

RAO

BULLETIN

15 March 2018

PDF Edition



THIS RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE BULLETIN CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

Pg	Article	Subject
* DOD *		
04	==	Selective Service System [27] ---- (Should the Draft Be Reinstated?)
05	==	DoD Tuition Assistance [06] ---- (Non-Traditional Use Proposal)
06	==	Arlington National Cemetery [73] ---- (Burial Eligibility Restrictions Proposed)
07	==	AFRH [11] ---- (IG Report on Declining Finances)
07	==	DoD Weapons Sales ---- (Waivers to Foreign Governments Cost Taxpayers Billions)
09	==	DoD Lawsuit PTSD Biased Discharges ---- (Impacts 57,000 Between 2011 & 2015)
10	==	DoD Lawsuit Tripler AMC Malpractice ---- (\$24.7 Million Awarded)
11	==	DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ---- (Reported 01 thru 15 MAR 2018)
12	==	POW/MIA Recoveries ---- (Reported 01 thru 15 MAR 2018 Eight)
* VA *		
14	==	VA Secretary [65] ---- (More Leadership Changes Promised)
15	==	VA Secretary [66] ---- (Power Struggle Paralyzes Trump's Plan to Fix Veterans' Care)
17	==	VA Health Care Access [61] ---- (Audit Reveals Incorrect Reporting of Wait Times)
18	==	VA Cancer Treatment [09] ---- (Colonoscopy Impact on Colorectal Morality Rate)
18	==	VA PDSI ---- (Safer Therapy Initiatives for Anxiety/Stress/Depression/Insomnia)
20	==	VA Mustard Agent Care [07] ---- (Compensation Approved)

- 21 == VA Adoption Assistance ---- (Final Interim Rule)
- 22 == VA Hepatitis C Care [17] ---- (Vets Infected 2014 - 146k | 2018 - 20k | 2019 - 0)
- 23 == VA Vet Home Policy ---- (Life Ending Drugs)
- 24 == Opioid Addiction [03] ---- (Opioids Not Better than Nonopioid Treatment for Pain)
- 24 == VA Accredited Representatives ---- (Disability Claim Assistance)
- 26 == VA Lung Cancer Care ---- (LDCT Screening Enhances Care for Veterans)
- 26 == VA Physician License Revocations [01] ---- (Record Review Promise Blasted)
- 27 == VA HUD-VASH [07] ---- (Sting Uncovers Vet Home Leasing Discrimination)
- 28 == VA Benefits Eligibility [08] ---- (Based on Disability Rating)
- 30 == VA Vet Choice [71] ---- (New Study Questions Private Care Provider's Capabilities)
- 31 == PTSD [243] ---- (Sample Disability Claim Pointman Stressor Letter)
- 33 == PTSD [244] ---- (Service Dog Pilot Program)
- 34 == PTSD [245] ---- (Pilot Telehealth Program (TOP) for Rural Vets)
- 35 == VAMC Miami FL [04] ---- (HIV Testing Discrepancies)
- 36 == VAMC Phoenix AZ [01] ---- (Screened! Take Ownership Of Your Health)
- 37 == VAMC Washington DC [07] ---- (Major Improvements Undertaken)

*** VETS ***

- 38 == MOH Awards [08] ---- (WWI Black Nominee's Recommendation Under Review)
- 39 == GI Bill [250] ---- (Transparency Expanded on Expenditures)
- 40 == California Veterans Home [17] ---- (Yountville Vet Center Killings)
- 41 == California Veterans Home [18] ---- (Unanswered Questions on Killings)
- 42 == Trump Pardons Sailor ---- (Convicted Of Taking Illegal Photos Aboard Submarine)
- 43 == Vet Jobs [230] ---- (Training Funded for 20,000 Tradespeople)
- 43 == Stolen Valor [109]---- (Reported 180301 thru 180315)
- 44 == Vet Suicide [20] ---- (AMVETS/VA Partnership | HEAL Program)
- 45 == Vet Scholarships [09] ---- (Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship)
- 46 == National Resource Directory [05] ---- (Designed For Veterans)
- 46 == Military Spouse Deportation ---- (PIP Eligibility Blocked by ICE & DHS Actions)
- 48 == Military Spouse Deportation [01] ---- (Multiple Families Under Stress)
- 49 == Military Spouse Deportation [02] ---- (Multiple Families Impacted)
- 52 == Vet Cemetery California [17] ---- (MINC Petition Gets VA's Attention)
- 53 == Obit | Floyd Carter Sr. ---- (8 MAR 2018)
- 54 == Obit | Togo West Jr. ---- (8 MAR 2018)
- 55 == Obit | Veronica Byrnes Bradley ---- 28 FEB 2018
- 55 == AFL Q&A 21 & 22 ---- (Grandchild VA Benefits & Purple Heart Obtainment)
- 56 == Retiree Appreciation Days ---- (Scheduled As of 15 MAR 2018)
- 57 == Vet Hiring Fairs ---- (Scheduled As of 16 MAR 2018)
- 57 == Vet State Benefits & Discounts ---- (South Carolina | MAR 2018)

*** VET LEGISLATION***

- 58 == Military Food Stamps [03] ---- (Senate Legislation Proposed)
- 59 == Vet Legislative Wins 2018 ---- (March | S.2372, S.2248 & H.R.3656)
- 59 == Military Retirement Pay [09] ---- (AB-2394 | Exemption From CA Income Tax)

*** MILITARY***

- 60 == USMC Data Breach [01] ---- (Email Sent to Wrong Distribution List)
- 61 == Columbia SSBN Program [01] ---- (\$100 Billion Projected Cost)
- 62 == Helicopter War Memorial ---- (Arlington Dedication 18 APR 2018)
- 63 == USS Ralph Johnson (DDG-114) [01] ---- (To Be Commissioned 24 MAR)
- 63 == Navy Hybrid Destroyers ---- (Installation Program Cancelled)
- 64 == USS Lexington (CV-2) ---- (Wreckage Discovered)
- 66 == MAVNI Program [07] ---- Military Base Immigration Center Closures
- 67 == Military Working Dogs [04] ---- (Mishandled | Army Will Comply w/Call for Reform)
- 67 == SCRA [08] ---- (BMW Financial Services' \$2.2 Million Settlement)
- 68 == Marine Corps Boot Camp ---- (High School Educators Get 5-Day Course)
- 69 == Military Humor ---- (Bumper Stickers Seen On Bases)
- 70 == West Point [04] ---- (8 Things To Consider Before Applying)
- 71 == Warships That Will Change The Future ---- (SAS Mendi F-148)

*** MILITARY HISTORY***

- 72 == HMS Hood Sinking ---- (How She Was Sunk by the Bismarck)
- 72 == Operation K ---- (2nd Pearl Harbor Raid | A Colossal Failure)
- 74 == Air Force Legend ---- (John L. Levitow | USAF's Lowest Ranking MOH Recipient)
- 75 == French Cruiser Emile Bertin ---- (WWII Career)
- 76 == WWII Vets 157 ---- (George Ciampa | Picking Up The Dead)
- 77 == WWII Vets 158 ---- (George Mendonsa | The Kissing Sailor)
- 78 == Military History Anniversaries ---- (16 thru 31 MAR)
- 79 == Medal of Honor Citations ---- (Gerstung~Robert E | WWII)
- 80 == WWII Bomber Nose Art ---- (02) Windy City Kitty)

*** HEALTH CARE***

- 81 == Health Care Options At Age 65 ---- (Veterans)
- 81 == Sleep [07] ---- (Why Are We So Sleep Deprived, and Why Does It Matter?)
- 83 == Kidney Disease [07] ---- (Risk Reduction)
- 84 == Opioid Addiction [02] ---- (Trump Suggests Death Penalty for Dealers)
- 85 == Opioid Addiction [04] ---- (Punitive Approach to Addiction Does Not right the Wrongs)
- 86 == Uterus Transplant ---- (Military Spouse Delivers Baby in Experimental Procedure)
- 88 == Mononucleosis ---- (Kissing Disease | It's A One-and-Done Event)
- 88 == TRICARE Podcast 439 ---- (Nutrition Tips - Qualifying Life Events)
- 89 == TRICARE Podcast 440 ---- (TRICARE Enrollment Changes)

*** FINANCIAL ***

- 90 == IRS Tax Deductions [01] ---- (Property Taxes 2018 thru 2025)
- 91 == Student Loan [06] ---- (Public Service Loan Forgiveness in Jeopardy)
- 92 == IRS Forgiven Debt Policy [02] ---- (Student Loans)
- 93 == VA Home Loan [58] ---- (Second Mortgage)
- 93 == VA Home Loan [59] ---- (Energy Efficient Mortgage Program)
- 94 == Medicare Card Switch Scam ---- (How It works)
- 94 == Making Money After Retirement [01] ---- (10 More Ways to Do It)
- 96 == Tax Burden for California Retired Vets ---- (As of MAR 2018)

*** GENERAL INTEREST ***

- 97 == Notes of Interest ---- (01 thru 15 MAR 2018)
- 98 == Gun Deaths ---- (2016 Breakdown of U.S. Deaths)
- 99 == Gun Deaths [01] ---- (More Thoughts on Gun Control)
- 99 == Russia Nuclear Weapons ---- (Latest Developments)
- 101 == National Suicide Hotline ---- (3-Digit Number A Step Closer)
- 102 == Men vs. Women ---- (How To Make Each Other Happy)
- 102 == National Anthem [08] ---- (Military Movie Theaters)
- 103 == Funerals [01] ---- (Trends | A Few Interesting Options Worth Investigating)
- 104 == One Word Essays ---- (Friendship)
- 105 == Quotable Quotes 01 ---- (Things to Think About)
- 105 == Billy Graham ---- (The Story Behind His Casket)
- 108 == What's Inside ---- (Hand, 9V Battery, Fireworks Shell, & Mature Hedge)
- 108 == Brain Teaser ---- (Grandmas and Trolls)
- 109 == Vinegar [01] ---- (Multiple Uses | Grooming, Health, & House Cleaning)
- 110 == Where There's a Will, There's a Way ---- (12)
- 111 == Brain Teaser Answer ---- (Grandmas and Trolls)
- 111 == Have You Heard? ---- (Older Bud-weiser | The Cynical Philosopher)

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 - South Carolina Vet State Benefits & Discounts MAR 2018
- Attachment - Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 MAR
- Attachment - HMS Hood Sinking

*** DoD ***



Selective Service System Update 27 ► Should the Draft Be Reinstated?

Should we bring back the draft? Should women be required to register for selective service? Every now and then, the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) gets these questions or requests for them to engage directly toward one result or the other. From their broad audience come equally broad opinions on both of these subjects. MOAA's position on the draft has been consistent: We support the all-volunteer "career" force as a necessary component of a strong national defense. Ever since the draft was eliminated in 1973, our military services have worked to recruit, train, and equip volunteers who join by choice — the result continues to be the most formidable, capable military on the planet.

MOAA has deferred to the service and defense secretaries regarding women in combat, and in December 2015, then-Secretary of Defense Ash Carter opened all combat jobs to women. What didn't follow was a decision to

require women to register for selective service (the draft), and the following year was somewhat contentious on the topic because men registered, women did not. In a 2016 survey, MOAA solicited feedback from currently serving members on this issue. We found the majority of those currently serving said that with the opening of all combat roles to women, women should be required to register for the draft. But not everyone agreed, thus keeping the issue of women registering for the draft alive on Capitol Hill and earning the attention of Congress, which stepped in to solve the problem by identifying the need for a study.

The FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act established the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service to (1) “conduct a review of the military selective service process (commonly referred to as “the draft”); and (2) consider methods to increase participation in military, national, and public service in order to address national security and other public service needs of the Nation.” This study will take place over 30 months and will include the gathering of opinions and subject-matter reviews. MOAA already has shared with commission members concerns regarding conscription as an offset to the challenges of getting volunteers. They were assured the efforts of the commission are quite broad and more focused on generally affecting the desire or propensity to serve. This might help solve the national problem without conscription.

The Commission did agree conscription would only be likely in a national crisis requiring the likes and numbers of citizens who quickly could be amassed, trained, and equipped — in other words, a global engagement. The debate will continue, but you now get a voice in the process. You can provide your comments directly through the commission’s website, www.inspire2serve.gov. Share your thoughts on these seven questions, which are posted on the website above the answer block:

1. Is a military draft or draft contingency still a necessary component of U.S. national security?
2. Are modifications to the selective service system needed?
3. How can the U.S. increase participation in military, national, and public service by individuals with skills critical to address the national security and other public service needs of the nation?
4. What are the barriers to participation in military, national, or public service?
5. Does service have inherent value, and, if so, what is it?
6. Is a mandatory service requirement for all Americans necessary, valuable, and feasible?
7. How does the U.S. increase the propensity for Americans, particularly young Americans, to serve?

[Source: MOAA | Dan Curry | March 1, 2018 ++]

DoD Tuition Assistance Update 06 ► Non-Traditional Use Proposal

Service members could use their military tuition assistance for training programs outside of traditional colleges and universities under legislation being introduced 12 MAR in the House and Senate. The plan, offered by a bipartisan group of lawmakers in each chamber, would allow eligible troops to use the money for licensing, credentialing and certification programs offered outside of institutions of higher education. Backers said the change is needed to help better prepare service members for post-military life, and recognizes that not all civilian jobs require a traditional four-year degree. “We have an obligation to ensure service members have access to the resources they need as they transition to civilian life,” said Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA) who is co-sponsoring the Senate proposal with the chamber’s Veterans’ Affairs Committee chairman, Johnny Isakson (R-GA) and ranking member Jon Tester (D-MT).

“Service members possess unique skill sets that make them great candidates for many in-demand jobs, but the current system makes it difficult for service members to obtain the licensing or credentialing needed for those jobs. As many skills based jobs do not require four-year degrees, [this bill] would allow service members to receive the [assistance] they need in a more expedient manner.” Veterans can already use their post-military education benefits for a host of non-college certification programs, particularly for specialties such as truck driving and emergency medical training. But tuition assistance provided to currently serving troops has a separate set of rules and

restrictions. Nearly all of the funding supplied under current initiatives is based on how many credit hours service members complete as part of degree programs.

Tester called it a “commonsense measure” that provides more flexibility in preparation for a modern civilian workforce. “The jobs of the 21st century evolve quickly, and today’s workers never stop learning,” he said in a statement. “We’re committed to helping our service members succeed at every stage: on active-duty, in the reserves or as a veteran.” Transition assistance for troops has been a major focus for lawmakers in recent years, with a focus on allowing service members to more easily transfer their military skills to civilian-sector jobs. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 12, 2018 ++]

Arlington National Cemetery Update 73 ► Burial Eligibility Restrictions Proposed

Veterans groups on 8 MAR opposed the idea of severely restricting eligibility for burial at Arlington National Cemetery in coming years to ensure the viability of the iconic landmark for decades to come. But military officials said they don’t see another realistic choice. “We are filling up every single day,” said Karen Durham-Aguilera, executive director of Army National Military Cemeteries. “Within the next few years, Section 60 — known for the recent wars — will be closed. This is on our mind every day.” The 154-year-old cemetery, originally established as an overflow site for mounting Civil War casualties, has become one of the most hallowed military sites in America. More than 3 million visitors travel to the site annually, and more than 7,000 service members were interred at the cemetery in fiscal 2017 alone. But Army officials said only about 100,000 burial sites are left at the site, tucked between the Potomac River and the ever growing northern Virginia suburbs. Expansion plans are expected to keep burials on pace into the 2040s, but not much beyond that.

That has prompted discussions of eligibility for burial at the site. Currently, most honorably discharged veterans can request Arlington Cemetery as their final resting place. Proposals under consideration by the service could restrict that to only troops killed in the line of duty and certain distinguished veterans, like Medal of Honor or Purple Heart recipients. Veterans groups told lawmakers during a House Armed Services Committee hearing on the topic Thursday that they’re not in favor of such moves. “We should save a select number of spaces for those individuals, but not change the eligibility rules at the exclusion of those serving today,” said retired Col. Keith Zuegel, senior director at the Air Force Association. Officials from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Military Officers Association of America and American Legion expressed similar concerns with excluding thousands of veterans who may have been planning to use the national cemetery for their burials.

But an Army survey conducted last year found wider support for more exclusive rules, with more than 60 percent in favor of restrictions that military planners say will keep the site viable well past 2100. A second survey on the issue will be conducted this spring. Durham-Aguilera said the current space crunch means that “a veteran from the 1991 Gulf War who lives to his or her normal life expectancy will not be able to be interred at Arlington.” Plans to add more above-ground burial sites and to carve out more space within the existing cemetery boundaries will add some short-term relief, but not significantly help the problem. Several veterans groups suggested the possibility of adding a new national burial site with the same “Arlington” name elsewhere in the National Capital region, saying it could avoid the eligibility fight and create a second national touchstone for deceased veterans.

But lawmakers on the committee expressed skepticism that a new site would carry the same national importance, and expressed their preference that service members killed in the line of duty be ensured a place of honor at the current site well into the future. “We should put a higher priority for those individuals at Arlington,” said Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb. and a retired Air Force brigadier general. “It seems like that place should be reserved for those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for the country.” An advisory committee for the cemetery is expected to make its recommendations to Congress on the eligibility issue later this year. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Leo Shane III | March 8, 2018 ++]

AFRH Update 11 ► IG Report on Declining Finances

The Defense Department and former Armed Forces Retirement Home officials failed to conduct financial oversight of the home, contributing to the sharp decline in its finances, a DoD Inspector General report has confirmed. The report, issued in February, echoes concerns of defense officials, who have taken steps over the last year to shore up the oversight and viability of the agency’s two homes — including firing the previous boss. With campuses in Washington and Gulfport, Mississippi, the homes care for about 1,000 former enlisted members.

Auditors found that DoD and AFRH officials allowed the AFRH trust fund to decline from \$186.5 million in fiscal 2010 to \$55 million in fiscal 2016. It would have declined even more in 2016 if \$20 million in taxpayer dollars hadn’t been transferred into the fund. For at least the near future, the agency will need an annual infusion of at least \$20 million in taxpayer dollars to meet its operating expenses. Part of the revenue comes from the residents’ fees and from a 50-cents-a-month mandatory deduction from the paycheck of active-duty enlisted, warrant officers and limited duty officers. Among the IG’s recommendations was to increase that monthly active-duty paycheck deduction to \$1. That move, apparently, would come as a last resort: In response to the IG’s recommendation, DoD’s deputy chief management officer stated that the deduction will stay the same unless a long-term fix using other revenue methods can’t be found. The AFRH is working on a new strategic plan, expected to be completed by 1 JUL, according to the report.

The IG report disputed the DoD statement from Stephanie Barna, acting secretary of defense for manpower and reserve affairs, that the AFRH didn’t bring the funding crisis to the attention of DoD officials until late 2014. Defense Department personnel and readiness officials “should have monitored the AFRH Trust Fund balance” in accordance with DoD requirements and should have identified concerns before fiscal 2014, auditors stated. Auditors also noted that the concerns were raised by AFRH officials in a fiscal 2013 performance accountability report. Barna hired the previous AFRH chief operating officer as part of her personnel and readiness oversight duties. That COO was fired in September by David Tillotson III, assistant deputy chief management officer, who cited the COO’s unwillingness to shore up the finances of the agency’s two homes. In November, officials named retired Army Maj. Gen. Stephen T. Rippe as the AFRH’s new chief executive officer; in January, retired Army Lt. Col. James M. Branham was named as the new COO.

Earlier in 2017, DoD officials moved oversight of AFRH from personnel and readiness officials to the deputy chief management officer. Officials have been looking at alternate revenue sources, including changes in the operation of the golf course on the Washington property. Some of the recommendations made by the IG involve changing contracting procedures, and identifying the impact that any major capital project has on the AFRH trust fund. A significant reason for the depleting of the trust fund was an \$88 million construction project on the D.C. campus that was completed in fiscal 2013. IG auditors stated the trust fund would still have faced uncertainty and become insolvent in later years because of the steady decline in revenues and the increase in expenses, even with the construction of the new \$88 million building. [Source: ArmyTimes | Karen Jowers | March 7, 2018 ++]

DoD Weapons Sales ► Waivers to Foreign Governments Cost Taxpayers Billions

Under the law, when a foreign government buys U.S. weapon systems through the Department of Defense those governments are required to reimburse the Department for research, development, and other one-time costs for those systems. A recent audit by the Government Accountability Office found the Department has waived \$16 billion it

could have recovered for taxpayers on \$250 billion worth of weapons sold under the Foreign Military Sales program from 2012 to 2017.

Under the law, foreign governments can request a waiver from repaying these costs, which the Department can grant for factors like interoperability or to avoid the loss of a sale. Defense contractors argued this requirement for foreign governments to repay the U.S. taxpayers raises the price of our weapon systems, making it more difficult to complete a sale. When the Department waives these repayments, that usually gives a competitive edge that defense contractors benefit from enormously. The contractors invest very little of their own money in research and development—those costs are generally paid by the taxpayers as part of the original acquisition process.

The contractors are then able to sell these weapons, developed at taxpayer expense, to foreign governments at a significant profit and only a minimal corporate investment. Allowing foreign governments to skate on the legally required repayments is little more than welfare for defense contractors, and this audit makes a compelling case for why Congress should close this loophole. Under the Arms Export Control Act the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, the Pentagon’s “point person” for all foreign military sales, evaluates waivers. As Bill Hartung, the Director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy explains, that office has perverse financial incentives to prioritize sales over what’s best for taxpayers or U.S. national security.

In a typical sale, the U.S. government is involved every step of the way. The Pentagon often does assessments of an allied nation’s armed forces in order to tell them what they “need”—and of course what they always need is billions of dollars in new U.S.-supplied equipment. Then the Pentagon helps negotiate the terms of the deal, notifies Congress of its details, and collects the funds from the foreign buyer, which it then gives to the U.S. supplier in the form of a defense contract. In most deals, the Pentagon is also the point of contact for maintenance and spare parts for any U.S.-supplied system. The bureaucracy that helps make all of this happen, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, is funded from a 3.5 percent surcharge on the deals it negotiates. This gives it all the more incentive to sell, sell, sell.

Given DSCA’s incentives to promote foreign military sales, it’s unsurprising DSCA approved 810 of the 813 waivers it reviewed from 2012 to 2017—**an approval rate of 99 percent**. When it came to waivers for loss of sale, the GAO found “none included any additional information on competing offers or spending limits” as evidence that the sale would be lost if the payment wasn’t waived. As Hartung notes, the Obama Administration brokered more weapons sales than any other administration since World War II.

For most of the duration of the GAO’s audit, the head of DSCA was Vice Adm. Joseph Rixey. Before he left that position, The Intercept reported he was the guest of honor at a reception co-hosted by the Senate Aerospace Caucus and the Aerospace Industries Association, the latter representing contractors like Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon. “Thank you admiral for all that you do...in helping us to sell our products,” Lockheed Martin CEO Marilyn Hewson said at the event. Perhaps unsurprisingly, shortly after his retirement Rixey joined Lockheed Martin as vice president for international program support for Lockheed Government Affairs.

The Trump administration may be on track to increasing foreign military sales even more. The Security Assistance Monitor found that foreign military sales in the first year of the Trump administration slightly surpassed sales in the last year of the Obama administration. Waivers cost taxpayers approximately \$1.3 billion in 2016 and \$6 billion in 2017. Costs to taxpayers may increase further without more oversight. In January Reuters reported plans to increase the role of diplomats and military attaches to promote U.S. weapons sales. As part of that effort the State Department sent Ambassador Tina Kaidanow, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs and the top diplomat for overseeing arms sales, to the Singapore Airshow to promote U.S. weapons, including the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

Congress shares plenty of blame for betraying taxpayers, as well, by continually revising the Arms Export Control Act to further subsidize weapon sales. For instance, the law didn’t always allow loss-of-sale waivers from recouping research and development costs. But in 1996—at the urging of the Aerospace Industries Association—the

law was changed to allow such waivers if not recouping those costs could result in the loss of a sale. The Project On Government Oversight (POGO) fought the change and other efforts to get rid of recoupment payments, calling it “corporate welfare at its worst.” The GAO found that change alone resulted in substantial losses for taxpayers, since 338 loss-of-sale waivers totaling almost \$9.2 billion were given under that authority between 2012 and 2017.

In POGO’s 2017 Baker’s Dozen of recommendations to Congress they noted more must be done to make the Pentagon financially accountable. Reimbursing taxpayers must be part of the equation. Taxpayers invest a lot of money in the research and development of weapon systems—the Pentagon’s most recent budget request asks for \$92.4 billion for research, development, test, and evaluation—and they deserve a fair return on their investment. It’s time to revise the Arms Export Control Act to get rid of this multi-billion crony-capitalism loophole. [Source: War Is Boring | Mandy Smithberger | March 5, 2018 ++]

DoD Lawsuit | PTSD Biased Discharges ► Impacts 57,000 Between 2011 & 2015

By the age of 21, Marine Corps Cpl. Tyson Manker led infantrymen into battle in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. His actions as a Marine garnered him the Presidential Unit Citation and other awards, yet the military doesn’t consider his service as honorable. Manker endured intense combat, saw civilians killed and witnessed the death of a close friend – experiences that caused nightmares and other symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder that only worsened when he returned home. Later that year while on leave, Manker was caught with marijuana, which he used to self-medicate. He was kicked out of the Marine Corps for misconduct with an other-than-honorable discharge. “It’s a national disgrace for the federal government to say someone doesn’t have honor because they didn’t handle the stresses of war the way some bureaucrat back stateside thinks they should’ve,” said Manker, now 36 and an attorney in Illinois.

Having tried and failed to get an upgrade, Manker is now the lead plaintiff in a class-action lawsuit filed 2 MAR against the Navy in the U.S. District Court in Connecticut. The suit claims the Navy has an institutional bias against veterans with PTSD. The National Veterans Council for Legal Redress is also a plaintiff in the lawsuit. It’s a Connecticut-based group comprised of veterans with other-than-honorable discharges. It’s estimated that tens of thousands of servicemembers suffering from PTSD or other mental health conditions caused by their wartime experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have been kicked out of the military with other-than-honorable discharges, known as “bad paper.” The status precludes them from receiving medical care and other benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs. Worse still, Manker said, is the stigma associated with the discharge status. “We’re in a system of punishing those who serve on the frontlines,” said the veteran, who has been haunted by his other-than-honorable status for years.

The Navy Discharge Review Board, responsible for discharges of sailors and Marines, has granted upgrades in only 15 percent of cases since 2016 in which PTSD was a contributing factor, according to the suit. In comparison, the Army granted upgrades in 45 percent of the same kind of cases and the Air Force granted 37 percent. “My hope with this is that the discharge review board will start following the law, plain and simple,” Manker said. “It’s about principle. It’s about restoring honor.”

After Manker was kicked out of the Marines, a civilian doctor diagnosed him with PTSD. He was later denied mental health care by the VA, and he continued to self-medicate. He said he struggled with suicidal thoughts. Manker turned things around in 2011, when he began seeing another civilian doctor who also diagnosed him with PTSD. His health improved, he went to college and then law school. In 2016, the Navy Discharge Review Board denied his upgrade request despite his multiple PTSD diagnoses. The lawsuit filed Friday requests Manker’s discharge be upgraded to honorable and the Navy follow Defense Department policy that requires review boards to give “liberal consideration” to veterans who seek to upgrade their discharges because of mental health conditions. A

policy change was made in August in an attempt to afford more leniency to veterans, but the suit claims the Navy board continues to unlawfully deny upgrades.

The lawsuit was filed by the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School, overseen by Michael Wishnie, which has filed other lawsuits in recent years seeking to change the military’s treatment of veterans with other-than-honorable discharges. The suit has the potential to include tens of thousands of veterans. The Government Accountability Office released findings in 2017 that the Defense Department separated approximately 92,000 servicemembers for misconduct from 2011 through 2015, and 57,000 of them were diagnosed with PTSD, traumatic brain injury or other conditions that can change servicemembers’ moods and behaviors and lead to disciplinary problems. Like Manker, many of them are disqualified from receiving any VA health care or other benefits because of their discharge status.

“He’s not afraid to sue the DOD,” Thomas Burke, a Marine Corps veteran with bad paper, said of Wishnie. “That’s really what it takes.” Burke isn’t part of this lawsuit. He has an attorney and is working on an upgrade request, but he hasn’t filed one yet. Looking at the numbers, he’s not too confident he’ll be approved. In Afghanistan in 2010, Burke came close to committing suicide. At the time, he was already diagnosed with PTSD. Six months after his near-suicide, he was kicked out of the Marines. Now he advocates for other veterans with bad paper. He’ll graduate from Yale in May with his Masters of Divinity, intent on becoming a minister. What he really wants, he said, is to be a military chaplain. But his bad paper makes that impossible. “I know I’d be in a place to love and care for these soldiers and Marines better than anyone else could, and I’ll never get that opportunity,” Burke said. “Just the rhetoric, the language of ‘other-than-honorable’ – it hurts. It’s isolating. It’s a chip on my shoulder.”

There are a lot of veterans out there who feel the same, Manker said, and many of them don’t know what they can do. Even as an attorney, Manker described the requirements to prove an upgrade as daunting. With the lawsuit, he’s hoping that process is made easier. “How do we expect them to do what I, as an attorney, failed to do with the discharge review board?” Manker said. “If I can’t prove my case, who can?” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | March 2, 2018 ++]

DoD Lawsuit | Tripler AMC Malpractice ► \$24.7 Million Awarded

A Navy spouse who suffered major kidney damage in 2013 after giving birth to a daughter at Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, scored a big win in a lawsuit against the military. Marites Campano, along with her husband, Raphael, were awarded \$24.7 million for permanent health damage after she contracted a bacterial infection that led to sepsis, according to the Honolulu Star Advertiser.

Campano’s daughter was born July 23 at about 1 a.m. “Two hours later, at 3 a.m., she spiked a very large fever and it was obvious at that time — and that was the start of the continuing breach of the standard of care — the malpractice — that she had an infection that should have been treated with IV antibiotics,” attorney Rick Fried told the Star Advertiser. “There’s no risk, and it was almost presumptively a serious infection that needed treatment.” Because physicians at Tripler failed to diagnose or treat the infection with antibiotics, Campano has endured kidney disease that has necessitated dialysis and numerous transplants, the Star Advertiser reported. She will have to take immunosuppressant medication for the rest of her life, according to the report.

The \$24.7 million verdict, the result of the lawsuit filed in October 2015, is the largest ever levied against Tripler, Fried said. In 2006, a \$16.5 million verdict was leveled against Tripler after a newborn baby, Izzy Peterson, was provided carbon dioxide instead of oxygen. [Source: ArmyTimes | J.D. Simkins | March 8, 2018 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 15 MAR 2018

Richmond, TX — A recently retired county jail guard in Texas has been charged in federal court with pocketing two decades worth of military pension checks sent to his long deceased uncle. The Houston Chronicle reports that **Burnie Joseph Haynes** is accused of theft of federal funds for taking more than \$286,000 from his late uncle's bank account, which was receiving military pension checks for service in the U.S. Air Force. He's wasset to appear in federal court 6 MAR. Haynes was a detention officer for the Fort Bend Sheriff's Office until about two weeks ago. Court documents show Haynes' uncle, Joseph McKinley Wells, died in 1996. He didn't list any benefactors on his account, but Haynes had signatory authority through a power of attorney. Federal officials allege Haynes stole money from 1996-2016 in the form of retirement pay from the Defense Department. [Source: Marine Corps Times | James Rufus Koren | February 23, 2018 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Fat Leonard — Accepting and soliciting gifts of lavish hotel rooms, drinks, meals and prostitutes has officially ended the careers of two of the Navy's rising stars — and will put a dent in both of their savings accounts as well. Capt. **John F. Steinberger** and Cmdr. **Jason W. Starmer** both struck deals with military prosecutors in separate but concurrent trials that played out 6 MAR in adjacent courtrooms on Norfolk Naval Station. The pair became the latest casualties of the Leonard "Fat Leonard" Francis scandal as they struck plea deals with Navy prosecutors and Adm. Phil Davidson, who, as head of Fleet Forces Command, has been designated the convening authority in any of the scandalous Fat Leonard cases. The 350-pound Francis, a Malaysian businessman who ran the Singapore-based company Glenn Defense Marine Asia, admitted last year to bilking the Navy for \$35 million in overcharges. He has yet to be sentenced.

Steinberger, a surface warfare officer, was initially charged with conspiracy, violation of a lawful order, conduct unbecoming, graft and bribery. In the end, the conspiracy, graft and bribery charges were dropped, and he instead pleaded guilty to a dereliction of duty charge for accepting gifts from Francis. He also pleaded guilty to an additional charge of conduct unbecoming an officer, specifically for having sex on multiple occasions with on-the-house prostitutes in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and The Philippines. At the time of the offenses, Steinberger was the commander of Destroyer Squadron 1, embarked on the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson. The sentence for Steinberger, handed down by Navy trial judge Capt. Charles Purnell, was a punitive letter of reprimand and a \$10,000 fine — with no jail time.

Steinberger will be administratively separated from the Navy and is expected to be able to retire as an O-5, the last paygrade in which he served honorably, Navy officials said. Still, the final decision on his retirement rests on the shoulders of the Secretary of the Navy. "I failed, I absolutely failed," Steinberger said in his statement to the trial judge before sentencing. "I did do what I plead guilty to ... I am ashamed." Since being charged last April 2017, Steinberger has been assigned — in a move that's sure to raise eyebrows — to Navy Region Southwest as the head of the Navy Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program.



Capt. John Steinberger (left) , shown here as the commander of Destroyer Squadron 1, Glenn Francis "fat leonard" Leonard (center), and U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander Jason W. Starmer (right)

Starmer, meanwhile, is a former enlisted sailor who was initially charged with graft, violating a lawful order, making false official statements and conduct unbecoming an officer while serving as head of operations for the Joint United States Military Advisory Group, Thailand. He pleaded guilty to the charges of patronizing a prostitute and adultery — for having sex with prostitutes provided by Francis in Singapore on consecutive nights in April 2013. Starmer also pleaded guilty to willful dereliction of duty for accepting not only the prostitutes, but complimentary food and drinks on multiple occasions. A 28-year Navy man, Starmer was ordered by Navy trial judge Capt. Robert Monahan to pay a \$3,000 fine. He'll also be restricted to Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling in Washington for 60 days. He won't, however, serve any hard time.

Starmer, like Steinberger, will be administratively separated from the Navy, but will most likely be allowed to retire at his current paygrade. But once again, the final retirement decision will be left to the Secretary of the Navy. "I was tempted by lust and I failed, and that disgrace I have to live with," Starmer told the trial judge in an unsworn statement to the court. "That horrible mistake destroyed my career and destroyed my reputation ... I throw myself at the mercy of the court."

Navy officials also announced today in a statement that Lt. **Peter Vapor**, a supply officer who has previously been slated for court-martial, agreed to accept nonjudicial punishment from Davidson on 27 FEB. Vapor's involvement included accepting and patronizing prostitutes, accepting gifts from Leonard and lying about it to investigators. Davidson found him guilty of violating a lawful order, making a false official statement and conduct unbecoming an officer. His punishment, the release said, was a punitive letter of reprimand and a forfeiture of \$2,000 for one month. Vapor will also be administratively separated. [Source: NavyTimes | Mark D. Faram | March 6, 2018 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries ► **Reported 01 thru 15 MAR 2018 | Eight**

"Keeping the Promise", "Fulfill their Trust" and "No one left behind" are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II 73,025, 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/2018> for a listing and details of those accounted for in 2018. 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. William W. Shank**, a P-38 pilot, was assigned to the 338th Fighter Squadron, 55th Fighter Group, 66th Fighter Wing, 8th Fighter Command, 8th Air Force. On Nov. 13, 1943, Shank was killed after engaging with the enemy on a mission to Bremen, Germany. Interment services are pending. [Read about Shank.](#)
- **Army Lt. Col. Robert G. Nopp**, an OV-1C pilot, was assigned to the 131st Aviation Company. On July 13, 1966, Nopp flew a night surveillance mission from Phu Bai Airfield over Attapu Province, Laos. Flying through heavy thunderstorms, radar and radio contact were lost with the aircraft, which was not uncommon due to the mountainous terrain in that part of Laos. When the aircraft did not return as scheduled, search efforts were initiated, but no crash site was found. Interment services are pending. [Read about Nopp.](#)
- **Army Pfc. Leroy W. Bryant**, 22, of Autreyville, GA, was scheduled to be buried 9 MAR in Columbus, Ohio. Bryant was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. On Feb. 6, 1951, Bryant's unit was tasked to determine the location and strength of enemy forces in the town of Yonghyon-ni, South Korea. They were attacked by enemy forces and forced to withdraw. Bryant could not be accounted for after the attack and was declared missing in action. Bryant's name later appeared on a list of Americans who died while in custody of communist forces, informally known as the "Christmas List." Following the war, a returning prisoner from Bryant's regiment reported he was told Bryant died while being marched north to prisoner of war Camp 1, located along the Yalu River, near the village of Changsong. [Read about Bryant.](#)
- **Army Pfc. Lamar E. Newman**, 19, of Griffin, GA, was scheduled to be buried 2 MAR in his hometown. He was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. In November 1950, his unit took part in a defensive operation in the vicinity of the village of Kujang, North Korea. The division suffered heavy losses, with many soldiers going missing or being killed or captured. Newman went missing on Nov. 27, 1950, near the village of Kujang as a result of heavy fighting. [Read about Newman.](#)
- **Marine Corps Pfc. Arnold J. Harrison**, 19, of Detroit, Mich assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division will was scheduled to be buried 2 MAR in Dallas, Texas. On Nov. 20, 1943, Harrison's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Over several days of intense fighting, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed. Harrison was killed on the first day of the battle. [Read about Harrison.](#)
- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Herman W. Mulligan** was assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 22nd Marine Regiment, 6th Marine Division. On May 30, 1945, Mulligan's unit was engaged with Japanese forces on Hill 27 on the northern bank of the Kobuka Estuary, Okinawa, Japan, when a large crypt of ammunition exploded, killing Mulligan and wounding dozens of others. Interment services are pending. [Read about Mulligan.](#)

- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class George H. Gibson** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Gibson was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gibson.](#)
- **Navy Radioman 3rd Class Howard V. Keffer** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Keffer was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Keffer.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | March 15, 2018 ++]

* VA *



VA Secretary Update 65 ► More Leadership Changes Promised

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin on 8 MAR promised another department leadership shakeup in the wake of yet another scathing inspector general report that accused VA officials of additional improper behavior. which overshadowed the goal of improving patient care. This time, the report wasn't focused on Shulkin himself, as has been the case with a series of scandals at the department in recent weeks. Instead, the new report focuses on errors at the Washington DC VA Medical Center that lead to the ouster of the hospital's chief executive last year and an ensuing slew of resignations as investigators worked through problems with supply shortages, improper sterilization of medical equipment and inadequate staffing at the campus.

“Failed leadership at multiple levels within VA put patients and assets at the DC VA Medical Center at unnecessary risk and resulted in a breakdown of core services,” VA Inspector General Michael Missal said in a statement accompanying the report. “It created a climate of complacency that allowed these conditions to exist for years.” In a hastily called press conference at the hospital Wednesday morning, Shulkin announced plans for a series of local staff changes and higher-level VA reorganizations. Two regional directors — one for the New England VA network, one for the Arizona and Southwest United States network — will retire in coming days, and the Washington, D.C., network director will be reassigned to another senior level job. A new executive will be put in charge of all three regions to implement a series of reforms.

The VA's overall procurement program will be overhauled, Shulkin said. All VA hospitals will undergo new hiring and staffing reviews and be subject to unannounced inspections, to ensure similar problems aren't festering. “This is time for this organization, probably long overdue, to do business differently,” he said. “And that's why we're announcing an effort to restructure VA, and we're starting with these three (regions) where we think there are urgent issues that need to be addressed.”

