

# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 15 April 2018

PDF Edition



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

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### **Joint Chiefs of Staff ► Fat Leonard Impact on Appointments**

When the Pentagon last chose a new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it was rattled by a last-minute surprise: A corrupt defense contractor known as "Fat Leonard" confided to federal agents that he had an unsavory past with one of the finalists to become the nation's top military officer. Leonard Glenn Francis, a maritime tycoon who had recently pleaded guilty to bribing Navy officers, told authorities in early 2015 that he had paid for opulent dinners and other favors for Adm. Samuel Locklear, then-commander of U.S. military forces in the Pacific, according to previously undisclosed documents and six people familiar with the case.

Francis also shared with investigators several photographs of him drinking and socializing with Locklear, who was one of four contenders to head the Joint Chiefs. Some photos were from a banquet in Singapore that Francis had hosted for the admiral and other Navy officers that featured prostitutes as entertainment, according to the documents and people familiar with the case. Locklear told The Washington Post that he was at the party but was unaware of any prostitutes, and he said he had limited contact with Francis over the years. After separate investigations, the

Justice Department declined to press charges, and the Navy cleared the four-star admiral of wrongdoing. But his association with the 350-pound contractor helped sink his chances to lead the Joint Chiefs, other documents show. Now retired, Locklear is the highest-ranking officer known to have been investigated in what has become the worst corruption scandal in Navy history.



Adm. Samuel Locklear MAR 2012 (left) and Leonard Glenn Francis, aka "Fat Leonard" (right)

When the still-unfolding scandal became public in 2013, Navy leaders promised transparency and accountability as they vowed to purge crooked officers from the ranks. Since then, however, the Navy has kept most details of its investigations a secret, including the allegations surrounding Locklear and hundreds of other officers. The Post confirmed Locklear's involvement through interviews and documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. The Justice Department has filed criminal charges against 29 defendants who worked for the Navy or Francis's company, Glenn Defense Marine Asia. But those represent only a fraction of the people swept up in the scandal. Separately, the Justice Department has provided the Navy with dossiers on 550 people who had contact with Francis — including about 60 admirals — to determine whether they violated military law or ethics rules.

The Navy has publicly identified only 11 individuals who have been charged under military law or who committed misconduct. Navy officials decide whether to release the names of offending officers "on a case-by-case basis," according to a statement from Cmdr. Mike Kafka, a Navy spokesman. The Navy also has refused to disclose how many people it has kicked out of the service for taking bribes or gifts from Francis. "The Navy is committed to being transparent but we must balance transparency with maintaining the integrity of the ongoing investigations," Kafka said. Francis' Singapore-based company held lucrative contracts to resupply Navy vessels in the Pacific for more than a quarter-century. He has confessed to swindling the Navy out of \$35 million and bribing scores of officers.

He remains in federal custody while he awaits sentencing. One of his attorneys, Ethan Posner, declined to comment on his behalf. On Jan. 15, 2015, Francis pleaded guilty in federal court in San Diego and agreed to cooperate with investigators. During confidential meetings, he told federal agents he met Locklear in September 2003 when the admiral was commander of the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier strike group. That month, during a port visit by the Nimitz to Singapore, Francis hosted a "lavish" dinner for Locklear, several other officers and their wives, Navy records show. The next month, the Nimitz returned to Singapore for another visit — and more hospitality from Francis. On Oct. 9, 2003, he invited Locklear and two dozen officers — this time without their wives — for a seven-course dinner on the 70th floor of the Swissotel Stamford, according to documents obtained by The Washington Post.

Francis later told federal agents that as the dinner was winding down, he escorted Locklear to a hotel room, according to two of the people familiar with the investigation but not authorized to speak publicly about it. Waiting inside, on a king-size bed, was a Chinese prostitute whom the contractor had hired and selected for the admiral, according to the account Francis gave the agents. In a letter to The Post, Locklear confirmed attending the dinner,

which he said included "some dancing, lots of picture taking, and nothing inappropriate." He said he was the first to leave and headed directly back to the Nimitz.

Locklear denied the allegation that Francis provided him with a prostitute. "Any assertions he may have made along these lines are false," he wrote. "It is inconceivable to me, as it is to others who know me, that I would engage in such activity no matter the circumstances," Locklear added. "So once again let me be clear: I was never offered a prostitute by Leonard Francis. I never requested a prostitute from him, and I never discussed prostitutes or escorts with him. If there were prostitutes ... they did not present themselves to me as such and I had no reason to suspect they were."

Another Navy officer who attended the banquet told The Post it was obvious Francis had hired prostitutes to provide entertainment. "I can tell you right now for a fact that I was standing there talking ... when the doors opened and Fat Leonard brought in the girls," said David Fravor, a since-retired fighter pilot who served on the Nimitz. "There were probably about 15 girls, at least, who barged in." But Fravor said he, Locklear and a few other officers left the room immediately. "I can tell you 100 percent, I have absolutely no doubt that I watched Sam Locklear and his aide walk out as soon as the hookers came in the room," he said. "They walked out, shook Leonard's hand, said 'thank you' and left."

In his letter to The Post, Locklear said he had obtained "legal reviews" clearing him to attend both dinners. One of his attorneys, Stanley Pottinger, said that there was no written record of the legal reviews but that the admiral's chief of staff had recommended he attend the events and verbally assured him they posed no ethical problems. Heavily redacted Navy documents mention the presence of sex workers at the banquet, quoting an unnamed Navy official who reported that "females of Chinese descent" who were "probably prostitutes" handed out "lots of good cigars." Other records, filed last year in federal court by Justice Department officials, also assert that Francis hired prostitutes for the Oct. 9, 2003, dinner in Singapore. In those documents, prosecutors said Francis "personally provided" two prostitutes and a hotel suite for then-Capt. Robert Gilbeau, the Nimitz's supply officer. Gilbeau pleaded guilty to lying about his contacts with Francis. He is serving an 18-month prison sentence and did not respond to a letter seeking comment.

The investigations into Locklear intensified in early 2015 as he came under strong consideration to become the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Then-Defense Secretary Ashton Carter had settled on a shortlist of Locklear and three other finalists, according to a March 30, 2015, email from a White House official that was made public by WikiLeaks. The email was sent by Christopher Kirchoff, a National Security Council official, to John Podesta, the chairman of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign. Kirchoff said that Carter was slated to decide within days whom he would recommend for the Joint Chiefs job but that no clear front-runner had emerged. Kirchoff noted Locklear's chances had dimmed because of his ties to Francis. He said the admiral "may drop from the slate absent Ash's extraordinary intervention because as soon as the Fat Leonard [investigation] pops, Locklear will be forced to retire." He added that Carter's staff was "doubtful they could keep Locklear in play."

Carter declined to comment. In an interview with The Post, Kirchoff said he knew "for a fact that Ash was undecided and was really wrestling with the decision." Deliberations about Locklear's fate moved rapidly on parallel tracks. The Navy verified that Locklear attended the two banquets in Singapore in 2003 that were paid for by Francis' company, documents show. They do not reveal how much the dinners cost, but Francis often spent between \$700 and \$1,000 per person to wine and dine officers, according to other Navy records. In an April 27, 2015, memo, Adm. John Richardson — now the Navy's top admiral — acknowledged that Locklear's acceptance of the two meals would normally violate federal ethics rules, which forbid taking gifts worth more than \$20 from contractors. But Richardson cleared Locklear of wrongdoing, concluding in his memo that "it would be inappropriate to substantiate allegations of misconduct ... in regards to these dinners, or any other matters."

The Navy redacted the rationale for Richardson's decision. Richardson did not respond to a request for comment. Kafka, the Navy spokesman, said Locklear's candidacy for the Joint Chiefs chairmanship did not influence how the Navy handled the case. About a week later, the White House chose someone else to lead the Joint Chiefs: Marine

Gen. Joseph Dunford, who still holds the job. The following month, Locklear retired from the military. [Source: Washington Post | Craig Whitlock | April 1, 2018 ++]

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## **F-35 Lightning II Update 01 ► All Deliveries Suspended | Repair Bill Disagreement**

The Pentagon has suspended acceptance of most F-35 deliveries as manufacturer Lockheed Martin and the F-35 program office debate who should be responsible for fixing jets after a production issue last year. “While all work in our factories remains active, the F-35 Joint Program Office has temporarily suspended accepting aircraft until we reach an agreement on a contractual issue and we expect this to be resolved soon,” a Lockheed spokeswoman confirmed in a statement, adding that the company remains confident that it can meet its delivery target of 91 aircraft for 2018. News of the delivery pause was first reported by Reuters.

The dispute is rooted in a quality control issue that caused F-35 deliveries to stop from Sept. 21 to Oct. 20. At the time, corrosion was found in fastener holes of F-35As being repaired at Hill Air Force Base in Utah. Lockheed and the JPO were able to agree on a corrective action plan, one source said, and Lockheed was able to complete planned deliveries of the F-35 for 2017. But sometime after that, a dispute over who should pay for the fix resurfaced and the Defense Department opted to take another production pause, a source said, declining to comment on how long deliveries have been suspended.

Production of the aircraft is ongoing at Lockheed’s line in Fort Worth, Texas, and at final assembly and check out facilities in Nagoya, Japan, and Cameri, Italy. A source noted that some customers have accepted planes due to warfighter demands. According to Reuters, two aircraft have been delivered to the Defense Department since it imposed the suspension. Meanwhile, a repair bill for more than 200 jets is on the line. The corrosion issue is just one of several production problems that has plagued the F-35 over the last couple years. A spokesman for the F-35 joint program office didn’t immediately respond for comment. Vice Adm. Mat Winter, the F-35 joint program executive officer, spoke 11 APR at the Navy League’s Sea Air Space conference but did not disclose the fact that deliveries had stopped. [Source: DefenseNews | Valerie Insinna | April 11, 2018 ++]

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## **AFRH Update 12 ► Average 55% Fee Increase OCT 2018**

Many residents at the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) — particularly those with higher incomes — will begin paying higher monthly fees in October as officials look to cover more of their operating costs, shore up AFRH finances and decrease the need for taxpayer dollar bailouts. More than three-fourths of the residents live in independent living units, where the average monthly fees paid will increase by about 55 percent — from \$1,226 to \$1,895. The cost of providing that independent living unit and associated services such as three meals a day, health care services, transportation and activities is \$3,054. “This is a difficult thing to do and not an action we take lightly,” said retired Army Maj. Gen. Stephen Rippe, chief executive officer of the Armed Forces Retirement Home. “Each resident served our nation in uniform, and their experience in the military and the circumstances they live with today as a result of that service are deeply personal.”

The AFRH has 858 residents on two campuses — one in Washington, D.C., and one in Gulfport, Mississippi. It can accommodate 1,056 residents. The fee increase comes as the result of an analysis of the cost for each level of care at the facility, and an analysis of residents’ income. “We realized when we determined what our cost was, that our maximum fee was dramatically less than that. We had residents who could afford to pay full cost in independent living but the taxpayer was heavily subsidizing it,” said Rippe, who took over as CEO of AFRH in November. He and his staff have been analyzing operations and looking at new ways to bring in more revenue. AFRH and DoD

officials have been examining every aspect of the AFRH operations, in the wake of a serious cash flow problem that resulted in nearly depleting the AFRH trust fund. It declined from \$186 million in 2010 to \$46 million in 2015. AFRH has been operating at a deficit of about \$20 million a year, with the shortfall being made up by taxpayers.

Independent living fees are now capped at \$1,458 a month or 40 percent of income, whichever is less. New fees will be capped at the actual operating cost of \$3,054 or 60 percent of income, whichever is less. While 10 percent of residents will be paying the maximum amount, others will see increases because the calculation will require a higher percentage of income. For those paying less than the operating costs, the difference is subsidized by the 50-cent-a-month deduction from active-duty enlisted service members' paychecks and fines imposed on enlisted members for disciplinary violations.

Rippe held a town hall with residents 9 APR at the Washington, D.C., campus, and video conferenced with the Gulfport residents. "The reaction when we talked to residents was positive," he said. The majority of residents have income in the \$40,000-a-year range, he said, and many have done research and know the AFRH cost is less than that of other similar facilities. "There are obviously a few people who are disgruntled, especially the people that are in the higher income range — \$60,000, \$70,000, \$80,000, \$90,000 a year, whose fee actually more than doubles," he said.

One resident of the Washington campus contacted by Military Times disagreed with that overall assessment. He said the fee increase essentially amounts to a 20 percent pay cut, and that residents are "unhappy and disappointed." "It's the main topic of conversation" at the home, he said. "There will probably be a mass exodus soon. I will be one of them. "This is a sad story because it will do little to solve the problems. We're in this situation because of the gross mismanagement over the past five or six years. ... The real losers are the ones who are too old to leave. They have no options."

No current residents in the level of care of assisted living, long-term care and memory support will pay the new maximum amount because of their income levels, Rippe said. Average fees in those units will drop by 21 percent, to about \$2,120 a month, because while the maximum payment will more than double (\$10,626 for memory care, \$10,413 for long-term care) the income percentage limits will drop from an 80 percent maximum to 70 percent. According to surveys by John Hancock and Genworth Financial, the monthly fee maximums are similar to costs for a private room in long term care in the Washington area. However, those commercial facilities don't include many of the services AFRH offers, Rippe said. There is no financial test for AFRH residents; eligibility is based on status generally as retired enlisted members ages 60 and older; and certain other former enlisted members incapable of earning a living. Rippe and his staff have been studying other options for increasing the revenue of the AFRH. [Source: ArmyTimes | Karen Jowers | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **Navy Fleet Size Update 12 ► 2016 Need Assessment Down-Play**

Just in case there was ever any doubt, the Navy really doesn't want you to hold them to the 355 ship number it said it needed at the end of 2016. Senior Navy leadership has made a cottage industry of down-playing its December 2016 assessment that attempted to match combatant commander demand with the kind of fleet size it might reasonably expect to build. Since Jim Mattis took over as Defense Secretary in January, equivocation has been the order of the day when it comes to what size fleet the Navy is building towards in the era of President Trump.

And that continued 9 APR at Navy League's annual maritime bonanza, Sea-Air-Space. In response to a question about priorities, the Navy top requirements officer told the crowd to focus less on the 355-ship number. When it comes to fleet lethality, its what's on the inside that counts, Vice Adm. William Merz told the crowd. "Capability is where we would really like to put most of our energy," Merz, the deputy chief of naval operations for warfare systems, said. "That's where we can return capability and make our fleet more lethal much more quickly than just

building capacity. There is the capacity piece, the 355-ship Navy, that I'm sure you're very familiar with. "We caution everybody that 355 is a target," he continued. "It's much more important to focus on the sum of the parts to derive from it." He said that fitting the right capabilities to operational plans and need areas was more important than actually hitting the target number of ships.

Merz is the latest in a long line of 355-ship soft-pedlars, a trend that has continued despite Congress making achieving a 355-ship Navy a matter of national policy as part of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act. Merz told House lawmakers in March that the Navy was gearing up for a new force structure assessment that would inevitably revise the 355-ship number. When Mattis was pressed last June about growing the fleet to 355 ships, he said the nation needed a larger fleet but that it was unlikely without three-to-five percent real growth in the defense budget annually. Mattis has made clear that restoring readiness in the force is his number one priority.

Navy Secretary Richard Spencer said in September that the Navy needs to grow, but that the service needed to take a hard look at what capabilities the fleet would need in 15 years. The Navy's own 30-year shipbuilding plan released in February didn't get to 355 ships at all, capping out at 342 ships in 2039. The Navy's public squirreliness on its own assessment of its needs have started to irk even its staunchest supporters on Capitol Hill. In a hearing in March, Rep. Rob Wittman, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's Seapower subcommittee, said the Navy was missing the mark on its shipbuilding plans. "Critical shortfalls in aircraft carriers, large-deck [amphibious ships] and attack submarines are debilitating to our national security and only serve to embolden potential adversaries," Wittman said. "The Navy sometimes misses the strategic imperative and national urgency associated with the message our nation needs to send to the world when an inadequate shipbuilding budget is proposed."

What this all boils down to is that 355-ships is not a priority for the current administration, said Bryan McGrath, a retired destroyer skipper and consultant with The FerryBridge Group. "I continue to believe that a lot of people (myself included) suffered from irrational exuberance when the president's 350 campaign promise morphed into a 355 ship force structure assessment in late 2016. When people downplay numbers, it is almost always a way to reconcile tight resources. The bottom line is that if 355 were a Secretary Mattis priority, we'd know it. It isn't, and so it is likely we will continue to see Navy downplay the number. [Source: NavyTimes | David B. Larter | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **Arlington National Cemetery Update 74 ► 2nd Future of the Cemetery Survey**

Only 1 percent of all veterans are buried or inurned at Arlington National Cemetery, but the cemetery is still projected to run out of space in two decades unless new land is obtained, eligibility requirements change, or some combination of both. That's why Congress asked the Department of the Army to consider what could be done to preserve Arlington as an active military cemetery well into the future, and that's why Arlington has launched a second survey to hear from its stakeholders. The first survey was conducted in July 2017 in partnership with the VFW and other organizations. [Those results can be found here](#). The new survey further refines the first. Finding new land that is adjacent to the cemetery would be extremely difficult in an urban environment, but would closing Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall be a solution or just prolong the inevitable, since one acre extends the service life of the cemetery by only three months? Should Arlington be reserved just for active-duty deaths, combat deaths, former POWs, high heroism medal recipients, or not? "Your opinion matters — not only to us, but to our military and civilian leaders as they face a difficult future for our hallowed national shrine," said Executive Director of Army National Military Cemeteries Karen Durham-Aguilera. [Take the new survey here](#). [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | April 6, 2018 ++]

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## TRICARE Problems Investigated Update 02 ► MOAA Town Hall Disclosures

The Military Health System and the TRICARE program are undergoing the most extensive and complex changes in decades. Most of these changes were swept in through the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act and have affected almost every facet of the military's health care delivery system. With changes of this magnitude, it's not surprising [there has been confusion for military beneficiaries](#).

The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) sees and hears from the beneficiary community the angst and frustration resulting from many of these changes. Their recent Facebook Live Town Hall captured the groundswell of dissatisfaction, as they addressed these issues with the director of the TRICARE Health Program. Click here to [view the whole 40 minute interview](#). Many of the structural changes to the TRICARE program have been compounded with the change in TRICARE's purchased care contractors in the West and East regions. Despite extensive preparation by both Humana and Health Net, they experienced big challenges early on and have reported to MOAA they are working hard to make adjustments. But they will have to prove it to beneficiaries, many of whom have been surprised to see their TRICARE copayments have increased.

MOAA and others in the beneficiary community are applying pressure on the Defense Health Agency (DHA) to produce improvements and quickly. In a briefing with TRICARE officials, accompanied by Health Net and Humana, they acknowledged key issues most affecting beneficiary experience and issues that require rapid improvement. MOAA has been targeting the following areas Humana and Health Net currently are addressing. They include:

- **Customer service:** Initial call volumes quickly exceeded call center capacities. Additionally, training of new center associates required to learn about the program and its changes have slowed calls.
- **Referrals and authorizations:** These have accumulated an immediate backlog, which required a waiver by the DHA to extend into April (West Region).
- **Adequate provider networks:** This continues to be a problem mainly in areas outside of major military installations and with the new TRICARE Select option.
- **Claims processing:** There have been delays in payments to providers, resulting in some beneficiaries covering the costs. Additionally, accuracy of beneficiary claims statements have been an issue.
- **Technology and data support:** Issues have occurred across a variety of claims, enrollment platforms, and functions, resulting in decreased performance capabilities and accuracy.
- **Enrollment:** Beneficiaries are highly encouraged to update their electronic transfer payments, for example, by credit card to ensure their TRICARE Prime enrollment is up-to-date. It is recommended beneficiaries review recent statements to verify their enrollment transaction went through.

These disruptions do not in any way serve to enhance the beneficiaries' experience with their TRICARE health benefit. MOAA continues to work closely with TRICARE program officials, and with those at Health Net and Humana, to identify and rectify these and many other issues that are brought to their attention by its membership. [Source MOAA Newsletter | Kathryn M. Beasley | April 5, 2018 ++]

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## TRICARE Premium ► 45,000 Missing Payment Info to Lose coverage

Troops and family members who missed monthly Tricare premium payments due to a contractor swap 1 JAN must make up missed payments, as well as pay one to two months in advance to reinstate coverage, Tricare officials confirmed 9 APR. When Tricare shifted regions and contractors 1 JAN, premium payment information was reset for thousands of beneficiaries in the West region and former North region. Those users were sent letters by mail in November notifying them to update their payment information or risk losing coverage entirely after 1 JAN. Tricare Young Adult, Reserve Select and Retired Reserve users pay monthly premiums for coverage, while retired Prime

users can make annual or monthly payments. Active-duty families, seniors on Tricare for Life and retirees using Tricare Select do not pay monthly premium fees.

As of late last month, 45,000 Tricare beneficiaries or households were missing payment information. To fix the issue, those users could be required to pay up to thousands of dollars out of pocket at once, depending on their plan, officials said.

- Tricare Retired Reserve and Tricare Young Adult users must pay five months out of pocket to keep their plans -- three months retroactively to Jan. 1 and two months in advance, officials said. For beneficiaries using the Tricare Retired Reserve family plan who reinstate coverage immediately, that means almost \$5,192 out of pocket -- \$1038.31 each for the three missed months, as well as April and May premiums in advance. For a Tricare Young Adult Prime user who fixes the payment issue immediately, that means \$1,620 for retroactive and continued coverage.
- Tricare Reserve Select and retired Tricare Prime users who do not pay by paycheck allotment must pay for the three missed months and one month in advance, according to Tricare's website.

Tricare officials said all beneficiaries using those plans should check to make sure their payment information is up to date, including those who updated it by late December as instructed in the November notices. That's because a separate Tricare system freeze over December caused an unknown number of updates made before the due date to be lost, officials said last month. Tricare officials warned that users who do not fix the payment problem within 150 days of the last payment, which likely was made 1 DEC, must wait a full year before they can re-enroll. [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **Military Enlistment Update 19 ► Dependent's Military Health Record Impact | Navy**

On the heels of a Military Times story about Army Maj. Rudy De La Rosa's two daughters who were denied entry into the Air Force and Army based on notations in their dependent medical records, four readers told Military Times that their sons had been kicked out of Navy recruit training for similar reasons. While the Air Force and Army merge dependent medical records with service medical records, the Navy doesn't do the same for new sailors and Marines who follow their parents into military service. However, Navy medical providers still can access those records, a spokeswoman has since clarified, which could result in service members being shown the door based on diagnoses or evaluations never shared with the dependent or their parents.

One mother emailed Military Times to say her son, who would have been the fourth generation in his family to serve in the Navy, was removed from recruit training at Naval Station Great Lakes, Illinois, for a condition "when he was 2 years old and 4 years old, when he was struggling with his dad being deployed." Another mother said her son was forced out of recruit training one week after he entered on Dec. 13, 2016, at age 20, because of counseling he received when he was 11 or 12. "His father and I were divorcing and thought it was in the best interest of our three children to go through counseling," she said in an interview. "It was situational ... there were no medications ordered, nothing." She said it was clear the medical provider had access to the records because he was citing counseling on several specific dates.

The Air Force and Army began merging prior dependent medical records with service member records in 2004. The Navy initially told Military Times that it doesn't merge records. After Military Times asked about comments from parents whose children were forced out of recruit training, officials then clarified that its medical staffers still could have access to the dependent records in the electronic system. This sets military dependents apart from their civilian counterparts, who don't come into the military with a previous electronic health record. "We determined that a provider at a recruit training command would only access a dependent's [electronic health record] under certain circumstances," said spokeswoman Mariah Felipe, such as red flags raised as part of a person's application,

if the individual was injured during boot camp or if someone was applying to a rate that required meeting specific physical requirements.

However, the Navy mother interviewed by Military Times said her son “was going through the routine medical exam at recruit training when they noticed he had a dependent medical record,” she said. “He was not in a specialized rating requiring medical clearance, nor did he have an injury.” She also saw a note in her son’s medical record from his counselor that stated at the time he “was stable, and had good coping skills” after four or five counseling sessions in a six-month period, and that no further counseling was warranted, unless the family chose to seek it later. “The Navy pushes so much, especially on the medical side, that if you have any problems whatsoever, to seek help. So when all this came up, I said, ‘Are you kidding me?’ “If I had known it would affect my child like this, I never would have put him in counseling” through the military, she said.

Army Maj. Rudy De La Rosa and his wife Mia felt the same way; they thought they were providing emotional support for their daughters when they took them to counseling to help them cope with multiple moves and his multiple deployments to Afghanistan. Until their oldest daughter was forced out of Air Force basic training and accused initially of fraudulent enlistment, they had no idea there were notations in both daughters’ counseling files that could bar them from joining the military. They contend the notations overstated events that were either extremely mild, or never happened. Despite multiple clean bills of health from civilian and DoD behavioral health providers, their daughters have been denied waivers to enter the military. [Source: NavyTimes | Karen Jowers | April 5, 2018 ++]

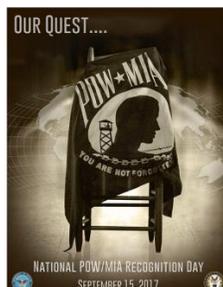
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## **POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 01 thru 15 APR 2018 | Sixteen**

“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**

- **Air Force Col. Peter J. Stewart** was a member of Headquarters, 8th Tactical Fighter Wing, and the pilot of a two-seater F-4C aircraft, the second in a flight of two on an armed reconnaissance mission over northern Vietnam. Stewart was assumed to have been shot down on March 15, 1966, along with his aircraft commander, Col. Martin R. Scott, whose remains were identified in June 2017. [Read about Stewart.](#)
- **Air Force Col. Roosevelt Hestle, Jr.**, 38, of Orlando, Fla., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried April 13 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Hestle was a pilot assigned to the 388th Tactical Fighter Squadron. On July 6, 1966, he led a flight of four F-105s on a strike mission against surface-to-air missile sites in northern Vietnam. As they approached the target, Hestle issued a missile launch warning and all aircraft began evasive action. Hestle's maneuvers took him close to the ground near the town of Thai Ngyuen, where the plane came under anti-aircraft fire and was believed to have crashed. [Read about Hestle.](#)
- **Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Percy C. Mathews** was a member of the 422nd Bombardment Squadron, 305th Bombardment Group, 8th U.S. Air Force, participating in a strike against the German submarine base at Saint-Nazaire, France. On May 29, 1943, the B-17 Mathews was aboard was hit by enemy fire as it left the target area. Mathews did not make it out of the bomber before it crashed. Interment services are pending. [Read about Mathews.](#)
- **Army Cpl. Thomas W. Reagan** was assigned to Company A, 14th Engineer Combat Battalion, 24th Infantry Division, participating in the defense of the 24th ID's main supply route and the town of Yongsan. He was reported missing in action on Aug. 12, 1950, as a result of fighting that occurred between his unit and enemy forces near Naktong Bulge, in South Korea. Interment services are pending. [Read about Reagan.](#)
- **Army Master Sgt. George R. Housekeeper, Jr.**, 28, of Lansdale, Pa., whose identification was previously announced, was buried April 11 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Housekeeper was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Housekeeper was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 12, 1950. [Read about Housekeeper.](#)
- **Army Sgt. Donald L. Baker** was assigned to Company H, 2nd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Sept. 6, 1950, as a result of fighting that occurred between his unit and enemy forces near Haman, South Korea. Interment services are pending. [Read about Baker.](#)
- **Army Staff Sgt. Marshall F. Kipina** was assigned to the 131st Aviation Company, serving as an observer aboard an OV-1C aircraft, on a night surveillance mission from Phu Bai Airfield over Attapu Province,

Laos People's Democratic Republic. Radar and radio contact were lost with the aircraft which did not return as scheduled. Search efforts were initiated, but no crash site was found. [Read about Kipina](#).

- **Marine Corps Pvt. Edwin W. Jordan**, 19, of Pittsburgh, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried April 9, in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C., was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. On Nov. 20, 1943, Jordan's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Jordan was killed on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. [Read about Jordan](#).
- **Navy Chief Machinist's Mate Dean S. Sanders** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Sanders was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Sanders](#).
- **Navy Reserve Lt. j.g. Irwin E. Rink**, 25, of Wichita, Kan., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried April 16 in his hometown. Rink was an F4F-4 Wildcat pilot assigned to Fighting Squadron Twenty Seven (VF-27). On Aug. 4, 1943, he and seven others took off on an escort mission to New Georgia Island when they were attacked by Japanese fighter aircrafts. Rink did not return to base and would be reported missing in action on Aug. 4, 1943. [Read about Rink](#).
- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Robert V. Young** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Young was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Young](#).
- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Walter C. Foley** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Foley was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Foley](#).
- **Navy Seaman 1st Class William G. Bruesewitz** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. **Bruesewitz** was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Bruesewitz](#).
- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Bernard V. Doyle** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Doyle was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Doyle](#).
- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Frank Wood**, 25, of Jackson, Ohio, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried April 14 in Franklin, N.C. Wood was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Wood. [Read about Wood](#).
- **Navy Steward Mate 1st Class Ignacio C. Farfan** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Farfan was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Farfan](#).

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

\* VA \*



## **VA Rehabilitation & Prosthetic Services ► Direct Appointment Scheduling Now Possible**

With a commitment to ensure Veterans receive quicker access to specialty rehabilitation services and equipment, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently implemented a rapid response team to expand staffing and training, increase communication directly with Veterans and improve processes to reduce and eliminate the backlog of pending requests for prosthetic items and services. To improve Veterans' access to specialty rehabilitation services, enrolled patients at VA medical centers can now schedule appointments directly with amputation care and wheelchair clinics, without having to first see a primary care provider.

This means Veterans will not have to make an extra appointment and travel to a VA facility for a referral. Direct scheduling is currently available at 137 VA facilities for amputation care and at 124 VA facilities for wheelchair clinics. Additionally, same-day access for orthotist/prosthetist clinical services is available at 141 VA facilities. "The dedication and support of the multidisciplinary team of VA employees who are implementing these improvements demonstrate their commitment to do the right thing for our Veterans," said Robert Wilkie, Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "We are focused on implementing the best solutions to modernize how we deliver rehabilitation and prosthetic services across all VA medical centers — ensuring Veterans nationwide are receiving timely and integrated health care and support."

As the largest and most comprehensive provider of prosthetic devices and sensory aids in the country, VA Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service currently averages 638,000 new requests monthly across its health-care system for such items. The service provides a full range of equipment and services to Veterans, including artificial limbs and bracing, wheeled mobility and seating systems, sensory-neural aids (e.g., hearing aids, eyeglasses), implants and devices surgically placed in the Veteran (e.g., hips and pacemakers), and home respiratory care. VA is working to ensure Veterans are receiving their medical items, equipment and supplies sooner. Since June 2017, the total number of requests for prosthetic items pending for more than 30 days has been reduced by 72 percent. [Source: VA News Release | April 4, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Presumptive Disabilities ► Top 10 Claimed and Agent Orange**

Click on highlighted condition for description and symptoms:

**Top 10: Those That SERVED** / [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder](#), [Sleep Apnea](#), [Diabetes Type II](#), [Chronic Fatigue Syndrome](#), [Irritable Bowel Syndrome](#), [Tinnitus](#), [Peripheral Neuropathy](#), [Depression](#), [Anxiety](#), and Various Skin Disorders

### **Agent Orange Related**

1. [Acute & Subacute Peripheral Neuropathy](#)
2. [Adult Fibrosarcoma](#)
3. [Alveolar Soft Part Sarcoma](#)
4. [Angiosarcoma](#)
5. [B-Cell Leukemias](#)
6. [Bone Pain](#)
7. [Chloracne](#)
8. [Clear Cell Sarcoma of Aponeuroses](#)
9. Clear Cell Sarcoma of Tendons & Aponeuroses
10. [Congenital Fibrosarcoma](#)
11. [Dermatofibrosarcoma Protuberans](#)

12. [Ectomesenchymoma](#)
13. Epithelioid Malignant Leiomyosarcoma
14. Epithelioid & Grandular Malignant Schwannomas
15. [Epithelioid Sarcoma](#)
16. [Extraskeletal Ewing's Sarcoma](#)
17. [Hemangiosarcoma](#)
18. [Hodgkin's Disease](#)
19. [Infantile Fibrosarcoma](#)
20. [Ischemic Heart Disease \(IHD\)](#)
21. [Leiomyosarcoma](#)
22. [Liposarcoma](#)
23. [Lymphangiosarcoma](#)
24. [Malignant Fibrous Histiocytoma](#)
25. [Malignant Ganglioneuroma](#)
26. [Malignant Giant Cell Tumor of the Tendon Sheath](#)
27. Malignant Glandular Schwannoma
28. [Malignant Granular Cell Tumor](#)
29. [Malignant Hemangiopericytoma](#)
30. Malignant Leiomyoblastoma
31. [Malignant Mesenchymoma](#)
32. [Malignant Schwannoma with Rhabdomyoblastic Differentiation](#)
33. [Malignant Synovioma](#)
34. [Multiple Myeloma](#)
35. [Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma](#)
36. [Parkinson's Disease](#)
37. [Porphyria Cutanea Tarda](#)
38. [Proliferating Angiendthliomatosis](#)
39. [Prostate Cancer](#)
40. [Respiratory Cancer](#)
41. [Rhabdomyosarcoma](#)
42. [Synovial Sarcoma](#)
43. [Type II Diabetes](#)

[Source: <http://www.veteranprograms.com/pd-full-list.html> | April 2018 ++]

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## **VA Vacancies ► Wait Time & Outsourcing Impact**

The Department of Veterans Affairs, facing intense scrutiny amid reports of widespread dysfunction and a controversial push by the Trump administration to outsource more medical care, has tens of thousands of full- and part-time vacancies nationwide, according to data compiled by veterans advocates, lawmakers and federal unions. Most urgently, the agency's health-care network needs thousands of primary care physicians, mental-health providers, physical therapists, social workers - even janitorial staff, Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT), ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, told The Washington Post in an interview. Of equal concern, he said, VA lacks enough human-resources personnel to vet candidates and make the hires. "It's crippling our ability to deliver health care to our vets," Tester said. " . . . It's effectively pushing veterans outside the system."

President Donald Trump, and the conservative groups advising him, has seized on the long waits many veterans face at government facilities as grounds for aggressively expanding a program that enables patients to seek services

from private providers at taxpayer expense. The proposal is deeply divisive, however, with opponents, including Democrats and Republicans in Congress, saying the effort could further weaken VA. Max Stier, president and chief executive officer of the nonprofit Partnership for Public Service, said that when Trump took office, he put into place a federal hiring freeze that has been a particular problem for VA as it looks to add staff. While doctors were exempt from the hiring freeze, the human resources professionals needed to make the hires were not, he noted, citing a 2017 report by the Government Accountability Office. VA's human resources division remains short-staffed and continues to struggle with hiring even after the freeze was lifted, Stier said.

VA officials said the vacancy rate in human resources is 11.5 percent, or 540 employees. That has not affected "our numerous staffing successes," said Curt Cashour, a VA spokesman, who noted that the department has added nearly 15,000 staff since Trump came into office. Across the agency, there were more than 33,000 full-time vacancies as of early March, Cashour said. He would not provide the number of part-time vacancies, a figure also believed to be in the thousands. "Historically, one of the main benefits of working at the VA is stability. Unfortunately, people working in the health-care field are increasingly not viewing the VA as stable, and it is making recruitment more difficult because of that," said Randy Erwin, president of the National Federation of Federal Employees. "It is a real problem."

A Senate hearing was scheduled for 11 APR to confirm Paul Lawrence to become VA's undersecretary for benefits, a key post that has gone without a permanent leader since October 2015. Lawrence is a retired Army officer and vice president of the consulting firm Kaiser Associates; his nomination is considered noncontroversial. The role of undersecretary for health also remains vacant. Cashour said the VA is "making steady progress" in its search for a permanent appointee. "VA has made phenomenal progress during the Trump administration when it comes to VA staffing," Cashour said. More than one-third of veterans enrolled in the VA system - which serves 9 million veterans a year at 1,200 hospitals and clinics - now receive care from private doctors.

At a hearing before he was fired, Shulkin spoke about the difficulty in hiring doctors and nurses, mental health care professionals and benefits claims officers. The agency offers lower pay than the private sector does and involves a tedious, government mandated recruiting process. It is not clear what is nominee Jackson's philosophy regarding outsourcing care. But health-care experts and veterans advocates say the private system is also overwhelmed by long wait times. The solution is not outsourcing more care, said Rick Weidman, executive director of policy and government affairs for Vietnam Veterans of America. "You can't just toss millions of veterans into the private health-care system, which wasn't built to care for their specific needs as vets," he said. "The VA needs full staffing. It's irresponsible and not fair." [Source: Emily Wax-Thibodeaux | The Washington Post | April 10, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Vet Choice Update 74 ► TriWest Healthcare Alliance Warning Letter to Congress**

TriWest Healthcare Alliance, which contracts with the Department of Veterans Affairs to arrange private-sector care for veterans through the VA Choice program, warned 3 APR in an apocalyptic letter to lawmakers that another funding shortfall could lead to restricted care for veterans, as well as layoffs and financial ruin for the alliance. In a letter sent to leaders on the House and Senate VA committees and congressional appropriators, TriWest President and CEO David McIntyre Jr. criticized Congress for failing to address the shortfall in the massive spending bill passed 23 MAR. The funding uncertainty threatens TriWest's network of private-sector medical providers, he wrote. "I cannot predict how much longer this company's owners and employees are going to be willing or able to stay at this work," McIntyre wrote.

Former VA Secretary David Shulkin warned lawmakers during his last few appearances on Capitol Hill that funds for the Choice program would be depleted by early June. The program allows veterans to receive care in the private sector if they live more than 40 miles driving distance from a VA facility or have to wait more than 30 days

for an appointment. If Congress doesn't approve more funding soon, Shulkin has said, the VA must further limit the number of veterans who could use private-sector medical care.

TriWest, based in Phoenix, is one of the third-party administrators that run the program. The company works with the VA and approximately 200,000 private-sector medical providers to schedule appointments for veterans in 28 states in the Midwest and along the West Coast. It also operates in Guam, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands. As the June deadline approaches, TriWest faces a "very real financial threat," McIntyre wrote. The company is preparing to lay off up to 25 percent of its workforce, which accounts for 700 people. "Veterans will be denied access to the community provider network we have constructed to support VA, providers likely will experience substantial claims payment delays, and TriWest will be forced to reduce as much as 25 percent of our workforce just to survive, if that's even possible," McIntyre wrote.

This marks the third instance in one year that the Choice program has faced a funding crisis. The last time, in December 2017, Congress approved \$2.1 billion to keep the program going. As of mid-March, about \$1 billion remained, and the VA was spending about \$370 million through the program each month. [Source: Nikki Wentling | Stars & Stripes | April 3, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Vet Choice Update 75** ► **Congress Again Urged to Pass VA Reform Package.**

The acting secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs supports a package of VA reforms Congress failed to pass last month and urged lawmakers 9 APR to try again. Robert Wilkie wrote in a statement that the VA and Congress need to come together to overhaul the VA Choice program, which veterans use to receive private-sector medical care. Lawmakers and large veterans organizations agree the program is complex and difficult for veterans to use, and they've been working for more than a year to garner support to pass large-scale reforms. The Choice program was created in response to the VA wait-time scandal – uncovered in Phoenix four years ago Monday. "It's time to fix the Choice program – as well as the department's other non-VA care efforts – once and for all by merging them into a single, streamlined community care program that's easy to use for veterans and VA employees," Wilkie wrote.



**Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert L. Wilkie**

Wilkie told members of the House and Senate veterans' affairs committees that he supported a package of reforms they failed to attach to Congress' massive spending bill in March. The package was a deal between Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and Sens. Johnny Isakson (R-GA) and Jon Tester (D-MT) who lead the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. In addition to overhauling the Choice

program, the reforms included an expansion of benefits for veteran caregivers, as well as a plan to initiate a systematic review of VA infrastructure, with the intention of disposing of aging and underused facilities nationwide.

Wilkie expressed urgency, noting Congress has been forced in multiple instances during the last year to approve emergency funding for the program. The program faces another funding shortfall – it’s slated to run out of money in early June. TriWest Healthcare Alliance, which contracts with the VA to arrange private-sector care for veterans through the Choice program, warned lawmakers last week that another shortfall could lead to restricted care for veterans, as well as layoffs and financial ruin for the alliance. Wilkie, who came to the VA from the Defense Department, is temporarily leading the VA following the dismissal of former VA Secretary David Shulkin on 28 MAR. He sat down with several large veterans organizations for the first time 6 APR and is scheduled to meet with Roe in the coming days.

In an official release last week, the VA rejected claims by Shulkin that he was fired because administration officials sought to privatize the agency and saw him as an obstacle. “There is no effort underway to privatize VA, and to suggest otherwise is completely false and a red herring designed to distract and avoid honest debate about the real issues surrounding veterans’ health care,” the VA statement read. It’s uncertain whether Congress can gain enough support for major VA reforms before veterans and lawmakers hear from Rear Adm. Ronny Jackson, the White House physician and President Donald Trump’s pick to lead the VA. Some lawmakers and veterans groups have expressed concern over Jackson’s lack of management experience and knowledge of VA issues. They were looking to Jackson’s confirmation hearing to learn more about him and the direction that he wants to lead the massive agency. A confirmation hearing for Jackson had not yet been scheduled.

Roe said Monday that he was working with other lawmakers to “find a path forward” for the reforms. “I am grateful acting Secretary Wilkie expressed his support of the bicameral, bipartisan agreement reached in March, and that he is bringing increased awareness to the limited funding remaining in the Choice Program account,” Roe said. [Source: | Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Baby Showers ► Nationwide MAY 5-16 | Welcoming New Children Into Vet Families**

To honor and support Veterans welcoming new children into their families in 2018, 60 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Centers (VAMC) around the country will host baby showers between May 5-16, the weeks surrounding Mother’s Day, in partnership with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. “The Nationwide Baby Shower will ensure Veterans have what they need to focus on the joy of growing their families in those stressful first weeks,” said acting VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “With this effort, our goal is to celebrate Veteran parents — especially moms — while also increasing awareness of VA’s comprehensive maternity care services and to encourage women Veterans to Choose VA to support their health and wellness goals.”

Women make up approximately 10 percent of the Veteran population in the United States, and nearly half of the nation’s 2 million women Veterans are of reproductive age. VA offers comprehensive primary care, prenatal and preconception (pre-pregnancy) care, infertility services, maternity care services and the first seven days of newborn care. The Elizabeth Dole Foundation, a nonprofit organization that advocates for military caregivers, is expanding its existing relationship with VA by aiding in welcoming the newest caregivers to the Veteran community through local support and volunteer efforts at each baby shower location. Philips, the Veteran Canteen Service and other partners are also supporting this initiative, which will provide new Veteran parents with items to help new parents and babies.

Over 2,400 new Veteran parents and new Veteran parents-to-be will be recognized at the events. At least one VAMC in every Veterans Integrated Service Network (YISN) is participating. All 60 sites can be found here: [www.va.gov/womenvet/acwv/babyShower.asp](http://www.va.gov/womenvet/acwv/babyShower.asp). For more information about VA’s benefits and services for women

Veterans, as well as the Nationwide Baby Shower, visit [www.va.gov/womenvet](http://www.va.gov/womenvet). [Source: VA News Release | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **VA National Transplant Program ▶ Where To Go**

Solid organ (kidney, liver, heart, lung, kidney/pancreas, heart/lung,) and bone marrow/stem cell are important, life-saving procedures. The Veterans Health Administration has offered solid organ transplant services since 1962 and bone marrow transplant services since 1982. VA Transplant Centers are located across the country. For a list of the 12 VA medical facilities which provide transplant services and the type of transplant they service go to <https://www.va.gov/health/services/transplant>. For more information regarding the VA National Transplant Program, contact your VA specialist, primary care provider, or nearest VA medical facility. For a list of VA medical facilities view the VA directory at <https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/division.asp?dnum=1>. [Source: <https://www.va.gov/health/services/transplant> | April 2018 ++]

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## **VA Claim Notice of Disagreement ▶ When to File**

Use the Notice of Disagreement (NOD) form 21-0958 to indicate to your Regional Office (RO) that you disagree with a decision you received regarding your claim for disability compensation. Examples of these decisions may include entitlement to service connection, percentage of evaluation assigned, and effective date among other things. Only fill out this form if you disagree with a decision issued by your RO. This includes an initial decision, a decision for an increased rating, or any other decision you disagree with. You can ask the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to help you fill out the form by contacting your local VA. Before you contact the VA, please make sure you gather the necessary information and materials, and complete as much of the form as you can.

Upon completing the NOD you should provide your signature in the block provided at the bottom of the second page. Be sure to sign every form you fill out before you send it to us. If you don't sign the form, VA will return it for you to sign, and it will take a longer process. Attach any materials that support and explain your NOD. Mail or take your NOD to the RO that issued the decision or notification that you disagree with, which is the Agency of Original Jurisdiction (AOJ.) It is important that you keep a copy of all completed forms and materials you give to VA. You can download the form at <https://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-0958-ARE.pdf>. [Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Lawsuit | Beemer~John ▶ Allergic Reaction Death Settlement**

Craig Beemer said he has agreed to a \$500,000 settlement with the Kansas City VA Medical Center for the death of his father, an 84-year-old U.S. Navy veteran. Beemer and his brother Mark filed a lawsuit in September that alleged their father, John, developed "pustular lesions" and died after VA staff treated him with an antibiotic, Ceftriaxone, that caused a severe reaction. "They knew they screwed up," Beemer said. "It was in his records he was allergic to that, but they gave it to him anyway." The U.S. Attorney's Office, which represented the VA, disputed that in court documents filed in February. But VA spokesman Dwayne Rider confirmed 6 APR that a settlement had been reached in the case. Rider said he was directed to refer questions to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Missouri. Jill Baker, a spokeswoman for that office, said it would not comment on the Beemer case. Craig Beemer said he made it clear from the beginning of the settlement negotiations that he was not willing to sign a non-

disclosure agreement that would keep him from talking about the terms and the payout. "It was never really about the money for me," Beemer said. "It was letting everybody know what happened." [Source: | The Kansas City Star | Andy Marso | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Braille/Talking Book Program ► Overview**

VA recently partnered with the Library of Congress to promote the Braille and Talking Book Program for Veterans. The program which is administered by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped and sponsored by the Library of Congress is already being used at many VA facilities across the country. Through a national network of cooperating libraries, the program offers books in a number of formats: Braille, audio, mailed to your door, or instantly downloadable. Although this service is available to any United States resident, honorably discharged Veterans who meet the eligibility requirements have preference in the lending of materials and equipment. Eligibility Veterans are those with an honorable discharge, blind, have low vision, or have a physical disability that prevents them from reading regular print materials. The program, designed to promote independence , improve wellness and the quality of life, is currently used by about 500,000.

Veterans interested in applying for this service must fill out the application online and submit the application to the nearest talking library available in their state. It can be found at <https://www.loc.gov/nls/pdf/application.pdf>. A medical professional certifies the applicant is eligible for the service. Once determined eligible, the Library of Congress provides books and equipment to the individual's residence. Any practitioner in VA's Blind Rehabilitation Service can assist Veterans in applying for services through their local VA facility. These include inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Centers, outpatient blind and low vision clinics, blind rehabilitation outpatient specialists, and visual impairment service team coordinators.

Books for the program are selected for the collection on the basis of their appeal across a wide range of interests to include bestsellers, biographies, fiction works, and how-to books are in great demand. The collection includes books in Spanish and a few titles in other languages. Additionally, books for youth, from preschool to young adult, are available in audio, braille and print/braille formats. This service also offers equipment that patrons may borrow, free of charge, to use for talking books and magazines. For example, digital talking-book machines provide high-quality sound, offer variable speed controls, and have built-in audio instructions. Accessories for the digital talking-book machines include lightweight headphones, a pillow speaker, adapters for commercial USB flash drives and a breath switch.

Additionally, readers with significant hearing loss may request amplified headphones. Individuals can also play books and magazines on digital cartridges sent to them via mail or download them to a computer or mobile device using the Braille and Audio Reading Download mobile app. The app is a web-based service that provides access to thousands of special-format books, magazines, and music materials. The same materials offered on digital cartridge are also available for download in compressed audio or braille formats. With the mobile app, readers may download and play talking books on their smartphones and tablets. Braille readers may also download and read materials using a refresh-able braille display with a Bluetooth connection.

The program also offers the world's largest collection of special-format music instructional and appreciation materials, which consists of scores, textbooks, and books in braille and large print. Music appreciation materials on a wide variety of topics, along with self-instruction for voice, piano, organ, keyboard, guitar, recorder, accordion, banjo, harmonica, and other instruments, are available on cartridges or can be downloaded from with the app.. For more details or to contact the library in your area go online to <https://www.loc.gov/thatallmayread>. or call 1-888-NLS-READ. [Source: VAntage Point | April 5, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Disability Benefits Update 01 ► 19-Year-Old Pain Precedent Overturned**

Thousands of veterans previously denied disability benefits for pain issues related to their military service may now be eligible for that assistance, thanks to a federal court ruling this week. On 4 APR, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit overturned a 19-year-old precedent used in more than 11,000 VA claims denials that stated veterans had to have a clear medical diagnosis connected to their pain in order to be eligible for those disability payouts. Advocates said the ruling could be life-changing for individuals who are unable to work because of service-connected injuries but excluded from veterans assistance because of medical technicalities.

“This was an all-or-nothing issue,” said Bart Stichman, executive director and co-founder of the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP). “This isn’t about arguing over the degree of disability where it is the difference of \$2,000 or \$3,000 a month in help. These are people who are getting zero benefits, despite their pain.” The court challenge, which was brought by NVLSP, involved Army veteran Melba Saunders, who served in first Gulf War. She injured her knees during her seven years in service, a fact that military doctors noted in her files without determining a specific medical diagnosis of the issue. When she left the service and applied for veterans disability benefits, her claim was denied. VA officials acknowledged the problem stemmed from her time in service but the Board of Veterans’ Appeals cited a 1999 Veterans Court decision which held that “pain alone is not a disability for the purpose of VA disability compensation.”

The new court ruling erases that precedent, at least for now. Veterans still need to show a clear connection between their pain and their military service to be eligible, but would not longer have to have a specific medical reason for the pain to apply for benefits. VA officials can appeal the decision, although it’s unclear if they will do so. In a statement, Saunders’ lawyer, Mel Bostwick, called the court case “a significant victory for disabled veterans” and a long-overdue correction in VA policy. “Congress recognized that the nation owes these veterans for their sacrifices, and the court today vindicated the common-sense notion that this debt does not depend on whether a veteran’s disabling pain can be labeled with a specific medical diagnosis,” she said.

Stichman said veterans who have previously been rejected for disability benefits — or who have avoided applying in the past because they assumed they would not be eligible — should now reapply to see if the new ruling will allow them to qualify. “We just don’t know how many veterans this could affect,” he said. “We know the Board of Veterans Appeals has cited this precedent in more than 11,000 cases. But we don’t know about all the other veterans who never even applied.” [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Leo Shane III | April 5, 2018 ++]

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## **CRSC Update 26 ► Are You Missing Out?**

Just because a veteran was not injured in combat does not mean he or she may not be entitled to receive Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC). Many veterans may be missing out on hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars every month because they have not applied for the special compensation. Don’t let the term combat throw you; there are many circumstances which are combat related that could justify approval of extra tax-free money for you.

CRSC is designed to restore military retirement pay that has been offset by Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) compensation when evidence exists to confirm the associated disabilities are combat related. For example, if a veteran is currently rated for disability of 10 percent with the VA, he or she receives a check from the VA for \$115 each month, but his or her retired pay is reduced by the same amount. If the disability is found to be combat-related by the CRSC review board, he or she would continue to receive the monthly check from the VA for \$115 along with the remainder of the retired pay, but begin to receive an additional monthly check from the CRSC for \$115.

Many disabilities that resulted from conditions during peacetime may meet the criteria for CRSC. Some examples are an aircraft mechanic who works on the flight line and begins to lose his hearing while in-service; a personnel technician who dives for cover during a simulated air raid and injures her shoulder; and a special forces journeyman who makes a peacetime parachute jump and breaks his ankle upon landing. If you're not sure the circumstances surrounding your disability meet the combat-related criteria, it would be beneficial for you to apply for CRSC and let the board make a determination for you. There are a few prerequisites to consider before submitting a CRSC application. To meet the basic eligibility criteria to be considered for CRSC, veterans must:

- Be retired with 20 (or more) years of active-duty military service, or retired at age 60 from the Guard or Reserve and
- Be receiving military retired pay and
- Have a compensable VA disability rating of 10 percent or higher and
- Receive military retired pay that is reduced by VA disability payments.

NOTE: Veterans who waived military retirement pay for Civil Service credit are not eligible to apply for CRSC. The application for Combat-Related Special Compensation can be obtained by going to <http://www.naus.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/DD2860.pdf>. [Source: USVCP | February 23, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Privatization Update 13 ► Debunking The Myth**

There is no effort underway to privatize VA, and to suggest otherwise is completely false and a red herring designed to distract and avoid honest debate on the real issues surrounding Veterans' health care.

### **Facts Debunk the Privatization Myth: A Two-Decade Comparison**

- In 1998, VA's budget was \$42.38 billion. VA's 2018 enacted budget is more than four times that figure at \$188.65 billion.
- In 1998, VA had 240,846 employees. As of March 29, 2018, VA had 385,233 employees, a nearly 60 percent increase in 20 years.
- VA has increased its end strength by nearly 15,000 since the beginning of the Trump administration, from roughly 370,000 to 385,233 as of March 29, 2018.
- In 2000 VA had 1,110 medical facilities. Today, VA has 130 more medical facilities, for a total of 1,240.

### **VA Community Care Has Existed for More Than 70 Years, and Has Nothing to Do with Privatization**

- VA has been offering community care since the World War II era, starting with the then-Veterans Administration's Hometown Program that began in 1945. As former Secretary Shulkin [said](#), "No health care provider delivers every treatment under the sun. Referral programs for patients to get care through outside providers (known as Choice or Community Care at the VA) are as essential to the medical profession as stethoscopes and tongue depressors."
- Currently, VA operates seven distinct community care programs. VA is working with Congress to merge all of VA's community care efforts into a single, streamlined program that's easy for Veterans and VA employees to use so the department can work with Veterans to coordinate their care with private providers when VA can't provide the care in a timely way or when it's in Veterans' best medical interest.
- The fact is that demand for Veterans' health care is outpacing VA's ability to supply it wholly in-house. And with America facing a looming doctor shortage, VA has to be able to share health care resources with the private sector through an effective community care program. There is just no other option and, once again, VA has offered this solution since the World War II era.

### **The Bottom Line on the Privatization Myth**

"If we're trying to privatize, we're not doing a very good job,"... "We've gone from 250,000 employees in the VA in 2009 to 370,000 employees, and we've gone from a \$93.5 billion budget to what the president's asked this year is \$198 billion. It sounds like we've been an utter failure if we're trying to privatize." – [House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Phil Roe](#)

[Source: VA News Release | April 5, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Privatization Update 14 ► What Does Privatization Really Mean?**

When confirmation hearings for the next Veterans Affairs secretary begin in a few weeks, privatization of the department will be the main focus of most lawmakers' questions. Nearly everyone in the veterans community and on Capitol Hill is against privatizing VA — and nearly everyone has a different definition of what privatization is. Last week, VA officials released a statement titled “Debunking the VA Privatization Myth,” which insists “there is no effort underway to privatize VA,” and “to suggest otherwise is completely false and a red herring designed to distract and avoid honest debate on the real issues surrounding veterans' health care.” The move came in response to comments from former VA Secretary David Shulkin, fired by President Donald Trump.

In an op-ed just hours after his dismissal, Shulkin warned of individuals within the White House who “seek to privatize veteran health care as an alternative to government-run VA care.” But the definition of what privatizing the nearly \$200 billion department would mean depends largely on who is making the argument. The VA “debunking” statement notes that the department budget has gone up five times in the last 20 years, and the VA workforce has increased about 60 percent since then (to around 385,000 workers). The argument is that adding more resources to the bureaucracy can't be considered privatizing VA. But veterans groups have noted that increase is a function of inflation and increased demands on the department, and has little to do with future plans to shift more resources into community care programs in lieu of building up more VA infrastructure.

Shulkin warned in his piece against “dismantling of the department's extensive health care system,” but he also supported closing down a number of aging VA facilities and increasing partnerships with private-sector physicians to improve veterans' access to medical appointments. Meanwhile, both Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill have vowed to oppose “privatization” of VA even as they near an agreement that could substantially increase the number of outside care appointments for veterans, something that multiple lawmakers just a few years ago said amounted to outsourcing VA responsibilities. “The folks who actually want to privatize VA won't use the word, because they know it's a political fight,” said Paul Rieckhoff, executive director at Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. “But there's no doubt it is already happening.”

### **Moving veterans outside VA**

During the 2016 presidential campaign, then-Republican candidate Ben Carson suggested eliminating VA medical programs in favor of health care vouchers that veterans could take anywhere in the country. By nearly any advocate's definition, that idea amounts to fully privatizing VA. The plan has been floated several times over the years, but it has failed to gain serious traction because of the dramatic effects it would have on existing care programs. About \$72 billion of VA's budget this fiscal year goes to medical care, and the department has more than 1,200 medical facilities nationwide. With Carson's model as the extreme edge of the debate, the privatization fight largely hinges on how much medical care should go outside the department's existing infrastructure, and what counts as too much reliance on the private sector.

Last year, VA administrators coordinated more than 60 million medical appointments for veterans. More than one-third of them were with doctors and offices outside the Veterans Health Administration, either because the department didn't offer the right services or officials felt veterans would be better cared for through outside options.

Critics of the administration have warned that increasing the percentage of appointments — and money — heading out of VA and into the private sector could weaken department services. “Each time you’re taking resources out and putting them into the private sector, you’re leaving VA dying on the vine,” said Will Fischer, director of government relations for VoteVets.org. “It’s bit by bit draining of VA.”

For Fischer’s group — which has ties to the Democratic Party and has attacked Trump on a host of national security issues — the department is already on a dangerously close path to privatization, with plans to bump up community care programs to more than \$14 billion in fiscal 2019. Rieckhoff said he defines privatization as “any dollar spent by the government on government programs that goes to the private sector instead.” By that definition, large swaths of VA programs have been privatized for years. “The real fight here is over ‘full privatization’ versus ‘expanded privatization’ at VA,” he said. “But you can’t say you want more private care options in the community through VA but you are totally against privatization. That doesn’t make sense.”

Most of the larger veterans groups have used the charges of privatization to express serious concerns about efforts to boost outside care programs, and pushed to match them with equal funding to ensure that VA medical centers are being improved, not ignored. “Our view is that Congress and the administration must fix what is wrong with the VA health care system — improve hiring authorities, expand and fix its aging infrastructure, improve access, customer service — and not just simply turn to the private sector when VA facilities are having problems,” said Carlos Fuentes, director of the National Legislative Service at Veterans of Foreign Wars. “Community care is part of the solution, but not the only answer.”

### **Privatization vs. Choice**

One of the more recent proposals that alarmed some vets groups was a proposal by Rep. Doug Latta (R-CO) that would create a veterans health insurance program to allow participants to skip the department procedures entirely and get private-sector medical care at taxpayers’ expense. When it was introduced last fall, VFW officials blasted the idea as an effort to “kill the VA as a provider of care to America’s veterans” and labeled it a blatant “privatization attempt” by the congressman. He bristled at the accusation. “Our veterans deserve the highest degree of care,” he said in a statement. “Giving them options to choose their healthcare plans and doctors is empowering.” The plan closely tracks with one previously backed by Concerned Veterans for America, which has close ties to the conservative Koch brothers’ network and the Trump administration.

In 2015, the group issued a report calling for converting the Veterans Health Administration into a government-chartered nonprofit and having it compete against private-sector companies for federal funding. Veterans groups have said that amounts to privatizing VA responsibilities. CVA officials say that’s ridiculous. Dan Caldwell, executive director at CVA, said selling off VA facilities or completely defunding the department would equal privatization. But “the misrepresentation of efforts to expand veteran health care choice as ‘privatization’ is simply an attempt to undermine popular and common sense concepts which have overwhelming support among veterans.”

### **Slowly siphoning resources**

Many of the privatization fights surrounding VA trace back to 2014, in the wake of the wait-time scandal that forced the resignation of then-Secretary Eric Shinseki. In an effort to get veterans quicker access to medical appointments, Congress approved (by an overwhelmingly bipartisan majority) a new VA Choice program that allowed veterans who faced long waits for department care or long travels to department hospitals to instead pay for medical treatments in their community with public dollars. The idea drew criticism from some liberal groups, who warned the three-year program would slowly siphon off resources from the federal health system and that money would be better spent hiring more VA physicians and improving existing VA hospitals.

Since then, VA officials under Trump and former President Barack Obama have pushed for more simplification and flexibility on a range of community care programs, including Choice. Lawmakers removed the program’s end date last summer and added \$2 billion more to the program’s original \$10 billion funding cost. That has intensified the privatization accusations. “Once you start cannibalizing VA infrastructure, you are on your way to privatization,” said Lou Celli, national veterans affairs director for The American Legion. He and other veterans

groups worry that critics of the VA system will look at reduced numbers of patients at department hospitals as reasons to slash funding and staff, creating a death spiral for the system. “The word ‘choice’ has become a dog whistle for urging veterans to seek care outside of the VA,” said Sherman Gillums Jr., AMVETS’ chief strategy officer. “The demand for healthcare would then become profitable for corporations and organizations that provide healthcare, essentially commoditizing veterans healthcare, with no competition from a government system.”

Advocates note that outside doctors don’t have expertise in identifying service-connected injuries like burn pit exposure and post-traumatic stress disorder. “Maintaining an effective system of the things VA does best is a must,” said Carl Blake, executive director at Paralyzed Veterans of America. “It’s specialized services like spinal cord injury care, polytrauma, amputee and mental health. Those services don’t exist in a vacuum and are at risk when the system shrinks to support the greater cost in the community.”

### **The looming VA fights**

Trump’s VA has pushed back on the idea that shifting more care outside the VA equals privatization of core department missions, even though the president just two months after the election said he would consider privatizing some parts of the department if it means better care for veterans. Leaders in the House and Senate for months have been working on a VA health care overhaul package that would broaden eligibility for private-sector veterans care even more than the existing Choice program. Veterans who previously didn’t meet travel criteria could appeal based on the quality of services rendered in their community, or even opt for two walk-in appointments with private-sector doctors at taxpayers expense without any prior approval from VA administrators. But the Republican-authored plan, which was nearly passed as part of the budget omnibus package last month, also keeps most aspects of veterans health care under VA control, giving department officials the right to deny outside care in some cases.

Senate Democrats have given support for the measure, even though it likely will mean increasing the number of appointments paid for outside VA. House Democrats have expressed reservations in recent negotiations, with some voicing concerns that it amounts to privatization. White House officials have argued department managers should have as little role as possible, possibly even none at all, in deciding what doctor a veteran can visit. Shulkin and mainstream veterans groups have argued that VA cannot be completely divorced from patients’ care without dangerous health consequences. Whether the proposal can move through Congress while lawmakers are considering the new VA secretary nominee is unclear. But regardless, that nominee — White House physician Ronny Jackson — is expected to face a slew of questions on those “privatization” issues during his meetings with lawmakers in coming weeks, and during his confirmation hearing.

In a statement, House Veterans’ Affairs Committee ranking member Tim Walz (D-MN) said that he wants to make sure Trump’s new pick to lead VA is ready to “put veterans first, listen to [veterans service organizations], and fight any and all attempts to fully privatize the VA.” Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and herself a wounded Iraq War veteran, has already warned that she believes the Trump administration “wants to push VA down the dangerous path of privatization.” Administration officials say that simply isn’t true. “The fact is that demand for veterans’ health care is outpacing VA’s ability to supply it wholly in-house,” VA’s statement said. “And with America facing a looming doctor shortage, VA has to be able to share health care resources with the private sector through an effective community care program. “There is just no other option.” [Source MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 10, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Burial Benefits Update 45 ► Hmong and Laotian Vets Now Eligible**

Hmong and Laotian veterans who fought alongside the United States during a “secret war” in Laos against North Vietnamese forces celebrated a legislative victory last month after the passage of a bill that allows them to be buried in national cemeteries. On 23 MAR, the Hmong Veterans’ Service Recognition Act was enacted as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018. The legislation, introduced in Congress by Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) in

December 2017, takes effect more than 40 years after the end of the secret war. It allows some Hmong- and Laotian-American veterans to be buried in U.S. national cemeteries, excluding Arlington National Cemetery, and applies to only veterans who pass away on or after the bill's enactment.

Costa, whose district includes Fresno, California, which is home to more than 20,000 people of Hmong descent, according to the 2010 Census, previously sponsored four similar measures to extend burial benefits to Hmong and Laotian veterans. During the Laotian Civil War, the CIA recruited Hmong and Lao soldiers to fight against communist forces. At the end of the war, those who came to the U.S. as refugees were provided an expedited pathway to citizenship through naturalization. "These brave men and women fought shoulder-to-shoulder with U.S. Armed Forces during the Vietnam War, and they have earned this honor and recognition," Costa said. "I have been working closely with our local veterans leaders and my House and Senate colleagues on a bipartisan basis to secure these benefits for our SGU veterans for nearly 10 years, and seeing our nation finally extend these benefits is a huge victory for our veterans and their families."

Between 6,900 and 9,700 veterans would qualify for the burial benefit, according to a 2015 estimate from a veterans group. Costa hosted a press conference on 29 MAR at the Lao Hmong American War Memorial in Fresno County Courthouse Park to announce and celebrate the legislation. Between 40 and 50 people attended the event on according to Claudia Larson, Costa's spokesperson. Among those in attendance was Peter Vang, the son of a veteran and executive director of Lao Veterans of America — a Laotian- and Hmong-American nonprofit veterans organization. In an email, Vang said he is extremely happy about the bill's passage.

*"Lao Veterans of America has been working very hard for many years on this bill," he said. "I am now can tell my father and many thousand Hmong Veterans who fought with the US. Government (CIA) during the secret war in Laos from 1961-1975 that now they can chose to be burial at the Veterans National Cemetery. Their children will be very proud ... This is making history for us."*

[Source: NBC News | Agnes Constante | April 3, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Golden Age Games 2018 ► To Be Held AUG 3-8 in Albuquerque NM**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will begin accepting applications on April 2, 2018, from veterans interested in competing in the 2018 National Veterans Golden Age Games in Albuquerque, New Mexico, August 3-8, 2018. Veterans ages 55 and older who are eligible for VA health care benefits may complete applications online through May 2, 2018 at [www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov](http://www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov). "The Golden Age Games empower our nation's senior veterans to lead active, healthy lives," said VA Secretary David Shulkin. "After more than a week of competition, many participants have boasted of an overall improvement to their quality of life and a rejuvenation to stay active and fit."

Nearly 800 athletes are expected to compete in the national multi-sport competition for senior Veterans. The event encourages participants to make physical activity a central part of their lives, and supports VA's comprehensive recreation and rehabilitation therapy programs. Competitive events include air rifle, badminton, basketball, boccia, bowling, cycling, blind disc golf, golf, horseshoes, nine ball, pickleball, powerwalk, shuffleboard, swimming, table tennis and track and field. Exhibition events include air pistol, archery and floorball. The games encourage participants to continue in local senior events in their home communities, and every other year serve as a qualifying event for competition in the National Senior Games. The New Mexico VA Health Care System, which provides care for more than 59,000 Veterans throughout New Mexico and Southern Colorado, will host this year's games. For more information, visit [www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov](http://www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov). Follow VA Adaptive Sports on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram @Sports4Vets. [Source: USVCP Staff | March 26, 2018 ++]

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## VA Secretary Update 71 ► David J. Shulkin's Departing Comments



It has been my greatest professional honor to serve our country's more than 20 million veterans. Almost three years ago, I left my private sector job running hospitals and came to Washington to repay my gratitude to the men and women who put their lives on the line for our country.

I believe strongly in the mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and nothing about my political experience in Washington could ever change that. I also believe that maintaining a strong V.A. is an essential piece of the puzzle that is the United States' national security system: We can only expect our sons and daughters to risk their lives and fight for our freedom if we can keep our promise to care for them when they return home broken, injured or traumatized. There is no excuse for not holding up our end of the bargain. The mission set forth by President Abraham Lincoln to care for those who have "borne the battle" is a sacred duty that I will remain committed to always.

During my tenure at the department, we have accomplished a tremendous amount. We passed critical legislation that improved the appeals process for veterans seeking disability benefits, enacted a new G.I. Bill and helped ensure that we employ the right people to work at the department. We have expanded access to health care by reducing wait times, increasing productivity and working more closely with the private sector. We have put in place more and better mental health services for those suffering from the invisible wounds of war. We are now processing more disability claims and appeals than ever before and, for the first time, allowing veterans to see the status of their appeals by simply logging on to their accounts. Unemployment among veterans is near its lowest level in years, at 3.5 percent, and the percent of veterans who have regained trust in V.A. services has risen to 70 percent, from 46 percent four years ago.

It seems that these successes within the department have intensified the ambitions of people who want to put V.A. health care in the hands of the private sector. I believe differences in philosophy deserve robust debate, and solutions should be determined based on the merits of the arguments. The advocates within the administration for privatizing V.A. health services, however, reject this approach. They saw me as an obstacle to privatization who had to be removed. That is because I am convinced that privatization is a political issue aimed at rewarding select people and companies with profits, even if it undermines care for veterans.

Until the past few months, veteran issues were dealt with in a largely bipartisan way. (My 100-0 Senate confirmation was perhaps the best evidence that the V.A. has been the exception to Washington's political polarization). Unfortunately, the department has become entangled in a brutal power struggle, with some political appointees choosing to promote their agendas instead of what's best for veterans. These individuals, who seek to privatize veteran health care as an alternative to government-run V.A. care, unfortunately fail to engage in realistic plans regarding who will care for the more than 9 million veterans who rely on the department for life-sustaining care.

The private sector, already struggling to provide adequate access to care in many communities, is ill-prepared to handle the number and complexity of patients that would come from closing or downsizing V.A. hospitals and clinics, particularly when it involves the mental health needs of people scarred by the horrors of war. Working with community providers to adequately ensure that veterans' needs are met is a good practice. But privatization leading to the dismantling of the department's extensive health care system is a terrible idea. The department's understanding of service-related health problems, its groundbreaking research and its special ability to work with military veterans cannot be easily replicated in the private sector.

I have fought to stand up for this great department and all that it embodies. In recent months, though, the environment in Washington has turned so toxic, chaotic, disrespectful and subversive that it became impossible for me to accomplish the important work that our veterans need and deserve. I can assure you that I will continue to speak out against those who seek to harm the V.A. by putting their personal agendas in front of the well-being of our veterans.

As many of you know, I am a physician, not a politician. I came to government with an understanding that Washington can be ugly, but I assumed that I could avoid all of the ugliness by staying true to my values. I have been falsely accused of things by people who wanted me out of the way. But despite these politically based attacks on me and my family's character, I am proud of my record and know that I acted with the utmost integrity. Unfortunately, none of that mattered.

As I prepare to leave government, I am struck by a recurring thought: It should not be this hard to serve your country.

[Source: The New York Times | David J. Shulkin | March 28, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 72 ► Shulkin Did Not Leave Office Willingly**

Former veterans affairs secretary David Shulkin said 1 APR that he did not voluntarily leave his office, clashing with the White House's description of his exit and adding to questions about who will run the department until a new secretary is confirmed. "I would not resign, because I'm committed to making sure this job was seen through to the very end," Shulkin said in an interview on CNN's "State of the Union" with Jake Tapper. "I did not resign." Shulkin made similar comments on NBC's "Meet the Press," saying that he did not submit a letter of resignation, and was not asked to.

Whether Shulkin resigned or was fired would have bearing on who leads the Department of Veterans Affairs until the president's nominee, Navy Rear Adm. Ronny L. Jackson, is confirmed by the Senate. According to federal statutes, the departure of a Senate-confirmed secretary elevates the department's deputy secretary to that position until a permanent replacement arrives. But VA's deputy secretary, Thomas G. Bowman, has already been passed over by a White House that has wanted to overhaul the department's leadership. Robert Wilkie, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, is now running VA. The Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998 empowers the

president to bypass a deputy and install anyone who has been confirmed by the Senate for any position “to perform the functions and duties of the vacant office temporarily in an acting capacity.”

The White House previously used that power to install Mick Mulvaney, the Senate-confirmed OMB director, to lead the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau, a move that is still being litigated by CFPB Deputy Director Leandra English. But Mulvaney’s predecessor, Richard Cordray, had resigned to run for governor of Ohio. Shulkin told The Washington Post on 30 MAR, as he told CNN on 1 APR, that he did not resign and was instead fired after being undermined by political appointees. “I don’t think that this was the president,” Shulkin told Tapper. “The president is committed to improving the care for veterans. These appointees had a belief that there was a different way to do that than I did ... these individuals, when they didn’t see that their way was being adopted, used subversive techniques to change the leadership at VA.”

Shulkin’s description of what happened clashes with that of the Trump administration. On 30 MAR, Shulkin told The Post that he was told by White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly that he was being pushed out. But 31 MAR, deputy White House press secretary Lindsay Walters told Politico that “Secretary Shulkin resigned from his position as Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.” Asked on 1 APR about Shulkin’s description of what happened, Walters repeated that statement. The questions about Shulkin’s removal may well end up in court. Democrats, who, like Shulkin, believe that the Trump administration is attempting to elevate people who favor privatizing VA’s services, could sue over any major decisions made by Wilkie, arguing that the 1998 law on vacancies does not apply when appointees are fired.

“I would strongly suspect that, if you get rid of Shulkin, who opposed privatization, and you put Dr. Jackson in, that is what his mission will be,” Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who caucuses with Democrats, said 1 APR on CNN. “Without exception, the major veterans organizations say, we have got to strengthen VA, not dismember it, not privatize it. And I will do everything I can as a member of the veterans committee not to approve any nominee who is not going to strengthen VA and who will oppose privatization.” The prospect of an acting VA secretary making decisions and then facing legal action also worries some advocacy groups. “That uncertainty creates risk, which is a real problem,” said Max Stier, the president of the Partnership for Public Service. “I don’t believe any court has opined on this as of yet. It is uncertainty piled on top of uncertainty with real harm being caused to the VA and veterans.” [Source: The Washington Post | David Weigel | April 1, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 73 ► VA Confirmation Process Could Be Contentious**

Ronny Jackson’s nomination to become the next Veterans Affairs secretary could become the most contentious confirmation process since the department was founded 30 years ago. But that’s also a fairly low bar. Since the department was elevated to a Cabinet-level post back in 1988, no senator has ever voted against a VA secretary pick. All of the confirmations have been unanimous or near-unanimous votes (with a handful of lawmakers absent), or procedural votes where no opposition was formally recorded. That includes former VA Secretary David Shulkin, confirmed by a 100-0 vote in February 2017. His total support from the Senate was frequently touted by President Donald Trump in public appearances, including one just a few weeks before Shulkin was fired by the president over social media on March 28.

In fact, no nominee for a confirmable department post over the last 30 years — totaling more than 150 individuals — has ever received a vote of opposition from the Senate, underscoring the non-partisan nature of VA work. That means even a single vote against Jackson’s confirmation could send a message of irreversible political division on the once seemingly untouchable approach to the department issues. Jackson, who retired from the Navy in late MAR as a rear admiral with 23 years of service, was a surprise nominee for the post. He’s an Iraq War veteran who served under three presidents as the top White House medical officer, and is best known for giving Trump a clear bill of health in January.

But little is known about his familiarity with the department, which boasts a budget this fiscal year of more than \$186 billion and a staff of more than 370,000 employees. Senate Democrats have openly questioned the pick, and hinted he may not receive the same support as past nominees. “I admire Dr. Jackson’s service to the nation, but I don’t know if he is the right person to lead the VA,” Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) and ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said in a statement last week. “The VA is a large and intricate agency that requires steadfast leadership and an understanding of how to run a complex organization.”

Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) is a combat-wounded Iraq War veteran and a frequent critic of the Trump administration. Like Reed, she promised to “carefully review Dr. Jackson’s qualifications to determine whether he has the best interests of our veterans at heart.” But she also accused Trump of wanting “to push VA down the dangerous path of privatization” and warned that “the next VA secretary must be able to protect the department from becoming consumed by partisan politics.” Former Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-VT) similarly said the Senate “should not approve any nominee for secretary who supports the privatization of the VA,” a charge which he has also leveled at Trump. The current top Democrat on the committee, Montana Sen. Jon Tester, said simply that he is “looking forward to meeting Admiral Jackson soon and seeing if he is up to the job.”

Few Republicans in the chamber have offered strong praise for Jackson thus far, though none have offered serious public concerns, either. No timetable has been set for the confirmation hearings. Senate officials still have not received the formal nominating paperwork from the White House, which will start the background check and confirmation process. That work typically takes between one and two months. Senate leaders have said they hope to move quickly on the work to ensure a vote on Jackson’s nomination before the summer. Confirmation votes by the Senate on VA secretary nominees

- David Shulkin, 100-0 (Feb. 13, 2017)
- Bob McDonald, 97-0 (July 29, 2014)
- Eric Shinseki, voice vote (Jan. 20, 2009)
- James Peake, voice vote (Dec. 14, 2007)
- John Nicholson, voice vote (April 11, 2003)
- Anthony Principi, 100-0 (Jan. 23, 2001)
- Togo West Jr., voice vote (April 28, 1998)
- Jesse Brown, unanimous consent (Jan. 23, 1993)
- Edward Derwinski, 94-0 (March 2, 1989)

[Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane III | April 2, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 74 ► What The Law Calls For**

Officials from one of the nation’s largest veterans groups are calling for President Donald Trump to remove the acting Veterans Affairs secretary from the post and instead hand over control to the department’s deputy secretary, saying that is “what the law calls for.” Leaders from AMVETS on 3 APR are sending a letter to the White House insisting the change is needed to calm fears of veterans and VA employees in the wake of the firing of David Shulkin last week. Shulkin, who had been one of Trump’s closest Cabinet members for much of 2017, was dismissed by the president over Twitter after nearly two months of controversy surrounding a watchdog report accusing him of ethics violations and subsequent infighting among political operatives in the administration.

