

RAO

BULLETIN

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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.
3. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin to other vets or veteran organizations.

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U.S. Philippine Bases Update 18 ► New Facility Opened on Luzon

The United States and the Philippines opened the first of several new facilities for visiting American forces on the island of Luzon this week and will start building another on Palawan once funding is available, according to Philippine defense secretary Delfin Lorenzana. Speaking at Cesar Basa Air Base during the 29 JAN opening of a new “Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief warehouse,” Lorenzana said, in comments reported by the Philippine Daily Inquirer, that another warehouse would be built at **Antonio Bautista Air Base** on Palawan once U.S. funding comes through.



U.S. Ambassador Sung Y. Kim and Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana toss coins Tuesday, Jan. 29, 2019, at the Basa Air Base Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief warehouse, symbolizing good fortune for the new building.

The Palawan construction is significant because of its proximity to the South China Sea, according to Carl Baker, executive director of the Pacific Forum think tank in Hawaii. China has built its own military bases and placed missiles

on artificial islands in the contested waters that are subject to claims by a number of neighboring states, including the Philippines. The Palawan base includes a 9,000-foot World War II-era runway, Baker said. “That warehouse could be used to store equipment for surveillance flights,” he said.

Facilities for visiting U.S. forces will be built on five Philippine military bases under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. The pact allows U.S. forces and contractors to operate at agreed locations in the Philippines. It stipulates that the U.S. can’t set up permanent bases — the revised Philippine constitution bans that — but it hands over operational control of the locations to U.S. forces and allows them to stockpile defense equipment and supplies. The cooperation agreement “builds capacity for U.S. forces and the Armed Forces of the Philippines by enabling greater interoperability, capability development, and modernization,” according to a report posted on the U.S. Embassy in Manila’s official website 30 JAN.

Supplies and equipment prepositioned at Basa will be critical to the U.S. and Philippines’ ability to respond quickly and effectively to humanitarian crises in the region, the report states. The newly opened warehouse is about 15 miles from Clark Air Base, which was America’s largest overseas military installation before it closed following severe damage after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991. “This project illustrates not only our commitment to the U.S.-Philippine alliance, but also both of our countries’ dedication to peace and stability in the larger Indo-Pacific region,” U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Kim, who helped open the new warehouse, said in the embassy report. “For over seven decades, our alliance has effectively addressed security issues in the region.”

The U.S. is also working with the Philippine government on projects at Fort Magsaysay Military Reservation, Lumbia Air Base and Mactan Benito Ebuen Air Base, the report states. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Seth Robson | | January 31, 2019 ++]

SECDEF Update 17 ► Patrick Shanahan’s International Debut

At an extraordinary moment in Pentagon history, a former business executive with little political stature and without military experience is making his international debut as the acting U.S. secretary of defense. After conferring 11 FEB with Afghan leaders and American military commanders and diplomats in Kabul, Pat Shanahan was scheduled to attend a NATO defense ministers meeting in Brussels and an international security conference in Munich, Germany. It was Shanahan’s first-ever visit to Afghanistan, where American troops have been at war for 17 years and the Trump administration is pushing for a peace deal with the Taliban.



Acting Secretary of Defense Pat Shanahan greets an Afghan commando at Camp Commando, Afghanistan

Shanahan’s performance on the global stage could influence whether President Donald Trump elevates the longtime Boeing executive from his uncertain status as interim Pentagon leader to be the administration’s nominee to replace Jim Mattis. The retired Marine general quit in late December in protest of Trump’s policies. In his resignation letter, Mattis offered to stay on until after this week’s NATO meeting to ensure that the Pentagon’s interests were “properly

articulated and protected.” But three days after Mattis gave Trump that letter, the president on 23 DEC told Mattis to leave the Cabinet on 31 DEC. This unusually sudden transition came at sensitive junctures in Syria, where Trump has ordered a U.S. troop withdrawal, and Afghanistan, where a potential troop pullout looms amid continued Taliban violence.

The status of U.S. forces in Iraq also has been put in question as Iraqi leaders responded with anger to Trump's statement in early February that he would keep American troops in Iraq in order to watch neighboring Iran. Trump had earlier angered Iraqis by saying he would use Iraq as a base to strike Islamic State targets inside Syria.

It is extraordinary for the Pentagon to be run by an interim leader and even rarer that the leader is a career defense industry executive. Shanahan is only the third person to serve as acting defense secretary and the first in 30 years. The last was William H. Taft, who served for two months in 1989 after President George H.W. Bush's first choice to be defense secretary, John Tower, became mired in controversy and ultimately failed to be confirmed by the Senate. Dick Cheney, the future vice president under President George W. Bush, then was nominated and confirmed. Shanahan is the first to undertake an international trip while serving as acting secretary, according to Pentagon spokesman Chris Sherwood.

No one has been nominated to succeed Mattis. Nor has anyone been nominated to succeed Shanahan in his previous role as deputy defense secretary. The Pentagon's budget chief, David L. Norquist, has been "performing the duties" of the deputy secretary since 1 JAN. Presidents typically take pains to ensure the Pentagon is being run by a Senate-confirmed official, given the grave responsibilities that include sending young Americans into battle, ensuring the military is ready for extreme emergencies like nuclear war and managing overseas alliances that are central to U.S. security. Trump, however, seems in no hurry to end Shanahan's limbo status. "I like acting," the president said 6 JAN. "It gives me more flexibility." He did not explain what he meant, but the implication was that he can keep Shanahan on a string and not immediately seek the advice and consent of the Senate. Mattis sought a certain independence from the White House, which seemed to irritate Trump.

Shanahan told reporters on 29 JAN he isn't thinking about how long he might keep his "acting" status, jokingly adding that his mother each morning sends him a "pray" emoticon. Trump has publicly praised Shanahan several times, suggesting he favors keeping him on. "Patrick has a long list of accomplishments" during his tenure as deputy defense secretary, Trump tweeted on 23 DEC. Mattis' resignation from three days earlier had implicitly criticized Trump's unwillingness to stand up to Russia and his inclination to disrespect America's longtime allies. "We have a wonderful man in there now," Trump said on 25 DEC during a visit to Iraq when a reporter asked if he had a timeline for nominating someone to succeed Mattis. Trump praised Shanahan profusely, noting his reputation at Boeing for managing costs and rescuing a troubled Dreamliner 787 program. "He could be there for a long time," Trump said, adding, "I'm in no rush."

Although Trump cites Shanahan's Boeing experience, Shanahan's link to one of the nation's biggest defense contractors is not universally praised. During Shanahan's confirmation hearing in 2017, Sen. John McCain, then chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, sternly cautioned him about what McCain and others saw as the danger of an overly cozy connection between the Pentagon and its defense contractors. "I am concerned that 90 percent of defense spending is in the hands of five corporations, of which you represent one," McCain said. "I have to have confidence that the fox is not going to be put back into the hen house." Shanahan won confirmation by a vote of 92-7. One senator, McCain, did not vote. [Source: The Associated Press | Robert Burns | February 11, 2019 ++]

Nuclear Launch Authority Update 01 ► H.R.669/S.200 | No First Use Act

Two key Democratic lawmakers introduced legislation 30 JAN that would ensure the U.S. does not fire nuclear weapons first in a potential future war. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith and Sen. Elizabeth

Warren, a 2020 presidential hopeful and Senate Armed Services Committee member, offered a bill — “The No First Use Act” — to establish in law that it is the policy of the United States not to use nuclear weapons first in a conflict.

Though previous administrations have resisted such moves, and the GOP-controlled Senate is unlikely to take up the legislation, the players are notable. As chairman, Smith may elevate the issue by inserting the language into the annual defense policy bill, and Warren’s potential candidacy means the issue could reach the wider public on a future presidential debate stage.

Because the Trump administration’s Nuclear Posture Review states the U.S. reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in “significant non-nuclear strategic attacks,” such as attacks on the U.S., its allies and its nuclear infrastructure, some lawmakers have criticized that policy as over-broad. “Our current nuclear strategy is not just outdated—it is dangerous,” Smith and Warren said in a joint statement. “By making clear that deterrence is the sole purpose of our arsenal, this bill would reduce the chances of a nuclear miscalculation and help us maintain our moral and diplomatic leadership in the world.”

Both lawmakers have previously advocated for military restraint and signaled in recent weeks that such a move was coming. Warren, called for a “no first use” nuclear weapons policy in a speech last month, and Smith did likewise in November, in a speech to the Ploughshares Fund, an anti-nuclear weapons group. One of the arguments against President Barack Obama adopting such a policy when he considered in 2016 was that declaring it could undermine allies’ confidence in U.S. commitment to their defense—and spur them to pursue their own nuclear weapons. Removing the threat of nuclear escalation could embolden countries like North Korea, China, or Russia, who might believe that they could overwhelm U.S. allies before the U.S. could respond, the thinking goes.

U.S. Sen. Deb Fischer ((R-NB), a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the chairman of the Strategic Forces Subcommittee, blasted the proposed measure in a statement 30 JAN. She pointed to presidents from both parties who have rejected it, “because it erodes deterrence, undermines allied confidence in U.S. security guarantees and risks emboldening potential adversaries.” “Calculated ambiguity has long been an element of U.S. nuclear declaratory policy,” Fischer said. “With Russia and China increasingly attempting to intimidate their neighbors – some of whom are U.S. allies – this is the wrong message to send. It betrays a naïve and disturbed world view.”

Fischer quoted the 2009 bipartisan Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, saying “Potential aggressors should have to worry about the possibility that the United States might respond by overwhelming means at a time and in a manner of its choosing.” Should Smith seek to include the language in the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, it could trigger pushback from other key Republicans, such as HASC’s ranking member, Rep. Mac Thornberry, and Senate Armed Services Committee chairman Sen. Jim Inhofe—who have both been supportive of the Trump administration’s direction on nuclear weapons.

The Union of Concerned Scientists hailed Smith and Warren’s bill in a statement on Wednesday. The organization said that such a policy would “reduce the risk of miscalculation during a crisis with Russia, China or North Korea; strengthen the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty by demonstrating the United States is serious about reducing the role of nuclear weapons in its security policy, and reduce risks associated with the president’s sole authority to order the use of nuclear weapons by removing the option of using them first.” “The purpose of US nuclear weapons is to deter a nuclear attack on the United States and its allies. Any other purpose simply makes nuclear war more likely,” said Stephen Young, Washington representative for the UCS Global Security Program. [Source: DefenseNews | Joe Gould | January 30, 2019 ++]

StratCom ► **A First Look Inside New \$1.3 Billion Headquarters**

For a building whose function is prepping for what would be America’s darkest day, U.S. Strategic Command’s new \$1.3 billion headquarters sure is bathed in brightness. Light flows in through the oversized windows of the three above-

ground floors of what StratCom leaders call their “Command and Control Facility.” (Or “C2F” in Strat-speak.) Employees and visitors enter through an open, airy atrium. “The construction of the C2F is historic,” said Vice Adm. David Kriete, StratCom’s deputy commander, during an interview he described as the first meeting in his still-undecorated office. “It marks the transition from the old to the new.”



The contrast couldn’t be starker with the current StratCom headquarters a block to the east at Offutt Air Force Base. The Gen. Curtis E. LeMay Building, constructed for the Strategic Air Command in 1957, is a large warren of dark offices and cubicles beneath low, fluorescent-lit ceilings. Windows are at a premium. It’s not a coincidence that the building is best-known for a dark war room known as “the bunker.”

The first of StratCom’s more than 3,500 military and civilian employees are expected to move into the new 916,000-square-foot building in early spring, Kriete said, 6½ years after the October 2012 groundbreaking ceremony. StratCom’s new headquarters is among the costliest and most expensive building projects ever undertaken by the Defense Department. Its price tag is just slightly less than the bill for the Pentagon itself, which cost \$83 million when it was built in 1941, equal to \$1.4 billion in current dollars. The Pentagon, though, has seven times the square footage, houses 10 times as many workers and was completed in 15 months.

Of course, modern buildings are far more complicated than their mid-20th century counterparts. StratCom’s C2F is designed to serve as the nation’s military command headquarters in even the most dire circumstances, up to and including a nuclear war. “It’s very unique, one-of-a-kind,” Kriete said. “It’s a national asset.” It’s been a bumpy road to get here. Soon after groundbreaking, workers for project contractor Kiewit Phelps ran into serious flooding problems at the site. Later, some of the heating and air-conditioning ductwork developed persistent mold, forcing time-consuming inspections and expensive replacement. The project also experienced a fire, several floods and even an EF-1 tornado that passed close to the site in June 2017.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Omaha District oversaw the first phase of the project, involving construction of the building, parking lots, landscaping and much of the interior, at a cost of \$617 million. That work was \$53 million over budget, and more than two years behind schedule. The Corps had planned to deliver the building on Sept. 11, 2016: the 15th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks, and the 75th anniversary of groundbreaking for the Pentagon. The Corps handed over the building to the Air Force on 31 OCT, though Kiewit Phelps continues to work on some items that aren’t quite finished. Kiewit Phelps was selected to manage the project for the Corps. It also is planning to replace a boiler that overheated in December and was shut down until it could be repaired or replaced. “There’s been some minor glitches,” Kriete said. “Nothing that has substantially set us back.”

Now StratCom is engaged in Phase 2 of the project, what its leaders call the “missionization” of the new headquarters. That means outfitting it with the electronics and communications gear it needs to carry out its missions, including oversight of the nation’s space forces, missile defense, electronic warfare, and, of course, its nuclear arsenal. This missionization phase is priced at \$679 million — even more than the construction phase. It involves the installation

of a communications suite robust enough to carry out StratCom’s functions even in a national emergency, and electronic and cybersecurity capabilities strong enough to withstand any attack.

The second phase is now 86 percent complete. Kriete said StratCom still hopes to move its entire staff into the new building by the end of 2019. “I’m very optimistic,” he said. “We’re not going to move the command over until (the building) is mission-ready.” When the employees do move, they’ll enter through the multistory atrium, which will feature a large mosaic of StratCom’s command emblem — featuring a hand in a gauntlet grasping lightning bolts and an olive branch — on the floor, and replicas of a pair of communications and surveillance satellites hanging from the ceiling. The atrium also will feature a stage from which StratCom’s commander, Gen. John Hyten, or his successors can address all of their workers at once, the upstairs mezzanines, and the skywalks that connect the north and south wings of the building. Workers will eat in an adjacent cafeteria decorated with scenes of prominent Omaha-area landmarks.

Throughout the building, offices will have ceilings at least 10 feet high, 2 feet higher than in the current headquarters. The desks already have been installed, and they offer employees the option of sitting or standing. Many already are marked with the names of their future occupants. Though the senior commanders’ offices are on the building’s top floor, Kriete said, he or Hyten can quickly get to the most important room, deep beneath the ground: the famous Global Operations Center. The center’s “battle deck,” at slightly more than 1,000 square feet, features several semi-circular rows of computer workstations facing a video screen 9 feet high and 32 feet wide. The back row can be set off by a soundproof divider, in case information is discussed that is too sensitive for even some of the commander’s closest aides to hear. The room connects instantly to the White House and the Pentagon. If necessary, Hyten could fight a nuclear war from there.

