days, at the end of which the experimenter was awake, but stumbled over words, hallucinated and frequently forgot what he was doing.
44. The most common blood type in the world is Type O. The rarest blood type, A-H or Bombay blood, due to the location of its discovery, has been found in less than hundred people since it was discovered.
45. Every human spent about half an hour after being conceived, as a single cell. Shortly afterward, the cells begin rapidly dividing and begin forming the components of a tiny embryo.
46. Right-handed people live, on average, nine years longer than left-handed people do.
47. Your ears secrete more earwax when you are afraid than when you aren't.
48. Koalas and primates are the only animals with unique fingerprints.

49. Humans are the only animals to produce emotional tears.
50. The human heart creates enough pressure to squirt blood 30 feet in the air.

[Source: Odd Stuff Magazine | October 13, 2017 ++]

Have You Heard? ► We Three | A Man Who Knows His Math | Bad Parrot

WE THREE

A cowboy, who just moved to Wyoming from Texas, walks into a bar and orders three mugs of Budweiser. He sits in the back of the room, drinking a sip out of each one in turn. When he finishes them, he comes back to the bar and orders three more.

The bartender approaches and tells the cowboy, "You know, a mug goes flat after I draw it. It would taste better if you bought one at a time.."

The cowboy replies, "Well, you see, I have two brothers. One is an Airborne Ranger, the other is a Navy Seal, both serving overseas somewhere. When we all left our home in Texas, we promised that we'd drink this way to remember the days when we drank together. So I'm drinking one beer for each of my brothers and one for myself."

The bartender admits that this is a nice custom, and leaves it there. The cowboy becomes a regular in the bar, and always drinks the same way. He orders three mugs and drinks them in turn.

One day, he comes in and only orders two mugs. All the regulars take notice and fall silent. When he comes back to the bar for the second round, the bartender says, "I don't want to intrude on your grief, but I wanted to offer my condolences on your loss."

The cowboy looks quite puzzled for a moment, then a light dawns in his eyes and he laughs. "Oh, no, everybody's just fine," he explains, "It's just that my wife and I joined the Baptist Church and I had to quit drinking." "Hasn't affected my brothers though...."

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A MAN WHO KNOWS HIS MATH

I was riding to work yesterday when I observed a female driver, who cut right in front of a pickup truck, causing the driver to drive onto the shoulder to avoid hitting her. This evidently angered the driver enough that he hung his arm out his window and gave the woman the finger. 'Man, that guy is stupid,' I thought to myself. I ALWAYS smile nicely and wave in a sheepish manner whenever a female does anything to me in traffic, and here's why:

- I drive 48 miles each way every day to work. That's 96 miles each day.
- Of these, 16 miles each way is bumper-to-bumper.
- Most of the bumper-to-bumper is on an 8 lane highway.
- There are 7 cars every 40 feet for 32 miles. That works out to 982 cars every mile, or 31,424 cars.
- Even though the rest of the 32 miles is not bumper-to-bumper, I figure I pass at least another 4000 cars. That brings the number to something like 36,000 cars that I pass every day.
- Statistically, females drive half of these. That's 18,000 women drivers!
- In any given group of females, 1 in 28 has PMS. That's 642.
- According to Cosmopolitan, 70% describe their love life as dissatisfying or unrewarding. That's 449.

- According to the National Institute of Health, 22% of all females have seriously considered suicide or homicide. That's 98.
- And 34% describe men as their biggest problem. That's 33.
- According to the National Rifle Association, 5% of all females carry weapons and this number is increasing especially in California. That means that EVERY SINGLE DAY, I drive past at least one female that has a lousy love life, thinks men are her biggest problem, has seriously considered suicide or homicide, has PMS, and is armed.

Give her the finger? I don't think so.

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BAD PARROT

A young man named John received a parrot as a gift. The parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary.

Every word out of the bird's mouth was rude, obnoxious and laced with profanity.

John tried and tried to change the bird's attitude by consistently saying only polite words, playing soft music and anything else he could think of to 'clean up' the bird's vocabulary.

Finally, John was fed up and he yelled at the parrot. The parrot yelled back. John shook the parrot and the parrot got angrier and even more rude. John, in desperation, threw up his hand, grabbed the bird and put him in the freezer. For a few minutes the parrot squawked and kicked and screamed.

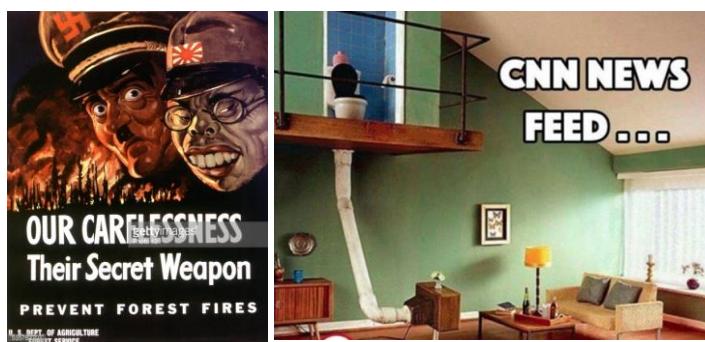
Then suddenly there was total quiet. Not a peep was heard for over a minute.

Fearing that he'd hurt the parrot, John quickly opened the door to the freezer.. The parrot calmly stepped out onto John's outstretched arms and said "I believe I may have offended you with my rude language and actions. I'm sincerely remorseful for my inappropriate transgressions and I fully intend to do everything I can to correct my rude and unforgivable behavior."

John was stunned at the change in the bird's attitude.

As he was about to ask the parrot what had made such a dramatic change in his behavior, the bird spoke-up, very softly,

"May I ask what the turkey did?"





Military Canines

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Notes:

1. The Bulletin is provided as a website accessed document vice direct access. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to

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8. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. At the end of each article the primary source from which it was obtained is provided. The ++ indicates that the information was reformatted from the original source and/or editorialized from more than one source. Because of the number of articles contained in each Bulletin there is no way that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken from previously reliable sources. My staff consists of only one person (myself) and it is a 7/10-12 endeavor to prepare and publish. Readers who question the validity of content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.

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