But Shulkin — who served as the VA's top health care official when many of the DC medical center's problems first surfaced — deflected blame for not making the corrections sooner, saying that top officials were unaware of the problems just a few miles away from the department's national headquarters. He also sidestepped questions about recent turmoil at VA, asserting that the days of “unfortunate distractions” at his department are in the past. “My leadership team is fully committed to this work,” he said. “They are only focused on improving care to veterans today.”

Last month, a similarly lengthy and scathing inspector general report accused Shulkin of multiple ethics violations during an overseas trip last summer, where, in between official duties, he accepted free tickets from an English businesswoman to the Wimbledon tennis tournament and taxpayer dollars were used to pay for his wife's airfare. President Donald Trump has not directly addressed the issue, but White House Chief of Staff John Kelly has told veterans groups that Shulkin's job is safe for now. Beyond the retirement of Shulkin's chief of staff, no high-ranking officials at VA have been dismissed or have resigned since the scandals broke. That has left Shulkin publicly insisting that he is in control of the department and that his staff has moved past the infighting.

"We are not going to be spending time on identifying particular personnel actions, but it's going to be clear this is an organization that is moving ahead with a singular focus to fix these problems," Shulkin said. "The White House has made clear that I am the secretary. My job is to fix the system for veterans. Things that are not productive, or not contributing to services for veterans, are not being tolerated." Shulkin said he expects detailed plans on the just-announced reorganizations in the next two months. Meanwhile, he said, changes already made at the Washington DC medical center have resulted in dramatic improvements in recent months. He's hoping to see that progress repeated across the country with the additional staffing and procedural changes in the weeks ahead. [Source: AirForceTimes | Leo Shane III | March 7, 2018 ++]

VA Secretary Update 66 ► Power Struggle Paralyzes Trump's Plan to Fix Veterans' Care

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin is managing the government's second-largest bureaucracy from a fortified bunker atop the agency's Washington headquarters. He has canceled the morning meetings once attended by several of President Donald Trump's political appointees — members of his senior management team — gathering instead with aides he trusts not to miscast his remarks. Access to Shulkin's 10th-floor executive suite was recently revoked for several people he has accused of lobbying the White House to oust him. He and his public-affairs chief have not spoken in weeks. And in a sign of how deeply the secretary's trust in his senior staff has eroded, an armed guard now stands outside his office.

Shulkin, a favorite of Trump's who by most accounts tallied multiple wins in his first year serving a crucial constituency for the president, is fighting to regain his standing amid a mutiny. Although those who want him gone say their focus is fulfilling the president's priorities, it has become clear that one side — whether it's Shulkin, who is the only Obama administration holdover in Trump's Cabinet, or his estranged management team — is unlikely to survive the standoff. "The tragedy of all of this is that Shulkin is putting points on the scoreboard for Trump," said Philip Carter, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, where he focuses on veterans issues. "... **What gets lost with the palace intrigue is that reforms will stall.** It's the president's agenda that suffers with this kind of dysfunction."

-o-o-O-o-o-

The following portrait of the Department of Veterans Affairs' leadership crisis is based on interviews with 16 administration officials and other observers. Most spoke on the condition of anonymity to offer candid views.

It is an extraordinary state of affairs at the massive federal agency — only the Defense Department is bigger — whose mission is etched outside its headquarters a block from the White House: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle." Some of the secretary's aides, many of whom spent decades following orders in the military, have for weeks openly defied their VA chain of command. "This is salacious conspiracy, and it's treason," said Louis Celli, national director of veterans affairs for the American Legion, the country's largest veterans group. The organization's leaders recently informed the White House that, if necessary, they will gather members to picket outside with signs bearing the names of those they want removed.

Shulkin has sought to fire at least six of his senior managers and said as recently as 7 MAR that he has assurances from White House chief of staff John F. Kelly that terminating disloyal staffers is within his authority. Administration officials dispute this, however, saying Kelly has rebuffed such efforts. The rift has simmered for months, driven by personality and policy differences over shifting more health care for veterans to the private sector. It exploded into public view in February with the release of an inspector general report admonishing Shulkin and his staff for missteps surrounding a 10-day business trip to Europe. The report so outraged veterans that some threatened Shulkin, another reason security was enhanced outside his office.

Shulkin continues to have Trump's confidence, the White House says, but the impasse has compelled the secretary to seek support from those closest to the president. Last week, he flew to Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida to meet with Ike Perlmutter, chief executive of Marvel Entertainment, who advises Trump on veterans issues. The four-hour meeting focused largely on VA policy, but Shulkin also sought Perlmutter's backing in ridding the agency of those Shulkin considers obstacles to further changes. Some Trump appointees feel the work environment at VA is "toxic" and are said to be seeking other jobs within the administration, but as of 8 MAR none had departed, officials said.

Shulkin is a physician and former hospital administrator who ran VA's massive health-care arm for 18 months under President Barack Obama before becoming secretary. At a media event in Washington on 6 MAR, he made clear that he wants to clean house, announcing new leadership overseeing two dozen troubled hospitals. While those moves targeted career VA personnel who had failed to meet expectations, Shulkin used the opportunity to warn "everybody on the political team who is not helping." "It's taken a lot of my effort not to get distracted," Shulkin said in a separate interview with The Washington Post. "But I'm hearing from veterans all over the country saying, 'We know VA is moving in the right direction.'" He said many members of Congress also have shown support, telling him to "keep going."

'The right to choose'

Shulkin's critics deny they are plotting a coup. Rather, they say they are airing differences over a controversial policy priority for the president — that veterans have greater ability to choose private doctors at VA's expense. Though popular in the White House, the effort is viewed skeptically by the American Legion and other veterans groups that fear it will lead to VA's downsizing. Shulkin and his deputy, Thomas Bowman, have backed a bipartisan compromise in the Senate that would remove some restrictions on private care but keep VA in charge of deciding whether veterans can choose private doctors. Their stance has been a disappointment to the White House, Shulkin's critics say. "The president said he believes veterans have the right to choose," said Pete Hegseth, a former chief executive of Concerned Veterans for America, a conservative advocacy group backed by the billionaire industrialists Charles and David Koch. An Iraq War veteran, Hegseth is now co-host of "Fox & Friends Weekend." "Shulkin has talked a good game on Choice," Hegseth said, referring to an existing program that allows veterans to see private doctors, but with restrictions. "But he's sided with the permanent bureaucracy, the traditional veterans groups and the unions. This is a litmus test of whether he is truly a reformer who will drain the swamp at VA."

VA employs 360,000 people and accounts for \$186 billion annually. Its sprawling health-care and benefits system, which Trump blasted on the campaign trail as a wasteful, inefficient failure, churns away. But the dysfunction, observers say, has jeopardized legislation to extend the Choice program and a separate initiative to overhaul VA's aging electronic health-records system. The legislation remains deadlocked in Congress. And if Shulkin were to leave, his allies said, the health-records project would face indefinite delay. "Things have come to a grinding halt," one senior manager said. "It's killing the agency. Nobody trusts each other."

The power struggle

Shulkin and his team saw eye to eye at first. Some aides, such as John Ulyot, his public-affairs chief, arrived at VA with years of Capitol Hill experience. Others, including Jake Leinenkugel, a senior aide installed as part of a Cabinet-wide program to monitor secretaries' loyalty, has no prior government experience. In Shulkin's first year, Congress passed 11 bills to bring change to the agency, easing the backlog of benefit applications and appeals and

clearing a fast path to fire employees involved in misconduct. VA also launched a 24-hour hotline for veterans' complaints and began posting wait times for appointments at its 1,200 medical centers.

Beginning last spring, though, the debate over private care and a growing distrust of Shulkin's affiliation with the Obama administration began to fuel the leadership fight. Then in August, early in his tenure as deputy secretary, Bowman alienated some when he told staffers they needed to show respect for Shulkin, his chief of staff and the agency's career civil servants, and to value their expertise, according to three people with knowledge of the meeting. Bowman could not be reached for comment. A VA spokesman said the agency does not comment on private meetings. Shulkin, meanwhile, had concluded some of his aides had no defined roles and were not moving his efforts forward, according to current and former VA officials. In February, White House aides sought to have Bowman removed in an effort to rattle Shulkin. Bowman survived after a strong show of support from Capitol Hill, but he remains in the crosshairs of some in the White House and at VA.

Shulkin and his senior managers have clashed over high-level hires, including one former Obama administration official. They have also argued over policies believed by Trump's political team to be out of step with this administration's priorities, with the appointees consistently overruling the secretary. The friction grew so intense that Ulyyot, Leinenkugel and VA's legislative-affairs chief, Brooks Tucker, met regularly to plot the ouster of Shulkin and his top aides, according to current and former agency employees with knowledge of the conversations. At one point, Leinenkugel advocated he take over as deputy secretary until a permanent replacement could be found. Ulyyot declined to comment. Leinenkugel has said previously that he has routinely expressed his "concerns and suggestions for improvements." He did not return messages seeking comment for this report. Efforts to reach Tucker were unsuccessful.

The feud reached a peak last month with the release of the inspector general's report. Shulkin's chief of staff, a longtime civil servant who was disliked by the Trump team, stepped down as a result, and her replacement was installed by the White House, a sign of the administration's desire for more influence. Last week, Camilo Sandoval, a senior adviser at the Veterans Health Administration, appeared unexpectedly at the first meeting between new chief of staff Peter O'Rourke and Christopher Vojta, VA's new deputy undersecretary for health, according to two agency officials. Sandoval told Vojta he was representing the White House, these people said. In a move that unsettled Vojta and others, Sandoval inquired about Vojta's loyalty to Shulkin and Bowman. "Camilo was trying to assess whose side he was on," said one senior official familiar with the encounter. Sandoval did not respond to a message seeking comment. Curt Cashour, VA's press secretary, said the meeting never happened.

[Source: The Washington Post | Lisa Rein | March 9, 2018 ++]

VA Health Care Access Update 61 ► Audit Reveals Incorrect Reporting of Wait Times

An internal audit published 13 MAR by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) revealed that the agency incorrectly reported wait times experienced by veterans seeking first-time care from the agency's doctors. The report, issued by the agency's Office of Inspector General (OIG), found that the Veterans Health Administration incorrectly recorded wait times in 2017 experienced by veterans through its electronic records system, resulting in inaccurate public reports from the agency amid its wait-time scandal.

The VA has been under fire for long wait times for veterans seeking care since 2014, and last year began a yearlong audit of new patient appointments and consultations. The audit found that the Durham branch of the VA's care network experienced both high wait times in 2017 and a discrepancy between actual wait times and what was reported by the office. "The OIG estimated that new patients waited an average of about 18 days, and 18 percent of the appointments for new patients at VISN [Veterans Integrated Service Network] 15 facilities had wait times longer

than 30 days. This was higher than the estimated 10 percent that Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) electronic scheduling system showed," a synopsis of the report's findings reads.

"Staff did not correctly record clinically indicated dates for about 38 percent of the new patient appointments, which understated wait times by about 15 days," the findings continue. "Inaccurate wait time data resulted in veterans not being identified as eligible for Choice. With respect to veterans in VISN 15 who received care through Choice, the OIG estimated that the overall average wait time was 32 days. The audit estimated that 41 percent of the appointments had wait times longer than 30 days, and those veterans waited an average of 58 days." In 2017, Shulkin said the agency was "laser-focused" on reducing wait times for veterans seeking medical care. "We're focused on wait times, and things are getting better around the country," Shulkin said in April. "Where there still are wait time problems, we're laser-focused to make sure that no veterans are waiting for care." [Source: The Hill | John Bowden | March 13, 2018 ++]

VA Cancer Treatment Update 09 ► Colonoscopy Impact on Colorectal Mortality Rate

Colonoscopy was associated with a 61 percent reduction in colorectal (relating to colon and rectum) cancer mortality among veterans receiving care through the Veterans Affairs (VA) health system. The reduction was observed for both left- and right-sided colorectal cancer, although the association was weaker for right-sided cancer (46 percent versus 72 percent reduction). The findings are published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Colonoscopy is widely used in the VA health care system, where it is endorsed as a primary colorectal cancer screening option for average-risk patients aged 50 and older. Despite its increased use, it is not known whether colonoscopy decreases colorectal cancer mortality among veterans and whether the effect varies based on the anatomical location of colorectal cancer.

A team of researchers from the VA Medical Centers in Indianapolis and White River Junction (affiliated with Indiana University School of Medicine and Geisel School of Medicine in Dartmouth) reviewed VA-Medicare administrative data, and identified 4,964 case patients who were diagnosed with colorectal cancer between 2002 and 2008 and died of the disease by the end of 2010. Case patients were matched to 4 control patients (n = 19,856) without prior diagnosis of colorectal cancer. Exposure to colonoscopy was determined from 1997 to 6 months before colorectal cancer diagnosis in case patients and to a corresponding date in control patients. Subgroup analysis was performed for patients who had undergone screening colonoscopy.

The researchers found that the patients who died of colorectal cancer were significantly less likely to have undergone any colonoscopy. Colonoscopy was associated with reduced mortality for left-sided cancer and right-sided cancer, although the reduction was smaller for right-sided cancer. The authors suggest that reducing variability in colonoscopy effectiveness, particularly against right-sided colorectal cancer, is critical for effective disease prevention. [Source: Medical Press | American College of Physicians | March 12, 2018 ++]

VA PDSI ► Safer Therapy Initiatives for Anxiety/Stress/Depression/Insomnia

By the late 1970s, benzodiazepines ranked among the most commonly prescribed medications in the world. These include Valium, Xanax and related medications that help calm activity in the brain. For many patients facing conditions such as anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder and depression, "benzos" became the answer. But over time, that answer began to raise serious questions. There is increasing evidence that benzodiazepines — along with other medications commonly prescribed for sleep, called "sedative hypnotics" — can increase the risk for adverse

events like falls, hip fractures, cognitive impairment, motor vehicle crashes, drug dependence and withdrawal, and even death by overdose.

In October 2015, VA launched a nationwide effort to address the issue in a particularly vulnerable population: Veterans ages 75 and older. This effort marked phase two of VA's Psychotropic Drug Safety Initiative (PDSI), and it aimed to reduce the use of these medications, encourage the use of safer therapies and appropriate monitoring, and enhance prescribing practices for older Veterans. "There are a lot of Veterans that I have met who have been taking these medications for a very long time," said Dr. Ilse Wiechers, a VA geriatric psychiatrist and an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at Yale University's School of Medicine. "They were started many, many years ago by a very well-meaning and well-intentioned provider who was trying to help them, usually with problems with sleep or with anxiety. In the interim ... we now have evidence that shows there are safe and effective treatments for things like insomnia and anxiety disorders that are less potentially risky and harmful."

By June 2017, the initiative had achieved dramatic results: More than 30,000 Veterans benefited from improvements in prescribing practices, and the number of Veteran outpatients who received prescriptions for benzodiazepines or sedative hypnotics fell by more than 20,000. "We really wanted to focus on these older Veterans because there's a growing number of older patients coming into our system," said Wiechers, who is the national director for PDSI. "Because they are so vulnerable to some of the side effects of [these] particular medications and the VA is well-equipped to provide alternative, evidence-based treatments, we wanted to make sure that they're getting the best treatment possible and not being prescribed these medications in excess."

Here's how it worked: VA facilities across the country selected at least one of 14 prescribing metrics to prioritize over the course of the initiative. For example, some chose reducing benzodiazepine use by older Veterans, while others chose to monitor for particular side effects in Veterans taking an antipsychotic. The PDSI program office then provided the facilities with support tools, technical assistance, educational and collaboration opportunities, and quarterly metrics to monitor progress. Facilities that may have widely prescribed benzodiazepines for insomnia prior to PDSI relied more heavily on cognitive behavioral therapy instead. Likewise, those that had prescribed benzodiazepines widely for anxiety may have shifted toward alternative, safer pharmacotherapy like antidepressants. As a result, overall performance across the entire VA improved in all 14 metrics.

- Over 5,700 fewer Veterans with dementia received a prescription for benzodiazepines.
- Over 5,200 fewer Veterans received potentially harmful, highly anticholinergic medications.
- Over 1,400 fewer Veterans with dementia received a prescription for antipsychotics.

"The thing that I was most excited about ... was the success that we had in reducing the use of benzodiazepines and sedative hypnotics in our older Veterans," Wiechers said. "This has often been viewed by both patients and their providers as something that is difficult to do. They often will push back on the idea that we should be targeting reduction of benzodiazepines, because they're really hard to taper off, or at least people believe that they're really hard to taper off. But we were able to have quite a bit of success."

That was the case in Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 16, where six of the eight facilities made it a priority to reduce the prescription of benzodiazepines. "We have had patients on the front end that were very, very agitated that we were reviewing the case and suggesting to discontinue [the use of benzos]," said Dr. Jason Hawkins, the pharmacy executive for VISN 16. "The reward of that was, a few months later, we would have either the patient or the family members come back and actually thank the staff at the facility for holding our ground and really looking out for the best case for the Veteran. They would say things like they could actually remember interactions with their family now, rather than just being in a haze for a few years."

Both Hawkins and Dr. Stacy Hargrove, an academic detailer for VISN 16, said the initiative benefited from Wiechers' close work with individual VISNs. In addition, the PDSI dashboard proved a particularly effective tool, providing near real-time updates on how facilities were doing in all 14 metrics. With just a few clicks on the dashboard, staffers could drill down to actionable data, such as a list of all patients in the facility, ages 75 and older,

with an active prescription for a benzodiazepine. “I found that some providers, before I kind of demoed it with them, were just a little intimidated by the idea of the dashboard and trying to find information in it,” Hargrove said. “But once they saw how really simple it was to use, they were much more comfortable. So, in some ways, this was unique in that it was just very user-friendly — easy to get the data, easy to get the information you were looking for.”

The PDSI team has now turned its attention to a critical next phase: improving access to medication-assisted treatment for Veterans with opioid and alcohol use disorders. Particularly in the case of opioids, Wiechers calls it “an issue of life and death with people.” Already, the team has applied one lesson from its work targeting benzodiazepines: “The more facilities we have focusing on one specific performance area, the greater impact we can have across the whole system,” she said. So instead of addressing 14 metrics, the team now focuses on just two, with about half of the VA health system working on alcohol misuse and the other half on the opioid issue.

“I really think that we’re going to see a much more robust impact across the entire system,” Wiechers said. In VISN 16, Hawkins sees successes to build on as well. “Just empower the leaders,” he said. “The leaders are already in place, already engaged. Give them the information they need, and let them take ownership.” [Source: Vantage Point | March 13, 2018 ++]

VA Mustard Agent Care Update 07 ► Compensation Approved

Last week, March 6, 2018, 17 World War II era veterans finally gained the care and benefits they need from the Department of Veterans Administration (VA). Last year, President Trump signed a bill to help veterans who were intentionally exposed to mustard gas by covert Department of Defense (DoD) experiments. The Bill was designed to provide benefits and compensation to those veterans exposed to mustard gas in those secret experiments. The WWII era veterans reaped in more than \$1 million from the VA. In case you didn’t know, the following locations are considered presumptive locations for mustard gas exposure in the 1940’s:

- Bari, Italy
- Hart's Island, New York
- Bushnell, Florida
- Horn Island Installation, Mississippi
- Charleston, South Carolina
- Huntsville Arsenal, Alabama
- Camp Crowder, Missouri
- Naval Research Laboratory, Virginia
- Camp Lejeune, North Carolina
- Naval Research Lab in Washington, D.C.
- Camp Sibert, Alabama
- Naval Training Center, Bainbridge, Maryland
- Dugway Proving Ground, Utah
- Ondal, India
- Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland
- Rocky Mountain Arsenal, Colorado
- Ft. Detrick, Maryland
- San Jose Island, Panama Canal Zone
- Ft. McClellan, Alabama
- Toole Army Depot, Utah
- Great Lakes Naval Training Center, IL

- USS Eagle Boat No. 58

Note: Some servicemembers may have participated in Allied mustard agent testing in Porton Down, England, and Finschhafen, New Guinea.

According to the VA, service-connection may be granted by presumption for disabilities which are due to mustard gas. The conditions considered presumptive for exposure to mustard gas are:

- Acute nonlymphocytic leukemia
- Chronic conjunctivitis, keratitis, corneal opacities, scar formation
- The following cancers: nasopharyngeal; laryngeal; lung (except mesothelioma); or squamous cell carcinoma of the skin
- Chronic laryngitis, bronchitis, emphysema, asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

To assess for consideration for benefits see a local [VSO](#). Make sure and have documentation in your service medical records or other military documents that you were stationed in the areas above or spent time there on military orders.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | USVCP Staff | March 12, 2018 ++]

VA Adoption Assistance ► Final Interim Rule

Effective March 5, 2018 the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) amends its regulation to provide for reimbursement of qualifying adoption expenses incurred by a veteran with a service-connected disability that results in the inability of the veteran to procreate without the use of fertility treatment. Under the Continuing Appropriations and Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2017, and Zika Response and Preparedness Act, VA may use funds appropriated or otherwise made available to VA for the “Medical Services” account to provide adoption reimbursement to these veterans.

Under the law, reimbursement may be for the adoption-related expenses for an adoption that is finalized after the date of the enactment of this Act under the same terms as apply under the adoption reimbursement program of the Department of Defense (DoD) including the reimbursement limits and requirements set forth in such instruction. No more than \$2,000 may be reimbursed to a covered veteran, or to two covered veterans who are spouses of each other, for expenses incurred in the adoption of a child. In the case of two married covered veterans, only one spouse may claim reimbursement for any one adoption. No more than \$5,000 may be paid under this section to a covered veteran in any calendar year. In the case of two married covered veterans, the couple is limited to a maximum of \$5,000 per calendar year.

“Qualifying adoption expenses” is defined based on the DoD Instruction to mean reasonable and necessary expenses that are directly related to the legal adoption of a child under 18 years of age, but only if such adoption is arranged by a qualified adoption agency. This definition includes several important elements. The expense must be “reasonable and necessary.” Based on the DoD Instruction, “reasonable and necessary” is defined to include:

- Public and private agency fees, including adoption fees charged by an agency in a foreign country;
- Placement fees, including fees charged to adoptive parents for counseling; and legal fees (including court costs).
- Medical expenses, including hospital expenses of the biological mother and medical care of the child to be adopted, as well as temporary foster care charges when payment of such charges is required before the adoptive child's placement.

Certain items are not reimbursable including expenses such as clothing, bedding, toys and books; travel expenses; and expenses incurred in connection with an adoption arranged in violation of Federal, State, or local law. For more information refer to <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/03/05/2018-04245/reimbursement-of-qualifying-adoption-expenses-for-certain-veterans>. [Source: VFW Action corps Weekly | March 9, 2018 ++]

VA Hepatitis C Care Update 17 ► Vets Infected 2014 - 146k | 2018 - 20k | 2019 - 0

Only a few years ago, stories appeared in the media about how tens of thousands of U.S. veterans were infected with hepatitis C and that the government couldn't afford to treat them. Typical was a CBS News report headlined "VA can't afford drug for veterans suffering from hepatitis C". The drug in question was Gilead's Sovaldi, a once-a-day pill that remarkably can cure hepatitis C over a 12 week regimen. The concerns being raised by the press was that Sovaldi cost \$1,000/pill – a cost that could cripple the VA's budget if all of our veterans were to be treated.

The issue was especially timely. These veterans, many of whom contracted the disease during their service in the Vietnam War as a result of battlefield injuries requiring blood transfusions, were now suffering from the consequences of this largely silent menace. They were now experiencing liver disease, cirrhosis and liver cancer. Without Sovaldi, the sicker of these patients were facing certain death. Fast forward to last Friday (23 FEB). At the 24th Annual Wharton Health Care Business Conference, Dr. David J. Shulkin, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, announced that the VA was on track to eliminate hepatitis C infections in the next 12 months for those who are willing and able to be treated. In October 2014, the VA had over 146,000 veterans afflicted with hepatitis C. By next October, this number will be only 20,000.

How did this happen? Here's the VA's response as contained in their 2018 Budget in Brief: *"In 2014, VA began a ground-breaking system of care for Veterans with the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV). The Food and Drug Administration approved two new, highly-effective drugs – Sofosbuvir (Sovaldi) and Simeprevir (Olysio) – that work to change the lives of Veterans infected with Hepatitis C. Prior to the introduction of the new high-cost treatments therapies in the VA system in January 2014, treatments for Hepatitis C were often ineffective and presented considerable side-effects. By contrast, the new treatment options are considerably more effective than earlier options, and are much easier to administer. Cure of HCV significantly decreases the risk of progression of the disease to cirrhosis, liver failure, liver cancer, and death. VA wants to ensure that all Veterans eligible for these new drugs, based on their clinician's recommendation, receive the medication."*

But what about the high-cost of these drugs? While the retail price of Sovaldi was \$84,000 at launch, the VA is allowed by law to negotiate drug prices. In addition, other hepatitis C cures have been brought to market over the intervening years such as AbbVie's Viekira Pak and Merck's Zepatier, thus putting purchasers in a good negotiating position. Here's how the VA described drug costs in their 2018 Budget in Brief: *"VA successfully worked with the manufacturers of these drugs to receive a reduced price for their use to treat Veterans. VA estimates the drugs will cost \$748.8 million and provide 31,200 treatments in 2017 and costs increasing to \$751.2 million for 28,000 treatments in 2018."*

If you quickly do the math, 59,200 U.S veterans will be cured of hepatitis C for roughly \$25,300/soldier. That's remarkable and a far cry from the concerns being raised less than four years ago. This is a great story. Thanks to the VA's commitment as well as the innovation on the part the manufacturers, a major health issue for our veterans will be eliminated. Hopefully, the press will be motivated to cover this story as diligently as they did in 2014. [Source: Forbes | John LaMattina | March 1, 2018 ++]

VA Vet Home Policy ► Life Ending Drugs

Terminally ill veterans who live in government-run homes in California and other states where physician-assisted deaths are legal are finding they cannot access such laws without leaving their facilities. Suffering from heart problems, Bob Sloan told his children he wants to use California's new law allowing life-ending drugs for the terminally ill when his disease becomes too advanced to bear. But then the 73-year-old former U.S. Army sergeant learned that because he lives at the Veterans Home of California at Yountville — the nation's largest retirement home for veterans — he must first move out.

Veterans in government-run homes in many parts of the country that have legalized physician-assisted death, including Colorado, Vermont and Washington, D.C., are finding similar restrictions because assisted suicide goes against the policy of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans like Sloan say relocating would cause undue hardship during an already painful time. Veterans living at the Yountville home raised the issue in recent weeks with California lawmakers, and one organization is considering "I should be able to die peacefully in my home, and this is my home," Sloan said of Yountville, where he has lived since 2013. "If I'm in that state or condition, why should I be forced to move to make use of what has been changed into law? It just doesn't make sense."

Doctors also can legally prescribe lethal medication for terminally ill patients in Oregon and Washington. Veteran homes in those states do not require the person be discharged to take the drugs, though staff cannot be involved, and no federal funds can be used. Montana's state Supreme Court ruled in 2009 that doctors could use a patient's request for life-ending medication as a defense against criminal charges. Opponents say the option could lead to hasty decisions, misdiagnosis and coercion. Regardless of state laws, the 1997 Assisted Suicide Funding Restriction Act passed by Congress prohibits the use of federal funds for assisted suicides, Veterans Affairs spokesman Curt Cashour said. The VA provides many state homes with money for veterans' care, including the doctors. It leaves it to states to decide their own regulations regarding the homes.

The funding restriction act is the only federal law regarding the issue. The Supreme Court has left it to states to enact legislation permitting or prohibiting physician-assisted deaths. After California's law took effect in 2016, California's Department of Veterans Affairs, or CalVet, mandated the discharge of residents intending to consume medication to achieve a peaceful death and barred any employees, independent contractors or anyone else from participating in any activities under the End of Life Option Act while on the premises of one of its homes. If a veteran decides not to go through with it, the person will be re-admitted immediately. It also promises, like in other states that require veterans move first, to assist them in transferring to hospice, a home or another facility. "The safety and support of our veterans is our No. 1 priority, and we cannot implement policies or programs that could result in California losing vital federal funding for our veterans," CalVet Secretary Dr. Vito Imbasciani said in an email to The Associated Press.

Funds from the VA account for more than half of the operating budget for CalVet's eight live-in care facilities, which serve more than 2,600 people. After veterans at the Yountville home and advocates for the end-of-life option sent a letter protesting the discharge policy, CalVet officials promised to look into the matter. But so far, they have not proposed a solution. Yountville resident Ed Warren, who signed a protest letter sent to CalVet in October, said he believes there are ways the homes can get around the federal restrictions. "It is an inhumane act because these people, if they're at such a point of considering ending their life, they are not in a position to go through the mechanics of disenrolling to check out of here," said the 82-year-old who served in the Air Force.

Advocate Kathryn Tucker, of the End of Life Liberty Project, said many states are interpreting the federal restrictions too broadly. The 1997 law does not bar such deaths from occurring on the premises of state homes if no federal funds are spent. She is considering legal action if CalVet's regulation remains. Nationwide, only one veteran in a state home is known to have requested lethal medication. He died at a veteran home in Washington state in 2015. California requires patients make an oral and written request for a prescription for life-ending drugs to their primary doctors. Two doctors must determine if the patient has fewer than six months to live. The state requires the

person be able to administer the drugs themselves without help. A common drug used for such purposes, secobarbital, can run up to \$5,000 for a lethal dose.

Tucker recently gave a talk to a small group at Yountville, but the home would not allow the in-house TV station to air the presentation to its more than 900 residents. CalVet officials said they considered her presentation to be political since it involved changing the home's policy, and state resources, which fund the TV station, cannot be used for political purposes. Ed Warren's wife, Jac, quit working at the station over what she saw as censorship. "It was an informational meeting," said Jac Warren, 81. "If you live in a state facility, you should not be disallowed from taking advantage of state legislation." [Source: Associated Press | Julie Watson | March 7, 2018 ++]

Opioid Addiction Update 03 ► Opioids Not Better than Nonopioid Treatment for Pain

Opioid medications were not better than nonopioid treatment to improve chronic back, hip or knee pain, according to medical research conducted at Veterans Affairs clinics in Minnesota. Participants found that pain still interfered with activities that included walking, work and sleep over a 12-month period, according to research released Tuesday in the Journal of American Medical Association. "Treatment with opioids was not superior to treatment with nonopioid medications for improving pain-related function over 12 months," the researchers wrote. "Results do not support initiation of opioid therapy for moderate to severe chronic back pain or hip or knee osteoarthritis pain." Pain intensity was less severe in the nonopioid group and adverse medication-related symptoms were more common in the opioid group, according to the researchers.

A total of 240 patients from 62 Veterans Affairs clinics in Minneapolis, Minn., with moderate to severe chronic back pain or hip or knee osteoarthritis pain were examined from 2013 to 2015 and follow-up ended in 2016. The mean patient age was 58.3 years old and 13 percent of participants were women. Erin E. Krebs at the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs Health Care System, Minneapolis, was the lead author of the study. The researchers noted that because this study was conducted in VA clinics, "patient characteristics differ from those of the general population, most notably in sex distribution." In addition, patients with physiological opioid dependence due to ongoing opioid use were excluded. "Recent systematic reviews have concluded that opioids have small beneficial effects on pain compared with placebo that may be outweighed by common adverse effects," the researchers wrote. "Observational studies have found that treatment with long-term opioid therapy is associated with poor pain outcomes, greater functional impairment, and lower return to work rates."

Patients in the opioid group in Step 1 were given morphine IR, hydrocodone/acetaminophen and oxycodone. Step 2 was morphine sustained-action and oxycodone. Step 3 was transdermal fentanyl. The control group was administered acetaminophen and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs in Step 1. Then Step 2 included adjuvant oral medications and topical analgesics. Step 3 included drugs requiring prior authorization from the VA clinic, such as pregabalin, duloxetine and tramadol.

[Source: UPI | Allen Cone | March 6, 2018 ++]

VA Accredited Representatives ► Disability Claim Assistance

An accredited representative is an individual who has undergone a formal application and training process and is recognized by VA as being capable of assisting claimants with their affairs before VA. Most accredited representatives work for veteran service organizations (VSOs) many of which are private non-profit groups that advocate on behalf of Veterans, Servicemembers, dependents and survivors. Accredited representatives may also

work for state or county government entities. The accreditation process includes an examination, a background investigation, and continuing education requirements to ensure VSOs are providing the most up-to-date information. Recognized organizations and individuals, whether congressionally chartered VSOs or VA accredited claims agents or attorneys, can legally represent a Veteran, Servicemember, dependent, or survivor before VA. Non-recognized organizations and individuals can provide information, but cannot be a representative.

What is the role of an accredited representative?

A VSO, along with state, county, and other local Veteran service representatives are trained to help you understand and apply for any VA benefits you may be entitled to including: [compensation](#), [education](#), [vocational rehabilitation and employment](#), [home loans](#), [life insurance](#), [pension](#), [health care](#), and [burial benefits](#). Additionally, your VSO can help you gather any evidence needed and submit a [Fully Developed Claim](#) on your behalf. Many VSOs provide their services free-of-charge, but they may request reimbursement for unusual expenses.

In addition to assisting Veterans and their families with VA claims, VSOs also sponsor a range of Veteran-centric programs such as providing transportation to and from VA medical center appointments, funds and volunteers for disaster relief, and grants. VSOs also lobby Congress on behalf of issues facing Veterans and help support requests for resources needed by VA to better serve Veterans, their families, and survivors. The VA Office of General Counsel maintains a list of VA-recognized organizations and VA-accredited individuals that are authorized to assist in the preparation, presentation and prosecution of VA benefit claims. For more information is available to veterans at <https://www.va.gov/ogc/accreditation.asp> on how to select a representative, find out who can charge fees relating to representation, file a complaint about your representative, or to dispute a charged by an agent or attorney based on reasonableness.

Fee for Service

Unlike VSOs, VA accredited claims agents and attorneys may charge a fee for their services. For more information on what to do if you believe you were charged an unreasonable fee by a claims agent or attorney, see the fact sheet on How to Challenge a Fee at <https://www.va.gov/OGC/docs/Accred/HowtoChallengeaFee.pdf>.

How to find a Representative

Online - You can [find a local representative including](#) a recognized VSO , attorney, or claims agent by state/territory, zip code, or by the organization's name online using [eBenefits](#).

At your nearest VA regional benefit office. To find a VSO office located in or near your local regional benefit office, use VA's directory of VSOs <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vso/varo.asp>.

How to Appoint a VSO or Representative

You may appoint an attorney, claim agent, or VSO to represent you or manage your current representative online using [eBenefits](#). You may also appoint a VSO or representative by completing [VA Form 21-22, Appointment of Veterans Service Organization as Claimant's Representative](#) and mailing it to:

Department Of Veterans Affairs
Claims Intake Center
PO Box 4444
Janesville, WI 53547-4444

It is recommended that you first speak to the service organization before you submit your request to VA.

[Source: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vso/index.asp> | March 2018 ++]

VA Lung Cancer Care ► LDCT Screening Enhances Care for Veterans

The Bay Pines VA Healthcare System (VAHCS) is actively pursuing ways to deliver the best in health care for America's heroes. Providing personalized, proactive, patient-driven care and empowering Veterans to make important health related decisions are at the forefront of the organization's strategic plan. An important area of focus in the strategic plan identifies seamless oncology care as a tactic in moving the organization toward becoming a five-star health care system. Improving access to services, like lung cancer screening, is one of the ways in which the health care system is enhancing positive health outcomes for Veterans.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, lung cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer in both men and women in the United States. Unfortunately, the prognosis after diagnosis is poor. About 90 percent of the cases identified will inevitably lead to death. "Early identification of lung cancer leads to more effective treatments. Research has proved that lung cancer screening programs can help save lives," said Dr. Dominique Thuriere, Chief of Staff, Bay Pines VAHCS. "Providing lung cancer screening with Low-Dose Computed Tomography (LDCT) is essential to our overall goal to drive health, prevent disease, and advance the cure for America's heroes," she said.

In a process of shared decision making between a Veteran and his or her provider, Veterans have the choice to be voluntarily screened for lung cancer at Bay Pines. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) **recommends an annual screening** for lung cancer with LDCT for adults aged 55 to 80 years-old, who have a history of smoking 30 or more packs of cigarettes per year, who currently smoke or have quit within the past 15 years, and have a life expectancy of more than 5 years. More information about LDCT lung cancer screening can be accessed here: <https://www.prevention.va.gov/docs/LungCancerScreeningHandout.pdf>

Cardiothoracic Radiologist Dr. Maria Harvey spearheaded the development of the lung cancer screening program at Bay Pines VAHCS. "To date, we have performed over 2,000 LDCT lung cancer screening exams. Review of our data has shown our cancer detection rate at Bay Pines is about 1.135 percent, a number that is comparable to the results from a National Lung Cancer Screening Trial recently conducted. I am happy to report that LDCT for lung cancer screening is already saving lives at Bay Pines," she said. Dr. Harvey recently participated on a lung cancer screening interdisciplinary project team, providing support to develop guidelines for the newly implemented screening standards for facilities and health care systems across VHA. "I am very proud to work at a facility that provides such exemplary care to our Veterans. Bay Pines is ahead of the curve on LDCT for lung cancer screening. We have a great team of people who made that possible," Dr. Harvey explained.

In addition to offering Veterans LDCT lung cancer screenings, Bay Pines VAHCS is working to improve access for Veterans receiving cancer treatment through the construction of a new 17,375-square-foot cancer infusion/chemotherapy center on the north side of the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center Campus. The new center will be connected to the existing radiation oncology center. To learn more about Bay Pines VAHCS's modernization efforts, visit: www.baypines.va.gov/features/20171218.asp. [Source: Veterans Health | March 6, 2018 ++]

VA Physician License Revocations Update 01 ► Record Review Promise Blasted

Iowa's U.S. senators blasted the Department of Veterans Affairs on 2 MAR for failing to promptly determine how many of its doctors were illegally hired after having their state medical licenses revoked. The complaint from Sens. Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst comes in the wake of a USA TODAY investigation in December that found the Iowa City VA hospital hired a neurosurgeon whose Wyoming medical license was revoked over allegations of deadly malpractice. The surgeon, John Henry Schneider, resigned after USA TODAY began asking questions. VA leaders

acknowledged to Grassley and Ernst in December that Schneider's hiring was improper, and they vowed to review the records of all VA doctors by the end of February.

The senators expressed frustration that the VA failed to live up to its promise. "Our veterans have sacrificed so much for our nation and it is unacceptable that the VA has failed to ensure that the doctors treating our veterans are certified to do so," Ernst wrote. "...These findings are critical to ensure an unqualified and improperly licensed doctor is never allowed to practice at the VA again." Ernst and Grassley said the results of the investigation should be made public. VA leaders responded in a January letter to the senators: "At this time, VA has not made a determination on whether or not to publicize the results of the national licensure review." The VA also told the senators that it "has not identified a reason" to notify patients or their families if it turns out they were treated by doctors who should not have been hired because of discipline by state medical boards.

In his statement 2 MAR, Grassley reiterated his feelings on the subject of openness. "Ensuring qualified, professional staff are caring for our nation's veterans is crucial, and we need to know the men and women who have served this country are receiving the best possible care," he wrote. "The hiring practices at VA directly impact the lives of veterans from Iowa and every state. The VA has an obligation to our veterans and the public to share the findings of their internal review." A national VA spokesman said later Friday that the review of 77,000 health-care providers, which was ordered by Secretary David Shulkin, was 95 percent complete. "Although the review is ongoing, VA has already taken a number of disciplinary actions, where warranted," Curt Cashour wrote in an email to The Des Moines Register, a member of the USA TODAY Network. He did not specify what or how many "disciplinary actions" were taken, or whom they affected.