In the current building, Kriete said, it takes at least 5 minutes to get there, walking fast. From his new office, he can make it in 90 seconds, taking the stairs, or 30 seconds via an express elevator. You might think it’s not often used. That’s not the case, Kriete said. “This whole space will be manned 24/7,” he said. “Command and control: We practice that all the time.” “We firmly believe a nuclear war should never be fought,” Kriete added. “But we want the good guys to know, and the bad guys to know; we’re really good at it.” [Source: Omaha World-Herald | Steve Liewer | January 28, 2019 ++]

China’s Space Program ► U.S. Military Warns of Their Argentina Space Station Threat

Senior U.S. defense officials are growing increasingly concerned that the Chinese military can monitor and potentially target U.S. and allied satellites from a new deep space ground station in the Western Hemisphere, located in the deserts of Patagonia, Argentina. In wide-ranging testimony before the U.S. Congress on 7 FEB, Adm. Craig Faller, the newly confirmed commander of U.S. Southern Command, warned lawmakers about China’s accelerated expansion into Latin America. Not only does China support the autocratic regimes in Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua and employ predatory lending practices across the region, but it is also investing in key infrastructure such as a deep-space tracking facility in Argentina, Faller told lawmakers.

U.S. military and intelligence officials have been watching the development of this particular facility with growing alarm since its inception. Over the past few years, a powerful 16-story antenna has risen from the remote, 200-hectare compound in the Neuquén province. But the station, which is surrounded by an 8-foot barbed wire fence, operates with little oversight from Argentine authorities, experts say. The ground station reportedly began operations in April 2018. China has insisted that the aim of the facility is peaceful space exploration and observation. For example, it is said to have played a critical role in China’s landing a spacecraft on the dark side of the moon in January.

Brian Weeden, a space policy and security expert with the Secure World Foundation, noted that the United States deploys antennas similar to the one in Patagonia all around the world. “Unless there is something specifically different

about this, it's a little bit of the pot calling the kettle black," he said. "To me, there is no specific piece of evidence other than it happens to be Chinese that signals that it is nefarious." But the U.S. military is concerned that the big-dish radar could be used for another purpose: collecting information on the position and activity of U.S. military satellites. "Beijing could be in violation of the terms of its agreement with Argentina to only conduct civilian activities and may have the ability to monitor and potentially target U.S., allied, and partner space activities," said Faller, who until recently served in the Pentagon as the top military aide to former Secretary of Defense James Mattis, said in his written testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee.



The main antenna of a Chinese deep space ground station in the Neuquén province, Argentina.

Both China and Russia have multiple ways of taking out or disabling U.S. and allied civil and military satellites, which provide critical navigation, communication, and command-and-control services around the globe, according to a report by the U.S. Air Force's National Air and Space Intelligence Center. China has military units that have already begun training with anti-satellite missiles like the one used in a 2007 test to destroy a Chinese weather satellite, generating more than 3,000 pieces of dangerous debris that are still orbiting the Earth and endangering nearby space assets. In addition to anti-satellite missiles, both nations have capabilities to jam U.S. and allied satellites, such as the ones that control unmanned U.S. military aircraft, according to the report. Airborne lasers can also be used to temporarily or permanently blind imagery satellites and other sensors. Cyberattacks on key infrastructure, such as ground-based space stations, also pose a threat.

The U.S. intelligence community also believes China and Russia's space capabilities are a risk to U.S. forces, even as both countries push for international agreements on the non-weaponization of space. In addition to the operational Chinese army missile intended to target satellites in low-Earth orbit, China likely intends to pursue additional weapons capable of destroying satellites up to "geosynchronous" Earth orbit, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats said in his Jan. 29 testimony to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. "China's and Russia's proposals for international agreements on the non-weaponization of space do not cover multiple issues connected to the [anti-satellite] weapons they are developing and deploying, which has allowed them to pursue space warfare capabilities while maintaining the position that space must remain weapons-free," Coats said, according to his written testimony.

Experts noted that Beijing's claim that it will use the facility only for peaceful purposes can't be taken at face value, as the Chinese national space agency is closely linked with the People's Liberation Army. Frank Rose, who served as U.S. assistant secretary of state for arms control from 2014 to 2017 and currently is a senior fellow with the Brookings Institution, said the geographic location of the new station provides China critical space coverage in the Southern and Western Hemispheres. "It's a question of covering certain orbits. There's a reason why the U.S. has satellite tracking stations around the world—it gives you global coverage," Rose said. "You can't get global coverage from China."

Evan Ellis, a professor of Latin American studies at the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, said the ground station's primary purpose may in fact be for peaceful research. The general shape and size of the dish is "consistent with what the Chinese say that it is," he said, noting that the location "does make a certain amount of sense" because scientists need facilities positioned on all sides of the Earth for deep-space observations. The personnel who operate the facility are either active-duty or former Chinese military, but that is "not inherently nefarious" given

how closely the army is tied with the Chinese space program, Ellis said. However, Ellis noted that the facility could also be used to collect other types of data, particularly on the various sensitive commercial and military satellites that frequently pass overhead. It is also concerning that the Argentine government “really doesn’t have physical access” to the compound, he added, noting that it is a six-hour drive from the closest government facility.

Rose applauded the Trump administration for increasing its focus on space, including the plan to re-establish U.S. Space Command, but said that one “gaping hole” in their approach is the lack of diplomatic outreach to China on this issue. The Obama administration in 2016 held two rounds of space security talks with China, one in Washington and one in Beijing, he said, noting the participation of the State and Defense Department. But the Trump administration has not continued these talks, he said. “I will give the administration some credit, they are focused on the threat to our space systems, and I give them credit for focusing public attention,” Rose said. “However it is not just a military solution to this problem—yes we have to protect our systems in outer space, yes we need to be prepared to respond to attacks, but there has to be a role for diplomacy.” [Source: Foreign Policy | Lara Seligman | February 8, 2019 ++]

GTMO Prison Update 12 ► Option of Last Resort for ISIS Detainees

The Guantanamo Bay detention center would receive new prisoners for the first time in more than a decade under one option being considered as the U.S. withdraws its forces from Syria and works to resolve the fate of hundreds of captured suspected Islamic State fighters, officials say. U.S.-backed Syrian fighters have custody of nearly 1,000 suspected ISIS fighters who the State Department said should be sent back to their home countries and prosecuted. The Syrian fighters have warned they may not be able to continue to hold the ISIS fighters after the withdrawal of American forces from Syria ordered by President Donald Trump in December.



Entrance to GTMO’s Camp VI detention facility

If they can't be repatriated, though, the detention center on the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, could be used to hold them "where lawful and appropriate," the State Department said 7 FEB. "The Administration's National Strategy for Counterterrorism makes very clear that Law of Armed Conflict detention, including at Guantanamo, remains an important and effective counterterrorism tool," it said in a statement to The Associated Press in response to questions about the prisoners. Trump had said in his first State of the Union last year that he would use Guantanamo "in many cases" to detain prisoners as part of the fight against Islamic State and al-Qaida. As a candidate, when asked about what he would do with the controversial detention center, he said he would "load it up with some bad dudes."

But the administration has not added any prisoners to the detention center that President Barack Obama sought to close and officials say that sending suspected Islamic State fighters back to their homelands remains the preferred choice. “Repatriating foreign terrorist fighters to their countries of origin and ensuring they are prosecuted and detained is the best solution to prevent them from returning to the battlefield,” the State Department said. A U.S. official, said Guantanamo is the "option of last resort." The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the U.S. has identified

about 50 people among the more than 900 held by Syrian forces as "high value" suspects that could be transported to Guantanamo if they are not repatriated.

Sending Islamic State prisoners to Guantanamo would open up new legal challenges, according to experts. The U.S. is allowed to detain al-Qaida and "associated forces" at Guantanamo under the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force. But whether Islamic State group fighters meets that criteria is an untested question, said Robert Chesney, a national security law professor at the University of Texas. "No court has ever once had the case and the executive branch for many years has really not wanted the court to answer that question," Chesney said. The U.S. began holding prisoners suspected of links to al-Qaida and the Taliban in January 2002, drawing intense international criticism for holding men indefinitely without charge amid reports of mistreatment at the isolated base on the southeastern tip of Cuba.

Guantanamo held nearly 700 prisoners at its peak in the summer of 2003. Amid legal challenges and international pressure, more than 500 were released under President George W. Bush. Obama viewed the detention center as a waste of money that damaged America's reputation and ordered it closed but was blocked by Congress. There are now 40 prisoners held, including nine who have been charged and are facing trial by military commission in proceedings that have dragged on for years. From a purely practical standpoint, U.S. military officials have said they could accommodate additional prisoners at the base. The forces overseeing Guantanamo prison say the prison can hold 40 more people "with no additional staffing" and the facility could accommodate 200 more inmates total, "with minimal adjustments to current infrastructure and manpower," said Navy Cdr. Adam Bashaw, a spokesman for the military task force that runs the detention center. [Source: The Associated Press | Susannah George | February 8, 2019 ++]

DODDS No Touching Rule ► New NBC Policy Questioned

A strict "no touching" rule that went into effect 30 JAN at Bahrain Elementary School has kept grade-schoolers from giving each other hugs and high-fives, prompting some parents to question the policy. Some parents shared their frustrations online last week in an informal questionnaire that's been sent to administrators. But school officials insist that the temporary rule is a step toward developing a comprehensive policy that allows some forms of physical contact. Friction over the policy underscores a broader debate over several years in U.S. schools regarding both children's rights – a concept steeped in United Nations conventions that calls for children's mental, physical and psychological security – and how children learn and develop through physical contact.



In Bahrain, the new rule banning things like games of tag and hand-holding and its punishment — brief timeouts — was outlined for students at an assembly on 30 JAN. It's a response to "frequent incidences with children touching, pushing and such to one another" at recess, an email sent to parents the same day said. "For example, the game of tag often gets rough or children don't realize how their tap is interpreted as a push," Penelope Miller-Smith, who is in her first year as the school's principal, said in the email. "While many of these incidences are not intentional, children are being hurt or feel like they are being hurt."

Matt Hansen, father of a fifth-grader, attended the assembly and said he understands why the No Body Contact, or NBC rule, came about. He saw recess behavior get "out of hand" last semester, he said. "It was becoming difficult for the monitors," Hansen said in an email. "My hope is that this new NBC rule can be a temporary measure that will help

the children better understand the concept of personal space, and eventually the rule can be phased out.” Other parents were caught off-guard after learning of the policy only via email or from their children after the assembly. “It came out of nowhere,” said Carmen Sunderland, mother of a fourth-grader and a kindergarten student. “I send my kids to school to learn — and recess is part of it — how to play, socialize the right way and help them make right choices while playing.”

Those lessons are part of a longer-term plan, Miller-Smith told Stars and Stripes in an email. The new rule is not designed to be permanent nor will it be a “never touch” policy, she said, but is the first part of a larger initiative to “help reduce touching that is hurtful, unwanted and in some instances misunderstood.” Such rules are a typical response at Department of Defense Education Activity and stateside schools, Miller-Smith has told parents. Miller-Smith, a career educator, said she’s often seen cyclical increases in rough play in the long stretches of the second semester. “The pattern repeats itself for me annually in almost all schools,” she said.

Her plan calls for teachers to discuss the issue with the students in coming weeks, using picture books, group discussions, class lessons and other activities to help develop a policy on appropriate physical contact, such as helping someone up after a fall, giving a hug or a high-five, the principal said. She’s participated in similar efforts in the past and has seen “great success,” she said. A 50-page student-parent handbook at the school had already prohibited horseplay, fighting and shoving on school grounds and buses, but Miller-Smith told parents that the lack of “a common and simple definition” for what’s allowed makes enforcement difficult. The NBC rule is meant to eliminate misunderstandings and keep play from getting out of control, she said.

Though her email to parents described it as barring “any touching to peers,” Miller-Smith told Stars and Stripes the new rule isn’t meant to discourage courtesy and kindness, like shaking hands or offering help to others. But Theresa Tamash’s daughter, a third-grader, was upset at what she saw as a ban against hugging her friends, Tamash said. The 8-year-old explained the policy to her mother after the school assembly. Tamash created an online questionnaire that garnered 47 anonymous responses in two days — 30 of them opposed to the new rule — a share of the parents of the 300 enrolled K-5 students at the school. “A lot of people said, ‘I don’t like it,’” Tamash said. “I was hoping to give those parents an opportunity to share their opinion.”

The survey also allowed parents to suggest alternatives, such as adding more playground monitors or focusing efforts on children who are misbehaving rather than making a blanket policy, Tamash said. For her part, Tamash has volunteered to help at the school, but she said she’s never been asked to assist during lunch or recess. “No one’s ever said, ‘We need more help on the playground ... We need more eyes in the cafeteria,’” she said. Tamash sent the parent responses to her questionnaire to the school on 4 FEB and Miller-Smith said she planned to talk with her. But the principal stood by the rule, saying she’d received positive feedback from others. While he favors the policy and sent a note to Miller-Smith saying he understands why it’s needed, Hansen said in his email to the school that the NBC rule has drawbacks. “I have to be honest with you and let you know that our son misses being able to play tag and ‘cops and robbers’ during recess,” he wrote. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Joshua Karsten | February 6, 2019 ++]

PCS Moves Update 05 ► Privatizing Household Goods Shipments

In the wake of increasing problems with service members' household goods shipments, U.S. Transportation Command officials are moving toward privatizing the entire process within two years. While this is a longer-term possible solution to fix problems with the physical process of moving, officials are also putting some initiatives into place for this year’s summer peak season. And the Army is looking at the bigger issue of the frequency of permanent change of station (PCS) moves, which affect a variety of quality of life issues such as spouse employment and children’s education. “I want to slow the turmoil, reduce PCS moves,” said Army Secretary Mark Esper, during a town hall meeting at the Association of the United States Army on 5 FEB. One initiative the Army has underway is moving to standardize all continental U.S. tours and most overseas tours to 36 months, he said.



There has been increasing pressure on defense officials to improve household goods moves for military families, and to hold moving companies accountable, especially after last year, when a number of families complained about late deliveries and damaged household belongings. Esper and other senior leaders heard complaints at an AUSA forum last fall, and in other visits. Officials at TRANSCOM have been considering a number of ideas and suggestions to improve the process, and are now in the initial stages of gathering input and moving toward total privatization, said Army Col. Ralph Lounsborough, personal property division chief in TRANSCOM's strategy, capabilities, policy and logistics directorate. TRANSCOM is the executive agency for military household goods moves. "There would be one move manager that would be responsible for coordinating all the industry," he said. In turn, TRANSCOM would manage the contract, similar to the current process for managing the shipment of service members' privately owned vehicles.

Officials hope to have that move manager in place and make the transition to a privatized system by the beginning of the peak summer season in 2021, Lounsborough said. "We think it would help with accountability and transparency, and ultimately we're trying to make things better for the service members," he said. After seeing the results from a request for information to industry, Lounsborough said, "We know there are companies out there that have the ability to do that. We think it's time to let industry manage the industry piece." Defense Department household goods moves make up about 20 percent of the household goods market domestically, Lounsborough said, but the current process awards that business one move at a time.

About 40 percent of military moves are made in the summer, and in 2017 there were 430,000 moves. "So we have 900 companies, one move at a time." He said officials believe there a "massive efficiencies" that could be gained. It could also be a benefit to the agents who own the trucks, employ the packers and loaders, as more money could pass through to them to reinvest in more capacity to help move military personnel, he said. Officials have been seeking to bring on more moving companies to ease the issues of lack of capacity. Last year's problems were exacerbated by ever-growing shortages of truck drivers, and workers to do the jobs such as packing and loading, for a variety of reasons including an improving economy that opened up jobs elsewhere. Among other steps being taken this year:

- TRANSCOM will post moving companies' customer satisfaction scores online. "The aim is to give families, those who are moving, a lot more transparency with regard to the scores of companies that may be moving your household goods," Esper said.
- The service branches are increasing the quality assurance inspections of companies to hold them accountable. The Army will now conduct quality assurance inspections for 50 percent of the moves, at the point of packing, and the point of delivery, said Army Maj. Gen. John P. Sullivan, assistant deputy chief of staff, G-4, up from the previous 25 percent of moves inspected.
- Across DoD, movers will also crate more household goods for moves within the continental U.S., Sullivan said, noting that a lot of damage and loss occurs when shipments are put into storage. The wooden crates are normally used to encase household goods going overseas.
- In May, TRANSCOM will stand up a 24/7 hotline for anyone across DoD who is having issues with their household goods move. Part of the frustration for service members and families last year was difficulty in

getting problems solved. Because the process is so segmented, people had to call multiple parties, Sullivan said.