Following Shulkin’s firing, Trump nominated White House physician Ronny Jackson as the next VA secretary, and Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Robert Wilkie to serve as acting secretary until the confirmation process is complete. But the announcement bypassed VA Deputy Secretary Tom Bowman, who was the next in line to take over the top leadership post. White House officials have not addressed the legal justification

for a move, saying only that Wilkie has been working in the role since 29 MAR. On 3 APR, AMVETS Executive Director Joe Chenelly said administration officials erred in moving Wilkie from the Pentagon to VA headquarters, and asked for the “leadership situation” to be resolved immediately. “Tom Bowman is the person veterans need running the VA in this time of turmoil,” he said. “Tom is a retired Marine Corps colonel, highly respected on Capitol Hill and well regarded in the veterans community. This needs to happen now.”



VA Acting Secretary Robert Wilkie



VA Deputy Secretary Tom Bowman

Bowman was also the subject of possible firing rumors earlier this year, as opponents of Shulkin within the administration wrestled with how to deal with high-ranking VA officials they saw as opposing sweeping reform proposals to the department. Multiple sources within VA said they expect Bowman to resign within days, if he isn’t fired first. Under current law, the president can fill leadership vacancies with any individual in cases where the current office holder resigns or is unable to perform the job.

If the Trump administration is found to be in violation of federal law in appointing Wilkie to the acting VA secretary post, it could call into question any department decisions he makes. That would mean that any new program starts, contract negotiations or policy changes may be vulnerable to future legal challenges. Chenelly said that uncertainty undermines Trump’s promises to improve and reform the department. Returning Wilkie to the Pentagon and elevating Bowman would limit confusion and bring stability to the now tumultuous department. Shulkin is the second VA secretary to be forced out of the office in the last four years. Including Wilkie and the other acting officials, six different men have helmed the \$186 billion department since May 2014. Jackson, who’s nomination to the top VA job came as a surprise to most veterans groups, is expected to face confirmation hearings at the end of April or beginning of May. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 3, 2018 ++]

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## VAMC Washington DC Update 08 ► Director Replaced | Problems Still Exist

The director of the beleaguered Department of Veterans Affairs hospital in Washington D.C. was reassigned 9 APR amid ongoing problems at the hospital and an investigation into whether his appointment broke federal protocols. Retired Army Col. Larry Connell took over the hospital in April 2017, following a scathing report from the VA Inspector General’s Office about widespread, systematic failures that put veterans at risk. Former VA Secretary David Shulkin fired then-director Brian Hawkins and tapped Connell to reform the facility. In an email to VA staff 9 APR, Raymond Chung, acting director of the VA Capitol Health Care Network, announced that Connell’s tenure as temporary director of the DC hospital expired Saturday. Connell wasn’t asked to stay in the job longer, Chung wrote. Chung said the reason was that questions recently arose about whether correct hiring processes were followed when Connell was named to the post.

VA Press Secretary Curt Cashour confirmed to Stars and Stripes in March that the VA Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection was investigating whether protocols were violated. Citing a memo from the Office of Personnel Management, CNN reported that political influence could have played a role in his selection. Before

taking the helm of the DC hospital, Connell worked on Trump’s transition team and was a special adviser to Shulkin. “Larry Connell’s temporary detail as acting director expired as scheduled 7 APR,” Chung wrote. “Although we had hoped for him to continue as VA D.C. medical center’s permanent director, issues regarding technical aspects of his initial appointment as acting director have arisen making it impossible at this time.” Connell was sent back to the VA central office to resume his previous role as senior adviser to the VA secretary. Charles Faselis, chief of staff of the hospital, will temporarily lead the facility, Chung wrote.

After the IG report April 2017, Faselis was Shulkin’s first choice to take over the hospital. However, Shulkin changed his mind and appointed Connell instead, announcing he wanted to bring in an outsider. Chung told VA staff that the decision to have Connell step down from the position was not made because of his performance. “This move has absolutely nothing to do with Larry’s performance, which has been phenomenal,” Chung wrote. “Over the past year, his efforts have been pivotal to the positive changes made here.”

The leadership shakeup came one day after Stars and Stripes reported that many of the problems existing at the hospital in April 2017 remained unresolved one year later, despite public reassurance from Connell and other VA leaders that real progress had been made. Stars and Stripes reviewed multiple inspection reports that described unsanitary conditions at the facility as recently as last month. A January report concluded the hospital still posed a risk to patient safety. Connell told reporters at a 7 MAR news conference that the facility had been scrubbed clean. “This hospital is a different hospital today than it was back in April,” he said, suggesting that the problems had been addressed. “This is a great hospital for veterans to receive their health care,” he said. “I am so confident in the quality and safety of care at this facility, I enrolled here with my health care.”

Despite those claims, the VA Inspector General’s Office said the eight early recommendations it made in April 2017 to fix the DC hospital — which it said should be carried out “immediately”— had not been completed as last week. The IG asked the VA to ensure that supplies were available, create a working inventory system and hire key staff, among other recommendations. Multiple problems the IG discovered in April 2017 were echoed in a January 2018 report from the VA’s National Program Office for Sterile Processing. Inspectors found dirty syringe bottles and stopped their work to hold an immediate meeting with hospital leadership about the risk to patients. In March, an FDA inspector found a nonworking refrigerator in the hospital’s blood bank, keeping blood at room temperature, and workers weren’t always recording the temperature of blood when it was transported to the Children’s National Medical Center next door. On 5 MAR the FDA ordered the VA to resolve the issues.

In response to questions about ongoing troubles, Cashour said 5 APR that the DC hospital “has been aggressively addressing a number of identified concerns, but the facility’s problems didn’t emerge overnight and they won’t be solved overnight.” The uncertainty in the ranks at the DC hospital adds to an already turbulent leadership situation at the VA. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | April 9, 2018 ++ ]

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## **VAMC Washington DC Update 09 ► Problems Persist Despite Reported Resolutions**

Department of Veterans Affairs documents detail seven canceled procedures caused by supply shortages in February and March at the VA hospital in Washington, contrary to the agency’s claims that the last one was in January. The documents, newly obtained by Stars and Stripes, outline seven instances of procedures being delayed or postponed because of supply shortages at the agency’s flagship hospital – four in February and three in March. In one case last month, a 69-year-old veteran was under anesthesia and a surgeon made an incision for his hip implant before medical workers realized they didn’t have the correct supplies – nails for the implant were mismatched. The procedure was eventually completed, but the mix-up led to the veteran being under sedation 30 minutes longer than expected. The VA launched a patient safety report, and the incident will go under peer review.

The VA Inspector General's Office issued early findings in April 2017 of its investigation into the DC hospital, which serves about 93,000 veterans, revealing widespread problems that put veterans at risk. Inspectors found multiple procedures that were canceled because of a lack of supplies. In response to questions from Stars and Stripes about whether the problems were fixed, the VA claimed last week that the most recent canceled procedure because of supply shortages occurred in January. In that instance, the VA blamed delays at the Federal Express sorting station as the reason the hospital didn't have the necessary supplies. "The last canceled procedure due to equipment/supply shortages occurred in January 2018," VA Press Secretary Curt Cashour said in a written statement last week.

In response to questions 12 APR about the incidents in February and March, the VA claimed there were no procedures delayed or rescheduled because of a lack of supplies. Instead, Cashour argued six procedures were rescheduled during those two months because of "minor equipment sterilization issues." The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs is aware of cases of canceled procedures at the DC hospital after January, said Tiffany Haverly, committee spokeswoman. "The committee has received evidence of and is investigating canceled procedures in January, February and March," she said. Incidents reported include:

- According to a VA list of canceled procedures at the hospital, three dental procedures were delayed at the hospital in February because of unavailable supplies. One procedure was postponed for two weeks. Another was pushed back 48 days, and the other 51 days. A colon surgery was canceled in February because of missing supplies and rescheduled for the following day. VA reports show that problems with supply shortages at the DC hospital continued into March.
- In one case last month, a 54-year-old veteran arrived at the hospital for a hip replacement. While he was in the waiting room, medical workers discovered their equipment wasn't sterile. The procedure was rescheduled for the following week.
- Another day in March, the hospital scheduled nine veterans for the same outpatient procedure but had only enough supplies for seven. A 69-year-old veteran had his appointment rescheduled for a later date. An 80-year-old veteran chose to wait for equipment to be sterilized, and he had his procedure later the same day. The VA said a "communication breakdown" contributed to the shortage, as well as the heavy workload on the department responsible for sterilizing medical supplies. According to a report from January, the VA's National Program Office for Sterile Processing found key staff vacancies in that department. Cashour said last week that the hospital had hired nine additional permanent staff members for the team.
- On March 26, the hospital's medical supply vendor failed to make a delivery – leading to "critical medical supply shortages," according to a report. Hospital leadership was notified, and supplies were pulled from other departments for time-sensitive surgeries. The situation prompted the hospital to find backup vendors that could provide emergency medical supplies in case it happens again.

The instances of supply shortages and canceled procedures in the past two months are analogous of problems the IG described one year ago, indicating the issues persist at the DC hospital — located just four miles from VA headquarters — despite recent claims from the VA of substantial progress. In a more comprehensive report the IG released last month, inspectors cited multiple incidents in 2017 when staff had to leave the medical center to borrow supplies from a private hospital across the street. Inspectors reviewed 39 cases of canceled procedures because of supply shortages from 2015 to 2017. In some cases, veterans were unnecessarily hospitalized overnight because they were waiting for supplies. Surgeons sometimes were forced to use instruments that were available, instead of the ones they preferred, the IG reported.

Inspectors found no evidence that patients were harmed because of the lack of supplies, and they credited staff who "worked around these challenges and improvised as necessary to provide veterans with the best possible services under the circumstances." The IG and the Office of Special Counsel would not confirm whether they are investigating continued shortages and canceled procedures at the hospital. The House Committee on Veterans'

Affairs is planning an oversight hearing as early as next month. [Source: Stars And Stripes | Nikki Wentling | April 12, 2018 ++]

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## **VAMC Northport NY Update 01 ► Emergency Funding Needed | \$15M**

When the Northport Veterans Affairs Medical Center was built early in the 20th century as a haven for psychiatric and tuberculosis patients, the cooling system consisted of fans and open windows. Today, in several buildings on the 268-acre campus, things are not much different. “We have an emergency here, worse than most other places,” Senator Chuck Schumer said outside the troubled Long Island facility on 9 APR. “It’s hard to believe, but the dog days of summer are on our doorstep, and to do surgery and treatment, you need a temperature that’s relatively temperate.” Mr. Schumer called for the Department of Veterans Affairs in Washington to cut an emergency check for the replacement of the heating, cooling and ventilation systems across the medical center’s campus, where failing units have forced the cancellations of surgeries for weeks and months at a time.

Senator Schumer, Democrat of New York, helped negotiate a bill, signed into law, that allocates \$4 billion to veterans’ hospitals across the country. Northport needs \$15 million of that, Mr. Schumer said. The air-conditioning unit in the main hospital is 12 years past its expiration date, according to a statement from Mr. Schumer’s office. Among its other needs is an HVAC unit for four second-floor rooms that are intended to house patients with infectious diseases. Several more buildings on campus need new HVAC units, including Building 5, which has had three failed HVAC units for over four years, and Building 7, in which the units are infested with rats and inoperable, the statement said. As recently as February, Mr. Schumer said, the center shut five operating rooms, postponing 18 surgeries, because of HVAC problems. In 2016, the medical center closed its operating rooms for four months because particles from the HVAC system were blowing into operating rooms.

“Can you imagine, if you’re a veteran, or a family member of a veteran, you desperately need an operation, they say, ‘We can’t do it,’ not because the doctors aren’t there, not because you don’t deserve it, but because the HVAC system is so deteriorated that gunk is blowing into the operating room,” Mr. Schumer said.

Scott Guermonprez, the director of the Veterans Affairs center, previously served as director of the center in Albany. A Northport native who spent 30 years in the Air Force, he assumed the Long Island post in June after Philip C. Moschitta retired, amid an investigation into the center’s shortcomings. A spokeswoman for the House Committee on Veterans Affairs confirmed on 9 APR that the congressional investigation was continuing. “Most V.A.s are set up as a tower, like a single tower structure, that has almost a million square feet in one building,” Mr. Guermonprez said. “We have 72 buildings and 1.4 million square feet spread across the campus.” The Northport center also has a new chief of engineering, Mr. Guermonprez said, and is hiring people with the necessary skills and abilities to make improvements. Replacing heating and cooling systems now comes with a fringe benefit, he added: energy efficiency. [Source: The New York Times | Arielle Dollinger | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **VAMC Canandaigua NY ► \$161 Million Expansion Project**

A groundbreaking ceremony 10 APR at the Canandaigua VA Medical Center marked the kickoff of a \$161 million project to give veterans across the region a modern, state-of-the art outpatient clinic and related upgrades. Gathered under the pavilion overlooking the VA courtyard and area where the new 84,200-square-foot clinic will be housed were many involved with the project. They included members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from Buffalo, Ohio and Kentucky. “This will be the first VA project with the Army Corps as construction agent,” said Stella Fiotes, executive director with VA construction and facilities management. “We will learn from this project,” she

said of the partnership expected to mark future joint endeavors. Those include a planned second phase for modernizing the campus at 400 Fort Hill Ave.

Brigadier General Mark Toy, commander and division engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Great Lakes and Ohio River, said the division has 4,100 members involved. The project will be managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with support from the medical center and VA Construction and Facilities Management. Construction for the project was awarded in January to Ontario County-based Pike-P.J. Dick Joint Venture. Kenneth Piazza, acting director of the Canandaigua VA, said the new outpatient clinic will provide the latest in primary and speciality care, radiology and a new dental clinic. The new outpatient clinic is expected to be completed in 2022.

Canandaigua Mayor Ellen Polimeni acknowledged the hard work and perseverance of veterans and other community members including VA employees. “We came close to losing the VA,” said Polimeni. In 2003 it was targeted for closure under a national restructuring plan. Now, the project breaking ground is just the first phase of a planned \$351 million overhaul. U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer was in Canandaigua last month to announce his push for approval of the \$190 million needed for the second phase. That will bring a new community living center for nursing home level care; short-term housing for veterans recovering from substance abuse, homelessness and mental or behavioral health conditions; and renovations to improve rehabilitation and physical therapy services.

The Medical Center, officially opened in FEB 1933, has been designated as a VA Center of Excellence for research and education of mental health issues. The [national VA Suicide/Crisis Hotline call center](#) is also located on the Canandaigua campus. Located on 150 acres with 14 patient care buildings, the Canandaigua VA Medical Center currently provides: Primary, mental health, and specialty care, disease prevention and wellness programs, alcohol and drug abuse rehabilitation, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) care, a domiciliary program and community living center (nursing home) care. [Source: Daily Messenger | Julie Sherwood | April 10, 2018 ++]

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### **VAMC Houston Update 03 ► End Harassment Campaign | Female Vets**

Cat calls NOT welcome. Staring and whistling...NOT okay at the VA. These are some key messages of a special campaign kicking off this month at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (MEDVAMC) in Houston. The medical center’s new End Harassment Campaign is aimed at ensuring women Veterans receive their healthcare in a safe and respectful environment, free of even the hint of sexual harassment. During the month of April, MEDVAMC is educating employees, Veterans, and visitors and actively working to change the medical center culture to one of zero tolerance for any type of harassment.

More than 15,000 women Veterans are currently registered for care at the Houston VA. Some of these women Veterans have reported feeling uncomfortable or harassed while surrounded by their male Veteran counterparts at the medical center, according to Dr. Rola El-Serag, Director of the MEDVAMC Women’s Health Program. “When women feel uncomfortable in our medical center, they are less inclined to come in to receive the medical care they need,” said El-Serag. “This can have a hugely negative effect on their health, both mentally and physically. The thought that a woman Veteran who has experienced something like military sexual trauma or is suffering from something like post-traumatic stress disorder, would not be comfortable coming to the VA is just unacceptable.”

To combat this issue, the MEDVAMC began training all 5,400+ employees on ways to recognize inappropriate behavior and equipping them with the tools to intervene on behalf of women Veterans in a variety of situations. In addition, signs educating Veterans and visitors to avoid doing things like staring and making inappropriate remarks, while encouraging them to treat the women Veterans with dignity and respect, have been installed around the Medical Center. VA Police are trained to intervene when necessary. “We are determined to remove any barriers to care that exist for our women Veterans and make sure the VA is a place they feel is nurturing, helpful, and

respectful,” said Frank Vazquez, Medical Center Director. In 2017, the Medical Center opened a new Women’s Health Center, dedicated to meeting the special needs of women Veterans. The new center offers women Veterans a private entrance, a growing number of co-located services including on-site mammograms, and primary and mental health care. As the fastest growing demographic of VA patients, women Veterans average about 20 years younger than the male patients at the medical center.

Women Veterans experiencing harassment are encouraged to report it to the Women’s Health Center or to the MEDVAMC Patient Experience Office, located on the 5th floor of the medical center near the blue elevators. Employees are trained to pay close attention to what is going on around them and intervene, and if necessary report inappropriate behavior to the VA Police. So far, MEDVAMC employees and Veterans have embraced the End Harassment Campaign. Over the past few weeks, the VA police have already seen an increase in the number of reported complaints of inappropriate behavior. “We are hoping to see the number of complaints go up at first, indicating that our women Veterans and employees feel empowered to bring issues forward and are confident that we will act on them,” El-Serag said. “The women Veterans I meet here every day, are incredibly brave, determined, and accomplished. It is our job at the VA to provide a safe and respectful environment for these women.”

For more information about the MEDVAMC’s End Harassment Campaign or to report inappropriate behavior, contact the MEDVAMC’s Women Veterans Coordinator at 713-794-2834. [Source: Houston VAMC News Update | April 12, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Green Alert ► Wisconsin System For Missing Vulnerable Veterans**

Wisconsin might become the first state in the nation to create a Green Alert system for missing vulnerable veterans, reports the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. The system would be similar to state Amber and Silver alerts for missing children and older adults, respectively. The state Senate passed legislation to create the system in late JAN, and the state Assembly was expected to take up the bill in February. “We’re hoping this goes national,” state Democratic Sen. LaTonya Johnson told the newspaper. Johnson had introduced the bill. “Veterans give so much.” Johnson said. Referring to an Air Force veteran whose death prompted her to introduce the bill, she said that the vet had “served (three) tours and he came home safe. If he made it home safe we should have done everything to make sure he was made whole.”

For 18 days last spring, U.S. Air Force veteran Corey Adams of Milwaukee was missing, but it took eight days before he met the criteria to warrant an official law enforcement search. Adams' body was recovered in a pond just a mile from his home. His family, which notified authorities immediately when he went missing, went to State Sen. LaTonya Johnson and asked for help, in hopes that no other family would have to go through such a traumatic event.

Republican state Assemblyman Joel Kleefisch, a sponsor of the [Corey Adams Searchlight Act](#), said he expected it to pass the Assembly and be on Gov. Scott Walker's desk by the end of February. The bill has since been enacted into law. "I will not be surprised if we see Green Alert in every state of the union in the next three to four years," Kleefisch told the newspaper. [Source: Wisconsin State Journal | Ken Chamberlain | January 31, 2018 ++]

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## **PTSD Update 244 ► Should Seeking VA Help Impact on Vet's Gun Ownership Right?**

Adam Lingo, a retired Army staff sergeant, walked across 11 states last year, flanked by men who had become like brothers while serving together in Iraq. They made the nearly 3,000-mile journey to honor their dead and — more pressingly — help other veterans still struggling. "We started doing the numbers and I think we lost more guys to suicide in our unit than we did while we were in combat," the 42-year-old veteran told HuffPost, referring to the men who served in his 1-24 infantry unit in the early 2000s. "It is an epidemic and it's something I don't think the [Department of Veteran Affairs] is paying enough attention to," Lingo said. "Honestly, I don't think they know what to do."

Lingo is referring to the acute mental health crisis facing veterans across the country. On average, 20 veterans die by suicide each day. And studies show that between 13 to 30 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have post-traumatic stress disorder, a mental health disorder that typically manifests after someone experiences or witnesses a life-threatening event. But only about half of the vets from these wars who might need mental health treatment — not only for PTSD but also substance use and depression — actually seek it through the VA or private health care. To receive health care from the VA, vets must undergo PTSD screening, and those who are diagnosed with it or other conditions are eligible to receive monetary disability benefits.

During his trek, Lingo noticed a pattern among veterans who needed help for mental illnesses: They were afraid to reach out for it. Many of the vets he spoke to were distrustful of the government, and he described a common refrain he heard along the way: "'Hey, if I do go and I register to get help and they do diagnose me with PTSD, am I gonna be able to keep my guns?'" Veterans face several barriers to treatment for mental health illnesses like PTSD, including long waiting lists for care with the VA and the social stigma of carrying a mental health diagnosis. But with nearly half of all veterans owning one or more firearms, the fear that seeking help for PTSD could result in losing access to their guns proves to be a significant barrier to care. And it's an obstacle fraught with danger. PTSD increases a veteran's risk of substance abuse, severe depression, anxiety, death by suicide and also has a small but significant link to domestic violence. Left untreated, these risks are even higher. One study found that U.S. army service members who died by suicide from 2001 to 2009 were nearly 13 times more likely to have a PTSD diagnosis.

I get asked that question more than once every single week: 'If I file a claim for PTSD are they going to take my guns?'" Heather E. Vanhose, veteran attorney. Vanhose, lead veteran attorney for the Jan Dils Law Firm, has often heard concerns related to PTSD and gun ownership during her 11 years representing veterans. "It's very real among my client population," said Vanhose, who is based in West Virginia but handles cases nationwide. "I get asked that question more than once every single week: 'If I file a claim for PTSD are they going to take my guns?'" She added that none of her clients have ever had any issues with owning or buying a gun because of their PTSD classification.

The fear is evident online as well, with similar questions popping up on Reddit, military forums and blogs. While some of these platforms, including a blog published by Vanhose's law firm, attempt to quell veterans' concerns, others, like the NRA's America's First Freedom magazine, have stoked fears that veterans' gun rights are under siege. But veterans' concerns aren't irrational, either. The VA has the ability to deem a veteran "mentally incompetent" to handle monetary benefits through its fiduciary program — a decision that would bar the beneficiary from possessing or purchasing a gun. An incompetent rating, tied to the management of VA-allocated monetary

benefits, results in the appointment of a trustee on the veteran's behalf. Then, in compliance with the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, the agency sends the names of incompetent beneficiaries to the FBI, which in turn places the names into the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). A name in the NICS is what could prevent a veteran from buying, transporting and owning a firearm.

The agency's indirect impact on some veterans' ability to own and purchase firearms is a point of contention for some ardent 2nd Amendment supporters. Last year, Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) introduced a controversial bill that would still allow veterans deemed mentally incompetent to own a firearm unless a judge ordered otherwise. Those who opposed the legislation pointed to the high rates of firearm suicide among veterans. While a mental incompetence designation is a possibility for some vets, a misunderstanding of the VA's protocol may be preventing many more from getting the mental health care they need. A VA spokesperson told HuffPost that veterans' concerns of losing their firearms due to a PTSD diagnosis are "unfounded."

Still, the fear persists — particularly among veterans hoping to work or who are already working in law enforcement jobs, the vast majority of which require that a person be legally able to possess a gun. Mike, whose name has been changed because he did not have permission from his police department to speak to the press, is an Oregon-based police officer of almost a decade and an Iraq War vet. He told HuffPost that at the beginning of his career he was afraid to seek help for his PTSD because he thought it could mean losing his job. "There is definitely some stigma, with being a police officer and being diagnosed with PTSD," he said, adding that he only sought help after an injury led him to question whether he would be let go from his department anyway.

The VA offered him benefits and regular counseling, and he now focuses on reaching out to veterans who have yet to seek help. Mike said he answers a call about a distressed veteran almost weekly. The men and women he comes across are often suicidal — sometimes they haven't slept in days, a symptom of their PTSD. The police officer must often peel back the sleeve of his uniform to reveal the infantry badge inked on his forearm — a tattoo that has helped him make immediate, life-saving connections with many vets reluctant to speak about their experiences and fears. "I go to these calls and one of my first questions while we're talking is, 'Why haven't you gone, before now, to seek help?'" Mike said. "It is a common theme that they are afraid of losing the right to own firearms."

### **When The Fear Becomes Real**

Sergeant Eddie Montoya, 40, was sitting next to his company commander just minutes before a suicide bomber attacked their mess hall tent near Mosul in December 2004. In the wake of the explosion, the former combat medic helped tend to the wounded and identify bodies. The bombing, which killed 22 people and left dozens injured, was one of the deadliest attacks on U.S. forces during the war. It was also the last time Montoya and Lingo saw four of their fellow soldiers, including commander Capt. William Jacobsen. After 16 years in the army, Montoya received a PTSD diagnosis. It had no impact on his ability to purchase or own guns legally, but two subsequent experiences with the VA in 2015 almost did.

It began with his drinking. Once stateside, the veteran self-medicated with alcohol. "I think I was just trying to numb the pain," Montoya, who now lives in San Bernardino, California, told HuffPost. But when he sought help to quit drinking at a VA clinic, Montoya said he ended up in a psychiatric hold for two days because staff confused his emotional state with being suicidal. "It was degrading and embarrassing," he added. (Citing patient privacy concerns, the VA was unable to corroborate why Montoya was put in a psychiatric hold.) "I've done a couple of tours, I've seen a lot of stuff. My mind isn't what I would call normal," Montoya said. "But, I'm not crazy. I'm not homicidal. I'm not suicidal." It's a distinction that Montoya feels passionate about making, particularly due to how often veterans are erroneously portrayed as dangerous or "ticking-time bombs."

Circumstances were further complicated months later when Montoya sought to increase his VA benefits after he quit drinking (the veteran told HuffPost he's currently almost three years sober). Montoya went through a procedural psychological evaluation during which he said a doctor asked him about his finances. The vet said he told the doctor that he allows his wife, a social worker, to manage household finances because she helped him get out of debt and

get his credit score over 700. A couple of weeks later, he received a written notice from the VA referencing his psychological evaluation and informing him that the agency was considering designating him incompetent, putting his firearm possession rights at risk.

There remains a lack of clarity surrounding the threshold of injury or disease that could lead the VA to declare a veteran mentally incompetent, but the agency told HuffPost the decision is not directly connected to a single diagnosis. “While a mental disorder, such as PTSD, may be considered a disease under 38 C.F.R. § 3.353(a), the fact that an individual has been diagnosed by a VA physician as having a mental disorder — or even that the individual has been found to be disabled for purposes of VA disability compensation — would not establish that the individual lacks the mental capacity to manage his or her own affairs,” VA press secretary Curt Cashour said. Veterans are given a due process period to fight a proposed incompetence rating. Montoya was told he had 60 days to respond with evidence to prove he did not need a fiduciary.

“My attorney fought it,” Montoya said. “They ended up increasing my benefits from 50 to 100 percent and they took away that letter saying they wanted to seize my weapons and give me a trust for my disability money.” Montoya added that at no point during the three to four-month process did anyone show up attempting to seize his firearms. He also said he’s had no issues purchasing a gun since. Last year, however, Montoya said he was denied a concealed carry permit by the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department. He said an officer told him it was due to his medical history and the veteran suspects it has something to do with his PTSD or his time in the psychiatric hold. “I was reaching out to a ‘trusted’ source and got penalized for it,” Montoya speculated. “This is why vets won’t reach out.”

The San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department did not respond to questions about Montoya’s specific case but Sergeant Matt Yost told HuffPost applicants are issued a concealed weapons permit based on good moral character, residency and good cause per California law. “The Sheriff’s Department generally does not request medical records from our applicants,” Yost added, but applicants do sign a notarized authorization to release certain medical information, including psychological records, in accordance to state law.

### **Deadly Consequences**

Some veterans forego mental health treatment over the possibility they’ll lose their gun ownership rights, but leaving PTSD untreated is dangerous. In particular, vets who don’t seek treatment for PTSD could run a higher risk of dying by suicide, forensic psychiatrist Dr. Elspeth Cameron Ritchie told HuffPost. “PTSD symptoms wax and wane, but certainly not getting help can make things worse,” she said, adding that there’s a very close link between PTSD and depression. Out of the average 20 veteran suicides per day, only 30 percent are users of VA health services. Guns are by far the most common method of suicide among veterans, with approximately 67 percent of all deaths by suicide being a result of firearm injuries.

It’s a grim reality Lingo, Montoya and the men in their infantry unit have witnessed up close over the years — and the reason the veterans set up the nonprofit Brotherhood Bridge, which seeks to help veterans integrate back into civilian life, after their “Walk of Life.” “I’ve had tons of friends that had guns to their head — I did, at one point — so I understand it,” Lingo said. He described his own “Russian roulette”-style incident as something that happened “years ago” while he was still in the army. Lingo said his past experience with depression is one reason he doesn’t currently own a gun. “I wouldn’t want to use it on myself,” he said, adding that he also simply doesn’t feel he needs one at the moment. “Now, if I ever felt like I needed one, I would go and get one ... I feel like I should be able to have a gun. I just choose not to have a gun.”

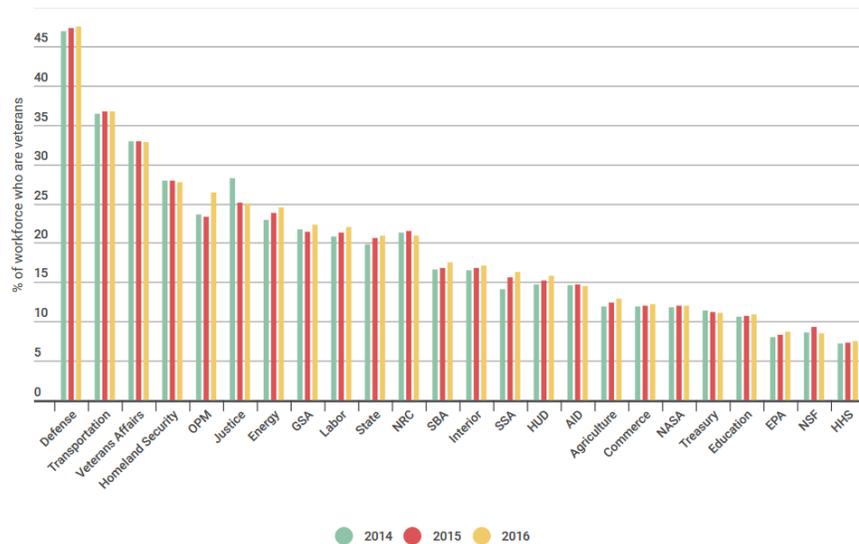
The sort of nuance that Lingo describes is difficult to achieve from a policy standpoint — as experts and policymakers seek to both keep veterans safe and protect their ability to own guns. And Dr. Ritchie said there’s no easy solution when it comes to creating guidelines that delineate who is fit to own a gun and who is not in relation to mental health. “I think it’s important to talk about it as an issue and to look at the data that exists rather than classify people either as ticking time bombs or ‘everybody is just fine,’” she said. Mike agrees. “How many wars has America been in? And this has been an issue after every single war we’ve ever gone to,” the Oregon cop said. “Still

today, I'll go to calls of old Vietnam veterans and they're still having issues with PTSD and they've buried it with alcoholism, drugs or other things ... You'd think we'd have figured it out by now." [Source: Huff Post | Carolina Moreno | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## Vet Jobs Update 231 ► Federal Government

Federal government representatives talk about their commitment in hiring veterans, but how well do they really do? Not bad, actually. In fiscal 2016 (the latest year for which data is available), roughly one-quarter to one-half of the workers at the largest agencies, such as the departments of Defense and Homeland Security, are military veterans, according to the Office of Personnel Management. Other agencies, including some of the relatively smaller ones, such as AID and EPA, employ a significantly smaller percentage of veterans. There's been relatively little variation from fiscal 2014 to 2016 in the percentages, as demonstrated in the chart below. And overall, 31.1 percent of federal workers were veterans in fiscal 2016, only a slight bump from 2012 when veterans made up 29.7 percent of the workforce.



[Source: Federal Times | Ken Chamberlain | April 7, 2018 ++]

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## Stolen Valor Update 110 ► Reported 180401 thru 180415

A Florida man who posed as a U.S. military veteran and claimed to have earned more than 20 medals and badges has been arrested, according to police. Port St. Lucie Police had been investigating 46-year-old **Edward Louis Liroff** for three weeks before they arrested him after he allegedly tried to apply for a job using a fraudulent DD214 form, a certificate of release from active duty, said Master Sgt. Frank Sabol. On 8 MAR, Liroff applied for a code compliance officer position with the City of Port St. Lucie, Sabol said. The city's assistant director of neighborhood services then contacted Port St. Lucie Officer Joseph Byrne -- a military veteran -- to help review the form.

Byrne began an investigation into Liroff after noting several irregularities in the form, Sabol said. On the form, Liroff stated that he served in the U.S. military from 1988 to 2004 and listed that he was the recipient of more than 20 medals and badges, included the Distinguished Service Medal, the Silver Star Medal, the Purple Heart Medal and

the Air Medal for Valor, according to authorities. As a result of the investigation, Byrne discovered that Liroff had never served in the U.S. military, Sabol said. In addition, Byrne discovered that Liroff had been receiving treatment from the Veteran's Administration and had fraudulently obtained a Florida driver's license with a veteran designation and a Purple Heart vehicle registration, Sabol said. The DD214 form claiming veteran's preference Liroff submitted with his job application was also determined to be fake, according to authorities.



Edward Louis Liroff, 4

Liroff was arrested on 4 APR after Byrne presented his findings to the Florida State Attorney's Office. He has been charged with uttering a forged instrument, unlawful use of uniforms, medals or insignia and fraudulently obtaining a driver's license, jail records show. He is currently being held on \$15,000 bond at the Port. St. Lucie jail, according to jail records. ABC News' could not immediately reach a representative for Liroff. [Source: ABC News | Julia Jacobo | April 4, 2018 ++]

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## Did You Know (01) ► Items of Interest to Vets

Reversing a long-held position, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) now says Air Force reservists who became ill after being exposed to Agent Orange residue while working on planes after the Vietnam War should be eligible for disability benefits. The VA said it has been working to finalize a rule that could cover more than 2,000 military personnel who flew or worked on Fairchild C-123 aircraft in the U.S. from 1972 to 1982. Many of the Vietnam-era planes, used by the reservists for medical and cargo transport, had sprayed millions of gallons of herbicide during the 1955-1975 military conflict in Southeast Asia. If the White House Office of Management and Budget approves the change, it would be the first time the VA had established a special category of Agent Orange exposure for military personnel without “boots on the ground” or inland waterways service in Vietnam. That could open the VA to renewed claims by thousands of other veterans who say they were exposed to Agent Orange in less direct circumstances, such as on the open sea.

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The Semper Fi Fund, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and its program America's Fund, are set up to provide immediate financial assistance and lifetime support for wounded, critically-ill and injured members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families. Since establishing the Semper Fi Fund in 2004, they've issued more than 71,500 grants, totaling close to \$91 million in assistance to over 11,500 heroes and their families. For assistance call 760-725-3680.

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At <http://www.militarydisabilitymadeeasy.com> you can find out about the accuracy of your VA rated disability. The site is comprised of a team of military medical professionals with experience ranging from health care administration to analyzing military medical laws, policies, and directives, and reporting to congressional committees.

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Project 112/SHAD (Shipboard Hazard and Defense) is the name of the program for both shipboard and land-based biological and chemical testing conducted by the U.S. military between 1962 – 1973. VA will provide physical examinations to veterans who participated in the testing. Veterans will receive medical care free of charge for conditions related to exposure. Veterans may be eligible for disability compensation if they have a service-related disability and were discharged under other than dishonorable conditions. VA does not presume by regulation that any specific disabilities are related to participation in Project 112/SHAD. Veterans' claims are decided on a case-by-case basis.

VA presumes amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) diagnosed in all Veterans with 90 days or more continuous active military service is related to their service, although ALS is not related to Project 112/SHAD. Surviving spouses, dependent children and dependent parents of Veterans who died from health problems related to participation in Project 112/SHAD may be eligible for health care, compensation, education, and home loan benefits.

[Source: <http://www.veteranprograms.com/did-you-know2.html> | USVCP | April 15, 2018 ++]

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### **Obit: Daniel K. Akaka** ► 6 April 2018 | U.S. Senator & WWII Vet

Former Senator Daniel K. Akaka, a Democrat who represented Hawaii for 36 years in Congress and successfully fought for the belated recognition of Asians and Asian-Americans who had fought for the United States in World War II, died on 6 APR in Honolulu. He was 93. Jon Yoshimura, the senator's former communications director, confirmed the death, saying Mr. Akaka had been hospitalized for several months.

A World War II veteran, Mr. Akaka sponsored legislation in 1996 that led to a re-evaluation of the service records of Asian-Americans who had fought in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the 100th Division during the war. As a result, almost two-dozen Medals of Honor, the military's highest award, were ultimately bestowed belatedly, some posthumously, on Asian-American veterans, most of them of Japanese heritage. Only one had been awarded during the war itself. After a White House awards-presentation ceremony led by President Bill Clinton in 2000, Senator Akaka said the medals had dispelled apparent wartime discrimination against Asian-American military personnel. The most prominent recipient was Senator Daniel K. Inouye, Mr. Akaka's much better-known colleague — and Hawaii's senior senator — for 22 years in the Senate. Mr. Inouye, who died in 2012, had lost his right arm while serving with the 442nd in Europe.



Senator Daniel K. Akaka on Capitol Hill in 2011

Senator Akaka also successfully pursued legislation that provided onetime compensation for members of the Phillipine Scouts, an American-led unit of mostly Filipino and Filipino-American recruits who fought alongside United States troops but did not qualify for Veterans Administration benefits. And he secured a formal apology for the United States's role in the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani of Hawaii in 1893 as well as a transfer of land that the federal government had taken. But he failed in repeated legislative efforts to have native Hawaiians recognized as an indigenous people so that they might receive federal benefits similar to those provided to American Indians and natives of Alaska. During his Senate years Mr. Akaka had stints as chairman of its Committee on Veterans Affairs and of its Committee on Indian Affairs.

Mr. Akaka was an outspoken critic of the war in Iraq. On March 17, 2003, three days before the United States attacked that country, he warned the Senate: "If we pursue our current path, we will have a war lacking in many things essential to achieving complete success. It will be a war without broad international support, without sufficient planning for post-conflict reconstruction and stability, without a definite exit time and strategy, and without a firm price tag. "Moreover," he continued, "it will be a war with serious ramifications for our long-term readiness capabilities for homeland security and for managing other crises." A steadfast liberal on most issues, he was known as a champion of federal workers, complaining that his Senate colleagues too often denigrated them and cheerfully froze their pay. He chaired a Senate subcommittee on the federal work force and was the chief sponsor of the 2012 Whistleblower Protection Act, which provided safeguards against retaliation to federal workers who report waste, fraud and abuse.