The USA TODAY investigation noted federal law bars the VA from hiring physicians whose licenses have been revoked by state boards, even if they still hold active licenses in other states. Schneider still had a license in Montana, even though his Wyoming license was revoked. The investigation uncovered new allegations of malpractice by Schneider after he started work at the Iowa City VA hospital last year. In one case, Schneider performed four brain surgeries in a span of four weeks on one 65-year-old veteran who died in August. The USA TODAY investigation determined that other doctors also were hired by the VA after being sanctioned by state medical boards.

The Des Moines Register has written about two cases in which former Des Moines surgeons sanctioned the Iowa Board of Medicine were hired by VA hospitals in West Virginia and South Carolina. Those doctors didn't have their Iowa licenses revoked, but they were fined and publicly sanctioned. The findings come amid several years of scandals over care lapses and cover-ups of long waiting lists for care at VA facilities. [Source: USA Today | Tony Leys | March 2, 2018 ++]

VA HUD-VASH Update 07 ► Sting Uncovers Vet Home Leasing Discrimination

Disabled military veterans who use vouchers to pay rent will find it easier to lease homes in the Tri-Cities and elsewhere in Washington after a sting by the state attorney general's office. Celski & Associates Inc. of Kennewick and nine other property managers initially declined to rent to investigators who posed as veterans using **Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing** (VASH) vouchers to pay their rent. Two other agencies are in Walla Walla. Attorney General Bob Ferguson called the VASH program a key tool in the fight to house homeless veterans. "A blanket denial is outrageous," Ferguson said. "It is also illegal."

Ferguson said he ordered the Wing Luke Civil Rights Unit to investigate discrimination against veterans after his office regularly fielded complaints that some were being denied housing if they used VASH to pay their rent. That violates Washington's Law Against Discrimination, he said. A bill pending in Olympia will explicitly ban discrimination against VASH users, but Ferguson said he's confident the existing law applies. VASH is a federal

program to support veterans with disabilities, including mental illness, substance abuse disorders and physical disabilities.

For the sting, the attorney general’s office partnered with Northwest Fair Housing Alliance in Spokane in 2016. Investigators emailed property managers who had advertised homes for rent. In their messages, investigators said they were veterans and were interested in renting. They said they had VASH vouchers to cover rent. Of the 50 landlords contacted, 10 said they wouldn’t rent to VASH users. Jason Celski, a U.S. Air Force veteran who runs a law practice and property management firm in Kennewick, said the employee who fielded the inquiry from investigators did not realize it was for a veteran and that the message referred to VASH by the acronym, not its full name.

Ferguson defended the investigation, saying his team provided would-be landlords with a clear picture of the prospective tenant. “They knew exactly what it was,” he said. After follow-up, eight of the companies, including Celski, agreed to amend their policies. Two disagreed, asserting the current law doesn’t apply. They are awaiting the outcome of a bill pending in Olympia. If approved, the bill will explicitly prohibit landlords from refusing to rent property based on the tenant’s source of income, including VASH and other subsidies. Ferguson supported the bill, which passed in the House and is pending in the Senate Rules committee. A similar bill already passed the Senate this session. Ferguson said he believes it will pass this session.

In addition to Celski, the companies that agreed to change their policies are KPS Realty of Spokane; Domus Urbis of Spokane; Country Homes Realty of Spokane; Rowley Properties of Issaquah; TJ Cline of Walla Walla; Welcome Home Properties of Walla Walla; and Yelm Creek Apartments of Yelm. Ferguson said he will sue the holdouts, Apartment Management Consultants of Utah and Mission Rock Residential of Colorado, under the state’s law against discrimination if the new law does not pass and they refuse to come into compliance.

VASH is a venture of the U.S. departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development. More than 52,000 Washington households use “housing choice” vouchers in 2017. It was not immediately clear how many of those are through the VASH program. There were approximately 1,500 homeless veterans in Washington, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan research and policy institute based in Washington, D.C.

[Source: Tri-City (Washington) Herald | Wendy Culverwell | March 3, 2018 ++]

VA Benefits Eligibility Update 08 ► Based on Disability Rating

Take a look at the eligibility matrix below to see what benefits you are eligible for based on your disability rating:

Rating of 0% - 20%

- Certification of Eligibility for home loan guaranty.
- Home loan guaranty fee exemption.
- VA Priority medical treatment card.
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling under Title 38 USC Chapter 31 (must be at least 10%).
- Service Disabled Veterans Insurance (Maximum of \$10,000 coverage) must file within 2 years from the date of new service connection.
- 10-point Civil Service preference (10 points added to Civil Service test score).
- Clothing allowance for veterans who use or wear a prosthetic or orthopedic appliance (artificial limb, braces, wheelchair) or use prescribed medications for skin condition, which tend to wear, tear or soil clothing.

- Temporary total evaluation (100%) based on hospitalization for a service connected disability in excess of 21 days; or surgical treatment for a service connected disability necessitating at least 1 month of convalescence or immobilization by cast, without surgery of more major joints.

Rating of 30%

- Additional allowance for dependent (spouse, child(ren), step child(ren), helpless child(ren), full-time students between the ages of 18 and 23 and parent(s).
- Additional allowances for a spouse who is a patient in a nursing home or helpless or blind or so nearly helpless or blind as to require the regular aid and attendance of another person.

Rating of 40%

- Automobile grant and/or special adaptive equipment for an automobile provided there is loss or permanent loss of use of one or both feet, loss or permanent loss of one or both hands or permanent impaired vision in both eyes with central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in better eye.
- Special adaptive equipment may also be applied for if there is ankylosis of one or both knees or one or both hips.

Rating of 50%

- VA Medical outpatient treatment for any condition except dental.
- Preventative health care services.
- Hospital care and medical services in non-VA facilities under an authorized fee basis agreement.

Rating of 60% - 80%

- Increased compensation (100%) based on Individual Unemployability (IU) (applies to veterans who are unable to obtain or maintain substantially gainful employment due to service connected disability).

Rating of 100%

- Dental treatment.
- Department of Defense Commissary privileges.
- Veteran's employment preference for spouse.
- Waiver of National Service Life Insurance premiums.
- National Service Life Insurance total disability income provisions.
- Specially adapted housing for veterans who have loss or permanent loss of use of both lower extremities or the loss of blindness in both eyes having light perception only plus loss of use of one lower extremity or the loss or permanent loss of use of one lower extremity with loss or permanent loss of use of one upper extremity or the loss or permanent loss of use of one extremity together with an organic disease which affects the functions of balance and propulsion as to preclude locomotion without the aid of braces, crutches, canes or wheelchair.
- Special home adaptation grant (for veterans who don't qualify for Specially Adapted Housing) may be applied for if the veteran is permanently and totally disabled due to blindness in both eyes with visual acuity of 5/200 or less or loss or permanent loss of use of both hands.

Rating of 100% (Permanent and Total)

In Addition to the Above:

- Civilian Health and Medical Program for Dependents and Survivors (CHAMPVA).
- Survivors and dependents education assistance under Title 38 USC Chapter 35.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | March 2, 2018 ++]

VA Vet Choice Update 71 ► New Study Questions Private Care Provider's Capabilities

Lawmakers appear poised to send tens of thousands of veterans in the private sector for health care in an effort to provide quicker, more convenient appointments for an array of medical needs. But a new study casts doubt on whether private care providers can do that. Researchers from the Rand Corp. on 1 MAR released a new study of New York state medical providers that noted the majority of physicians working outside Veterans Affairs programs “know little about the military or veterans, are not routinely screening for conditions common among veterans, and are unfamiliar with VA.”

Though restricted to one state, the findings echo concerns among critics of the White House push to send more veterans outside the VA’s medical system to receive care: that easing access for veterans appointments may bring with it a host of other, unintended problems. House and Senate lawmakers are currently crafting separate but similar measures which would ease access for veterans to receive health care from doctors in their communities at the federal government’s expense. VA already pays for a significant amount of community care among its patients — last year, about one-third of all medical appointments were at sites outside the Veterans Health Administration — but the new realignment would push even more resources into those private-sector appointments and reduce administrative restrictions on veterans’ eligibility to access them.

Conservative groups have pushed for President Donald Trump to go even further and adopt a system where veterans could choose whether to skip VA services altogether in favor of their own local physicians but still have federal agencies pay for the costs. That has drawn accusations of privatization of VA services and responsibilities, a fight that has led to significant internal turmoil at the department in recent weeks. One of the concerns raised has been whether military-specific health care issues like combat traumatic brain injury can be diagnosed and treated by doctors outside the VA system. The Rand study states that while access to care may improve with broader VA rules, actual wellness among veterans may not.

“We found that most providers regularly screened patients for pain-related concerns, but fewer regularly screened for suicide risk, sleep-related problems, and other issues,” researchers wrote. “Providers in the metropolitan region were less likely than providers in the western region to screen for common conditions among veterans.” Only about one in three providers met the study’s “minimum threshold for familiarity with military culture” and only one in five routinely asked patients if they had a military background. Researchers also concluded that veterans with significant disabilities “might not always receive appropriate accommodations in the community-based health care setting” given unfamiliarity with their types of injuries.

The study does not outright reject the idea of expanding community care, but instead notes that “significant efforts are needed to increase the readiness of community-based providers to deliver culturally competent, high-quality care” if such changes are made. And researchers acknowledge that their findings have limitations for the national health care picture given that they focus on only one state, albeit one with around 900,000 veterans, among the largest totals in the country. Lawmakers and VA officials had hoped to complete the health care overhaul last spring, but have been forced to extend funding for the controversial VA Choice program twice as negotiations in Congress have stalled. They’ll need another funding bridge later this spring if the two chambers can pass changes soon.

Meanwhile, VA Secretary David Shulkin has repeatedly stated he is not in favor of privatizing his department’s duties or services, but does believe that the future of veterans health care depends on a network of federal and private-sector providers to ensure reliable access and quality care.

[Source: AirForceTimes | Leo Shane III | February 27, 2018 ++]

PTSD Update 243 ► Sample Disability Claim Pointman Stressor Letter

Most VSOs will tell that a well-crafted Stressor Letter will help immensely in providing empirical evidence needed to bolster your disability claim. So, what exactly is a Stressor Letter. A Stressor Letter is used by Veterans Affairs (VA) raters to identify potential traumatic events that may have invoked Posttraumatic Stressor Disorder(PTSD) symptoms in combat veterans. The Stressor Letter consist of three vital parts: 1. Life before military service; 2. Life during military service (to include traumatic event(s); and 3. Life after traumatic event(s). The Pointman Sample Stressor Letter below has been used by numerous veterans as supportive evidence for their PTSD claim. Use it for yours (modify as needed).

(LIFE BEFORE MILITARY SERVICE Section)

Growing up on the South side of Chicago was pretty tough. Crime was rampant, drugs were on every street corner, illiteracy seemed a way of life, and mother nature was a constant reminder of just how brutal life could be. Along with eight brothers and sisters, even getting basic essentials was an everyday challenge. My mother worked four jobs just to keep a roof over our heads. Since my mother worked so much, I hardly ever saw her. My oldest sister assumed the duties of parent for me and my brothers and sisters.

When I was having problems in junior high school, I remember it was my oldest sister who attended the parent-teacher conferences. When I got my report cards, I always showed it to my oldest sister. She never gave me any positive feedback, the report card for her was a way to verify that I was going to school.

Getting good grades was never a problem. I never studied much, but I had a very good memory. In high school, I was able to memorize all of the words and definitions of the entire school dictionary. I was very proud of that. By the time I was in the eleventh grade, my mother's health started to fade. She was unable to work due to severe arthritis. Years of cleaning toilet seats and mopping floors took their toll. To help the family, I started working in a nearby diner. I got a job washing dishes. My oldest sister always told me to work hard. I guess it sunk in, because I worked at the diner every chance I got, and I worked until the place closed regardless of the time I got there.

I was not earning enough money washing dishes to really support my family. I started consoling in friends for help. A friend of a friend informed me that I could make a lot of money by doing business on the street. I knew what that meant. Out of desperation I thought I would give it a try. My plan was to "work on the street" and wash dishes. If my friend was right, I could soon give up washing dishes and make a lot of money on the street. I was hoping I would make a lot of money quickly, put the money in the bank, then move on to a legitimate job.

My friend was right. I made lots of money, quickly and easily. As a teenager, when you are making \$10,000 - \$15,000 per month, you want more. The money I was earning helped my family and helped me live a lifestyle I only saw in the movies. I had a brand new Cadillac, fine clothes, expensive jewelry, and moved my family away from the South side of Chicago. My oldest sister knew I was making "dirty money," but she never said a word to me about it. My brothers and sisters saw me as a hero. They never asked where I got the money either.

I was good at selling and manipulating people for my own personal gain. I soon dropped out of high school to pursue the dream of making more money.

Then it all ended. I'll never forget that day. On May 30, 1966, the mail came early that day. Typically, I did not get mail, but that day I had a letter from the U.S. Government. Instinctively I knew what it was – my draft notice.

(LIFE DURING MILITARY SERVICE Section)

In July 1966, I reported to the local MEPS station and enlisted in the U.S. Army. I was in conflict from the moment I signed my name. On one hand I saw the Army as a way of living a clean lifestyle. On the other hand, I missed the excitement and money of the streets.

Basic training was harder than what my friends told me. The physical training was a piece of cake. Following directives from angry drill sergeants was hard. For the most part, I was being yelled at on a daily basis. I had trouble waking up in the morning. I had trouble cleaning. I had trouble with the drill sergeants telling me what to eat and how much. All my life I had been my own drill sergeant, now I had these army grunts telling what to do and how to do it. That was a huge adjustment for me. To keep from getting in trouble I made it a game. I recruited a couple of guys I knew from the streets to look after my things. I hired them as my personal assistances. Because of my reputation in South Chicago I had no problem getting them to do what I wanted.

After basic training I was sent to Vietnam immediately. Assigned to a forward base unit in DaNang, I quickly learned the ropes. Vietnam was a lot different from what I had been briefed on. All the military protocol was out the window. It was a free-for-all existence. I was sure I could adapt to that lifestyle very quickly, and I was right. In no time at all I was running a gambling hall behind the scenes. All of the guys knew to come see me if they wanted a chance a making some extra loot. I liked DaNang. I was making money, I had girls, and I was popular with the guys. It was like a vacation until I got called to the field.

My first impulse was to get someone to take my place, I had a gambling hall to run. At the same time, I figured I would increase my reputation and respect by going out on search and destroy missions.

On November 3, 1966, my unit commander asked me to lead a group of 17 guys on a mission North of DaNang. I was glad he asked me. I knew I could lead, but I informed the commander that I had to handpick who I wanted. He agreed. I selected a good combination of city kids and country boys. These were the survivors. I didn't want any privileged punks going out in the jungle with me.

That night, while digging in to rest we got ambushed. All day my instincts told me we were being followed. That was the last time I ignored my intuition.

The NVA had us surrounded. We were being bombarded with small arms fire, rockets, and grenades. However, my guys were armed, ready, and willing to fight. Just as I hoped, most seemed to enjoy the experience. Not sure how many enemy soldiers had us surrounded, but I can say that my guys killed 36 enemy troops that night. It was a blood bath. The kills came so easy it was like my guys were shooting cans at an arcade.

At sunrise we ran across a few dead NVA troops. Most were young boys. We were young, but these were little kids. One kid, probably about 13 or 14 was missing the top half of his skull. His brain was bulging and swollen out of his skull. It was a horrible sight. Another NVA kid was lying face up with his entrails exposed. There were a few more bodies laying around. We left them there and moved on. Luckily, none of my guys were hurt.

Two days later while heading back to the base my guys and I entered a small village. Hungry, thirsty, and tired, we decided to camp out there for the night. The local villagers did not want us to stay. Even though we could not communicate with them, I could sense some degree of urgency from the villagers. My instincts told me they were trying to warn us. My instincts were right.

Around dusk, I noticed that all of the villagers were disappearing. I wasn't sure where they were going, but I had my guys take cover. Even though it seemed like an eternity, about two hours after taking cover a small band of NVA troops entered the village. One of my country boys, who had sniper training picked off three NVA troops right away. The rest of the NVA troops scattered in the jungle. We never did see them again.

After the shootings lots of villagers came from out of hiding. They unclothed the three dead NVA troops, tied ropes around their necks and hoisted them up a tree. The scene was gruesome.

The remainder of my tour in Vietnam involved briefing troops about the dangers of search and destroy missions and running my gambling hall. All of the brass knew what I was doing was wrong, but they seemed to condone it because it helped with morale.

(LIFE AFTER TRAUMATIC EVENT Section)

I didn't realize it right away, however, after a year or two from discharging from the Army, it became apparent that my time in uniform and in Vietnam changed how I saw the world. When I was in Vietnam my senses operated at maximum capacity and effectiveness. I was always on guard. My family and friends tell me that I still act like I am in Vietnam. When we go out to eat I only sit in restaurants with my back to the wall. If I can't see everything in front of me, then I don't eat there. If a restaurant is crowded, I will not eat there. I can't stand the crowds, they make me want to fight somebody.

Also, every now and then I will have nightmares about Vietnam crap. Not the firefight I was involved in, but general war scenes. Especially the faces of NVA soldiers.

My family and friends tell me that I seem cold and distant. They tell me all the time that I act like I'm afraid to get close to people. My three ex-wives used to tell me all the time that I was incapable of deep feelings toward them.

Every boss I ever had reminded me of those drill sergeants in basic training. They all yelled at me, treated with disrespect, tried to boss me around, and most seemed incompetent. When I worked as a butcher at a local supermarket, one boss fired me because I ran a football parlay. I made lots of money running that parlay and morale was never higher at the supermarket. But he didn't see it that way. For whatever reason, I have never been able to hold down a legitimate job for more than a year. Since discharging from the army I have had over 50 jobs.

Lastly, my life after Vietnam has been so screwed up that I get really down sometimes. I have been known to stay in bed for weeks. Too tired to move and too angry to try. I look like I have anorexia nervosa because I have lost close to a hundred pounds. I don't eat much anymore. I just don't seem to be hungry anymore. I am not entirely sure what happened to me in Vietnam, but I am sure something affected me that altered my potential.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | February 23 , 2018 ++]

PTSD Update 244 ► Service Dog Pilot Program

The Department of Veterans Affairs is studying how service dogs might be able to help veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. Though the results are years away, a group helping with that research isn't waiting to pair its pups with servicemembers. Canine Companions for Independence Inc. — a nonprofit in Santa Rosa, Calif., that's been providing service dogs for people with physical disabilities since 1975 — is preparing to launch a pilot program that will train and pair dogs with veterans with PTSD based on a curriculum developed for the VA study.

PTSD is an anxiety disorder caused by the psychological wounds of war and traumatic experiences. Symptoms include anger, paranoia, anxiety and withdrawal from society. CCI aims to begin pairing dogs with veterans by the middle of this year, with up to 20 placements by mid-2019, said instructor Sarah Birman. "This is the first time — aside from the VA study — that we will be training dogs in specific skills that are designed to address the symptoms of PTSD," she said. "As we've worked with veterans with PTSD through the VA study, we've had the opportunity to really get to know them, hear some really incredible stories of the ways in which the dogs have helped them."

For its pilot program, CCI is accepting veterans who live within 90 miles of its Santa Rosa campus, but hopes to expand nationwide over the next few years. Service dogs have been used for years to benefit those with physical disabilities; however, there is no scientific literature that says the animals are equally beneficial to those with PTSD. A 2011 attempt to study the issue was scuttled because of dog bites and was later canceled over concerns about the animals' health and training. At the end of 2014, the VA kicked off the current study, which it says is more comprehensive and more tightly controlled, with new partners, including Canine Companions. The most recent group of participants received their dogs in December, Birman said. After 18 months, the VA will compile and publish the results.

Birman said CCI has confidence in the protocols and training techniques, and believe that it will benefit some veterans. “We believe that dogs can be trained in tasks that can help mitigate aspects of PTSD and help someone in their process of recovery along with other resources that exist already,” she said. CCI’s program will start with about five local veterans, whose dogs will be selected based on temperament, energy levels, confidence and reactions to stimuli, Birman said. For example, they are looking for dogs with a high level of confidence, those that interact or snuggle with their handler, those attuned to their handler’s emotional state and are not reactive to loud sounds.

CCI officials will be looking to fine-tune all of their processes, from application procedures to pairing and training handlers and their new furry companions – and to fit the new program into its existing model. It will expand to about 20 placements during the first year. There will be frequent follow-up meetings to determine how the veterans are benefitting from the dogs and to see whether there are any unforeseen benefits. If all goes well, CCI could start admitting police, fire and emergency medical personnel to the program, Birman said. It could also start rolling out the program in regional centers in the next few years. The group has also been fundraising to open a PTSD-dedicated building on its campus.

“We’ve had the opportunity to learn a great deal through the screening process, the placement process, of course the training process with the dogs and also the team-training with veterans with PTSD, and we feel now, as the VA study is wrapping up, we feel like we’d like to carry that momentum forward,” Birman said. “Service dogs are another tool that is available to veterans,” she said. “I think the more options that we make available to people the more people will be able to hopefully find something that works for them. PTSD can be an incredibly debilitating condition and really tremendously isolating, and so, if through these dogs we can make a difference in the lives of even just a handful of veterans, then it will absolutely have been worth it.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Matthew M. Burke | February 25, 2018 ++]

Veterans with post-traumatic stress, depression or anxiety can apply to be part of this pilot project if they receive care from the VA. Interested veterans should start by talking to their treatment team and asking to be considered for a service dog under this program. Additional information about VA’s service dog program can be found at <http://www.prosthetics.va.gov/ServiceAndGuideDogs.asp>. For more information see for the [Mental Health Mobility Service Dog Benefit Pilot](#), or contact the VHA Center for Compassionate Innovation at VHACCISD@va.gov. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Matthew M. Burke | February 25, 2018 ++]

PTSD Update 245 ► Pilot Telehealth Program (TOP) for Rural Vets

With a focus on improving access to mental health care for Veterans living in rural areas, on 6 MAR the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has launched a pilot telehealth program that will give rural Veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) remote access to psychotherapy and related services. VA’s Office of Rural Health, in partnership with VA’s Quality Enhancement Research Initiative, is supporting the Telemedicine Outreach for PTSD (TOP) program to deliver therapy and other care through phone and interactive video contact.

“Our researchers have worked diligently in recent years to establish the safety and efficacy of PTSD psychotherapy delivered remotely, ensuring Veterans will get the same quality of PTSD care as if they were in a doctor’s office at a VA medical center,” said VA Secretary David Shulkin. “We are excited to see this program help greater numbers of Veterans living in rural areas and pleased that it will save them time and effort to get to a VA facility that is far from their homes.” Dr. John Fortney, a research health scientist at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Seattle, Washington, is leading the project. “Long travel distances to urban areas can be a major barrier to care for rural Veterans,” Fortney said. “In a prior trial, we were able to use telehealth technologies

successfully to engage Veterans in evidence-based, trauma-focused therapy without their having to travel to a distant VA medical center.”

To date, more than 500 rural Veterans who are not receiving specialty PTSD care have enrolled in the study. The participants may choose between the two main forms of evidence-based, trauma-focused psychotherapy used in VA: cognitive processing therapy and prolonged exposure therapy. Veterans participating in the program receive frequent phone calls from a care manager who helps them access services provided by off-site psychiatrists and psychologists. The psychotherapy is delivered via interactive video from a VA medical center to a community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC) or to the Veteran’s home. The telephone care manager also monitors the Veterans’ progress and helps them overcome barriers to care.

The program includes 12 CBOCs across the nation in Charleston, South Carolina; Iowa City, Iowa; Little Rock, Arkansas; Denver, Colorado; San Diego, California; and Seattle. The results, which will be available in 2020, will lay the groundwork for national implementation of the TOP program. To learn more about VA research on PTSD, visit www.research.va.gov/topics/ptsd.cfm. [Source: VA News Release | March 6, 2018 ++]

VAMC Miami FL Update 04 ► HIV Testing Discrepancies

At least eight military veterans who were tested for HIV at the Miami VA Medical Center received a different result when they were screened for a second time by an outside lab — a discrepancy discovered only after an employee at the Miami facility complained to outside agencies and the White House that local managers were ignoring his concerns, according to an independent federal investigator. The Department of Veterans Affairs investigated the complaints and said it was unable to substantiate the employee’s claims after a four-day visit to the Miami VAMC in October 2016. On 28 FEB the U.S. Office of Special Counsel, an independent federal investigative agency, called the VA’s findings “unreasonable” and expressed “incredulity” that the Miami VAMC complied with new HIV testing policy only after the employee complained to outside agencies.

In a letter to President Trump, Special Counsel Henry J. Kerner said VA investigators were unable to substantiate the claims because they loosely interpreted the deadline for the Miami VAMC to comply with the new HIV testing policy. Kerner added that Miami VAMC officials failed to respond to concerns raised by the employee, Roman Miguel, a lab director, until after Miguel complained to the OSC in May 2016 and hand-delivered a notice to Miami VAMC Director Paul Russo on June 30, 2016. “I am incredulous that compliance with Directive 1113 [the policy] and implementation of fourth generation HIV testing occurred only after Mr. Miguel’s disclosures and OSC’s intercession,” Kerner wrote in the letter. Kerner noted that the OSC also asked VA Sec. David Shulkin to report on whether all of the agency’s medical facilities around the country were using the latest HIV testing procedures as required by the 2015 policy.

Shane Suzuki, public affairs officer for the Miami VA Healthcare System, which oversees the medical center, said administrators “strongly disagree” with the OSC’s allegations. “As VA mentioned in its formal response provided to the OSC in January 2017, we did not substantiate any of the allegations; rather, VA confirmed compliance with VA and CDC recommendations and did not validate a public health risk,” Suzuki said in a written statement. “A comprehensive review of patients revealed they were tested under the appropriate CDC-approved alternative HIV testing procedures pending the receipt and installation of new laboratory equipment.”

The new HIV testing policy, known as Directive 1113, was implemented in May 2015 and involves general processes and programs for HIV testing as part of the VA’s routine medical care. It includes guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for recommended and alternate testing sequences that updated the standard used since 1987. Each VA medical facility is required to establish a written testing policy, and to follow requirements and processes for obtaining oral consent for HIV testing. The policy also details procedures for

performing HIV tests and establishes timely notification of results in order to link newly diagnosed patients with the appropriate medical care. But the VA's investigation identified eight veterans whose HIV test results from outside labs differed from the Miami VAMC's test results — including one patient who was deemed “high risk” for HIV and tested positive for the virus after follow up screening.

In a second case, the Miami VAMC tried at least five times between June and December 2016 to contact a veteran with differing HIV test results. Eventually, the veteran returned for repeat screening and tested positive for HIV. The remaining six veterans with differing results returned to the Miami VAMC for retesting and were negative. It's unclear how many HIV tests from the Miami VAMC were sent to an outside lab. But the VA's investigative report notes that the eight cases identified were produced by the Miami VAMC in response to the agency's request for all differing test results from Oct. 1, 2015 to Oct. 11, 2016.

Reached by phone on 28 FEB, Miguel said he was unaware of the OSC's letter to the president and unprepared to comment. But he added that Miami VAMC administrators had taken steps to ensure the integrity of the facility's HIV testing process. “I'm happy that this came out,” Miguel said, “because it's for the best of the patient. That's what we want to do here. We try to give the patient what they need.” [Source: Miami Herald | Daniel Chang | February 28, 2018 ++]

VAMC Phoenix AZ Update 01 ► Get Screened! Take Ownership Of Your Health.

Phoenix resident **Dave English** turned 53 not that long ago. Normally birthdays are happy events, but turning 53 for Dave was a bit different. And maybe a bit ominous. “I had two cousins die of heart attacks,” he reported. “Both were 53. My grandfather died of a heart attack at 53. Last July another cousin died of a heart attack at 50. My great grandfather died of a heart attack at 54...” For Dave, the writing on the wall was there to see. “My family's cardiac history is like a train wreck,” he said. “So when I went to the Phoenix VA for my scheduled physical I told the doctor I was a little creeped out and wanted to get my heart checked...”



“It's a good thing I did,” he continued. “I had absolutely no symptoms, but my angiogram revealed multiple blockages.” Dave said the good folks at the Phoenix VA jumped into action immediately. “They didn't mess around,” he said. “Dr. Joel Kupfer, chief of cardiology at Phoenix, came in to see me and said I needed surgery right away. He said I was in bad shape. I was still a bit shocked at how the day was unfolding, so I asked if I could go home and get my stuff in order.” “The doc told me, ‘You have a very serious condition. Please promise you will be there this evening.’ So I gave my word as an Annapolis grad and Marine officer that I would report back as scheduled.” Dave said his surgery, which took place two days later, was a great success: “Dr. Mark Tasset was my surgeon, and he was fantastic. He gave me a quadruple bypass. Later they told me that if I had waited another week, it's likely I would have had a massive heart attack.”

The Marine Corps officer said he wants to share his story with as many of his fellow Veterans as possible. “It seems the media are filled with negative coverage of the VA,” he observed. “Stories like mine are seldom heard. But through this experience and after, I have seen how the VA is working hard to be proactive. Today I’m feeling healthy and enjoying my new lease on life. And for that, I thank the helpful doctors, nurses and staff at the Phoenix VA.” Dave said he has one simple message for Veterans everywhere: “Get screened!” he urged. “Take ownership of your health.” [Source: VAntage Point | March 5, 2018 ++]

VAMC Washington DC Update 07 ► Major Improvements Undertaken

On 7 MAR, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) outlined a series of major improvements undertaken at the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center (DCVAMC) in the 11 months since the VA’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released an interim report critical of the medical center. In April 2017, VA Secretary David Shulkin immediately began replacing key members of the leadership team, bringing in Larry Connell as the acting medical center director. In addition to Connell, the facility also has a new acting deputy director, acting assistant director, a new nurse executive and a new chief of logistics. “We appreciate the work of the OIG,” Shulkin said. “Their report is a critical step in improving the overall performance of this facility. Further, it is especially valuable as VA strives to markedly improve the care we provide to our Veterans and as we move forward in restoring Veterans’ confidence in the medical care they receive.” Important actions taken and progress made at the DCVAMC include:

- Eliminated all pending prosthetics consults greater than 30 days – from 9,000 to zero.
- Established the Incident Command Center (ICC), providing for a robust oversight process that identified and promptly addressed new supply or equipment shortages, and instituted a 24-hour hotline for ordering urgent and emergent medical supplies.
- Awarded a contract to construct a 14,200-square-foot space for the Sterile Processing Service. The \$8.9 million project will be completed in March 2019.
- Transitioned inventory to the General Inventory Package, and the periodic automatic replenishment levels are validated to ensure stock outages do not occur.
- Off-site, warehouse secured with restricted access to protect medical equipment and supplies.
- Thirty-six Logistics, Sterile Processing Service vacancies have been filled and seven positions remain under recruitment.

Shulkin also announced several proactive steps to help correct and prevent similar problems, including: tasking independent health-care management experts to begin making unannounced on-site audits at VA facilities, VA-wide staffing reviews, restructuring logistics to decentralize accountability, establishing new governance oversight for medical center performance and restructuring VA Central Office. [Source: VA News Release | March 7, 2018 ++]

* Vets *

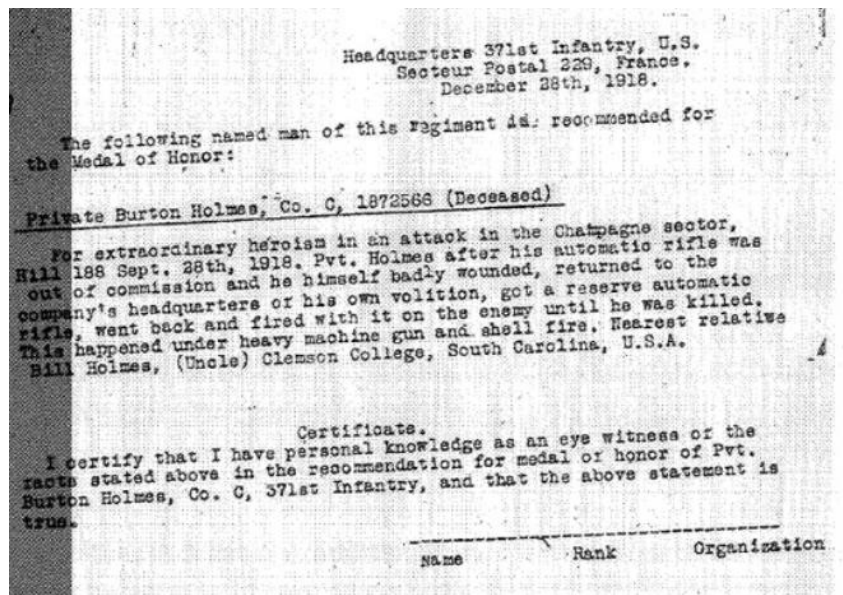


MOH Awards Update 08 ► WWI Black Nominee's Recommendation Under Review

Out of a hailstorm of machine gun fire and heavy shelling, Pvt. Burton Holmes returned, badly wounded, to the 371st Infantry Regiment's command post. His unit had been set up, lured out onto Hill 188 by the false promise of surrender, leaving them vulnerable to the surprise attack from the Germans. But Holmes returned only because his automatic rifle was out of commission. He refused to be taken to the hospital for treatment. Instead, he got a reserve automatic rifle and rejoined the fight, firing upon the enemy until he died. His try-or-die attitude was shared by all of Company C. His fellow soldier, Cpl. Freddie Stowers, continued to crawl ahead after being mortally wounded. He, too, died under fire, while encouraging the unit to continue advancing. For their actions in the Battle of Hill 188, on Sept. 28, 1918, both Holmes and Stowers were recommended for the Medal of Honor.

It's a special case, according to Dr. Jeff Gusky, ER doctor and National Geographic photographer. It is, as far as he can tell, the only case in U.S. history in which two African Americans died in the same battle and were both considered for the Medal of Honor. But neither recommendation was approved; Holmes' award was downgraded to a Distinguished Service Cross and Stowers' recommendation was lost for decades. Why? Gusky said it's institutionalized and systematic racism. He is working with the American Legion and the American Battle Monuments Commission to get Holmes' case reviewed.

"There was a concerted effort of preserving Jim Crow laws and the myth that African Americans were second class citizens," said Gusky. "Imagine ... how powerful this would have been in the American press ... if word got out that there were two black soldiers who died in this ambush and were both nominated for the Medal of Honor." Stowers' recommendation was uncovered in the late 1980s and awarded posthumously to his family in 1991, making him the first black Medal of Honor recipient for World War I. If Stowers' actions deserved the Medal of Honor, Gusky said, Holmes' actions do, too. "Stowers was able to get the Medal of Honor, and if it was good enough [73] years after, you have to wonder, what was different?" said Verna Jones, executive director of the American Legion. "What was the distinguishing factor?"



Burton Holmes' recommendation for the Medal of Honor. There are no known photographs of Holmes and it's not clear what he looked like or what his history is, Gusky said. He is presumed to have been illiterate; he signed his draft card with an "x," according to Gusky.

Was it racism, which arguably increased during WWI in response to the standards of equality set by the "color blind" French Command that the 371st served with? Perhaps, Gusky argues, Holmes was not awarded the Medal of

Honor because it would challenge the status of Jim Crow laws. “That was actually Pershing’s policy,” said Gerald Torrence, director of Strategic Planning at AMBC, referring to Pershing’s secret memo: secret information sent to the French Command outlining how to “handle” black U.S. soldiers. “You don’t treat blacks with too much respect, you don’t give them compliments in front of white officers, you don’t treat them too well, because you don’t want them to come home and be disappointed,” Torrence said, referring to the policy.

However, the team at AMBC says it’s a difficult argument to make, and still wants to conduct more research before bringing the case before the Army. “The Army does not like to second guess,” said Col. Rob Dalessandro, deputy secretary of AMBC. “And there’s nobody alive to say, ‘I saw what happened on that hill and he deserved the Medal of Honor.’” The recommendation could have been poorly written, and there was no one advocating for Holmes, a poor, illiterate cotton picker from rural South Carolina, drafted into the 371st Infantry Regiment, a newly formed unit within the segregated 93rd Division.

An officer — a white officer, the only kind in the 371st — recommended him for the medal. “It had to be a white officer who put him in, and it probably had to go through several levels before it could be downgraded,” said Michael Knapp, AMBC director of Historical Services. “He was given the Distinguished Service Cross, which they don’t hand out freely then or today.” Their next step would be approaching the Army, which would review the case and, if they agree that it should be upgraded, would take it to Congress. But it’s all conjecture, according to Knapp. “There are a few things I can say for sure. The Army of 1918 will not give an African American a fair shake,” said Knapp. “But can we say all four of us at this table for sure that Burton Holmes was reduced because he was an African American? We can’t say that.”

Regardless of the reason, Jones says it’s a wrong that must be righted. “You have to go back and honor people who have done extraordinary things ... We ask men and women [to put their lives on the line] every day, the least we can do is reward those acts of heroism,” said Jones. “I mean, how many of us would have done what he did?” said Jones. “Those are the things that you can’t mind going back to right.” Gusky and Jones have reached out to Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina to advocate for Holmes in Congress. According to Gusky and Jones, Scott expressed his interest in the story and agreed to research it more. He did not respond to Military Times for comment.

It may be difficult to achieve, but Gusky and advocates at the AMBC and American Legion believe the cause is important and the story is unifying. “These guys were victimized, but they were not victims in their minds,” said Torrence. “That’s why they would step up for something bigger than themselves and put their lives on the line and their blood on the line. They were not victims in their minds.” [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Nicole Bauke | February 28, 2018 ++]

GI Bill Update 250 ► Transparency Expanded on Expenditures

As part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) ongoing commitment to expand public transparency and accountability of agency expenditures, VA on 12 MAR released data showing GI Bill tuition and fee payments to VA-approved colleges, universities, and other education and training institutions across the country. “Though there’s no dispute about the success of the program, Veterans and taxpayers still have a right to know where and how much money is being spent at these institutions,” said VA Secretary David Shulkin. “VA is committed to becoming the most transparent organization in government.”

The current available data spans fiscal years 2009 to 2017, and includes key information, such as names of institutions, states, countries, school classifications, number of enrolled beneficiaries, total amount paid to each institution by fiscal year and grand total money spent. The GI Bill has long been noted for its popularity as one of the most successful programs administered by VA for Veterans and eligible family members. Millions of American Veterans have benefited from this program, which assists them in starting, or continuing, their education after

service to the nation. This information is posted at <https://www.data.va.gov> and will be updated at the end of each fiscal year. [Source: VA News Release | March 12, 2018 ++]

California Veterans Home Update 17 ► Yountville Vet Center Killings

Three women who devoted their lives to helping traumatized veterans were killed by a patient who had been kicked out of their Northern California treatment program, authorities and a relative of a victim said. A daylong siege at The Pathway Home ended the evening of 9 MAR with the discovery of four bodies, including the gunman. He was identified as **Albert Wong**, 36, a former Army rifleman who served a year in Afghanistan in 2011-2012. Investigators were still trying to determine when and why Wong killed two executives and a psychologist at The Pathway Home, a nonprofit post-traumatic stress disorder program at the Veterans Home of California-Yountville in the Napa Valley wine country region. It was "far too early to say if they were chosen at random" because investigators had not yet determined a motive, California Highway Patrol Assistant Chief Chris Childs said.

Gov. Jerry Brown ordered flags flown at half-staff at the capitol in memory of the victims. They were identified as The Pathway Home Executive Director Christine Loeber, 48; Clinical Director Jennifer Golick, 42; and Jennifer Gonzales, 29, a clinical psychologist with the San Francisco Department of Veterans Affairs Healthcare System. "These brave women were accomplished professionals who dedicated their careers to serving our nation's veterans, working closely with those in the greatest need of attention after deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan," The Pathway Home said in a statement. Golick's father-in-law, Bob Golick, said in an interview that she had recently expelled Wong from the program.