Army wives Megan Harless and Tarah Nypaver said they have been providing suggestions and input to TRANSCOM as part of an advisory group in efforts to improve the process for military families. Both will be moving this summer. In general, there's a lack of resources such as quality assurance inspectors, said Harless. They've suggested that service officials could consider hiring and training military spouses as seasonal quality assurance inspectors. But there are currently problems with how long the hiring process would take, she said. "At a minimum, we need more quality assurance inspectors," said Nypaver, noting that it's not clear how many inspectors will be hired.

"It would give great peace of mind to families to know that when they're starting to have issues with their packers, with their movers and they can't come to a resolution, to know they can get on the phone with somebody," who can resolve the problem, Harless said. Since the plan for privatization doesn't roll out until 2021, Harless said, "we've still got two years of moves that will happen ... So we have to focus on what are the things that we can do that will help families in those two years. "Crating some shipments gives peace of mind to some families, but it doesn't help everyone." "It may be piecemeal, where some issues can help some families and some can help others, but as long as we're in the aggregate helping more people, that's great," Nypaver said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | February 5, 2019 ++]

DoD/VA Health Care ► Portions of Both Systems May Merge

The Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs may be considering merging parts of their two health care programs in a move that could alter how about 19 million military personnel, retirees, dependents and veterans receive care. In an announcement released 31 JAN, the Defense Health Agency said that an initiative known as DOD VA Health Care Staffing Services has reached the "strategy development stage." The effort is designed to merge the delivery of health care using facilities run by both agencies to serve the two populations of beneficiaries in a combined fashion, according to veterans' advocates. "The idea in itself makes sense," said Pat Murray, Deputy Director of the National Legislative Service for Veterans of Foreign Wars. "But it's going to be a lot harder than I think they understand." Kathy Beasley, Director of Health Affairs for the Military Officers Association of America said, "I think you have the possibility to save. Where there might be excess capacity in one area it may be utilized by beneficiaries in the other."

In October, the DHA, which oversees the health care system for the 9.4 million participants in the military, sought health-care company feedback on the private industry's ability to supplement clinical operations in Pentagon and VA facilities. That request also said DHA had "partnered with the VA to determine the feasibility of a joint strategic solution for the delivery of integrated, high-quality health care services to 19 million beneficiaries." Although the two health care systems serve populations of roughly similar numbers, they deliver care differently and serve a different clientele: The VA on average treats an older population, while DOD deals more with younger individuals and families. The move would offload some of the VA's burden onto the military health care system, according to Murray. VA has struggled in recent years to provide timely care to veterans within its internal systems. Congress overhauled a community care program in 2018 that expands opportunities for veterans to receive government-subsidized care from private providers.

In December, the VA announced the award of the first three of six contracts for its community care program, which will greatly expand the use of civilian providers. Bloomberg Government has estimated that health spending through the private health care program could reach as much as \$21 billion annually. A merger of the two health care systems is likely to be a complex undertaking compounded by political resistance. Both veterans' service organizations and those that represent military personnel are always concerned that drastic changes to their members' health systems will have a negative impact on care.

The Trump administration and officials from both departments came under fire in 2017 for secretly considering merging parts of the two health care systems. Lawmakers said any attempt to combine the two would require congressional oversight and significant input from stakeholders. Political infighting over community care also led to the ouster of then-VA Secretary David Shulkin in 2018. Democrats have promised to stop any further health care privatization attempts at the agency and are already gearing up for a fight over the implementation of the community care overhaul. Not every stakeholder will resist the idea, however: The proposal could present enormous opportunities for federal contracts both in resolving the technical and logistical barriers to the merger and in the further expansion of the Tricare and community care programs into the private sector. [Source: Bloomberg Government | Robert Levinson & Megan Howard | February 4, 2019 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 14 FEB 2019

Fat Leonard Scandal – A former U.S. Pacific Fleet spokesman who moonlighted as a PR guru for “Fat Leonard” Glenn Francis was sentenced to six months in prison on 8 FEB. Now-retired Navy Capt. **Jeffrey Breslau** also must pay a \$20,000 fine and perform 250 hours of community service as part of the sentence handed down in a San Diego courtroom by U.S. District Judge Janis Sammartino. Breslau also must reimburse the Navy the \$65,000 that Fat Leonard paid the captain “for insider advice that helped the contractor build a business empire that cost the Navy tens of millions of dollars,” according to a U.S. Justice Department release announcing the punishment. He pleaded guilty in November to a criminal conflict of interest charge. (Breslau’s attorneys did not return a call seeking comment).



The 52-year-old Breslau wrote emails and provided talking points to Francis to help the portly Malaysian magnate build networks with five Navy admirals in order to secure rich Navy contracts for his in-port ship servicing company, Glenn Defense Marine Asia, or GDMA, according to a copy of Breslau’s sentencing memo obtained by Navy Times. Justice Department officials declined comment when asked to identify those five admirals. The memo states Breslau used “his specialized skills and privileged position, bestowed upon him by the U.S. Navy, for GDMA’s benefit.” “Simply put, defendant sold his fiduciary alliance for \$65,000,” the memo states. The sentencing memo not only shows how the public affairs officer aided Francis until the corrupt contractor’s 2013 arrest in San Diego, but it also connects the dots to Navy officers toiling on behalf of Leonard, and how they interacted with each other.

Breslau helped manage negative Fat Leonard news about a ship dumping waste in Philippine waters and a GDMA truck that killed a moped driver, according to the memo. The captain gave Francis advice on dining with admirals at their homes, and Francis told of how he hooked up 7th Fleet staffers with tickets to a Lady Gaga concert in Thailand. Breslau’s Fat Leonard-related work began in 2012 when he was head of public affairs for Pacific Fleet and continued into 2013 when he led a crisis-communications command in Norfolk. Along the way, he helped massage bad news

Francis brought to him about the increasing scrutiny Navy officials were bringing to bear on GDMA, among other headaches, according to the memo.

Breslau met Francis in early 2012, a meetup “facilitated by another U.S. Navy officer, whom Francis had lavished gifts upon for years,” the sentencing memo states. The two conversed about the “perceived unfairness and retaliation” hitting GDMA — issues ranging from competitors landing a contract for the Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group’s April 2012 India port visit to complaints about a former GDMA employee who was later hired as the Pacific Fleet’s director of logistics, according to the sentencing memo. Francis told Breslau that GDMA was being “unfairly targeted” by that former employee, identified in the memo as “Employee 1.”

“Staggeringly, at this time, (Breslau) worked with Employee 1, as both were senior staff at Pacific Fleet,” the memo states. “In this exchange, Francis forwarded Breslau a number of U.S. Navy internal emails with competitor information and documents related to the relationship between GDMA and Employee 1,” the memo states. “Francis asked Breslau to review the documents and provide him with advice.” Breslau suggested that Francis leverage his “key influencers” in the ranks, “which he identified as [Admiral 1]” and Capt. David Haas, a former 7th Fleet director of operations who was indicted for his role in the scandal last summer, the memo states. (Haas’ attorney told Navy Times last summer that his client is innocent.)

Francis sent a message to Haas and his deputy, Cmdr. Michael Misiewicz, and “blind copied” Breslau, meaning the others couldn’t see his name. That message contained an internal Fleet Logistic Center email about challenges to the India port visit. Misiewicz is incarcerated at the United States Penitentiary Lompoc until March 23, 2022 for his role in the Fat Leonard public corruption scandal. Breslau promised “talking points” about how to use damaging information about a competitor, but also urged Francis to be careful, according to the memo. “[H]ope I was blind copied on the note below,” Breslau wrote, according to the memo. “Important to not compromise me even to your closest Navy brothers.” He added that an unidentified Navy captain was “the only one who knows I am providing advice and it is best to keep it that way,” according to the memo. “Rest assured, your identity is protected,” Francis replied.

A few days later, Breslau advised Francis to meet with several unidentified admirals in order to share his concerns about the former GDMA employee now heading up logistics for Pacific Fleet, the memo states. Breslau and his side boss emailed in May 2012 about communicating with a flag officer identified in the memo as Admiral 4. “Francis opined that Admiral 4 may have been ‘spooked’ by a recent ethics message sent through the Pacific Fleet to be ‘wary about GDMA ethical business practices’ coupled with the general perception that GDMA ‘is under Naval Criminal Investigative Service investigation,’” the memo states. Breslau agreed with Fat Leonard’s plan to contact Capt. David Lausman, then-commanding officer of the aircraft carrier George Washington and Admiral 4’s subordinate. (Lausman’s case is ongoing, according to court records.)

“Breslau agreed that Lausman was in a ‘very good position to help’ and ‘(he) can whisper to [Admiral 4] for you,’” the memo states. “Although context is muddled, Breslau added, if this happens, it keeps [Admiral 4] safe during any investigation.” Admiral 4 replied to Francis and invited him to dinner at his home in Japan, and Breslau helped craft talking points, according to the memo. “Breslau responded that the dinner event would be a great opportunity to strengthen Francis’s relationship with Admiral 4 and impress another U.S. Navy Admiral, Admiral 5, who would also be in attendance,” the memo states. Breslau said Francis should bring his wife so that “she can help distract the other spouses and give you a better opportunity to talk with your friends,” the memo states. “Plus, she can also help carry flowers,” Breslau suggested. “You only have two hands and four couples to meet with.”

Also in May 2012, Francis told Breslau that the 7th Fleet’s Chief of Staff wanted to go see Lady Gaga in Thailand — and Francis was going to make it happen, according to the memo. Breslau urged Francis to “be careful with this email” and that the chief of staff’s email was being monitored, the memo states. (That chief of staff is not identified in Breslau’s sentencing documents.) Francis later called Breslau a “brilliant strategist” in an email and told his consultant he had booked 12 Lady Gaga tickets “and provided eight of the tickets to Seventh Fleet Staff,” the memo states. Later that month in an email exchange, “Breslau recommended Francis take his wife to Tokyo so she can shop

with Admiral 1's wife and then the four of them could go out to dinner and late night drinks," the memo states. At one point that year, the two conferred about getting a Supply Corps member to file an anonymous Inspector General complaint about the former GDMA employee who had joined the Pacific Fleet staff and was impugning Francis's company, according to the memo.

Breslau helped Francis manage other issues in late 2012, including Navy ship sewage being dumped into Philippine waters. Francis forwarded "internal U.S. Navy messages from Seventh Fleet Logistics" discussing that allegation "as well as the sinking of a picket boat, and the killing of a moped rider by a GDMA bus," the memo states. "Francis asked Breslau for his expertise in extinguishing the 'wild malicious allegations,'" prosecutors wrote. "Breslau agreed to assist in minimizing GDMA's exposure to these allegations and draft a response for Francis to provide to the N4 and anyone else who asked." Investigators believe Breslau eventually grew overwhelmed with all the tasks he was juggling. "I am averaging three hours a sleep over the past four nights between the [U.S. Navy] exercise in South Carolina, travel to Bogota, trip prep, day job, and [consulting for] Leonard so I am not as sharp at the moment and hope I am not confusing things too much," he wrote in June 2013.

A few months later, in September, Francis was arrested in San Diego. He had been meeting with Navy officers and presented them materials about new Asian opportunities, the memo states, "all of which had been edited by Breslau." Over time, Breslau wrote, reviewed or edited at least 33 documents and crafted at least 135 emails advising Francis. And on at least 14 occasions, Breslau provided Francis with talking points before the magnate's meetings with high-ranking Navy personnel, prosecutors wrote. Breslau called himself Fat Leonard's "priest" because of their relationship's confidential nature, and Francis praised the captain as a ghost writer. "Thanks for the compliment with regard to the ghost emails," Breslau replied. "Glad to help."

Breslau is the latest high-ranking officer to get snagged in the west Pacific web of bribes, booze, prostitutes and classified info leaking that is the Fat Leonard scandal. Francis pleaded guilty in 2015 to bribery and fraud charges for overseeing a sprawling 10-year conspiracy that saw him plying Navy officials with luxury travel, five-star hotels, top-shelf boozes, prostitutes and even plump Spanish suckling pigs in exchange for information on lucrative contracts. Breslau faced a max sentence of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. He becomes the 18th former or current Navy official to plead guilty in federal court as part of the scandal. Thirty-three defendants overall have been charged so far, and 22 have pleaded guilty. The Justice Department has forwarded hundreds of lower-level cases to the Navy for adjudication. That review continues. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | February 9, 2019 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ► **Reported 01 thru 14 JAN 2018 | Seven**

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

For a listing of all missing or unaccounted for personnel to date refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil> and click on 'Our Missing'. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Year/2018> for a listing and details of those accounted for in 2018. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

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

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

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



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

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

LOOK FOR

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Lynn W. Hadfield** a member of the 642nd Bombardment Squadron, 409th Bombardment Group, 9th Bombardment Division, 9th Air Force. On March 21, 1945, Hadfield was piloting an A-26B when his aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and went missing during a combat mission from Couvron, France. Hadfield, and his two crewmen, Sgt. Vernon Hamilton and Sgt. John Kalausich, had been participating in the interdiction campaign to obstruct German troop movements in preparation for the Allied crossing of the Rhine River on March 23, 1945. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hadfield.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Clifford M. Mills** was a member of the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division, which participated in Operation Market Garden, the invasion of the German-occupied Netherlands. On Sept. 18, 1944, Mills was reported missing in action in the vicinity of Wyler and Zylflich, Germany. Interment services are pending. [Read about Mills.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pvt. Waldean Black** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Black. Interment services are pending. [Read about Black.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. Ted Hall** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Hall. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hall.](#)

-- **Navy Machinist's Mate 1st Class Eugene K. Eberhardt** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Eberhardt. Interment services are pending. [Read about Eberhardt.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Frank A. Hryniewicz** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Hryniewicz. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hryniewicz.](#)

-- **U.S. Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Howard T. Lurcott** was a member of the 38th Bombardment Squadron, 30th Bombardment Group, stationed at Hawkins Field, Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll, Gilbert Islands. On Jan. 21, 1944, the

B-24J bomber aircraft he was piloting crashed into Tarawa lagoon shortly after takeoff. Lurcott and the nine other servicemen aboard the aircraft were killed. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lurcott.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | February 14, 2019 ++]

DoD Websites Update 01 ► Watch Out for Fake Ones

Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command identified a website posing as the Department of Defense [Transition Assistance Program](#) this week. Upon visiting the phony URL address, the site asks for a visitor's personal identification information and attempts to download malicious software onto the visitor's personal computer. The warning was shared 13 FEB by Air Forces Cyber on Facebook. The correct URL for the Transition Assistance Program is <https://DoDTAP.mil>. The fake website used the appropriate acronyms but ended in the **.com** domain name, which brings users to commercial web addresses. The .mil and .gov domain names, though, are used for most DoD websites. Exceptions to the rule include recruitment websites, such as goarmy.com. To protect your home computer, active duty military and civilian employees are encouraged by the DoD to download anti-virus software through the [Defense Information Systems Agency](#) using their Common Access Cards. More information on cyber security best practices can be found on the Air Forces Cyber [resources webpage](#). The Department of Homeland Security also provides a [list of publications](#) for securing home computers and understanding emerging threats in the cyber domain. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Kyle Rempfer | February 13, 2018 ++]

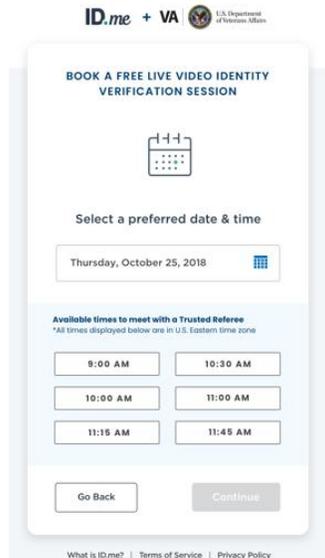
* VA *



VA Access via ID.me ► New Option Brings Virtual Identity Proofing to the VA

There's an 81-year-old veteran living in Japan who's been trying, and failing, to sign up for a Veteran ID card online — he can't seem to verify his international phone number. There's a 19-year-old service member trying to get access to his GI Bill Benefits through VA.gov, but the agency can't confirm his identity because he doesn't have any credit history. There are many more veterans just like these. Traditionally, veterans who have been locked out of the convenient online registration process that the Department of Veterans Affairs offers, which requires things like a stable address and a credit history, are unable to sufficiently prove their identities online. So, they're forced to go to a VA field office in person, an extra hurdle that can prove to be a complete roadblock, depending on the veteran's circumstances.