Daniel Kahikina Akaka was born in Honolulu on Sept. 11, 1924, the youngest of eight children. His father was of Chinese and Hawaiian descent; his mother was Hawaiian. He attended public schools. After service with the Army Corps of Engineers, he graduated from the University of Hawaii in 1952 with a degree in education and taught music, social studies and math in elementary, middle and high schools. He later became a school principal and earned a master's degree. After Hawaii was admitted into the union in 1959, he was an official in the state's Department of Education and was named director of the Hawaii Office of Economic Opportunity, an antipoverty program. Mr. Akaka was first elected to the House in 1976 and easily re-elected afterward. In 1990 he was appointed to fill a Senate vacancy caused by the death of Spark Matsunaga. He was elected that fall and re-elected in 1994, 2000 and 2006. He announced in March 2011 that he would not run again in 2012.

Mr. Akaka, who lived in Honolulu, is survived by his wife, Mary Mildred Chong, whom he married in 1948; a daughter, Millannie Akaka Mattson; four sons, Daniel Jr., Gerard, Alan and Nicholas; and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. While he was never known as a key lawmaker, Mr. Akaka was familiar to watchers of C-Span: his name came first whenever the Senate roll was called and, in his early years, he relished presiding over that body, a duty many of his colleagues regarded as tedious. In 1992, the Senate presented him with its Golden Gavel Award for presiding for at least 100 hours. "I really was proud of being able to chair the Senate floor over the years and really looked forward to it," he said in a 2011 interview for this obituary. Even in his final years, he left instructions with the Democratic cloakroom that he would preside in a pinch, saying, "Any time you can't find somebody, call me." [Source: The New Youk Times | Adam Clymer | April 6, 2018 ++]

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## **Obit: Thomas Hudner Jr. ► 13 NOV 2017 | ROK MOH Awardee**

With full military honors and an honorary flyover, Thomas Hudner Jr., who received the Medal of Honor in 1951 for bravery during the Korean War, was buried at Arlington National Cemetery on 4 APR. His friends and family gathered in Section 54 of the cemetery on the gray and blustery afternoon. The U.S. Navy Band played as a horse-drawn caisson carried Hudner's casket to the grave site.

His place in American military history was evident in the people who gathered to pay their respects. Joseph Dunford — a Boston native, Marine general and now chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — was there, as were a

dozen other Medal of Honor recipients and Francisco Urena, a former Marine who's now state secretary of veterans services, a job Hudner used to hold. Young pilots, members of Hudner's former squadron, soared overhead in F-18s. They flew in the missing man formation — appropriate, because this isn't just Tom Hudner's story. "I think it's just great closure, like being able to see the ceremonial burial that Jesse Brown never got to have," said Jessica Knight Henry, granddaughter of Ensign Jesse Brown.



Retired Capt. Thomas Hudner (left), in 2011 and Arlington burial ceremony (right)

Brown was the son of Mississippi sharecroppers who was the Navy's first black pilot. And it was Brown that Hudner, a white man from Fall River, Massachusetts, tried to save on a frozen hillside in Korea in 1950, the act that earned him the Medal of Honor. "On that day, Dec. 4th, 1950, he said he was doing his job, helping out a squadron mate who needed help. In his eyes it wasn't an extraordinary act. It was just the right thing to do," said Tom Hudner III, speaking at the service. On that day, Hudner had crash-landed his own plane to try to save Brown, who had been shot down. Brown was trapped, and Hudner tried for 45 minutes to free him. It was freezing cold and getting dark and the helicopter that had landed to pull both men out couldn't fly at night. So Hudner had to make an agonizing decision to leave, to save his own life.

"You know, I think he probably felt some responsibility to help carry on Jesse's legacy," said Hudner III. "Jesse's own story is incredible, and what he achieved and the adversity that he overcame is incredible." Jesse Brown's remains were never recovered. But Knight Henry says his loss forged a friendship that outlives both men. "You know they were tied together in that selfless act that Tom made, but I think it's reflective in the relationship that we still have with the Hudner family. So the stories of these two men live on long after they both have sort of passed here," she said. Jesse Brown was 24 when he died. Thomas Hudner was 93. [Source: WBUR News | Alex Ashlock | April 05, 2018 ++]

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## Vet Deportations Update 20 ► ICE Wrongly Interpreting SECDEF Directive

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) appears to have ignored a directive from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to prevent the deportation of noncitizen troops and veterans, seeking to remove a Chinese immigrant despite laws that allow veterans with honorable service to naturalize, court filings show. **Xilong Zhu**, 27, who came from China in 2009 to attend college in the United States, enlisted in the Army and was caught in an immigration dragnet involving a fake university set up by the Department of Homeland Security to catch brokers of fraudulent student visas.

Zhu paid tuition to the University of Northern New Jersey, created by DHS to appear as a real school, long enough to ship to basic training using the legal status gained from a student visa issued to attend that school. Then ICE found him and asked the Army to release him for alleged visa fraud. He left Fort Benning, Ga., on Nov. 16, 2016, in handcuffs as an honorably discharged veteran. He was detained for three weeks and released. Zhu is waiting to hear a judge in Seattle rule in his removal proceedings. His attorney says his client is a victim of federal entrapment.

Zhu's case comes amid Trump administration pressure on immigration judges to speed up deportation proceedings in an apparent move to adjudicate more removals, aligning with President Trump's stated goals. But it

also comes after Mattis said he would protect certain immigrant recruits who enlist through a program designed to trade fast-tracked citizenship for medical and language skills. Those assurances followed sustained controversy over how the Pentagon has exposed more than a thousand foreign-born recruits to deportation. A background-screening logjam began in late 2016 when fears of insider threats slowed clearances to a glacial pace.

“Anyone with an honorable discharge ... will not be subject to any kind of deportation,” Mattis told reporters at the Pentagon in February, describing exceptions for criminals and anyone who has been authorized for deportation in an agreement he said was made with DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen. Zhu’s attorney, retired Army officer Margaret Stock, told The Washington Post those exceptions do not apply to him. DHS referred queries to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which did not respond to a request for comment. ICE did not immediately return comment. But through court documents, ICE has interpreted the Mattis directive applies to a narrow group of foreign recruits that exclude Zhu. It’s unclear whether ICE consulted with the Pentagon on the subject, or if the agency has moved to deport other immigrant recruits since Mattis spoke in February.

Zhu graduated from basic training on June 9, 2016, and was handed over to ICE custody months later, after the Army lost a battle to retain him, Stock said. Zhu was included in a group of “holdovers,” an Army term he disdains that refers to soldiers who fail training. That wasn’t him. “It made me nauseous to be lumped into that group,” he told The Post.

How Zhu got in his predicament is a strange, bureaucratic odyssey after he graduated from Beloit College in Wisconsin in 2013. He wanted to become a U.S. citizen, so he decided to enlist through the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) program that his father in China had read about. It trades expedited citizenship for language and medical skills in short supply among U.S.-born recruits. The program was designed by Stock and implemented in 2009, with more than 10,000 troops rotating through since then. But it was temporarily shelved at the time Zhu tried to enlist in 2013, so he needed a way to keep his status. U.S. Quickly, a company that provides education consultation to immigrants, told him that the University of Northern New Jersey was approved by DHS to authorize curricular practical training, a type of school credit for his work at Apple as a customer support technician.

**Section C. USCIS Comments**

1. Unable to process request without an original consent of disclosure statement signed by the applicant. Resubmit request.

2. No determination can be made from the information submitted. Obtain copy of the original alien registration document. Resubmit request.

3. No determination can be made without seeing both sides of the documents submitted. Resubmit request.

4. Cannot read document copy. Resubmit request.

5. Other:

The applicant has maintained continuous legal status in a MAVNI category (F1) for the previous two years. The applicant does not appear to have been out of the country for more than 90 days in a single trip during the past two years.

USCIS Stamp

**MAVNI BUF 08**

JUN 26 2015

MPA INITIALS *[Signature]*

**APPROVED**

MUST ENLIST IN DEP/DTP PRIOR TO  
31 July 2017.  
MUST BE IN DEP AT LEAST 180 DAYS

Zhu’s enlistment contract was approved by USCIS on the basis he attended a school DHS itself set up as a sting operation.

DHS certified his studies, and he paid the university \$8,000. He took his new I-20 form as proof of lawful status to obtain a driver’s license, Stock said, all while the sting operation fooled students. As part of Operation Triple Lindy, undercover agents posed as university administrators, and the school website promised “an exceptional

educational experience.” U.S. Quickly did not return a request for comment. “Nobody knew the school was fake,” Stock said, including Zhu, who said it would be “suicide” to knowingly attend a fake school given that he would soon be screened by government agencies, including DHS.

A class-action lawsuit of students alleging entrapment was dismissed in October because ICE had not determined whether it was taking further action. He was released after seven months of service, according to court documents obtained by The Post. His driver’s license from Washington state has “veteran” printed on it. His status should mean that he can proceed with citizenship. Laws in place since World War I say noncitizens who leave the military under “honorable conditions” are eligible for naturalization. But ICE disputes the circumstances.

Jordan L. Jones, an ICE assistant chief counsel, said in a Seattle federal immigration court filing on 29 MAR that Mattis was actually referring only to recruits who came to the country illegally as children and enlisted later through DACA as those who are protected. Zhu is removable “despite his honorable discharge,” Jones wrote, adding the judge, John F. Walsh, cannot dismiss proceedings. Stock said Mattis could not have meant only DACA recipients because they overwhelmingly naturalize in the military and are only a small portion of foreign recruits who enlist. “They’re ignoring what Mattis said,” Stock said. When asked to clarify Mattis’s remarks, Pentagon spokesman Maj. David Eastburn referred to the February statement. Mattis previously said he wants to preserve the MAVNI program.

Zhu, a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese, could have proved useful in uniform as the U.S. military focuses on countering an increasingly aggressive China and Russia. Instead, deportation looms, including threats from Zhu’s former homeland. A former State Department official told The Post in July that Chinese-born U.S. military recruits who are deported to their native land may face harsh confinement and interrogation. If deported, Zhu would probably return to his home town in Chongqing. It features an unusual memorial for a communist nation: a bust of Army Gen. Joseph Stilwell, who commanded U.S. and Chinese forces from the city during World War II. A library named after President Franklin D. Roosevelt is also there, Zhu said. But the city also brims with hostility toward the United States.

Zhu said that after he graduated in 2013, local authorities investigated allegations of corruption involving his father, a businessman. They obtained his phone and viewed instant messages in which he and his son discussed Zhu’s future military service. The authorities were suspicious and called his son unpatriotic, then let him go without charges after 48 hours, Zhu said. The episode rattled his father. “If you get a chance,” he told his son, “don’t ever think about coming back.” [Source: The Washington Post | Alex Horton April 4, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Fraud & Abuse** ► Reported 01 thru 15 APR 2017

**Grave Robber Historian Sentenced:** The VFW was one of only two organizations invited by the federal government to speak at the sentencing hearing of **Antonin DeHays**, a French historian and archivist, who over a five-year period sold more than 430 World War II items he had stolen from the National Archives. Representing the other organization — the National Archives — was Archivist of the United States David Ferriero. Stolen were 297 dog tags and 136 other items, to include ID cards, a Bible, photos and personal letters. The items were originally obtained from the bodies of dead or captured Americans, mostly as the result of military aircraft crashes in Nazi-held territory. The Germans kept meticulous records, which were later seized by the Allies after the war. On Monday, U.S. District Court Judge Theodore Chuang in Maryland sentenced DeHays to 364 days in prison for the theft of government records and ordered him to pay more than \$43,000 in restitution to the unwitting buyers who purchased the stolen goods. Said VFW spokesman Joe Davis, “DeHays isn’t just a thief, he’s a grave robber who abused the professional courtesies extended to fellow historians as a means to steal for personal gain.” About 95 percent of the stolen items have been recovered so far. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | April 13, 2018 ++]

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## **Philippine Veterans Advocacy Committee ► APR 2018 Notes**

1. On average it is taking 14 days for FMP (Foreign Medical Program) checks to come from the FMP office In Denver, CO.
2. Baguio Medical Center is now accepting FMP.
3. TRICARE Dental is available in the Philippines. Beginning on January 1, 2019, the TRDP will be replaced by the Federal Employees Dental and VisiU.S. embassy Manila on Insurance Program (FEDVIP) which offers dental benefits comparable to the TRDP and a choice of ten dental carriers including Delta Dental. Enrollment in the FEDVIP will begin November 12, 2018 and run through December 10, 2018. You must select a FEDVIP dental plan to continue your dental care benefits.
4. Next time that you are at the VA Outpatient Clinic, you may request a PSA Test be taken for you.
5. The issue of not being paid for travel while using VA appointments is still in-work. Members should send a “nice” e-mail to their Congressmen.
6. Pass to veterans that there is no VA care in Guam and that veterans in the Philippines seeking VA care need to go directly to Tripler in Hawaii.
7. The VA Outpatient Clinic in Manila has increased its medical walk-ins since there are less people coming to the clinic.
8. Those veterans receiving VA disability benefits must be seen by a VA doctor at least once a year in order to maintain their VA Benefits.
9. Calling the VA Manila should be a lot easier and quicker as there is a reduction of incoming calls—they still have five agents available.
10. If you are in need of VA medical attention; DO NOT move to the Philippines!
11. There are no heart surgeons in Guam.
12. DO NOT USE FIXERS; USE SERVICE OFFICERS.
13. On 13 APR the U.S. Embassy Manila put out a Health Alert! U.S. citizens living in or traveling to the Philippines should make sure they are vaccinated against measles with the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine. Health officials in the Philippines have reported an outbreak of measles throughout the country. If in doubt on what to do read the Center for Disease Control's (CDC's) webpage [Measles in the Philippines](#).

[Source: VFW Post 9892 | VSO Bobby Reyes | APR 2018 ++]

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## **Retiree Appreciation Days ► Scheduled As of 16 APR 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](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html)

== PDF: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.pdf](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf)

== Word: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.doc](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](mailto: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 | April 15, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 16 APR 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 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 | April 16, 2018 ++]

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## **State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► Tennessee MAR 2018**

The state of Tennessee 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 – TN**” 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://www.tn.gov/veteran> & <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/tennessee.html>

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Recreational Benefits
- Other State Sponsored Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/content/veteran-state-benefits/tennessee-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.

## **Drug Cost Increases Update 14 ► S.2155 | Know the Lowest Price Act**

New legislation launched by U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) on 14 MAR would lower prescription drug costs in a three-pronged effort involving gag clauses, negotiations, and import regulation allowances. The Know the Lowest Price Act, which strikes gag clauses that prohibit pharmacists from telling customers they could pay less for their prescription when paying out of pocket. The other two prongs, for which no action has been taken to date on, include:

- The Empowering Medicare Senior to Negotiate Drug Prices Act (S.1688) introduced 1 AUG 2017 by Sen. Amy Klobuche. If passed this would allow the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate with drug companies on drug price discounts—something currently banned outright.
- The Affordable and Safe Prescription Drug Importation Act (S.469) introduced 28 FEB 2017 by Sen. Bernard Sanders. If passed this would provide an authorization for that same Secretary to issue regulations which permit wholesalers, licensed U.S. pharmacies and individuals alike to import drugs from licenses Canadian sellers manufacturers at Food and Drug Administration inspected facilities.

“I continue to stand up to the drug lobbyists and special interests because it is morally wrong to keep prices for your medications so high,” Stabenow said. “The passage of my legislation would make a major difference for

Michigan families.” A recent AARP study found that prices for the most popular brand-name drugs rose 208 percent between 2008 and 2016. [Source: The Peninsula | Chris Galfor | April 03, 2018 ++]

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## **Generic Drug Pricing Update 05 ► S.2553, S.1688, & S.469 | Lowering Cost**

U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) unveiled more new legislation aimed at lowering the cost of prescription drugs during events across the state in Detroit, Flint, Lansing, Grand Rapids, Ishpeming, and Traverse City. Americans pay – by far – the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. Prices for the most popular brand-name drugs have risen 208% from 2008 to 2016, according to AARP. “I continue to stand up to the drug lobbyists and special interests because it is morally wrong to keep prices for your medications so high,” said Senator Stabenow. “The passage of my legislation would make a major difference for Michigan families.” Pharmaceutical and health product lobbying reached \$279 million last year, more than any other industry. Stabenow is announcing three pieces of legislation that will combat rising prescription drug costs:

- The bipartisan Know the Lowest Price Act (S.2553) cracks down on outrageous gag clauses that stop pharmacists from telling customers that they could pay less for their prescription if they pay out of pocket.
- The Empowering Medicare Seniors to Negotiate Drug Prices Act (S.1688) would allow the Secretary of Health and Human Services to directly negotiate with drug companies for price discounts of their drugs, which is banned under current law.
- The Affordable and Safe Prescription Drug Importation Act (S.469) authorizes the Secretary of Health and Human Services to issue regulations permitting wholesalers, licensed U.S. pharmacies, and individuals to import drugs from licensed Canadian sellers that are manufactured at facilities inspected by the Food and Drug Administration. Currently, Americans pay about 40 percent more on prescriptions per person than Canadians do.

At <https://www.stabenow.senate.gov/about/issues/lowering-costs-of-prescription-drugs> can be found more details on Senator Stabenow’s prescription drugs legislation. [Source: CBS Minnesota | Susan-Elizabeth Littlefield | March 25, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Emergency Care Update 11 ► S.2131 | Newborn Emergency Treatment Act**

The VA Newborn Emergency Treatment Act would authorize the VA Secretary to provide payment for emergency transportation in cases where a newborn of a woman veteran requires treatment at a more specialized medical facility. If a veteran mother and infant are transported to another medical facility together, VA is authorized to pay for that transportation. Currently, VA lacks clear authority to pay for the transportation of the newborn infant alone. However, this legislation would provide such authority.

In concurrence with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) organization's resolution 225, which calls for enhancing women's health care services, DAV believes women veterans deserve a robust maternity care benefit that allows their infants basic transportation coverage for care that would be covered under Medicaid and most private insurance plans. Maternity care is an important benefit to the large portion of women veterans who use VA services. Many women veterans for whom VA coordinates maternity care are at high-risk for pregnancy complications, including pre-term labor or low-birth weight newborns, because of service-connected conditions. Infants born to these mothers often require more specialized and intensive services after birth; however, not all hospitals have such services available and transportation for the infant, but not necessarily the mother becomes necessary.

DAV is requesting your support to help them ensure that VA covers the expense of emergency transportation for the newborns of women veterans. Towards this they have prepared a letter to use to ask your Senators to support S. 2131, the VA Newborn Emergency Treatment Act. At the DAV Commander's Action Network [Take Action](#) you can review the letter and, if you agree, have it automatically sent to your legislator. [Source: Disabled American Veterans | Delphine Metcalf-Foste | April 11, 2018 ++]

**\* Military \***



## **Military Tattoo Criteria Update 12** ► **No Change to USMC Policy for Reserves**

Marine officials said 3 APR that there have been no changes to the Corps' official tattoo policy despite an announcement from a prior service recruiting station 31 MAR claiming a new lenient policy. "There is no change to the tattoo policy, and no leniency for IRR Marines [Individual Ready Reserves]," Yvonne Carlock, a spokeswoman with Manpower Reserve Affairs, told Marine Corps Times. The initial announcement of a substantial change making the tattoo policy more lenient appears to have stemmed from a misreading of an internal message distributed by the Corps' Total Force Retention System. "The message outlines a procedural change intended to streamline the handling/staffing of re-enlistment packages for drilling and IRR Marines with undocumented and out of regulation tattoos," Carlock said.

The confusion began when the Londonderry, New Hampshire, prior service recruiting station made a posting on its social media account claiming that Marine Forces Reserve would allow prior service Marines with out of regulation tattoos to join the reserves with various caveats. As long as the tattoos are "not egregious (face, hands, racist, etc.), we can get Marines back in who otherwise might not have the chance," Londonderry, New Hampshire, Prior Service Recruiter Staff Sgt. Justin Eckersley told Marine Corps Times Saturday in an email. According to the Londonderry prior service recruiting station, former Marines could get approval for out of regulation tattoos at a lower level of approval, bypassing an extensive review process.

That streamlining removed the need for a commanding general endorsement, but didn't necessarily put the power of approving out of regulation tattoos in the hands of prior service recruiting commanders, as the Londonderry station initially believed. The social media post outlining the new lenient tattoo policy from the Londonderry recruiting station has since been removed. "Bottom line is retention officials removed the requirement for CG [commanding general] endorsement because MCBUL 1020 [Marine Corps Bulletin] requires that all out of regs tattoos be documented with a post-120 Page 11 entry," Carlock explained to Marine Corps Times. Marines are required to document any out of regulation tattoos with an administrative "Page 11" entry in their service record books 120 days after the Marine bulletin was signed.

Marines have long complained of strict tattoo policies that have at times prohibited Marines re-enlisting in the Corps. Commandant Gen. Robert B. Neller updated the tattoo policy in 2016 to allow tattoos to extend further on the upper arms and thighs. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | April 3, 2018 ++]

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## **USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) Update 12 ► \$57 Million More Added for Repairs**

The U.S. Navy is adding another \$57 million to what it's paying a Mississippi shipyard to repair a destroyer damaged in a June collision that killed seven sailors. The additional contract for repairing the USS Fitzgerald was awarded Tuesday to Ingalls Shipbuilding of Pascagoula, Mississippi. The destroyer arrived at Ingalls in January. A June 17 collision with a Philippine-flagged container ship caved in parts of the Fitzgerald above and below the waterline. Ingalls, part of Virginia-based Huntington Ingalls Industries, already received a \$63 million contract to rip out damaged areas. Repairs and modernization are expected to take until mid-2019. Secretary of the Navy Richard Spencer has said it could cost \$600 million combined to repair the Fitzgerald and the USS John S. McCain, another destroyer that was damaged in August. [Source: The Associated Press | April 4, 2018 ++]



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## **B-1 Bomber Update 02 ► Deployed to Middle East Again To Take Over Strike Missions**

The B-1B Lancer is back in the Middle East for the first time in nearly two-and-a-half years to take over strike missions from B-52 Stratofortress bombers. The non-nuclear bombers from Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota, arrived at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, on 31 MAR, according to social media posts from Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT). The Lancers will be primarily focused on Operation Inherent Resolve, the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and Operation Freedom Sentinel in Afghanistan, Air AFCENT said. The command would not give details on how many bombers are involved or on the duration of the mission.

"Following two years supporting U.S. Pacific Command requirements, the B-1 returns to the U.S. Central Command [area of responsibility] where it will take over bomber duty from the venerable B-52 Stratofortress," AFCENT posted on Twitter. "The [B-52] will soon depart following two years in which it played an instrumental role in the fights against ISIS and the Taliban, clocking more than 1,800 sorties and approximately 12,000 weapons released against targets in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan," the message continued. The long-range B-52 bombers, known as "Big Ugly Fat Fellow," or BUFF, transitioned back to the Pacific earlier this year, replacing the B-1Bs for an 18-month-long mission. The B-1 took over that mission in 2016, marking the first time since 2006 that Lancers had been housed at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam. In December, B-1 pilots and crew members told Military.com they were training round-the-clock for the evolving battlespace in the Middle East.

Military.com sat down with leaders from Air Force Global Strike Command's 7th Bomb Wing, responsible for producing combat-ready aircrews in the Air Force's only formal B-1B training unit, during a trip to Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, in December. The trip also included a ride in the B-1B over training ranges in New Mexico. The aircraft, known as the "Bone," left the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in early 2016 and was replaced by B-52 Stratofortress bombers at Al Udeid that April. Air Force officials at the time said the B-1B's return stateside was crucial to upgrade the fleet with the latest Integrated Battle Station, or IBS. The IBS upgrade has been incorporated into more than half of the 62 total aircraft. Before its 2016 departure, the aircraft deployed the most weapons of any aircraft involved in the anti-ISIS campaign, according to statistics provided to Air Force Times. The B-1B was responsible for almost 40 percent of Air Force bombs on Islamic State targets, according to service statistics.

Now, even as the air campaign against ISIS steadily winds down, it still requires "surgical strikes," or precision-guided bombs on target as the battlespace continues to shrink, Maj. Charles "Astro" Kilchrist, chief of training for the 9th Bomb Squadron, said in December. Meanwhile, the U.S. has increased airstrikes in Afghanistan in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel. The Air Force has been shifting more MQ-9 Reaper drones for Overwatch and strike missions; additional combat search-and-rescue squadrons; and A-10C Thunderbolt II ground attack aircraft, which recently arrived at Kandahar Airfield, for close-air support strikes. In January, the aircraft joined F-16 Fighting Falcon fighter jets, C-130J Hercules mobility airlift, EC-130H Compass Call electronic attack aircraft, and other planes already in the AOR supporting these operations from Bagram Airfield. [Military.com | Oriana Pawlyk | April 2, 2018 ++]

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## **USAF Warrant Officer Program ► Inching Closer To Reinstatement**

The Air Force is closing in on a new report on whether it should reinstate warrant officers for the first time in six decades. And while nothing has been settled about whether warrant officers will return or what they will look like, the Air Force's personnel chief is already thinking ahead, contemplating whether they could include aviators — and if they could help solve the service's long-standing pilot retention problem. Lt. Gen. Gina Grosso, the Air Force's personnel chief, said in a 22 MAR interview at the Pentagon that a long-awaited report on the feasibility of re-establishing warrant officers is expected to be finished in April and provided to Congress.

The RAND Corporation was brought in to provide the Air Force with needed "analytical bandwidth" to help inform the service's study, and the group has been researching the issue for months. Rand's findings were due to the Air Force at the end of March. It remains to be seen whether creating another category of uniformed airmen will help solve the problems plaguing the Air Force — or, if warrant officers are revived, what form they will take. "This idea of warrant officers is not new," Grosso said. "The Air Force ... deliberately chose not to have warrant officers. When we talk to the Hill, they believe some sort of warrant officer program might help us with the pilot shortage. And then there's other career fields that also are interested in having a technical track."

When the Air Force was split off from the Army as its own service in 1947, it brought along about 1,200 warrant officers — representing a special class of expert airmen — from the former Army Air Corps. In 1958, Congress created the grades of E-8 and E-9 for all the services, and the Air Force started phasing out warrant officers. The last active-duty warrant officer retired in 1980. Since then, the idea of reviving warrant officers was occasionally suggested, but it never went far. Former Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force James Cody simply responded, "No," when he was asked at a May 2016 all-call meeting if the service was considering warrants. He then went on to say that the Air Force already maintained technical competencies at its highest enlisted ranks without a warrant officer program, and that the only thing that would change is an increase to those airmen's pay.

And when the Air Force decided in late 2015 to allow enlisted airmen to fly unarmed remotely-piloted aircraft, it decided to not bring back warrant officers. "The reason for that was the belief that our current enlisted system

produces fantastic enlisted airmen for us,” former Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James said in an August 2016 interview. But the man who succeeded Cody as the top enlisted airman, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth Wright, is more open to the idea. Wright said in a September interview that although he was “agnostic” on the idea, he asked the Air Force’s manpower and readiness department to study whether having warrants would make the service more lethal and efficient. “If so, I’d be OK with implementing that program,” Wright said. “If the research proves that, in today’s Air Force, if we had warrant officers in cyber, if our enlisted pilots someday become warrant officers, in space, in contracting? I can see a couple of areas where it might be beneficial to us.”

Grosso likewise expressed no opinion on whether warrants would be beneficial to the service. But, she said, questions remain about how the Air Force would structure a warrant program, if that’s the way it goes. For example, where would they come from? Because warrant officers would be considered officers, Grosso said, their billets would come from the Air Force’s officer end strength. Would the Air Force get the funding to buy additional billets for warrant officers? Or would a cadre of warrant officers be carved from the existing ranks of Air Force officers? And if warrant officers are re-established, who would be chosen to convert into those billets? Grosso said the Air Force hasn’t yet figured that out.

Grosso said that the Air Force could conceivably allow both current enlisted airmen and officers to become warrants. But, she said, the pay scales for warrant officers would likely make that switch more appealing to enlisted than officers. The pay scale for the W-4 pay grade — where most warrant officers max out — is closest to the pay scale for O-3 captains. A captain’s basic pay maxes out at 14 years, at \$6,741 per month, and a W-4 at the same point in his career makes \$6,172, though the warrant officer will continue to get raises. But when compared to enlisted airman, even the W-3 pay scales are higher than what an E-9 chief master sergeant makes. A W-3 at 20 years of service makes \$6,346 per month in basic pay, and a W-4 makes \$6,909 per month, but a chief master sergeant at that point in his career makes \$6,068 per month.

Bringing back warrants, Grosso said, also would require yet another performance management and promotion system for supervisors to learn and navigate. “Do the benefits outweigh the [added] complexity?” Grosso said. “We are, out of respect for Congress, doing a very thorough, intellectual look. ... If you do it, how do you do it — and then who would do it?” Grosso also said that warrant officers could provide a technical track for officers to focus on their specialized skills, adding that the Air Force could look at how the Navy set up its Limited Duty Officer program. Hypothetically, that could be how a warrant officer program helps solve the pilot retention crisis, she said — by allowing aviators to concentrate primarily on flying without having to deal with other issues such as leadership responsibilities.

Air Force officials “hear feedback from pilots that they just want to fly, which is what I would call a technical track,” Grosso said. “Those that favor warrant officers say, ‘hey, you’ve already got this technical track in law that you can use, and because they are doing what they want to do, you’ll keep them.’” The Army has warrant officer aviators who fly helicopters and remotely-piloted aircraft, and Grosso said the Army’s retention of them is strong. It remains to be seen how the Air Force would determine what warrant officers would and would not be required to do, Grosso said, but she thinks the Air Force would have plenty of leeway to set that policy. “There’s a lot to think about in the details,” Grosso said. [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | April 6, 2018 ++

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## **Norfolk Four ► Wrongfully Convicted and Imprisoned Sailor's Compensation**

Gov. Ralph Northam has signed legislation to provide nearly \$3.5 million in compensation to the “Norfolk Four,” the U.S. Navy sailors who were wrongfully convicted and imprisoned for a 1997 rape and murder. Northam last week signed identical House and Senate bills to compensate Danial Williams, Joseph Dick, Derek Tice and Eric Wilson, who were wrongly convicted in 1999 of raping and killing 18-year-old Michelle Bosko. Under the legislation, Williams will receive \$895,299; Dick, \$875,845; Wilson, \$866,456; and Tice, \$858,704.



**Retired FBI agent Jay Cochran, at podium, speaks during a news conference on the murder convictions of the Norfolk Four in Richmond, Va., on Nov. 10, 2008.**

On 31 MAR, Northam signed the measures containing the compensation package - Senate Bill 772, proposed by Sen. Scott Surovell, D-Fairfax, and House Bill 762, proposed by Del. Chris Jones, R-Suffolk. The legislation notes that the “Norfolk Four” defendants “spent nearly four decades in prison collectively for crimes they did not commit, and another collective 30 years after release from prison under highly restrictive parole and sex offender registry conditions that imposed onerous barriers to their reentry to society.” The four men were “imprisoned and experienced assaults and other horrific experiences during the imprisonment that irreparably broke them in a manner that no time or money will ever fix,” according to the legislation.

The defendants were convicted because of their coerced confessions, even though the real rapist and murderer, Omar Ballard, confessed in 1999 to committing the crime alone and his DNA was found at the crime scene, bills state. Ballard is currently an inmate at Sussex II State Prison and serving two life terms plus 42 years for capital murder, two rapes, two counts of malicious wounding, and abduction. In 2009, then-Gov. Tim Kaine granted conditional pardons to Williams, Dick and Tice. That action ended their sentences, but the men remained on the sex offender registry. Wilson had already been released from prison in 2005 after serving more than eight years behind bars.

A decade after their convictions, U.S. District Judge John Gibney dismissed the convictions of Dick and Williams. “Considering the evolution of their admissions, their subsequent recantation and the other physical evidence, the admissions of guilt by Williams, Dick and Tice are far from convincing,” Gibney’s decision stated. “Any reasonable juror considering all of the evidence would harbor reasonable doubt as to whether Williams, Dick, or anyone else, was with Ballard in Bosko’s apartment.” In March 2017, then-Gov. Terry McAuliffe granted the “Norfolk Four” unconditional pardons, fully restoring their civil rights. However, the legislation signed by Northam states that “all four men have struggled to rebuild their lives and have lived vastly reduced lives due to the strong stigma of their wrongful convictions.” [Source: Virginia Commonwealth University’s Capital News Service.] April 3, 2018 ++]

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## **USS Bremerton (SSN-698) ► Last Cruise Completed for Oldest SSN**

After six months in the western Pacific, the Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine Bremerton arrived pier side — one last time — at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii. Sailors of the tenth Los Angeles-class and oldest commissioned submarine in the U.S. Navy were welcomed by friends and family on 6 APR following operations in support of national security that took the boat over 42,000 nautical miles and through five port visits before returning home, a Navy release said. The Bremerton’s arrival marked the end of her active service. She’ll soon make her way up to Washington state, to the city bearing her name, for deactivation.

“The Bremerton is one of the most impressive engineering marvels in human history,” said Master Chief Wade Jacobson, Bremerton’s chief of the boat “It is truly incredible for a warship to be operational at such deep and strenuous depths for nearly 40 years.” Bremerton’s keel was laid in Groton, Connecticut, in May 1976 by General Dynamics’ Electric Boat Division, the release said. Despite its advanced age, Jacobson lauded the craft, as well as the sailors who made its last voyage a successful one. “Every curveball thrown our way was hit out of the park,” he said. “It took a lot of work to keep our classic submarine in fighting condition but we executed every assignment as requested with zero lost mission days.” [Source: NavyTimes | J.D. Simkins | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **USS Daniel Inouye (DDG-118) ► Keel-Laying Ceremony Set for 14 MAY**

Irene Hirano Inouye, the widow of U.S. Sen. Dan Inouye, will participate in a keel-joining ceremony — a major milestone in the life of a Navy ship — in May in Bath, Maine, as work progresses on the \$1.5 billion destroyer named for the Medal of Honor recipient and legendary Hawaii lawmaker. Delivery of the USS Daniel Inouye has slipped more than a year due to a schedule change with the contractor, which means the 510-foot warship won’t arrive in Hawaii until 2020. Inouye said she was grateful and humbled to be asked to be the ship’s “sponsor.” The keel ceremony is scheduled for 14 MAY

The naming of the ship for the senator “is really a wonderful tribute,” Inouye said in a phone interview. “It’s something that I know he would be extremely proud of. He would also feel it was a tribute to those that he served with in the military and for the sacrifices that they made.” In 2013 then-Navy Secretary Ray Mabus announced that a new destroyer would be named after Sen. Inouye, whom he called “a true American hero.” Inouye, part of the fabled Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team, lost his right arm attacking multiple German machine gun positions in Italy in 1945, and later received the Medal of Honor. He went on to become one of the most powerful members of the U.S. Senate. He died in late 2012.

The USS Daniel Inouye is expected to be commissioned in Hawaii in 2020 at what will be a major event. More than 2,000 people attended the July Pearl Harbor commissioning of a destroyer named after Dec. 7, 1941, hero Chief John Finn, who fired back at attacking planes even after receiving 21 shrapnel and bullet wounds. The Navy said the USS Daniel Inouye’s completion has been delayed so the shipyard where it is being built can also work on other vessels. Shipbuilder General Dynamics Bath Iron Works started fabrication on the USS Daniel Inouye in October 2014. The vessel was originally expected to be delivered to the Navy late this year. But the construction schedule — the warship is 44 percent complete, according to the Navy — was modified in part due to the complexity of another type of destroyer being built by Bath.

The Maine shipyard is producing three Zumwalt- class destroyers — futuristic-looking stealth ships with a wave-piercing “tumblehome” hull. The Zumwalts, at 610 feet, are much bigger than the USS Daniel Inouye, which is an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer. The Zumwalts were envisioned to replace the Arleigh Burkes, which were first put into service in 1991. Up to 32 of the Zumwalts — designed to provide land-pounding firepower akin to old battleships from the littorals, or near-shore waters — were to be built. But with costs spiraling and a shift in

focus to “great power” competition with China and Russia, production was halted on the now more than \$4 billion Zumwalts at three, and construction was restarted on upgraded Arleigh Burke destroyers.

Bath Iron Works has been responsible for the new ship class — the Zumwalts — while also building Arleigh Burke destroyers. Huntington Ingalls Industries in Pascagoula, Miss., is also building Arleigh Burke destroyers. Capt. Casey Moton, the Arleigh Burke program manager, said in an email that “in late 2016, the Navy and Bath Iron Works mutually agreed on ship schedule adjustments” for Bath to more efficiently sequence their ship construction efforts for the Zumwalt class and the restart of the Arleigh Burke class production line. As a result, the delivery date for the USS Daniel Inouye was changed from December of this year to April 2020, Moton said.



The keel-laying ceremony in May will reflect the joining of two major sections of the ship. Launch is planned by early 2019, the Navy said. Arleigh Burke destroyers are multimission ships equipped with the Aegis combat system, an integrated ship combat system named for the mythological shield that defended Zeus, according to the Congressional Research Service. Some of the destroyers have ballistic missile shoot-down capability. The Navy previously said the “technology insertion” destroyers such as the USS Daniel Inouye would include “better onboard power-generation systems, increased automation and next-generation weapons, sensors and electronics.” [Source: Honolulu Star Advertiser | William Cole| April 2, 2018 ++]

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## **Military Spouse Deportation Update 05 ► Estimated Up to 11,800 Active Duty Impacted**

As many as 11,800 currently serving in the U.S. military are dealing with a spouse or family member who is facing deportation, a national immigration advocacy group announced 30 MAR. No previous estimate, official or unofficial, has been available on just how many of the 1 million married military members currently on active duty, National Guard or Reserve status may be dealing with the stress of having a spouse, dependent or parent deported. It’s also not a number that can be easily checked, or verified, because neither DoD, the Department of Homeland Security nor U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement tracks military status in immigration proceedings.

American Families United, a non-profit immigration advocacy group, calculated the estimate using 2011 U.S. Census statistics, which found that 6.3 percent of the 129 million married Americans are married to foreign-born spouses. The Pew Research Center found that one in four of those foreign-born spouses are in the country illegally. About 75 percent of that population comes from countries like Mexico, where if they entered illegally, they have a

harder time obtaining legal status, as opposed to a person from Europe who might have overstayed a visa, said American Families United President Randall Emery.

“So we derived the total of military (active and reserves) married to people with inadmissibility-type immigration issues by taking the total (1 million), multiplying by the national percentage of foreign-born (6.3 percent, so 63,000 current U.S. military are married to immigrants), and then the 25 percent of the total which have problems with immigration law: 15,750. Of that, Pew’s data indicates 75 percent are from sources characterized by entry without inspection and similar issues, that would be about 11,800,” Emery said.

While it may not be exact, AFU generated the military estimate to “create awareness and get some of these legislators who say they support the military to actually act on it” and recognize that this is a bigger military problem than previously thought, said Nancy Kuznetsov, the group’s military liaison. That’s become more important in the last year, both Emery and Kuznetsov said, as President Donald Trump’s administration has taken a harder line on immigration enforcement. “It used to be veterans we’d see more frequently,” Kuznetsov said. “We’re now seeing an uptick in active-duty people.” While the active duty members themselves are protected — because in order to enlist a service member has to show proof that they are in the country legally — their undocumented spouses are not.