The Pathway Home is located on the sprawling campus of the veterans center, which cares for about 1,000 elderly and disabled vets. It is the largest veterans home in the nation, according to the state Department of Veterans Affairs. Wong went to the campus about 53 miles (85 kilometers) north of San Francisco on Friday morning, slipping into a going-away party for some employees of The Pathway House. Larry Kamer told The Associated Press that his wife, Devereaux Smith, called him to say that the gunman had entered the room quietly, letting some people leave while taking others hostage. Golick called her husband, Mark, to say that she had been taken hostage by the former soldier, her father-in-law said. Mark Golick didn't hear from her again, Malick said.

A Napa Valley sheriff's deputy exchanged gunshots with the hostage-taker at about 10:30 a.m. but after that, nothing was heard from Wong or his hostages, despite daylong efforts to contact him, authorities said. Army veteran and resident Bob Sloan, 73, was working at the home's TV station when a co-worker came in and said he had heard four gunshots coming from The Pathway Home. Sloan sent alerts for residents to stay put. A group of about 80 students who were on the home's grounds were safely evacuated after being locked down, Napa County Sheriff John Robertson said. The teens from Justin-Siena High School were at a theater rehearsing a play. "They were a distance away from the shooting situation," Robertson said.

Authorities had the building under siege for about eight hours before entering it. They found the bodies of Wong and the women at about 6 p.m. Wong's rental car was later found nearby. A bomb-sniffing dog alerted authorities to something on the car but the only thing found was a cellphone, authorities said. Yvette Bennett, a wound-care supply worker at the veterans center, was turned back when she tried to deliver what she called urgently needed medical supplies for two patients inside. Of all the medical institutions she has worked with, "this is the most placid, calm, serene place," she said. Earlier this week, when she last visited, she asked a doctor, "What's your magic here?" "And then 48 hours later this happens," Bennett said. [Source: Associated Press | Janie Har & Ellen Knickmeyer | 10 Mar 2018 ++]

California Veterans Home Update 18 ► Unanswered Questions on Killings

Three days after a former Army rifleman killed three mental health care workers at a program where he had received care in Northern California, there are still more questions than answers. Albert Wong, 36, slipped into a going-away party at The Pathway Home on the morning of 9 MAR. About seven hours later, a robot with a video feed showed officers that Wong and the three workers were dead. Executive Director Christine Loeber, 48; Clinical Director Jennifer Golick, 42; and Jennifer Gonzales Shushereba, 32, a clinical psychologist with the San Francisco Department of Veterans Affairs Healthcare System who was nearly 7 months pregnant died in the siege. Here are some of the things officials have said about what happened and questions that remain:

Did officials at The Pathway Home, at the Veterans Administration or in the military ever report any concerns about Albert Wong's mental health to outside authorities?

- Napa County Sheriff's Capt. Steve Blower said Monday that his office had received no prior reports from mental health workers alerting them to concerns about Wong's mental health or that he was a danger to others, though his agency would have been a primary point of contact for such reporting. The U.S. Army has declined to provide more details beyond Wong's basic service record, which shows he served in Afghanistan from April 2011 to March 2012 and received numerous awards.
- Stanford University psychiatry professor Keith Humphreys said mental health care professionals are required by state law to report to law enforcement agencies patients they believe have made a "credible, specific threat against a specific individual." Humphreys also said patients can be reported who are "gravely disabled" or pose a "serious danger" to themselves or others.

Why was Wong kicked out of the treatment program, and what help was he given when he was removed?

- Pathway Home spokesman Larry Kamer declined to comment, citing "confidentiality rules and the ongoing investigation." There have been reports that Wong may have threatened one of the women, but Napa County officials and the California Highway Patrol have declined to comment on those reports, saying they are premature.

Did Wong's behavior prompt any reports to gun registries?

- The California Attorney General's Office operates a gun registry, but the agency declined to say 12 MAR if Wong's previous behavior or actions while enrolled in the program and his subsequent expulsion prompted any reports to the gun registry or a program that seizes firearms from those who are no longer allowed to have them because of mental illness or criminal convictions.
- "Since this is an active case, everything has to come from the investigating agency," spokeswoman Bethany Lesser said in an email.

How many guns did Wong own and did he legally obtain/retain them after he enrolled in an in-patient mental health program?

- Investigators haven't publicly identified the weapon Wong used to kill the three mental health workers. Wong's state permit to carry a 9-millimeter gun as a security guard was cancelled last October after he failed to pay the Bureau of Security and Investigative Services, agency spokesman Matt Woodcheke said Monday. Attorney General Xavier Becerra's office, which is responsible for performing gun background checks for buyers, declined to provide records. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives spokeswoman Alexandria Corneiro did not respond to a request Monday about whether federal agents had traced the weapons used in the shooting or determined how many guns Wong owned.

At what point were the women killed? Did law enforcement respond properly during the siege when they waited for eight hours to go into the room where Wong had kept the women inside?

- Capt. Blower of the sheriff's office said a deputy exchanged gunfire 10 minutes after he responded to a 10:20 a.m. report of "shots fired" at the veterans home. Blower said Wong fled into a room, slamming shut

the door and the deputy didn't follow the gunman into the room. Authorities say it's apparent the victims were shot Friday morning because no gunfire was heard afterward.

- California Highway Patrol Sgt. Rob Nacke said CHP and the Napa County Sheriff's Department shared responsibility for responding to the shooting. The veterans home is in the sheriff's jurisdiction but it is a state agency, prompting the joint response, Nacke said. The FBI also responded with a hostage negotiating team. Nacke said the first officer on scene was responding to an "active shooter," requiring an immediate and aggressive response. "Typically, you want to rush in and confront an active shooter," Nacke said.
- After Wong fled into a room and slammed the door shut, "At that point it turned into a hostage situation," Nacke said. The proper response to a hostage situation is to play for time. Typically, the longer the situation drags on without violence, the more likely it is to resolve peacefully, Nacke said. "Time was on our side." But at 6 p.m. officers determined Wong and the three victims were dead.

[Source: The Associated Press | March 12, 2018 ++]

Trump Pardons Sailor ► Convicted Of Taking Illegal Photos Aboard Submarine

President Donald Trump on 9 MAR pardoned a former sailor jailed for taking pictures of his workstation on a personal cell phone, a case that became entangled with former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's own controversies involving mishandling classified information. Former Machinist's Mate 1st Class Kristian Saucier pleaded guilty to the crime in 2016 and spent a year in jail. He had petitioned the White House for a full pardon, arguing that federal prosecutors targeted him for overly severe punishment in the wake of revelations that Clinton used a private email server to store classified emails. "This is not justice" he wrote in a letter to the White House in January 2017.

On Friday, White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders announced the pardon and said the president was "appreciative of Mr. Saucier's service to the country," and said the felony conviction was excessive given his "commendable" military service record. "Mr. Saucier was 22 years old at the time of his offenses and has served out his 12-month sentence," she said. "He has been recognized by his fellow service members for his dedication, skill and patriotic spirit." In court, Saucier acknowledged that he took six photos of his work station aboard an attack submarine in violation of Navy rules. He said the reason was not to jeopardize sensitive information about the vessel, but instead to keep as a memento of his time on board. But he also noted that two other sailors caught taking similar photos on the same submarine a few years earlier faced a rank reduction and forfeited pay for the actions, not a dishonorable discharge and felony prison sentence like he received.



Former Machinist's Mate 1st Class Kristian Saucier, shown here during his time in the Navy

Saucier's case became a talking point among conservatives during the 2016 presidential campaign, even though federal prosecutors argued comparisons between his actions and Clinton's were laughable. Trump's pardon removes

the felony conviction from Saucier's record but will not make the former sailor automatically available for military and veteran benefits. The pardon is only the second issued by Trump since taking office in early 2017. Last August, he awarded a pardon to Joe Arpaio, a controversial former Arizona sheriff, who was convicted of contempt in an immigration case. [Source: ArmyTimes | Leo Shane III | March 9, 2018 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 230 ► Training Funded for 20,000 Tradespeople

The Home Depot Foundation, a leadership arm for the company founded by Bernie Marcus, Arthur Blank and with the help of Ken Langone, hammered down on its pledge to closing the gap among skilled laborers in America. It announced 8 MAR that it would commit \$50 million to train 20,000 tradespeople over the next 10 years, starting with separating military members and veterans, at-risk youth and members of the Atlanta Westside community, in an effort to reduce the number of unfilled construction sector jobs in the U.S. Currently, there are 158,000 unfilled jobs in the sector, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which projects the total employment number of construction laborers to increase 10.5% by 2026. As [FOX Business reported](#), many six figure jobs in the sector are going unfilled.

"We want to bring shop class back, from coast-to-coast," Shannon Gerber, executive director of The Home Depot Foundation, said in a statement. "We're thrilled to train 20,000 next-generation plumbers, electricians, carpenters and beyond. It's a true honor to welcome our first classes of separating soldiers as they transition to civilian life and into successful careers in the trades." The foundation launched a pilot trades training program last year for separating military members in partnership with the Home Builders Institute (HBI) – a nonprofit dedicated to providing education, career development, training and offers job placement services for the building industry – on Ft. Stewart in Georgia and Ft. Bragg in North Carolina. The first set of students will graduate this month.

A 12-week pre-apprenticeship certification program, which is free for students, uses an industry-based curriculum recognized by the Labor Department that integrates work-based learning with technical and academic skills. The program has a job placement rate of more than 90% and will roll out on more military bases nationwide, Home Depot said. Go to <http://www.hbi.org/Programs/Training-Programs/Veterans-Program> for information on what is available and how to participate.

"HBI has a 50-year history of training individuals with the skills they need to succeed in the building industry. Our program prepares men and women for high-growth careers in the industry after leaving military service," HBI CEO John Courson said in a statement. "With 200,000 service members separating from the military every year, our partnership with The Home Depot Foundation enables us to serve more veterans across the country." Home Depot also said the foundation is establishing an advanced level trades training program in partnership with the Construction Education Foundation of Georgia for residents of Atlanta's Westside, which will expand training support to the broader veteran community and underserved high schools across America. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | March 2, 2018 ++]

Stolen Valor Update 109 ► Reported 180301 thru 180315

A popular high school history teacher from Massachusetts has been fired from his job after it was revealed he had been lying for years about being a US Army veteran and being awarded two Purple Hearts. **Andrew Gaboury**, 36, had taught social sciences at Coyle and Cassidy High School in Taunton for four years. At the time of his hiring in 2014, Gaboury claimed that he served for eight years as an intelligence and counter-intelligence analyst and that he was deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo and Uzbekistan as part of the global war on terror.



History teacher Andrew Gaboury, 36

The school newspaper even published a laudatory article, titled 'Gaboury goes from military to history classroom,' which touted the rookie teacher's purported military service. 'I'm so pleased to have a man like Mr Gaboury to be on our staff. He had a lot of experiences and was well educated. He even served for our country's military,' Principal Kathleen St. Laurent was quoted as saying at the time. But Gaboury was no decorated war hero and had not served in the military at all. Fox25 Boston untangled the teacher's web of lies concerning his non-existent military career after being tipped off that Gaboury had been lying about his biography.

The station reached out to the US National Archives and Records Administration in St Louis and was told that there was no mention of Gaboury in the records. On 3 MAR, the 36-year-old teacher came clean to Fox 25 about his deception in an email, saying he had been desperate for a job after being unemployed for a year. When the principal asked about his military service during the job interview, having mistaken him for another applicant, Gaboury said he did not correct her. 'I made up time in the Army,' he wrote. 'Over the intervening years I added details as people asked. I am deeply sorrowful for this and did not see a way out.'

The Bridgewater resident claimed he tried to join the Army in 2002 after graduating from high school but was disqualified because of unspecified medical reasons. The Boston news station also has obtained a receipt purportedly showing that the bogus veteran in December purchased online \$95 worth of war medals, including a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. Coyle and Cassidy High School and Middle School President Mary Pat Tranter told the Taunton Daily Gazette that when she first confronted Gaboury on 28 FEB about the allegations against him, he denied the claims.

Gaboury was ousted from the school on 3 MAR, effective immediately, for lying about his military service on his employment application. In his email, the 36-year-old said he has two sons and that he and his wife had recently finalized their divorce. Although Gaboury acknowledged his wrongdoings, he also sought to downplay the matter, describing it as a personal 'embarrassment'. [Source: DailyMail.com | March 3, 2018 ++]

Vet Suicide Update 20 ► AMVETS/VA Partnership | HEAL Program

AMVETS officials on 6 Mar announced a new mental health care partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs that's part of a broader effort by both organizations to better combat suicide among vulnerable veterans. "We have to start saving lives, not just talking about it," said Sherman Gillums Jr., chief strategy officer for AMVETS. The new initiative — nicknamed the HEAL program — comes the same week that VA officials are set to deliver plans to the White House to **provide mental health services to every service member leaving the ranks**, in an effort to better identify troubled veterans and intervene before they harm themselves. Those plans are the culmination of a 60-day interagency review of mental health services and policies mandated by an executive order in January. At the time, President Donald Trump said the move meant that federal departments would take a closer

look at “supporting our veterans during their transition from uniformed service to civilian life, taking some of their difficulty away.”

On 6 MAR, VA Secretary David Shulkin called the moves an extension of his department’s clinical work on suicide prevention. He acknowledged that many service members and veterans do not know enough about the services available to them, and called the coordination with AMVETS an important step forward. “We know that mental health care saves lives, and we can do more,” he said. “So this is really important.” Research by the Naval Postgraduate School has found that veterans in their first year out of the military are almost three times more likely to take their own lives than individuals still serving. That has led to a new focus on that first year of military transition, and outreach to those new veterans.

The HEAL program (which stands for healthcare, evaluation, advocacy and legislation) includes a new AMVETS-run hotline for veterans to call for guidance on available resources, to be launched 19 MAR. Email and online chat components are also being created. The veterans group is spending about \$700,000 to pay for a team of clinicians to work with veterans, VA officials and other community advocates to better coordinate care options and measure the effectiveness of existing programs. Additional information on the services will be available in coming weeks on the group’s web site <http://amvets.org>.

An estimated 20 veterans a day nationwide commit suicide. VA research has found more than half of those are veterans who do not have regular contact with department health care or support programs. To contact the Veteran Crisis Line, callers can dial 1-800-273-8255 and select option 1 for a VA staffer. Veterans, troops or their families members can also text 838255 or visit VeteransCrisisLine.net (<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>) for assistance. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 6, 2018 ++]

Vet Scholarships Update 09 ► Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship

As a provision in the new [Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017](#) — more commonly known as the Forever GI Bill — the VA is extending education benefits for veteran students seeking science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) degrees, effective Aug. 1, 2019. This scholarship is intended to encourage veterans to pursue fields that often require more resources than the 36 months of benefits the Post-9/11 GI Bill allocates. By granting greater financial assistance, the talent pool of student veterans in STEM concentrations can grow.

Students who have used up or nearly depleted the entirety of their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits ([learn more about GI bill eligibility and benefits](#)) will be able to apply to the VA for extended time and financial assistance. This extension will pay eligible students up to nine additional months of benefits or a maximum lump sum of \$30,000. The eligibility requirements for this expansion are students who:

- Are enrolled in a program of education leading to a post-secondary degree that requires more than the standard 128 semester credits hours (or 192 quarter credit hours); and
 - are completing their undergraduate college degree in:
 - biological or biomedical science,
 - physical science,
 - science technologies or technicians,
 - computer and information science and support services,
 - mathematics or statistics,
 - engineering; engineering technologies or an engineering-related field,
 - a health profession or related program,
 - a medical residency program,

- an agriculture science program or natural resources science program, or
- other subjects and fields identified as meeting national needs; and
- Have completed at least 60 standard semester credit hours (or 90 quarter hours) in one of the above fields or,
- Have earned a degree in one of these fields and are currently pursuing a teaching certification.

Individuals who require the most credit hours for their degree will be given precedence as well as individuals who were already entitled 100 percent of the GI bill benefits. It is important to note the expansion is not transferable to dependents and Yellow Ribbon funds are not available under this program. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Abigail Chu | March 1, 2018 ++]

National Resource Directory Update 05 ► Designed For Veterans

The National Resource Directory (NRD) at <https://nrd.gov> is one of the largest online collections of government and non-government resources specifically designed for Veterans, service members, their families and caregivers. With a unique collection of more than 16,000 organized and vetted resources, the directory provides information covering a variety of topics, including benefits and compensation, education, homeless assistance, housing and other services. For Veterans looking for reliable resources and information, the directory is an one-stop alternative to searching through multiple websites and publications to find what you're looking for. At www.nrd.gov, all resources and information for a topic area can be found within a single website and are easily located using the site's search engine.

“The resources listed on the National Resource Directory are vetted and undergo a thorough review process on a continuous basis,” said Jonathan Morris, director of business requirements for the Office of Warrior Care and manager of the directory. “The NRD’s purpose is to provide information and access to high-quality, reliable resources that benefit individuals in, and connected to, the Veteran and military communities.” This means no scams, no privacy concerns and no fear that the resources found on nrd.gov are anything but the highest quality resources supporting Veterans.

The result of a partnership between the U.S. Departments of Defense, Labor and Veterans Affairs in 2011, the directory has been the go-to destination for Veterans and their families to find trusted resources and information. All three agencies are committed to maintaining and improving the site today and in the future. “Users can expect swift search results that produce valid, relevant programs no matter the inquiry, such as Veteran Service Organizations, faith-based and community organizations, academic institutions and more,” said Morris. [Source: Vantage Point | March 1, 2018 ++]

Military Spouse Deportation ► PIP Eligibility Blocked by ICE & DHS Actions

A Virginia immigration court could decide to deport the wife of an Army 7th Special Forces Group veteran, despite provisions in the law that allow her to remain in the United States. Retired Sgt. 1st Class Bob Crawford, 52, and Elia, 44, married in 2001 when he was still on active duty and deploying regularly with 7th Group to conduct counter-narcotics operations and training missions in Latin America. Elia illegally crossed into the U.S. in 1999, after she fled the devastation of Hurricane Mitch, which killed 7,000 people in her native Honduras.



After they married, the Crawfords filled out paperwork to seek legal residency for Elia and learned she was under deportation orders. “We’ve been fighting this for years,” Bob Crawford said, listing the filings and attorneys the family has pursued to get Elia legal status. The pair has two sons, ages 12 and 9, and Elia has been the foundation that has allowed Bob to keep deploying — as many as two or three times a year — first as an active duty soldier and now as a Defense Department contractor. “My wife supported me the whole time I was gone — she ran the house,” Crawford said. “Behind every good soldier is a good woman.” Crawford hasn’t discussed his family’s predicament publicly before. He decided to now because he is fearful that the administrative limbo she is caught up in will force the family to split.

Spouses of active-duty troops or veterans are eligible for “Parole in Place,” or PIP, a relief that allows spouses, children and parents of active duty, National Guard and Reserve troops and veterans who entered the U.S. illegally to remain in the country and pursue a green card. The law was put in place in 2007 to come to the aid of Yaderlin Hiraldo, the wife of Army Sgt. Alex Jimenez. Hiraldo entered the U.S. illegally, and Jimenez was killed in Iraq before they could complete her green card request.

The PIP provision has been “extraordinarily important for military families,” said Leticia Corona, the Crawfords’ attorney. “It’s a tremendous amount of stress for military personnel in general who deploy to dangerous places to be worried about their loved ones who are undocumented back home.” That policy has not helped the Crawfords, because they can’t file for the relief while a deportation order remains, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) won’t clear Elia Crawford’s order. “The government won’t terminate that removal so she can get the PIP,” Bob Crawford said. “So she’s caught between ICE (Immigration and Customs enforcement) and DHS.”

In recent hearings, the Crawfords have requested the deportation order be removed so they could proceed with the paperwork to be granted PIP. Getting the orders cleared in earlier cases had been fairly procedural, Corona said. That’s changed under President Donald Trump’s administration, which has taken a harder line on immigration and deportation issues. In late December, DHS declined the Crawfords’ request. “They provided no reason as to why they came to that decision,” Corona said. There was no one immediately available at DHS for comment.

Bob Crawford, who was honorably discharged in 2006 after 20 years of service, including in the 75th Ranger Regiment, a deployment during the Gulf War, and then serving in Latin America with 7th Group, said he has watched over the past year as both Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and new Army Secretary Mark Esper have talked about the importance of military families. He said it’s a juxtaposition to what he and other military families facing deportation are going through. “I know the military takes care of families — because I lived it for 20 years,” Crawford said. “I just feel, right now, we’re caught in this limbo.”

Crawford continues to deploy in his contractor role to support the military. He is worried about Elia’s safety if the government decides she must return to Honduras. “Honduras is one of the most dangerous countries in the world, especially for a female if they know she’s a military dependent,” he said. The Crawfords return to an immigration court in Arlington, Virginia, 5 MAR to see if there are other options available to them to get the

deportation orders cleared. The family is fearful. “This is kind of my last hope,” Bob Crawford said. “I don’t know what’s going to happen.”

-o-o-O-o-o-

In a follow-up report on 1 MAR, the family's legal representation said DHS offered to back off, pending approval from the judge. “We are now at a crossroads that could make or break this family,” said attorney Leticia Corona. “The latest development in this case is that we were contacted today by the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of the Chief Counsel who offered to dismiss deportation [removal] proceedings ... Once the judge approves the dismissal, this would allow Mrs. Crawford to pursue permanent legal status,” she added. After a burst of media attention last week, it took a Virginia immigration court just about 10 minutes to finally clear her on 5 MAR.

The Crawfords still have several months of additional court proceedings ahead to get the military spouse exemption approved. “I know there’s other families in this same situation, and hopefully this will help bring light to that situation, for our military and our veterans,” Crawford said. For more on military spouse deportations go to <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/03/04/more-military-families-come-forward-with-deportation-fears>. [Source: The Atlantic Journal-Constitution & Washington Examiner | Brad Schrade & Diana Stancy Correll | February 27 & March 1, 2018 ++]

Military Spouse Deportation Update 01 ► Multiple Families Under Stress

Last July, inside a crowded cocktail tent, Navy Petty Officer First Class **Justin Sullivan** stood under a stage light in his dress whites. Politicians and defense leaders pushed through the crowd to shake his hand. By his side was his wife, Loretto Dalmazzo Sullivan. She smiled despite the heat, their baby strapped to her chest. Justin Sullivan, the Navy Times’ 2017 Sailor of the Year, was being honored for his service as a radio operator during two combat tours in Afghanistan and hundreds of hours of volunteer work at home. Loretto kept one eye on their toddler daughter while their infant son pulled on her long dark hair. She wanted to take the opportunity to say something about those Afghanistan deployments, but she didn’t. This was Justin’s moment.

Now, however, “we are at a point where people need to hear,” Loretto, 32, told Military Times 8 MAR. While Justin, 28, was deployed in 2012 and 2013, Loretto lived under intense stress, fearing their family would be split apart by immigration authorities. She is undocumented. “It’s this constant fear that someone is going to show up at your door and take you away,” she said in a phone interview from Florida, where the family is currently based.



Navy Petty Officer First Class Justin Sullivan and his wife, Loretto who are now based in Pensacola, Fla., decided to speak out about the challenges they have faced obtaining citizenship for her.

The family started her immigration paperwork after Justin and Loretto married, but Loretto was denied because she had previously claimed to be a U.S. citizen on a restaurant job application. Instead, as Justin was set to deploy

again, U.S. immigration officials sent Loretto a letter urging her to voluntarily depart the country. While he was away, Justin would worry and press Loretto. Don't speed. Make sure the blinker lights and headlights are working on the car. "One blinker light out on her car could be her ticket out," he said. "Deploying in Afghanistan has its own stressors," he said. "Every morning going to work, it's just another thing that's on my mind. 'Is today the day they are coming?'"

In 2014, Loretto qualified for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, protection, which grants her legal status here as long as the program, which is under threat of being cancelled, is continued. She is one of a dozen military spouses, active-duty service members, veterans or their attorneys who have spoken to Military Times since the news organization reported the story of the looming deportation of the wife of a 7th Special Forces Group veteran, Army Sgt. 1st Class Bob Crawford. The story, and DHS's decision to drop deportation proceedings after the story published, touched a nerve. Now, more military families are looking for answers.

"We are kind of hopeless," said another active-duty sailor, a California-based 35-year-old chief petty officer who has served on the cruiser Lake Champlain, destroyer Chafee and now-decommissioned attack submarine Albuquerque. He asked not to be identified and said he is contemplating moving his family to Mexico because his wife faces deportation. Like the others who spoke to Military Times, his wife's vulnerability "is always on your mind when you get deployed." Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has already said that some active-duty and National Guard members, reservists and honorably discharged veterans are "protected" from deportation as the administration of President Donald Trump has taken a harder line on immigration. The families want to know: What about the spouses and kids?

Each case is different and complex; the affected spouses crossed illegally into the U.S. for various reasons, often to escape violence or hardship. They face deportation for different reasons, too. Some missed a hearing, some falsely said they were U.S. citizens to cross into the U.S. or to obtain work. At some point, they met their significant others and became the backbone of the military families so often lauded by the service chiefs, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. Joe Dunford, Mattis, and even President Trump. "I want every military family in this country to know that our administration is at your service. We stand with you 100 percent. We will protect those who protect us. And we will never, ever let you down," Trump said in February 2017 to troops at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida.

Vice President Mike Pence, while still in Congress as a representative from Indiana, issued his own support for undocumented military spouses in 2010. He co-authored a letter with colleagues urging DHS to use all means at its disposal to help the families obtain legal status, including a program called Parole in Place, or PIP, which would allow spouses who crossed illegally to stay. Vice President Mike Pence was one of several key lawmakers who pressed the Department of Homeland Security in 2010 to "use all the power" at its disposal to protect military families from deportation. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | March 12, 2018 ++]

Military Spouse Deportation Update 02 ► Multiple Families Impacted



Former Army Spc. Charles Shreve's wife, Claudia (left), Former Spc. Brian Holovach (left) said his wife, Esmeralda (center), and Retired Lt. Col. Patrick Schreiber and his wife (right), Soo Jin

Impacted military families and their attorneys say “Parole in Place” (PIP) has been effectively frozen, since Trump’s January 2017 executive order directing immigration authorities “to employ all lawful means to enforce the immigration laws of the United States.” Even though the order specified going after immigrants who have committed crimes since coming to the country, it’s had a blanket impact on the military community’s undocumented dependents, too. “The concerns I have for [my clients] are the concerns I have for so many,” said attorney David Funke, who is representing former Army Spc. **Charles Shreve**, 40, who joined the military in 2009 and deployed to Afghanistan with the 307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion in 2010. Shreve’s wife, 37-year-old Claudia, left the U.S. in 2017 after being given the option to depart voluntarily, or be deported.

“They support themselves, they have family, they are not criminals, but all that goes out the window” under the tighter enforcement, Funke said. Besides the Shreves, he currently has two other military families he is representing in deportation cases. There are at least three bills under consideration in Congress that could help military spouses, dependents and even veterans themselves who have been deported or face a future deportation.

- The first is H.R. 1036, the “**American Families United Act**,” sponsored by Rep. Beto O’Rourke, D-Texas, which would enable immigration enforcement on a case-by-case basis to allow military spouses, dependents and other categories of immigrants to remain in the U.S.
- The second is “**Adoptee Citizenship Act of 2018**,” sponsored by Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., and Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, which would ease some of the immigration restrictions for international adoptees.
- The third is H.R. 3429, “**Repatriate Our Patriots Act**” sponsored by Rep. Vicente Gonzalez, D-Texas, Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, and O’Rourke. That bill would allow certain honorably discharged veterans who have been deported to come home.

Neither House bill has been granted a committee hearing in Congress, and the Senate bill was just reintroduced this week after it did not gain traction last session. Instead, individual congressional offices are lobbying for individual families in jeopardy to see if there’s a chance for relief. After Military Times wrote about the case of Alejandra Juarez, the wife of a Marine veteran in Florida who is set to be deported in April, the office of Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL) reached out to DHS on her behalf. That case is still pending. “These are loved ones of our service members, and they deserve some kind of special attention,” Gonzalez said. “Anything that has to do with a veteran should be looked at with special eyes.”

There’s not a good count of how many military families are affected by the tougher immigration enforcement. Gonzalez, however, said he’s heard from deported veterans in 38 different countries. “I know we are not the only ones who have been through this, and there will continue to be more,” Shreve said. “I just pray our leadership will find a better way for all of us and our families.”

In the days since the story broke about former Army Sgt. 1st Class Bob Crawford, readers have questioned why service members would choose to marry someone who was undocumented. Several of the service members and veterans had the same response. “You can’t help who you fall in love with,” Justin Sullivan said. Loretto “was the whole reason I got Navy Times’ Sailor of the Year. She’s the one who nominated me. She took all my evals and wrote it up for me. She’s always been my rock.” “She’s the person I come home to. Without that, I’d be lost.”

-o-o-O-o-o-

Charles Shreve’s wife, Claudia, 37, was given an option; leave voluntarily or be deported. “We ended up doing voluntary departure,” Shreve said. “She had a deport order on her.” In March 2017, the couple was sent a letter to show up at the Louisville, Kentucky, immigration office to which they had reported regularly. But this time, the family got a “heads up,” he said. “We weren’t going to get another year in probation.” Claudia is now in Mexico; Charles Shreve drove most of the family’s belongings there in January. Charles is staying in the U.S. through June with their two older kids so they can finish the school year. Then everyone will relocate to Chiapas, Mexico, their new home. “We see this two ways,” Shreve said. “One, it’s unfortunate our family has to go through this. The

situation did not end the way we wanted it to. But we look at it as a positive adventure for our children. They get to be multicultural.”

-o-o-O-o-o-

Former Army Spc. **Brian Holovach**, 53, first served from 1982 to 1986 with the 3rd Armored Division in Germany. After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, he decided to serve again, re-enlisting in 2002 with the Army National Guard’s 42nd Infantry Division. In 2004, the 42nd was activated. Holovach, a network systems operator, spent 11 months deployed and served in a signal unit in Tikrit, Iraq. “But mostly I was a commander’s driver,” Holovach said. Their base got mortared almost every day, Holovach said. Once he got home, he had a hard time coping. “Brian, you’ve changed,” said wife, Esmeralda, 56, who he’d married in 2003. Esmeralda was a petite beauty from Guatemala who’d stepped out of a big, red pickup truck at a Burger King. “It was love at first sight,” Holovach said.

When he got back, he said, he “was drinking a lot, she didn’t like it. I was on a downward spiral. She lifted me up. I love her. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for her.” They have tried to get her legal status adjusted for 15 years. Holovach said immigration officials recently informed his lawyer that the paperwork they previously filed cannot be located, and their next hearing is this October. If for some reason the judge is unavailable that day, their case “gets pushed another year,” Holovach said. “That’s the way the immigration court system works.” In the meantime, his wife’s legal residency is still in jeopardy. “I love my country. I love my family,” Holovach said. “But this is one thing I’ve promised her. Nothing is going to happen to her. If she ever was, God forbid, brought into ICE, I would camp out at their doorstep with a sleeping bag and a tent. She would not do it alone.”

-o-o-O-o-o-

“Who knows how many of us are out there, both inside and outside the U.S.,” said a retired Air Force C-141 pilot who served as an instructor pilot in Iraq in 2009 and 2010. He and his wife and their two toddler-age daughters now live full-time in the Middle East because his wife, who is Mexican and entered the country illegally, was instructed by DHS to voluntarily leave. “I continue to this day as a DoD contract pilot, training international pilots in the Middle East,” the 20-year Air Force veteran said via email. “Our hopes, like many other veterans who are outside the U.S. for the same reason, is that we can come home and bring our family home one day.” Right now, though, it doesn’t look good, he said. “We’re considering Canada, where she was recently granted a visa when I finish my tour here in the Middle East,” he said. “We’re just tired of all the denials and going through the process and spending money on a lost cause, it seems.”

-o-o-O-o-o-

Deportation doesn’t just affect military spouses. It involves their children, too. “My greatest mistake in life is I didn’t know that [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] had their own age policy,” said retired Army Lt. Col. **Patrick Schreiber**. It was 2013. The Schreibers had taken in their niece as their own child. Patrick Schreiber was about to deploy to Afghanistan for a year as director of military intelligence for the 4th Infantry Division at RC-South. So they decided to wait on formal adoption until he got home. When he returned, the courts approved the adoption. The state of Kansas issued a birth certificate naming Schieber and his wife, Soo Jin, as the legal parents of Hyebin, who had just turned 17. The military issued her an ID card and put her in DEERS. But the Department of Homeland Security issued Hyebin a rejection. “They said there was no path to citizenship,” Schreiber said.

In immigration policy, age 16 is the cutoff. It didn’t matter that he was military; it continues not to matter that Hyebin, now 20, is a junior excelling in chemical engineering at the University of Kansas. Schreiber met Soo Jin in South Korea while he was serving as a tank company executive officer and other positions with 1st Battalion, 72nd Armor Regiment in the late 1990s. Soo Jin was her niece’s confidant and main support. As Hyebin’s home situation worsened, she asked to come live with them and study in the U.S. Then they legally adopted her. Hyebin’s forced departure “would tear the family apart,” Schreiber said. Schreiber retired from the military in 2015 and continues to work for DoD as a contractor. For now, Hyebin is in the U.S. on a student visa. Once she graduates, she will have to leave, Schreiber said.

“I spent 27 years in the Army, always putting the Army ahead” of family, he said. He jumped with the 82nd Airborne Division into Panama during Operation Just Cause, served in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, deployed to Iraq from 2005 to 2006 and then again from 2007 to 2008, then was sent to Afghanistan from 2010 to 2011 and again from 2013 to 2014. If Hyebin is sent back to South Korea, it’s likely Schreiber and his wife will leave the U.S. to be with their daughter.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | March 12, 2018 ++]

Vet Cemetery California Update 17 ► MINC Petition Gets VA's Attention

A petition to transfer an abandoned Naval cemetery in Northern California to the VA, which gathered more than 1,700 signatures, has gotten response from the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration (NCA). Posted on 11 FEB by Vallejo resident Nestor Aliga, a retired U.S. Army Colonel, the petition calls the Mare Island Naval Cemetery a “national shrine,” but chastises “its deplorable condition is a shocking disgrace to the honorable service, uncommon valor, and selfless sacrifice of our courageous Veterans buried there.” In response, the NCA penned an op-ed in the Vallejo Times-Herald in support for refurbishment, but not assuming responsibility of the crumbling cemetery.

“In response to concerns recently raised about the conditions of the cemetery, NCA and the Navy assisted the City of Vallejo in preparing an application for the Department of Defense’s (DoD) Innovating Readiness Training Program where military funds and manpower may be used for the restoration of this cemetery,” the NCA wrote.

The Innovating Readiness Training Program (IRT) would most likely comprise of a team of U.S. Navy “Seabees,” an engineering and construction unit who could fix some of the structural issues of the site including replacing headstones. “If this project is approved, DoD would match a military department/unit with the project and work would start in Fiscal Year ’19.”

The 166-year old Mare Island Naval Shipyard was the first permanent U.S. Naval installation on the Pacific Coast. A 1993 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round closed the shipyard, and in 1996 Naval operations ceased and the facility and adjacent cemetery was transferred initially to the state of California, and later to the city of Vallejo. Vallejo, a city with more than 100,000 residents, filed for bankruptcy in 2008, and has been able to provide limited upkeep on the dilapidated cemetery, such as preening overgrown acacia trees. But, the extensive damage requires more care and maintenance local volunteers could provide. Headstones of veterans, many of which were killed while working at the shipyard, are crumbling. Fences are broken and some of the gates need repair.

While the city has been unable to provide the required maintenance, concerned Bay Area veterans and advocates organized a National Day of Service last September to provide the space with some much needed aesthetic beautification. With the site having historical significance, however, the volunteers were not permitted to fix the shattered headstones. The Administration has worked directly with Vallejo Mayor Bob Sampayan on the applications, and has offered assistance in “replacing government headstones, as it would for any cemetery where veterans are buried.”

“The IRT project and the question of the NCA taking over are independent but complimentary subjects,” said Ralph Parrott, a retired U.S. Navy Captain who has worked tirelessly to get the VA to assume responsibility of the cemetery. “IRT makes no provision for perpetual care whereas the NCA taking over will ensure perpetual care. The IRT project actually compliments the NCA ownership because it will accomplish a lot of the work the NCA would have to perform anyway.” While the petition calls on the NCA to assume responsibility of the cemetery, the NCA says the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery “served veterans and families in the northern bay area with in ground and above burial options.” The NCA also said they will be expanding burial service to Bay-area vets with a

new columbaria-only urban cemetery at the Alameda Point National Cemetery. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Matt Saintsing | February 26, 2018 ++]

Obit | **Floyd Carter Sr.** ► 8 MAR 2018

Floyd Carter Sr., one of the last of the Tuskegee Airmen, dedicated his remarkable life to serving his country and his city. The decorated veteran of three wars and 27 years with the NYPD died Thursday at age 95, leaving a long legacy as a groundbreaking hero pilot and a city police detective. Carter, who simultaneously rose through the ranks of the U.S. Air Force Reserves and the police, was honored in 2007 with the Congressional Gold Medal by President Bush for breaking the color barrier in Tuskegee. “We mourn the loss of a true American hero,” read a tweet from the 47th Precinct in his adopted home of the Bronx. “Our community & nation has lost a giant.”



Floyd Carter Sr. (seen in 2012)

Carter rose to the rank of Air Force lieutenant colonel years after joining the group of African-American pilots at Tuskegee University. He met his wife Atherine there, where the Alabama native was working as part of an all-female repair crew. Carter wooed his bride-to-be on several dates in his plane, and they were married at the air base in 1945. In 2012, he joined “Star Wars” filmmaker George Lucas for a screening of his film “Red Tails” about the Tuskegee Airmen — the first black aviators in the U.S. military, trained in Alabama as a segregated unit. In addition to serving during World War II, Carter flew during the Korean and Vietnam wars and led the first squadron of supply-laden planes into Berlin during the famed Cold War airlift of 1948-49. During the Tet Offensive, Carter flew U.S. troops and supplies into South Vietnam.

His NYPD duties included work as a bodyguard for visiting heads of state, and Carter spent time with Cuban leader Fidel Castro and Soviet head Nikita Khrushchev, recalled his son Floyd Jr. He earned a half-dozen citations for his outstanding police work, and survived a number of shootouts with armed bandits. “He’s got a little history,” said Floyd Jr. “We were blessed, we sure were. He went from what I call the outhouse to the fine house. The Lord blessed him.”

The Yorktown, Va., native joined the Army Air Corps in 1944, and was commissioned a year later as a 2nd Lt. bombardier navigator. In 1946, he received his pilot wings and transferred a year later to the Air Force Reserves. By the end of his tenure in 1974, he was commander of the 732nd Military Airlift Squadron at McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey. Carter joined the NYPD in 1953, earned his detective’s gold shield within three years, and retired in 1980. He once recalled talking politics with Castro, and believed the federal government needed to open a dialogue with the bearded Communist. Oddly enough, Carter was called up for active duty during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

Carter remained active into his 90s, serving in November 2015 as the grand marshal of the annual Veterans Day Parade in the Bronx. He was honored by ex-Congressman Charles Rangel in 2005 with a proclamation for his lifelong achievements. He is survived by his wife of more than seven decades and their two children, Floyd Jr. and Rozalind, along with grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Funeral arrangements were not yet finalized. [Source: New York Daily News | Thomas Tracey | March 10, 2018 ++]

Obit | Togo West Jr. ► 8 MAR 2018

Togo West Jr., who served as both Army secretary and Veterans Affairs secretary under former President Bill Clinton, died suddenly last week at the age of 75. West was the second African American to serve in both jobs. He was a longtime fixture in Washington, D.C. defense and veterans circles, holding a number of high-ranking permanent appointments and temporary posts on investigative commissions. West's daughter told The Washington Post that he died of a heart attack during a cruise in the Caribbean. He was a North Carolina native who graduated from Howard University Law School before being commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army. He served in a variety of posts in former President Jimmy Carter's administration and returned to government in 1993 when Clinton was elected.