Now there's another option — [Virtual In-Person Identity Proofing](#) enabled by digital identity provider [ID.me](#). After a four-month pilot, ID.me and the VA announced the official launch of this digital service 12 FEB.



The interface for Veterans setting up a virtual identity proofing session

The technology is essentially what it sounds like — veterans who need help verifying their identities online can set up a virtual meeting (via video chat) with a “trusted referee” who will examine various identity documents in much the same way as an employee at a VA field office would. “As part of the digital modernization of the VA, it is important that all Veterans can securely access their benefits and services online,” Charles Worthington, CTO at the VA, said in a statement. “Adding Virtual In-Person Identity Proofing is a critical step towards making sure that no Veteran is left behind.”

As is often the case in IT modernization, it was a policy development, not a technological one, that got us here. The National Institute of Standards and Technology is in charge of developing digital identity guidelines for the federal government — in June 2017 the agency released [special publication 800-63-3](#), which outlines the requirements for verifying identity virtually. ID.me, a recipient of NIST grant funding, developed its tech offering around these guidelines. To ID.me founder Blake Hall, a former soldier himself, helping veterans is especially meaningful. But he sees a future for this product at agencies beyond the VA. “Everyone runs into this problem where thin-file customers, international customers, aren’t able to prove their identity,” he told FedScoop. “We can also expand this to other agencies.”

The Virtual In-Person Proofing Process -- ID.me provides step-by-step instructions to facilitate a compliant and auditable virtual in-person identity proofing process

- **Step 1:** After a user fails online verification, they will be prompted to schedule a free live video session with a Trusted Referee from available time slots.
- **Step 2:** The user will upload their identity documents and confirm their personal information. They will then receive an email confirming their appointment.
- **Step 3:** During the virtual in-person proofing session, the user meets with a Trusted Referee via video conference and displays their identity documents.
- **Step 4:** To complete the process, the Trusted Referee attests the authenticity of the user's documents and application through the video conference. A NIST 800-63-3 compliant digital credential is generated.

To complete virtual in-person identity proofing, users must present the following pieces of information:

- First and Last Name, Birthdate, Mobile Phone Number, Email addree, and Address
- Social Security Number plus 2 Primary documents or 1 primary document & 2 secondary documents

- Primary Documents include a U.S. or Canadian driver's license, U.S. Passport or passport card, Federal or State ID, Permanent Resident Card (I-511), Military ID, Foreign Passport with I-511, and Employment authorization card (I-766)
- Secondary Documents include a Credit card, Health Insurance card, Social Security card, Birth certificate, School ID with photo. Voter registration card, and Temporary resident card

[Source: FEDSCOOP & <https://www.id.me/business/virtual-in-person-identity> | Tajha Chappellet-Lanier | February 12, 2019 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims Update 64 ► Court Ruling Fuels Renewed Effort for Bill

A bipartisan push in Congress on a bill to get Agent Orange benefits for "Blue Water Navy" veterans of Vietnam gained traction 31 JAN from a court ruling that went against opposition from the Department of Veterans Affairs. "I hope they've heard it loud and clear at the VA," Thomas Snee, national executive director of the Fleet Reserve Association, said of the court ruling that could extend Agent Orange benefits and health care to an estimated 90,000 sailors who served off the coast of Vietnam. Snee, a former master chief who served on the destroyer Vogelgesang off Vietnam, said, "The VA needs to stop pushing back and get to 'Yes.'"

In a 9-2 ruling, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit ruled in favor of 73-year-old Alfred Procopio Jr., who served on the aircraft carrier Intrepid off Vietnam. He had been denied benefits by the VA for lack of scientific evidence that his diabetes and prostate cancer were related to exposure to the toxic defoliant Agent Orange. In her ruling for the majority supporting Procopio's claim, Judge Kimberly A. Moore wrote, "We find no merit in the government's arguments to the contrary." John Wells, a lawyer and Navy veteran who argued the case for Procopio, said that "innumerable veterans were denied palliative and potentially lifesaving benefits" in the long struggle for coverage. In a statement after the ruling, Wells, head of the Military Veterans Advocacy group, said, "The many people who fought this battle alongside us and the veterans whose lives have been forever changed by the VA's policy are all due thanks and credit."

The VA has yet to decide whether to appeal the decision or continue to oppose congressional efforts to pass a bill mandating benefits and health care for the Blue Water veterans. "VA is reviewing this decision and will determine an appropriate response," a spokesman said. In his concurring opinion in the Procopio case, Judge Raymond T. Chen wrote that legislation is needed to back up the court's action. "Recent debates in Congress, which required consideration of the significant cost of the proposed addition of Blue Water Navy veterans [for Agent Orange benefits], underscores why Congress, rather than the courts, should be the one to revisit our interpretation," he wrote.

Last year, the House unanimously passed a Blue Water Navy bill, but several Republican senators, citing the costs, blocked a vote in the Senate. A spokesman for Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY), one of the senators who blocked the vote, said that he was "still reviewing the [court] decision at this time." A similar bill was introduced on the House side earlier this month. Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA), the new chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said the court ruling "appears to bring our country one step closer to ensuring that we fulfill our duty to care for veterans affected by exposure to Agent Orange." He noted the failure of the bill last year, and said in a statement, "It is time for Congress to right this wrong, redouble our effort to pass H.R. 299 and uphold our responsibility to care for our nation's veterans."

Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, said in a statement that he supported the bill last year "because I believe [Blue Water veterans] should have remained eligible for these benefits as Congress intended." "I am pleased to see this recent court decision, and I look forward to working with the VA on its next steps on addressing this," he said.

Earlier this month during a VA town hall meeting webcast, Paul Lawrence, head of the Veterans Benefits Administration, said the VA still lacks "sufficient evidence" to prove a presumptive link between service off the coast of Vietnam and the illnesses caused by the widespread use of the Agent Orange. Those who served on the ground or the inland waters of Vietnam currently are eligible for benefits for the "presumptive" link to 14 Agent Orange-related illnesses, but those who served off the coast are not. "In terms of presumptives, they come with a real requirement of sufficient evidence to indicate it's warranted," Lawrence said.

Major veterans organizations hailed the court's decision and urged Congress to move quickly on legislation for the aging Blue Water veterans. Veterans of Foreign Wars National Commander B.J. Lawrence said the ruling for Procopio, a life member of VFW Post 6587 in Spring Lake Park, Minnesota, was laudable, but "the VFW isn't quite ready to celebrate." "That's because the VA can always appeal the ruling and Congress has yet to pass a Blue Water Navy bill," he said in a statement. "But it is very encouraging to now have a court of law support Blue Water Navy veterans along with the court of public opinion." Carl Blake, an Army veteran and executive director of Paralyzed Veterans of America, said the court ruling "resolves a decades-long controversy that has visited a grave injustice" on Blue Water veterans. "Now our staff around the country will work to ensure that the Blue Water veterans and their families receive their benefits," he said in a statement. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | January 30, 2019 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims Update 65 ► Now is the Time to File VA Form 21-0966

On January 29, in a 9-2 decision, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit ruled in favor of the veteran in *Alfred Procopio, Jr., v. Robert Wilkie*, finding the intent of Congress in the *Agent Orange Act of 1991* was to extend benefits to *all* veterans who served within the territorial waters of Vietnam, 12 nautical miles from shore. The VA has 90 days from the Court's ruling to appeal this decision to the Supreme Court; and VA Secretary Wilkie has yet to announce how it plans to respond. In the meantime, VVA recommends those veterans who think they may have served on a vessel in Vietnam's territorial waters reach out to their local Veterans Service Officer to file [VA Form 21-0966, Intent to File a Claim](#). If VVA is your representative, go to [Service Officer Locator](#) on www.vva.org to find your local representative. If you do not wish to work with a service officer, you may fill out the VA Form 21-0966 form and submit it to the VA.

VVA recommends Blue Water Navy veterans submit the VA Form 21-0966 if they have never filed an Agent Orange claim or if they have been denied an Agent Orange claim. If you are a spouse of a Blue Water Navy veteran who died from an Agent Orange-related illness, they recommend you also file a VA Form 21-0966. By submitting VA Form 21-0966, you preserve your effective date. You have one year from the day you submitted your VA Form 21-0966 to submit your claim for benefits. By submitting this form, you will be putting yourself in the best possible position while waiting to see how the VA responds to the Court's decision.

To help your claim's success, it is recommended you start gathering evidence such as deck logs, service records, or anything else that could help prove the location of your vessel. VVA will keep you updated on suggested next steps as they continue to learn more information. [Source: VVA Press Release No. 19-4 | Mokie Porter | February 6, 2019 ++]

VA Disability Rating Update 02 ► How To Increase Your Percentage

Did you know that you can have your VA disability compensation benefit increased by the Department of Veterans Affairs? Many types of medical conditions get worse over time. If you are getting disability benefits from the VA, you have the right to request that your rating be increased if your medical condition gets worse or causes your health to deteriorate. Before you file for an increase in your disability rating, make sure you know what you can expect from

the VA, and be prepared for both the best and worst outcomes you might face after requesting a disability rating increase. There are basically three different courses of action you can take when applying for an increase in disability benefits:

1. Requesting Compensation for a New Disability

You normally do this if you are already getting VA disability, or have filed before and were denied. For example, you hurt your back while in the military so the VA is paying you disability compensation for a bad back. Now, you realize you are having hearing issues that may be related to your military service. In this case, you just have to file a new disability claim with the VA. Some disabilities may have time limits, and you do have to document everything just like any other application for VA disability. You can choose one of three ways To file for a new disability:

- Apply online, using the [VA's VETS.GOV website](#), or
- Work with a [Veteran's Service Organization](#). These groups know the intricacies of dealing with the VA and can help you ensure your submission is complete and correct. They will provide free assistance, anyone who charges you for help filing a VA claim is ripping you off.
- Go to a [VA regional office](#) and have a VA employee assist you.

Once you filed your claim, now you sit and wait. It can take months, but usually the VA will send you a letter when:

- They get your claim
- They start working on your claim
- If they need more information
- Around Every Month Or So While They Are Working On It
- When They Make A Decision On Your Claim.

If you submitted a claim online you can check the [www.VETS.GOV](#) website for the status. If you filed through a Veteran's Service Organization you can check your claim's status through them. The VA may have to contact the DoD for records or if they need more medical information, they may ask you to provide it. The VA may also schedule an examination for you to assess the disabilities you claimed. If the VA requires you to undergo a medical exam to support your claim be sure to show up for the appointment, or risk having your claim delayed by several months. The VA may schedule you for multiple medical appointments depending on how many or what type of disabilities you claim. Other than attend scheduled examinations, you don't need to do anything else unless VA sends you a letter saying it needs more information.

2. Filing for an Increase to an Existing Disability

There may come a time that your disability begins to worsen. You may have more pain, have new symptoms, or find that your existing disability causes other issues. For example, your service-connected back injury leads you to favor one leg over the other, causing knee pain. To file for an increase, you normally go through the same procedure you went through when you initially filed for compensation. You will need medical proof that your condition has gotten worse. This can be from either the VA doctor or a private doctor. You can file your increase request using eBenefits or by filling out a VA Form [21-526b](#) Veteran's Supplemental Claim for Compensation (Fillable)

If you have medical information from a private doctor, you must submit a VA Form [21-4142](#) Authorization to Disclose Information to the Department Of Veterans Affairs (VA) which authorizes that doctor to share information with the VA. If you are seeing a civilian doctor as part of the Veterans' Choice program, you may not need the VA Form 21-4142, but it never hurts to have one on file.

When you request an increase in your VA disability rating, you are in effect opening up your claim for re-evaluation. The VA can actually lower or terminate your existing rating, so you need to make sure you have all your ducks in a row before you file.

- If you've had your VA disability for more than five years, the VA has to prove that your illness or disease has gotten better and will stay better before reducing or terminating your rating.

- If you've had your disability for 10 years or more, the VA can very rarely terminate your benefits unless it proves that you've been fraudulent in your claim. It can, however, reduce your benefits.
- If you've had your disability for 20 years, the VA won't reduce your rating below the lowest one you've received in those 20 years.

The VA can also reduce or terminate your compensation if you miss a scheduled disability rating medical exam. Whatever the situation, be prepared to send in a ton of documents, fill out lots of forms (this may be easier to do using [eBenefits](#) instead of regular mail), and wait for several months before the VA makes a decision on your claim.

3. Disagreeing with the VA's Decision

If you disagree with the VA's decision on your disability, you can file an appeal. You can file an appeal if you think the VA rated your disability too low or it denied your disability. You can file an appeal with any decision made by the VA, the initial rating or any subsequent rating. The Board has prepared a pamphlet for you to help explain the process. It is available for you on the web site: https://www.bva.va.gov/How_Do_I_APPEAL.asp. You may also send in your name and address, and they will mail you a copy. You may request a copy by:

- Email to: BVAOmbudsman@mail.VA.Gov
- Mail to: Board of Veterans' Appeals, 810 Vermont Avenue, Washington, DC 20420 Attention: Ombudsman

Anyone who is not satisfied with the results of a claim for Veterans benefits (determined by a VA RO, VHA medical center, or other local VA office) should read the pamphlet above. It is intended to explain the current steps involved in filing an appeal and to serve as a reference for the terms and abbreviations used in the appeal process. Updates to this process as a result of the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 are forthcoming. Upon reviewing the pamphlet, if you still want to continue, you will need to submit a Notice of disagreement using VA FORM [21-0958](#), SEP 2018.

[Source: Military.com | January 28, 2019 ++]

VA Disciplinary Actions Update 02 ► Vet Indicted for Making Threats and Assault

A federal grand jury returned a two-count indictment charging **Lon R. Sweeney**, age 53, making threats against a federal employee and assault of federal officers. The indictment alleges that Sweeney threatened a Department of Veterans Affairs employee and later, while being placed under arrest, assaulted three VA officers. Assistant U.S. Attorney Brad Beeson is prosecuting the case following an investigation by the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General — Criminal Investigative Division and the VA Police Department. If convicted, the defendant's sentence will be determined by the court after review of factors unique to this case, including the defendant's prior criminal record, if any, the defendant's role in the offense, and the characteristics of the violation. In all cases, the sentence will not exceed the statutory maximum and in most cases it will be less than the maximum. An indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is entitled to a fair trial, in which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. [Source: DoJ No. District of Ohio | U.S. Attorney | February 8, 2019 ++]

VA Shadow Rulers ► HVAC Investigation Launching on Trump's Golf Buddies

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee is launching an investigation into whether President Donald Trump's country club friends had undue influence over Veterans Affairs Department policies or violated any laws. In a letter to VA officials 8 FEB, committee Chairman Mark Takano, D-Calif., said the department needs to turn over dozens of documents by the end of the month to clarify the role of "these individuals who have not served in the U.S. military

nor U.S. government, and are not accountable to veterans and the American people.” The move comes amid increasing tension between the department and members of Congress, and just days after President Donald Trump chastised congressional Democrats in his State of the Union address over investigations. “If there is going to be peace and legislation, there cannot be war and investigation,” he said. “It just doesn't work that way.”