An earlier “parole in place” program that was previously championed by Vice President Mike Pence to give relief to military families is no longer being utilized due to stricter enforcement of deportation proceedings under Trump. That’s meant more military families calling the group for assistance, Emery said. “Recently, we’ve seen an increase in cases of both active-duty personnel and veterans who have been failed by immigration law,” Emery said. “These estimates give us perspective on the problem.” Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) removed 61,094 people in fiscal year 2017, compared with 44,512 in fiscal year 2016, a 37 percent increase, according to Department of Homeland Security data.

Military Times has spoken to more than a dozen military families who reached out after hearing about 7th Special Forces Group veteran Bob Crawford and his wife Elia, who was facing deportation. After intense media interest, DHS dropped removal proceedings against her. When asked, neither DoD, DHS nor ICE could say how many military families are facing deportation proceedings, because it’s not data they track or report. While an ICE official said the agency “respects the service and sacrifice of those in military service, and is very deliberate in its review of cases involving U.S. military veterans,” the agency does not track military status in its removal statistics, the official said.

ICE referred queries on how many military families were facing removal proceedings to the Department of Justice’s Executive Office for Immigration Review. But that court “does not track military status among respondents or their spouses,” when prosecuting immigration cases, said spokesman Devin O’Malley, so there’s no way to know how many military family members were among those persons removed last year. [Source: MiliraeyTimes | Tara Copp | April 1, 2018 ++]

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## **USCGC Sherman ► Decommissioned 29 MAR After 50 Years Service**

The 50-year-old cutter Sherman, the Coast Guard's last active warship to have sunk an enemy vessel in combat, was decommissioned in Honolulu on 29 MAR.. The 378-foot cutter was in service during the Vietnam War in November 1970 when it intercepted and assisted other U.S. ships in sinking a North Vietnamese supply trawler that was hailed to stop but resisted, according to the Coast Guard. Some 37 years later, in 2007, a boarding team from the Sherman found 17 metric tons of cocaine worth \$600 million on a Panamanian-flagged freighter, the Coast Guard said. The Sherman returned to Honolulu in March 2017 after making another big drug haul, seizing more than 13,730 pounds of cocaine worth over \$205.9 million off Central and South America.



The retirement is the end of the line of aged "high-endurance cutters" in Honolulu that included the Morgenthau, Jarvis and Rush, officials said. "The Sherman has served above and beyond the cutter's intended capabilities across her (lengthy) service to our country," said Coast Guard Vice Adm. Fred Midgette, who leads the Pacific region, in a news release. Commissioned in 1968, the ship is going to Sri Lanka through the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program, the Coast Guard said. The Morgenthau, commissioned in 1969, was turned over to Vietnam upon its decommissioning. The Sherman was sent to Honolulu in 2015 to replace the retired cutter Rush. Both the Rush and Jarvis were transferred to Bangladesh.

The Coast Guard, in the meantime, is recapitalizing its ship assets in Hawaii. The first of three new 154-foot, \$65 million "fast response cutters" arrived in Honolulu in September. The Oliver Berry was followed by the Joseph Gerczak in February. The William Hart will be the third, the Coast Guard said. The ships "will be able to reach far beyond the Hawaiian Islands to help with search and rescue efforts and law enforcement fisheries efforts," according to the service. Two new 418-foot "national security cutters" also are expected to be stationed in Honolulu. The big \$695 million cutters are the new centerpiece of the Coast Guard fleet, "capable of executing the most challenging operations, including supporting maritime homeland security and defense mission," the service said. The first of those ships for Honolulu, the Kimball, is expected to arrive in December 2018. [Source: Honolulu Star-Advertiser | William Cole | April 2, 2018 ++]

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## **Navy M80 Stiletton ► Navy's Coolest Surface Vessel**

It's arguably the Navy's coolest surface vessel and comes with potentially the coolest name. Meet the M80 Stiletto. The 88-foot Little Creek-based high-speed craft, owned by the Naval Sea Systems Command, is currently used to test new technologies for the Navy — specifically for Navy Special Warfare forces. The ship recently took a trip up the Chesapeake Bay and Potomac River to Washington for the annual Sea, Air and Space symposium, which kicked off 9 APR. And it will be open for tours, Navy officials say.



Capable of speeds of up to 60 knots, the craft was designed to transport Navy SEALs to battle and potentially serve as their next operational craft. For that purpose, it was designed with a shallow draft of just three feet, making it ideal to operate in littoral and riverine environments. It can cruise for 500 nautical miles at a speed of 40 knots on a single tank of gas. The vessel even has a small topside flight deck that can launch and retrieve unmanned aerial vehicles, and a rear ramp that can launch and recover 11-meter rigid-hull inflatable boats and autonomous underwater vehicles. It weighs 45 tons unloaded and can be hoisted onto a cargo ship, but it can also carry up to 20 tons of cargo. To date, it's the largest naval vessel built using carbon-fiber and advanced composite materials, as well as epoxy building, making it lighter but still providing a strong hull.

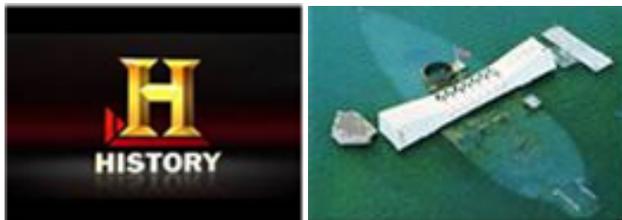
Though it has spent most of its existence in research and development, the Stiletto has been operational. In 2008, it deployed on a 70-day mission for U.S. Southern Command, conducting counter-drug operations in the Caribbean. Since then, it's completed odd jobs and research and development for the Navy, something officials say it will continue to do. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Mark D. Faram | April 4, 2018 ++]

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**Warships That Will Change The Future ► HMAS Canberra L02**



The enormous HMAS Canberra from The Land Down Under serves the Royal Australian Navy and can host more than a hundred vehicles at once or almost twenty helicopters! The Aussie warship was laid down in 2009 after the construction work started a year before, and was launched in 2011. Its motto is: For Queen and Country. It can also hold over 1,000 troops. The Canberra is one of two LHD (Landing Helicopter Dock) of the Canberra class.



### **Stolen C-130's Fate** ► **Air Force Mechanic/S 1968 Drunken, Desperate Bid To Return Home**

On May 23, 1969, Sgt. Paul Meyer stole a four-engine Hercules C-130 and took off from a U.S. Air Force base in Mildenhall, England. Aiming for Langley, Virginia, Meyer's plane disappeared from radar shortly after takeoff and went down over the English Channel. Nearly 50 years later, even Meyer's stepson doesn't know whether the Hercules was shot down or crashed due to pilot error. Now a small group of divers from Southern England wants to solve the mystery. Deeper Dorset is a group of self-proclaimed wreck hunters with a combined 50-plus years of diving and wreck investigation experience. The group's founder, Grahame Knott, specializes in side scan sonar operations and has extensive experience working in the English Channel.

With the Meyer family's approval, Deeper Dorset has launched a [Kickstarter](#) campaign to help fund a year-long project to find the plane's crash site and document any remains. According to the Kickstarter page, the team will use cutting-edge 3D photogrammetry technology to build detailed models of the underwater wreckage, with the goal of uncovering the truth of what happened to Meyer. "I'm sure plenty of people will think we're a crazy bunch of Brits chasing ghosts, but .... well, they're probably right. But speaking to Paul's stepson Henry really hits home that there's a family still waiting to hear what happened to their loved one, and if we can do anything to help, then surely it's the right thing to do," Paul Smith, who works with Knott at Deeper Dorset, told Air Force Times.



**Meyer stole the plane in a desperate attempt to return home to his wife, Jane, whom he successfully made radio contact with before crashing.**

Meyer was a chief mechanic in the Air Force who had previously served in Vietnam, according to the Kickstarter project description. At the time of the Hercules incident, he was stationed in the U.K. and was due to return home to Virginia in a month. Depressed and homesick, Meyer requested early leave from his superior officers but was denied. After a long night of drinking on May 23, he mounted a daring escape plan. Posing as a captain, he ordered a Hercules C-130 be refueled and took off into the skies, effectively evading efforts to stop his flight. Meyer had a private pilot's license but was in no way qualified to fly a four-engine military cargo plane, as the Kickstarter page notes. After a successful takeoff, Meyer plotted a course to Langley and made radio contact with his wife, Jane. But somewhere over the English Channel, radar contact with the Hercules was lost.

According to the official report on the incident, eyewitnesses saw the plane fall out of the sky and explode upon hitting water. The report concluded that Meyer was likely dead, but it did not provide an explanation for the crash. The Deeper Dorset team believes the remains of the Hercules will unlock the mystery and provide truth and closure for Meyer's family and world history. So far, the team has raised nearly \$2,700 toward its \$8,450 goal. The team plans to start sonar scans of the seabed later this year. [Source: AirForceTimes | Victoria Leoni | March 28, 2018 ++]

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## **Pacific's 4th Marine Regiment ► Honor vs. Dishonor**

Army Lt. Gen. Jonathan Wainwright ordered the surrender of U.S. forces in the Philippines on May 6, 1942, following an overwhelming six-month Japanese onslaught. Marine Col. Sam Howard — commander of the 4th Marine Regiment — ordered the national and regimental colors burned rather than see them fall into enemy hands. The Marines reluctantly went into a brutal captivity at the hands of the Japanese. The 4th Marine Regiment hasn't been stationed in the continental United States since then. It is the only regiment whose lineage is rooted on the American mainland to deploy to the Pacific and never be rotated back, Marine officials said.

Rumors have swirled among Marines that the regiment is doomed to wander the Pacific — much like the mythical ghost ship The Flying Dutchman — due to the dishonor over surrendering. It is the largest organized Marine unit to ever do so in battle. Before elements of the regiment traveled to South Korea recently for exercises Foal Eagle and Key Resolve, current 4th Marine Regiment commander Col. Kevin Norton pushed back against that myth, saying it is because of honor, not dishonor, that his Marines are stewards of the Pacific. “Like most things, there's rumor and misconception,” said Norton, who has spent more than 10 years with the regiment in various leadership positions. “We were still reeling from Pearl Harbor and we had to pick and choose where we were going to send forces to, so in many ways, the Marines and the U.S. Army and the Filipinos kind of got left hung out to dry a little bit out of necessity, because the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army had to kind of get their act together and mobilize in order to get over here.”

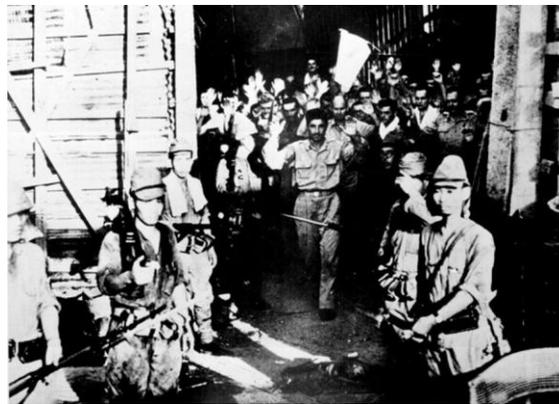
The 4th Marine Regiment was activated at Puget Sound, Wash., on April 16, 1914, with Col. Joseph Pendleton — namesake for Camp Pendleton, Calif. — as its inaugural commanding officer. The unit's first duty station was San Diego. In June 1916, 4th Marines was dispatched to the Dominican Republic to intervene on behalf of the government in their civil war, the Marine Corps said. This would be the first time the unit would see combat, and it was awarded two Medals of Honor for heroism. The unit was then dispatched to Shanghai, China, in March 1927 to protect American interests in the face of yet another civil war. Known as the “China Marines,” they stayed in country for nearly 15 years. The China Marines departed for the Philippines on Nov. 27 and 28, 1941, after being surrounded by the invading Japanese. They had been in the Philippines for nine days when the Japanese attacked to coincide with the attack on Pearl Harbor.

### **Surrender**

The 4th Marine Regiment engaged the Japanese for the first time on Dec. 12, 1941, the Marine Corps said. After arriving at Subic Bay, it had been tasked with guarding Olongapo Naval Station and a naval base at Mariveles. As

the Japanese bore down on Manila from the north and defeat seemed all but assured, 4th Marines in Olongapo evacuated to Mariveles and then to Corregidor, the fortified island off the southern coast of the Bataan Peninsula. They prepared and strengthened defensive positions as the Japanese closed in. The Japanese made landfall on Corregidor Island on May 5, 1942, the Marine Corps said. The regiment inflicted heavy casualties on the Japanese invaders, decimating the first two attempted landings; however, they were no match for Japanese planes, tanks and Bataan-based artillery. The Japanese gained a foothold on the beach and expanded it, pushing toward Wainwright's headquarters.

The Marines lost all of their heavy guns and were almost out of ammunition. All seemed lost. "Feeling that further resistance was useless and fearing a possible massacre of 1,000 sick and wounded personnel in Malinta Tunnel, Gen. Wainwright decided to surrender," a unit history said. Isolated pockets of Marines continued to fight four hours after the surrender went into effect, until news of the order trickled down. "The Marines were beside themselves," Norton said. "They fought valiantly for several days and then ultimately Gen. Wainwright ordered the surrender because the higher headquarters folks were inside of a tunnel and they didn't have all the information and the communications had been severed."



**This May 1942 photo shows the surrender of American troops at Corregidor, Philippines**

Norton said Wainwright did what he thought was right, and the Marines had to follow orders. The 4th Marine Regiment ceased to exist. "I don't think the United States nor Gen. Wainwright understood how the Japanese were going to view prisoners," Norton said. "There were some big-time atrocities. There were executions regularly. It was a brutal captivity. Most of those Marines who we refer to as the 'old 4th Marine Regiment' spent all of World War II in prisoner of war camps or they simply died in POW camps; it was that horrific."

### **Proud lineage**

While Howard's Marines tried to stay alive in brutal prison conditions, the 4th Marines was resurrected Feb. 1, 1944, with members of the 1st Marine Raider Regiment, a commando-style unit that had fought with distinction in the Makin Island, Guadalcanal, Central Solomons and Bougainville campaigns. "If you talk to World War II vets, there was such a proud lineage of the 4th Marines that it was a big deal for them to rename that Raider regiment the 4th Marines," Norton said. The "new" 4th Marines participated in the recapturing of Guam and the seizure of Okinawa at the cost of 4,000 of their lives, the Marine Corps said. World War II ended with Japan's surrender Aug. 15, 1945, following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The 4th Marines — who were awarded five Medals of Honor for service during the war — were chosen as the first American combat unit to land in Japan for the occupation. They were there to welcome the "old" 4th Marines, emaciated and in poor health, as they were liberated from POW camps. "They held a parade for many of the prisoners," Norton said. "It was a good homecoming for those guys because they realized the regiment was still alive." The 4th Marines was deactivated in 1949 only to be reactivated three years later for the Korean War.

However, they arrived in Japan after the armistice that ended the conflict was signed. They were sent to Hawaii, the closest they would ever get to the continental United States.

Through the years, the regiment has served with distinction in combat in Vietnam and through advisers sent to Iraq and Afghanistan, leading to nearly another dozen Medals of Honor. They were the last Marine regiment to depart Vietnam in 1969 and have been on Okinawa ever since. Today, 4th Marines is the anchor for the unit deployment program, accepting stateside battalions into their ranks on six-month rotations to the Pacific. "Unlike units stationed in the United States permanently, we're kind of on the tippy, tippy part of the spear and our readiness is at the highest levels permanently," Norton said. "When the Marines really learn the history, all that rumor and conjecture of, 'Hey, the surrender was dishonorable,' you just have a totally different perception ... the Marines had nothing to do with the surrender. There was no dishonor in it." [Source: Stars & Stripes | Matthew M. Burke | April 5, 2018 ++]

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## **USS Thresher (SSN-593) ► Worst Submarine Disaster In U.S. Navy History**

The worst submarine disaster in U.S. Navy history happened on the morning of April 10, 1963, when the nuclear-powered USS Thresher (SSN 593) was lost with 129 crew members and civilian employees on board. A Naval Court of Inquiry (NCOI) convened to investigate the disaster concluded the probable cause of the Thresher's loss was "major flooding" -- a finding that has since been challenged by naval and submarine experts. After more than a half-century, all but 18 pages of testimony from key witnesses remains closed to the public.

Retired Navy Capt. Jim Bryant, who served on board three Thresher-class subs and commanded the USS Guardfish (SSN-612), recently authored a new analysis of the submarine disaster, highlighting discrepancies between the NCOI's findings and evidence available for its investigation at the time. He raises concerns about the court's accuracy in recording the last understandable message sent by the sub, at about 9:12 a.m., pieced together from the testimony of several witnesses: "Experiencing minor difficulties. Have positive up angle. Am attempting to blow. Will keep you informed." In his analysis, Bryant said, "Thresher's difficulties were anything but minor by the time Skylark received that message." The USS Skylark (ASR-20) was the submarine rescue ship that accompanied the Thresher for its sea trials about 200 miles off the Massachusetts coast.

Bryant's paper, excerpted and paraphrased below, faults the Navy for not being forthcoming enough regarding the historic disaster.

- "The NCOI report cannot be accepted verbatim. It is not an acceptable reference for defining the sequence of events that occurred as the Thresher lost control and sank," Bryant said in his analysis.
- "The boat was below test depth of about 1,300 feet and its nuclear reactor had just shut down. The Thresher had negative buoyancy and there was no power to drive it back to the surface," he continued.
- The Thresher tried to blow its main ballast tanks with no effect. According to Bryant, it would take the crew at least another 20 minutes to restore main propulsion -- time they did not have.
- The Thresher kept sinking until its hull imploded at a depth of about 2,400 feet, releasing energy equivalent to the explosive force of about 22,000 pounds of TNT. The hull collapsed in 47 milliseconds, about one-twentieth of a second.
- The Thresher's crushed and shattered hull was later found just off the Continental Shelf, at a depth of more than 8,000 feet.

Bryant said the Thresher's final descent and implosion was recorded on paper time-frequency plots in great detail by the Navy's underwater Sound Surveillance System (SOSUS). "All of the data recorded by SOSUS was available to the Naval Court of Inquiry," he said. "But it wasn't used effectively because the court didn't trust it. If the NCOI had thoroughly understood the acoustic data, it could have ruled out major flooding as a cause of the disaster, since

the resonances created by such an event were not detected." Bryant said the court did hear the testimony (in closed session) of a single acoustics expert: Navy Lt. Bruce Rule, analysis officer for the SOSUS Evaluation Center in Norfolk, Va. He went on to become the lead acoustic analyst for the Office of Naval Intelligence.

Rule analyzed the acoustic data from the Thresher during its final dive. Not only did he discount a major flooding incident, Bryant said, he indicated that the sub's nuclear power plant shut down completely at a critical moment -- from an electrical failure -- when all the main coolant pumps stopped. Rule said the NCOI softened his conclusion by stating that the Thresher's main coolant pumps "slowed or stopped," a phrase that would deflect blame from Adm. Hyman G. Rickover, who created the Navy's nuclear propulsion program. "In fact, I was aggressively confronted by a couple of Navy commanders who challenged my data," Rule said. "I don't recall their names, but I do remember their vicious -- and unsuccessful -- attempt to get me to change my testimony."

Because the court of inquiry didn't trust the SOSUS data, Bryant said, it relied heavily on the Skylark's underwater telephone communications log and testimony from crew members in defining the tragic sequence of events. The NCOI interviewed many witnesses about underwater communications with the Thresher during its final dive, he said. Yet the Navy has released only a small portion of that testimony since 1963. "We have no way of comparing the original words from witnesses with the language of the NCOI's final report on the Thresher's loss," Bryant wrote. As far as Bryant is concerned, it is time for the Navy to release all remaining documents related to the Thresher disaster. "The entire NCOI report, especially all of the testimony, should be made available to scholars and the public at large," he wrote. "That report is sitting in a federal records center, waiting for more than a decade to be transferred to the National Archives."

In other words, he argues the Navy should comply with the spirit of Executive Order 13526, issued in December 2009. It created the National Declassification Center to facilitate the timely and systematic release of classified material. Bryant said that even a small gesture, such as releasing the unclassified Sea Trial Agenda, would demonstrate a concern for transparency and provide greater insight for historians. "To date," he said, "formal requests for Thresher's Sea Trial Agenda have been repeatedly and systematically deferred by the Navy."

For more information, see "Thresher Disaster: New Analysis" by Capt. Jim Bryant, USN (ret.), a research paper currently under review for publication by the Naval Engineers Journal. A 3,000-word article based on this paper is tentatively scheduled for publication in U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings magazine.

[Source: Military.com | Marty Callaghan | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **Broken Arrow | Mars Bluff S.C. ► March 11, 1958**

Ella Davis Hudson remembers stacking bricks to make a kitchen to play house. The next thing she knew, the 9 year-old was running down the driveway, blood streaming from the gash above her eye. She doesn't remember the actual blast from an atomic bomb. Sixty years ago, on March 11, 1958, an Air Force bomber dropped a nuclear weapon on a farm in the rural Mars Bluff community outside Florence. The radioactive payload either wasn't loaded in the warhead or didn't detonate — the stories differ.

But the TNT trigger for the bomb blew a crater in Walter Gregg's garden and the blast shredded his farm house about 100 yards away. Hudson, a cousin, had been playing with two of Gregg's children in the backyard. The atomic warhead would have been 30 kilotons — twice as powerful as the bomb that devastated Hiroshima in World War II. Florence, five miles away, would have been obliterated. Most of the rest of the 30,000 residents of Florence County would have been wiped out or sickened by radiation. You'd think the crater site would be one of those ghoulis

attractions that become a heavily promoted tourist site. But today it sits almost in obscurity on private property, in the woods at the edge of the backyard of a home in a modest neighborhood near Francis Marion University.



**C. B. Gregg looks at the bomb damaged home (left) of his brother Walter Gregg who was injured after an Air Force bomb (above) hit about 100 yards away. Hole 50 feet wide and 20 feet deep (right) was made after an Air Force nuclear weapon accidentally fell from a B-47 and exploded**

An information kiosk and a wooden silhouette of the 10-foot-tall, 7,600-pound bomb stand near what's left of the hole. Hurricane debris limbs have been tossed along its rim and a few Pepsi and Bud Lite cans are scattered around. There's no sign from the road to show it's there. The stream of curious visitors is steady, though. You can almost tell the season by them — Canadian license plates in the spring and motorcycle groups in the summer, neighbor Mary Cantey said. The neighbors are amused. They've talked about putting up a homemade sign to point it out, but it's too much fun to watch people try to hunt it down, said Cantey, who can see the impact site from her porch. "If I see a car come around the neighborhood twice, I know they're looking for it," she said.

The tale, on the other hand, is anything but fun. You don't want to think of trained crews bobbling atomic bombs. But the Mars Bluff incident is one of about a dozen unplanned drops that took place in the 1950s before the military decided not to carry nuclear warheads on training runs. They called the lost bombs "broken arrows." The era was the dawn of the Cold War, when atomic bombs were still as incomprehensible as they were horrifying. The threat was immediate. There was no real defense. School children ran through drills where they hid under their desks — "duck and cover" — in case of an attack. Just a month before the Mars Bluff incident, a bomber dropped a hydrogen bomb somewhere off Tybee Island, Ga., after colliding with a fighter jet during training. A nuclear explosion from it would have been 100 times more powerful than Hiroshima. That bomb has lain buried deep somewhere in the ocean-bottom muck for more than a half-century.

Typically during training runs the bombs carried uranium but not the capsule needed to detonate it, although in congressional testimony in 1966 the acting secretary of defense said four of the missing bombs did carry the capsule, including the Tybee bomb, according to a later CBS News report. The testimony itself was later recanted — just one indication of how secretively the military dealt with mishaps.

When Hudson came to her senses that day in 1958, she was running frantically, with fallen electric lines singing around her. Helen Gregg Holladay, one of the daughters Hudson was playing with, remembers getting up from the ground to find an entire stand of pines, where the 6-year-old had just climbed down from her tree fort, flattened. Hudson had been struck in the forehead by a brick. Holladay, somehow, was uninjured. The adults piled the kids into a car and raced to a hospital, with Hudson's gaping wound wrapped in the apron she had been playing in.

Hudson remembers the speedometer reading 80 mph and her yelling at the driver to slow down. At the hospital, two odd things happened for a little country girl: Everybody wanted her to pull off the apron so they could take photographs and a doctor waved a Geiger counter over her.

The story told in Mars Bluff is that the bomb was launched inadvertently, bumped loose from a B-47 when the plane hit an air pocket as a crew member leaned over the launch trigger to check it. The military never officially said. Its spokespeople insisted early and often the bomb wasn't armed and there was no danger of nuclear detonation. But one of the pilots made a distress call saying they had jettisoned "hot cargo," or an atomic bomb. The three pilots, said to be on training mission out of Savannah and cruising at 15,000 feet, were re-assigned overseas for seven years. When they came back, they went to see Walter Gregg. "They told my daddy everything was aboard," Holladay said. "It was a totally different story than what the government put out." For the next 25 years, she said, military craft flew overhead the farm checking for radiation.

No one died or was seriously injured in the Mars Bluff blast. But the Gregg family came away with little more than the clothes on their backs. Walter Gregg eventually sued and was awarded \$36,000, according to the exhibit at the Florence County Museum. That wasn't enough to rebuild the house, much less replace the possessions lost or stolen in the aftermath, Holladay said. "My daddy resented it all his life." The Greggs later appeared on the television show "I've Got a Secret" and stumped the panel trying to guess what the secret was. In 2008, making an effort to recognize the event, county historians erected the markers at the site and held a commemoration ceremony attended by about 100 people. "It's not many towns that can say they had an atomic bomb drop and nothing (deadly) happened," said Marshall Yarborough, the Florence County Historical Commission chairwoman.

Internet-recirculated reports of the ceremony and flurries of social media postings continue to spur the curious to come see the site. The historical commission is seeking to buy that wedge of the property from the owner to turn into a park, Yarborough said. But no luck so far. Hudson carries the scar on her forehead to this day. She doesn't dwell on the incident or often talk about it. Out to dinner once, she and her husband, Knapp Hudson, surprised a table of Air Force officers who were talking about the Mars Bluff bomb by introducing her to them. But mostly, "it's just too fantastical to tell people," she said. "It's like a chapter in your life you just close." Holladay will still pause to take a breath when she talks about it. "I think I'm lucky to be alive," she said. [Source: The Post and Courier of Charleston (S.C.) | Bo Petersen | March 31, 2018 ++]

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## **Profile in Courage** ► **James Williams | Most Decorated Enlisted Sailor in Navy History**

In the history of the United States Navy, only seven men have earned all of the big three valor awards: Medal of Honor, Navy Cross, and Silver Star. Six were World War II officers, including one aviator. The seventh was **James Elliott "Willy" Williams** - considered the most decorated enlisted man in the history of the Navy.



Williams, a Cherokee Indian, was born November 13, 1930, in Fort Mill, South Carolina. Two months later he moved with his parents to Darlington, South Carolina where he spent his early childhood and youth. He attended the local schools and graduated from St. John's High School. In August 1947, at the age of 16, Williams enlisted in the United States Navy with a fraudulent birth certificate. He completed basic training at Naval Training Center San Diego. He served for almost twenty years, retiring on April 26, 1967, as a Boatswain's Mate First Class (BM1). During those years, he served in both the Korean War and Vietnam War.

During the Korean War, he was stationed aboard the Destroyer USS Douglas H Fox (DD-779) from November 1950 to June 1952. He was detached off the Destroyer and operated off the coast of Korea by taking raiding parties into North Korea on small boats. From 1953 to 1965 he served tours on a variety of naval vessels. In 1966, with only a year before he was to retire from the Navy, the burly man, 5-foot-8 and 210 pounds Williams volunteered for combat duty in Vietnam.

Williams arrived in Vietnam in April 1966 as a BM1. He was assigned in May to the River Patrol Force, River Squadron Five, in command of River Patrol Boat 105 (PBR-105). The force's mission was to intercept Viet Cong and North Vietnamese arms shipments, supplies, and personnel on the waterways of South Vietnam's swampy Mekong Delta and to keep innocent boat traffic on the river and canals safe. On July 1, 1966, Williams led a patrol that came under fire from the Vietcong sampan. His deft maneuvers and accurate fire killed five VC and resulted in the capture of the enemy boat, earning Williams a Bronze Star Medal with a V for Valor. Twenty-two days later his crew captured another sampan, earning Williams a second Bronze Star Medal for Valor. Less than a month later, he received his Silver Star and the first of three Purple Hearts he would eventually receive.

On the night of October 31, 1966, Williams was commanding PBR 105 alongside another PBR searching for Viet Cong guerrillas operating in an isolated area of the Mekong Delta. Suddenly, Viet Cong manning two sampans opened fire on the Americans. While Williams and his men neutralized one sampan, the other one escaped into a nearby canal. The PBRs gave chase and soon found themselves in a beehive of enemy activity as the VC opened fire on them with rocket-propelled grenades and small arms from fortified river bank positions.

Williams, who knew the area well from months of patrols, directed his two boats in a high-speed detour to a spot he knew the fleeing sampan would eventually emerge. Both threaded an alternative channel too narrow for the boats to reverse course. At nearly 35 knots they roared up the twisting passage, the heavily jungled bank passing in a green blur. Then as they rounded a bend to an area of more open water, to the surprise of all aboard, they stumbled into a major staging area for the North Vietnamese Army. Thirty to forty sampans were crossing the channel, each loaded to the gunwales with NVA troops and supplies.

The enemy was equally surprised and sprang to their guns. Along the shore, the familiar "thunk" of mortars could be heard. Williams had no choice but to gun his engines straight at the enemy! Tracers streaked across the water. Williams ran his boat directly at several sampans, splitting them in half under the sharp bow of his rocketing speedboat. The PBR's twisted and jinked blazed their weapons and spilled hundreds of dead and dying NVA troops into the water. The speed and maneuverability of the Americans kept them ahead of the enemy return fire. They blasted through the enemy formation and back into the narrow channel beyond.

Momentarily safe, the PBR's sped onward. Williams called in heavily armed UH-1B Huey helicopters from the Navy Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron 3 "Seawolves" for air support, but as his speedboats rounded another bend they found themselves smack in the middle of a second staging area as big as the first. Again, the narrow channel determined their fate, and both PBR's sped boldly at the enemy. For a second time, their machine guns blazed and splinters flew from enemy sampans and NVA soldiers spilled into the water. And for a second time, the two American gunboats sliced through the enemy, blasting and ramming as they went. Secondary explosions from several of the larger junks confirmed Williams' suspicion that they were ammunition and supply vessels.

Despite three hours of intense combat, Williams' crew received only two casualties--one gunner was shot through the wrist, and Williams himself was wounded by shrapnel. For his conspicuous bravery above and beyond the call of

duty he was put in for the Medal of Honor - which he received from President Lyndon B. Johnson on May 14, 1968, during the dedication ceremony of the Pentagon's "Hall of Heroes." On January 9, 1967, the Navy dredge Jamaica Bay was blown up by mines and PVR-105 arrived to pick up seven of the survivor. Another man was wrapped in the rapidly sinking dredge. Williams dove into the water and, with a rope attached to a nearby tree, pulled clear and obstruction, then swim through a hatch to recover the Sailor. For this, he was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal. Six days later Williams was wounded while leading a three-boat patrol that interdicted a crossing attempt by three VC heavy weapons companies and 400 fighters. He and his boat accounted for 16 VC killed, 20 wounded in the destruction of nine sampans and junks. Williams was awarded the Navy Cross and his third Purple Heart.

Williams transferred to the Fleet Reserve in April 1967 and returned to his native South Carolina with a list of awards unmatched by any enlisted man in Navy history. His awards included the Medal of Honor, the Navy Cross, two Silver Stars and the Legion of Merit, three Bronze Stars, and the Navy Commendation Medal. He also received three Purple Hearts and was twice awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for rescue operations under fire.

He retired after 20 years of service and was appointed in 1969 by President Richard M. Nixon as United States Marshal, serving more than a decade in the Marshals Service. His initial assignment was U.S. Marshal for the District of South Carolina where he served until May 1977. He then transferred to Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Georgia as an instructor and National Armorer. He was called back to South Carolina in July 1979 to resume his appointment as U.S. Marshal and functioned in that position until April 1980. His next assignment was with the U.S. Marshal service Headquarters, Washington, D.C. as Program Manager, Health and Safety and In-District Training Officer where he performed his assigned duties until his retirement from the U.S. Marshal Service.

In the fall of 1999, he was in Florence, South Carolina where he suffered a heart attack and died on the Navy's birthday, October 13th. He was buried with full military honors at the Florence National Cemetery in Florence, South Carolina. The procession of dignitaries at his funeral included seven Medal of Honor recipients and state and national legislators. In addition to his wife Elaine, he was survived by three sons, James Jr., of Darlington, S.C.; Steven, of Dorchester, S.C., and Charles, of Charlotte, N.C.; two daughters, Debbie Clark of Palm Coast and Gail Patterson of Florence, and seven grandchildren. Navy Guided Missile Destroyer USS James E. Williams (DDG-95) was named and christened in his honor on June 28, 2003, at Pascagoula, Mississippi. His widow Elaine was present at the ceremony. [Source: Vietnam Magazine | Doug Sterner | July 18, 2017 ++]

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## **Battle of Britain ► How It Was Really Won**

It was a battle fought without armies. No rifles, no tanks, no barbed wire. In the summer of 1940, the skies above Britain served as the battlefield for the British Royal Air Force and the German Luftwaffe. The Nazis had conquered most of Western Europe, and Britain stood alone. The Luftwaffe represented the first arm of the German military juggernaut to take a swing at the British Isles. Its mission was simple: repeat the performances in Poland and France and eliminate the enemy air force.

This would facilitate an invasion, which the Germans had no reason to believe would fail. The Luftwaffe's crack pilots, many of them experienced since 1936 in the Spanish Civil War, included men like the dashing and headstrong Adolf Galland and deadly tactical genius Werner Mölders. The RAF stood grossly outnumbered, outgunned, and outmanned. Therein lies the importance of the Battle of Britain. The RAF, subsequently nicknamed "The Few" by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, held the responsibility of not only defending Britain from the Luftwaffe but also defeating the German pilots and thwarting Hitler's plan for invasion. Despite German numerical and tactical superiority, higher echelons of leadership in the RAF proved more strategically flexible and adapted to the situations and parameters of the battle better than their Luftwaffe counterparts. To read more about how the

battle unfolded refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Battle of Britain**". [Source: Warfare History Network | Grant Matla | February 2, 2016 ++]

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## **Battle of Okinawa Update 01** ► **Easter Sunday | A Time to Remember**

As we celebrated Easter Sunday and the Jewish Passover, it was also the time to keep in our prayers and remembrances the many Americans who fought and sacrificed during that same time 73 years ago in the Battle of Okinawa. The event was Operation Iceberg. It was the bloodiest battle and the largest amphibious assault in the Pacific Theater of World War II. On Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945, the Navy's Fifth Fleet under Adm. Raymond Spruance attacked the Japanese-held island. They were joined by a British, Canadian, New Zealand, and Australian naval task force and more than 180,000 Army soldiers and Marines. This was the final push toward invading mainland Japan and putting an end to the war.

Military planners considered the capture of Okinawa and its airfields to be a crucial and necessary precondition for the invasion of the Japanese mainland. Were the U.S. to invade Japan, estimates of potential American casualties were upward of 1.7 to 4 million, with between 400,000 and 800,000 deaths. The Battle of Okinawa only served to raise those estimates, as had the recent brutal battle for Iwo Jima, where U.S. casualties numbered 26,000 over five weeks of fighting. Only a few hundred Japanese had been captured out of the 21,000 troops who fought to the death. Those expected casualties were the major reason for President Harry Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb.

The Japanese military knew that Okinawa was its last stand in the Pacific. As a result, it fixed 77,000 troops on the island under the command of Lt. Gen. Mitsuru Ushijima, along with a 20,000-strong Okinawan militia. The Japanese forces even included 1,800 middle school boys conscripted into the "Blood and Iron Corps." The American invasion started with a massive seven-day naval bombardment of the landing beaches, where heavy resistance from the Japanese forces was expected. That prelanding bombardment included tens of thousands of artillery shells, rockets, mortar shells, and napalm attacks.

The Japanese allowed American troops to land unopposed on Easter Sunday and to move inland with nominal resistance. Japanese troops had been ordered not to fire on the American landing because Ushijima wanted to lure the American forces into a trap he had laid for them in what became known as the Naha-Shuri-Yonabaru Defense Line in southern Okinawa, a rugged terrain riddled with fortified pillboxes, gun emplacements, tunnels, and caves. The Japanese also sent the battleship Yamato on a one-way suicide mission to Okinawa, but it was spotted by Allied submarines and sunk (along with a cruiser and four enemy destroyers) by American pilots, downing nearly the entire crew of over 2,300.

The far more dangerous attacks on the Allied fleet were by dense waves of suicide kamikazes diving their planes into ships. The Fifth Fleet lost 36 ships in the Battle of Okinawa and suffered damage to another 368 ships. Almost 5,000 U.S. sailors and pilots were killed and almost as many were wounded, with over 700 Allied planes being shot down. It was the biggest naval loss of the war. On Okinawa, Americans fought ferocious battles on almost every defended hilltop. Torrential rains turned the island into a sea of mud that bogged down tanks, trucks, and other heavy equipment. The most infamous hilltop was Hacksaw Ridge, a 400-foot cliff on the Maeda Escarpment that was depicted in a 2016 movie about Cpl. Desmond T. Doss. Doss was a Seventh-Day Adventist and conscientious objector who became a combat medic. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for rescuing 75 wounded soldiers at Hacksaw Ridge.

In almost every fight on Okinawa, American troops fought for every foot of ground in hand-to-hand combat against fanatical Japanese troops who often took their own lives rather than surrendering. That eventually included Ushijima and his chief of staff who committed seppuku on June 22. It was Ushijima who had ordered his troops to

“fight to the death.” With his suicide, the Battle of Okinawa was effectively over. The Battle of Okinawa was the deadliest fight of the Pacific island campaign. The Japanese knew they could not win. Their purpose was simply to make the battle as costly as possible to the Americans and to hold them off as long as possible, allowing Japan to prepare for the defense of their home islands. Thus, Japanese commanders considered all their forces and the residents of Okinawa totally expendable.

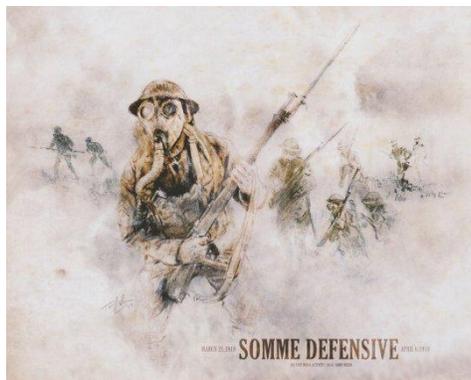
Americans incurred almost 50,000 casualties on Okinawa, including over 12,000 dead. Those killed included the American commander, Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, who was killed by enemy artillery fire just four days before the battle ended, making him the highest-ranking U.S. officer killed during the entire war. Ernie Pyle, the famous war correspondent, was also killed when he was shot by a sniper on a small island northwest of Okinawa. In addition to Doss, six other Americans who fought in the battle received the Medal of Honor, our nation’s highest award for bravery under fire.