Togo West testifies on Capitol Hill in January 2010 as part of the Pentagon investigation into the mass shooting at Fort Hood, Texas, a year earlier

He was nominated to the top civilian Army post after his predecessor, acting Secretary John Shannon, was charged with shoplifting and forced to resign. His tenure there included overseeing a controversial drawdown of Army end strength and investigations into sexual abuse of female recruits at a series of bases. In 1998, West took over as VA secretary, remaining in the post until summer of 2000. At the time, Clinton praised West for his efforts to better aid veterans suffering from Agent Orange exposure and Gulf War Syndrome, but his tenure was also marked by controversy over his personal travel expenses and conflict with the White House over VA funding levels. West later served on special congressional commissions investigating mismanagement at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the 2009 mass shooting at Fort Hood, Texas.

More recently, he served on the National Advisory Council of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, offering advice on ways to better help military families and caregivers. He is survived by his wife of 51 years, Gail Berry, and two daughters. [Source: ArmyTimes | Leo Shane III | March 8, 2018 ++]

Obit | Veronica Byrnes Bradley ► 28 FEB 2018

The Marine Corps has bid farewell to a woman who was the face of the service's recruiting efforts during World War II. Veronica Byrnes Bradley, 95, died Feb. 28 in New Milford, Conn. She was a corporal in the Marine Corps Women's Reserve and was featured on recruiting posters throughout the conflict. "We'd like to thank Cpl. Veronica Byrnes Bradley for her incredible service to the Marine Corps, and the proud history she helped imbue into generations of Marines," Marine Corps spokeswoman Capt. Sarah Burns said in a statement issued 9 MAR. Bradley had received the World War II Victory Medal and the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal, according to a Feb. 28 tweet by Connecticut Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman. "Connecticut is grateful for her service during WWII & for setting the stage for women to serve in the military," she wrote.



Veronica Byrnes Bradley poses with her World War II-era recruiting poster, in a Tweet posted last week by the Marine Corps.

In 1942, a then-19-year-old Bradley joined the Marines after seeing a poster of a woman wearing a "sharp looking" Marine Corps hat, the News-Times of Danbury, Conn., reported last year. She started out fixing planes at an air station in Santa Barbara, Calif. A year into her service, Bradley found out that her likeness was being used on recruiting posters encouraging other women to join up, the newspaper reported. The image features Bradley, clipboard in hand, standing in front of an aircraft and the words: "BE A MARINE. FREE A MARINE TO FIGHT."

Bradley told the newspaper that she was proud to have served, adding that joining the Marines was one of the best decisions she'd ever made. "I had a good sense of being a good American," she said. Replicas of the recruiting poster hang in several museums, and her image has been used on postcards and in documentaries about women's role in the war. Bradley's ashes will be placed at Arlington National Cemetery this month. She is survived by six children, 12 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren, and two great-great grandchildren, according to the newspaper. [Source: Stars & Stripes | James Bolinger | March 12, 2018 ++]

AFL Q&A 21 & 22 ► Grandchild VA Benefits & Purple Heart Obtainment

Q. I have court ordered custody of my granddaughter. Why can't I get VA benefits for her?

A1: Per 38 CFR 3.57, disability compensation can be increased for a child, stepchild, or adopted child. Grandchildren with or without a court order, do not qualify. (AP) 12/3/16

A2: May cost a little but you can adopt your grandchild and then get benefits. (PW) 12/8/16

-o-o-O-o-o-

Q. I was injured by phosphorus and shrapnel in my back from a German parachute bomb while crossing a bridge near the Meuse River in November 1944. Military Police personal treated my injuries and sent me on my way. A VA doctor has recently examined the injury to my back. How do I go about getting a Purple Heart for this injury?

A1: If it isn't noted in your military record contact a couple vets you served with and get notarized statements proving the same. If the scaring is severe enough and you can get a VA Dr. to state is is most likely a Phos. burn, then go to a VSO VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER. OR if you have proof that it was SERVICE connected in a combat issue contact your congressman/woman. The will get a reissue/issue and present it to you in some kind of ceremony. (TP) 12/5/16

A2: AR 672-5-1 is the regulation for awards and decorations for US Army. DA Form 638 is the form for submission for awards. It is normally submitted by the one who has knowledge of the action. Also, old Morning Reports DA Form 1 should have the incident in the report. Also old After Action Reports should contain the event. Also, google up the unit that the event occurred. Sometimes it will be in the history section of the home page. If you are in contact with someone who witnessed the event he can initiate the DA Form 638. (GH) 12/5/16

A3: Though obtaining two statements from others that may have been there during the incident or witnessing the incident directly is not enough to prove that you were wounded. The MOPH now requires a statement from the corpsman/medic that treated you for this injury. In this case a statement of fact would have to come from those that treated you. I am an independent veterans advocate who has dealt with this type of scenario a few times resulting in no Purple Heart for the individual. The restrictions have gotten much more difficult for these veterans to obtain their PH. (TVH) 12/5/16

-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> | March 15, 2018 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► Scheduled As of 15 MAR 2018

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 2018 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\ veterans 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\ veterans 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 | March 15, 2018 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 16 MAR 2018

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.legion.org/careers/jobfairs>

[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | March 15, 2018 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► South Carolina 2018

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

- Veteran Housing Programs
- Veteran and Active Duty Financial Assistance Benefits
- Veteran Employment Benefits

- Veteran Dependent Education Benefits
- Veteran Recreation Benefits
- Other State Sponsored Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/content/veteran-state-benefits/south-carolina-state-veterans-benefits.html>
MAR 2018 ++]

*** 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.

Military Food Stamps Update 03 ► Senate Legislation Proposed

A bipartisan group of senators is pursuing a legislative effort that would give low-income military service members and their families access to federal food assistance programs, a concern that has impacted more than 20,000 people in recent years. Because of a quirk in the law, some service members can be disqualified from programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, which might be more widely known as "food stamps." Service members can be considered ineligible because of certain military pay, such as housing benefits. Their effort is similar to the Rep. Susan A. Davis [D-CA-53] H.R.1078 - Military Hunger Prevention Act legislation introduced in the House 15 FEB 2017.

The new Senate legislative proposal introduced by Sens. Tammy Duckworth, D-IL), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and Tom Udall (D-NM) would help such military families struggling to pay for food, they said 2 MAR in an announcement. "Our military is weakened when servicemembers go hungry and are unable to feed their families," said Duckworth, a combat pilot veteran who lost both legs in the Iraq War. "As someone whose family depended on food stamps after my father lost his job, and who served in uniform for most of my adult life, this is personal for me. We are the wealthiest nation in the world. Our service members shouldn't be forced to rely on food stamps to feed themselves -- but at the very least, we must ensure that those who need food stamps have access to them."

A 2013 Census Bureau survey found about 23,000 active-duty service members depend on food stamps, the senators said. A Government Accountability Office report found service members spent roughly \$21 million in SNAP benefits between September 2014 and August 2015, "indicating that many service members are having difficulty making ends meet," they said. The military has not collected data on how many military families struggle with hunger, making it difficult to determine the overall scope of the food insecurity problem in the services. However, the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, which directs policy for the military, will require the Pentagon to finally collect the data to determine how many service members rely on federal hunger assistance programs.

Udall called the effort to provide members with the resources that they need a "solemn obligation." "Military families across the country are struggling with food insecurity -- and at the same time facing down unacceptable and

unnecessary barriers to accessing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program," he said. "Our troops should not have to worry that their families are well fed. Congress should live up to its promise to servicemembers and pass this common-sense legislation to remove needless roadblocks preventing military families from being able to put food on the table." The proposed legislation fixes language in federal law and eliminates inconsistencies that prevent servicemembers in need from accessing the federal food assistance programs, the senators said. A flaw in federal law often forces such military families to instead rely on food pantries and food banks for emergency assistance "when the nation they are serving owes them much more," they said.

Service members who are disqualified from federal food assistance programs include ones receiving basic allowance for housing or pay to live off-base or private military residences. Because of calculations in qualifying for federal food assistance programs such as SNAP, low-income service members who receive the housing allowances can be excluded from food assistance benefits. "Our military families have enough to worry about as they defend our nation's security," Murkowski said.

The legislative proposal has been endorsed by several advocacy groups, including MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, the Greater Chicago Food Depository, the St. Louis Area Foodbank, the National Military Families Association, Blue Star Families and the Western Center on Law and Poverty. "Food insecurity among currently serving military families is a real but preventable reality," MAZON President and CEO Abby Leibman said. The legislation "will remove a major barrier that prevents tens of thousands of military families from putting nutritious food on the table." The senators' bipartisan legislation is cosponsored by nine Democratic senators, including Sens. Cory Booker (D-NJ), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Doug Jones (D-AL), Patty Murray (D-WA), Tina Smith (D-MN), and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD). [Source: Stars & Stripes | Claudia Grisales | March 2, 2018 ++]

Vet Legislative Wins 2018 ► March | S.2372, S.2248 & H.R.3656

In MAR the Senate passed three pieces of veteran legislation supported by the VFW —

- [S.2372](#) the *Veterans Cemetery Benefit Correction Act* introduced by Senate Committee of Veterans' Affairs Chairman Johnny Isakson (R-GA), requires the Department of the Interior to provide outer burial receptacles for veterans remains buried in cemeteries administered by the National Park Service (NPS).
- [S. 2248](#) introduced by Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Ranking Member Jon Tester (D-MT) authorizes the VA to provide burial benefits for spouses and children of veterans who are buried in tribal cemeteries.
- [H.R. 3656](#) introduced by Representative Jim Banks (R-Ind.-3) expands VA headstones and markers eligibility for children of veterans. The bill will eliminate an inconsistency in the dates of eligibility, which results in certain spouses being eligible but not dependent children. H.R. 3656 will now head to the president's desk to be signed into law. The VFW thanks Senators Isakson and Tester and Representatives Banks for their steadfast dedication to veterans.

[Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | March 2, 2018 ++]

Military Retirement Pay Update 09 ► AB-2394 | Exemption From CA Income Tax

California Governor Edmund G. Brown's Military Council is currently researching the impacts of exempting military retirement pay from state income tax. According to a report and recommendations from the Council, over

the next few years California is expected to have more military service members retire there than any other state. However, many veterans and discharging service members will choose to move to other states. While some portion of these individuals are simply returning to their home state, others leave California based on concerns about the state's cost of living or because they are attracted to incentives provided by other states for veterans. State leaders are exploring appropriate ways to incentivize veterans to stay in California.

California is home to 1.8 million military veterans, representing 8% of the total population of American veterans. To incentivize more veterans to keep their excellent skills in California, AB-2394 would exempt military retirement pay from state income tax for veterans who are residents in California. By exempting military retirement pay from state income tax, California would join 16 other states like Hawaii, New York, and Massachusetts that provide these benefits. Veterans are a vital part of California's workforce and the state should do its part to not only give back to our veterans, but to attract future veterans to keep their skills in the Golden State.

Currently California's Constitution contains provisions offering a partial exemption from property tax for disabled veterans worth \$150,000 of their home's assessed value for lower income disabled vets and \$100,000 for all other incomes. These amounts have been adjusted for inflation so that disabled veterans with household income below \$57,258 are eligible for an exemption amount of \$191,266. All other disabled veterans qualify for an exemption amount of \$127,510 for fiscal year 2016-17. Eligibility is based on a disability rating from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). To qualify for the exemption, the USDVA must rate the veteran's disability at 100 percent or rate their disability compensation at 100 percent because they are unable to find and keep gainful employment. Property owners must apply each year for the exemption.

State Assemblyman William P. Brough, R-73 (veteran US Army) is seeking support for AB 2394 from individuals, veterans organizations, military associations and retiree groups to enhance the prospect of this legislation becoming law. For more information, questions or comments contact Kawika Nunenkamp, Legislative Director, Assemblyman Bill Brough, State Capitol, Room 3141 Tel: (916) 319-2073 Email: Kawika.Nunenkamp@asm.ca.gov. Also, at <http://bit.ly/2D2q3hw> is a petition for anyone interested in seeing this legislation pass to sign. Ignore the request for a \$3 donation as that is a quirk of the Change.org. website that is being utilized and is not really desired. [Source: Assemblyman Bill Brough msg | Tom Lasser | March 4, 2018 ++]

*** Military ***



USMC Data Breach Update 01 ► Email Sent to Wrong Distribution List

The personal information of thousands of Marines, sailors and civilians, including bank account numbers, was compromised in a major data spillage emanating from U.S. Marine Corps Forces Reserve. Roughly 21,426 people were impacted when an unencrypted email with an attachment containing personal confidential information was sent to the wrong email distribution list 26 FEB. The compromised attachment included highly sensitive data such as truncated social security numbers, bank electronic funds transfer and bank routing numbers, truncated credit card information, mailing address, residential address and emergency contact information, Maj. Andrew Aranda, spokesman for Marine Forces Reserve said in a command release.

That email was a roster sent out by the Defense Travel System, or DTS, Marine Corps Times has learned. DTS is a Defense Department system that assists military and civilian defense personnel with travel itineraries and settling expenses from official authorized trips. “It was very quickly noticed and email recall procedures were implemented to reduce the number of accounts that received it,” Aranda said. The email containing the data was sent within the usmc.mil official unclassified Marine domain, but also to some civilian accounts. Personal information can be used by criminals or entities to steal identities, commit bank and credit fraud, or phishing schemes. In 2015, ISIS posted a ‘kill list’ of 41 Marines and sailors based on information it pulled from publicly accessible online forums and social media accounts.

The Marines are still analyzing the extent of the spread of the sensitive data and plan to implement future changes to better safeguard personally identifiable information. But Aranda said he believed “no malicious intent was involved.” However analyzing the full impact could prove to be a Sisyphean task. Once the data moves outside of the Marine domain there’s no telling how far it could spread. The Corps plans to notify those affected by the breach and provide guidance on ways to safeguard from identity theft. “The Marine Corps takes the protection of individual Marines’ private information and personal data very seriously, and we have steps in place to prevent the accidental or intentional release of such information,” Aranda said. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | February 28, 2018 ++]

Columbia SSBN Program Update 01 ► \$100 Billion Projected Cost

A new Columbia-class nuclear submarine currently under development will likely end up costing taxpayers an “eye-watering” \$100 billion over the program’s lifetime, Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer said on Monday. Spencer and the secretaries of the Air Force and Army discussed the challenge and high costs of modernizing the U.S. nuclear triad during a rare public gathering together at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank. The Trump administration has recently completed a review of its nuclear forces and the Congressional Budget Office found last year that it will cost \$1.2 trillion over 30 years to modernize the Cold War-era triad. “All of sudden you’re talking about the submarines and there is a number that will make your eyes water. Columbia will be a \$100 billion program for its lifetime. We have to do it. I think we have to have big discussions about it.”

The triad is made up of a Navy submarine fleet, ground-based intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear bombers and is designed to deter a strike from other nuclear powers, particularly Russia. Last week, Gen. John Hyten, the head of U.S. Strategic Command, touted the power of the U.S. submarines, saying Russia and China “do not know where they are and they have the ability to decimate their country if we go down that path.” Even with a coming budget hike, the Navy is still looking for a viable plan and the funding to increase its fleet to 355 ships. It has already made advanced plans to buy the Columbia-class ballistic missile subs to replace the Ohio-class that now form that leg of the triad. “The underwater aspect to date does seem to be the most elusive [to adversaries] but it comes with a price,” Spencer said.

Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson said she “faces the same challenge” with her service, which manages the U.S. ground-based nuclear missiles and bomber fleet. “We are modernizing all three legs of the triad and the nuclear command-and-control at the same time in both the Navy and the Air Force. It’s a challenge,” Wilson said. The Air Force will be doing modernization and engineering work over the next five years to update its legs of the triad but over the next decade big investments will be needed, she said. “The nation is going to have to make the decision on the actual purchase of these systems within this 10-year window,” Wilson said.

As the country weighs the costs, it should also consider investing in other ways to head off a nuclear conflict, Army Secretary Mark Esper said. “Many of us grew up with the triad as part of the Cold War but we have a new capability these days that provides the president more options and creates its own deterrence and that is missile defense,” he said. Congress approved over \$4 billion in supplemental missile defense spending at the end of last

year and that area of defense seems in line for more increases in the upcoming Pentagon budget. Former Virginia Sen. John Warner, who also served as Navy secretary, attended the CSIS event and warned that the U.S. nuclear deterrent has a growing strategic problem. He said the Trump administration secretaries should consider greater emphasis on the submarine component, which has the highest invulnerability. “It is in stone that we have it and we shall always have it. We’ve got to begin to make tough decisions on the various allocations between air-sea, sub-sea and land,” Warner said. [Source: Washington Examiner | Travis J. Tritten | March 12, 2018 ++]

Helicopter War Memorial ► Arlington Dedication 18 APR 2018

Space is in short supply at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, but military officials have managed to carve out a few square feet for a special memorial. The new stone monument will pay tribute to the nearly 5,000 American helicopter pilots and crew members who died in the Vietnam War. A formal dedication will take place 18 APR, followed by a wreath-laying ceremony. That day can’t come soon enough for one Monroe County veteran. “This mission is almost accomplished,” said Bill “Moon” Mullen, of Pocono Pines. The retired first lieutenant served as an Army helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War. “There were so many good, young guys in their early 20s that never came home 50 years ago,” he said. “That memorial will be there now for hundreds and hundreds of years.”



All costs of the new installation are being funded by the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association. Mullen had served as the association’s president in 2013 when the project began. Army officials approved an initial request by the association for a memorial tree, which was dedicated Aug. 28, 2015. The tree was planted within eight feet of a sidewalk along Memorial Drive, a space unusable for burials. Association leaders later asked to place a granite monument, at the association’s own costs, on the same site. Their request was denied, and the project stalled. That is, until a local Congressman got involved. “During our first walk through Washington, I had an appointment with Congressman Matt Cartwright,” Mullen said. “At that time, he was co-sponsor number 11 on our bill.” “Cartwright, though, he did not stop. He wrote letters to the Secretary of the Army. He wrote letters to the Director of ANC. Two years later, our bill passed the House 435 to 0.”

That bill never became law, however. Military and legislative officials came to an agreement before the bill reached a vote on the Senate floor. “If the Army and ANC refused to give us a spot, Congress would have forced them,” Mullen said. “That’s when they decided to sit down, negotiate and give us what we had asked for forty years.” “Without the Congressional approval, I don’t think it would have ever happened.” Mullen credits Cartwright as a large factor to that. “Every time I came down to walk the halls of Congress, Cartwright was right there,” he said. “He never asked if I was a Democrat, a Republican, or if I was an Independent — not once. He just cared about the project.”

The new monument, which bears the emblems of all five branches of the U.S. military, is currently in ANC care awaiting installation. A concrete foundation, poured on 7 MAR, will help support the weight of the granite for years to come. “We are right across from the tomb of the unknown soldier, one of the most visited monuments at ANC,” Mullen said. “If we were just a tree with a ground level marker, you wouldn’t even stop and notice.” “Those 5,000 deserve to be thanked for their sacrifice. It will remind people, maybe for generations, that these were the people who fought the ‘Helicopter War.’” [Source: The Pocono Record | Bill Cameron | March 9, 2018 ++]

USS Ralph Johnson (DDG-114) Update 01 ► To Be Commissioned 24 MAR

The USS Ralph Johnson (DDG 114) set sail from Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula on 9 MAR. The guided missile destroyer is headed to Charleston, South Carolina, where it will be the latest Arleigh Burke-class destroyer commissioned into the U.S. Navy on 24 MAR. The ship is named after Medal of Honor recipient Pfc. Ralph Henry Johnson, who was 19 in the midst of the Vietnam War when his 15-man reconnaissance patrol was attacked in Quan Duc Valley on March 5, 1968. With the battle enveloping the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, a hand grenade landed in the fighting hole Johnson shared with fellow Marines, according to Huntington Ingalls Industries. Johnson threw his body over the grenade, absorbing the full impact of the blast. He died instantly and was posthumously honored by President Richard Nixon in 1970.

The USS Ralph Johnson is equipped with the Aegis Baseline 9 combat system, allowing it to use Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) capability with Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) 5.0 and Naval Integrated Fire Control-Counter Air. The ship is the 64th Arleigh Burke-class destroyer and 30th DDG 51 class destroyer built by HII, according to the Navy. According to a release, the keel of Ralph Johnson was laid down in the fall of 2014. The ship was launched in Dec. 2015 and christened on April 2, 2016. Following commissioning, the ship will make her way to homeport in Everett, Washington. “My team had a key part in building this ship and the 113 and the 107 and the 105,” said Freddie Joe O’Brien, master shipbuilder who has worked at Ingalls for 46 years. “The responsibility and the feeling of pride is much, much different than it was back then.” [Source: Sun Herald | Patrick Ochs | March 9, 2018 ++]

Navy Hybrid Destroyers ► Installation Program Cancelled

The Navy is canceling a program to install fuel-efficient hybrid electric drives in 34 destroyers, leaving only one destroyer with the technology, the Navy confirmed in a statement. Citing “department priorities,” the service requested \$6.3 million for 2018 to finish the installation on the destroyer Truxtun, but has zeroed out funding in 2019 and in the out years. The service has spent about \$52 million on the program to date. The whole program was expected to cost \$356.25 million, according to the Navy’s FY2017 budget submission. “Based on the Department’s priorities, President’s Budget 2019 removes funding from Hybrid Electric Drive (HED) program in FY 2019,” said Lt. Lauren Chatmas in a statement. “There are no further procurements or installations planned beyond DDG-103 in the Future Years Defense Program.”

The Navy will use Truxtun as a test bed to see if the technology pays off in the long run, Chatmas continued. “Installation on DDG-103 is in progress and when installation is complete, operational usage of HED on DDG-103 will be monitored and evaluated to determine the effectiveness of HED. This will inform future decision on the fielding of HED.”

The program developed with L-3 was designed to switch power to the drive shaft, which turns the ship's propellers, from the main LM2500 gas turbine motors to the ship's electrical generators at speeds below 13 knots. At those speeds the ship could perform night steaming, ballistic missile defense or anti-submarine operations, but not keep up with the speedy carriers. As the program began to materialize and development progressed, a number of problems began to materialize, according to a former Navy official who spoke on background. Foremost among them was the intense electrical load that running the drive system on the ship's two running generators was putting on the ship.

Destroyers have three generators, two of which run while a third remains in standby, which rotates through while generators are down for maintenance or in case of an emergency. Running the electrical motor that turned the shaft while also running the ship's power-hungry radars and related systems maxed out the capacity of those generators. "At that point you are a light switch flipping on away from winking out the whole ship," the official said. Furthermore running the generators at that load wasn't exactly as fuel efficient as they had hoped it would be. Those issues, while valid, could probably have been solved through engineering, said Bryan Clark, a retired submarine officer and analyst with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments.

To Clark, canceling the program seems a bit shortsighted, given the potential for the technology to make a real difference in fuel efficiency in future ships and classes. "If it's a money thing, that's one thing," he said. "If it's either this or invest in over-the-horizon anti-surface weapons, well OK. But if it's this or another science and technology or research and development program — one of the major challenges we have is figuring out how to be more efficient at certain profiles. That would be worth knowing." [Source: Defense News | David B. Larter | March 8, 2018 ++]

USS Lexington (CV-2) ► Wreckage Discovered

Silence, darkness and cold. Those were the only things surrounding the U.S. Navy aircraft carrier USS Lexington (CV-2) since she plummeted to her deep-sea grave on the sea floor two miles below the surface of the war-torn Pacific on May 8, 1942. Until this week Like an improbable plot from one of Clive Cussler's "NUMA Files" adventure novels, billionaire explorer Paul Allen and his own private fleet of deep-sea scientists used a remotely piloted submarine to discover the wreckage of the USS Lexington on Mar. 4, 2018. She lies on the bottom in 10,000 feet of water about 500 miles off the eastern coast of Australia where she sank. Photos show her deck guns still trained at a black liquid sky waiting for phantom Japanese Zeros, Val dive bombers and Kate torpedo bombers that disappeared into antiquity decades ago.



The crew of Paul Allen's research vessel R/V Petrel watch video (left) from their remotely piloted submersible as it explores the wreck of the USS Lexington when it was discovered. One of the final explosions (right) on board the USS Lexington when she sank on May 8, 1942.

The USS Lexington's wreck was discovered from Paul Allen's private research vessel, the R/V Petrel, on Sunday morning at about 8:00 am local time in the Pacific. Brilliant color images of the Lexington and some of her aircraft were transmitted to the surface and shared around the world over the last 24 hours. To watch a video of some of the wreckage go to https://youtu.be/-K-V_ah6IIs.

One of the most remarkable photos shows a beautiful, colorful Grumman F4F Wildcat fighter from U.S. Navy Fighter Squadron 3 (VF-3) that was aboard the USS Lexington at Coral Sea. The aircraft wears the "Felix the Cat holding a bomb" insignia common along with four Japanese kill markings on the right side of its fuselage below the canopy. The aircraft sits with its canopy open and its beautiful blue upper wing and fuselage and gray lower surface paint livery. It is the first time anyone has seen the aircraft since she was sent to the bottom in 1942. Despite the crushing depth, corrosive seawater and decades gone by, it remains in amazingly good condition. Researcher Robert Kraft, director of subsea operations for Allen, was quoted earlier today on Geekwire.com in a story by writer Kurt Schlosser as saying that the USS Lexington was on a priority list of ships to locate by Allen's team.

"Based on geography, time of year and other factors, I work together with Paul Allen to determine what missions to pursue," Kraft said. "We've been planning to locate the Lexington for about six months and it came together nicely." Underwater images and video taken by the remotely operated submersible launched from the research vessel R/V Petrel also show large deck guns on the carrier along with aircraft like the F4F Wildcat and others. The advanced submersible robot camera vehicles used by Allen's team can submerge to a depth of nearly 20,000 feet and transmit high-resolution video and navigation data to the surface.

Allen's team also found the fabled USS Indianapolis last year. The cruiser Indianapolis was sunk by a Japanese submarine after a secret mission to deliver the first atomic bomb in 1945. The terrifying ordeal of the Indianapolis survivors became famous after it was featured in a monologue by the fictional character "Quint" in the Peter Benchley novel and movie, "Jaws". In 2015 Paul Allen's team also located the wreck of the Japanese megabattleship, "Mushashi", sister ship to the giant Yamato battleship. Mushashi and Yamato remain the largest battleships ever constructed. Both were sunk in WWII.

Significant history also surrounds the discovery of the USS Lexington making Allen's find even more extraordinary. The USS Lexington was the first full-sized fleet aircraft carrier to be sunk by aircraft launched from an enemy aircraft carrier in WWII. The Lexington took hits from several torpedoes and bombs launched from Japanese aircraft as it fought alongside the USS Yorktown with an opposing force of three Japanese carriers. Her deployment in the region was a critical strategic deterrent to an anticipated Japanese invasion of the Australian mainland that never came. About a year earlier the smaller Royal Navy HMS Hermes, one of the first purpose-built aircraft carriers, was sunk by Japanese dive bombers.

After the USS Lexington took multiple hits from Japanese aircraft on May 8, 1942, a massive explosion tore through her spaces at 12:47 PM. Gasoline vapor from the ruptured port aviation fuel tanks exploded. The giant explosion destroyed the ship's main damage control station, but air operations continued despite the fires. Remarkably, all of the surviving aircraft from the morning's strike were recovered by 2:14 PM. Moments later at 2:42 PM another major explosion tore through the forward part of the Lexington, igniting fires below the flight deck on the hanger deck and leading to a power failure. Though assisted by three destroyers, the Lexington's damage control parties were overwhelmed after a third explosion ripped through her hull at 3:25 PM. That explosion, the death blow to Lexington, cut off water pressure to the hanger deck preventing fire crews from containing the fire there. As a result, a final, enormous explosion from fuel and ammunition stored in her hold and magazines ignited an uncontrollable inferno on board.

Shortly after 3:28 PM her commander, Captain Frederick Sherman, issued the order to abandon ship. Despite multiple explosions and fires on board Lexington a remarkable 2,770 crewmen and officers were rescued. Tragically, 216 were killed in the Japanese attack on the ship and in the fire-fighting efforts that followed. The USS Lexington was scuttled (purposely sunk) by several torpedoes fired from the USS Phelps to prevent her hulk from

falling into Japanese hands. The discovery of the USS Lexington's wreck and the images made by Paul Allen's research team provide a unique and invaluable insight into WWII history. This treasure of historical data would have likely remained lost forever if it weren't for the wealthy investor's remarkable drive for discovery and commitment to research. [Source: The Aviationist |Tom Demerly | March 6, 2018 ++]

MAVNI Program Update 07 ► Military Base Immigration Center Closures

Lawmakers on 6 MAR slammed reports that offices for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services have been closed on several large military bases in recent weeks. The offices are a lifeline for immigrant military recruits and active members seeking citizenship, and help expedite the protracted process. On Monday, BuzzFeed News reported that the offices at U.S. Army basic training locations in Fort Benning, Ga.; Fort Jackson, S.C.; and Fort Sill, Okla.; were closed 26 JAN. "Our military is stronger because of the diversity of those who serve in it," Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), a combat pilot who lost both legs in the Iraq War, said. "No matter where you were born and what background you come from, if you are able and willing to wear the uniform of this great nation, you should have the opportunity to become an American citizen."

The comments come in the wake of heated and controversial rhetoric over border security and the role of immigrants under President Donald Trump. He has railed against certain immigrants' access to the U.S., saying some have fueled terrorism, hurt the national job market and created other concerns. "This is indefensible," Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA) tweeted Tuesday of the closures. "These military recruits are willing to put their lives on the line for our country and fill key positions in our Armed Forces. We need to honor their service." Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-TX) also pushed back against the move Tuesday. "Yet another barrier for immigrants who were promised naturalization after service," he tweeted.

This comes as Congress has failed to reach a deal on a fix to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program, which could force recipients known as Dreamers to be deported. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has said Dreamers serving in the military would not be deported, but it's not clear how if an executive order Trump signed last year definitively ends DACA. For now, the fate of the program lies in a legal effort making its way through the courts. The Pentagon estimated late last year that 900 Dreamers were serving in the military.

Duckworth called out the closure of the citizenship offices on military bases as another Trump-initiated roadblock against immigrants. The offices are critical to the Military Accessions Vital to National Interest, or MAVNI, program, which helps immigrants join the military with a fast track to citizenship. "The closure of the offices makes it significantly harder and it violates the commitment we have made to thousands of brave men and women who signed up to defend our country through the MAVNI program," Duckworth said. "It's disappointing to see the Trump administration head in such a shameful direction."

Duckworth has introduced several bills to prevent veterans and servicemembers from being deported and denied the opportunity to become citizens of the nation they swore to defend. For example, her legislation would establish naturalization offices at military training facilities to make it easier for servicemembers to become citizens, prohibit the administration from deporting veterans and give legal permanent residents a path to citizenship through military service, her office said. Duckworth said she has also co-sponsored legislation to protect military recruits who have enlisted through the MAVNI program from being discharged or deported due to their immigration status. Her office estimates 1,000 to 1,800 recruits – including hundreds of Dreamers – have skills that are underrepresented in the U.S. military and are currently waiting for the chance to serve. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Claudia Grisales | March 6, 2018 ++]

Military Working Dogs Update 04 ► Mishandled | Army Will Comply w/Call for Reform

The U.S. Army confirmed on 5 MAR that it had mishandled retired bomb-sniffing war dogs and said it would comply with recommendations in a Defense Department Inspector General’s report that called for reforms. In a report released 2 MAR, the Inspector General said that canine heroes, which saved the lives of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan while working with brigade combat teams to sniff out roadside bombs, were mistreated by the Army after they returned to the United States. Army spokesman Major Christopher Ophardt said in a statement emailed to Reuters, “The Army concurs with the DoDIG [cq] (Defense Inspector General) report and is complying with” its recommendations.

The report said that some dogs were left in kennels for up to 11 months, beyond a deadline for giving them away for adoption or re-using them in the military or other government agencies. It said they were mistreated through lack of care and attention, and others may have been put down. Contrary to military rules, new owners were not screened before the Army allowed them to adopt the dogs. It said that some dogs with histories of biting were given to families with children, and others were given to owners who lacked the ability or resources to care for them. In some cases, the report said, soldiers who wanted to adopt dogs with which they had worked were not told they had the right to do so. An investigation was started after soldiers who had handled the war dogs complained about their fate.

The recommendations included requiring unit commanders to comply with Army regulations spelling out proper handling of “Military Working Dogs.” The regulations require that plans be made ahead of time for their retirement and for screening owners who want to adopt dogs. The recommendations also call for the Army to better track and keep records of all of its working dogs. In addition to the dogs specified in the report, which specialized in detecting roadside improvised explosive devices, the Army also has search dogs and “patrol” dogs. [Source: Reuters | Scott Paltrow | March 5, 2018 ++]

SCRA Update 08 ► BMW Financial Services' \$2.2 Million Settlement

In a first-of-its kind case, the Justice Department has reached a \$2.2 million settlement with BMW Financial Services involving allegations that the company failed to refund partial upfront payments to 492 service members who terminated car lease agreements because of military duty. Justice officials also have worked with the company to set up a clear process for providing future refunds to service members in such circumstances.

The Justice Department complaint alleged that the company violated the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, or SCRA. Under the SCRA, service members are allowed to terminate vehicle leases early without penalty after entering military service, or after receiving qualifying military orders for a permanent change of station, or to deploy. The law also states that lease amounts should refund lease payments made in advance, when service members lawfully terminate their lease agreements.

The department’s investigation began with two service members stationed at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland, who had leased BMWs and made upfront payments in the form of vehicle trade-in and rebate credits. While BMW Financial Services agreed to terminate their leases — one airman wanted out because of a relocation, the other because of a deployment — it refused to refund any part of the upfront payments.

The government contends that part of those payments is applied to the first month’s lease payment and the remainder is used to reduce the monthly payment over the lease’s term. BMW Financial Services disputes these contentions, according to the settlement agreement, contending that the payments are in the form of a down payment that’s retained by the motor vehicle dealer and not paid to BMW Financial Services. Still, BMW Financial Services has agreed to partial refunds for each of the 492 service members based on how many days were remaining in the

lease. The company also will pay indirect damages to each service member based on three times the amount of that refund, or \$500, whichever is greater. It also will pay a \$60,788 fine to the government.

According to a Justice Department news release, it's the first case officials have brought against a motor vehicle leasing company for failure to refund upfront lease amounts to service members who had exercised their rights to terminate those leases under the SCRA. Justice Department spokesman Devin O'Malley declined to comment on whether officials are investigating other vehicle leasing companies regarding this issue. "BMW Financial Services and the Department of Justice worked closely to reach the settlement agreement announced [Feb. 22], which will result in a better understanding of this unusual legal issue," according to a statement released by the company.

"The agreement settles and closes the complaint, and we are pleased the Department worked with us to establish a clear process for service members who terminated their lease agreement under the SCRA to receive refunds when appropriate." In recent years, the Justice Department has beefed up its enforcement related to protections in the SCRA.

The settlement requires BMW Financial Services to deposit nearly \$2.2 million into an escrow account to compensate the service members whose rights were allegedly violated. It covers all leases terminated by service members since Aug. 24, 2011. BMW Financial Services offers leases for BMW, MINI and Rolls-Royce vehicles through its dealers, according to the complaint filed by the Justice Department in New Jersey federal court. The settlement agreement states that the company neither admits nor denies the allegations. The case was handled jointly by that division and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey. [Source: ArmyTimes : Karen Jowers | March 5, 2018 ++]

Marine Corps Boot Camp ► High School Educators Get 5-Day Course

A group of educators from the Twin Cities and surrounding states stepped off a bus at the Marine Corps Recruiting Depot in San Diego and tried to keep up as a drill instructor barked orders. They stood on the infamous yellow footprints — the footprints that every Marine stands on when he or she first arrives at boot camp — and learned the proper way to address a drill instructor. "You will scream at the top of your miserable lungs 'Aye aye, sir,' " drill instructor Sgt. Trevor Woodruff said. When he yelled "ears" they yelled "open." When he said "eyeballs" they said "click." When he said "zero," they responded "freeze." When he gave them a command, they rushed to complete it.

"Obviously, the yelling was, for our age, kind of over the top," said 55-year-old Dan Dymoke, a government and psychology teacher at Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis. "You're almost wanting to laugh. But if you were an 18-year-old recruit ... it sets a tone."



Sgt. David Alvarado, a Marine Corps drill instructor, instructs high school teachers from Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana how to properly stand on his yellow footprints during an Educators Workshop on Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, Aug. 16, 2016.

The yellow footprint experience was part of a five-day workshop the educators attended to gain a deeper knowledge of life in the Marines. They sat through presentations and participated in activities so they could tell their students back home about the Marine Corps. “I have a lot of students who expressed interest in the military, and they oftentimes ask me questions or for guidance, and I really don’t know a lot,” said Shallyn Tordeur, an alternative-education coordinator at Delano High School. “This really kind of gave me an eye-opening experience to understand further what (the Marines) offer and understand my role in the district and help kids make decisions.”

Tordeur was one of 30 educators representing schools in Minnesota, the Dakotas and Wisconsin. A group of educators from Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska attended the workshop as well. The Marines have had an increasingly difficult time finding qualified volunteers, according to Lt. Col. Jesse Sjoberg, commanding officer of the 2nd Recruit Training Battalion. The Marine Corps want the valedictorians and star athletes. It wants the best. “The biggest challenge is not getting out there and getting to meet them and showing them the benefits,” Sjoberg said. He said the Marines want to get “folks that are actually capable of doing it, from a physical standpoint and from a mental and moral standpoint.”

The educators’ experiences in one week at boot camp were much more glamorous than the grind Marines endure for 12 weeks, but they still left with a deeper understanding of the branch and an eagerness to share that with their students. One educator hopes to use part of the Marines’ history curriculum in his classroom. A group plans to put on a mini boot camp at its school. An athletic coordinator hopes to arrange a Marine fitness test at his school — similar to the one educators attempted in San Diego. “I needed to really make sure that when I say ‘check out the military’ I knew what I was talking about,” Dymoke said. “I needed to put my money where my mouth was, which is why I took my 55-year-old body and ran the half-mile. If I can attempt some of this and come out standing, my students can, too.”

Educators flew to San Diego on Presidents Day and began the yellow footprint experience the next morning. During the rest of the week, they took the combat fitness test, ran a bayonet assault course, visited Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, listened to a Marine band, saw the educational center, shot rifles, spoke with Marines and attended a boot camp graduation, among other activities. They also listened to presentations about tuition assistance, the emphasis on furthering education and the more than 600 kinds of jobs Marines do. “There was a lot of insight as to how many different jobs they can set you up for and train you for,” Tartan High School athletics coordinator Chris DeCorsey said. “I think the more we can learn about the options our kids have for the future, both long term and short term, the better. As educators, that’s something that we owe them.” [Source: Pioneer Press | S.M. Chavey | March 4, 2018 ++]

Military Humor ► Bumper Stickers Seen On Bases

- 101st Airborne Division - “When it comes to Combat, we care enough to send the very best”
- “When in doubt, empty the magazine”
- “Sniper – You can run, but you’ll just die tired!”
- “Machine Gunners – Accuracy By Volume”
- “Except For Ending Slavery, Fascism, Nazism and Communism, WAR has Never Solved Anything”
- “U.S. Marines – Certified Counselors to the 72 Virgins Dating Club”
- “U.S. Air Force – Travel Agents To Allah”
- “The Marine Corps – When It Absolutely, Positively Has To Be Destroyed Overnight”
- “Death Smiles At Everyone – Marines Smile Back”
- “What Do I Feel When I Kill A Terrorist? A Little Recoil”
- “Marines – Providing Enemies of America an Opportunity To Die For their Country Since 1775”

- “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Anyone Who Threatens It”
- “Happiness Is A Belt-Fed Weapon”
- “It’s God’s Job to Forgive Bin Laden – It was Our Job To Arrange The Meeting”(Gen H. Norman Schwarzkopf)
- “Artillery Brings Dignity to What Would Otherwise Be Just A Vulgar Brawl”
- “One Shot, Twelve Kills – U.S. Naval Gun Fire Support “
- “My Kid Fought In Iraq So Your Kid Can Party In College and Protest”
- “A Dead Enemy Is A Peaceful Enemy – Blessed Be The Peacemakers”
- “Some people spend an entire lifetime wondering if they made a difference in the world. But the US Marines doesn’t have that problem.
- The American soldier does not fight because he hates who is in front of him; he fights because he loves who is behind him.