The men at the center of the new VA investigation — Marvel Entertainment CEO Ike Perlmutter, primary care specialist Dr. Bruce Moskowitz and attorney Marc Sherman — are members of Trump’s exclusive Mar-a-Lago club and have been dubbed the department’s “shadow rulers” because of their high-level conversations with VA employees over the past two years. The full extent of that involvement is unclear. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in congressional testimony last fall that he had only cursory contact with the men and they have had no significant influence over department policy matters. But a ProPublica investigation last summer revealed extensive communication between the men and VA officials in the past, including involvement in the adoption of a new 10-year, \$16-billion electronic medical records overhaul and the firing of former VA Secretary David Shulkin last spring.

The committee has asked for all communications between the trio and VA employees, to include emails, texts and telephone records. “Top department officials apparently treated these Mar-a-Lago members as having decision-making authority, and emails demonstrate these powerful men weighed in on candidates to lead the Veterans Health Administration and organized meetings and summits between VA and commercial entities,” Takano’s letter states. In a statement, department spokesman Curt Cashour said that VA has already responded to multiple requests on the issue, and “since most of these communications occurred under previous VA leaders, we refer you to them for further comment.” He also added that “although his predecessors may have done things differently, Sec. Wilkie has been clear about how he does business. No one from outside the administration dictates VA policies or decisions. That’s up to Sec. Wilkie and President Trump.”

The move comes a day after Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) set a letter directly to the three men out of frustration over months of unanswered questions from VA officials over their roles. “Although you reportedly had access to and influence over key agency decisions and decision-makers, you were reportedly not subject to any of the conflicts-of-interest and other ethics rules that apply to government employees,” she wrote. “As a result, I am concerned that you may have had the opportunity to profit from your arrangement, including possibly by engaging in trades or other actions to enrich yourselves.”

Takano’s counterpart in the upper chamber, Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson (R-GA) on said 7 FEB that he has no plans to investigate the three businessmen for now. Whether House Republicans will support the Democratic majority’s information requests remains to be seen. In October, VA officials refused to produce the documents, citing “ongoing litigation alleging violations of the Federal Advisory Committee Act” making them “not appropriate for release at this time.” That was due to an ongoing lawsuit filed by the left-leaning advocacy group VoteVets seeking to block the men from contact with VA leadership on official matters. Now, House Democrats hold subpoena powers for the records. The committee has used that authority several times in recent years, although with near unanimous bipartisan support each time. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | February 8, 2019 ++]

VA Lawsuit | Caregiver Program ► Laws & Regulations Not Followed by VA

In a suit filed 22 JAN in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, the plaintiffs, led by Florida resident Zamantha Tapia, fiancée of Army veteran Cesar Silva, allege that the VA did not follow the laws and regulations governing the department's Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers program, which provides compensation and health benefits to those who provide care for seriously injured post-9/11 veterans. According to the suit, Silva and Tapia's application was denied, and the benefits of the other plaintiffs were inappropriately downgraded or terminated without proper investigation or determination.

In 2017, veterans and their caregivers enrolled in the program began seeing their benefits curtailed or terminated - often with no reason given, other than that their VA providers determined they no longer needed help with their daily activities. In August 2018, the VA Office of Inspector General found that across the VA, facilities didn't adequately manage the program, failing to provide consistent access to it, improperly accepting ineligible veterans and declining to monitor the health statuses of nearly half the veterans it discharged from the program. The IG also learned that the department paid out \$4.8 million to caregivers of veterans who weren't eligible for the program, and the VA "failed to manage the program effectively because it did not establish governance that promoted accountability for program management," staff members wrote in the report.

In 2015, plaintiff Jennifer Wilmot and her husband George Wilmot, an Army National Guard veteran who served from October 2007 to May 2013, were booted from the program. Wilmot had been injured during a 2009 deployment to Mosul, Iraq, when the Humvee he was riding in came under small-arms fire and crashed. He suffered a traumatic brain injury, fractured portions of his back and pelvis and nearly lost his left arm. He also has post-traumatic stress disorder and memory loss. The Wilmots were accepted into the caregiver program in 2013 but should have received the highest level of compensation rather than the level they were awarded, according to attorneys Jason Perry and Luke Miller. Then came the dismissal. "After completing a comprehensive review of your medical records, it appears that you have met the intention of the program and your participation will be discontinued," VA officials wrote to the Wilmots. The lawsuit calls the termination "arbitrary and capricious."

Silva was deployed to Iraq from November 2003 to August 2004, sustaining shrapnel injuries in an attack. According to the lawsuit, he received a VA disability rating of 70 percent in 2009 for rotator cuff strain and impingement and suffers from chronic headaches, degenerative joint disease, back pain and neuropathy. He also has PTSD, TBI, memory loss, depression and irritable bowel syndrome. Tapia and Silva applied for the family caregiver program in 2014 but were denied. According to the suit, the VA found that Silva did not need assistance for physical injuries and said his mental health conditions were not service-connected. They reapplied in 2017, but following a phone assessment, VA officials said that Silva was not "receiving medical treatment" -- an error, the lawsuit alleges - and that Tapia was "an enabler."

According to Perry, an attorney in Wellington, Florida, and Miller, of Military Disability Lawyer LLC in Salem, Oregon, the plaintiffs have asked the court to certify the suit as a class action, meaning that other affected caregivers could sign on if it is approved. They estimate that the VA received more than 100,000 applications for the family caregiver program between May 2011 and September 2018 and, therefore, thousands may be able to sign on to the possible class action. The plaintiffs also are requesting that the VA stop what they perceive as arbitrary dismissals from the program and are seeking monetary compensation in an amount "to be determined at trial," according to the suit. The federal government has until 25 MAR to file a response in the case, and a status conference is scheduled for 29 MAR, according to court documents. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | February 8, 2019 ++]

VA 3D Printing ► Use is Lowering Costs, and Reducing Surgery/Healing Times

Some doctors use printers to produce patient records or referrals. Others use them to replicate human organs. That's what Dr. Beth Ripley is doing at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Washington. Granted, replicas are more plastic than tissue and don't function like the real thing — at least not yet. But in a growing number of VA hospitals using 3D printing technology, life-size replicas of human anatomy are helping surgeons cut down on operating times by as much as two hours, lowering costs and potentially helping patients heal faster. "One of the magical things about 3D printing ... is that you can create these really complex structures that you could never make using traditional manufacturing," said Ripley, who chairs the VA's Veterans Health Administration 3D Printing Advisory Committee.



Radiologists like her can take a CT scan of a veteran’s heart, for example, then print a nearly exact copy of its faulty valve in anywhere from 30 minutes to 30 hours for the surgeons to study. The same goes for tumorous kidneys or pelvises. “[Surgeons] can look at it and figure out exactly what their plan is before they ever go into the surgery,” said Ripley. 3D printing capability started in three of the VA’s 172 hospitals in 2017 and has since grown to 20, with 10 more health care facilities working on implementation, according to the VA. In some hospitals, 3D printers are also being used to make special surgical tools and orthotic devices that enhance mobility for veterans with physical limitations and disabilities. These “MacGyvers of medicine,” as Ripley calls them, allow patients to return to everyday hobbies, such as ice skating or playing pool, she said.

Last month, the VA announced researchers are also collaborating on a three-year project to create a bioprinting program using 3D printers to make replacement tissues customized to individual patients. This would reduce the need for grafting surgeries, among other things. Prosthetic limbs are also in the research-and-development stage, as are artificial lungs. “There’s a lot of lung injury that happens in combat situations,” said Joseph Potkay, a biomedical engineer at the VA hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan, who’s working toward creating 3D-printed lungs that he hopes will one day replicate the functions of the real thing. “Exposure to smoke or even blast injury results in lung injury. Chemical exposure, other irritants can cause lung damage either short term or long term. That’s why this is of interest to veterans hospitals and the [Veterans Health Administration] system.”

Ripley said combat injuries are driving a lot of the innovation at the VA, as doctors and researchers “think of ways to get people back doing the things they love.” The devices cost anywhere from \$1,500 to \$400,000, she said. But their impact is difficult to put a price tag on. Shorter surgery times cut down on operating room costs and also time spent under anesthesia, which can help patients recover faster, she said. And in hospitals where 3D printers are being used to make orthotics, such as braces, veterans just have to go to the hospital once for a fitting. If a replacement is needed, the hospital hits print and drops it in the mail, saving the veteran another trip to the doctor’s office. “It can be very low cost and allows you to customize the design, which are huge advantages,” Potkay said of the technology.

When asked about the future of 3D printing in VA hospitals, Ripley said, “The goal is that 3D printing services will benefit all 9 million patients as part of the VA system.” She also praised her employer for being a leader in this space and recognizing the “power of 3D printing” early on. “I believe that the future is VA will be leading ... what 3D printing looks like and defining what 3D printing looks like for the country. Because we’re so large and because we’re integrated, we’re able to test and deploy on a faster scale,” she said. “I hope you see lots of 3D printing innovations and rapid deployment to veterans as well.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross| February 7, 2019 ++]

Twilight Brigade ► VA Evicting Group after 21 Years at the Bedside of Dying Patients

The Veterans Affairs hospital in West Los Angeles is evicting a volunteer group that spent 21 years at the bedside of dying patients who otherwise would have been alone in their final moments. The Twilight Brigade is among several

veterans service organizations that have been told by the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System they can no longer have offices or meetings on its campuses. The decision comes in the aftermath of an inspector general's report that criticized the system's administration for leasing land for a dog park, oil drills, baseball fields and other uses that did not clearly benefit veterans.

So, why are some of the evictions targeting groups dedicated to veterans? The answer isn't clear, especially to the organizations now searching for new homes. "No one has talked to me, no one has called me. Nine times I've tried, no one's responded, nothing," said Dannion Brinkley, founder of the nonprofit Twilight Brigade. "I look at everybody else they're throwing out, and these are places where veterans are making a difference. These are veterans giving back." Twilight Brigade has spent 33,000 hours at the bedsides of dying veterans over the past 31 years. For 21 of those years, they operated out of offices in Los Angeles — one on the West Los Angeles Medical Center's 387-acre campus and the other at the VA's Sepulveda Ambulatory Care Center in Northridge. Those offices were used by volunteers to prepare, train and wait until they're needed, he said.

In December, Brinkley was told they must vacate both offices by 6 FEB. The eviction does not prevent the group from visiting veterans in the hospital, and Brinkley said he is trying to find new space. But, the former Marine, who described himself as a defender of the VA, is now struggling to understand why the agency would throw away decades of partnership without an explanation. Brinkley said his group is funded by donations and run by volunteers. "I know how much time is spent at that bedside and I know how bad the patients need volunteers to come by, to ask how are you doing, and care about them, and appreciate them," Brinkley said. "It cost the VA nothing, I paid for everything except space."

Eviction notices also were sent to two posts of the Jewish War Veterans and the Disabled American Veterans, according to a spokesperson for the health-care system. The Jewish War Veterans Post 118 met in a conference room for three hours on Sundays about four times per year. A statement from the Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System described the meetings as a potential "burden" on staff as the employees had to "work overtime to open, close, secure or clean spaces after normal business hours." "VAGLAHS regrets the inconvenience some groups may experience, but we are doing what is necessary in order to comply with federal regulations, the inspector general's recommendations, the West Los Angeles Leasing Act of 2016 and the framework Draft Master Plan while ensuring that VAGLAHS' limited resources are prioritized to meet Veterans' health care needs," according to the statement.

West LA campus didn't always benefit vets

The evictions are tied to a critical report issued in September by the Department of Veteran Affairs' Office of Inspector General. That audit found 63 percent of the land-use agreements on the campus were "improper." Of the 40 agreements reviewed, 11 did not appear to benefit veterans, including 21 acres of athletic facilities for Brentwood Schools, a Los Angeles city dog park, an American Red Cross office, a parrot sanctuary and a space in the Japanese Gardens used for plays by the Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles. Another 14 entities were operating on the campus with either an expired agreement, or no agreement on file. That category included both the Jewish War Veterans and the Twilight Brigade. However, the inspector general did not criticize those uses, stating only that the property's administration should "establish new agreements compliant with the West Los Angeles Leasing Act."

The West Los Angeles Leasing Act of 2016 requires the property to be used to meet the needs of veterans rather than the general public. For years, some of the VA's leases only provided a monetary benefit to the department but did not benefit veterans at all. At least one of the arrangements turned into a federal investigation. In early 2018, Ralph Tillman, a Veterans Affairs contract officer, pleaded guilty to felony charges for accepting nearly \$300,000 bribes from a parking lot operator who defrauded the VA of \$13 million.

How the VA decided who to evict

A list of terminated agreements provided by the VA included Twilight Brigade, the U.S. Postal Service, The American Red Cross, the Disabled American Veterans, the Association for Parrot C.A.R.E. and Vet-to-Vet, an organization that trains veterans to provide counseling to their peers. Michiko Riley, a spokesperson for VAGLAHS, said the VA reviewed third-party land uses with these organizations based on several factors.

- Did the land use principally benefit veterans?
- Was the third party complying with the terms of its land-use agreement?
- Was the third party’s use of the space the highest-value or best use for the space from the perspective of serving veterans?
- Could VA support and sustain the third party’s use of the space without undue burden on scarce hospital resources (e.g. police/security, housekeeping/grounds keeping, administrative or clinical space).

“If the answer to any of those questions for a particular use was no, VA took action to terminate it,” Riley said in an email. The Association for Parrot C.A.R.E. operated a parrot sanctuary open to veterans for therapeutic activities. The OIG report stated the association had not submitted any of the required quarterly reports on the number of veterans served by the organization as of May 2018. The agreement with the American Red Cross stated it would “prospectively provide” services to veterans but did not describe any specific service, the OIG found. The VA would not provide the specific criterion that the Twilight Brigade and the other veteran groups failed to meet.

Veterans still seeking answers

Mathew Millen, commander of the Jewish War Veterans Post 118, also been seeking answers for months. The post was given a 30-day notice to vacate in December after using a conference room for meetings for five years. The group meets on Sundays when the room is not in use, providing education and socialization for group members, Millen said. Both uses are defined as acceptable in the West Los Angeles Leasing Act. In an email to Millen, Lori Moore, the health-care systems’ contract manager, wrote that the veteran services organization did not provide direct services “exclusively or principally for Los Angeles-area veterans.” His post — consisting of about 25 veterans — used the conference room only 12 hours total per year and has donated more than \$3,000 in gifts that it delivers to patients on Christmas Day each year.

Millen said he’s been unable to find any provisions in federal regulation, the leasing act or the OIG’s report that would prevent the Jewish War Veterans from continuing to use the conference room. “I don’t understand why we’re being barred from meeting there anymore,” he said. “The reasons provided to me were nonsensical.” Millen has asked the secretary of the VA to reverse the decision, and is waiting to hear back.