But the Japanese losses were much greater. Only 7,400 Japanese soldiers survived—90 percent of Japanese troops on the island fought to the death. Almost 150,000 Okinawan civilians were killed, amounting to one-third of the prewar population. Many were used as human shields by Japanese troops. Others threw themselves and their families off cliffs on the southern part of Okinawa in mass suicides after the Japanese convinced them that the Americans would kill or rape anyone they captured. Ironically enough, it was Japanese troops who engaged in mass rapes of Okinawan women during the battle.

The bloody, ferocious battle for Okinawa lasted 82 days and left the island a “vast field of mud, lead, decay, and maggots” according to Ted Tsukiyama’s “Battle of Okinawa.” Almost every building on the island was destroyed. Truman’s decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August ended the war and all Japanese resistance, thereby preventing the enormous American casualties that would have resulted from a land invasion of Japan. On Easter Sunday, American Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which marks the triumph of good over evil, sin, and death. At the same time during Passover, Jewish Americans celebrate their liberation from slavery in ancient Egypt. Those celebrations are profound and deeply significant. But every April 1st we should also pause to remember the Americans and their allies who, 73 years ago, fought and died during Easter and Passover to preserve our freedom and end a brutal war started by a ruthless military dictatorship intent on enslaving the people it conquered. We and the world owe them more than we can ever repay. [Source: The Daily Signal | Hans von Spakovsky | March 30, 2018 ++]

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## WWI German Spring Offensive Update 01 ► MAR 21 thru APR 6, 1918



U.S. Soldiers and allies on the Western Front in 1918 faced a dreaded but expected bloody German Spring Offensive, which the Germans referred to as the Kaiserschlacht or Kaiser's Battle, according to Eric B. Setzkorn, a

historian at the Center of Military History. The World War I Spring Offensive, now exactly a century old, was anticipated, he said, due in large part to two events: the collapse of the Russian army on the Eastern Front and the deployment of American forces to Europe, following a year-long effort to recruit, train and ship them over. Victory in the east allowed Germany to shift divisions westward and the Germans were particularly eager to employ them before the U.S. divisions could reach the front, he said.

The Spring Offensive began 21 MAR, with just one American division, the 1st Infantry Div., at the line of trenches that marked the front line. The other divisions, the 2nd, 42nd and 26th, were still in their final phase of training by the French in a quiet sector away from the front. That meant that the majority of allied combatants on the Western Front were French, French colonials, British and Commonwealth forces. With reinforcements drawn from the Eastern Front, the Germans were able to bulk up and send 192 German divisions to the Western Front, outnumbering the 180 British and French divisions there, he said. After a massive enemy bombardment by more than 6,000 cannons, 72 German divisions smashed into the British in the Somme sector of the line in the north of France. That line of trenches extended from the English Channel in Belgium, through northern and eastern France to the Swiss border.

German troops succeeded by using infiltration tactics that relied on small groups of elite infantry bypassing strongpoints and moving quickly into the rear of allied defenses, isolating frontline troops and disrupting communications. After a week of nearly constant attacks, the German army had advanced more than 40 miles, creating a huge salient in the line just north of Paris and inflicting more than 175,000 casualties on the British. 40 miles was considered significant because for the preceding few years, the lines moved very little, if at all. The German efforts to drive a wedge between the British and French armies and push the British back to the English Channel appeared to be working. Although British forces rallied to block the Germans at Amiens, France, the threat remained severe. "For the first time since 1914, panic gripped the allies, who feared that the Channel ports or perhaps even Paris could be lost," Setzkorn noted.

American participation in British defensive operations remained limited throughout the Spring Offensive, which lasted until 6 APR. Altogether, just fewer than 3,000 Americans participated in this campaign. The 12th and 14th Engineers maintained and operated light railways in the advance zone of the British Third and Fifth Armies and later helped to construct trenches north of Amiens. Elements from the 3d Div's 6th Engineers had been assigned to the British Fifth Army in February for bridge construction near the town of Péronne, France. When the Germans attacked, the engineers mined the recently-constructed bridges over the Somme River and withdrew with the British. After rigging an engineer dump at Chaulnes for demolition and preparing new defensive positions at Démuin, the 545-man detachment of the 6th Engineers deployed to the front west of Warfusée-Abancourt on 27 MAR. They were issued British rifles and joined British units to hold the line.

For four days, the British and Americans weathered intense shellfire and repulsed a German attack, suffering numerous casualties in the process. The 6th Engineers was finally withdrawn on 3 APR. The 17th, 22d, 28th, and 148th Aero Squadrons of the U.S. Army Air Service, also served in the Somme defense, operating as part of the British Royal Flying Corps. Although the Spring Offensive ended 6 APR, the German 1918 offensives were far from over, he said. In the coming months, thousands of American Soldiers would be called on to join the battle to block follow-on German attempts to win the war. [Source: Army News Service | David Vergun | April 6, 2018 ++]

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## **WWII Vets 160 ► Jack Schwartz | 1300 Days in Captivity**

Whatever doesn't kill you only makes you stronger. For retired Commander Jack Schwartz, that seems to be the case. The 22-year Navy veteran spent 1,367 days in captivity as a prisoner of war during World War II. And he's about to turn 103 years old 28 APR. For Schwartz, it all started just three days after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. On Dec. 10, 1941, he was a Navy Lieutenant Junior Grade stationed in Guam as a Civil Engineer

responsible for the water supply, roads, the breakwater and some construction. “We only had 100 Marines on the island – about 400 of us total, to include those who worked at the Naval hospital,” Schwartz said. “And there were about 4-5,000 Japanese Soldiers. They sank one of our ships, a mine sweeper, and nine sailors were killed.”



**A young Jack Schwartz in uniform. (left) and holding his shadow box with his medals (right)**

“We didn’t put up much of a fight.” Schwartz said he was held by the Japanese there in Guam for about 30 days. “There was plenty of food on Guam, but they deliberately starved us to make us weak,” he said. After 30 days, they were transported by ship – all 400 U.S. POWs to include Schwartz – to Shikoku Island in Japan. They stayed there for about eight months, in some old barracks left over from the Japanese war with Russia, before being moved again. The next place Schwartz was sent to was Kawasaki, between Tokyo and Yokohama. There were already POW camps and prisoners there when Schwartz arrived to include U.S. service members captured in the Philippines and from U.S. ships.

More than 300 prisoners were there, but just a few were officers, he said. “I was the senior U.S. officer there so they put me in charge of the camp,” Schwartz said. “As a prisoner, I had absolutely no authority to do anything, but if anything went wrong it was my fault.” “Every month or two I got a beating by the Japanese guards – nothing too serious – just to show me they’re in charge.” After two years, Schwartz said he was sent back to Shikoku Island to the same POW camp he was at previously. “This was a camp for officers – not just U.S., but English and Dutch. This was where the Japanese would invite the Red Cross to show how nice the conditions were,” Schwartz said.

“The day the war with Japan was over, a Japanese officer lined us up outside and told us hostilities have ceased,” Schwartz said. “And he and the other Japanese officers and guards just walked away.” They made a big sign in white paint on the roof that read POW. After a couple of weeks, a U.S. B-29 bomber spotted us, and a few hours later they started dropping parachutes full of food. “Naturally we all started stuffing ourselves and got sick.” Upon release – after being held POW for 3.75 years – Schwartz made the decision he would not end his career with the Navy and instead, he continued to serve for another 18 years.

The CalTech graduate – who was born in San Francisco but moved to Hollywood with his parents at an early age – would eventually retire from the Navy with honors and distinction and move to Hanford, California in 1962. He then worked for 18 years as Hanford’s Public Works director and city engineer before retiring a second time. Schwartz said he now receives his medical care from the VA Central California Health Care System. “I still remember my first doctor there at the VA, Dr. Ron Naggar. And Dr. Ivance Pugoy is one of my current doctors,”

Schwartz said. "You get a feeling they actually care. They make you feel like you are not just a name. You are a person. They do an excellent job for all the POWs," he said. [Source: VAntage Point| April 2, 2018 ++]

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## **WWII Vets 161 ► Richard Overton | Will Turn 112 Next Month**

Richard Overton, the grandson of a slave, worked in a furniture store and as a courier for decades until he finally retired when he was 85. That was more than 25 years ago. Now, Overton — the country's oldest living World War II veteran — has been enjoying a bit of fame for his longevity, and has a regular stream of visitors to his home in Austin, Texas. Last week, he mentioned to one of his visitors that he'd like to someday see the National Museum of African American History in Washington, D.C. The following morning, Overton and a few friends were on a private jet heading toward the nation's capital. They got a private tour of the museum before it opened to the public Sunday morning.

It was one in a line of stunning and unlikely happenings for Overton, who is believed to be the oldest living American and the third-oldest person in the world. His 112th birthday is next month. His secret to a long life includes cigars, whiskey and speaking his mind. "I enjoyed every bit of the tour," Overton said at the museum as he was lunching on soul food. Then he added, "I didn't see my name up there," referring to the World War II exhibit. His friends chuckled. "One of these days it will be," he assured them.

The whirlwind tour was put in motion after one of Overton's friends, Allen Bergeron, introduced him to billionaire philanthropist Robert Smith, who donated \$20 million to the museum. Bergeron knows both men through his work with the Austin Military Veterans Program. Bergeron said he has been trying to introduce the two men for years; Smith's father and grandfather served in the military, and Overton served as a sharpshooter in Pearl Harbor and Okinawa. On Friday (6 APR), he was finally able to bring Smith to Overton's house for a visit. The two men talked for two hours and ate fried catfish. That was when Overton said he'd like to see the museum. Smith replied, "What are you all doing this weekend?" according to Bergeron. It was settled.

While they were on the tour, retired four-star general and former Secretary of State Colin Powell, who is on the museum board, called Overton to welcome him. The two had never met. "Everything we do with Mr. Overton turns magical," Bergeron said, adding that a street in Austin was recently named after Overton. Overton has been to the White House several times and met President Barack Obama. When he came across the museum exhibit featuring the former president, he sat up a little taller in his wheelchair. "Yes, sir!" he said. "That's my friend." Asked if he had been nervous to meet Obama, he shook his head. "He's a good man," Overton said. "It was like meeting anybody."

A few years later, when Overton turned 109, he was still tending his own lawn and driving his own car. He celebrated that birthday with cigars, milkshakes, burgers and a big party. Although life after 100 has been exciting for Overton, there have also been frustrations, said his cousin Volma Overton, who oversees his care. "His mind is strong, but his body is frail," he said. Volma Overton said he wants to keep Richard Overton in his house where he's happy and comfortable. People stop by every day to see him, many of them strangers who have read about him in the news, he said. "His front porch is his everything," said Volma Overton, 70, who works as a greens keeper on a golf course. "It's his throne."

Richard Overton's veteran's benefits would pay to move him to an assisted-living facility, but Volma Overton said that would "kill him." Volma Overton began round-the-clock care at his cousin's home a year and a half ago, but at \$15,000 a month, he couldn't afford to maintain it. He started a GoFundMe page, which raised more than \$200,000, but that money has been spent on in-home care, leaving the family in debt. Richard Overton does not have children. He married twice; he and his first wife divorced in the 1920s, and his second wife died in the 1980s. "He's outlived almost everybody in his family," Volma Overton said.

He was born March 11, 1906, in Texas, and served in the Pacific Theater from 1942 to 1945 as part of the all-black 1887th Engineer Aviation Battalion. He grew up hearing his grandfather's stories of being a slave in Tennessee. When his grandfather was freed, he moved to Texas, where his family settled. On Sunday, Richard Overton said it was meaningful for him to see the museum and the African American story through time: from his grandfather's history as a slave to his own history as an African American fighter in World War II and then the pride of the first African American president. "All of it is important," he said. "I'd seen some of it before, but I've never seen it all at once." [Source: The Washington Post | Allison Klein | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## WWII Vets 162 ► Vernon Bishop | Operation Fortitude

If there was one thing young Vernon Bishop knew, it was that he had to be a part of World War II. He became part of one of the biggest wartime deceptions in history, although he didn't really know that until he got back home to Walton County. Bishop's wartime story began shortly after his graduation from Point Washington High School. As a young newlywed, he was working with a construction company that built runways, work that qualified him for deferments from military service. But as he saw young men heading off to war, including his three brothers, he chafed against not being a part of it. "I said to my wife, 'You know, this is bothering me,'" he remembered. "We talked about it, and we finally made up our mind to tell the company not to give me any more deferments."



So one day in 1942, Bishop went to Jacksonville to enlist in the Army. A short time later, he was at North Carolina's Fort Bragg for training as an artilleryman. "I wasn't there but a couple of weeks, maybe, and here comes my wife," Bishop smiled during a recent interview. "She followed me right to the camp, got a job on the base, and stayed with me for the whole basic training." After basic training, Bishop and his wife, Loyce, spent a couple of weeks back home in Walton County before he reported for duty near Washington, D.C. "And here she came again," Bishop said. The couple spent a week together before Bishop boarded a troop ship bound for England, where he spent a long time waiting for an assignment. Given his training, he expected to go to an artillery unit. His actual assignment, though, would be far different.

"One day, I didn't have anything to do, so I went to the mess hall and asked, 'Do you folks have anything I can do?'" Bishop remembered. "They said, 'Yeah, take this machine and slice that bologna.' Next thing I knew, somebody was up beside me, talking to me. He said, 'I want you to report to this theater.'" Later that day, Bishop reported to the theater with about 10 other soldiers. "Next thing I knew, here came a train," he said. "We didn't know where we were going." Where they were going was a headquarters unit of the 1st Army Group, a "paper army" created with relatively few actual troops, like Bishop, that included tanks, ships and other military vehicles and buildings crafted from cardboard and fabric. The object of the deception, part of a plan called Operation Fortitude, was to keep the Germans guessing as to the actual location of the Allies' D-Day invasion of France.

The deception worked, as German forces continued to concentrate on the French coastal town of Calais even after the real D-Day invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. "Nobody knew what we were doing, or why we were

doing it,” Bishop said. He’s learned more about Operation Fortitude in the years since the war than he knew about it at the time, he said. “We didn’t have much to do,” Bishop said. One of the things he did, though, was teach new soldiers how to shoot. “They were sending guys overseas who didn’t know the front end from the tail end of a rifle,” Bishop said. Among his other memories are seeing Gen. George Patton, commander of the 1st Army Group. “Patton, he came to the outfit a lot,” Bishop said. “He wore them pearl-handled 45s on his hips. He was different, I can say that.”

Following Operation Fortitude, Bishop went to France, and then to Germany, where he got advance notice of the May 8, 1945 end of the war in Europe. “There was a buddy of mine, working in the ‘war room,’ and he came out that day and told me, ‘The war is over,’” Bishop said. Bishop got the news 12 hours before it was formally announced. In the meantime, he and his buddy had to struggle to keep their secret. “They had a pub there, so we went to it and got us some cognac and drank it,” Bishop remembered. “We had to do something.” Still, Bishop and his buddy struggled not to share the news. “It was hard. That’s why we drank the cognac,” Bishop laughed.

Bishop didn’t get aboard a troop ship until Thanksgiving Day of 1945. He left from Antwerp, Belgium, and was home 21 days later. He and his wife, Loyce, who passed away in 2005, had two sons as he made a life locally in the grocery and service station businesses. Now 95, and likely the oldest native of Walton County — his church, South Walton Baptist, hosted a birthday celebration for him on Saturday — Bishop is among the dwindling number of World War II veterans left to bear living witness to the conflict. Of the more than 16 million Americans who served during World War II, 558,000 remained alive as of last year, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. These days, youthful bravado tempered by wisdom, Bishop is a more circumspect about his wartime experience. “I look back now and think, ‘Why did I do that?’” he said. [Source: Santa Rosa's Press Gazette | Jim Thompson | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **Military History Anniversaries** ► **Military History Anniversaries**

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 30 April**. [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | April 2018 ++]

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## **Medal of Honor Citations** ► **Gilmore, Howard W. | WWII**



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

## HOWARD WALTER GILMORE

**Rank and organization:** Commander, U.S. Navy  
**Place and date:** February 7, 1943 Off the Solomon's  
**Entered service:** November 15, 1920  
**Born:** September 29, 1902 Selma, Alabama

### Citation

For distinguished gallantry and valor above and beyond the call of duty as commanding officer of the U.S.S. Growler during her Fourth War Patrol in the Southwest Pacific from 10 January to 7 February 1943. Boldly striking at the enemy in spite of continuous hostile air and antisubmarine patrols, Comdr. Gilmore sank one Japanese freighter and damaged another by torpedo fire, successfully evading severe depth charges following each attack. In the darkness of night on 7 February, an enemy gunboat closed range and prepared to ram the Growler. Comdr. Gilmore daringly maneuvered to avoid the crash and rammed the attacker instead, ripping into her port side at 11 knots and bursting wide her plates. In the terrific fire of the sinking gunboat's heavy machineguns, Comdr. Gilmore calmly gave the order to clear the bridge, and refusing safety for himself, remained on deck while his men preceded him below. Struck down by the fusillade of bullets and having done his utmost against the enemy, in his final living moments, Comdr. Gilmore gave his last order to the officer of the deck, "Take her down." The Growler dived; seriously damaged but under control, she was brought safely to port by her well-trained crew inspired by the courageous fighting spirit of their dead captain.



In 1922 Gilmore was appointed to the United States Naval Academy by competitive examination. Standing 34 in a class of 436, Gilmore was commissioned in 1926 and reported to the battleship USS Mississippi (BB-41). He underwent submarine training in 1930 and in the years that followed served in various submarines and at stations ashore. Gilmore served as the executive officer of USS Shark (SS-174), and in a near-fatal incident during Shark's shakedown cruise, narrowly survived an assault by a group of thugs in Panama, who cut his throat during an excursion ashore. He had to deal with several other instances of tragedy in his life, including the death of his first wife from disease, and at the time of his Medal of Honor action his second wife was still in a coma from a fall she had taken down a flight of stairs. In 1941, he assumed his first command, USS Shark (SS-174), only to be transferred the day following the attack on Pearl Harbor to take command of the still-unfinished USS Growler (SS-215).

Gilmore commanded his submarine skillfully during four Pacific war patrols. During his first, on 5 July 1942 Growler attacked three enemy destroyers off Kiska, sinking one and severely damaging the other two, while

narrowly avoiding two torpedoes fired in return, for which he received the Navy Cross. On his second patrol, Growler sank four merchant ships totaling 15,000 tons in the East China Sea near Taiwan. Gilmore received a gold star in lieu of a second Navy Cross. In October 1942, Growler patrolled off of Truk in the Caroline Islands in a repositioning of submarine assets on the way to Brisbane, Australia. No significant action occurred.

On its 4th patrol the submarine continued to take a heavy toll on shipping on her fourth war patrol, and on the night of 6–7 February 1943, she approached a convoy stealthily for a surface attack. Suddenly a convoy escort, Hayasaki, closed and prepared to ram. As the small ship charged out of the darkness, Gilmore sounded the collision alarm and shouted, “Left full rudder!” — to no avail. Perhaps inadvertently, Growler hit the Japanese adversary amidships at 11 knots, heeling the submarine 50 degrees, bending 18 feet of her bow sideways to port, and disabling the forward torpedo tubes. Simultaneously, the Japanese crew unleashed a burst of machine gun fire at Growler’s bridge, killing the junior officer of the deck and a lookout, while wounding Gilmore himself and two other men. “Clear the bridge!” Gilmore ordered as he struggled to hang on to a frame. As the rest of the bridge party dropped down the hatch into the conning tower, the executive officer, Lieutenant Commander Arnold Schade — shaken by the impact and dazed by his own fall into the control room — waited expectantly for his captain to appear. Instead from above came the shouted command, “Take her down!” Realizing that he could not get below in time if the ship were to escape, Gilmore chose to make the supreme sacrifice for his shipmates. Schade hesitated briefly — then followed his captain’s last order and submerged the crippled ship.

Surfacing some time later in hope of reattacking the Hayasaki, Schade found the seas empty. The Japanese ship had, in fact, survived the encounter, but there was no sign of Gilmore, who apparently had drifted away in the night. Schade and Growler’s crew managed to control the ship’s flooding and limped back to Brisbane on February 17. Even today “Take her down!” remains one of the legendary phrases of the U.S. Submarine Force.



Japanese patrol vessel (lleft) burning after being attacked by Growler (SS-215). USS Growler at Brisbane, Australia, (right) for repairs to her bow,

In September 1943, the submarine tender USS Howard W. Gilmore (AS-16) was named for him and sponsored by his widow. A cenotaph (photo of stone) can be found in Commander Gilmore's memory and honor was placed by Ed Shields, Ward Calhoun, and the Lauderdale County Department of Archives and History, Inc. at Magnolia Cemetery, Meridian, Mississippi in the Howard Family Plot. His mother's maiden name was Howard.

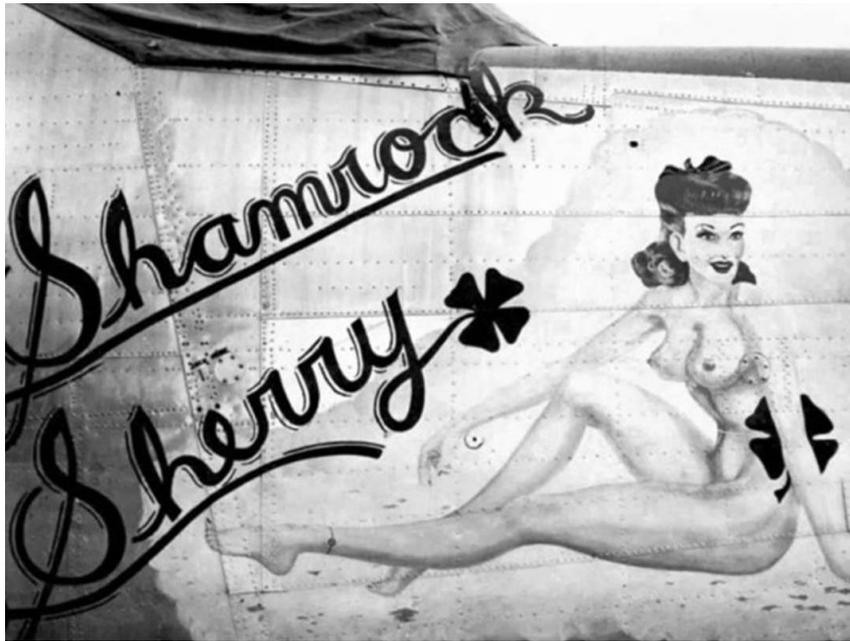
[Source: <https://history.army.mil/moh/wwII-g-l.html> | April 2018 ++]

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## WWII Bomber Nose Art [04] ► Shamrock Sherry

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 \***



## **TRICARE Enrollment Update 02 ► Active Duty Retirement**

Retiring from active duty, whether a medical retirement or a regular retirement, is a significant life event. You should know before you retire which TRICARE programs best suit your and your family’s needs. Once you retire, you’ll only have 90 days from your retirement date to enroll in a TRICARE plan to continue TRICARE coverage. Otherwise, you will have no TRICARE Purchased Care coverage and will only be able to access care at military hospitals and clinics on a space-available basis. The TRICARE Health Program is often referred to as purchased care. It is the services we “purchase” through the managed care support contracts. If you retire from active duty and are under age 65, you can choose either TRICARE Prime (where available) or TRICARE Select (available worldwide). You should decide before you retire which one best suits your and your family’s needs.

You may reenroll in TRICARE Prime if you live in a Prime Service Area (PSA) or live within 100 miles of an available primary care manager and waive your drive-time access standards. You can see if you live in a PSA by using the [TRICARE Plan Finder](#). If you choose not to reenroll in TRICARE Prime or don’t live in a PSA, then you may enroll in TRICARE Select. With TRICARE Select, you can see any TRICARE-authorized provider you choose, but you save money when you use TRICARE network providers. Referrals are not required for most health care services, but some services require prior authorization from your TRICARE regional contractor. If you live

overseas, you may seek coverage under [TRICARE Overseas Program \(TOP\) Select](#). TOP Prime and TOP Prime Remote options are not available after retirement.

If you or a family member are, or become, entitled to premium-free Medicare Part A after your retirement, you or they will lose TRICARE coverage unless enrolled in Medicare Part B. With Medicare parts A and B, you or they will have coverage under TRICARE For Life. For more information on how to enroll in a TRICARE plan, visit Enroll or Purchase a Plan on the TRICARE website. Learn more about TRICARE plans during retirement in the [Retiring from Active Duty Brochure](#). [Source: Health.mil | April 3, 2018 ++]

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## **Chronic Chillness ► Causative Conditions**

Certain medical conditions can cause your hands and feet to always feel chilled. As anyone who has worked in a shared office space can tell you, people have different body temperatures. Some people freezing while others roast is quite common, but if you constantly feel chilly when others seem comfortable, there may be a medical issue at play. The numerous potential causes for coldness include hypothyroidism, calorie reduction and general aging, where people become more sensitive to cold temps due to a decrease in the metabolic rate and thinning of fat under the skin. A few other causes that affect older people frequently should probably be addressed with a doctor.

### **Anemia**

Are your hands and feet always freezing? Anemia, a condition in which you don't have enough healthy red blood cells to carry adequate oxygen to the body's tissues, may be the culprit. The condition is commonly overlooked in older people, according to a 2010 study published in American Family Physician, with more than 10 percent of people over 65 being anemic and the prevalence increasing with age. Anemia also may make you feel tired and weak, according to the Mayo Clinic. Other symptoms include pale or yellowish skin, irregular heartbeat, shortness of breath, and headaches. Some types of anemia can be treated through better nutrition, although it is always important to discuss potential options with your doctor. Lack of vitamin B12 and iron deficiency can cause anemia and lead you to feel cold. Good sources of B12 are chicken, eggs and fish, and people with iron deficiency may want to seek out poultry, pork, fish, peas, soybeans, chickpeas and dark green leafy vegetables.

### **Type 2 Diabetes**

Diabetes can cause anemia, kidney and circulation problems, which can lead people to feel cold. It can also lead to nerve damage and peripheral neuropathy, which affects an estimated 20 million people in the United States, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), and results from damage to the peripheral nervous system. A warning sign for this could be if your feet feel cold but aren't cold to the touch. Keeping diabetes in check is a good way to prevent peripheral neuropathy, and you should talk to your doctor about other possible treatments. "When this develops, you experience numbness and sometimes pain in the hands and feet, and since these nerves are also responsible for sending messages to the brain regarding temperature sensation, your hands and feet may feel cold," Margarita Rohr, an internist at NYU Langone medical center in New York, told Health.com. Other symptoms of diabetes include frequent urination, fatigue and increased thirst.

### **Kidney Disease**

Diabetes and high blood pressure often lead to kidney disease, which means that your kidneys don't work as they should to filter your blood. Waste can build up to dangerous levels, which can cause lower core body temperature. Kidney disease is also linked to anemia, and your risk increases with age, according to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). The longer you have diabetes, high blood pressure or heart disease, the greater your risk of developing kidney disease.

### **Peripheral Artery Disease**

Peripheral artery disease (PAD) is a common circulatory problem in which your arteries become narrowed, which reduces blood flow to your limbs, according to the Mayo Clinic. PAD prevents your extremities, typically your legs, from receiving adequate blood flow to keep up with demand. Coldness in a lower leg or foot, especially when compared with the other side, can be a sign of this condition. In addition to cold, you may feel leg pain when walking. PAD could also reduce blood flow to your heart and brain, so it is important to address it with your doctor, especially if you are over 70, or over 50 and have a history of diabetes or smoking.

### **Medication Complications**

Some drugs may make you feel colder as a side effect, including beta-blockers used for heart disease, according to the Cleveland Clinic. These blockers help the heart relax but also may cause you to feel dizzy, tired, nauseous, and colder in your hands and feet. Calcium channel blockers can also be a culprit. Your doctor may be able to lower your dose or find an alternative medication.

[Source: AARP | Kim Hayes | February 23, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Medical Marijuana Update 43 ► Shift In Federal Policy Called For**

Former House Speaker John Boehner on 11 APR said he has shifted his stance on medical marijuana in part because of the potential positive effects it could have for suffering veterans. Boehner, who said he was opposed to medical marijuana legalization during his time in office, this week was appointed to the board of advisers for Acreage Holdings, one of the country’s largest cannabis cultivation and dispensing firms. In a statement, he called for “a shift in federal marijuana policy” and said his views on the issue have “evolved” in recent years. “We need to look no further than our nation’s 20 million veterans, 20 percent of whom, according to a 2017 American Legion survey, reportedly use cannabis to self-treat post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic pain and other ailments,” he said in a statement released by Acreage Holdings.

“Yet the [Department of Veterans Affairs] does not allow its doctors to recommend its usage. There are numerous other patient groups in America whose quality of life has been dramatically improved by the state-sanctioned use of medical cannabis.” Boehner said one of the main obstacles to further marijuana research and acceptance is the federal classification of cannabis as a Schedule 1 drug, which places strict testing and procurement guidelines on medical testing of the drug. The former speaker’s support now makes him the most prominent Republican in the country to actively advocate for a change in marijuana laws.

The move comes as veterans groups have made a major push on Capitol Hill for expanded marijuana research, arguing that it has the potential to become a safer alternative to highly addictive opioids for tens of thousands of veterans nationwide. The American Legion’s survey, released in November, found that more than 90 percent of veterans support expanding research into medical marijuana, and over 80 percent back allowing federal doctors to prescribe it to veterans. Medical marijuana is legal in 29 states and the District of Columbia, but is still illegal to use or possess under federal law. That prevents VA doctors from prescribing it to patients even in states where it is available.

Last year, VA officials updated their guidelines to allow doctors to discuss medical marijuana with patients in an effort to better gauge its usage among veterans. But administration officials still will not let physicians recommend its use or provide assistance in obtaining the drug. Boehner said he hopes his work at Acreage will help “transform the debate, policy and landscape around this issue.” Legislative efforts to reschedule cannabis and legalize medical marijuana nationwide have stalled in Congress in recent months. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 11, 2018 ++]

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## Deep Vein Thrombosis Update 01 ► What You Need To Know

Military Health System beneficiary Jamia Bailey plays three sports at Yokota High School in Fussa, Japan. She spends long hours traveling with her teammates to competitions at schools eight and even 10 hours away. When her left leg became swollen and painful one morning during class, a trip to the school nurse's office and then to the urgent care clinic on Yokota Air Base schooled Bailey on deep vein thrombosis (DVT). This is a blood clot that forms in a vein deep inside the body. It usually occurs in the lower leg, thigh, or pelvis. "Blood clots naturally form in our body after injury to prevent blood loss through the blood vessel wall," said Air Force Col. Jay Sampson, a board-certified vascular surgeon at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. "We also have a natural process to stop clot formation and then to break down the clot," he said. "DVT occurs when something goes wrong with this clotting process."

As many as 900,000 Americans may be affected by DVT each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Of those, the CDC said, about half will have long-term complications, including swelling and pain. Additionally, about 33 percent will have a DVT recurrence within 10 years. DVT is particularly dangerous if part of the clot breaks off and travels through the bloodstream to the lungs. This causes a pulmonary embolism, or PE, which prevents blood from reaching the lungs. According to the CDC, from 60,000 to 100,000 people die each year from PE. "Numerous risk factors can help identify who might be at risk for DVT," Sampson said. "But in the medical community, we tend to think of it as, everyone's at risk."

Risk factors include being obese, older, or confined to bed because of illness or disease, Sampson said. But even young and fit people can be at risk when they're immobile for long periods of time. NBC television journalist David Bloom was 39 when he died of PE in April 2003 while covering the Iraq War. Bloom had spent long hours inside cramped armored vehicles. Pregnant women up to six weeks after childbirth, and women who take oral contraceptives that include estrogen, also have an increased risk of DVT, Sampson said. Changes in hormone levels and blood composition may affect the normal clotting process. Also, blood flow in the legs may be reduced because of the fetus pressing on the veins. Swelling and pain are two symptoms of DVT. But some people don't experience any symptoms at all, Sampson said. The signs and symptoms of PE include difficulty breathing, chest pain, and coughing up blood. But sudden death, like Bloom's, is the first symptom in about 25 percent of people with PE, according to the CDC.

Bailey went to Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii for treatment with dad James, a retired Navy senior chief petty officer, and mom Pia, a Department of Defense Education Activity elementary school teacher. "Jamia was predisposed to getting DVT because she has May-Thurner syndrome, and the long periods of immobility during bus rides were a contributing factor," said Dr. Brian Ching, an interventional radiologist at Tripler. May-Thurner is a rare condition in which an artery compresses a vein in the pelvis. Bailey had minor surgery to remove the blood clots; a stent was inserted into the compressed vein to keep it open. She's now taking a blood thinner to reduce the risk of DVT recurring. "A blood thinner prevents the clot from getting bigger," Sampson said. "It also stabilizes the clot to reduce the risk of it traveling to the pulmonary artery. That's the pulmonary embolism we worry about."

Bailey said she can't play soccer while she's taking a blood thinner because any head trauma could cause bleeding in the brain. Otherwise, she's resumed her normal activities. Her goal is to play basketball next year for Chaminade University in Hawaii. "I really appreciate the doctors and nurses who helped me get through that rough part of my life," she said. Sampson and other experts offer the following tips to reduce risk of DVT:

- Move around as soon as recommended after being confined to bed for surgery, illness, or injury.
- Stretch your legs every few hours during long periods of immobility, including during air travel. Wear loose-fitting clothing and perhaps even compression socks, which prevent pooling of blood in the legs.
- Seek medical help immediately for swelling and pain in the legs or arms. "The next step would be an ultrasound test to diagnose," Sampson said.

[Source: Health.mil | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## Opium Use Update 01 ► VA Overdose-Reversal Naloxone Kits

In 2016, more than 46 people died every day from overdoses involving prescription opioids. Today, 40 percent of all U.S. opioid overdose deaths involve a prescription opioid. Throughout April, VA Women’s Health Services (WHS) is bringing awareness to opioid risks, promoting best practices for the safe use of opioids, and providing education for overdose-reversal Naloxone Kits, informing women Veterans how to respond to an opioid overdose in the event of an emergency. WHS is sharing these important messages about overdose prevention and practicing safe use:

- **Don’t Mix.** Do not mix opioids with alcohol, Benzodiazepines sometimes called “benzos” (Xanax, Ativan, Valium), or any medication that causes drowsiness. Know the color, shape, size, and name of your prescription opioid. Talk to your provider about co-prescription safety.
- **Don’t Share.** An opioid dose prescribed to you could cause an overdose if shared with another person. Do not share your medication with anyone else.
- **Take as Directed.** Take opioid medication exactly as directed. Taking too much of your opioid medication can cause you to pass out or stop breathing, resulting in brain damage or even death.
- **Consult your Provider.** If you stop taking your prescription opioid, even for a few days, taking the dose that you consume regularly could cause an overdose. Check in with your VA provider throughout the duration of your opioid use to ensure you are practicing safe use.
- **Remove old medications.** Removing expired or unwanted prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs reduces the risk of taking the wrong drug by mistake, the chance of accidental poisoning, especially in children, and/or misuse by family and friends. You can prevent opioid misuse by safely disposing of these medications as soon as you no longer need them. Check with your VA Pharmacist about how VA can help you safely dispose of unwanted prescriptions.



- **Reverse an overdose with Naloxone.** A prescription opioid overdose can be fatal and requires immediate emergency attention. Knowing the signs of an opioid overdose and how to use a Naloxone Kit can help save a life.

A prescription opioid overdose can be fatal and requires immediate emergency attention. Knowing the signs of an opioid overdose and how to use a Naloxone Kit can help save a life. Go to <https://youtu.be/0w-us7fQE3s> for a video on how to use it. Indicators that someone has overdosed and the kit should be used are:

- Extremely pale in the face and/or feels clammy to the touch
- Confusion, delirium, or acting drunk
- Extreme sleepiness, or the inability to wake up
- Frequent vomiting
- Loss of consciousness
- Slowed or irregular breathing

**Naloxone** is a prescription medication that is a highly effective treatment for reversing an opioid overdose in the event of an emergency, if administered in a timely manner. The most common Naloxone Kit includes an easy-to-use nasal spray with instructions. Other kits contain injections. Both forms are effective in reversing a life-threatening opioid overdose when used as intended. VA's Opioid Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution (OEND) Program provides Naloxone Kits to at risk Veterans. VA's OEND program trains patients on proper naloxone administration technique and how to prevent, recognize, and respond to an opioid overdose. If you are prescribed opioids, ask your VA provider if a Naloxone Kit is right for you. For additional information and VA online resources refer to <http://bit.ly/2Cmli5m>. [Source: Vantage Point | April 10, 2018 ++]

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## Organ Transplant Update 01 ► What Donors Should Know

At this moment, more than 123,000 people in the U.S. are waiting for an organ. One more person is added to the national waiting list every 12 minutes. Each of these people is in desperate need of a kidney, liver, heart, or other organ. More than 6,500 people a year -- about 21 a day -- die before that organ ever becomes available. Organ donors are always in short supply. There are far more people in need of a transplant than there are people willing to donate an organ. Most of the organs that are available come from deceased donors. When you fill out an organ donor card with your driver's license, you're agreeing to donate all or some of your organs if you die. A smaller number of organs come from healthy people. More than 6,000 transplants from living donors are performed each year.

You might have wondered about donating an organ -- either to a friend or relative who needs an organ right now, or by filling out an organ donor card. Before you decide to become an organ donor here is some important information you need to consider if you're considering organ donation:

- **Who can donate an organ?** Just about anyone, at any age, can become an organ donor. Anyone younger than age 18 needs to have the consent of a parent or guardian. For organ donation after death, a medical assessment will be done to determine what organs can be donated. Certain conditions, such as having HIV, actively spreading cancer, or severe infection would exclude organ donation. Having a serious condition like cancer, HIV, diabetes, kidney disease, or heart disease can prevent you from donating as a living donor. Let your transplant team know about any health conditions you have at the beginning of the process. Then they can decide whether you're a good candidate.
- **Do your blood and tissue type have to match the recipient's?** It's easier to transplant an organ if the donor and recipient are a good match. The transplant team will put you through a series of tests to determine whether your blood and tissue types are compatible with the recipient's. Some medical centers

can transplant an organ even if the donor's and recipient's blood and tissue types don't match. In that case, the recipient will receive special treatments to prevent his or her body from rejecting the donor organ.