. [Source: Frontlines of Freedom Newsletter | March 9, 2018 ++]

West Point Update 04 ► 8 Things To Consider Before Applying

As the nation's top public university and America's oldest service academy, West Point has a lot to offer to many different students from across the globe. All four years at West Point are academically rigorous and physically demanding, and focus on preparing students to serve as officers in the U.S. Army after graduation. So, how do you know if you’re cut out for the West Point experience? Ask yourself these eight questions. It’s a great place to start.

1. Are you a leader? This may seem like an odd question to start with, but it cuts to the very heart of West Point. The entire reason West Point exists is to attract and build leaders of character. And leadership doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re the captain of every sports team or the president of every high school club. Leadership means making an impact on people and the progress of an organization or cause. So whether you’re at the front leading with a title, or in the mix leading by example, it’s important that every West Point candidate have a desire to become an even better leader than they are today.

2. Do physical challenges excite you? We can’t sugar-coat it. Spending four years at West Point will expose you to a string of strenuous physical challenges. Starting with Beast Barracks, plebes at West Point complete a six-week training exercise that ends with a 12-mile ruck march carrying nearly 50 pounds of gear on your back. Cadets have to complete regular Army Physical Fitness Tests. And then there’s the notorious Indoor Obstacle Course Test (IOCT), that recently, even the Superintendent and Commandant completed. If athletic challenges make your heart race with excitement, then you’ll be in good company here.

3. Are you comfortable with small class sizes? According to the Princeton Review, West Point ranks first in the nation for Best Classroom Experience and second for Most Accessible Professors. Part of the reason we’re able to maintain that high status is because West Point is committed to keeping our class sizes small. The student-to-faculty ratio is an incredible 7:1, and students often keep in touch with their professors long after graduation. But it also means that there’s no hiding in the back of the classroom. After all, in classes this small, everyone has a front row seat.

4. Do you feel energized when you work as part of a diverse team? Perhaps one of the best things about the West Point experience is the diversity of our student body and faculty. In fact, the Corps of Cadets is comprised of students from every State, U.S. Territory, and many partner countries. Every year, West Point admits the best of the best from across America, which means that you’ll work on a daily basis within a student body team that reflects the inspiring diversity of our country. If you’re looking for a college that exposes you to people from many different places and backgrounds, West Point is the place for you.

5. How good are you at managing your time? West Point intentionally overloads Cadets with far more duties, tasks and responsibilities than can realistically fit into any 24-hour day. That’s because it’s essential for America’s future leaders to learn how to manage their time, prioritize tasks, and cooperate with their teammates to get things done. If you struggle with managing your time, West Point will challenge you to improve your skills. And if you’re already great at managing your time, West Point will take you to a whole new level.

6. When was the last time you did something you were bad at? The truth is, many high-achieving students find it easy to navigate through the so-called “challenges” of high school. But part of going to West Point is learning to turn failure into character building experiences that strengthen you as a person and as a leader. Rather than avoid the things you aren’t good at, West Point will put you face-to-face with your weaknesses. Whether it’s long-distance running, survival swimming, challenging Engineering coursework, or memorizing long passages of Plebe Knowledge, every cadet has overcome failure during their college experience at West Point. If you’re afraid to fail and grow, you might want to apply elsewhere—because here at West Point, you will face fear and conquer it. To us, that’s part of the joy of learning.

7. How do you feel about serving as an officer in the U.S. Army? In exchange for West Point’s unparalleled academic and military experience, all cadets entering their Junior year at West Point must sign an eight-year commitment to serve as officers in the U.S. Army – five on active duty and three in the inactive reserve. Starting as Second Lieutenants, West Point graduates typically receive branch specialty training before becoming platoon leaders, where they put to use the lessons they learned in college leading America’s soldiers.

8. In ten years, what will your class ring mean to you? No matter where you attend college, one thing is certain: one day, you’ll be looking back on the decision, instead of forward. West Point’s Long Gray Line of graduates is second-to-none. The camaraderie that grows among classes extends in both directions, meaning that people who graduated 50 years before you and 50 years after you will all share a common bond, symbolized in the coveted class ring, unlike any other that exists in an undergraduate program. Whether it’s looking for help in transitioning to a new career, or simply running into someone else along the road in the future who shares the West Point experience, members of the Long Gray Line hold up and honor one another because of the special bond they share in the unique experience of West Point.

[Source: Aspire | <https://www.blog.westpointadmissions.com> | January 26, 2018 ++]

Warships That Will Change The Future ► SAS Mendi F-148



The SAS Mendi belongs to the South African Navy. It is the last of four [Valour-class frigates](#) built for the [South African Navy](#) by the European South African Corvette Consortium. Some controversy exists as to the class type of the vessel, with both the manufacturer and the South African Navy referring to her as a "corvette", but other similar vessels in other navies being referred to as frigates. The ship can go at 30 knots and its total weight is over 3500 tonnes. Its length is 397 ft with a beam of 53.6 ft. It's well equipped with different weapon launchers and machine guns. It also holds a very genius radar system and can carry two SUPER LYNX 300 Helicopters in its enclosed hanger. Mendi was laid down in June 2002 and was launched a year later. It entered service in MAR 2007 and is homeported in Simonstown South Africa, a picturesque place just off Cape Town. To view additional views of its configuration refer to the photos at http://www.sa-transport.co.za/military/navy/sas_mendi_1.html.

* **Military History** *



HMS Hood Sinking ► **How She Was Sunk by the Bismarck**

The British Admiralty Board of Enquiry into the loss of the battlecruiser HMS Hood, presided over by Vice Admiral Sir Geoffrey Blake, concluded, "The sinking of Hood was due to a hit from Bismarck's 15-inch shell in or adjacent to Hood's 4-inch or 15-inch magazines, causing them to explode and wreck the after part of the ship." Director of Naval Construction Sir Stanley Goodall, however, found this conclusion unsatisfactory and in his report pointed out the explosion was observed near the mainmast 65 feet further forward from the aft magazines. A second board of enquiry was convened under Rear Admiral H.T.C Walker. Even given eyewitness accounts that described fires on deck, that board still found a hit by Bismarck being the likely cause, although finishing with, "The probability is that the 4-inch magazines exploded first." To read how the battle unfolded in which the Hood was sunk refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**HMS Hood Sinking**". [Source: Warfare History Network | Mark Simmons | April 18, 2017 ++]

Operation K ► **2nd Pearl Harbor Raid | A Colossal Failure**

Everyone knows about the First Pearl Harbor Attack by the Japanese Imperial Navy. But few are aware of the 2nd Raid that the Japanese launched on Pearl Harbor. This raid was codenamed Operation K. It was a Japanese naval operation in WWII intended as a reconnaissance mission of the US Naval base at Pearl Harbor and to delay the US Navy Fleet's salvage operations. During the Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese had failed to destroy the oil storage facilities near Pearl Harbor Naval Air Station and the Navy Yard. So, they aimed to bomb these facilities in Operation K. Also, the Japanese aimed to disrupt the repair and salvage operations that were going on in full swing.

This was, perhaps, the longest bombing sortie by two planes without fighter escort in WWII. Operation K culminated on March 4, 1942. Two Japanese H8K planes nicknamed “Emily,” carried out the unsuccessful attack on Pearl Harbor. These flying boats were huge with a gross takeoff weight of 71,650 lb (32,500 kg) and a wingspan of 124 ft (38 m). Four 1,850 hp engines powered this flying boat. Its top speed was 296 mph [doubtful], and it had a crew of 10.



Japanese Kawanishi H8K “Emily” Navy flying boat (left) used for maritime patrol duties and Ships docked at Pearl Harbor's Ten-Ten Dock were salvage and repair operation were ongoing.

Named “the Flying Porcupine” by Allied pilots, these flying boats were each defended by 10 machine guns, an equal number of 20mm cannons, and could carry four 550 lb bombs. The H8K flying boat was capable of undertaking long missions that lasted up to 24 hours. Imperial Japan’s Navy wanted to exploit the Kawanishi H8K flying boats’ long-range capabilities. Each flying boat. Initial plans of the Japanese Navy’s high command called for the use of 5 H8K aircraft. They were to fly to French Frigate Shoals, the biggest atoll in the Northwestern tip of the Hawaiian Islands. Here, they’d be refueled by submarines before heading to Pearl Harbor. More raids would be undertaken if the first raid was successful. The Japanese Started Operation K with Only two Flying Boats Instead of five.

On mission day, only two of the planned 5 flying giants were available. The first H8K aircraft was flown by Pilot Lieutenant Hisao Hashizume, the commander of the mission. Ensign Shosuke Sasao was flying the second H8K. The mission started at Wotje Atoll (Marshall Islands). Each aircraft was loaded with four 550 lb (250 kg) bombs. From Wotje, the flying boats flew 1,900 mi (3,100 km) to French Frigate Shoals. After refueling here, the planes set off for Pearl Harbor that was 560 mi (900 km) away.

The Ten-Ten dock was so named because of its length—1,010 ft. The US Navy’s salvage and repair efforts were in progress at this dock. The time of the bombing was to be sometime after midnight. However, the Japanese plan of bombing the Ten-Ten Dock was hindered due to the prevalent unfavorable weather conditions at Pearl Harbor. Inclement weather also resulted in a comedy of errors. The Japanese submarine I-23 that was supposed to direct the flying boats south of Oahu was lost sometime after 14 FEB. Next, Hawaii’s WARD—Women’s Air Raid Defense—picked up the Japanese planes on their radar. They had been working for 12 weeks since the Pearl Harbor Attack and were on high alert.

The response to the women’s alert was instantaneous. Searchlights were turned on, fighter planes were scrambled, and the anti-aircraft guns were manned. Since it was a moonless, rainy night, the fighter planes were not successful in downing the flying boats (Altitude: 15,000 ft) even with help from the WARD Radar operators. In the absence of position support from their submarine I-23, the Japanese Pilots used the lighthouse at Kaena Point for a position fix. Mission Commander Hashizume attacked from the north. Poor quality radio communication resulted in the second pilot, Sasao, turning to skirt the opposite (north) coast of Oahu.

In the inclement weather, Hashizume was able to see just some patches of the island. He dropped his 4 bombs on the Tantalus Peak sometime around 2 am local time. The bombs landed close to Roosevelt High School, but the damage was minimal. If, you’re ever in Hawaii there are plenty of Pearl Harbor tours that cover this event and many

other pinnacle events that happened during WWII. Sasao dropped the 4 bombs he carried into the ocean somewhere close to the sea approach to Pearl Harbor and returned to Wotje Atoll. Hashizume, whose aircraft had sustained hull damage at French Frigate Shoals, proceeded to his home base at Jaluit Atoll.

Operation K was a colossal failure. The mission was jinxed right from the beginning. Only two porcupines flew instead of the planned five. Also, the absence of an element of surprise and poor weather conditions forced the Japanese planes to drop their bombs blind when they could not sight their targets. The flying giants returned without success. Blackout conditions in Oahu restricted damage and prevented Operation K from making any news headlines. [Source: <https://www.warhistoryonline.com> | March 4, 2018 ++]

Air Force Legend ► John L. Levitow | USAF's Lowest Ranking MOH Recipient

In the Air Force, few names ring as many bells as John L. Levitow. He's had awards named after him, as well as dorm halls and roads. Levitow's name is about as close to U.S. Air Force royalty as you'll get. Oddly, even though his name is emblazoned across every corner of every Air Force base in the world, many airmen have scant knowledge of Levitow's actions. Many are more well informed of his mysterious separation than of his heroic actions. The legend of his separation is still shared by many higher-ups during various briefings as a cautionary tale, but I digress. As the Air Force leads the way into the future, it's important to remember who paved the way and how exactly they did it. This is how John L. Levitow became the lowest ranking Medal of Honor recipient in Air Force history.



Airman First Class Levitow cross-trained into the Loadmaster career field after a couple of years in the Air Force. This cross-train is what ultimately placed Levitow on board the Spooky 71, an AC-47 gunship, during that fateful night. On Feb. 24, 1969, Levitow was aboard the Spooky 71 AC-47 gunship flying missions in South Vietnam. During the flight, a mortar round struck the side of the aircraft, ripping holes all across the plane, including an approximately two-foot puncture in the wing. After impact, Levitow, while suffering from over 40 fragment wounds, helped a fellow wounded airman away from the now-open cargo door. As he moved his comrade to relative safety, he spotted a Mark 24 flare that was seconds from igniting. Mind you, the Mark 24 flare is a three-foot metal tube weighing roughly 27 pounds that, once ignited, generates the light of 2,000,000 candlepower and burns at 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

Levitow dragged himself towards the flare, which was rolling to and fro as the Spooky 71 pilots fought to regain control, hurled himself atop of it, pushed the flare towards the cargo door, and flung it out into the Vietnam sky just before ignition. This really happened. It is not an exaggeration or poorly documented folk tale. Levitow literally placed his body atop a flare powerful enough to turn the Spooky 71 into a crisp with no real idea of how long he had

until the flare ignited. This is one of the most selfless acts ever documented. After the amazing feats he accomplished that night, he would return to Vietnam after recuperating to fly another 20 missions.

Levitow was awarded the nation's highest military honor on May 14, 1970 by President Richard Nixon. Levitow departed from the Air Force in 1970. Following his separation, Levitow worked diligently with the veteran community, showing up to events that honored or featured veterans. On Nov. 8, 2000, John Lee Levitow passed away after a year-and-a-half battle with an unspecified cancer. He was 55 years young. [Source:

French Cruiser Emile Bertin ► WWII Career

Emile Bertin was designed to operate both as a minelayer and as a destroyer flotilla leader. In June 1940, the 581-foot-long French light cruiser sat docked in Halifax, Nova Scotia when back in Europe, French officers gathered in the late Ferdinand Foch's railway car at Compiègne to sign the humiliating armistice with Nazi Germany — sealing continental France's subordination to German hegemony for a following four years. Émile Bertin's crew and skipper found themselves in the curious situation of being docked at a country still at war with Germany after their own country had surrendered. To complicate the situation further, the warship was on her second trip hauling gold reserves from the [Bank of France](#) to shelter in Canada. When Captain Battet signaled the French Admiralty for advice, the cruiser was ordered to [Fort-de-France, Martinique](#) in the Caribbean with the gold.



Emile Bertin

Unfortunately for the Allies, instead of joining the Free French Forces, she made a successful voyage unbothered by the Royal Navy which couldn't catch the fast-moving cruiser. Once at Martinique and the gold safely unloaded, she made ready to defend the island against an expected British attack - which was abandoned through United States pressure. For the next two years or so the ship was inactive at anchor off Fort-de-France, until, on 16 May 1942 she was ordered by the [Vichy](#) authorities to be immobilized, after pressure from the United States. The glamorous French steam transport ship Pasteur — another ship hauling gold — was not so lucky, and Allied troops seized her before she could make it out of port. Pasteur went on to have a productive war-time career in British service moving troops and German prisoners of war. Years later she sank accidentally in the Indian Ocean in 1980 while being towed to a Taiwanese scrap yard.

French warships like Émile Bertin, had fascinating, adventurous and often tragic careers. In July 1940, Vichy French vessels and sailors at Mers-el-Kebir off Algeria suffered heavy losses from British air and naval attack. At Dakar in 1940, French destroyers boldly shot their way out of a harbor under heavy fire while laying smoke. At Toulon in 1942, French Adm. François Darlan scuttled 77 vessels to prevent them from falling into German hands

after the Nazis invaded “neutral” Vichy. *Émile Bertin* was a lucky ship. Launched in 1933, she was a destroyer flotilla flagship and spent the early war — still in the Allies — moving Polish gold to French-controlled Lebanon. A sleek, fast and beautiful ship, the *Émile Bertin* could make 34 knots at top speed thanks to six boilers and steam turbines producing 102,000 shaft horsepower. She carried two seaplanes and a launch catapult.

For armament, the cruiser — and others of the *Émile Bertin* class — carried nine six-inch cannons in three turrets, two on the forward deck and one rear. She had formidable anti-aircraft defenses, including four 3.5-inch guns, eight 1.5-inchers and eight 13.2-millimeter guns. She had six torpedo tubes and also carried 200 sea mines — one of her primary duties. Her one combat mission occurred off Norway during Operation *Weseruebung*, the German invasion in 1940, where she sustained damage during a German air attack. Then once in Vichy hands, she sat at Martinique unused and technically out of the war, although German U-boats regularly made resupply stops at the island until summer 1943, when Free French forces assumed control of the island.

Once fighting for the Allies, the United States modified her in Philadelphia, removing the torpedo tubes — unnecessary at this stage of the war — while reconfiguring her anti-aircraft armament and removing the two seaplanes and catapult. The best available record for her remaining service is within U.S. Atlantic Fleet wartime records. In 1944, she fired her guns to support troops in Italy and carried out a preliminary bombardment of Porquerolles, an island strongpoint off the coast of southern France — aiding in the Allied landings during Operation *Dragoon*. “Big Willie,” an enormous stationary turret with two 340-millimeter guns on Cap Cepet near Toulon, shot at *Émile Bertin* but missed. The 1,800 sailors manning “Big Willie” and other guns at Cap Capet would later surrender after the liberation of Paris. The *Émile Bertin* spent her remaining years serving in southeast Asia, and then as a training ship until 1959, when she was scrapped. [Source: War Is Boring | Robert Beckhusen | March 1, 2018 ++]

WWII Vets 157 ► George Ciampa | Picking Up The Dead

Ciampa, now 92, who served in the 607th Graves Registration Company, will be the Honored Patriot on 3 MAR during the 52nd annual Patriots Day Parade in Laguna Beach. Ciampa vividly recalls gathering dead soldiers every day for 11 months, in hot weather and freezing cold, from the invasion of Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge to the end of the war in Europe near Berlin. His job was to document the dead, recover personal effects, wrap their bodies in mattress covers and bury them in temporary graves. Over a total of five campaigns, it was estimated that his company handled 75,000 bodies, Americans and Germans.



George Ciampa, 92, a World War veteran shown above (left) in October 1945 during WWII in Stuttgart, Germany and during a conference for students in 2014 in Sarreguemines, France (right).

His first taste of war and death came in April, 1944, when his company landed in England and prepared for the Normandy D-Day invasion. During a practice landing exercise, three of the four large landing crafts that went before him were sunk by a German submarine. Instantly, 800 men were lost, he recalled this week. On 6 JUN, when he and his company stormed Utah Beach, it was their job to recover the bodies. “The job of burying the dead was a tough, tough job,” Ciampa said. “There was a stench and you wore the same uniforms. If you were lucky, you had gloves. One day, I couldn’t handle it but a lieutenant told me to get out there and suck it up. I mentally tried to detach myself from it.”

At the Battle of the Bulge, the Army’s largest campaign, Ciampa handled frozen bodies. “We were close to shelling, artillery was flying over us, the enemy was fighting toward us and we were picking up bodies killed by buzz bombs,” he said. “It was a very difficult job but we had to do it.” Later, Ciampa was awarded five battle stars; the Meritorious Unit Commendation wreath; the Croix de Guerre for bravery in carrying out his duties in the face of enemy fire in Normandy; and the Légion d’Honneur, the highest French decoration. More recently, the longtime South Bay resident was recognized as Los Angeles County Veteran of the Year in 2017.

“Those of us in the Graves company and the combat medics, we knew the high cost of freedom,” Ciampa said. “We understood what that meant.” Sacrifice of dead soldiers meant liberty for others. But the sacrifice of those soldiers — many age 18, 19, 20 and 21 — that Ciampa buried, wasn’t only to preserve America’s freedom. “We liberated the German people from a terrible regime,” he said. “We protected the freedom of countries we liberated.” After the war, Ciampa was assigned to the 233rd Salvage Collection Company that worked near Mannheim, Germany. There he became aware of the plight of hungry German children and the war’s impact on them. “These children loved us,” Ciampa said. “We gave them attention and food and let them climb on our Jeeps. I still see all those German kids and their faces.”

Sixty-one years later, Ciampa would use those images for documentary subjects. In 2006, the former Los Angeles Times newspaper man formed a nonprofit foundation called “Let Freedom Ring” through which he has produced five films. For his first film, Ciampa took history teachers from Torrance, along with Battle of the Bulge veterans, to Belgium. There, the teachers heard stories from resistance fighters and veterans. He’s also told stories of Europeans who have adopted some of the remaining graves of American soldiers at the Henri-Chapelle near Aachen, Germany, and other permanent cemeteries. When Ciampa goes back to the cemeteries in Germany, Belgium and France, he often pauses. “I wonder, did I handle that particular body?” he said. “It bothers me when people visit the graves and have no idea that many were so young.”

Ciampa, who now lives in Palm Springs, appreciates the recognition from the Laguna parade and those who will come to see him. For those watching, especially children, he said he hopes to make an impact. “See that man, he was in the war and helped bring liberty to our country and others,” Ciampa said. “That’s what I hope grandparents and parents tell their children.” Retired Marine Col. Charlie Quilter, vice-president of the Patriots Day Parade, said it’s that dedication to sharing his story that, in part, led to this year’s honor. “We did break tradition this year in that George Ciampa is not from Laguna Beach like our previous Honored Patriots of the Year,” said Quilter, a decorated fighter pilot who served in the Marine Corps in Vietnam, Bosnia, Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Operation Enduring Freedom. “We found his story very compelling and now in his 90s, he is still trying to educate young people about the real costs of war.” [Source: The Orange county Register | Erika I. Ritchie | March 2, 2018 ++]

WWII Vets 158 ► George Mendonsa | The Kissing Sailor

George Mendonsa survived some of the hardest fought naval battles of World War II. And when the war ended, he was captured in a photo that will survive forever. The immortalized moment featuring Mendonsa on Victory over Japan Day is widely considered to be one of the iconic photos of the 20th century, a symbol of national relief and pure ecstasy. Life Magazine’s photographer, Alfred Eisenstadt, captured the image, while Navy photographer Lt.

Victor Jorgensen also caught the moment in a widely published variation. But neither photographer stopped to get the names of of the sailor or the woman in the image.

Mendonsa and Greta Zimmer Friedman, the other half of the brief romance, were proven 13 years ago through forensic science to be the pair in the image. Friedman passed away in September 2016. Mendonsa recently celebrated his 95th birthday surrounded by family and friends at the assisted living center he and his wife Rita now call home.



It was the day the World War II ended and Navy Quartermaster 1st Class George Mendonsa was about catch a train back to the West Coast and his ship, the destroyer The Sullivans. It was then he and his wife, Rita, heard the announcement that the Japanese had surrendered and New York City was going Mad. In a moment of relief and thanks, George saw a woman in a nurses outfit, grabbed her and kissed her. Life photographer Alfred Eisenstadt and Navy photographer Victor Jorgensen, only a few feet apart, both captured the moment (left) -- and the rest is history. Former Navy Quartermaster 1st Class George Mendonsa and his wife of 71 years, Rita (right), celebrate George's 95th birthday.

Mendonsa served onboard the destroyer The Sullivans during World War II, where he was part of the commissioning crew. He also participated in the commissioning ceremony of the newest rendition of The Sullivans, which is homeported in Mayport, Florida. A professional civilian sailor before the war in his Newport, Rhode Island-based family business, Mendonsa quickly rose to the rank of quartermaster 1st class. He was at the helm of the The Sullivans on May 11, 1945, during the Battle of Okinawa, when his ship rescued 166 sailors who had gone overboard from the aircraft carrier Bunker Hill after two Kamikazes smashed into it within 30 seconds of each other.

The Sullivans returned to the United States for an overhaul in July 1945, and Mendonsa went home for 30 days of leave. He was on his way back to the ship and awaiting a train to the West Coast when the news of the Japanese surrender was announced. And the rest is now history. After the kiss in Times Square, the pair didn't meet again until their identities were proven. They reunited in Times Square in 2012 to recreate the famous moment. In recent years, bloggers and others critics have tried to use the VJ Day kiss as an example of sexual harassment or sexual assault, a stance Mendonsa and Friedman adamantly opposed. [Source: NacyTimes | Mark D. Faram | March 8, 2018 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 16 thru 31 MAR

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, **“Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 March.** [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | March 2018 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Gerstung~Robert E. | WWII



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

ROBERT E. GERSTUNG

Rank and organization: Technical Sergeant, U.S. Army, Co. H, 313th Infantry, 79th Infantry Division

Place and date: Siegfried Line near Berg, Germany, 19 December 1944

Entered service: Chicago IL

Born: August 6, 1915 Chicago IL

Citation

On 19 December 1944 he was ordered with his heavy machinegun squad to the support of an infantry company attacking the outer defense of the Siegfried Line near Berg, Germany. For 8 hours he maintained a position made almost untenable by the density of artillery and mortar fire concentrated upon it and the proximity of enemy troops who threw hand grenades into the emplacement. While all other members of his squad became casualties, he remained at his gun. When he ran out of ammunition, he fearlessly dashed across bullet-swept, open terrain to secure a new supply from a disabled friendly tank. A fierce barrage pierced the water jacket of his gun, but he continued to fire until the weapon overheated and jammed. Instead of withdrawing, he crawled 50 yards across coverless ground to another of his company's machineguns which had been silenced when its entire crew was killed. He continued to man this gun, giving support vitally needed by the infantry. At one time he came under direct fire from a hostile tank, which shot the glove from his hand with an armor-piercing shell but could not drive him from his position or stop his shooting. When the American forces were ordered to retire to their original positions, he remained at his gun, giving the only covering fire. Finally withdrawing, he cradled the heavy weapon in his left arm, slung a belt of ammunition over his shoulder, and walked to the rear, loosing small bursts at the enemy as he went. One hundred yards from safety, he was struck in the leg by a mortar shell; but, with a supreme effort, he crawled the remaining distance, dragging along the gun which had served him and his comrades so well. By his remarkable perseverance, indomitable courage, and heroic devotion to his task in the face of devastating fire, T/Sgt. Gerstung gave his fellow soldiers powerful support in their encounter with formidable enemy forces.



On August 23, 1945 President Truman, awarded 28 soldiers the Medal of Honor in the East Room of the White House. Before a large audience of high ranking military officers and civilians and members of the families of those honored, President Truman tied the highest award of the Nation on each of the officers and men including T/Sgt. Gerstung after citations for their individual deeds of heroism were read by Maj. Gen. Edward F. Witsell.

Gerstung left the Army while still a technical sergeant. He died on June 17, 1979 at age 63 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington County, Virginia.

[Source: <https://history.army.mil/moh/wwII-g-1.html> | March 2018 ++]

WWII Bomber Nose Art ► (02) Windy City Kitty

Back in the day when America was in the "Big War" WWII, planes were flown by young boys. Politically correct was "go to war to break things and kill the enemy. Apparently no one worried about nose art on the bombers. Most of the "men," or soon to become men, were in their late teens or early twenties. Testosterone levels were high and the names and accompanying pictures on the assigned aircraft helped to boost morale. With no TV or other means, Moms or girlfriends back home would never know or see it! These planes would probably would not be allowed to leave the ground today.



*** Health Care ***



Health Care Options At Age 65 ► Veterans

At age 65, it's decision time: employer health plan and/or Medicare/TRICARE known as TRICARE For Life (TFL)? At age 65, TRICARE converts to a Medicare supplement plan and TRICARE Prime and Select are not available. TFL requires Medicare Parts A&B. Younger spouses continue under your employer health plan, stay under TRICARE Prime/Select, or stay with both until age 65. Here are your options:

- You keep your employer plan while working and delay Medicare/TFL. You're allowed to delay Part B while working and covered by an employer's health plan. You temporarily lose TFL benefits until you enroll in Part B.
- Go with both the employer plan and Medicare/TFL. Enroll in Parts A/B Medicare, get your TFL benefits and have your employer's plan. You'll pay for all programs and you might be over insured.
- Go Medicare/TFL only. Check to see whether you can suspend your employer's plan before you cancel it. Enroll in Medicare Parts A/B up to three months prior to age 65.

As long as you are working and covered by your employer's plan, the employer's plan pays first, Medicare second, and TRICARE third. Once you stop working, the payment order is: Medicare pays first, then your employer's plan, and finally TRICARE. If you have TFL only, Medicare is the first payer, then TRICARE. It's best not to enroll in another drug plan. Another drug plan has to pay first, and you'll be filing manual claims with TRICARE. In addition, another drug plan disqualifies you from the [TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery](#) program. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Shane Ostrom | March 1, 2018 ++]

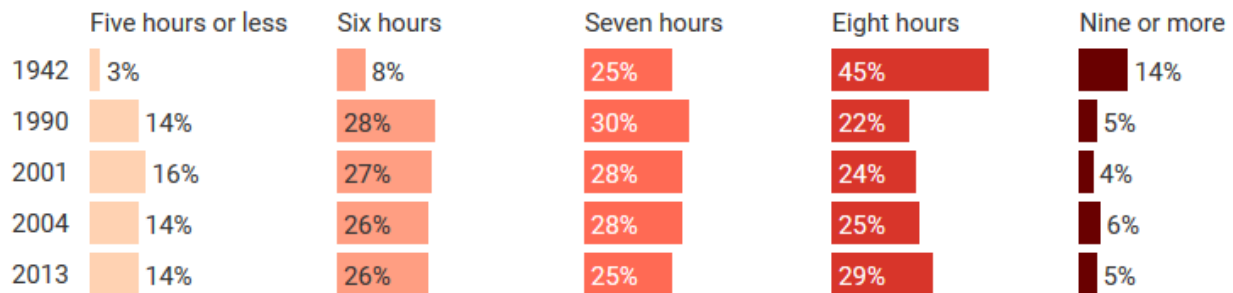
Sleep Update 07 ► Why Are We So Sleep Deprived, and Why Does It Matter?

As we prepared to “spring forward” for daylight saving time on 11 MAR, many of us dreaded the loss of the hour’s sleep we incur by moving our clocks forward. For millions, the loss was an added insult to the inadequate sleep they experience on a daily basis. Surveys show that 40 percent of American adults get less than the nightly minimum of seven hours of sleep recommended by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and the National Sleep Foundation. The National Institutes for Health estimate that between 50 million and 70 million people do not get enough sleep. These recommendations for minimal sleep are based on a review of many scientific studies evaluating the role of sleep in our bodies and the effects of sleep deprivation on our ability of our body to function at our peak performance level.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, American adults currently average 6.9 hours of sleep per night compared with the 1940s, when most American adults were averaging 7.9 hours a night, or one hour more each night. In fact, in 1942, 84 percent of Americans got the recommended seven to nine hours; in 2013, that number had dropped to 59 percent. Participants in that same Gallup poll reported on average they felt they needed 7.3 hours of sleep each night but were not getting enough, causing an average nightly sleep debt of 24 minutes. Fitbit in January 2018 announced results of a study it conducted of 6 billion nights of its customers’ sleep and reported that men actually get even less than women, about 6.5 hours.

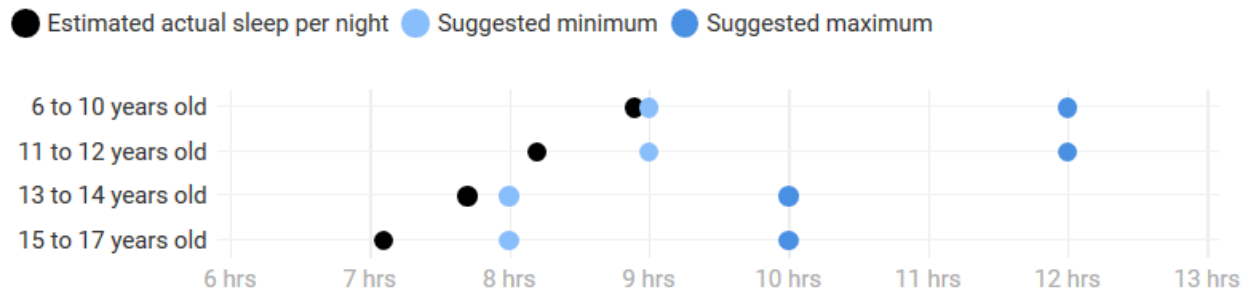
Lost hours of sleep

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends that adults get at least seven hours of sleep per night. About 40 percent of Americans don’t meet that bar.



Why sleep matters

The problems caused by sleep shortage go beyond tiredness. In recent years, studies have shown that adults who were short sleepers, or those who got less than seven hours in 24 hours, were more likely to report 10 chronic health conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma and depression, compared to those who got enough sleep, that is, seven or more hours in a 24-hour period. There are more challenges for children, as they are thought to have an increased sleep need compared to adults. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends that children 6 to 12 years of age should sleep nine to 12 hours a day and teens 13 to 18 should sleep eight to 10 hours daily on a regular basis to promote optimal health. A Sleep Foundation poll of parents suggested that American children are getting one hour of sleep or more per night less than what their body and brain require.



Researchers have found that sleep deprivation of even a single hour can have a harmful effect on a child’s developing brain. Inadequate sleep can affect synaptic plasticity and memory encoding, and it can result in inattentiveness in the classroom.

Every one of our biological systems is affected by sleep. When we don’t sleep long enough or when we experience poor quality of sleep, there can be serious biological consequences. When we are sleep deprived, our bodies become more aroused through an enhanced sympathetic nervous system, known as “fight or flight.” There is a greater propensity for increased blood pressure and possible risk of coronary heart disease. Our endocrine system releases more cortisol, a stress hormone. The body has less glucose tolerance and greater insulin resistance, which in the long term can cause an increased risk of Type 2 diabetes. Also, sleep deprivation causes a reduction in growth hormone and muscle maintenance.

We also rely on sleep to maintain our metabolism. Sleep deprivation can lead to decreased release of the hormone leptin and increased release of the hormone ghrelin, which can be associated with increased appetite and weight gain. The human body also relies on sleep to help with our immune system. Sleep deprivation is associated with increased inflammation and decreased antibodies to influenza and decreased resistance to infection. Inadequate sleep has been associated with a negative effect on mood as well as decreased attention and increased memory difficulty. In addition, someone who is sleep deprived may experience a decrease in pain tolerance and in reaction times. Occupational studies have associated sleep deprivation with decreased performance, increased car accidents, and more days missed from work.

The role of the brain

Researchers have known for a while that brain health is an important aspect of sleep. Notably, sleep is an important part of memory consolidation and learning. Newer research has suggested another important aspect of sleep for our brain: There is a system for the elimination of possibly harmful proteins such as abnormal variants of amyloid. This waste removal process, using what is known as the glymphatic system, relies on sleep to effectively eliminate these proteins from the brain. These are the same proteins found to be elevated in patients with Alzheimer’s disease. Studies show that older adults with less sleep have greater accumulations of these proteins in their brains.

Our sleep-wake cycle is regulated by the circadian system, which helps signal the brain to sleep using the release of the natural hormone melatonin. It turns out that our body’s system for regulating melatonin and our sleep schedule is most powerfully controlled by light. There are cells in the retina of our eye that communicate directly with the brain’s biological clock regulators located in the hypothalamus and this pathway is most affected by light. These neurons have been found to be most affected by light waves from the blue spectrum or blue light. This is the kind of light most prominent in electronic lights from computers and smartphones. This has become a modern challenge that can adversely affect our natural sleep-wake cycle. Additional factors that can hamper sleep include pain conditions, medications for other conditions, and the increased demands and connectedness of modern society.

The Conversation

As we prepare for daylight saving time, we can be mindful that many athletes have been including planned sleep extensions (sleeping longer than usual) into their schedule to enhance performance and that many professional sports

teams have hired sleep consultants to help assure their athletes have enough sleep. Perhaps we should have a similar game plan when we approach the second Sunday in March.

The author of this article is a neurologist at the University of Florida who has studied the effects of both traumatic brain injury and sleep impairment on the brain. He has seen the effects of sleep impairment and the significant effects it can have.

[Source: The Conversation | Michael S. Jaffee | March 8, 2018 ++]

Kidney Disease Update 07 ► Risk Reduction

Your kidneys are important organs that have many essential tasks that impact your health. Some of these include removing toxins from your blood, making urine, playing a role in blood pressure control, and helping to maintain healthy bones. There are many risk factors that contribute to chronic kidney disease, several of which can be managed with healthy eating and physical activity. These risk factors include poorly-controlled diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure) and being overweight or obese. Risk factors that we can't control include advanced age, family history of kidney disease and being of African, Asian or Aboriginal origin. While we can't change our age or genetics, there are many lifestyle changes we can make to [protect our kidneys](#).

Maintain healthy blood pressure.

- Whether it's table salt, sea salt or Himalayan salt, it's all [high in sodium](#) and too much of it can raise blood pressure. Salt is an acquired taste, meaning if you cut back gradually, your taste buds adapt.
- Try [adding flavor](#) with [low-sodium alternatives](#) such as spices and herbs instead of salt. Limit salty seasonings such as adobo, tartar sauce and soy sauce.
- Choose canned products that are low-sodium, reduced sodium or have no added salt. Draining and rinsing canned items (such as beans and vegetables) can remove up to 40 percent of the sodium.
- Read it before you eat it. Many foods (soups, frozen meals, breakfast cereals, snacks) contain sodium. Look for items that contain 5 percent or less of the daily value for sodium or less than 140 milligrams of sodium per serving.
- Cook at home more often. When you cook, you control the ingredients. Fast-food and restaurant meals are very high in sodium, so be cautious with how often you choose to eat out.

Maintain [healthy blood sugar](#) levels for those diagnosed with diabetes.

- It's not just soda, cookies, and candy that raise blood sugar levels. Many foods contain carbohydrates, which turn into sugar in your body, including milk, starchy vegetables (like corn, beans, peas, and potatoes), cereals, juices and bread.
- Plan your meals using the [healthy plate method](#). Limit carbohydrates to a quarter of the plate. Try choosing high-fiber whole grains such as unsweetened oatmeal, whole wheat pasta or brown rice. Or, choose starchy vegetables like baked potatoes, kidney beans or butternut squash. The higher fiber content may help you feel full longer.
- Choose low-sugar beverages. There is a lot of sugar in regular sodas, lemonade, bottled smoothies and sweetened bottled teas. Try unsweetened or diet versions of these drinks. Another option is to fill half of your glass with water and the other half with the sugary beverage to dilute it.

Maintain or achieve a healthy body weight. Consider joining the [MOVE! Weight Management Program](#) at your local VA.

Be more active. Exercise (after discussing it with your doctor) on a regular, consistent basis. Stand while you talk on the phone, walk around your house during commercials, park far away from the store – every little bit helps!

Ask your provider about your risk for developing chronic kidney disease. Then, talk with your PACT team or MOVE! registered dietitian about how you can reduce your risk by building healthier eating habits, even while still choosing foods you enjoy. If you have kidney disease, you may need to monitor specific nutrients, depending on what stage you are in. Contact your PACT today to learn more. [Source: Vantage Point | March 7, 2018 ++]

Opioid Addiction Update 02 ► Trump Suggests Death Penalty for Dealers

President Donald Trump made a surprise stop by the White House's summit on opioids 1 MAR, where he suggested dealers face "the ultimate penalty" for their roles in drug-related deaths. The summit came more than four months after Trump declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency, though the decision faced criticism as it stopped short of a national emergency declaration that would have made an additional surge of federal funds available to address treatment and recovery efforts.

First lady Melania Trump delivered opening remarks at the summit, remarking on her travels in recent months with the president across the country, in which she visited hospitals and treatment centers, where she's been briefed by those directly impacted by the crisis. Addressing the crowd of more than 200 participants from across the nation, the first lady read a letter sent to her from a mother who lost her son in an opioid-related death. "Sadly she's not alone in her grief and we need to change that," Melania Trump said. In her remarks, the first lady called for a focus on babies and young mothers with addiction. "I am so proud of the work that this administration has already done to combat this epidemic," she said. "We all know there is still much work to be done, which is why we are all here today."