[Source: Pasadena Star News | Jason Henry | February 4, 2019 ++]

VA Appeals Update 34 ► Appeals Modernization Act Now In Effect

The Veteran Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 became law on August 23, 2017 (Pub L. 115-55). It is also known as the Appeals Modernization Act. At <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2288> you can read the law in full. The new law will:

- Modernize the current claims and appeals process
- Include three review options for disagreements with decisions
- Require improved notification of VA decisions
- Provide earlier claim resolution
- Ensure you receive the earliest effective date possible

You now have three options for review of your claim:

Option 1: Higher-level Review

Your claim is reviewed by a more senior claims adjudicator and involves:

- A higher-level *de novo* review (new look) of the decision
 - No submission of new evidence allowed
- The possibility of overturning the decision based on:

- A difference of opinion
- A clear and unmistakable error

The reviewer, who identifies or learns of a duty to assist error, can return the claim to the regional office for correction. You or your representative can request an informal phone call to identify specific issues.

Option 2: A Supplemental Claim Lane

You can submit or identify new and relevant evidence to support your claim. VA will provide assistance in developing the evidence.

Option 3: Appeal Lane for Appeals to the Board

This option allows you to appeal directly to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals. You can choose between three options:

- Direct review: You have no new evidence and do not want a hearing.
- Evidence submission: You have new evidence, but do not want a hearing.
- Hearing: You have new evidence and want to testify before a Veterans Law Judge.

[Source: VA Benefits Bulletin | February 2019 ++]

VA Health Care Access Update 64 ► Fight Over Privatization to Escalate

The fight over privatizing Veterans Affairs health care is about to escalate. On 31 JAN, department officials released their first [first public draft of new rules](#) regarding which veterans will be eligible for private-sector medical appointments covered by taxpayer funds. The rules amount to a massive expansion of those outside care options, potentially adding more than 1 million more patients to community care programs. Almost immediately, critics attacked the plan as an overreach by President Donald Trump’s administration to shift patients and funding from the federal veterans medical system to the private sector, in an attempt to undermine government backed health care.

House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) has promised a public hearing on the issue in coming weeks. “Rather than working to find an equilibrium within the system by building up VA’s ability to deliver high quality care, ... today’s announcement places VA on a pathway to privatization and leads Congress to assume the worst,” he said in a statement after the rules release. But VA officials are calling those reactions nothing more than hyperbolic partisanship, and they said the new rules are designed to give veterans more options, not undermine the existing system. They also insist that the changes won’t significantly alter how the majority of veterans in America get their care, since many are satisfied with their current care plans. The small percentage who aren’t will now enjoy more choices, with the government picking up the bill. “Most Americans can already choose the health care providers that they trust, and President (Donald) Trump promised that veterans would be able to do the same,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “With VA’s new access standards, the future of the VA health care system will lie in the hands of veterans, exactly where it should be.”

The rules release is the culmination of nearly two years of debate within veterans community over how to balance promised health care with program reforms — and whether Trump supporters have pushed that line too far. Now, the disagreements are likely to get even more attention, as outside groups view the fight as a proxy for broader arguments over whether the president is interested in improving federal agencies or dismantling them. Currently, VA community care options are a collection of at least seven separate programs, each with different eligibility and payment rules. The most well-known is the VA Choice program, put in place after the department’s 2014 wait time scandal that forced the resignation of multiple top VA officials, including former Secretary Eric Shinseki.

The Choice program allows veterans who live 40 miles away from a VA medical facility or face a 30-day wait for care there to receive funding for medical appointments in their local community. Those standards have been attacked from both sides of the political aisle, as either too loose or too restrictive. Last summer, Congress passed (with overwhelming bipartisan support) the VA Mission Act, mandating that department officials consolidate the existing

community care programs and come up with new eligibility rules. Many Democrats who had warned that Trump officials were pushing for too much private-sector funding still went along with the legislation, arguing that reforms were needed regardless of the potential pitfalls. The draft rules unveiled by Wilkie at the beginning of February would echo the VA Choice limits but ease them significantly.

- For primary care and mental health medical appointments, the department is proposing a 30-minute average drive time standard and a wait-time standard at closer VA facilities of 20 days. For specialty care, the drive-time standard would increase to 60 minutes and the wait-time standard would increase to 28 days.
- Drive times would be calculated according to a private-sector program based on Microsoft's Bing search engine maps.

About 600,000 veterans enrolled in VA health care are eligible for the existing community care programs. The proposed expanded standards will raise that number to between 1.5 million and 2.1 million patients, according to the department. But VA officials are quick to note that eligibility doesn't mean guaranteed use. Last year, of all the veterans eligible for the VA Choice program, only about 36 percent used it. Less than 1 percent used those outside care appointments to cover all their medical appointment needs. Usage of all community care programs dropped about 2 percent from 2016. As a result, VA officials are saying they don't expect a significant rise even if the expanded rules are put in place.

But critics don't buy that, saying the new rules could easily amount to a rapid expansion of the program. "My concern is if (the standards) are too broad, it's going to hollow out the VA, and we're not going to be able to foot the bill," said Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee ranking member Jon Tester (D-MT). "A 30-minute drive, if you're in Scobey, Montana, that seems reasonable. But if you're in the middle of Chicago caught in traffic, does that work? We need a lot more information."

VA planners have put a price tag of more than \$21 billion over five years on the new standards. But critics have also questioned that, saying it will fall short of actual costs, especially if administration officials push the new options as preferred. "We are witnessing a deliberate attempt to drain the coffers that feed the VA and to force our veterans into the fragmented and chaotic private sector, a system that is costly, inefficient and unprepared to meet the needs of our veterans," said National Nurses United Co-president Jean Ross, in a statement. "Nurses are concerned that veterans returning from combat will find it harder to find specialized care or advocates to help them navigate through the maze of private-sector providers. If we fail to provide for our veterans, we are failing to live up the promise we made when they took the oath to serve." The group, along with federal union officials, have warned that years of bad-mouthing VA services combined with loosening eligibility rules for outside care options will lead to worse care for veterans.

Since his presidential campaign, Trump has repeatedly suggested that many veterans face onerous wait times when turning to VA for medical care, showing the need for more outside options. But earlier this month, a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that in most cases veterans' waits for appointments with VA clinics are shorter than in the private sector. In 2017, the average wait time for VA doctors was just under 18 days, compared to nearly 30 days for private sector care. In addition, veterans groups have long argued that private-sector doctors aren't always prepared to deal with combat injuries like post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury. They worry that the push for more outside appointments takes focus away from building up VA services and resources. "It will not be acceptable to veterans like our members, who use VA health care almost exclusively, to cannibalize the existing system in order to fund the expansion of this new community care program," said Carl Blake, executive director for Paralyzed Veterans of America.

When Takano holds his planned hearing on the new standards, the primary question will become whether tripling the number of veterans eligible for outside care amounts to privatizing VA's core mission to provide care for veterans. Wilkie has already argued that it does not. In his statement before the proposed rules release, he offered an early rebuttal to the privatization claims, arguing that allowing veterans more choices for their care will force VA hospitals to strive for even better service, in turn providing better care to veterans. "Our medical services must meet our veterans' needs and reinforce the trust that forms the basis for every interaction with VA," he said. "We will constantly

innovate, upgrade, and pursue ways to serve our nation’s heroes as best we can. Our new access standards are a vital part of this effort.”

But opponents say the new community care program won’t hold outside providers to the same wait-time or quality standards that VA physicians must meet. That puts VA at a disadvantage as they try to explain to veterans why their breadth of experience and associated support resources many outweigh a slightly-shorter car drive for check-ups. “The standards turn a blind eye to the quality of care veterans would receive in the private sector,” said Russell Lemle, a senior policy analyst at the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute, a frequent critic of the administration’s VA reform plans. “These standards will privatize veterans’ health care, plain and simple. They open up the floodgates for veterans to receive vouchers for private sector services. Now for the first time, dollars will follow veterans into the private sector, leaving less money and less staff available for VA facilities.”

Veterans groups have offered a mixed assessment of the rules thus far. Officials at the Veterans of Foreign Wars, like PVA, expressed serious concerns about the rules as written now. Officials at Disabled American Veterans said they have numerous unanswered questions about “whether sufficient new funding will be provided, without diverting resources from existing VA programs or modernization plans.” But AMVETS National Executive Director Joe Chenelly praised the initial draft. “The reality is VA-funded care is being placed in the hands of the veteran, and that is the right thing to do,” he said. “Many of those veterans will choose to go to a VA medical facility, while others want more freedom of choice.” But Chenelly — along with officials from Wounded Warrior Project and several other organizations — said they still have questions about the implementation, many of which were not explained to key community stakeholders before the Wednesday announcement.

Republicans on the House and Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee have largely offered support for the community care changes thus far, potentially giving VA support when their officials are summoned before those panels on Capitol Hill in coming weeks. Under rules laid out in the Mission Act, VA officials must finalize the new community care rules by the beginning of March. They’ll go into effect in June, unless lawmakers opt to block them. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | 31 January 30, 2019 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 14 FEB 2019

Baltimore, MD – A Veterans Affairs Department official steered disabled veterans to questionable schools in exchange for bribes from school officials, according to the Justice Department. **James King**, the VA official in question, on 13 FEB pleaded guilty to accepting about \$160,000 in bribes. In return, law enforcement officials say, he directed participants in VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program to Atius Technology Institute and Eelon Training Academy, generating more than \$2 million in VA revenue for the schools. Both schools were the subject of repeated complaints from veterans, who said they provided a poor-quality education, and both misled the VA about their costs and program details. Yet King pushed disabled vets in the program to attend the schools, despite these red flags and regardless of the vets’ individual interests or educational needs.

VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program provides education and career help to disabled veterans, including counselors to advise them and help paying for the education and training they need to land a good job in their chosen field. King’s co-conspirators in the bribery ring were **Albert Poawui**, Atius’ owner; **Sombo Kanneh**, one of Poawui’s employees at Atius; and **Michelle Stevens**, who owned Eelon. Atius claimed to specialize in information-technology courses, while Eelon claimed to provide digital-media training.

Poawui and Kanneh admitted in their pleas that they had struck a deal with King in which Poawui would give King 7 percent of all payments from the VA to Atius. King continued to help place veterans in Atius programs despite “repeated complaints about the poor quality of education” there, according to the DOJ news release. As part of this arrangement, Poawui and Stevens made numerous false claims to the VA about what was really going on at Atius and

Eelon. Powauw lied to the VA about the number of hours per week veterans were able to attend Atius classes, saying they were enrolled in up to 32 hours a week of class time, even though Atius only offered a maximum of six weekly class hours. Stevens made a fake attendance sheet for eight students showing they were in Eelon classes that they did not attend on specific days, even including dates on which no classes were held.

The VA was clearly suspicious of both schools, as it audited Atius and had “an ongoing investigation into Eelon following complaints by students about the poor quality of education,” according to the DoJ release. The VA’s Office of the Inspector General partnered with the FBI’s Washington Field Office for the investigation. The four participants in this scheme cost the VA \$2,217,259.44 between August 2015 and December 2017, the DoJ reported. Poawui paid King more than \$155,000 in that time period, with Stevens chipping in another \$3,000.

King pleaded guilty to charges of bribery, wire fraud and falsification of documents. He is scheduled to be sentenced on FEB. Poawui was sentenced to 70 months in prison with three years of supervised release and was also ordered to pay the VA back \$1.5 million. Kanneh was sentenced to 20 months in prison with three years of supervised release and was ordered to forfeit the \$1.5 million she helped embezzle, plus an extra \$113,227.30 in restitution. Stevens was sentenced to 30 months in prison with three years of supervised release and ordered to forfeit \$83,000 and pay the VA \$83,000. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Joshua Axelrod | February 13, 2019 ++]

*** Vets ***



Vet Small Businesses ► **New Law Offers Surplus Equipment to Vet Entrepreneurs for Free**

Scattered in warehouses throughout the country are the kinds of federal resources that can help make small businesses thrive — laptops and office furniture, construction equipment and farm tools that have been gathering dust, unused and unseen, year after year. Meanwhile, thousands of American service members are returning home from war, taking off their uniform then taking a chance: trying to scrounge up enough resources to start their own small businesses, all too often struggling to stay in the black if and when they get off the ground. Even in an era of such political gridlock, it just made no sense for these two problems to co-exist.



As of a few weeks ago, they no longer do. After both branches of Congress overwhelmingly voted for its passage in December, my **Veterans Small Business Enhancement Act** became law earlier this month, allowing veteran small business owners to acquire those pieces of equipment and personal property that the federal government no longer has any use for, effectively free of charge. A win-win, by anyone's estimation.

- Now that farmer in southern Illinois might not have to stay up at night, worried about how he'll possibly be able to pay for that generator.
- Now that veteran who returned from war and went back to school can get the computers she needs to open the doors to her very own practice.
- And now American taxpayers will no longer have to foot the bill to store all those resources that belong in office buildings and cornfields.

There's a reason veterans are twice as likely to start or lead their own companies as civilians, with roughly 10 percent of small businesses across the country run by those who've served, including 80,700 in Illinois alone. It's because no matter where they were deployed, no matter which branch they call their own, those who've worn the uniform have a kind of courage instilled in them that's impossible to root out — the type of resilience and determination that can turn a longshot idea into a smooth-running, profit-making business. Yet thanks to a number of factors, the number of veterans leading their own companies is plummeting as compared to generations past. While a staggering 49.7 percent of World War II veterans went on to run or own businesses, followed by 40 percent of Korean War veterans, just 4.5 percent of those who served after Sept. 11, 2001, had launched their own businesses as of late 2016.

We know that veterans are far more likely to hire other veterans, especially those who are struggling with the wounds of war, both visible and otherwise. So fewer vets at the helm of companies means fewer vets throughout the ranks, too. Fewer learning the ropes of an industry. Fewer climbing the ladder to the top. Fewer who, someday, might start a business of their own. Hope is that this bill will help change all that, beginning to reverse the trend of entrepreneurship among recent veterans and, in doing so, getting more of our heroes get hired and trained today so they can succeed tomorrow.

These women and men risked their lives for the rest of us overseas. It was way past time for us to pass legislation that looks out for them when they step back onto U.S. soil. So to all those veterans who own or are looking to start small businesses, this bill is for you. And all you have to do to begin laying claim to those unused items and their untapped potential is [click here](#) to contact your local state agency. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Sen. Tammy Duckworth | February 1, 2019 ++]

Concurrent Receipt Status 08 ► Restore Full Retirement Pay to All Disabled Vets

Rep. Gus Bilirakis (Fla.) introduced the "Retired Pay Restoration Act" (H.R.303), which would expand the eligibility of retirees with less than 50 percent disability rating to receive service-connected disability from VA and their full retirement pay for retirees eligible for Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments (CRDP). Currently, only CRDP disability disabled retirees with a rating of 50 percent or more are eligible for concurrent receipt. Rep. Sanford Bishop (Ga.) has also introduced comprehensive concurrent receipt reform (H.R.333) that includes disabled retirees with CRDP less than 50 percent and CRDP (Chapter 61) medically retired (less than 20 years of service).

Veterans who would like to see these bills passed are encouraged to go to the Noncommissioned Officer Association (NCOA) Call to Action at <https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/zwL5GvXQSuGByMluXionnA> to send a message to their representatives and request they support the bills. If you would like to modify or rewrite the preformatted message provided you can. [Source: NCOA | February 7, 2019 ++]

Vet Suicide Update 23 ► VA Parking Lot Trend

A new report illustrates a troubling trend of veterans committing suicide on VA hospital campuses after receiving inadequate care from individual facilities. Nineteen suicides have occurred on VA campuses from October 2017 to November 2018 — seven of them in parking lots, according to data the Washington Post obtained from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Some are worried that this is a gruesome form of protest by veterans to highlight how little help they were given in their time of need by the VA system.