- **How can you become an organ donor?** To donate your organs after death, you can either register with your state's donor registry (visit [www.OrganDonor.gov](http://www.OrganDonor.gov)), or fill out an organ donor card when you get or renew your driver's license. To become a living donor, you can either work directly with your family member or friend's transplant team, or contact a transplant center in your area to find out who's in need of an organ.
- **If you donate an organ, will you have health problems in the future?** Not necessarily. There are some organs you can give up all or part of without having long-term health issues. You can donate a whole kidney, or part of the pancreas, intestine, liver, or lung. Your body will compensate for the missing organ or organ part. If it is determined that donating an organ would put your health at risk in the short term or long term, then you would not be able to donate.
- **Will you be paid for donating an organ?** No. It's illegal to pay someone for an organ. The transplant program, recipient's insurance, or recipient should cover your expenses from tests and hospital costs related to a living organ donation. The transplant program can go over what coverage is available for additional medical services. Some or all of your travel costs may also be covered.
- **Will organ donation after death mean you can't have an open-casket funeral?** No. The surgical incisions used for organ donation will all be closed.
- **Will an organ donation after death incur any costs to your family?** No. The costs of the tests and surgery related to the donation will be covered by the recipient -- most often by the recipient's insurance. Your medical care and funeral costs are paid for by your family.
- **Does signing a donor card have an impact on the quality of medical care you get at a hospital?** No. When you are in a life-threatening situation, the medical team that is treating you is separate from the transplant team. A maximum effort to save your life will be made before an organ donation is considered.

Pros and Cons of Organ Donation -- When you're considering becoming a living organ donor, think very carefully about what you are getting into. Probably the greatest benefit of organ donation is knowing that you're saving a life. That life might be your spouse, child, parent, brother or sister, a close friend, or a very grateful stranger. You need to know organ donation is major surgery.

- All surgery comes with risks such as bleeding, infection, blood clots, allergic reactions, or damage to nearby organs and tissues.
- Although you will have anesthesia during the surgery as a living donor, you can have pain while you recover. Pain and discomfort will vary depending on the type of surgery.
- You may have visible, lasting scars from surgery. It will take some time for your body to recover from surgery.
- You might have to miss work until you're fully healed.
- Although the recipient's insurance will cover the costs of the surgery, any medical problems that develop from the transplant in the future won't be covered. Even your own health insurance policy might not cover these complications.

As you decide whether to donate an organ as a living donor, weigh the benefits and risks very seriously. It's important for you to get as much information as you can before making a decision. The transplant center should fully explain the organ donation process to you. You should also be assigned an independent donor advocate who will promote your medical rights. Make sure you ask a lot of questions throughout this process. It's important for you to fully understand the surgery and how becoming an organ donor might affect your future health. Finally, remember that this is your decision -- yours alone. Don't let anyone sway that decision. Even if a friend or loved one is very sick, you have to consider how donating an organ might affect your own life. Remember that even though

the donation process has started, you have the right to stop it at any time if you change your mind. [Source: [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com) | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **Irritable Bowel Syndrome ► Three Ways You Can Keep Your Gut Happy and Healthy**

IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome) affects 1 in 5 people in America. It is a disorder that can cause various gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms such as diarrhea, constipation, bloating and abdominal pain. If your doctor has talked to you about a possible Irritable Bowel Syndrome diagnosis, there is hope. Nutrition and lifestyle changes can help manage your symptoms. Here are three ways you can keep your gut happy and healthy:

### **Try a lactose-free diet**

Lactose is the natural sugar found in milk. About 65 percent of the world population is lactose-intolerant. This means that their bodies do not produce enough enzymes to break down milk sugar, which can cause and worsen GI symptoms. If you try a lactose-free diet, eliminate all foods that contain lactose. This includes dairy foods like cow's milk, ice cream, certain cheeses, cottage cheese and yogurt. Lactose-free milk is a good replacement, and is found in most grocery stores. Some foods contain less lactose than others, and may be better tolerated. Examples include hard cheeses such as cheddar and parmesan. Eliminate high lactose foods for at least a week to see if your GI symptoms improve. Check out this [page](#) for more tips and information about dairy. Your VA dietitian can help you implement a lactose-free diet and ensure you are meeting your nutrient needs that dairy products provide (such as calcium and vitamin D).

### **Reduce stress**

Stress plays a significant role in worsening symptoms. Since your brain and gut are linked through many hormones and nerve connections, lowering your stress may reduce your GI symptoms. For effectively lowering your stress, try deep breathing exercises, meditation or journaling. There are many free stress management resources online, like this from the [American Heart Association](#). Include at least one stress-reducing activity per day. Many VA facilities offer stress management resources, such as group classes or individual instruction. Check with your local VA facility for options.

### **Consider a low-FODMAP diet**

The [FODMAP diet](#) is an elimination diet that removes fermentable oligo-, di-, and mono-saccharides, and polyols which are types of carbohydrates and sugar alcohols that can worsen symptoms. High FODMAP foods can be poorly digested in people Irritable Bowel Syndrome, and can cause excess gas, bloating and other GI symptoms. By trialing an elimination of high FODMAP foods, many find that their symptoms are significantly reduced. Common high FODMAP foods include onions, garlic, cow's milk and wheat. To learn about other high FODMAP foods check out this page from the National Institute of Health. Consider starting a journal to track food and beverage intake and any GI symptoms that occur, including severity. Because there are many foods to consider, a low-FODMAP diet can be difficult to manage on your own. For the best results, work with your local VA dietitian to help you navigate this process, and help you find symptom relief.

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Although there is no known cure for Irritable Bowel Syndrome, it can often be successfully managed with changes to diet and lifestyle. In addition to the diet considerations listed above, limiting excessive fat intake may also help improve symptoms. If you're interested in learning more about how to eat with an Irritable Bowel Syndrome diagnosis, or any other nutrition-related topic, contact your local VA to speak with a registered dietitian.

[Source: VAntage Point | Maria Zamarripa | April 3, 2018 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 443 ► MHS Nurse Advice Line - Right of 1st Refusal - Nutritional Needs**

**MHS Nurse Advice Line** -- The Military Health System Nurse Advice Line, or MHS NAL, a service available to TRICARE beneficiaries living in the U.S. and Europe since 2014, is now available to those living in Japan and South Korea. MHS NAL allows you to speak with a registered nurse 24/7 for no cost. A registered nurse will help you choose the right level of care for yourself, your child or other family member, schedule military hospital or clinic appointments, and much more. If you're enrolled to a military hospital or clinic, the MHS NAL will send a note to your patient-centered medical home team to let them know how you're doing. If a health concern arises and your local hospital or clinic is closed or if you are not sure whether your health concern warrants a visit to a health care provider, you now have the option to call the MHS NAL.

This is not for emergencies. If you have an emergency, contact your local emergency medical service or go to the closest emergency room or emergency care facility. At [www.mhsnurseadvice.com](http://www.mhsnurseadvice.com) the new MHS NAL Beneficiary Portal also gives you the option to discuss your health concerns with a registered nurse in a secure web chat or video chat. The next time you need help making immediate decisions about your health needs, remember that the MHS NAL is just a phone call or click away.

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**Right of First Refusal** -- Military hospitals and clinics have the right of first refusal in providing specialty care to TRICARE Prime beneficiaries. This means that when you're referred for specialty care or treatment, your local military hospital or clinic must first be considered if the services are available there. If they have the capability to provide your specialty care, you'll get treatment there and not from a civilian provider. Right of first refusal is cost-effective for both you and TRICARE. By using military hospitals or clinics, there isn't an added cost of involving civilian providers and you may avoid a copayment.

Your regional contractor will send the referral request for specialty care to your local military hospital or clinic. If they can accommodate your specialty care need, they'll notify your regional contractor. If accepted, you may receive a call from them to schedule an appointment. You might also hear from your regional contractor with information on how to schedule an appointment with the military hospital or clinic. You must be offered an appointment with a specialist within 28 calendar days, or sooner, and within a one-hour travel time from your home. If you have any questions, contact your regional contractor at [www.TRICARE.mil/contactus](http://www.TRICARE.mil/contactus).

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**Medically Necessary Nutritional Needs** -- March was National Nutrition Month. It's a smart time to focus on choosing healthier foods to fuel your body. But complete nutrition is complex and depends on your individual needs. People with certain diseases or conditions may require special foods and vitamins beyond the normal healthy diet. Recent changes to the TRICARE benefit include updating the coverage for medically necessary foods and vitamins, and helping people with obesity get care to help manage their weight. Medically necessary specialized formulas are covered by TRICARE for oral nutritional therapy, or therapy requiring a feeding tube or intravenous tube. This coverage extends to nutrition therapy for malnutrition as a result of end-stage renal disease.

Medically necessary food, including some vitamins and minerals, medical equipment, supplies and services may be cost-shared when used as a treatment for certain covered medical conditions. Prenatal vitamins that require a prescription may also be cost-shared, but are covered for prenatal care only. Ketogenic diets for the treatment of seizures that are resistant to standard anti-seizure medication are covered, including medical services and supplies provided in inpatient or outpatient settings. For many people, complete nutrition means more than simply eating right. TRICARE supports medically necessary nutritional needs and ensures you and your family get the care you deserve. Learn more about your TRICARE coverage at [www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices](http://www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices).

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | March 30, 2018 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 444 ► Military Child Month | Eye Exams | Supporting Our Youngest Heroes**

**Military Child Month** -- Military children are a vital part of the military family and they deserve to be recognized. During the month of April, the Defense Department celebrates these children and recognizes their contribution to their military parents' mission and success. The strength, resilience and readiness of service members depends on the support of their entire family. TRICARE coverage helps ensure these beneficiaries get the care they deserve, too. TRICARE covers well-child care for children under age 6. Well-child care services include:

- Newborn care
- History and physical exams, and
- Routine eye exams

TRICARE also covers age-appropriate vaccines as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Covered vaccines from any TRICARE-authorized provider are at no cost. Frequent deployments and moves can be stressful for children. The Military Health System provides a variety of programs to help children cope with the realities of military life. You should speak to your doctor if you have concerns about your child. TRICARE covers medically and psychologically necessary mental health care. To learn more about TRICARE coverage and resources for military children, check out the TRICARE monthly tips at [www.TRICARE/mil/healthwellness](http://www.TRICARE/mil/healthwellness). Celebrate—and thank—the military kids in your life today!

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**Eye Exams** -- Eye exams can help keep your vision strong, diagnose potential issues early, and prevent diseases that may lead to vision loss or blindness. Beginning this fall, beneficiaries enrolled in a TRICARE health plan will be eligible to enroll in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, or FEDVIP during the open season. Open season runs from November 10th through December 10th with coverage starting on January 1st, 2019. Beneficiaries who are enrolled in or who are eligible for the TRICARE Retiree Dental Program will also be able to enroll in one of the FEDVIP dental options for 2019 coverage. FEDVIP offers 10 dental and four vision carrier options. If you're currently enrolled in the TRICARE Retiree Dental Program, you won't be automatically enrolled in a FEDVIP plan for 2019. You can begin reviewing your FEDVIP program options at [www.opm.gov/fedvip](http://www.opm.gov/fedvip) to better understand your coverage and cost options.

The open season will be your annual opportunity to enroll in, change, or cancel a FEDVIP dental or vision plan. Each year, it runs from the Monday of the second full work week in November through the Monday of the second full work week in December. You may only enroll in a FEDVIP plan outside of open season if you experience a Qualifying Life Event. Any election in a FEDVIP plan remains in effect for the entire calendar year. Almost all TRICARE beneficiaries are eligible to enroll in the FEDVIP vision coverage as the sponsor or primary enrollee. Visit [www.tricare.benefeds.com](http://www.tricare.benefeds.com) for more information and to sign up for notifications about this change.

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**Supporting Our Youngest Heroes** -- Military Kids Connect is a Defense Department program created to help military children improve their psychological health. The program plans to release four new videos to celebrate military kids during the Month of the Military Child. According to recent Department of Defense data, there are about 1.7 million military kids 18 years or younger worldwide. To highlight what it's like to be a military child and how real kids cope, Military Kids Connect will share the real stories of Joe, Grace, Ava and Neils with a video campaign. The first video, "Grace" is now available on the Military Kids Connect YouTube channel.

Military kids often experience many challenges, like coping with a parent’s combat injury, the deployment of a family member, and frequent military moves. Military Kids Connect addresses the unique situations that military kids face and offers resources for them to stay positive and strong. Parents, caregivers and educators can also find free resources from Military Kids Connect to help them support military kids at home and school.

Other website resources to help children manage the challenges of military life include:

- Interactive, age-appropriate games
- Stress management tools
- Arts and crafts ideas
- An activity book with puzzles to help kids handle the challenges of military life

The Month of the Military Child is all about showing military kids that we are proud of them. Military kids are special year-round, but let’s do all we can to make military kids feel extra special this month. Visit Military Kids Connect to learn more at [www.militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil](http://www.militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil).

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | April 5, 2018 ++]

**\* Finances \***



### **Drug Cost Increases Update 13 ► Lomustine | 1400% Since 2013**

Three U.S. senators are asking why a 40-year-old cancer drug has increased in price by 1,400 percent since 2013. The drug in question, lomustine, was introduced in 1976 to treat brain tumors and Hodgkin lymphoma. Lomustine, which has no generic competition, cost \$50 for a capsule with the highest dose in 2013. Now a capsule with the same dose costs \$768. Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) and Claire McCaskill (D-Mo) asked Tri-Source Pharma CEO Robert DiCrisci in a letter to explain the price increase and how much of a profit it makes from the drug.

Tri-Source's subsidiary NextSource Biopharmaceuticals supplies the product in a deal with a drug manufacturer, and has raised the price nine times since acquiring it in 2013 from a different company, according to The Wall Street Journal. The newspaper compared the situation to a move made by Turing Pharmaceuticals in 2015, when CEO Martin Shkreli acquired an off-patent drug and increased the price from about \$14 a pill to \$750 a pill. The senators also asked the company for information regarding its expenses related to the sales of the drug, all documents and communications referring or relating to the drug's cost estimates and profit projections, and a list of all drugs sold by the company that have increased in price by at least 200 percent in a single year. [Source: The Hill | Jessie Hellmann | April 2, 2018++]

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## **Direct Deposit Update 04 ► Address Changes For Government Payments**

If you are getting government payments you are most likely receiving them via Direct Deposit. In fact, the government requires all payments to individuals be made via direct deposit, there are exceptions to this rule, but they can be cumbersome. If you are unable to obtain a bank account, the government will issue you a debit card, they will then deposit your payments to that debit card. For more information see the [DFAS website](#). If you are one of the 99 percent of the people who get your government payments by direct deposit or Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), the following addresses just how to change your bank account information in case you move or change banks.

### **Direct Deposit of VA Payments**

If you get payments from the VA for GI Bill, disability compensation, vocational rehabilitation, Dependents Indemnity Compensation, or more you can change your direct deposit information on the [VA's eBenefits website](#). To change your information click on "Manage" on the top of the screen, then click on "Contact and Direct Deposit" on the menu that appears. To update your payment information online, you must have a submitted claim that is currently under consideration or be receiving benefits. You can also mail the Direct Deposit Enrollment [VA's eBenefits website](#). to: VA National Direct Deposit Center, Suite B, 125 S. Main Street, Muskogee, OK 74401. If you have problems, the best way to get a speedy answer is calling the VA. For GI Bill benefits, call 888-GI BILL (888-442-4551), for all other benefits call 800-827-1000.

### **Military Retirement & Survivor Benefit Plan Payments**

If you are receiving military retirement or Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuity payments, the fastest and easiest way to change your direct deposit account information is through the Defense Finance and Accounting System (DFAS) [myPay](#) online account access system. If you don't already have a myPay account, it can take a little effort to set one up, but the benefit is worth the effort. You'll have 24 hour a day, 7 day a week access to your account details, annual account statements, the ability to change your direct deposit account, change your mailing address, and print tax statements.

If you are unable to set up a myPay account, or do not want to, then you will need to change your direct deposit information using the paper Direct Deposit Enrollment Form ([FMS 2231](#)), and mailing it to: Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 8899 E. 56 Street. Indianapolis, IN 46249. Paper forms may take up to 60 days to be processed. As always, if you have problems, you can always call DFAS at 800-321-1080 for help.

### **Direct Deposit Overseas**

If you are living overseas and want your government payments directly deposited into an American bank, you follow the instructions above, if you want them deposited into a foreign bank it can be a bit trickier. Normally, the deposit will be in U.S. Dollars, the bank will convert it to the local currency, you may have to pay a conversion fee. If you are in Canada you have the option to be paid in U.S. Dollars or Canadian Dollars. Currently the U.S. Treasury allows your VA payments to be directly deposited into foreign banks in 65 different countries, and your military retirement to be directly deposited into foreign banks in 45 countries. To sign up for direct deposit into a foreign bank you will need to submit an [International Direct Deposit Enrollment SF 1199-I](#) and submit it by mail to the proper agency above.

[Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | April 11, 2018 ++]

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## **SBP Premium Update 02 ► Deductions From CRSC Started 1 APR**

Did you see the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) notification that Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) premiums are now deducted from Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) payments? Written into the 2017

National Defense Authorization Act and first announced by DFAS last fall, this change notification was released again this year because the first deductions were about to start 1 APR. This deduction will not result in any loss of total compensation for combat-injured veterans. What it will do, is “clean-up” what I would call an accounting issue.

How did this “accounting issue” come about? For some retirees, the “VA Waiver” (see note below) subsumes some or all of their retired pay — such that there isn’t enough left for DFAS to deduct SBP premiums. In this case, DFAS works with the VA to have SBP premiums deducted from the veteran’s VA tax-free disability compensation. This way there is no tax implication for the veteran; this upcoming change will not impact veterans. Their SBP premiums will still be deducted by the VA and sent to DFAS to cover SBP premiums.

Note: when total VA disability rating is 40% or less, or if in receipt of CRSC, the “VA Waiver” is the dollar amount equal to VA disability compensation that is deducted from military retirement pay.

However, retirees receiving CRSC, whose “VA waiver” was subsuming retirement pay, had to remit SBP premiums (meaning they wrote a check) directly to DFAS. Some of these veterans didn’t always remember to send their SBP premium payments to DFAS, putting them in a debt status. To “clean-up” the possibility of debt, DFAS was ordered to institute a fix. Since these retirees don’t have enough funds to pay their SBP premiums from pre-tax retirement pay but receive tax-free CRSC, the fix is to deduct SBP premiums from tax-free CRSC payments. This new accounting action not only prevents a possible debt, but also eliminates additional paperwork for both DFAS and the veteran. These retirees will have a smaller CRSC check, but they won’t have to write a check for their SBP premiums from post-tax funds. It also prevents the possibility of severely disabled veterans falling behind on their SBP premiums, and potentially leaving the surviving spouse with a liability when the veteran passes. Deductions from CRSC payments to cover SBP premiums began April 1, covering the month of March 2018. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Paul Frost | April 12, 2018 ++]

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## Bitcoins Update 02 ► Cryptocurrency Is A Taxable Entity

Tax day in the U.S. is on April 17—and if you made some money off bitcoin, ethereum, or another cryptocurrency, you need to declare your wallet. In the past, the IRS has mainly relied on the honor system for people to report their crypto earnings—but honesty and taxes have not traditionally been bedfellows. After a summons was issued in 2016, earlier this year Coinbase, the largest cryptocurrency exchange on the internet, was forced to hand over the details of around 13,000 users, including their taxpayer ID, name, birth date, address, and transaction records. These were some of the top-earning users from 2013 to 2015 who traded over \$20,000 on the exchange in a single year. Weren’t lucky enough to trade 20 grand worth of crypto? Though the IRS has not issued a similar summons yet for 2016 or 2017 Coinbase transactions, you’d be wise to cough up early. The tax man appears to be a crypto bro.

The U.S. government currently classifies cryptocurrencies as property, not currency. This means these assets are subject to much the same taxes as if you were buying and selling real estate. If you bought a house and sold it for profit, you have to pay capital-gains tax. If you bought bitcoin cheap and sold it at a profit, it’s the same. When U.S. president Donald Trump signed his monumental tax bill into effect late last year, it more clearly defined cryptocurrency as a taxable entity. It included an amendment to section 1031 (a)(1), which concerns “like kind exchanges,” meaning any crypto being traded for another is now legally taxable. So even if you have never converted your crypto into fiat currency (i.e. the U.S. dollar), but you have traded between two cryptos (like buying ethereum using your bitcoin), then you need to declare it. If you unintentionally earned money through one of your currencies forking, even though you didn’t have control over it, then that’s also a taxable event.

**Note:** You only have to pay taxes on assets where you made a profit. This means that if you simply bought bitcoin or another token but did not sell it—either by converting it into a fiat currency or trading it for another cryptocurrency—then you’re in the clear. For more details, check out our guide to paying bitcoin taxes here.

Shockingly, the IRS has not updated its policies on crypto taxes since they were written in 2014. The following year, only 804 Americans declared taxes on crypto gains—despite an estimated 500,000 to 1.2 million people owning bitcoin that year. Add another three years of taxes, and that’s a lot of money that is owed. Many people currently wrestling with their returns don’t know that they’re meant to declare their bitcoin earnings. And there’s no one to tell you: When filing taxes online through U.S. websites like TurboTax or H&R Block, there isn’t a checkbox that asks if you sold cryptocurrency that year. And as cryptocurrency is written on top of blockchain technologies, which is an immutable public ledger, it’s likely that tax fraud will become harder to get around in a future dominated by crypto. So let this be a warning: Declare all your wallets, even the ones the IRS can’t yet see. [Source: NextGov.com | Georgia Frances King | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## **Annuities** ► **What They Are**

An annuity is essentially an investment issued by an insurance company. There are three different kinds:

- An immediate annuity
- A deferred annuity
- A variable annuity

When you buy an immediate annuity, you give the insurance company a lump sum, and they give you monthly payments. There are lots of options for how you receive the payments. For example, the payments could extend over five years, 20 years, the rest of your life, or for your life and then your spouse’s life. A deferred annuity, on the other hand, is like a bank CD, except it’s from an insurance company. You give them your money, they pay interest on it, then give it back at some future date. The final type of annuity, a variable annuity, is like a mutual fund — except that instead of investing through a mutual fund company, it’s sponsored by an insurance company. As with mutual funds, within the variable annuity, you’re typically investing in stocks, bonds, or a combination of both.

Why do people want to invest through an insurance company? Why not just get a CD from a bank, or a mutual fund from a mutual fund company? The reason is that insurance companies bring a couple of advantages to the table. Investments with an insurance company “wrapper” allow earnings to grow tax-deferred, meaning you don’t pay taxes on earnings until you receive them. Another advantage offered by insurance companies is the ability to bypass probate. So, as with an IRA or 401(k), you name a beneficiary when you set it up. If you should die, the money goes directly to that beneficiary, bypassing probate. These are a couple of reasons why people use insurance company products, versus regular products from banks or brokerage firms.

When you’re shopping for an annuity, no matter what kind it is, be aware of fees. Annuities often have monster fees, and they’re not always clear. For that reason, avoid buying annuities from commissioned salespeople if you can help it. If you need professional advice, get it. But try to get it from someone who charges by the hour, instead of somebody who gets commissions. As with mutual funds, some companies selling insurance products have lower fees than others. Insurance products from TIAA-CREF, USAA and Vanguard have historically included lower fees. Another thing to know: Interest rates are now starting to rise. If you’re thinking about a deferred annuity, or an immediate annuity, be aware that the higher the interest rate is when you lock it in, the more money you’re going to make. So, the worst time to buy an annuity is when interest rates are really, really low. And the best time to buy an annuity — whether it’s immediate or deferred — is when interest rates are high.

Also, be aware that annuities typically have long surrender penalties. When you put money in, it’s going to be locked up, often for 10 years or more. So, you want to get the best deal you can. Since I’m seeing interest rates rising, I’m waiting before I lock my money into any kind of annuity. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | April 4, 2018 ++]

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## IRS 2018 Filing Season Update 01 ► Tax Cuts | Who Benefits

Individuals across every state and income level will see their next federal income tax bill drop, on average, according to a recent report from the Tax Policy Center. “On average” is the key phrase here, though. Drops can vary widely from one state to another and one income group to another. And not everyone will see a decrease in their 2018 tax bill, the one that’s due in April 2019. The Tax Policy Center analyzed how the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which became law in December 2017, impacts individual income taxes. The analysis does not account for changes to corporate tax rates, excise taxes, gift taxes or estate taxes. Here’s what it shows:

- **States Which will benefit more** -- Nationwide, folks will see their after-tax income rise by about an average of 1.8 percent in tax year 2018 due to the tax code overhaul, according to the Tax Policy Center. In seven lucky states, however, the rise in after-tax income will exceed 2.1 percent. These states are: Alaska, Louisiana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming
- **States Which will benefit less**-- At the other end of the spectrum are three states in which the rise in after-tax incomes will be less than 1.5 percent. They are: California, New York, and Oregon
- **The wealthiest benefit more** -- The Tax Policy Center estimates that the tax code overhaul will cut taxes for about 65 percent of households overall, with decreases averaging about \$2,200. However, the center found that the wealthier you are, the more likely you are to see your taxes drop — and the bigger the decrease stands to be. For example, the overhaul will cut taxes for an estimated 90 percent of households in the top quintile — that’s the top 20 percent of income earners. Their taxes will decrease by an average of \$7,170. But for 27 percent of households in the bottom quintile, it will cut taxes with decreases of an average \$190. In the middle quintile — the middle class — about 82 percent of folks will see a tax cut, with decreases averaging \$1,050.

To learn more about how the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will impact your bottom line in tax year 2018, check out [3 Big Ways the Tax Overhaul Will Affect Your 2018 Tax Return](#).” [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | April 5, 2018 ++]

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## Lending Money Update 01 ► Family | Lender Tax Ramifications

Beyond the family dynamics involved when you partake in business transactions with a person to whom you are related, there are tax ramifications. Imagine Junior is on his own now, and you want to help him. You loan him \$50,000 for a down payment on a house. In the eyes of the IRS, you’ve just entered into a business relationship with Junior. Because you don’t need to make money on the loan, you don’t charge Junior any interest. What parent would charge their child interest on a loan if they didn’t need the money? Well, the IRS says every parent would charge interest.

In fact, the IRS sets a minimum interest rate a lender is assumed to charge. It is called the **Applicable Federal Rate** (AFR). The IRS will not allow you to charge less than this amount of interest on a loan to anyone other than your spouse. What happens if you don’t charge the AFR-required rate? The IRS will impute interest. What this means, in essence, is the IRS will say you received interest income based on the AFR, and you will owe taxes on that income. The IRS also will say the instant you received that income, you gave it back to Junior. In other words, you’ll pay taxes on income you didn’t actually receive. There are exceptions, and the most notable is that imputed interest rules do not apply to loans of less than \$10,000 - as long as the loan is not used to buy income-producing assets.

Let's examine another possible business deal among family members. You decide to sell Junior your beach house. It doesn't qualify as your primary residence, so there will be income tax due on the sale - a lot of income tax. You've heard about a technique called an installment sale, and you decide you will sell the house to Junior that way. In an installment sale, Junior pays you back over time, and you only pay taxes on the prorated capital gains each year. Great deal, right? It should be, but it might not be. If Junior sells the property prior to owning it for two years, you must report and pay taxes on the entire remaining capital gains on the property the year of the sale. That is true regardless of when Junior pays you back.

The IRS publishes three AFRs: short-term, mid-term and long-term. Short-term AFR rates are determined from the one-month average of the market yields from marketable obligations, such as U.S. government T-bills with maturities of three years or less. Mid-term AFR rates are from obligations of maturities of more than three and up to nine years. Long-term AFR rates are from bonds with maturities of more than nine years. In July 2016, for example, the annual short-term AFR was 0.71%, the mid-term AFR was 1.43% and the long-term AFR was 2.18%. [Source: The MOAA Newsletter March 15, 2018 ++]

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## Revocable Living Trust ► What It Is and Does

A trust is a legal relationship under which a person (the grantor or settler) transfers assets to a named trust. As long as the grantor remains alive, assets transferred into the trust remain the property of the grantor. Income generated by trust assets are included as part of the grantor's annual income tax return. At the death of the grantor, asset management and asset distribution become responsibilities of the standby trustee named in the trust document. The trustee is responsible for seeing that all terms of the trust are fulfilled. Advantages of having a Revocable Living Trust are:

- You have complete control of your assets while you are alive.
- You avoid the expense of probate.
- Estate administration costs are reduced.
- Reduces delays in distribution of assets to your beneficiaries.

[Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust\\_law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust_law) | April 2018 ++]

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## Revocable Living Trust Update 01 ► Benefits of Establishing One

**Following is an excellent estate planning article written by Col. Steve Strobridge, USAF (Ret), former co-chair of The Military Coalition, which could benefit many in the military retirement community. Something to consider before you pass on.**

During their working lives, too many people fail to think about estate planning. Shocking numbers haven't even prepared a will. By the time you approach retirement age, you probably accomplished this. But is a will enough? Unfortunately, many in their 40s, 50s, and 60s have estate-planning issues thrust upon them because of the death of their parents. In my case, my mother had a will when she passed away in Vermont and I was her executor living in Virginia. I had to go through a time-consuming probate process to clear her property and other assets for distribution as she specified in the will. A will is an instruction sheet for probate; it's not the ticket to get around probate.

That was in contrast to my wife's experience with the recent passing of her mother in Oklahoma after a period of severe illness. Fortunately, her mom hired an attorney to establish a revocable trust, advance medical directives, and powers of attorney that enabled us to deal with her finances, health insurance, credit cards, banks, health care providers, hospice, and other agencies during her final months when she couldn't care for herself. Since my wife was the successor trustee of the trust, and her mother's bank accounts and other property were in the name of the

trust, it was a simple matter to deal with her final expenses. The trust eliminated the probate process, and we distributed the assets to the other heirs based on the trust instructions. This experience validated my wife's and my decision to set up a revocable family trust many years ago, for a number of reasons.

- At the time, there was some uncertainty about the future of the estate tax and a trust was one way of preserving assets for our heirs. Since the law changed to exempt assets up to \$11.2 million (inflation adjusted each year) per individual in 2018 from estate taxes, that is no longer an issue for the vast majority.
- Because one of our children had gone through a divorce, we also saw a trust as a way to ensure our family assets would stay within the family (children and grandchildren) rather than to a former spouse, should one or more of the children's families break up after our deaths.
- Finally, our own experience with the probate process convinced us the revocable trust was the way to protect our own children from having to deal with that.

### **How much does it cost to set up a trust?**

If you go to an attorney, most estimates are \$1,000 to \$3,000 or more, depending on what services are included. If you go with a legal firm specializing in estate planning, you might pay up to \$5,000 or more for all-inclusive services. Another option is online companies that offer templates for trusts and other documents for several hundred dollars or less. This do-it-yourself method puts the work and risk on you to process everything correctly. Military retirees also might be able to get such forms and some assistance from military legal assistance offices, as my spouse and I initially did.

We failed to follow through (see below) on our original trust after realizing we needed a more personalized plan. We regrouped and went to a civilian firm. In addition to the basic trust document, the firm provided pour-over trusts for our children, advance medical directives, and powers of attorney and took care of the retitling of our house and establishing the new deed, among other things.

### **What are potential problems with setting up a trust?**

If you're like my wife and I, the biggest problem is putting the trust into effect — which means retitling your home under the trust and establishing the trust as the beneficiary of your life insurance and the owner of your brokerage accounts, mutual funds, and bank accounts, etcetera. Those things can be a hassle, and we never got around to doing it on our "first-try" trust. Whatever assets (e.g., vehicles) are not put in the name of the trust will be subject to probate upon your death. A few issues to consider when you establish a trust are:

- Not keeping the trust document up-to-date over time. For example, if you establish more than one child as joint successor trustees and one passes away (as my wife's brother did), you must amend the trust to reflect that death and establish a new successor trustee or trustees. The same is true if you want to make changes to your designated heirs due to a death or divorce.
- How you safeguard your trust documents. For one thing, DO NOT put your trust documents in a safe deposit box (as my mother-in-law did). If that's the only document you have to establish the successor trustee, your heirs will have great difficulty accessing it.
- Make sure to provide your successor trustees a notarized copy of the trust document.

### **Are there assets you should not put under the trust umbrella?**

If you have children of significantly different ages whom you've established as beneficiaries of your 401(k) or IRAs, you might want to consider leaving them that way rather than switching the beneficiary to the trust. Why? Because children who inherit 401(k)s and IRAs must immediately start taking minimum required distributions based on their age. If you make the trust the beneficiary for a 401(k) or IRA, then each child must start taking distributions based on the age of the oldest child. If they are left as individual beneficiaries on those accounts, each child's required annual distribution is based on his or her own age.

In our case, our oldest child is 45 and our youngest is 33. The amount the older child must take as a taxable distribution from a regular inherited IRA or 401(k) is the same either way. However, the amount the younger child

would have to take is about a third higher if the trust is the heir of the account — which means she could exhaust the assets too quickly.

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In the end, having a trust versus a will is a matter of cost, effort, and convenience. Having experienced the consequences of a parent’s death without a trust convinced us, in our case, it was worth some expense and administrative effort to ensure our desired distribution of assets and save (hopefully) our grieving heirs from excessive estate burdens when the time comes. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Steve Strobridge | April 4, 2018 ++]

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## **Jury Duty Compensation** ► **May 7 Increase for Federal Courts**

Folks who serve as jurors at federal courthouses will soon see a pay raise — their first in a couple of decades. nThe U.S. Courts, the federal court system, recently announced that the daily fee paid to jurors is rising 25 percent: from \$40 to \$50. This pay hike is the first for federal jurors since 1990. The new pay rate takes effect 7 MAY and will apply to folks who serve on federal grand juries and federal trial juries. The change does not apply to folks called for jury duty in state court systems — which tend to pay less, according to data compiled by the nonprofit National Center for State Courts.

The pay hike for federal jurors stems from the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018, the budget bill that became law in late March. It set spending levels for many divisions of the federal government for the 2018 fiscal year. The federal judiciary as a whole, which includes the U.S. Courts, received \$7.1 billion in discretionary appropriations. According to a press release from the U.S. Courts, that’s an increase of 2.7 percent, or \$184 million, from the prior year and is enough money to fund all judiciary accounts for the current fiscal year. U.S. District Chief Judge Ruben Castillo, a federal trial judge based in Illinois, tells the Chicago Tribune that the judiciary hopes the pay hike will ease the financial burden of serving as a juror, thereby making juries more reflective of the U.S. population. Castillo explained: “More diverse juries is what we’re all after.”

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, employers are not required to pay employees for time they did not work, including while out for jury duty. So, jury pay is the extent of the income that some folks receive for days when they cannot work due to being called for jury duty or serving as a juror. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | April 4, 2018 ++]

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## **Car Insurance Update 15** ► **Low Mileage Discounts**

If you’re hoping for a car insurance discount because you or someone else on your policy doesn’t drive much, you better shop around. [Recent research](#) by the nonprofit Consumer Federation of American (CFA) shows that while spending less time behind the wheel lessens your odds of getting into a crash, not all major auto insurers offer significant discounts to low-mileage drivers. On average, folks outside of California save \$30 per year, or 1.6 percent, for every 5,000 fewer miles driven. That’s compared with an average savings of \$81, or 8.7 percent, in California — which is an exception because its regulations require insurers to charge lower-mileage drivers less.

For its research, CFA got premium quotes for basic liability coverage in 12 different U.S. cities — one in California, and the rest elsewhere. The quotes were from five large auto insurers: Allstate, Farmers, Geico, Progressive, and State Farm The quotes all were for a driver with an unblemished record. So, the only differences between quotes, besides the insurers and the cities, was the number of miles driven per year. Annual mileage varied from 2,500 to 22,500. From one insurer to another, low-mileage discounts vary from nonexistent to double digits.

CFA singled out Farmers and Progressive as being particularly stingy in the 11 non-California cities included in CFA’s analysis: Progressive and Farmers usually charge the same rates to someone who drives only 2,500 miles a year as they charge someone else who drives 22,500 miles a year — nine times as far — all else being equal. Geico offers “a small price reduction” for lower-mileage drivers outside California, CFA found. Allstate and State Farm offer average reductions of 11 percent and 13 percent, respectively, outside California. CFA argues that car insurance rates should be based more on driving-related factors such as mileage than on socioeconomic factors like your credit score or marital status. J. Robert Hunter, director of CFA and a former Texas insurance commissioner, notes: “For people in most parts of the country, with California as the notable exception, you’ll often pay about the same auto insurance premium whether you commute 90 miles round trip every day or if you take public transit to work and only drive on the weekends.”

For its part, Progressive says [on its website](#) that it normally does not ask policyholders to report their mileage, but that it does reward low-mileage drivers through its Snapshot program, which monitors driving behavior in exchange for discounted rates. Farmers says [on its website](#) that drivers who limit their time behind the wheel “may therefore enjoy low-mileage discounts.” Nonetheless, until laws change outside of California, consider this a reminder of the importance of periodically shopping your insurance policies around to confirm you’re getting the best rates for which you can qualify. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | April 3, 2018 ++]

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## **Bill Negotiations ► Should You Hire A Service?**

It’s bad enough to pay through the nose every month for things like cable, phone service and gym memberships. Even worse? The sneaking suspicion that you could probably negotiate a better deal if only you had the time, knew whom to talk to and figured out the right words to say. In the past, you had only two ways to save: reduce services — including [cutting the cable cord entirely](#) — or hop on the phone and [negotiate a better deal](#). These days, you’ve got a third option: Bring on a hired gun to do the tough talking for you.

Companies like [BillCutterz](#) and [BillFixers](#) will call any number of service providers and see if they can get you a better deal. In short, they’ll deal with just about any company you write checks to each month. If they can’t get a better deal it costs you nothing. If they can, they earn half the savings they achieve in the first year. These services will work with companies that provide:

- Pay TV service
- Gym memberships
- Internet service
- Phone service
- Landscaping services
- Pest control services
- Security services
- Satellite radio service
- Trash service

### **Does it work?**

Fred Frost is a highly satisfied [BillCutterz](#) customer. He is the perfect prospect. Fred owns five vacation rental homes, each of which has a maxed-out Comcast cable package. MoneyTalksNews Stacy Johnson first talked to Fred in March 2016. Between the end of 2014 when he contacted BillCutterz and that first interview with him, Fred says his total cable savings exceeded \$2,000. Fred had BillCutterz take a look at a few other bills as well, but he said the savings achieved on those weren’t enough to bother with. If you’ve ever tried to get a better deal on cable service, you know the savings you negotiate typically arise from special promotional offers that span months or years. When an offer expires, however, if you don’t call the company back and negotiate another one, your bill will once again

increase. Fred explained that a key advantage to BillCutterz is that they keep track of expiring offers and automatically call Comcast at the right time to keep his savings intact.

Stacy followed up by trying [BillCutterz](#) for herself. Last year, she contacted them as a regular customer. The process was fairly straightforward. After registering on their site and uploading a recent Comcast bill, she got an email from her assigned personal negotiator which said, " Hi Stacy, Thank you for your interest in saving money with BillCutterz. To help make your negotiations go quicker, please answer the following questions so we can get the best savings for you, or you can schedule an appointment for a new account consultation and we'll give you a call at your convenience.... Our promise to you is if we don't save you any money, then there is no charge to you. If we do save you money, we split the savings with you for the first 12 months. This means you get 50% of the savings, and we get 50% of the savings. So if we save you \$20 per month for 12 months, you get \$10 and we get \$10 each month. If we save you money for longer than one year, we only split the savings with you for the first 12 months and everything else is all yours. ..."