A range of other administration officials, including Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin also spoke at the summit. Azar highlighted his discussions at the National Governors Association's winter meeting last weekend, where he encouraged governors to apply for waivers that allow states to expand the opioid addiction treatments that Medicaid can be used to compensate. "I'm hopeful that we'll see a faster clip," Azar said. "Those waivers are very easy to do." Shulkin highlighted that opioid use in the VA system has declined 41 percent since 2012.

The White House has pointed to recent positive movement in trying to rally more resources to combat the epidemic, including the president's recent budget proposal that called for \$3 billion in new funding in 2018 and \$10 billion in new funding in 2019 for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to combat the opioid crisis. The president also recently nominated Jim Carroll as a new drug czar to lead the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), though lawmakers have recently criticized the White House for scaling back the ONDCP's role in coordinating the administration's response to the opioid crisis.

While prior to his arrival the discussion in the opioid summit largely focused around expanding access to treatment and interdiction efforts of drugs coming in from foreign countries, in his remarks President Trump went as far to suggest that convicted drug dealers should face the death penalty. "They kill hundreds and hundreds of people, and most of them don't even go to jail. If you shoot one person, they give you life. They give you the death penalty," Trump said. "These people can kill 2,000, 3,000 people and nothing happens to them. And we need strength with respect to the pushers and to the drug dealers. And if we don't do that, you will never solve the problem."

Trump also downplayed the role of blue ribbon committees. "If you want to be weak and talk about just blue ribbon committees, that is the not answer," Trump said "The answer is you have to have strength and toughness. The drug dealers and the pushers are -- they are doing damage. They are really doing damage. Some countries have a very, very tough penalty. The ultimate penalty." Senior counselor to the president Kellyanne Conway moderated two panels with Cabinet secretaries, Veterans' Affairs Secretary David Shulkin participated in a panel on prevention, treatment and recovery with Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Ben Carson. Attorney General Jeff

Sessions also spoke on a panel. Trump did not directly interact with Sessions while the two were in the room together, though he did briefly reference him in his remarks. "I've spoken with Jeff about bringing a lawsuit against some of these opioid companies," Trump said. [Source: ABC News | Alexander Mallin | March 1, 2018 ++]

Opioid Addiction Update 04 ► Punitive Approach to Addiction Does Not right the Wrongs

The governors of Maryland and Oregon asked senators 8 MAR to step up funding and coordination with states tackling the evolving opioid crisis, while rejecting a “punitive approach” to addiction. Testifying before the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee on Capitol Hill, Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan said nearly 2,000 people died from opioid overdoses in his state last year—more than firearm- and vehicle-related deaths combined. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown illustrated the toll opioids were having on child welfare in her own state, where about 60 percent of kids in the foster care system have at least one parent with a substance abuse issue.

“Right now the federal government recognizes the problem but is focused on punishment,” Brown said. “That leaves us, the states, to right the wrongs of a war on drugs that has done nothing to address the issues that drive this public health crisis, while our prisons and our foster care systems are filled to capacity with its victims.” The epidemic has affected almost every state, with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently reporting a 30-percent increase in emergency room visits nationally for suspected opioid overdoses between July 2016 and September 2017. Data from 16 states hit hard by the crisis showed eight with increases in ER visits for suspected opioid overdoses of 25 percent or greater.

Maryland implemented a regional prescription drug monitoring program and limited the number of pills physicians could prescribe, only for heroin distribution to increase—followed by that of fentanyl and carfentanil. Addicts are killing themselves with a single use of fentanyl, which is also being used to lace cocaine in the state, and carfentanil is 50 to 100 times more deadly. “I was the first governor in America to declare a real state of emergency on this issue because we decided that we needed to treat this crisis just like we would treat any other natural or manmade disaster,” Hogan said.

The Republican governor estimated Maryland has spent a half-billion dollars fighting the opioid epidemic. Fentanyl use was up about 70 percent in Maryland in 2017, trafficked in from China and Mexico, prompting Hogan to ask for more funding to track delivery services and for increased federal interdiction through the Stop Trafficking in Fentanyl Act (H.R.1354) currently in the House of Representatives. [Source: Route Fifty | Dave Nyczepir | March 8, 2018 ++]

Uterus Transplant ► Military Spouse Delivers Baby in Experimental Procedure

A Texas woman who learned as a teen that she would be unable to bear children has given birth to a healthy baby girl, thanks to an experimental procedure at Baylor University Medical Center. The woman is the second Baylor patient to give birth after receiving a uterine transplant from a living donor. She is the first to share her story publicly. Baylor, which is a part of Baylor Scott & White Health, is the first hospital in the U.S. and the second in the world to successfully perform the procedure, which is intended for women who were born without a functioning uterus or who lost their uterus to surgery or trauma. The patients’ only other options for having children are surrogacy or adoption. “It’s important to carry your own child and to feel that bond that you have when she’s in your stomach,” said the patient in an exclusive interview with The Dallas Morning News. She requested anonymity to protect her family’s privacy.



Surgeons at Baylor have conducted eight uterine transplants -- two from deceased and six from live donors -- since launching their clinical trial in 2016. Of those eight patients, four suffered complications that required surgeons to remove their uteruses. Some medical experts have questioned Baylor's decision to devote significant resources to a problem that is not life-threatening and affects relatively few women. But Baylor argues that the condition is a congenital malformation and requires treatment because it has profound effects on a woman's health and well-being, as well as that of her partner.

Two women have delivered babies -- the first, a baby boy, arrived in November. Two other women are undergoing embryo transfer procedures following in vitro fertilization, or IVF. The hospital plans to perform two more uterine transplants before reviewing results and working to raise money for a second trial. The new mother, who gave birth to a 6-pound, 7-ounce baby girl in February, said the road to the transplant was filled with emotional ups and downs. When she was 14, the woman noticed she was the only one among her friends who had not yet started to menstruate. She visited the doctor with her mother. Scans and tests turned up a startling diagnosis: She had been born with ovaries but no uterus or cervix, a condition that affects around 1 in 5,000 women. A specialist told her she would never be able to carry her own child.

The pain of that discovery settled in slowly. "You don't really have all of the emotions at that age, because you're not able to have a child yet," she said. "But once you get married, then you realize how heartbreaking it is to get the news." When she met her husband, she told him early in their relationship about her condition. He assured her they would find a way to have children no matter what it took. While living overseas with her husband, who serves in the military, she read about uterine transplant clinical trials in Sweden, where the procedure was performed successfully for the first time. Then, in early 2016, she learned from her mother, who lives in Texas, that Baylor was starting a clinical trial of its own, with help from the Swedish doctors. She became one of the first patients to enroll. Despite the surgical risks and unknown outcome, she and her husband called the decision to participate a "no-brainer." "My thought on it was, even if the transplant is not successful," she said, "I still would have had some satisfaction in that I helped doctors learn what to do and what not to do for the next person who has a transplant."

In December 2016, Baylor surgeons removed a healthy uterus from a live donor in a five-hour procedure similar to a hysterectomy. Baylor would say only that it was a woman who had already had children and wished to help another woman start her own family. Surgeons cooled and flushed the fist-sized organ and implanted it into the recipient, who had been wheeled into an operating room next door. They connected the patient's blood supply with the uterus' vessels and arteries and watched as the organ turned from beige to pink. After about five more hours, the patient awoke and said the procedure was less painful than she had imagined. The first sign that the transplant was working properly came one month later, when she got her period for the first time. "I remember telling her, 'I bet you no one else is this happy to have their first cycle,'" said her husband. She found herself researching periods to make sure everything she was experiencing looked normal, although she felt odd looking up information about periods at her age.

After she started menstruating, doctors transferred an embryo to her uterus. Before being admitted to the clinical trial, each couple had to go through IVF to make sure they could conceive a child. (IVF is necessary because the transplant recipients don't have fallopian tubes that allow eggs to travel from the ovaries to the uterus.) Then they froze their embryos. The day she learned she was pregnant, she and her husband celebrated and cried together. Even

after receiving the good news from her doctor by phone, she took a home pregnancy test so she could experience that milestone for herself. “I wanted to have that same feeling that any normal woman would have,” she said.

Her pregnancy went smoothly, despite the fact that she had to take immunosuppressants to prevent her body from rejecting the uterus. Doctors monitored her for signs of rejection, infection and other problems by taking regular cervical biopsies. Although the uterus’ nerves are not connected to the mother’s nerves during surgery, she could feel the baby kick and move inside her belly. She could not feel the pain of contractions, however, which required doctors to watch her closely for signs of early labor. Last month, doctors delivered her daughter by C-section to a room full of overjoyed people in blue hospital gowns and masks. The parents felt a mix of anxiety and excitement. Now that they and the baby are out of the hospital, they have assumed a routine of feeding, changing diapers and barely sleeping.

Patients in the trial can bear up to two children with the donated organ before it is removed. The mother would not say whether her donated uterus was removed. The birth of a second baby after a uterine transplant “is proof that this was not a clinical stunt,” said Dr. Giuliano Testa, a Baylor transplant surgeon and principal investigator of the trial. “We want to make this a reality for all the women who have this kind of problem, and we believe even more that this is the right way forward.” The future of the procedure at Baylor is unclear, although the hospital says it has a list of 450-plus patients interested in receiving a uterus and more than 150 interested in donating one. The team calculated the cost of each procedure to be around \$200,000, similar to a kidney transplant, said Testa.

During the trial, the Baylor Health Care System Foundation paid for the surgeries and immunosuppressants. The remaining costs were covered by Baylor University Medical Center, Baylor Scott & White Research Institute and the clinical trial team members, many of whom donated their time. But patients had to foot the roughly \$17,000 cost of IVF. Once the 10-patient trial ends, the current funding will end, as well. “We are securing funds for continuing the trial with 10 more women,” said Testa. “Also, we are working to offer the procedure to couples who can pay for it.” To the new parents, there’s no question that the decisions Baylor made have paid off. “It still hits me a few times a day that I’m not dreaming anymore,” said the father. “To be able to look at [the baby] and see me and my wife from different angles, it’s just crazy. It’s worth it.” [Source: The Dallas Morning News | Anna Kuchment | March 4, 2018 ++]

Mononucleosis ► Kissing Disease | It’s A One-and-Done Event

Tremendous fatigue, a very sore throat and achy body – Cheryl vividly recalls how bad she felt after coming down with infectious mononucleosis, commonly called mono, during her sophomore year at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York. “I felt really dizzy, but it wasn’t just my head,” said Cheryl, whose last name isn’t being used to respect her privacy. “It was like my whole body was twirling around inside.”

Mono is a contagious disease caused by the Epstein-Barr virus, or EBV. Spread through saliva, mono’s nickname is the “kissing disease.” But transmission of the virus isn’t limited to kissing; people can become infected by using someone else’s utensils or drinking from the same container, as Cheryl believes happened to her. She shared a cup with another member of the West Point orienteering team who later was diagnosed with mono ahead of Cheryl. Teenagers and young adults are more likely than others to get mono. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 25 percent of people in this age range who are exposed to EBV will develop mono.

“Over 90 percent of adults will have antibodies to mono – meaning, at some point in their lives they’ve been exposed,” said Dr. Jason Okulicz, an Air Force lieutenant colonel and chief of the Infectious Disease Service at San Antonio Military Medical Center in Texas. “It’s also possible to not have any symptoms, though that’s more likely for young children,” he said. Symptoms can occur anywhere from four to six weeks after being infected, according to the CDC. Along with what Cheryl experienced, they can include swollen lymph nodes in the neck and armpits, a

fever, and a rash. As bad as patients might feel, mono is a self-limiting illness for the vast majority, Okulicz said. That means it resolves on its own, usually over several weeks. “The fatigue might linger for a few weeks after that, but long-term effects on a person’s overall health are uncommon,” he said.

Another good thing about mono? It’s a one-and-done event. “With the flu, there are many different types and you can get infected numerous times over your lifetime,” Okulicz said. “But infectious mononucleosis doesn’t recur.” One possible complication of mono is an enlarged spleen that can rupture when performing strenuous exercises or engaging in contact sports. That’s why, even though an enlarged spleen is rare, doctors recommend people with mono avoid these activities at least three or four weeks after illness, Okulicz said. Any mono patient experiencing abdominal pain should seek help immediately, he added. Otherwise, Okulicz said, there’s not much to do for mono except offer supportive care: lozenges for a sore throat; over-the-counter medications for pain and fever; plenty of fluids to stay hydrated; and, of course, rest.

Cheryl spent a week in Keller Army Community Hospital recuperating. Classmates delivered her books and assignments so she could keep up with her schoolwork. She said she felt better by the time she was discharged, but it took several weeks before the fatigue went away “I didn’t realize how long it would take to feel like myself again,” she said. [Source: TRICARE Communications | February 2, 2018 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 439 ► Nutrition Tips - Qualifying Life Events

Nutrition Tips -- If you made New Year’s resolutions that are starting to fizzle, don’t despair. March is National Nutrition Month—the perfect time to assess and adjust your healthy living goals and behaviors. Whether you’re just trying to firm up, eat a more balanced diet, or lose weight, the results make a big impact on your overall health. More than one-third of adults in the U.S. are obese and obesity-related conditions are one of the leading causes of preventable deaths. Check out the TRICARE monthly tips on www.TRICARE.mil to discover small changes that will make a big difference during National Nutrition Month. You’ll learn health and wellness tips, including ways to adjust your diet, make food swaps, shop smart and engage in preventive health. You can use your TRICARE preventive health benefits to improve your health. Did you know that TRICARE covers:

- One Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Exam annually for TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select enrollees
- Age-appropriate doses of vaccines, as recommended by the CDC.
- Maternity care
- Medically and psychologically necessary mental health and substance use disorder care

Celebrate eating right during National Nutrition Month and take command of your health in 2018!

-o-o-O-o-o-

Qualifying Life Events -- Traumatic brain injuries affect millions of Americans each year, and no two brain injuries are exactly alike. Be sure to know the signs and symptoms of TBI as well as how you can prevent yourself and your loved ones from experiencing it. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the leading cause of traumatic brain injury is falls. Because the brain is soft and jello-like in consistency and “floats” in cerebral-spinal fluid in our skulls, when the head is struck or shaken violently it can cause brain injury.

You can help prevent TBI in children by always having your child use age and size-appropriate car seats, and by making sure they are properly installed. Also, make sure your child always wears the right helmet for their activity and that it fits right. Wearing a helmet is a must to help lower the risk of serious brain injury and skull fracture. But remember, there’s no such thing as a “concussion-proof” helmet. And if you have a toddler, make sure to have gates at the tops and bottoms of stairs to prevent your toddler from falling down them. If you take your child to the

playground, make sure that there is soft material under the play equipment, like mulch or sand rather than grass or dirt.

TRICARE offers a comprehensive rehabilitation benefit that includes occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy and behavioral health services when ordered by a physician as part of a comprehensive individual rehabilitation treatment plan. Learn more at www.TRICARE.mil/CRT.

-o-o-O-o-o-

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> | March 01, 2018 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 440 ► TRICARE Enrollment Changes

TRICARE Enrollment Changes -- One of the TRICARE changes that took effect on January 1 is when you can enroll in or change TRICARE plans. For 2018 coverage, you may enroll or make enrollment changes at any time based on your eligibility. However, for 2019 coverage, you'll only be able to enroll in or change your enrollment during this fall's annual open enrollment period or following a Qualifying Life Event, or QLE next year.

This fall, you'll have a chance to choose coverage for the 2019 calendar year. During the open enrollment period, which is November 12th through December 10th, you can change your plan. If you remain eligible, do nothing and you'll stay in the same plan for next year. Coverage runs thru the calendar year unless you lose eligibility or disenroll.

Beginning January 1st, you'll only be able to enroll in or change plans during next year's enrollment period or after you experience a QLE. QLEs are specific life events, like having a baby, getting married or turning age 65. Once a QLE occurs, you will only have a 90-day window to enroll or make any enrollment changes. Enrollment because of a QLE results in immediate coverage that runs through December 31st, 2019, unless you lose eligibility or disenroll.

-o-o-O-o-o-

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> | March 8, 2018 ++]

*** Finances ***



IRS Tax Deductions Update 01 ► Property Taxes 2018 thru 2025

The recent federal tax code overhaul limits deductions for state and local taxes, which include property taxes. That could be costly for taxpayers in many states. WalletHub recently released state rankings for property taxes. They shed light on who will be digging deeper into their wallets come tax time.

Property taxes on real estate

The financial data site reports that the average American household spends \$2,197 on real estate property taxes each year. The bill is higher than that in many states. For each state and Washington, D.C., WalletHub calculated the annual property taxes for a \$184,700 home. That is the median home value in the U.S., according to the latest Census Bureau data. Based on these calculations, the five states with the highest real estate taxes are:

- New Jersey: Annual taxes on a median-price home are \$4,437
- Illinois: \$4,288
- New Hampshire: \$4,038
- Connecticut: \$3,733
- Wisconsin: \$3,602

Property taxes on vehicles

In the 27 states that levy vehicle property taxes, the average cost to residents is \$436 per year. The five states with the highest vehicle taxes — applied to the value as of February 2018 of a Toyota Camry LE four-door sedan, the highest-selling car of 2017 — are:

- Rhode Island: Annual taxes on a \$24,000 car are \$1,144
- Virginia: \$971
- Mississippi: \$813
- South Carolina: \$651
- Connecticut: \$609

Property tax deductions

The tax code overhaul enacted in December limited the amount of state and local taxes — including property taxes — individuals can deduct on their federal tax returns. Starting in tax year 2018 — the return you’ll file next year — the cap will be \$10,000 for married couples filing joint tax returns and \$5,000 for those filing separate returns. This change, which will remain in effect through tax year 2025, has sparked controversy partly because property taxes can vary widely from state to state. In South Florida, for example, the annual tax bill for a 2,200-square-foot home is close to \$9,000 annually. Outside Atlanta they were paying less than \$1,000 per year.” In San Diego County, CA my (EMO's) taxes on a 3100 sq ft home with a \$134,000 tax exemption (for having a 100% service connected disability) on tax appraisal valuation run \$9,040 annually.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | March 1, 2018 ++]

Student Loan Update 06 ► Public Service Loan Forgiveness in Jeopardy

A benefit that lets service members and other government workers write off student loan debt would vanish under a new proposal in Congress. Republican-backed legislation would eliminate a program that allows borrowers in full-time public service jobs to have their student loans forgiven after making payments for 10 years — a move that military and veterans groups say would hurt their members. “Our concern with public service loan forgiveness being eliminated is that it is a recruiting and retention tool for the services themselves,” said Aniela Szymanski, government relations director for Military Officers Association of America. “That gives us concern about who are we going to get to join the military, how are they going to be able to maintain a career in the military and possibly public service thereafter.” But supporters say the measure is necessary to keep rising college costs in check.

“Unlimited borrowing combined with unlimited forgiveness enables institutions to increase college costs, pocket the extra money, and ignore the needs and reality of students and families who struggle with increasing loan balances,” said Michael Woeste, a spokesman for the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, chaired by Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC). “We don’t want our veterans to struggle with growing debt burdens, and these reforms will enable students to pursue their chosen career path without worrying about ever-rising loan balances.”

Plans to scrap public service loan forgiveness for future borrowers are part of a package of changes to higher education rules proposed in the PROSPER Act, introduced in the House of Representatives in December. Foxx's committee last made changes to the bill in February, and staff members are working to get the legislation to the House floor as soon as possible, Woeste said in an email. Currently, employees of local, state and federal government agencies, as well as nonprofits, can qualify for loan forgiveness after making qualifying payments for 120 months. These payments, though not required to be consecutive, must have been made after Oct. 1, 2007. Service members and other borrowers currently using federal direct student loans would be grandfathered into the legislation and would not be affected if the program is cut.

In addition to overhauling student loan forgiveness, the PROSPER Act would roll back rules cracking down on for-profit colleges, including a requirement applied primarily to for-profit schools requiring them to demonstrate that their graduates get jobs. It would also eliminate a requirement that for-profit colleges get at least 10 percent of their funds from sources other than federal financial aid. Veterans groups not only support keeping that so-called 90-10 rule in place, they also have long pushed for stricter versions of it. In a meeting with reporters earlier this month, John Kamin, American Legion assistant director of veterans employment and education, said the potential 90-10 elimination demands "vigorous opposition."

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions is working on comparable legislation to the PROSPER Act that lawmakers hope to push out this spring with bipartisan support, a spokesman for committee chairman Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) told Military Times. He did not say whether the Senate bill will also propose an end to public service loan forgiveness, as it has not yet been finalized. Alexander has been vocal about the high cost of loan forgiveness programs in the past, however. He wrote in a recent white paper, "A basic assumption in any loan program is that the amount borrowed will ultimately be repaid with interest. That is not the case in higher education."

On the House side, PROSPER Act proponents "believe America's veterans and active duty military will have greater access to postsecondary education through the reforms within the PROSPER Act, while also placing market pressure on institutions to lower costs," Woeste said. According to a recent Consumer Financial Protection Bureau analysis, more than 200,000 service members have student loan debt. Leaders of 17 military-oriented organizations, including Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America and Veterans Education Success, pointed to this statistic in a recent letter to Foxx and Alexander. "Student loan debt is of special interest and importance to veterans, who are often older than other college graduates and have family responsibilities that make their student debt burdens particularly onerous," the letter said.

VSO representatives worry that doing away with public service loan forgiveness could steer veterans and their family members away from the military and nonprofit work they may otherwise have considered. "We know that this generation of veterans prioritizes service to their country and community," said Will Hubbard, vice president of government affairs for Student Veterans of America, another organization that has raised concerns about the legislation in its current form. The promise of loan forgiveness not only incentivizes veterans to work in public service careers, but also makes it a realistic option, Hubbard said.

Some VSOs have singled out the Veterans Affairs Department, which has thousands of open jobs. "One of the few recruiting tools VA has is public service loan forgiveness," said Ashlynn Haycock, senior coordinator for education support services for the nonprofit Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors. Haycock said she has worked with many veterans and surviving family members who want to give back by working in mental health or other positions at the VA for which they need advanced degrees. "Public service loan forgiveness is one of the things that they were counting on in that plan," she said. "Cutting that is really a huge blow to veterans, survivors and military-connected students." [Source: ArmyTimes | Natalie Gross | March 14, 2018 ++]

IRS Forgiven Debt Policy Update 02 ► Student Loans

Military veterans and others who become [permanently disabled](#) while they're still repaying federal student loan debt will no longer be hit with a tax bill when that debt is forgiven. The bad news is that the change, part of a massive overhaul of the tax code spelled out by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, is not retroactive. Borrowers whose student loans are forgiven on or after January 1, 2018, due to "[total and permanent disability](#)" no longer have to pay federal income taxes on those forgiven loans. But [disabled](#) borrowers who were granted loan forgiveness before that date will still have to pay. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau offers the following tips to borrowers seeking [total and permanent disability \(TPD\)](#) loan discharges:

- **Have current proof of your disability** from a doctor, the Social Security Administration, or the Veterans Administration.
- **Apply as soon as you can** . If your loans are in default and the government is taking payments out of your social security benefits, those payments will be suspended while your application is under review.
- **Stay in touch with your loan servicer** until your 3-year review period is complete. If you start receiving an income or your [disability](#) determination changes, your forgiveness may be revoked and you may be required to repay the balance your loans (does not apply to [disabled veterans](#)).
- **Ask about other options** . If you're turned down for a [TPD](#) discharge, you may be eligible for another repayment plan.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | March 2, 2018 ++]

VA Home Loan Update 58 ► Second Mortgage

While a second mortgage may not be a preferred financial option, unexpected expenses or other budget crunches may make it a requirement. Troops and veterans seeking an additional mortgage may qualify for a VA-backed loan, even if their property's first mortgage was financed using their VA benefits. There are some hoops to jump through. Here's the a breakdown, from the [VA Lenders Handbook](#):

1. **Lesser loan.** The second mortgage "must be subordinated to the VA-guaranteed loan," per the handbook. In lender parlance, that makes it a "junior lien." Put simply, you can't borrow more on the second go-round than you did for in the first loan.
2. **Purpose-driven.** The loan can be used for closing costs or other purposes related to the first mortgage. It can even be used for a down payment, but only as part of meeting "secondary market requirements of the lender," not to cover down-payment dollars required by VA to make up for a home priced higher than the agency's "reasonable value."
3. **No cash.** While the rest of VA second-mortgage rules leave a bit of wiggle room (with words like "may" and "should"), those using the benefit are explicitly not allowed to get cash back as part of their borrowing.
4. **Rate talk.** Second mortgages can come with a higher interest rate than the first mortgage, but should be within industry standards, per the guidance. That's part of the requirement that whatever deal is made not limit the borrower's ability to sell the house; it's part of an "assumability" provision.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Kevin Lilley | February 13, 2018 ++]

VA Home Loan Update 59 ► Energy Efficient Mortgage Program

Those familiar with the [loan-closing process](#) know that the last thing any participants need or want as they wrap up their paperwork is another clause, codicil or addendum. But VA's Energy Efficient Mortgage program may well be worth the extra effort, even if you're not an eco-warrior. Following through with a bit more red tape could mean \$6,000 or more in additional [borrowing power](#) or, in some cases, cash in your pocket to make certain home [repairs](#). Here are five things to know about the benefit, courtesy of VA's [Lenders Handbook](#) and other VA sources:



Veterans won't need to cover their roof in solar panels to take advantage of VA's energy-efficiency loan program.

- 1. Joint operation.** EEM may sound like a standalone mortgage program, but it's not: It's an add-on to a home-purchase loan or a refinance loan.
- 2. Facts and figures.** Borrowers can tack on an additional \$3,000 to their loans by documenting the planned eco-friendly improvements they'll make (more on those later). They can add up to \$6,000 to the loan if their estimated utility bills will drop low enough to cover the difference in mortgage payments. They can add more than \$6,000 in cases where the improvements will raise the home's value to equal the additional loan amount.
- 3. What's covered?** Solar energy enhancements qualify, but don't think you have to cover your roof in panels to rate this benefit. A range of improvements are outlined in the handbook, from major projects (new furnace or water heater) to less-expensive energy-savers (insulation, weather stripping, and so on).
- 4. IRRRL reality check.** If you're considering an [Interest Rate Reduction Refinancing Loan](#), you could take advantage of the EEM program to make needed home repairs while improving your interest rate. If your furnace is an older model, for instance, a new one likely would qualify as an eco-friendly improvement.
- 5. Cash out.** An IRRRL usually comes without a cash-out option, but veterans can get up to \$6,000 in cash to pay for EEM-covered improvements, providing they're made less than 90 days after the loan closes.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Kevin Lilley | February 20, 2018 ++]

Medicare Card Switch Scam ► How It works

Medicare cards are undergoing a big change to make them more secure. But in the meantime, scammers are (of course!) taking advantage of confusion around the launch.

How the Scam Works

You receive a call from a person claiming to work with Medicare. They are allegedly calling about the new Medicare cards, which will be mailed this spring. The cards will be more secure because they use a "Medicare Beneficiary Identifier" instead of a Social Security number.

The scammer claims that there's a problem with your card. The con artist may say your new card was lost or someone tried to use your ID number. To resolve the situation, the scammer just needs your Social Security number.

In another version, the scammer claims you must pay money to receive your new Medicare card. They may ask you for payment information, so they can "complete the process" for you. They may even ask you to mail them your old card.

How to Avoid Medicare Scams

- **Know how the Medicare card switch works.** Understand that Medicare isn't calling consumers about the card switch. Also, the new Medicare cards are being provided free of charge.
- **Never provide personal information to a stranger.** Don't share personal details with anyone who calls you unsolicited. Do not confirm or give out your full name, address, Social Security number or any other personal information.

For More Information

Learn about similar scams by reading this BBB tip: BBB.org/HealthCareScam. Read more about the new cards and their security benefits on Medicare.gov. If you've fallen victim to this type of scam, you can help others avoid being scammed by filing a report BBB.org/ScamTracker.

[Source: BBB Scam Alert | March 9, 2018 ++]

Making Money After Retirement Update 01 ► 10 More Ways to Do It

So, you're retired — or planning on retiring — and you're looking for ways to keep busy and maybe put a little cash in your pocket. The good news is that your many years of hard work and experience, no matter what field you spent them in, can still be valuable once you retire. But now, you're in a position to leverage those skills in a new way, or try your hand at something completely different. Use the following list of ways to make money as a jumping off point for your next chapter.

1. Doing landscaping or gardening -- Lots of people want beautiful gardens and landscaping around their homes, but most don't have the time or energy to create and maintain it. If you happen to have a green thumb, you can earn money taking care of people's lawns and gardens and making sure their yards are well-manicured throughout the year.

2. Being a handyman/woman -- Home repair services such as fixing plumbing and broken kitchen drawers are always in high demand. Many people don't know how to do these jobs or don't have the time. As a retiree, you can put all the tricks and repair tips you have learned over the years to work and get paid for it at the same time.

3. Altering and fixing clothing -- Contrary to popular belief, people do still repair their clothing — or would like to if they had time. If you can sew on buttons, alter pants or fix a hem, you can tap into the market. Sometimes you can get started by advertising at dry cleaning and laundry businesses.

4. Teaching English -- The market for English language teachers is perennially strong — strong enough that many people, retired and otherwise, support their travels by taking teaching gigs around the world. Nowadays, you could also do the job from the comfort of your own home via your internet connection. Examples of sites that help match teachers and students include Lingoda.com and iTutorGroup, but you can also find clients on freelancing sites like www.upwork.com.

5. Tutoring -- There is always a need for tutors in certain subjects. If you have expertise in a particular field — say, physics or French — you could offer to tutor students in those subjects. There's also a need for people who can simply help kids who are struggling get through their homework. Post a note in the local library offering your tutoring services, spread the word through friends and family, or check out online tutor placement services like www.wyzant.com and www.tutors.com.

6. Providing customer service -- Do you like chatting on the phone? Many companies hire customer service and sales representatives to work from home. You can sometimes choose the hours you want to work, which is helpful if you want to keep your workload to a minimum. For these types of jobs, you usually just need a computer, reliable internet access and a headset and telephone to get started.

7. Taking surveys -- Technology makes it possible to perform a broad range of jobs from your laptop. You can even answer questions online and get paid for it. To learn more about the survey companies that offer these opportunities, check out "[Survey Sites to Turn Extra Minutes Into Extra Money.](#)"

8. Taking a part-time job -- Now that you are retired, you have the freedom to explore jobs that intersect with things you know you enjoy. If you love golf, maybe you should apply for a part-time job in the golf course pro shop. (It may not pay much, but you'd probably get a break on greens fees.) Part-time jobs in bookstores and wine shops can end up offering enjoyable places to spend time and earn money at the same time.

9. Starting a small business -- Retirement may be a good time to start a small business, especially if you've always had an interest in something but weren't able to pursue it before. Use the extra time you have now to follow a passion you have always thought of following. This could mean anything from baking bread to financial planning.

10. Downsizing -- Now might be a good time to go through all your stuff and get rid of clothing, furniture and other items you don't use or need anymore. This is a great way to make some cash and downsize a little at the same time. There are many outlets for selling things locally, such as www.Craigslist.com, as well as consignment websites for designer or collector items that might interest a buyer farther away. Get more ideas here: "[Where to Sell Your Stuff for Top Dollar.](#)"

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Christina Majaski | February 22, 2018 ++]

Tax Burden for California Retired Vets ► As of MAR 2018

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

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: California's state-only sales tax is 7.5 percent. Counties and cities can charge an additional [local sales tax](#) of up to 2.5%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 10% California has 2558 [special sales tax jurisdictions](#) with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax. Combined sales tax rates for California cities and counties can be found at <http://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/taxes-and-fees/sales-use-tax-rates.htm>. Food and prescription drugs are exempt. California has a lower state sales tax than 84.6% of states.

Gasoline Tax: 41.7 cents/gallon. Does not include local option.

Diesel Fuel Tax: 36.0 cents/gallon. Does not include local option.

Cigarette Tax: \$2.87 cents/pack of 20

Cannabis Tax: 15%

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 1.0%; High - 13.3%.

Income Brackets: Ten. Lowest 0 to \$8,014 & Highest \$1,000,000 to \$1,074,996. For joint returns, the taxes are twice the tax imposed on half the income. Bracket levels adjusted for inflation each year. Exemption credits phase

out for single taxpayers by \$6 for each \$2,500 of AGI above \$178,706 and for MFJ by \$12 for each \$2,500 of AGI above \$357,417. The credit cannot be reduced to below zero

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$111; Married – \$222; Dependent \$344

Tax Credits: Single - \$99; Married – \$198; Dependents – \$326; 65 years of age or older – \$99

Standard Deduction: Single – \$4,129; Married filing jointly – \$8,258

Medical/Dental Deduction: Same as Federal taxes

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security and Railroad Retirement benefits are exempt. There is a 2.5% tax on early distributions and qualified pensions. All private, local, state and federal pensions are fully taxed.

Retired Military Pay: Follows federal tax rules.

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

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

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

Property Taxes

Property is assessed at 100% of full cash value. The maximum amount of tax on real estate is limited to 1% of the full cash value. Under the homestead program, the first \$7,000 of the full value of a homeowner's dwelling is exempt. The Franchise Tax Board's Homeowner Assistance program, which provided property tax relief to persons who were blind, disabled, or at least 62 years old, and met certain minimum annual income thresholds, has been halted. The state budgets approved for the 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 fiscal years deleted funding for this Homeowner and Renter Assistance Program that once provided cash reimbursement of a portion of the property taxes that residents paid on their home. For more information, call the Franchise Tax Board at 1-800-852-5711, or visit.

The California constitution provides a \$7,000 reduction in the taxable value for a qualifying owner-occupied home. The home must have been the principal place of residence of the owner on the lien date, January 1st. To claim the exemption, the homeowner must make a one-time filing of a simple form with the county assessor where the property is located. The claim form, BOE-266, Claim for Homeowners' Property Tax Exemption, is available from the [county assessor](#). Go to <http://www.boe.ca.gov/proptaxes/pdf/pub29.pdf> for more information on the property tax program.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax. In 2003 the estate tax was repealed for those deceased after January 1, 2005. However, there is a limited California estate tax related to federal estate tax collection.

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>.

-o-o-o-o-

For further information visit the California Franchise Tax Board or the California State Board of Equalization site <http://www.boe.ca.gov>. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-alabama-iowa#CALIFORNIA> | March 2018 ++]



Notes of Interest ► 01 thru 15 MAR 2018

- **Philippines.** The Philippines Department of National Defense has formally cancelled its contract with the Canadian government to procure 16 new Bell Helicopters 412EPI medium-lift helicopters for the Philippine Air Force. Philippines believes it doesn't owe Canada a justification for the planned procurement.
- **Nuclear Arsenals.** President Donald Trump 12 FEB had a message for countries building their nuclear arsenals: "We're increasing arsenals of virtually every weapon," the president said during a meeting with governors and mayors. "We're modernizing and creating a brand-new nuclear force. And, frankly, we have to do because others are doing it. If they stop, we'll stop."
- **Illegal Immigration.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/embed/2QOwAJ2ez6U?rel=0> dated 4/28/2016 and listen to what Jason Chaffetz (R-UT), Chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, disclosed about what Department of Homeland Security is doing about the illegals it apprehend who have been convicted of crimes. And it gets little to no press.
- **2nd amendment Rights.** Check out <https://nickfreitasforsenate.com/2nd-vid.aspx?pid=gn01a> and listen to what Virginia House of Delegates Rep Nickolas Freitas (R-30) has to say about holding an open debate over Gun control.
- **Great Lakes Ice.** At https://youtu.be/wiD5T_MXZIA you can watch a Coast Guard cutter churning through the ice.
- **\$0.99 Sale.** Go to <https://youtu.be/LE3Ep8wXMDM> and check out the video on 7-Eleven's \$0.99 cents sale with a new twist.
- **Agent Orange.** During the Vietnam War, the U.S military engaged in an aggressive program of chemical warfare code named Operation Ranch Hand. From May 1960 to May 1971, the U.S. military sprayed a range of herbicides across more than 4.5 million acres of Vietnam and Southeast Asia to destroy the forest cover and food crops used by enemy North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops. A listing is available at http://users.neo.registeredsite.com/0/1/2/20893210/assets/Agent_Orange_Missions.pdf of the date each mission took place, the location where the herbicide was sprayed, the chemical used and the amount sprayed. Use the information below to help with your disability claim.
- **Vet Unemployment.** The percentage of post-9/11 veterans who are unemployed is the lowest it's been in the last decade, according to federal data released 12 MAR. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' February figures show an unemployment rate of 3.3 percent for the youngest generation of veterans, matching December's all-time low and marking a drop from 4.1 percent in January.
- **Stephen Hawkins.** The world has lost a beautiful and brilliant mind with the passing of Stephen Hawking and these 10 meaningful quotes at <https://youtu.be/uzaZnAjGg4s> at are a tribute to him.



[Source: Various | February 28, 2018 ++]

Gun Deaths ► 2016 Breakdown of U.S. Deaths

Frontlines of Freedom encourages all citizens who wish to do so to be armed—and be trained in the safe use of firearms. However, firearm ownership is under attack. Here are some statistics from 2016:

-o-o-O-o-o-

In 2016 there were 30,000 gun related deaths per year by firearms, thus 0.000000925% of the population died from gun related actions that year. To put them in perspective as compared to other causes of death, a breakdown of those 30,000 deaths was:

- 65% of those deaths were by suicide which would never be prevented by gun laws.
- 15% were by law enforcement in the line of duty and justified.
- 17% were through criminal activity, gang and drug related or mentally ill persons – gun violence.
- 3% were accidental discharge deaths.

So technically, "gun violence" deaths in 2016 were not 30,000, but drops to 5,100. Still too many? Well, first, how were those deaths spanned across the nation in 2016?

- 480 homicides (9.4%) were in Chicago,
- 344 homicides (6.7%) were in Baltimore.
- 333 homicides (6.5%) were in Detroit.
- 119 homicides (2.3%) were in Washington D.C. (a 54% increase over prior years)

So basically, 25% of all gun crime happened in just 4 cities. All four of those cities have strict gun laws, so it is not the lack of law that is the root cause. This basically leaves 3,825 for the entire rest of the nation, or about 75 deaths per state. That is an average because some States have much higher rates than others. For example, California had 1,169 and Alabama had 1. Now, who has the strictest gun laws by far? California, of course, but understand, so it is not guns causing this. It is a crime rate spawned by the number of criminal persons residing in those cities and states. So if all cities and states are not created equally, then there must be something other than the tool causing the gun deaths.