On 7 FEB, the Post published an investigation into this phenomenon featuring both big-picture concerns about mental-health services offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs and stories about veterans who took their lives after attempting to get treatment from their local VA hospitals. The Post investigation focused on a few specific cases, including the February 2018 suicide of 33-year-old Marine Corps veteran Justin Miller in the Minneapolis VA hospital’s parking lot, as well as 32-year-old former Army Sgt. John Toombs, who hung himself on the grounds of a VA medical center in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, just before Thanksgiving 2016.

Both men entered the separate VA facilities seeking assistance for post-traumatic stress disorder stemming from their time in the military, among other issues. Miller killed himself after four days in the Minneapolis VA’s mental-health unit, and Toombs did the same after being kicked out of his treatment program for not following its instructions, including being 20 minutes late to pick up his medications. Most recently, 55-year-old Marine Col. Jim Turner shot himself in December 2018 outside the Bay Pines Department of Veterans Affairs while dressed in his service uniform. He left a disturbing note that investigators found close to his body: “I bet if you look at the 22 suicides a day you will see VA screwed up in 90 percent.”

There were more than 6,000 reported veteran suicides every year from 2008-16, according to the 2005-16 VA National Suicide Data Report. The same report indicated that as of 2016, the suicide rate for veterans was 1.5 times higher than for non-veteran adults. In January 2018, President Donald Trump signed an executive order to give all veterans access to mental-health services for the entire first year of their new civilian lives. The VA told the Washington Post that it prevented 233 suicide attempts in that October 2017-November 2018 window, which mainly involved VA staff stopping veterans from hurting themselves on their campuses.

The quality of care at individual VA facilities fluctuates wildly, as demonstrated by the Department of Veteran Affairs’ 2016 Quality of Care report that ranks each hospital in various categories. The one that Toombs entered in Murfreesboro happened to be one of the lowest-ranked in the entire VA system for its mental-health care. Miller’s suicide invoked an official inquiry into the failings of the Minneapolis VA system that may have led to his death. The VA Office of the Inspector General determined that the facility staff who evaluated Miller did not schedule any follow-up appointments, communicate with his family about his treatment plan and, most crucially, properly assess his access to firearms. “The VA didn’t cause his suicide,” Alissa Harrington, Miller’s sister, told the Washington Post. “But they could have done more to prevent that, and that’s just so maddening.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Joshua Axelrod | February 7, 2019 ++]

Toxic Exposure | Holloman AFB ► Groundwater Discharge Permit Violated

Holloman Air Force Base violated its state permit for groundwater discharge after toxic chemicals were found in groundwater and has yet to respond to concerns from environmental officials, the New Mexico Environment Department said 6 FEB. In a letter to U.S. Air Force Col. Joseph Campo, the department said the contamination discovered in November violates the New Mexico Water Quality Act and other regulations. A site inspection report

said groundwater below Holloman tested positive for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances at levels nearly twice the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's drinking water health advisory.

According to the EPA, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances are a group of human-made chemicals that have been in use since the 1940s. The agency says manufacturing and processing facilities, airports, and military installations that use firefighting foams are some of the main sources of the chemicals. The EPA also said on its website that exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances can lead to cancer, thyroid disorders, and low infant birth weights. State officials say the chemicals were present in aqueous film-forming foam previously used by the Air Force in firefighting. In a statement, Holloman Air Force confirmed that chemicals came from foam that was used for firefighting, which they stopped using back 2016. The Air Force also reported identifying sampling results at other locations on the base not covered by the groundwater discharge permit with pollutants over 18,000 times the EPA's drinking water health advisory.

The state's environment department is evaluating the potential uses of groundwater in the area to ensure the owners of private, agricultural and industrial wells are informed of the contamination, said state Ground Water Quality Bureau Chief Michelle Hunter. She said failure to comply with the violation notice could result in an administrative compliance order that can assess civil penalties up to \$15,000 a day for each violation. In a statement, Holloman Air Force confirmed that chemicals came from foam that was used for firefighting, which they stopped using back in 2016. The base said Air Force officials received the letter Thursday from the New Mexico Environment Department and Air Force-level subject matter experts are reviewing it.

Environment Department Secretary-designate Jim Kenney said state officials are looking at all options to respond to the contamination. "We are dismayed by the Air Force's lack of prompt response to the contamination found at Holloman and will use all avenues available to us to hold the military accountable and make affected New Mexicans whole again," Kenney said in a statement. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat, said it was "unacceptable" that the U.S. Air Force has not responded to state officials. In December, the state Environment Department issued a notice of violation to the U.S. Air Force for failing to properly address groundwater contamination at Cannon Air Force Base near Clovis. Chemicals associated with firefighting foam once used at Cannon Air Force Base were detected in groundwater on and near the military installation. [Source: The Associated Press | February, 2019 ++]

Toxic Exposure | Wurtsmith AFB Update 03 ► MDEQ on USAF Cleanup

Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson is pledging cooperation with the state of Michigan over toxic chemical pollution near a former military installation, despite a continuing dispute about cleanup responsibilities. Wilson made the promise in a letter to U.S. Sen. Gary Peters, who released it 7 FEB. Peters complained to Wilson after the Air Force told Michigan in December it wasn't bound by state standards involving chemicals known as PFAS. They are used in firefighting foam and have polluted surface and ground waters near the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Oscoda. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality says the Air Force isn't doing enough to clean it up. In her letter, Wilson said the Air Force is complying with federal law and Assistant Secretary John Henderson plans to visit the state. [Source: Los Angeles Times | Patrick McGreevy | January 29, 2019 ++]

WWII Vets 183 ► Wilson Watson | The One-Man Regiment

Within the ranks of the military, there exists a certain rivalry between those who serve on the front lines and those who serve in the rear with the gear. While all jobs contribute to putting Americans in the fight, the Marines have long prized their beloved infantry above all. In modern terms, it is referred to as the "grunt versus POG debate" with POG

referring to "persons other than grunts." In Vietnam, one might have heard the term REMF. Whatever one might call those in the rear, it would serve students of history well to hold their tongue before calling men like Army mess hall cook Wilson Watson a POG or REMF. Little would they know that they would be speaking of a former Marine who fought the Japanese Army alone for 15 minutes on Iwo Jima before the rest of his platoon caught up.



The cook serving up a healthy dose of S.O.S on a plate had previously served up violence on Iwo Jima that would lead to the deaths of 60 enemy soldiers. Yes, quite literally, the soldier cracking eggs in one war was a Medal of Honor recipient Marine in another. Wilson Watson was born in 1922 in Tuscumbia, Alabama, to Charles and Ada Watson. While they looked upon their newborn baby with adoration, little did they know he would one day earn the nickname "The One-Man Regiment." In a family with twelve children, it is likely safe to assume that Watson had to do his share of fighting growing up. He spent much of his youth working on his father's farm and was only able to complete 7 years of grade school as a result.

When his nation was thrust into the fray of World War II, Watson didn't hesitate to do his part. August of 1942 saw him at a United States Marine Corps recruiting station in Little Rock, Arkansas, where he began his journey towards a Medal of Honor Marine. He attended basic training at the United States Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego before eventually deploying overseas with his fellow Marines, ready for the fight. Although Iwo Jima was where he would earn his unique place in military history, Watson gained experience as a combat veteran elsewhere throughout the Pacific. Serving with G Company, 2nd Battalion 9th Marines, he saw action in Bougainville, Guadalcanal, and Guam. When the Marines finally hit the beaches of Iwo Jima in February of 1945 for their most iconic battle, they had no idea that a one-man regiment existed among them.

Nearly a week after the initial landings, Watson and his fellow Marines had already witnessed what level of savagery it would take to overcome the island. The Japanese were well dug in, with a zealous commitment to fight to the death. Fortunately for America, the Marines were more than ready to match their aggression. As the 26th of February dawned, Watson's squad became pinned down by enemy fortifications that poured withering fire into the Marines. Upon his own initiative, Watson rushed the first enemy pillbox alone. After pinning down the Japanese with rifle fire, he approached the opening of the pillbox and tossed in a grenade. Then, for good measure, he ran around to the back of the enclosure in anticipation of those retreating. When they arrived as expected, he cut them down with a lethal burst of fire.

Not yet done with his acts of gallantry, Watson charged into action again when his fellow Marines came under fire from some Japanese soldiers on a small hill. Watson scaled the rocky escarpment, killing every enemy that crossed his path. The Japanese, who were none too pleased with his presence, began to pepper the hill with mortars and grenades. Remarkably, Watson could be seen standing erect, gifting violence right back to the enemy the entire time. For nearly 15 minutes Watson stood alone on the fire-swept hill, although wounded multiple times by bullets and mortar fragments, holding the position until the rest of his platoon could catch up. On that hill alone, it was estimated that he had killed nearly 60 Japanese.

Thus, the legend of "the one-man regiment" was born. In the attack, he was shot seven times and was hit in the shoulder by mortar fragments. He was evacuated from Iwo Jima after he suffered a gunshot wound in the neck on March 2, 1945. On October 5, 1945, Private Wilson Watson was presented the Medal of Honor by President Harry S. Truman at the White House. Following his discharge from the Marine Corps, he enlisted in the United States Army Air Force, and then the United States Army as a Private, where for a time he served in the mundane role of mess hall cook. He eventually reached the rank of Staff Sergeant and finally retired from the military in 1966.

He was married to wife Patricia, with whom he had two children: Ricky (b. 1953) and Darlene (b. 1962). Wilson "Doug" Watson—the man that an entire Japanese garrison on Iwo Jima couldn't seem to kill eventually passed away as a local hero and legend on December 19, 1994, in Russellville, Arkansas. [Source: TWS Newsletter | January 2019 ++]

Vet Unclaimed Remains ► Killeen TX | 29 JAN 2019

Only a few days ago, it seemed that veteran **Joseph Walker** would be laid to rest in Killeen with no one in attendance. Instead, thousands arrived on 29 JAN at the Central Texas State Veterans Cemetery in Killeen to pay their respects to the Air Force veteran, producing a miles-long line of cars and delaying the ceremony by 20 minutes. Walker served in the Air Force from September 1964 to September 1968 during the Vietnam War. He died of natural causes in November at the age of 72.



The Central Texas State Veterans Cemetery first put out the call for the public to attend Walker's full military burial on 24 JAN, the same request it posts for all unaccompanied burials: "If you have the opportunity, please come out and attend. We do NOT leave veterans behind." Unlike others before, this one reached far beyond Killeen. Sen. Ted Cruz and CNN's Jake Tapper were among those who publicized the cemetery's request. It paid off. Williamson County Sheriff Robert Chody estimated 5,000 people came. "The entire cemetery grounds were full of cars," said Karina Erickson, communications director for the Texas General Land Office. "I can safely say I've never seen anything like it."

Walker's funeral was facilitated by a unit of the Texas General Land Office, a state agency headed by George P. Bush. It was the 97th one since the program's inception. The military ceremony reflects policies that were changed in 2015, Erickson said. Before then, remains of veterans who died without any surviving relatives or other ties were sometimes interred without any recognition of their military service. Citing new federal and state collaborations in handling veterans' remains, Erickson said, "All eligible Veterans are now interred with honor and dignity, regardless of where they may have found themselves in life."

Each unaccompanied burial is publicized just as Walker's was and each one has seen at least a few people in attendance. Publicizing Walker's burial didn't just draw thousands from the public — family members heard about it on the news. Speakers and those attending recognized they didn't know a lot about Walker outside of his service. But to Erickson, that's what made the turnout all the more overwhelming. "It's one of those things that does the heart good," Erickson said. Monday's military ceremony ended with a representative from the Veterans Land Board

accepting the folded flag that was used during the service. It will be held at the cemetery for 90 days; if no family or next of kin comes forward, it will be flown from the cemetery's main flagpole. [Source: The Austin American-Statesman | Abigail Rosenthal | January 29, 2019 ++]

Obit: Rosemary Mariner ► 31 JAN 2019 | One of 1st 8 Female USN Aviators

Rosemary Conatser (later Mariner), who was one of the first group of female aviators in the Navy and continued to break barriers throughout her career, died 31 JAN at the age of 65. Mariner, who retired as a captain, had ovarian cancer. In 1973, she was one of the first eight women chosen to fly Navy aircraft. After completing flight training in 1974, Mariner was designated a naval aviator and received her Wings of Gold to become the Navy's first female jet pilot, flying the A-4E/L "Skyhawk" and the A-7E "Corsair II". During her 24 years of service, Mariner logged more than 3,500 flight hours in 15 types of aircraft.



Mariner “graduated from Purdue University with a degree in aeronautics at 19. She had wanted to be a pilot since she was a child. Her father, an Air Force pilot, died in a plane crash when she was 3, according to An Encyclopedia of American Women at War. Her family moved to California and she grew up watching the planes at Miramar Naval Air Station. She washed planes and cleaned houses to earn money for flight school. In a 1982 Glamour feature, Mariner said that whether a servicemember goes into combat should reflect an individual’s ability, not gender. “In modern warfare, the emphasis is not on physical strength, but on brain power operating sophisticated weapons systems,” she said. “A machine gun is a great equalizer.”

In 1982, she became one of the first females to serve aboard a U.S. Navy warship, USS Lexington (CV-16), logging 17 carrier arrested landings and qualified as a Surface Warfare Officer. In 1990, then-Commander Mariner assumed command of Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron (VAQ-34) at Naval Air Station Pt. Mugu in California, becoming the first woman to command a Navy aviation squadron. Even after commanding an operational squadron during Operation Desert Shield, Mariner wasn’t done finding barriers to break down:

After her Navy career, she taught military history classes at the University of Tennessee and was an adviser for the Department of the Navy and media outlets. She lived in Norris, Tenn., with her husband of 40 years, Tommy Mariner, a retired Navy commander. Their daughter, Emmalee, attends Duke University. She was known for her leadership and many tributes have noted her contributions to the fight to end the ban on women in combat aviation. Tammie Jo Shults, a former Navy pilot who served under Mariner, told National Public Radio that the changes Mariner was a part of had “huge ripples of effect.”

To honor not only her achievements but also her work as an educator and mentor – to female pilots in particular – during and after her naval career, the Navy scheduled an all-female flyover during Mariner’s funeral on 2 FEB. Naval Air Force Atlantic spokesman Cmdr. Dave Hecht said the Navy had selected all female pilots, as well as one of two ground crew being female, to participate in The Missing Man Flyover which is the first all-female flyover for the service. Mariner had personally mentored some of the women involved. All of the aviators participating in the flyover are from squadrons based at Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana and will be flying F/A-18E/F “Super Hornets.” The

Missing Man Flyover is a special tribute honoring the service of aviators who have died serving their country. The maneuver features four aircraft flying above the funeral service in formation as one of the aircraft leaves the formation and climbs vertically into the heavens. [Source: USNI News | Megan Eckstein | January 31, 2019 ++]

Obit: Ruth Wheeler ► 02 FEB 2019 | Longest-Tenured VA Volunteer

Several days a week for nearly 70 years, Ruth Wheeler made her way to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical center in Leeds, assisting with a variety of tasks. Even at the age of 88, and as the longest-tenured VA volunteer in the country, Wheeler continued to have a passion for helping those who served in the military, spending each weekday at her home away from home until just a few days before her 2 FEB death.



“Every veteran was very special to her,” said Carol Booker of Hadley, Wheeler’s niece. “She always went out of her way to greet them, and they remembered her smile, and her very cheery personality. They all seemed to love her.” Whether it was seemingly mundane administrative and clerical tasks like sending out health benefit renewals, patient pre-registrations and information catalogs, running a kissing booth coinciding with Valentine’s Day week where she would hand out chocolate Hershey Kisses, or aiding in services at the chapel, Wheeler put in nearly 30,000 hours at the VA. “Whatever they had for Ruthie, she was the first to volunteer,” Booker said.