After answering the questions, the next step was to notify Comcast that the negotiator was authorized to act on her behalf. This she did in a brief (5-minute) three-way call with Comcast. A few days later, her negotiator called her back to give her the bad news. The only savings Comcast offered was \$10 monthly, and that was only available if she agreed to sign a new two-year contract. Since she was hoping that a better alternative to Comcast would appear in hwe neighborhood someday, she didn't want to sign a two-year extension for those paltry savings.

**Bottom line: Should you bite?**

While services like BillCutterz and BillFixers are relatively new, the concept of hiring an advocate isn't. Attorneys, accountants, credit counselors — the world is full of people trained to tilt the odds in your favor. If you're ever on trial in a criminal proceeding, good advice is to pay as much as you possibly can for a superb advocate. But when it comes to negotiating your bills? The jury is still out. The most effective way to get a discount on anything from your cable bill to your yard service is to find a better deal elsewhere, then use that as leverage to get a better deal from your existing provider. It's not rocket science. But if you're not going to do that, then you should do this. It only takes a few minutes, and you have to admit, it does feel cool to have a hired gun in your corner.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | April 4, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Benefit/Pension Buyout Scam ► How It works**

Many Veterans depend on a pension to cover day-to-day as well as occasional unexpected expenses, such as health emergencies or home repairs. In a pension advance, a company pays the pension holder a lump sum (usually far less than the pension is worth) in exchange for a portion or all of the future pension payments. This can be an attractive arrangement to some retirees, especially those facing temporary hardships or financial challenges that need to be resolved quickly. But though pension advances may seem like a "quick fix" to financial problems, they can eat into or even deplete your retirement income when you start paying back the advance plus interest and fees.

More often than not, a pension advance is a raw deal. Pension advance companies deliberately target government retirees with pensions and typically charge high interest rates and fees for an advance. One representative from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau said: "We've heard from Veterans paying interest rates as high as 106 percent." Former service members should especially be on guard, because many of those shady companies use patriotic-sounding names or logos and even claim they are endorsed by the VA as a way of enticing potential customers.

If you or a loved one is considering a pension advance, consider your alternatives. According to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Office for Service Members, a financial coach or credit counselor can help you weigh

your options. To get started, contact the [Financial Counseling Association of America](#) (800-450-1794) or the [National Foundation for Credit Counseling](#) (800-388-2227). Here are three things service members can do to protect their retirement pension:

- Avoid loans with high fees and interest. Pension advance companies may not always advertise their fees and interest rates, but you will certainly feel them in your bottom line. Before you sign anything, learn what you are getting and how much you are giving up.
- Don't sign over control of your benefits. Companies sometimes arrange for monthly payments to be automatically deposited in a newly created bank account so the company can withdraw payments, fees, and interest charges from the account. This leaves you with little control.
- Don't buy life insurance that you don't want or need. Pension advance companies sometimes require consumers to sign up for life insurance with the company as the consumer's beneficiary. If you sign up for life insurance with the pension advance company as your beneficiary, you could end up footing the bill, whether you know it or not.

You can also get a [printer-friendly version](#) of this information to share with friends who are considering pension advances. Whether you're thinking about giving to a Veterans charity or have been offered a cash advance of your pension, use extreme caution. Both of these decisions will likely be charged with emotion, but be smart and do some research before giving up anything. Scammers are determined to get their hands on your money or any personal information that might give them access to your money. If you or someone you know has encountered any military-affiliated scam, you can join the fight by sharing your experiences, good and bad, with our partners at the [Fraud Watch Network](#) (877-908-3360). [Source: VAntage Point | Marc Ewing | April 2, 2018 ++]

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## **Vet Benefit Charity Scam ► Bogus | Verify Before Donating**

According to [AARP's Fraud Watch Network](#), bogus charities that claim to benefit Veterans are a proven strategy for scammers, especially when targeting patriotic older donors. Scammers often use names that sound like authentic organizations when soliciting contributions. The criminals behind these fake charities know Veterans share a bond of honor, and they use that bond to manipulate and defraud. One such scammer, convicted and currently under appeal, operated two fake charities, pocketing the donations his victims *thought* were going to Veterans. Then he stooped even lower and used the personal information on the checks to steal donors' identities and take even more cash.

Whether you're a Veteran (active or retired), a family member of a Veteran, or a civilian who simply appreciates what Veterans have done serving their country, keep your guard up when encountering solicitations for charities with the word "Veterans" in the organization's name or mission statement. Before donating, verify the charity's name and their reputation. Use sites such as the [Wise Giving Alliance](#), operated by the Better Business Bureau, or [Charity Navigator](#). You can also contact the state agency that regulates charities where you live.

Donors also should have a clear understanding of how their donations will be used. Just because the word "Veterans" is in the name of a charity doesn't mean Veterans or their families will get any benefit. For example, telemarketers' consulting fees are often counted as "program" services. Look closely at the amounts a charity actually spends on programs that directly benefit its intended recipients. Reputable and effective nonprofits spend at least 75 percent of their expenses on program services and no more than 25 percent on fundraising and overhead, according to charity watchdogs. You can research charities at sites like [CharityWatch](#), a nonprofit that analyzes the financial statements of charitable organizations and uses a scale from A+ to F to rate nonprofits based on their financial transparency and spending habits. [Source: VAntage Point | Marc Ewing | April 2, 2018 ++]

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## Free Health Screening Scam ► How It works

"Free health screening!" This offer often pops up at local health fairs, senior housing, and community centers. Screenings are mostly an affordable way to stay on top of your health, and most providers are legitimate, but BBB has been hearing about scammers who use them as bait to steal sensitive personal information from unsuspecting victims.

### How the Scam Works

- You show up for your free health screening, and the representative asks you to fill out a sign-in sheet. This sheet asks for standard information, such as your name. But it also requests sensitive information, such as your Medicare or Social Security number. In some versions, "health company reps" claim that your health plan will cover the cost and send you the results. All you need to do is provide your ID and plan information.
- Don't fall for it! Scammers may go through the motions of the health screening – such as taking your blood pressure or cholesterol levels -- only to use your personal information later. Scammers can use this information to bill your insurance for thousands of dollars' worth of tests, gain access to your personal genetic information, or simply to steal your identity.

### Protect Yourself from Free Health Screening Scams

- Guard your personal information carefully. Never give your medical insurance ID number, Social Security number, or banking information to strangers.
- It is illegal to accept anything of value in exchange for medical services. Never trade personal information for "free" tests.
- Don't consent to lab tests without direct orders from your doctor. Protect yourself and your health insurance benefits.
- Keep a close eye on correspondence from your medical insurance provider. Inform your provider right away if you notice any unauthorized changes or charges.

Read more about healthcare scams at [www.BBB.org/healthcarescam](http://www.BBB.org/healthcarescam). In the United States, learn more about how to protect yourself from Medicare fraud at [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov). If you've fallen victim to this type of scam, you can help others avoid being scammed by filing a report with [www.BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://www.BBB.org/ScamTracker). Learn more about other scams and how to avoid them at [www.BBB.org/scamtips](http://www.BBB.org/scamtips). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | April 6, 2018 ++]

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## Tax Burden for Connecticut Retired Vets | 2017 ► As of APR 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 Connecticut:

### **Sales Tax**

**State Sales Tax:** 6.35% (food, prescription & non-prescription drugs exempt).

**Gasoline Tax:** 58.25 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 66.10 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** \$3.90/pack of 20.

### **Personal Income Taxes**

**All taxpayers:** 3% to 6/99% of Federal taxable income. Connecticut has a complex set of phase-out provisions. For each single taxpayer whose Connecticut AGI exceeds \$56,500, the amount of the taxpayer's Connecticut taxable income to which the 3% tax rate applies shall be reduced by \$1,000 for each \$5,000, or fraction thereof, by which the taxpayer's Connecticut AGI exceeds said amount. Any such amount will have a tax rate of 5% instead of 3%. Additionally, each single taxpayer whose Connecticut AGI exceeds \$200,000 shall pay an amount equal to \$90 for each \$5,000, or fraction thereof, by which the taxpayer's Connecticut AGI exceeds \$200,000, up to a maximum payment of \$3,150. For each MFJ taxpayer whose Connecticut AGI exceeds \$100,500, the amount of the taxpayer's Connecticut taxable income to which the 3% tax rate applies shall be reduced by \$2,000 for each \$5,000, or fraction thereof, by which the taxpayer's Connecticut AGI exceeds said amount. Any such amount of Connecticut taxable income to which, as provided in the preceding sentence, the 3% tax rate does not apply shall be an amount to which the 5% tax rate shall apply. For each MFJ taxpayer whose Connecticut AGI exceeds \$400,000 dollars shall pay, in addition to the amount above, an amount equal to \$180 for each \$10,000, or fraction thereof, by which the taxpayer's Connecticut AGI exceeds \$400,000, up to a maximum payment of \$6,300.

**Personal Exemptions/Credits:** \$15,000 Single & \$24,000 Couple. Dependents none. Connecticut taxpayers are also given a personal tax credit based upon certain income constraints, which completely phases out by \$1,000 for every \$1,000 of AGI over \$30,000.

**Standard Deduction:** None

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** None

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** None

**Retirement Income Taxes:** Social Security is exempt for individual taxpayers with federal adjusted gross income of less than \$50,000 and for married filing jointly taxpayers, with federal AGI below \$60,000. All out-of-state government and federal civil service pensions are fully taxed. Tax information for seniors ([click here](#)).

**Retired Military Pay:** Connecticut exempts military pensions.

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

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

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

### **Property Taxes**

Taxes and real and personal property are assessed and collected by individual towns or other taxing districts. All assessments are at 70% of fair market value. An annual property tax credit or rent rebate is available to residents, age 65 or older, or to a surviving spouse of a previously approved applicant who is age 50 or older. Regardless of age, totally disabled persons are also eligible. Income parameters apply.

Municipalities may provide additional tax relief for seniors. Call 800-286-2214 or 860-297-5962 for details.

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

Connecticut imposes an estate tax which taxes the transfer of estates valued at \$2.0 million or more at a progressive rate starting with 7.2 percent of the first \$100,000 over the threshold and rising to 12 percent for the amount above \$10.1 million. This is applicable to estates of decedents dying on or after January 1, 2011. Additional information can be found at <http://www.ct.gov/drs/cwp/>

### **Other State Tax Rates**

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

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

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Go to <http://www.ct.gov/drs/cwp/view.asp?a=1509&q=443614> for tax instructions and forms. Visit the Connecticut Department of Revenue site <http://www.ct.gov/drs/site/default.asp> or call 303-866 2371 for further information.

[Source: [www.retirementliving.com](http://www.retirementliving.com) | April 2018 ++]

### \* General Interest \*



## Notes of Interest ► 01 thru 15 APR 2018

- **Battle Hymn of the Republic.** Go to <https://youtu.be/bf4TXjZrzAY> to listen to Orson Welles tell the story of how the hymn came about.
- **Playboy.** At <http://myplaymates.club/1954> can be viewed every Playboy Playmate from 1954 thru 2016. If still living some would be 80 years old now.
- **Military Pilot Shortage.** The military's shortfall is reaching alarming proportions — and a new report from the Government Accountability Office shows just how bad the problem has become. The Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps are each short about a 25 percent of the fighter pilots they need in crucial areas, according to the [GAO report](#) released 11 APR, titled “DOD Needs to Reevaluate Fighter Pilot Workforce Requirements.”
- **China.** China's new defense minister Wei Fenghe has reportedly said during his visit to Moscow that China is ready to support Russia against the US. “I am visiting Russia as a new defense minister of China to show the world a high level of development of our bilateral relations and firm determination of our armed forces to strengthen strategic cooperation.”
- **Involuntary Extension.** Air Force Reserve pilots, maintainers, space operators and cyber specialists who want to quit the service will have to stay in uniform for at least six months under a plan to address critical skills shortages. The involuntary service commitment is to ensure that the Air Force Reserve meets recruiting and end-strength goals, according to a memo on the policy that went into effect 1 APR.
- **Vet Unemployment.** As the national unemployment rate remained unchanged for the sixth month in a row, the percentage of veterans without jobs ticked upward in March, the latest federal figures show. The unemployment rate among post-9/11 veterans grew to 5 percent last month — up from 3.3 percent in February, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. For veterans of all eras, the unemployment rate rose from 3.5 to 4.1 percent, slightly higher than the nonveteran rate of 4 percent.
- **What Policemen Must Deal With.** Very graphic. To see what happens when a suspect pulls a gun go to [https://video.twimg.com/ext\\_tw\\_video/949109023688634368/pu/vid/1280x720/04WCi3g3\\_pmAtBgk.mp4](https://video.twimg.com/ext_tw_video/949109023688634368/pu/vid/1280x720/04WCi3g3_pmAtBgk.mp4).
- **Eating Out.** A French restaurant came up with an original way to entertain guests while waiting for their order by using an overhead projector on the ceiling. The animation is on the table and your plate. There is a small chef who appears on your plate, ...watch what he does at <https://www.youtube.com/embed/yBJEP4lsRFY>. Bon Appetite'!!

- **Child Credit Report.** It's a good idea to check whether your child has a credit report close to the child's 16th birthday. If there is one — and it has errors due to fraud or misuse — you will have time to correct it before the child applies for a job, a loan for tuition or a car, or needs to rent an apartment.
- **Deficit.** The federal government's annual budget deficit is set to widen significantly in the next few years, and is expected to top \$1 trillion in 2020 despite healthy economic growth, according to [new projections](#) from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office released 9 APR. The national debt, which has exceeded \$21 trillion, will soar to more than \$33 trillion in 2028, according to the budget office
- **Government Pay.** The Federal Salary Council reported on 10 APR that federal employees on average earn 31.86 percent less than their counterparts in non-federal jobs, said an advisory council on compensation issues. The Congressional Budget Office, which uses a different methodology found last year that feds made [17 percent more](#) than those in the private sector from 2011 through 2015.
- **Female Submariners.** The Navy has extended the April deadline for female enlisted sailors to apply to convert to submarine force ratings. Sailors ranks E-1 through E-8 now have until June 1 to submit their applications, according to a Navy release. The traditionally all-male submarine force was first opened to female officers in 2011. The Navy has plans to add 550 enlisted women to seven Ohio-class subs by 2020.
- **Federal Taxes.** “What percentage of your household's income would you say is paid in federal income tax?” The vast majority of Americans believe they pay a lot more in than they actually do, based on recent research. About 85 percent of folks overstated their average income tax rate — by 11.6%. Average paid is 13.9%.
- **Pillows.** The cleaning experts suggest washing pillows at least twice a year. The best way to check whether you should throw away a pillow is to fold it in half and see if springs back into shape. If it doesn't, it's time to buy a new one.
- **Birth Year.** Did you know that seventy-seven years minus your age plus 40 equals the last two digits of the year you were born in.
- **Battle-of-Athens.** Go to <https://youtu.be/U5ut6yPrObw> to view a 13 minute clip on an actual event 1-2 AUG 1946 in which American veterans took up arms to restore law and order in their town from a corrupt political regime.

[Source: Various | April 15, 2018 ++]

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## **U.S. Entry Requirements** ► **The Line Could Soon Be Getting A Lot Longer**

Would-be-travelers to the U.S. beware: The line for a U.S. visa could soon be getting a lot longer. The State Department on 30 MAR proposed to include extra questions about social-media use in visa applications. It wants applicants for **immigrant and non-immigrant** visas to submit their social-media handles from the previous five years, according to notices filed by the agency in Federal Register.

The changes, which have to be approved by the Office of Management and Budget after a 60-day public comment period, are part of the Trump administration's mounting scrutiny on immigrants. Since he took office, U.S. agencies have been rolling out a series of bureaucratic measures that have slowed down legal immigration. They include his travel ban, which blocks citizens from certain majority-Muslim countries, and a flurry of extra demands for information from skilled workers applying for H-1B visas. “This is an indirect way that the Trump administration is trying to limit immigration to the U.S. that does not require for them to go to Congress,” said Stephen Yale-Loehr, an immigration law professor at Cornell University, of the proposed rules.

The U.S. had already been requesting social-media information from people suspected to represent a national security threat. That policy targeted a sliver of travelers to the U.S.—about 65,000. The new measures would cover nearly 15 million people. Along with the handles, the State Department is also asking for a five-year history of email addresses, telephone numbers, and international trips. The extra information has the potential of significantly increasing the workload of consular officers, says Yale-Loehr, and reducing the number of visas the U.S. issues. The rules could also have economic consequences. People going to the U.S. on vacation might ditch their plans rather than divulging five-years' worth of personal details.

Some groups criticized the proposed policy on grounds that it will censor immigrants' communications amongst themselves and with US citizen relatives. "People will now have to wonder if what they say online will be misconstrued or misunderstood by a government official," said Hina Shamsi, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's national security project, in a statement. Marisa Cianciarulo, a law professor at Chapman University, said anyone active on social media should assume that their posts could be inspected at some point. But she questioned the effectiveness of the questions in screening dangerous visitors. "What trained terrorist, intent on getting into the country to do harm, would honestly answer those questions?" she added. [Source: GovExec.com | Ana Campoy | April 2, 2018 ++]

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## California Statehood ► Three State Proposal

There's an effort to split California into three new states that's gaining steam — and it may be heading to the ballot box in the 2018 midterm election. It's a question that could forever reshape America, and it's already well on its way to the voting booth. Tech billionaire and bitcoin enthusiast Timothy Draper wants to carve California into three separate states. This week, his initiative cleared the first legal hurdle needed to divide up the Golden State permanently. California Secretary of State Alex Padilla announced 12 APR that Draper is allowed to take the next step and circulate a petition among California residents. If he's able to obtain 365,880 signatures from registered voters within the next 180 days, the state of California will officially vote to split apart after the 2018 election.

The new states would be divided by geographic area, according to the proposed measure. Northern California would encompass everything from Oregon to San Francisco county. Southern California would begin south of San Francisco in Fresno and cover nearly everything to Mexico. New California would be Los Angeles and much of the central and southern coast. Should the measure gains enough signatures and voters choose to divide up the Golden State, California state's assets and debts would be divided evenly among the three new entities. According to a local Bay Area NBC News affiliate in California, the state would be divided accordingly:

- **CALIFORNIA:** Los Angeles, Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura
- **SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA:** Fresno, Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mono, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Tulare
- **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA:** Alameda, Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Contra Costa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Marin, Mariposa, Mendocino, Merced, Modoc, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Joaqui, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tuolumne, Yolo, Yuba.

The idea of the vote making it to the ballot isn't too farfetched, either. After all, Californians once voted to allow a police officer in San Francisco walk his beat with his ventriloquist dummy. They tried to ban hippies from sitting on sidewalks (but failed). California even voted once to ban the sale of horse meat to Europe on a statewide ballot. Is it so much of a stretch to think that a billionaire could find over 365,000 people who want to divide the state into three? If the initiative passes, it would mean the new state(s) map would look like the following:



[Source: The Horn News | April 12, 2018 ++]

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## Children’s Online Safety ► BBB Tips

From “tweens” getting their first smart phone, to preschoolers playing games on mom’s tablet, to students researching a science fair project, more and more kids are getting online every day. Nearly half of children in 1st-4th grade have regular access to a cell phone, and the majority of middle and high school students have their own phones. Parents are concerned about what their children may be seeing online, but they should also be concerned about what they are sharing online. Better Business Bureau and its national Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU) have these tips for parents:

**Talk to your kids.** If you’re not already talking to your children about what they read and watch – or where they play and how they interact online – now is the time to start. Check out BBB Children’s Online Safety ([www.bbb.org/kidsonline](http://www.bbb.org/kidsonline)) and CARU’s “A Parent’s Guide to Children and Advertising.”

**Spend some time with your children online.** What sites do they visit? What activities do they take part in? Are these sites appropriate for your child’s level of development? Do bloggers disclose if they get paid for talking about products?

**Explain about online advertising.** Just like the overall online experience, online advertising is interactive. Help your children understand that banner ads, pop ups and the like are designed to get you to click. To avoid phishing and scammers, make a family rule about when they are allowed to click and when not.

**Have a rule about sharing.** Tell your children to ask you before they share personal information or photos online. Once that information is on the web, you may not be able to control who sees it and how they use it. Your children should always tell you the types of information they are asked to share or want to share online.

**Use parental controls.** Computers, Internet browsers, tablets and mobile phones have parental controls that you can use to place limits on where your children go online, the types of advertising they may encounter, even the hours they can access the device. Get to know what controls are available to you as a parent and learn how to use them. Start with your mobile carrier; most have extensive online resources for parents.

**Understand apps.** Short for “applications,” apps are downloaded software that can run on various devices. However, there are some things you should know. Apps might collect and share personal information about your child. They may include ads that aren’t labeled as such. Even free apps may include paid features, and children may not understand that some apps or game features cost money, since they were labeled as free to download.

**Read privacy policies.** Apps, games, social media sites and other services all should have a privacy policy and terms of use statement readily available. In many cases, you can restrict an app’s access to additional information on your phone or other device. For instance, you may want to allow a social media site access to photos stored on your phone so that you can easily post them to share with your friends, but you may want to restrict the site’s access to other data on your phone.

[Source: Better Business Bureau | October 9, 2017 ++]

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## **Border Wall Update 04 ► Trump | Military Will Guard Border Until Wall Is Built**

President Donald Trump said 3 APR that he's directing the U.S. military to secure the U.S.-Mexico border in lieu of, for now, a border wall. "We're going to be doing things militarily until we can have a wall and proper security." Trump said. Trump's comments came as he sat next to Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, who was reportedly at the White House for discussions around immigration. However, a defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity had no immediate details as to how many troops would be used or what authorities they would have. Speaking later in the day, Trump indicated Mattis would be part of an afternoon meeting to figure out how to address the "horrible, horrible, very unsafe laws" for the border with Mexico.

The defense official noted one option could be similar to the 2006-2008 patrols U.S. military personnel conducted under Operation Jump Start. In that operation, President George W. Bush called for up to 6,000 National Guard members to secure parts of the border. Eventually 29,000 military personnel from all over the country were involved in the mission, which had a projected cost of around \$1.2 billion in 2006-year dollars.

In 2012, President Barack Obama deployed Army forces from Fort Bliss to the Tucson, Arizona, and El Paso, Texas, areas for Operation Nimbus, a joint operation between U.S. Northern Command and Customs and Border Patrol. Per an Army press release at the time, military forces conducted "day and night reconnaissance missions using the Long Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System to detect, recognize, identify and geo-locate possible incursions, which they would then report to Border Patrol agents. Avenger Soldiers, using the Forward Looking Infrared system, and Soldiers monitoring Sentinel radar, also augmented border air incursion detection efforts."

The Pentagon and White House on 4 APR walked back President Donald Trump promise to handle border security "militarily," saying the proposed moves will be restricted to National Guard personnel and be similar to past operations in Southern states. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen at a White House press conference said that her agency and the Pentagon are coordinating with governors on the specifics of the deployments, with exact numbers and missions to be announced later. Guardsmen will serve in support roles, and not actual law enforcement activities. The comments drew questions and concerns about the commander in chief overstepping traditional military limits. "A lot of folks were envisioning a line of active-duty troops and tanks on the border after Trump's first comments," said Todd Weiler, a former senior Pentagon official during Obama's tenure. "What we'll probably end up seeing is some vehicles and aerial assets supporting the border patrol, which is normal."

Neilsen said she anticipates the moves will happen as soon as possible. If the Guard is deployed as it has been in the past, there would be little those troops could do to stop crime along the border, said William Banks, author of "Soldiers on the Home Front: The Domestic Role of the American Military" and director at the Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism at Syracuse University's College of Law. The Posse Comitatus Act prevents the federal government from using federal troops to conduct local law enforcement on U.S. soil. Banks called it the backbone of colonists' grievances when the United States declared independence from England. "The phrase is known by every Private 1st Class in the U.S. military," Banks said. It's also why National Guard forces are under state control, Banks said. The president could federalize the National Guard in an extreme situation, such as when Bush requested that the Guard forces responding to Hurricane Katrina be placed under federal control. But even then, guardsmen would not have the authority to participate in law enforcement, such as preventing an illegal crossing or conducting a drug interdiction, he said.

There are exceptions, Banks said. Title 32 of the Code of Federal Regulations, section 185.4 provides National Guard troops "immediate response authority" — the ability to defend themselves if they are under immediate threat.

There is also a broader, short-term “emergency authority,” which allows the forces to take control “in extraordinary emergency circumstances where prior authorization by the president is impossible and duly constituted local authorities are unable to control the situation, to engage temporarily in activities that are necessary to quell large-scale, unexpected civil disturbances.”

Nielsen said none of those issues are under consideration at the moment. Federal departments are coordinating with all of the border state governors on the steps ahead, and administration officials are optimistic they will have full support from local leaders. “Border security is homeland security, which is national security,” she said. “It’s not a partisan issue. It’s not something we can separate out. It’s core to being a sovereign nation.” California officials have already publicly expressed resistance to the plan. Trump has said he’s turning to the military for help with immigration enforcement because of congressional Democrats’ opposition to funding his proposed border wall. That issue is unlikely to be resolved in coming months, given the current fractured political environment on Capitol Hill. [Source: AirForceTimes | Tara Copp, Aaron Mehta, ^ Leo Shane III | April 3 & 4, 2018 ++]

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## **U.S.-Mexico Border Security ► National Guard Deployment**

Federal agents on the front lines of the U.S.-Mexico border are “excited” about the forthcoming deployment of the National Guard to assist them in their mission, according to the employees’ union, with officials noting that the extra personnel will help offset their being “woefully understaffed.” The guardsmen will serve in support and administrative positions, said Brandon Judd, president of the National Border Patrol Council (NBPC) , freeing up Border Patrol agents to go directly to the front lines. The National Guard can fill roles in a control room watching surveillance cameras, monitoring sensors, in skyboxes or scope trucks, Judd said, noting ideas that he has passed up the chain of command at Customs and Border Protection and drawing from his experiences during previous deployments. “It frees up our resources and allows us to put more agents at the border instead of in support,” said Judd, who has served as a Border Patrol agent for 20 years. “The National Guard is going to be a huge boon especially considering how understaffed we are.”

The Border Patrol is currently operating about 2,000 agents short of its congressionally mandated floor, and efforts to fill vacancies and add to its rolls on top of that level are not going well. In fiscal 2017, the agency actually lost more agents than it brought on. CBP has for the last two years gone to Congress and conceded it required \$200 million less in its appropriation for hiring because it could not keep pace with what it had anticipated. This occurred in spite of President Trump’s demands that the agency hire 5,000 new agents. “It’s absolutely a contributing factor” to the deployment of the guard, Judd said of the hiring woes.

The Trump administration has pointed to an uptick in illegal border crossing to justify the deployment, the details of which are still being worked out with the governors of each state expected to send troops. CBP apprehended or deemed inadmissible more than 50,000 individuals at the Southwest border last month, tripling the total in March of 2017. Last year was unusual, however—the administration has attributed this to a “Trump effect” associated with fewer immigrants looking to cross because of the rhetoric the president used on the campaign trail—and the March 2018 apprehensions are in line with the figures seen in that month in previous years. Apprehensions were down in January compared to 2017, but increased by more than 50 percent in February.

Homeland Security Department Secretary Kristjen Nielsen at a White House briefing this week, however, cited an uptick in the number of unaccompanied children and family units arriving at the border to justify the National Guard deployment. “The traffickers and smugglers know that if you arrive with a family, under our current legal and court system, you have a much better chance of being released into the United States,” Nielsen said. Figures from CBP, however, show that unaccompanied children apprehended at the border are on pace to decline by 11 percent. Family unit apprehensions are on pace to drop by more than half. When asked about this discrepancy, DHS spokespeople pointed back to the same numbers.

Judd said Border Patrol agents on the ground have been warning CBP leadership about an overall influx of illegal crossings for months. "It's one of my great disappointments and one of my pet peeves," Judd said. Ever since March of 2017, with limited exception, Judd said, "The numbers kept going up and up and up. We kept said, 'What are you going to do? What operations are you going to implement? What are you going to do to stem this tide, to stem this flow?' And nothing happened." The union leader said he blames CBP leadership for bringing the agency to the point that the National Guard is necessary. "We're always reactive instead of proactive," he said. "Frankly, this is CBP's fault."

Trump on 5 APR estimated CBP will welcome between 2,000 and 4,000 guardsmen. That would surpass the 1,200 troops President Obama deployed to the border in 2010 during Operation Phalanx, but fall short of the 6,000 President George W. Bush deployed in Operation Jump Start in 2006. Bush's initiative cost \$1.2 billion over two years and required 30,000 guardsmen to fill the 6,000 slots. The National Guard "assisted in 11.7 percent of all undocumented alien apprehensions and 9.4 percent of all marijuana seized on the Southwest border" during Jump Start, according to the Government Accountability Office. Obama's push cost \$110 million over one year, and the guardsmen assisted in 6 percent of undocumented apprehensions and 3 percent of marijuana seizures.

Guardsmen are statutorily prohibited from personally making arrests and seizures, instead only identifying individuals attempting to enter the country and relaying that information to Border Patrol. This means National Guard patrols require twice as many individuals as those conducted by Border Patrol, according to GAO. National Guard officials have told GAO the deployment of their troops could lead to civilians thinking the border has been militarized and guardsmen receiving surveillance training with diminishing value. It could also hurt future recruitment and retention and limit the Guard's availability for other duties such as disaster assistance. CBP officials have cautioned that temporary duty assignments from the National Guard could impact the agency's long-term border security planning. To Judd, the National Guard deployment is a proven method. "I think it will be even more effective this time because we get better and better each time," he said. [Source: GovExec.com | Eric Katz | April 6, 2018 ++]

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## **Roseanne's Appeal ► Explained**

Actor Rob Lowe — one of the few free-thinking individuals left in Hollywood — perfectly summed up the appeal of the hit show "Roseanne" in one concise tweet: It's not that the show is pro-Trump, but that it showcases actual tolerance for differing political ideologies; something we don't see a lot of in today's political climate. "The secret to [Roseanne] massive ratings is that it celebrates people with huge political differences who are able to laugh and love together as they passionately disagree," wrote the actor. The reboot captured over 18 million viewers on its debut night; hitting a grand total of 21.9 million when next-day DVR and video-on-demand viewers were counted, according to CNN Money.

Mark Hemingway of The Weekly Standard agreed with the rational take, adding that conservatives just want to be represented accurately, and not as unlovable backward hicks. "Exactly," he wrote. "The issue isn't that the show caters to conservatives. It just gives them a seat at the table rather than pretending half of America is backwards or doesn't exist." Daily Wire Editor-in-Chief Ben Shapiro explained exactly this the day after the "Roseanne" premiere. "That's what the Hollywood Left — and Hillary Clinton — have never understood," explained Shapiro. "It's not that the Right wants their approval. It's that the Right doesn't want to be characterized as benighted and evil. Roseanne and Trump were both cultural figures who aren't buying into that characterization. And they're winning because of it." The reboot has already been renewed for a second season. [Source: The Dailywire | Amanda Prestigiacomo | April 4, 2018 ++]

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## Gun Control Update 03 ► Right To Bear Arms

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

Mass killings of civilians by military dictatorships in the 1900s were more often than not preceded by the confiscation of firearms from targeted populations, a task made easier by laws requiring the registration and/or licensing of privately-owned weapons. However, "Gun control" isn't synonymous with gun confiscation, in some genocide cases gun restriction laws had already been in place for many years prior, and evidence does not demonstrate a causal link between gun control and mass exterminations.

During WWII the Japanese decided not to invade America. One alleged factor in their decision was they knew most Americans were armed. Switzerland issues every household a gun. Switzerland's government trains every adult to whom they issue a rifle. Switzerland has the lowest gun related crime rate of any civilized country in the world. While it has a low overall crime rate by European standards, it has one of the highest gun suicide rates in Europe. However, it also has one of the world's lowest overall homicide rates, considerably lower than the European average. Their gun homicide rate ranks in the middle of Western European countries.

The right to keep and bear arms is the people's right to possess weapons (arms) for their own defense, as described in the philosophical and political writings of Aristotle, Cicero, John Locke, Machiavelli, the English Whigs and others. Inclusion of this right in a written constitution is uncommon. In 1875, only 17 percent of constitutions included a right to bear arms, yet, since the early twentieth century, "the proportion has been less than 9 percent and falling". In their historical survey and comparative analysis of constitutions dating back to 1789, Tom Ginsburg and colleagues "identified only 15 constitutions (in nine countries) that had ever included an explicit right to bear arms. Almost all of these constitutions have been in Latin America, and most were from the 19th century".

Generally, where modern constitutions refer to arms at all, the purpose is "to allow the government to regulate their use or to compel military service, not to provide a right to bear them". Constitutions which historically guaranteed a right to bear arms are those of Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Liberia, Mexico, Nicaragua and the United States of America. Nearly all of the Latin American examples were modeled on that of the United States. At present, out of the world's nearly 200 constitutions, three still include a right to bear arms: Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States (2nd Amendment); of these three, only the U.S. does not include explicit restrictive conditions. [Source: [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com) & [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right\\_to\\_keep\\_and\\_bear\\_arms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_to_keep_and_bear_arms) | April 9, 2018 ++]

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## Vinegar Update 03 ► Multiple Uses | Household Hints, Yard & Garden, and Car Care

### Household Hints

- 1. Coffee scrub** -- If your favorite coffee or tea mug has dark stains, scour with a 1-to-1 mix of vinegar and salt. Rinse well in warm water.
- 2. Stop mold** -- Spray undiluted vinegar onto areas that develop mold or mildew. You can add a bit of essential oil to the spray bottle, but remember, the vinegar smell will go away.
- 3. Clean filters** -- Soak humidifier or air conditioner filters in a 50/50 solution of vinegar and water, then rinse and squeeze dry.
- 4. Sanitize cutting boards** -- After washing cutting boards, spray with undiluted white vinegar to further disinfect the surface. Bonus: It'll neutralize the odor of that fish you just cut up.
- 5. Go grill crazy** -- Are charcoal and food juice gumming up your grill? Spray thoroughly with undiluted vinegar, wait a couple of minutes and scrub with a wire brush or some crumpled-up aluminum foil.
- 6. Clean the iron** -- Spray starch can build up on the faceplate of your iron, so wipe it with vinegar every so often. If you've got hard water, clean the iron's innards every now and then: Fill the water reservoir with vinegar, stand it upright and turn on the "steam" setting. After 10 minutes, empty and rinse well.
- 7. Cleanse copper** -- If your copper-bottomed cookware is discolored, apply a paste of equal parts salt, flour and vinegar. Let stand for no more than 30 minutes, then rinse well.

### Yard & Garden

- 1. Bug killer** -- Cider vinegar stinks to us, but it attracts insects. Create a funnel trap by rolling a sheet of notebook paper into a funnel and placing it into a jar with cider vinegar at the bottom. This works in the kitchen for fruit flies and on the deck when entertaining outdoors.
- 2. Ant killer** -- That vinegar-and-dish-soap cleaner also vanquishes uninvited guests that march into your home. This mixture is a lot less worrisome than spraying a pesticide ant killer around the area where your kids and pets play, and around the areas where you prepare food. Some folks swear by vinegar sprayed or poured on anthills.
- 3. Feeder cleaner** -- A good wash with a gentle dish soap, followed by a spray with a 50/50 vinegar solution, means clean dishes (and less chance of bacterial issues) for hummingbirds and other feathered friends.
- 4. Flowerpot freshener** -- White stains on terra-cotta pots won't come off with soap and water? Wipe down with undiluted vinegar and let dry. After that, rub with baby oil.
- 5. Mower helper** -- Once you've finished the lawn, wipe the blades down with vinegar — not just to clean off grass bits, but also any insects that might have hitched a ride while you rolled the mower back to the garage.
- 6. Critter repellent** -- Some say that deer, raccoons, rabbits, dogs and cats don't like the smell of vinegar. Try hanging up vinegar-soaked rags near your garden (re-wetting them once a week) and spraying your garbage cans with the stuff. It may not work in every case, but it's worth a try.
- 7. Make paint stick** -- If you're painting concrete or galvanized metal, pretreat the area by sponging on vinegar and allowing it to dry. The paint will last longer.
- 8. Clean paintbrushes** -- Is your synthetic-bristle brush completely paint-stiffened? Soak in undiluted vinegar until things are moving again, then wash with soap and hot water.
- 9. Soil tester** -- Pour a half-cup of white vinegar over a handful of garden soil in a container. Fizzy/bubbly means alkaline. Science!

### Caring for Your Car

- 1. Wiper magic** -- Rub windshield wiper blades a couple of times with undiluted vinegar.
- 2. Clearer windows** -- Wipe windows and the windshield with a 3-to-1 mixture of vinegar and water. This makes it harder for frost to form. Reapply when it stops working.

**3. Revive the rug** -- After vacuuming your vehicle, sponge carpeting with a 50/50 vinegar-water mixture. Blot after a couple of minutes.

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

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## Have You Heard? ► Trivia | Origin of Phrases/Words

**Drinking:** There is an old Hotel/Pub in Marble Arch, London, which used to have a gallows adjacent to it. Prisoners were taken to the gallows (after a fair trial of course) to be hanged. The horse-drawn dray, carting the prisoner, was accompanied by an armed guard, who would stop the dray outside the pub and ask the prisoner if he would like "*ONE LAST DRINK*". If he said YES, it was referred to as ONE FOR THE ROAD. If he declined, that prisoner was *ON THE WAGON*.

**Poverty:** They used to use urine to tan animal skins, so families used to all pee in a pot and then once a day it was taken and sold to the tannery. If you had to do this to survive you were "*piss poor*", but worse than that were the really poor folk, who couldn't even afford to buy a pot, they "*Didn't have a pot to piss in*" and were the lowest of the low.

**Cleanliness:** The next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be. Here are some facts about the 1500s:

- Most people got married in June, because they took their yearly bath in May and they still smelled pretty good by June. However, since they were starting to smell, brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odor. Hence the custom today of *carrying a bouquet when getting married*.
- Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children. Last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it. Hence the saying, "*Don't throw the baby out with the bath water!*"
- Houses had thatched roofs, thick straw piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Hence the saying "*It's raining cats and dogs*."
- There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom, where bugs and other droppings could mess up your nice clean bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's *how canopy beds came into existence*.
- The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence the saying, "*dirt poor*."
- The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on they added more thresh until, when you opened the door, it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entrance-way. Hence: a *thresh hold*.

### Food:

- In those old days, they cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight, then start over the next day. Sometimes stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while. Hence the rhyme: "*Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot, nine days old*".

- Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over they would hang up their bacon, to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man could, "*Bring home the bacon.*" They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around talking and "*chew the fat.*"
- Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning and death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.
- Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or "The Upper Crust".
- Lead cups were used to drink ale or whisky. The combination would sometimes knock the imbibers out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the; custom of "Holding a Wake".

**Death:** England is old and small and the local folks started running out of places to bury people, so they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a bone-house and reuse the grave. When reopening these coffins, 1 out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, thread it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night (the graveyard shift) to listen for the bell; thus someone could be, "*Saved by the Bell*" or was considered a "*Dead Ringer*" And that's the truth.

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## Where There's a Will, There's a Way ► 14



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**Anton Rubaclini**  
@AntonRubaclini

I live in constant fear that President Trump will deport my latina mother-in-law, who lives at 1837 Third Street, Los Angeles, CA 90023 (blue house). She gets off work at 6 PM.



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