So, the question is, do we wish to disarm all law-abiding citizens—many of whom do protect themselves from crime with their firearms—in order to deal with this? [Source: Frontlines of Freedom Newsletter | March 8, 2018 ++]

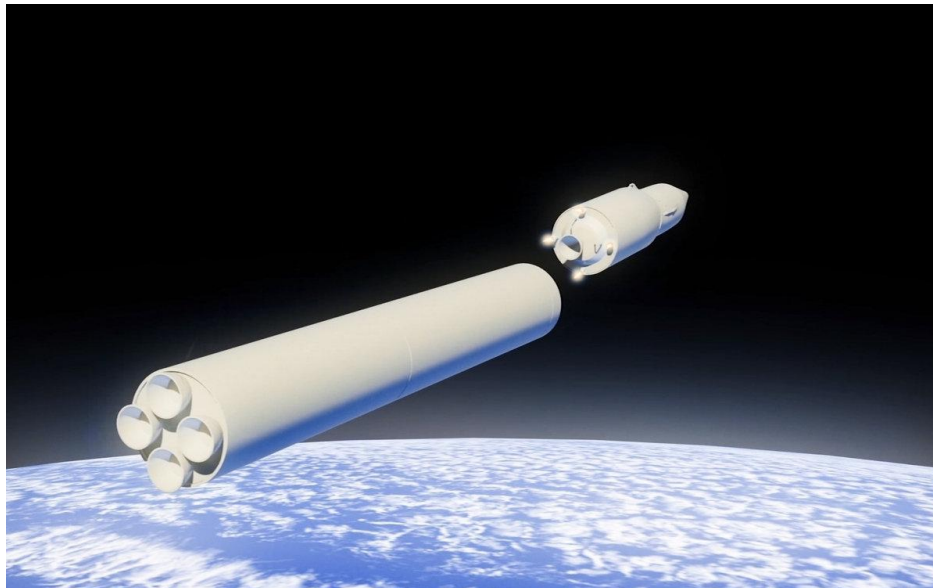
Gun Deaths Update 01 ► More Thoughts on Gun Control

- In 1911, Turkey established gun control. From 1915 to 1917, 1.5 million Armenians, unable to defend themselves, were rounded up and exterminated.
- In 1929, the Soviet Union established gun control. From 1929 to 1953, 20 million dissidents, unable to defend themselves, were rounded up and exterminated.
- In 1935, China established gun control. From 1948 to 1952, 20 million political dissidents, unable to defend themselves were rounded up and exterminated.
- In 1938, Germany established gun control. From 1939 to 1945, a total of 13 million Jews and others who were unable to defend themselves were rounded up and exterminated.
- In 1964, Guatemala established gun control. From 1964 to 1981, 100,000 Mayan Indians, unable to defend themselves, were rounded up and exterminated.
- Uganda established gun control in 1970. From 1971 to 1979, 300,000 Christians, unable to defend themselves, were rounded up and exterminated.
- In 1956, Cambodia established gun control. From 1975 to 1977, one million educated people, unable to defend themselves, were rounded up and exterminated.

About fifty-six million defenseless people were rounded up and exterminated in the 20th Century because of gun control. Guns in the hands of honest citizens save lives and property and, yes, gun-control laws adversely affect only the law-abiding citizens. With guns, we are "citizens". Without them, we are "subjects". During WWII the Japanese debated not invading America because they knew most Americans were armed. By the way: Everyone in Switzerland is armed and they have the lowest crime rate in the world. [Source: Frontlines of Freedom Newsletter | March 8, 2018 ++]

Russia Nuclear Weapons ► **Latest Developments**

Following Russian President Vladimir Putin's unveiling of several new types of nuclear weapons 1 MAR, Westerners were left scratching their heads and wondering if he was bluffing. But in an interview published by the military newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star) on 12 MAR, Deputy Defence Minister Yury Borisov assured them: "This is no bluff." Borisov was specifically referring to the hypersonic boost-glide system **Avangard**, also known as 4202, one of the systems mentioned by Putin. The announcement itself was not a revelation. Russia has been testing hypersonic technologies similar to the U.S. gliders since at least 2004, and the Soviets began playing with the technology in the late 1980s. "Avangard is well-tested," Borisov said. "Its development was not without difficulty because the temperature on the surface of the glide vehicle reaches 2,000 degrees Celsius. It really flies within a plasma."



A computer simulation shows the Avangard hypersonic vehicle being released from booster rockets. President Vladimir Putin says Russia has developed a range of new nuclear weapons, claiming they can't be intercepted.

Borisov said the major stumbling blocks to Avangard's development were related to control surfaces and heat shielding for the vehicle. Borisov, who is in charge of defense procurement, stressed that solutions were found and that "we already have a contract for the mass production of this system." He also mentioned that Russia's new heavy intercontinental ballistic missile, the 200-ton **Sarmat**, would be capable of launching a hypersonic vehicle — suggesting that Sarmat will double as the launch vehicle for Avangard. Borisov's interview comes a day after the Defence Ministry published a video of another Russian hypersonic system, **Kinzhal**, conducting a test flight. Taken together, it seems the Defence Ministry wants to underscore Putin's message and ensure the announced systems are real — and not bluffs. Borisov walked down the list of six new systems announced by Putin.

Kinzhal is a more basic hypersonic weapon and is essentially a heavily modified Iskander short-range ballistic missile launched from a MiG-31 supersonic interceptor. The video blurred out shots of the engine. But as Borisov told Krasnaya Zvezda: "It is probably clear to everyone, from a technical point of view, how all this works." According to Borisov, Kinzhal can reach Mach 10 and maneuver during hypersonic flight. Its range has previously been reported to be 2,000 kilometers. Borisov said "the first prototypes have already been tested and placed on duty. "So this has long been no fantasy," he said. Borisov also insisted, though it comes as no surprise, that testing was well-underway for the Sarmat ICBM. As for the nuclear-powered cruise missile that turned so many heads, Borisov said the design last year underwent "integration testing" that showed the concept is feasible. The nuclear-powered engine has not, it seems, actually been tested yet. [Source: DefenseNews | Matthew Bodner | March 13, 2018 ++]

National Suicide Hotline ► 3-Digit Number A Step Closer

As President Donald Trump calls for more help for those with mental health issues in the wake of the Parkland high school shooting, Congress is considering a bill that would create a three-digit suicide and mental health hotline. Introducing the legislation on the Senate floor in May, Sen. Orrin Hatch said constituents have told him that friends and family who've struggled with suicidal thoughts don't always know where to turn. "To make matters worse, the national suicide hotline number, **1-800-273-TALK**, is not an intuitive or easy number to remember, particularly for those experiencing a mental health emergency," the Utah Republican said.

Hatch gave the example of one young Utah woman who tried to call her counselor before her suicide -- but couldn't reach her. "I believe that by making the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline system more user-friendly and accessible, we can save thousands of lives by helping people find the help they need when they need it most," he said. The suicide rate in the United States has seen sharp increases in recent years. It's now the 10th leading cause of death in the country, according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Young people are particularly vulnerable: In Hatch's home state of Utah, suicide is the leading cause of death among teens. The existing crisis phone line, and the crisis text line, is staffed by a mix of paid professionals and unpaid volunteers trained in crisis and suicide intervention. When people use it, the risk of suicide declines sharply, studies show. The confidential environment, the 24-hour accessibility, a caller's ability to hang up at any time and the person-centered care have helped its success, advocates say.

The bill would require the Federal Communications Commission to work with the Health and Human Services Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs to study the existing system, suggest ways to improve it -- and recommend a new three-digit number. The bill passed the Senate unanimously in November, and the House Energy and Commerce Committee is considering an identical bill with strong bipartisan support, according to its sponsors. "Too many of us have experienced the tragic loss of life and heartbreak that results from suicide. Those who have experienced this tragedy have expressed to me that, while there are many resources for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis, it can be difficult to find these resources during a time of need," bill co-sponsor and Utah Republican Rep. Chris Stewart said. **"The National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act** works to streamline and provide easy access to potentially life-saving resources."

Renewed attention on the current number has increased calls, according to program managers. Rapper Logic put 1-800-273-Talk in a song. After he performed it on MTV and while surrounded by survivors at the Grammy Awards in January, there was an immediate spike in calls. Two million people called the crisis line in 2017, up from 1.5 million in 2016. In January, calls were up 60% from January 2017. "We know it works" "People want access to these lines. We have seen calls increase every year since they have been in operation, and this is an extraordinary time in which more people are reaching out for help, and we are very pleased with that because we know it works, but it does come with some challenges," said the Lifeline's executive director, John Draper.

The challenges, according to John Madigan, vice president of public policy at the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, are funding and infrastructure. He hopes the new legislation will improve that quickly. "What we have now is a critical nationwide system, but as you might imagine, it is being overwhelmed," Madigan said. When callers are able to connect, there is a 76% de-escalation in risk of suicide once they start talking and working collaboratively with counselors. But, he added, "picture the little boy with the finger in the dike." Madigan thinks a budget for the civilian crisis line "needs to be ramped up substantially." He agrees that a streamlined number would be a big improvement. "Three digits, if you are in crisis, would help. Everyone, even 1- and 2-year-olds, know to call 911" if there's an emergency. "It's high time we make it as easy as possible to get help." [Source: CNN | Jen Christensen | March 5, 2018 ++]

Men vs. Women ► **How To Make Each Other Happy**



How to make a man Happy:

Feed him, sleep with him, leave him in peace, don't check his phone messages, and don't bother him with his movements. So what's so hard about that?

How to make a woman happy:

It's really not too difficult ... To make a woman happy a man only needs to be:

A friend, a companion, a lover, a brother, a father, a master, a chef, an electrician, a carpenter, a decorator, a stylist, a sexologist, a gynecologist, a pest exterminator, a psychiatrist, a healer, a good listener, an organizer, a good father, very clean, sympathetic, athletic, warm, attentive, gallant, intelligent, funny, creative, tender, strong, understanding, tolerant, prudent, ambitious, capable, courageous, determined, true, dependable, and passionate.

WITHOUT FORGETTING TO:

- Give her compliments regularly,
- Go shopping with her.
- Be honest,
- Be very rich,
- Not stress her out,
- Not look at other girls,

AND AT THE SAME TIME, YOU MUST ALSO:

- Give her lots of attention.
- Give her lots of time, especially time to herself.
- Give her lots of space, never worrying about where she goes.

BUT MOST OF ALL IT IS VERY IMPORTANT: Never to forget

- Birthdays,
- Anniversaries,
- Valentine's Day
- Arrangements she makes

National Anthem Update 08 ► Military Movie Theaters

In May, 2007 Chaplain Jim Higgins attended a showing of 'Superman 3' at LSA Anaconda located on the Ballad Airport in Iraq, north of Baghdad. They have a large auditorium that is used for movies as well as memorial services and other large gatherings. As is the custom at all military bases, attendees stand to attention when The National Anthem begins before the main feature. All was going well until three-quarters of the way through The National Anthem, the music stopped.

Now, what would happen if this occurred with 1,000 18-to-22-year-olds back in the States? You can imagine that there would be hoots, catcalls, laughter, a few rude comments, and everyone would sit down and yell for the movie to begin. Of course, that is, only if they had stood for The National Anthem in the first place. In Iraq, 1,000 soldiers continued to stand at attention, eyes fixed forward. The music started again, and the soldiers continued to quietly stand at attention. Again, though, at the same point, the music stopped.

What would you expect 1,000 soldiers standing at attention to do? Frankly, Chaplain Higgins expected some laughter, and everyone would eventually sit down and wait for the movie to start. No! You could have heard a pin drop while every soldier continued to stand at attention. Suddenly, there was a lone voice from the front of the auditorium, then a dozen voices, and soon the room was filled with the voices of a thousand soldiers, finishing where the recording left off: "And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still there. Oh, say, does that Star Spangled Banner yet wave, o'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave."

It was the most inspiring moment the Chaplain Higgins had in Iraq, and he wanted you to know what kind of U.S. Soldiers are serving you. [Source: <https://www.truthorfiction.com/iraq-anthem> | Rich McMeekin | March 2, 2018 ++]

Funerals Update 01 ► Trends | A Few Interesting Options Worth Investigating

Traditional funerals are on their death bed. More people are skipping the two days of visitation, religious service and burial of an embalmed body in a casket that can cost as much as a used car, and instead opting for funerals that are easier on the planet and the budget. They're going for more personal rituals, too, that break the rigid customs that became the norm in the 20th century. Here's a look at what's out there.

Cremation -- Cremation has become the new normal. Last year, cremation surpassed traditional burial for the first time in the United States. That's a huge milestone and marks a sea change in funeral traditions. In 1970, just 5 percent of people opted for cremation. This year, about 55 percent of those who die will be cremated, says the Cremation Association of North America, and by 2030, that number is predicted to rise to 71 percent. The main reason people are being burned instead of embalmed? Cremation is a lot cheaper, costing a third as much as a regular burial. It also saves natural resources, like land for a burial, and wood or steel for a coffin.

Water Cremation -- The next wave in cremation is a process called alkaline hydrolysis, a.k.a. liquefying a body. It works like this: The corpse is put in a vat of solution that dissolves everything but the bones, which are crushed into ashes and returned to the family. It's a more eco-friendly process than flame cremation, which spews as much carbon dioxide into the air as a 600-mile drive. Alkaline hydrolysis is legal in 15 states, and so new that there aren't statistics available for how many people are choosing it. It's comparable in cost to a regular cremation.

Green Burial -- This trend of the 21st century is straight out of the 19th century: [Green burials](#), in which an unembalmed corpse is placed into a biodegradable container and buried directly in the ground. Nature does the rest. Its growing popularity is driven by concern about the environmental impact of burying corpses pumped with toxic embalming fluids, and a desire to cut the massive amount of natural resources used in traditional burials. Green burial is better for the budget, too, costing less than half as much as a traditional funeral. "It's a return to the simple funeral customs that used to be common," says Kate Kalanick, executive director of the board of the Green Burial Council. The GBC doesn't keep stats on how many green burials are happening in the U.S., but Kalanick says they've seen their list of green burial providers grow from just one when they launched in 2005 to more than 400 this year.

At-Home Funerals -- There's a growing movement of people who are skipping the mortician and caring for their dead loved ones themselves. Instead of whisking the body off to a funeral home and letting others handle it, the

family washes and dresses it, has the viewing at home, and handles the burial themselves. It's no frills and very personal. "It's about the family taking back the care of the loved ones in death," says Ed Bixby, owner of Steelmantown Cemetery in Steelmantown, N.J., who specializes in helping people conduct at-home funerals. It's also much more affordable than a traditional funeral. The National Home Funeral Alliance, a nonprofit that educates the public about DIY funerals, says an at-home funeral can cost as little as \$200 if you bury your loved one out in the yard. For those not up to DIY-ing an entire funeral — like the part where you'll need to keep the body in ice packs — you can hire a funeral home or other specialists to help with some of the steps.

Therapy Dogs -- Some funeral homes have added dogs to their staff to comfort mourners. At Olson Funeral Home and Cremation Service in Sheboygan, Wisc., Olli, a young cockapoo, cuddles with families as they plan funerals. "Families love having him here," says owner James Olson. "It takes their minds off what we are doing just for a moment." There are no statistics on how many pups are working at funeral homes, but a survey from the National Funeral Directors of America found that nearly 35 percent of Americans are "extremely interested" in having a [therapy dog](#) at their funeral. So it's reasonable to expect to see funeral homes answering that need.

Cremains Creativity -- Ashes to ashes, dust to, um, shotgun shells? There are a slew of companies offering more interesting things to do with loved ones' cremains than leave them in an urn. A British company will press them into a vinyl record with a custom song. Your local tattoo artist can mix them into tattoo ink and give you a custom tat in their honor. And an Alabama company will put them into the ammo of your choice so you can blast them to the afterlife in a one-gun salute. Because scattering ashes is so 2001.

[Source: AARP | Leanne Pott | November 20, 2017 ++]

One Word Essays ► Friendship



Quotable Quotes 01 ► Things to Think About

~ Betsy Salkind...

Men are like linoleum floors. Lay 'em right and you can walk all over them for thirty years.

~ **Jean Kerr..**

The only reason they say 'Women and children first' is to test the strength of the lifeboats.

~ **Prince Philip...**

When a man opens a car door for his wife, it's either a new car or a new wife.

~ **Harrison Ford...**

Wood burns faster when you have to cut and chop it yourself.

~ **Spike Milligan...**

The best cure for Sea Sickness, is to sit under a tree.

~ **Jean Rostand...**

Kill one man and you're a murderer, kill a million and you're a conqueror

~**Arnold Schwarzenegger...**

Having more money doesn't make you happier. I have 50 million dollars but I'm just as happy as when I had 48 million.

~ **WH Auden...**

We are here on earth to do good unto others. What the others are here for, I have no idea.

~ **Jonathan Katz...**

In hotel rooms, I worry. I can't be the only guy who sits on the furniture naked.

~ **Robert Benchley...**

I have kleptomania, but when it gets bad, I take something for it.

~ **John Glenn...**

As I hurtled through space, one thought kept crossing my mind - every part of this rocket was supplied by the lowest bidder.

~ **David Letterman...**

America is the only country where a significant proportion of the population believes that professional wrestling is real but the moon landing was faked.

~ **Old Italian proverb..**

After the game, the King and the pawn go into the same box.

[Source: Cane.com | Chris Cane | January 3, 2013 ++]

Billy Graham ► **The Story Behind His Casket**

The Rev. Billy Graham, who touched many lives, died on February 21, 2018 at the age of 99. Inmates at Louisiana State Penitentiary built his casket at the request of his son Franklin Graham. They built it inside a small prison wood-working shop, tucked away from the main complex of America's largest maximum-security penitentiary. Two of the three men were sentenced to life for murder and the other is serving more than 30 years for armed robbery. The prison is formally named Louisiana State Penitentiary but everyone calls it "Angola" – built on land that was a slave plantation, home to thousands of people who were forcibly taken from Angola, their birth country in Africa.



The closed casket of Billy Graham lies in repose in his childhood home on Charlotte's Billy Graham Evangelistic Association property.

Angola, with its 18,000-acre footprint in the Lower Mississippi Delta, houses men who have committed the most violent of crimes. Most of the more than 5,600 inmates will die behind bars – either serving a life sentence or by execution. In many cases, inmates’ families cannot afford to have their remains shipped or to pay for a funeral. For years, Angola buried these prisoners inside crate-like boxes, not much sturdier than cardboard. Sometimes, the home-made coffins fell apart. A new warden decided that wouldn’t do.

A decade before Graham’s ministry reached Angola, the prison was considered one of the toughest, bloodiest jails in the country. Burl Cain, a new warden hired in 1995, is credited with expanding Angola’s education and work training programs. His “moral rehabilitation” philosophy called for inmates to work unless they were physically unable and to practice spirituality or religion. Cain himself chose Jesus. But, being a state-run facility, Angola had to welcome all religions. Steeples and interfaith chapels went up. Some inmates became Christian music DJs at Angola’s radio station. Others attended seminary. The prison started a hospice end-of-life program for inmates to care for the aging and dying among them.

Angola also has its own burial ceremony. Prison ministers, graduates of Angola’s seminary, lead a prayer service. Family and friends from outside the prison are invited to attend. A prisoner’s body is carried by a horse-drawn carriage hearse to Point Lookout cemetery. Angola has two cemeteries now – the original Point Lookout is full. During one of these burials, early in Cain’s tenure, he stood at the foot of a prisoner’s grave. He watched as inmates began to lower the coffin into the ground. But the box, with the man’s body inside, fell apart, remembers Gary Young, assistant warden at Angola who has worked at the prison for nearly 30 years.

Young said Cain believed that prisoners who died at Angola had paid their debt to society and deserved a dignified funeral service and proper burial. Cain started a casket-building program at the prison – and he turned to an inmate known as “Grasshopper” to design a reliable casket. Richard Lee “Grasshopper” Liggett, the oldest of four children, grew up in Newton, Kansas, a small city about 25 miles north of Wichita. He had a knack for mischief and occasionally ran away from home, said his brother John Liggett. But, John said, mostly they lived a quiet life. The brothers would go to the dairy farm where their stepfather worked and help round up cows and wash milk bottles. At home, they counted train cars as they passed on a track near their house.

Before his time in prison, Richard Liggett wasn’t a religious person, John Liggett said. Discussion of God or religion “just wasn’t our thing,” he said. When John Liggett turned 17, he joined the Army and left Kansas. That same year, he’d later learn, his brother was charged with murder and kidnapping. In 1971, 19-year-old Richard Liggett and another man were planning to rob a family late one Friday night, according to a news story from the

Wichita Eagle. When they arrived on the family's farm, police told the newspaper, Liggett and 29-year-old Dwight Kafka killed a man, then held five members of the family hostage while trying to hide the man's body.

Both men were convicted and sentenced to life in prison. Liggett served the first three years of his sentence at Kansas' Hutchinson Correctional Facility. Then he was transferred to Angola. There, he learned carpentry and leather-working, Liggett's brother told the Observer. In prison Richard picked up the nickname "Grasshopper" – he was so skinny, he could hide in the grass – and became a master carpenter in Angola's woodworking shop. Building a casket took about three days. That's what Liggett was doing in 2005 when Franklin Graham came to Angola.

The Graham family has donated more than \$200,000 to help build chapels and support prison ministry at Angola. When Cain opened the prison gates to preachers like Franklin Graham, the change among prisoners was evident, says Young. "Moral rehabilitation," he said, is as much as about changing hearts for the good as it is teaching an Angola inmate a trade. The prison wanted to host Billy Graham but by the early 2000s, the evangelist was unable to make the trip. His son Franklin, though, visited several times. So did his daughter Ruth.

A tour of Angola in 2005 took Franklin Graham to the woodworking shop, where he was moved by the simple dignity of the caskets and the inmates' care in building them. According to Young, who was on the tour that day, Franklin said his father was a "simple man with a simple message," and would want to be laid to rest in a simple casket. Franklin Graham asked Cain to have Angola carpenters make a casket for his mother, Ruth Bell Graham, and his father, and to burn the builders' names into the wood. The cost: \$215 each. He declined Cain's offer to use a higher-grade wood for the Grahams. Ruth Bell Graham died in June 2007 and was buried in one of the Angola caskets.

Richard Liggett didn't get to see the family receive the casket he'd built for her, or to see her funeral – he died three months earlier from lung and liver cancer. Prison officials shipped Liggett's body to his family in Kansas. They sent with him a casket – one of the last ones Liggett had built before he was too sick to work in the shop. John Liggett believes his brother's heart was changed at Angola because he went to church and heard a tale of redemption. In a box of papers, discovered at their mother's house after Richard Liggett died, his brother found dozens of certificates from Angola. The papers show Liggett was active in church, studied the Bible and shared his religious views with other inmates. "My brother," he said, "was probably saved by Billy Graham."

As Liggett's health declined in 2005 and 2006, other inmates were brought in to help build the caskets. At least four other inmates, whose names aren't on Billy Graham's casket, had a hand in building it, said Young, the assistant warden. David Bacon, convicted of murder in 1988 and sent to Angola to serve a life sentence, was one of them. Bacon told the Observer he grew up estranged from his stepfather and mother. He didn't know his biological father until he was 12. "This comes from hindsight: I was looking for love, guidance, acceptance, approval," Bacon said. "When you're young, you'll do anything to get it.

I couldn't get that from my father." Instead, Bacon filled his life with drugs and alcohol, he said. By age 24, he had no job and his wife had left him, taking their two young daughters. In 1988, Bacon and his stepfather killed a man in Baton Rouge, according to court documents. At Angola, he entered substance abuse counseling and Alcoholics Anonymous. He earned his GED, took public speaking courses and participated in anger management classes. Prison was the unlikely place he found faith, Bacon said. "I had never really had a relationship with God or Jesus," Bacon said. "But after a few years at Angola, I began to soul-search and make those changes."

In Billy Graham's preaching, Bacon heard a message of redemption, he said, and his newfound faith filled a hole in his heart he had barely realized was there. Graham's teachings, Bacon said, showed him God wasn't looking down at him inside Angola with judgment. "They showed us the love of God," Bacon said. "Nobody is beyond redemption. I've been redeemed." Bacon was awarded clemency and released from Angola in December 2016. He lives in Mississippi and says he's established relationships with his brother, his two daughters – now 34 and 31 – and four grandchildren. He has a job remodeling homes and says he's been thinking about trying to build caskets again. On 28 FEB, he watched television coverage of Graham lying in honor in the U.S. Capitol. Bacon remembers

the smoothness of the cabinet-grade plywood and the smell of the wood stain as he helped build Billy Graham's casket. "It was," he says, "a great honor and a privilege."

In addition to Liggett, Krolowitz, and Bacon the Observer was able to identify the other four inmates who helped in building Billy Ghramh's casket. They were:

- **Clarence "Mr. Bud" E. Wilkerson**, of Arkansas, was convicted of aggravated kidnapping and served 47 years at Angola. He died Feb. 13, 2018 at age 78. He's buried at Angola's Point Lookout Cemetery, in a casket built by fellow Angola prisoners. Wilkerson was a machinist who made the brass hardware components for caskets.
- **Gerald Grabert** serving a life sentence at Angola for second-degree murder.
- **Royal Thompkins** serving a life sentence for two counts of second-degree murder. Thompkins worked with Liggett to draft the original plans for Angola caskets.
- **Clifford Ray Bowman**, of Louisiana, convicted of murder in 1985 for killing his father-in-law. Bowman died in 2009 at age 55. He served a life sentence at Angola and attended the prison's Baptist seminary.

[Source: Charlotte Observer | Anna Douglas| March 1, 2018 ++]

What's Inside ► Hand, 9V Battery, Fireworks Shell, & Mature Hedge



Brain Teaser ► Grandmas and Trolls

You are on your way to visit your Grandma, who lives at the end of the valley. It's her birthday, and you want to give her the cakes you've made.

Between your house and her house, you have to cross 7 bridges, and as it goes in the land of make believe, there is a troll under every bridge! Each troll, quite rightly, insists that you pay a troll toll. Before you can cross their bridge, you have to give them half of the cakes you are carrying, but as they are kind trolls, they each give you back a single cake.

How many cakes do you have to leave home with to make sure that you arrive at Grandma's with exactly 2 cakes?



Vinegar Update 01 ► Multiple Uses | Grooming, Health, & House Cleaning

Grooming

- 1. Hair care** -- Some people swear by using a mixture of cider vinegar and baking soda instead of shampoo. Others swear at it, because apparently it doesn't work for everyone. Do an internet search for the basics and try it for yourself.
- 2. Hair rinse** -- Condition with a 50/50 mix of cider vinegar and water. Wait a few minutes, then rinse well.
- 3. Dandruff killer** -- Do a weekly scalp treatment with straight cider vinegar. Leave it on for up to 15 minutes, then rinse well.
- 4. Skin toner** -- Mix one part cider vinegar to two parts water (more water if your skin is sensitive) and dab onto your face after washing.
- 5. Deodorant** -- Sounds counterintuitive, but users swear that the smell goes away quickly – and that the vinegar keeps odor-producing bacteria from growing. Either white or cider vinegar can be used, but try it on a small area first to see if irritation develops.
- 6. Clean the loofah** -- Soak the rough sponge-like piece of plant fibre which you use to scrub your body in a 50/50 vinegar and water mix, then rinse well.
- 7. Brighten your smile** -- Brush with a paste of two parts cider vinegar to one part baking soda a few times each week. Or mix 1 teaspoon cider vinegar into a glass of water and rinse your teeth for up to 60 seconds.
- 8. Prepare for a mani-pedi** -- Soak a cotton ball in vinegar and treat your nails before polishing them. The clean surface will hold the color longer.

Health

- 1. Combat sore throat** -- Mix a tablespoon of cider vinegar and a teaspoon of salt in a glass of warm water, then gargle with it. Yep, it'll taste weird, but the acid should help kill germs in your throat.
 - 2. Soothe itching** -- Dab vinegar onto bug bites to kill the irritation. The smell goes away — and so does the itch!
 - 3. Sting relief** -- Attacked by a bee or wasp? Dab on vinegar.
 - 4. Foot care, part 1** -- Kill the fungus that causes athlete's foot by soaking your feet in a half-vinegar and half-water solution.
 - 5. Foot care, part 2** -- Make that vinegar-and-water mixture with warm water and soak your feet for at least 20 minutes. It's soothing and also helps remove dead skin.
 - 6. Foot care, part 3** -- Nail fungus can turn your toes into horror shows. Apply vinegar with a cotton swab, and you may see some relief. If this isn't sufficient, however, consider seeing your doctor.
- Cleaning house

House Cleaning

- 1. Floors** -- Mop with a 50/50 mix of vinegar and water. The vinegar smell will dissipate, but you also can add a drop or two of essential oil to the water.
- 2. All-purpose cleaner** -- A 50/50 mix of vinegar and water works on counters, stovetops, bathroom fixtures and tile, and the range hood. If the grease is really stubborn, use vinegar straight from the bottle.
- 3. Keep drains open** -- Tap half a cup of baking soda down the drain, then pour in half a cup of vinegar. Enjoy the fizzing and bubbling for a few minutes. Follow with a teakettle's worth of boiling water, then let hot water run from the tap for a while. Do this once a month or so.
- 4. De-gunk shower heads** -- Is mineral buildup impeding the shower spray? Fill a small, sturdy plastic bag with vinegar and rubber-band it to the shower head for a couple of hours.
- 5. Soap scum buster** -- Spray a 50/50 mix of vinegar and Dawn dish detergent on the tub, wait a couple of minutes and wipe. Rinse thoroughly.

- 6. Streak-free shine** -- Mix vinegar and water in a spray bottle to clean mirrors and windows. Save money on paper towels by wiping with sheets of newspaper.
- 7. Clean the toilet** -- Add two cups of vinegar to the toilet bowl and let it soak overnight. That should keep away water rings.
- 8. Clean sinks and bathtubs** -- Scrub with full-strength vinegar, then rinse well. If hard-water stains have developed in the tub, pour in 3 cups of vinegar and fill the rest of the way with hot water. In four hours, drain the tub and scrub off the rings. Then, rinse well.
- 9. Clean shower-door tracks** -- Carefully fill the tracks with vinegar and let it stand for a few hours. Then, scrub with an old toothbrush.
- 10. Clean the shower curtain** -- Is mildew developing along the hem of your plastic curtain? Launder it along with a few towels using half a cup of your usual detergent and half a cup of baking soda. Then, add 1 cup of vinegar to the first rinse. Take out the curtain before the spin cycle starts — it'll be drippy — and hang to dry.
- 11. Shine fixtures** -- Use vinegar on a soft cloth — a piece of worn-out sheet or an old T-shirt works well — to wipe away soap scum.
- 12. Banish crayon** -- Have the kids' coloring projects gone off the pages and onto the floor? Vinegar should take care of it. This also works on ink.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Donna Freedman | March 7, 2018 ++]

Where There's a Will, There's a Way ► 12



Brain Teaser Answer ► **Grandmas and Trolls**

Two. At each bridge you are required to give half of your cakes, and you receive one back. Which leaves you with 2 cakes after every bridge.

Have You Heard? ► Older Bud-weiser | The Cynical Philosopher

A woman decides to have a face lift for her 50th birthday. She spends \$15,000 and feels pretty good about the results. On her way home, she stops at a news stand to buy a newspaper. Before leaving, she says to the clerk, 'I hope you don't mind my asking, but how old do you think I am. 'About 32,' is the reply.' 'Nope! I'm exactly 50,' the woman says happily.

A little while later she goes into McDonald's and asks the counter girl the very same question. The girl replies, 'I'd guess about 29.' The woman replies with a big smile, 'Nope, I'm 50.'

Now she's feeling really good about herself. She stops at a candy shop on her way down the street. She goes up to the counter to get some mints and asks the assistant the same burning question. The clerk responds, 'Oh, I'd say 30.' Again she proudly responds, 'I'm 50, but thank you!'

While waiting for the bus to go home, she asks an old man waiting next to her the same question. He replies, 'Lady, I'm 87 and my eyesight is going. Although, when I was young there was a sure-fire way to tell how old a woman was. It sounds very forward, but it requires you to let me put my hands under your bra. Then, and only then I can tell you EXACTLY how old you are.'

They wait in silence on the empty street until her curiosity gets the better of her. She finally blurts out, 'What the hell, go ahead.'

He slips both of his hands under her blouse and begins to feel around very slowly and carefully. He bounces and weighs each breast and he gently pinches each nipple. He pushes her breasts together and rubs them against each other. After a couple of minutes of this, she says, 'Okay, okay.....How old am I?' He completes one last squeeze of her breasts, removes his hands, and says, 'Madam, you are 50.'

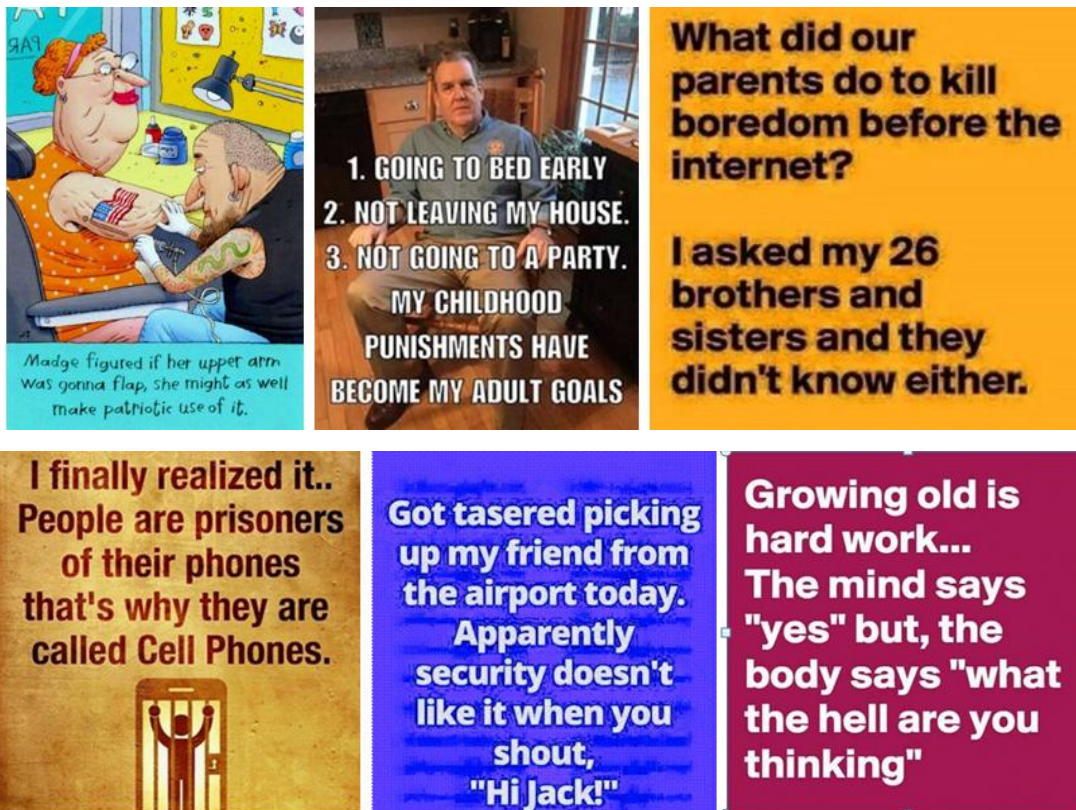
Stunned and amazed, the woman says, 'That was incredible, how could you tell?' 'I was behind you at McDonalds'

-o-o-O-o-o-

The Cynical Philosopher

1. I read that 4,153,237 people got married last year, not to cause any trouble but shouldn't that be an even number?
2. I want to die peacefully in my sleep, like my grandfather. Not screaming and yelling like the passengers in his car.
3. I find it ironic that the colors red, white, and blue stand for freedom until they are flashing behind you.
4. When wearing a bikini, women reveal 90% of their body. Men are so polite they only look at the covered parts.
5. Relationships are a lot like algebra. Have you ever looked at your X and wonder Y.
6. You know that tingly little feeling you get when you like someone? That's your common sense leaving your body.
7. Money talks... but all mine ever says is good-bye.
8. You're not fat, you're just... easier to see.
9. I always wondered what the job application is like at Hooters. Do they just give you a bra and say, "Here, fill this out?"
10. I can't understand why women are okay that JC Penny has an older women's clothing line named, "Sag Harbor."

11. My 60-year kindergarten reunion is coming up soon and I'm worried about the 175 pounds I've gained since then.
12. Denny's has a slogan, "If it's your birthday, the meal is on us." If you're in Denny's and it's your birthday, your life sucks!
13. The location of your mailbox shows you how far away from your house you can be in a robe before you start looking like a mental patient.
14. The reason Mayberry was so peaceful and quiet was because nobody was married. Andy, Aunt Bea, Barney, Floyd, Howard, Goober, Gomer, Sam, Earnest T Bass, Helen, Thelma Lou, Clara and, of course, Opie were all single. The only married person was Otis, and he stayed drunk.



FAIR USE NOTICE: This newsletter may contain copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. The Editor/Publisher of the Bulletin at times includes such material in an effort to advance reader's understanding of veterans' issues. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material in this newsletter is distributed without profit to those who have expressed an interest in receiving the included information for educating themselves on veteran issues so they can better communicate with their legislators on issues affecting them. To obtain more information on Fair Use refer to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this newsletter for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

-0-0-0-0-0-

**TO READ and/or DOWNLOAD THE ABOVE ARTICLES, ATTACHMENTS, OR PAST BULLETINS GO
Online To:**

- <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html> (PDF Edition w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://www.veteransresources.org> (PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions in Word format)
- <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://www.nj-americanlegionpost493.org> (PDF Edition w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://www.veteransresources.org/rao-bulletin> (past Bulletins)

Note: The above websites are blocked by some, if not all, USAF & USCG military commands for security purposes. To gain access you need to open them using a non "...@us.af.mil" "...@uscg.mil" source. Contact raoemo@sbcglobal.net if you are unable to do this.

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 continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 19,870 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others were deleted from the active mailing list.
2. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.
3. New subscribers and those who submit a change of address should receive a message that verifies their addition or address change being entered in the mailing list. If you do not receive a message within 3 days it indicates that either I never received your request, I made an error in processing your request, or your server will not allow me to send to the email addree you provided. Anyone who cannot reach me by email can call (858) 842-1111 to ask questions or confirm info needed to add them to the directory.
4. If you have another email addree at work or home and would like to receive Bulletin notices there also, just provide the appropriate addree to raoemo@sbcglobal.net.
5. Past Bulletin articles as well as an index of all previously published article titles are available on request to raoemo@sbcglobal.net. Bear in mind that the articles listed on this 200 page plus index were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or become outdated.
6. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. To aid in continued receipt of Bulletin availability notices, recommend enter the email addree raoemo@sbcglobal.net into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html> (PDF Edition), <http://www.veteransresources.org> (PDF & HTML Editions), <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions), or <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you can access the Bulletin at any of the aforementioned sites it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my email. Either your server considers it to be spam or I have somehow incorrectly entered or removed your addree from the mailing list. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the validated mailing list. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at any of these sites let me know.
7. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. At the end of each article is provided the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that 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 why that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken from previously reliable sources. My staff consist 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.

== To subscribe first add the RAO email addee raoemo@sbcglobal.net to your address book and/or white list. Then send to this addee your full name plus either the post/branch/chapter number of the fraternal military/government organization you are currently affiliated with (if any) "AND/OR" the city and state/country you reside in so your addee can be properly positioned in the directory for future recovery. Subscription is open at no cost to all veterans, dependents, military/veteran support organizations, and media.

== Anyone who wants to remove or change their email addee from the Bulletin mailing list can the automatic "UNSUBSCRIBE" or "Change of Address" tabs at the bottom of this message or send a message to raoemo@sbcglobal.net with the word "DELETE" or "COA" in the subject line.

RAO Bulletin Editor/Publisher:

Lt. James (EMO) Tichacek, USN (Ret) Tel: (858) 842-1111 Email: raoemo@sbcglobal.net
Bulletin Web Access: <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html>, <http://www.veteransresources.org>, <http://frabr245.org>, and <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> [PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS]

RAO Baguio Director:

SSgt Terrance (Terry) Parker, USAF (Ret), PSC 517 Box 4107, FPO AP 96517-1000, Tel: Smart 0921824728 or Globe 09454073380, Email: rao.dir.baguio@gmail.com

RAO Baguio Office: Mountain Lodge, 27 Leonard Wood Road, Baguio City, 2600 Philippines
FPO Mail Pickup: TUE & THUR 09-1100 --- Outgoing Mail Closeout: THUR 1100

Warning:

DELETE the end-paragraph (i.e. UNSUBSCRIBE Option) of the Bulletin before you forward it to others. The option following this warning is required by law and offers the recipient an opportunity to "UNSUBSCRIBE", if they choose to. This "unsubscribe" link contains **YOUR** email address vice theirs and whoever receives your re-distribution has the opportunity, whether purposely or inadvertently, to terminate your future receipt of Bulletin messages if they should click on it.