Christina Bertrand, chief of voluntary services at the VA, said a memorial for Wheeler is tentatively planned for 21 FEB “Basically, she was here for five days a week, eight hours a day, and always had a smile for everyone,” Bertrand said. Bertrand said when she and her former boss, Anne Murray, went to New Mexico three years ago, when Wheeler was receiving accolades from the U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald, they worried about the trip and how Wheeler would take to the hotel accommodations. They needn’t have been concerned, because when they got up the next morning they found Wheeler had already been in the hotel lobby getting to know other participants.

Juan Perez, claims assistant at the VA, said he misses Wheeler terribly. “We all love her. My heart broke when I heard the news,” Perez said. He said he could always depend on Wheeler to handle the work she was assigned. “She was fantastic, and I’m never going to find anyone like her,” Perez said. David Whiteley, the retired chaplain at the VA, describes Wheeler as “an all-things-for-all-people type of woman,” who was always supportive of the chapel during the more than 20 years he served in that role. “I’ll certainly miss her. It feels like we’ve lost a family member,” Whiteley said. Wheeler’s death was noted on the sign at the entrance to the facility, where it stated, “We mourn the passing of Ms. Ruth Wheeler, America’s longest-serving VA volunteer.”

Wheeler, who lived in Florence, was born in Ashfield and graduated from Sanderson Academy, later getting a degree at the Northampton Commercial College. It was while living in Shelburne Falls that she joined the American Legion Auxiliary and, with her mother, Mary, a member of the Women’s Relief Corps during World War I, and her sister, Doris, began volunteering at the VA in 1951. “It was kind of what got her up in the morning and got her going,” Booker said. Booker said Wheeler was also inspired by her father, Raymond, a World War I veteran, and her brother

James “Bud” Wheeler who served during World War I. Wheeler had relatives who served in all branches of the military. Booker herself is an Air Force veteran.

Wheeler stayed active in the American Legion Auxiliary, eventually joining the American Legion in Easthampton, where she was senior vice president of the auxiliary and attended all meetings and monthly dinners. “She was an awesome lady,” said Legion member Susan Miller. “She was very well liked, and a hard worker.” Miller said that 27 JAN, when a chili cook-off was held, Wheeler made sure to be there to help out, making it a point to tell everyone that she wouldn’t be eating any of the food. All money raised from the event supported the chapel at the VA.

Wheeler earned numerous honors for the length of her volunteer service. A day after her death she was scheduled to be honored at the Four Chaplains observance, with a Legion of Honor Humanitarian Award, given in recognition of her “lifetime commitment to selfless service and societal advancement that has demonstrably affected the quality of life in the community, state or nation, service without regard to faith or race.” Booker said two boxes filled with the awards, certificates and trophies Wheeler earned, including recognitions signed by President Barack Obama and President George W. Bush, former U.S. Sen. Scott Brown and former state Sen. Stanley Rosenberg, will be given to the VA. All these honors could be displayed at some point, Bertrand said, though she observes that Wheeler didn’t volunteer for acclaim. “She was given countless awards, but she just wanted to give back to veterans,” Bertrand said. [Source: Daily Hampshire Gazette | Scott Merzbach | February 11, 2019 ++]

Vietnam Vets [34] ► Sidney Shachnow | Legendary Special Forces Officer

Maj. Gen. Sidney Shachnow survived three years in a Nazi concentration camp, he deployed twice to the jungles of Vietnam and he was the top U.S. Army officer in Berlin at the end of the Cold War. Along the way, the general became a legendary Special Forces officer, revered by many in the close-knit community of Green Berets.

Born in Lithuania in 1934, Shachnow faced oppression in his homeland. As a 7-year-old boy, he was among thousands of Jews imprisoned in the Kovno concentration camp near Kaunas, Lithuania. For three years he endured countless brutalities in the camp and was forced to watch helplessly as almost every single one of his extended family were slaughtered. To increase his prospects of survival, young Shachnow performed heavy manual labor under harsh conditions. He narrowly escaped death only days before Kovno's gruesome "Children's Action," of March 27, 1944, when Nazi troops rounded up all children in the camp and marched them to The Ninth Fort for execution or to Auschwitz to be gassed.

"Our camp did things the old-fashioned way," he said in a speech at Elon University, in North Carolina, in 2014. "Several bulldozers would dig a ditch; people would be asked to move to the edge of the ditch. In most cases they were naked. Automatic weapons would kill them. They would fall into the ditch, some wounded and not dead, and if you were lying on the ledge, an individual would throw you into the ditch." After years of escalating brutality (in one instance a guard beat him with a shovel), his family devised an improbable but successful escape plan for him. Leaving behind his weeping parents one morning before dawn, 9-year-old Sidney hid under his Uncle Willie's long coat as the uncle, with Sidney moving in rhythm with him, walked through the gates, passing guards and a work detail that was often sent outside the ghetto. Shortly afterward, children at the camp were liquidated.

When he and his uncle reached the streets beyond the gates of the ghetto, he said, his uncle gave him a prearranged signal to emerge from under the coat and find his contact, a woman wearing a red kerchief. Following the route, he had been given, he found her and followed her to temporary safety - in a storage room of a building with a table, chairs and a toilet. Afterward, he was taken in by a Roman Catholic family and lived with them for several months. He was then reunited with his mother, who had escaped from the camp, and his younger brother, Mula, who had been smuggled to safety disguised as a girl. For a while they lived in the family's house in Kaunas with Soviet officers; the Red Army had by then taken control of Lithuania.

But fearing that the Communists would seal the country's borders after the war, Sidney left with his mother and brother on a six-month 2,000-mile trek by foot, wagon, and train through Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria before settling in Furth, Germany, near Nuremberg, in the fall of 1945. His father, who had been fighting the Germans with partisans, rejoined them, and they charted a path to the United States. To make a living in war-torn Nuremberg, Shachnow resorted to pirating black market contraband such as nylon stockings and chocolate. It was during this time that he learned to speak German. "After I finished that experience, I was very cynical about people," he said. "I didn't trust people. I thought that there is a dark side to people. If you leave things to people, they'll probably screw things up."

In 1950 the family left Germany on a Navy transport ship and arrived in Boston. Sidney, his parents, and brother settled in Salem, Mass., where relatives had preceded them to America. Sidney attended high school but dropped out in 1955 and joined the Army, despite hardly being able to speak English. He married Arlene Armstrong - a Jewish-Catholic union that his parents opposed. He later attended Officer Candidate School as a Sergeant First Class and was commissioned in 1960 as an Infantry Officer. He served with the 4th Armored Division until 1962, when he volunteered for Special Forces. He served with the 5th Special Forces Group and commanded the secretive "Detachment A," a small team of Special Forces soldiers who operated in Berlin during the Cold War and prepared for possible war with the Soviet Union. Many of its members later went on to help form Delta Force (B-52).



His status grew as Special Forces grew, rising to the rank of Major General, receiving both a masters and an honorary doctoral degree along the way. He traveled the world, from Vietnam to the Middle East, Africa, Europe, Korea and back to Germany as commander of all-American forces in Berlin when the Berlin Wall was toppled, near the end of the Soviet Union. "Here it is the very capital of fascism and the Third Reich. The very buildings and streets where they were goose-stepping and heil-Hitler and the very system that put me in the camp and killed many people," he said. "Here we are 40 some-odd years later, and I come back to be Commander of American forces in that city and a Jew on top of that. It sorts of adds insult to injury, doesn't it?"

He served 32 years in the Special Forces community. His top posts included leadership of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School and U.S. Army Special Forces Command at Fort Bragg and U.S. Army-Berlin in Germany. "Maj. Gen. Sidney Shachnow truly lived the American dream," said officials at the Special Warfare Center and School, which the general commanded from 1991 until his retirement in 1994. "He came up through the ranks from private to major general through hard work and selfless service to this nation and the men and women under his command."

While serving in Infantry, Airborne, Airmobile, and Special Forces units, he also earned degrees from the University of Nebraska and Shippensburg State College in Pennsylvania. And he received an honorary doctorate from the Harvard Executive Management Program. Shachnow was inducted as a Distinguished Member of the Special Forces Regiment in 2007. During his military career, his awards and decorations included two Distinguished Service Medals, two Silver Stars, the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, three Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts, among other honors. He also was honored with the U.S. Special Operations medal for outstanding contributions to the special operations community and is included on the honor roll in the Infantry Officers' Hall of Fame at Fort Benning, Georgia.

"Even in retirement after 39 years of service, Maj. Gen. Shachnow remained committed to the Special Forces Regiment, serving in a variety of volunteer roles and serving on a number of boards," officials said. "He continued to provide sage guidance and sound counsel to commanders throughout the enterprise, and specifically here at the Special Warfare Center and School. Shachnow authored a best-selling autobiography, "Hope and Honor," which was published in 2004. The late Col. Aaron Bank, known as the "father of the Green Berets," once called Maj. Gen. Shachnow a "determined, dedicated, dyed-in-the-wool Special Forces officer." And Bob Charest, a veteran of Detachment A who twice served under Shachnow, said the general would be remembered as one of the greatest leaders in Special Forces history. "He stood out throughout his career," Charest said. "He is quite an icon among Special Forces troops."

Maj. Gen. Shachnow, 83, who lived in Southern Pines, died Sept. 27, 2018, and is survived by his wife Arlene, four daughters and more than a dozen grandchildren. Shachnow cast a long shadow, and we will miss him dearly. "But his legacy lives on. [Source: TWS Newsletter | January 2019 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 14 FEB 2019

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 | February 14, 2018 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ► As of 14 FEB 2019

The Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is intended to serve as a one-stop resource for retirees and veterans seeking information about events such as retirement appreciation days (RAD), stand downs, veterans town hall meetings, resource fairs, free legal advice, mobile outreach services, airshows, and other beneficial community events. The events included on the schedule are obtained from military, VA, veterans service organizations and other reliable retiree/veterans related websites and resources.

The current Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is available in the following three formats. After connecting to the website, click on the appropriate state, territory or country to check for events scheduled for your area.

- HTML: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html.
- PDF: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf.
- Word: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc.

Please note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date\time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214.

Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and\or other military retiree\vetterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, Milton.Bell126@gmail.com

[Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | February 14, 2018 ++]

Veteran State Benefits ► **Illinois 2019**

The state of Illinois 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 – IL**” for an overview of the below listed veteran benefits/programs. They are available to veterans who have established residence in the state. For a more detailed explanation of each refer to <https://www.illinois.gov/veterans/Pages/default.aspx>.

- Housing
- Financial Assistance
- Employment
- Education
- Recreation
- Other State Veteran Benefits/Programs

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/illinois-state-veterans-benefits.html> | February 2019 ++]

*** 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.

Vet Benefit Fraud ► **H.R.450 | The Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act of 2019**

On 10 JAN Rep. Theodore E. Deutch (D-FL-22) introduced the Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act of 2019. The bill would, if passed, amend Chapter 63 of title 18, United States Code by adding at the end of the existing code

that whoever knowingly executes, or attempts to execute, any scheme or artifice to defraud an individual of veterans' benefits, or in connection with obtaining veteran's benefits for that individual, shall be fined under this title, imprisoned not more than 5 years, or both. The term 'veterans' benefits' means any benefit provided by Federal law for a veteran or a dependent or survivor of a veteran." The bill has already passed the House, received in the Senate, and referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.

[Source: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/450/text> | February 12, 2019 ++]

VA Child Care Subsidy Update 01 ► H.R.840/S.91 | Veterans' Access to Child Care Act

For some veterans, getting a timely appointment at a VA health care facility is not the only barrier to getting medical treatment. Many struggle with childcare issues. But a new proposal passed by the House on 8 FEB would connect veterans with that childcare, free of cost. **The Veterans' Access to Child Care Act**, introduced by Reps. Julia Brownley (D-CA) and Brian Higgins (R-NY), would greatly expand and make permanent a pilot program veterans can take advantage of when deciding how best to balance their own care and the well-being of their children and grandchildren. "The lack of affordable and convenient childcare should never be a barrier for veterans trying to access the VA healthcare they've earned and deserve," said Brownley. "This is especially important for the growing population of women veterans, who are more often taking care of young children. I look forward to continuing to work with Rep. Higgins and all of our colleagues to see this important program finally become permanent and nationwide."

Similar legislation was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) has not yet passed. Launched in 2011, the VA Childcare Pilot Program provides drop-in childcare service cost-free for qualified veterans receiving VA health care at a few participating VA sites nationwide. The program has been especially popular with women, a growing veteran population, who use the program four times that of the broader veteran community. When asked, a majority of women say that without the program, they have had to bring their children to the appointment, or cancel it, according to a VA satisfaction survey. "Treating our veterans right means removing barriers to quality care," said Higgins. "This bill gives parents and grandparents, who have served this nation, access to child care during their health and mental health appointments.

Higgins added he'd seen the success this program has had on his constituents around Buffalo and western New York. Congress has reauthorized the program four times, but unless lawmakers act again, it'll expire in October 2019. The bill would also expand the program to every VA facility in the country, leaving veteran parents one less hoop to jump through when coordinating their care.

[Source: ConnectingVets.com | Matt Saintsing | February 05, 2019 ++]

DoD/VA Concurrent Receipt Update 01 ► H.R.303 | Retired Pay Restoration Act

On January 8, 2019, Representative Gus Bilirakis (FL) reintroduced H.R. 303, the Retired Pay Restoration Act. This bill would extend concurrent receipt authority to longevity retirees with service-connected disabilities rated less than 50 percent disabling. Under current law disabled veterans with longevity retirement from active military service who are also in receipt of a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability determination of 50 percent or higher may retain both military retirement pay and their compensation. DAV strongly supports H.R. 303 as it would end the unfair policy of forcing many military longevity retirees to forfeit some of their retired pay in order to receive equal

amounts of disability compensation from the VA. This legislation is in accord with DAV Resolution No. 104 and would eliminate concurrent receipt for all longevity retirees.

Readers are requested to use the DAV editable prepared electronic letter or draft their own to urge their Congressional Representative to support and cosponsor H.R. 303. Also, for them to advise readers of their intentions to support this bill or not. This can be easily done by clicking on [Take Action](#).

[Source: DAV National Commander | Dennis Nixon | February 8, 2019 ++]

Vet Deportations Update 25 ► H.R.1078 | Repatriate Our Patriots Act

A pair of House lawmakers has reintroduced legislation that would ease the path to citizenship for immigrants who served in the Armed Forces but were later deported because of criminal activity. The “Repatriate Our Patriots Act” would also block federal officials from forcing those veteran immigrants out of the country, ensuring that they receive legal permanent residency after serving their criminal sentences. “If you are willing to put your life on the line to defend this great nation and its values, you should be able to become a U.S. citizen,” said Rep. Don Young (R-AK), one of the bill’s sponsors. “It is inexcusable that service members who risked it all to protect us would be put through the deportation process.”

Young and Rep. Vicente Gonzalez (D-TX-15) introduced the measure in the last session of Congress, but it made little progress toward passage. With Democrats now in control of the House, they’re more hopeful about possibility of momentum in that chamber, but the measure still faces long odds in the Republican-controlled Senate. The move comes amid a polarizing national debate over immigration that has already prompted a month-long partial government shutdown and accusations from the White House that critics are endangering national security by not doing enough to limit migrants from entering the United States. But the two lawmakers behind the bill argue that immigrants who served honorably in the military — but committed crimes after leaving the ranks — deserve a chance to stay in this country after serving their time in prison.

They note that combat injuries like post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury can lead to substance abuse, and even minor drug offenses can result in deportation for an immigrant going through the naturalization process. The proposal would exclude veterans convicted of violent crimes such as murder, rape, child abuse and terrorism. And it would not apply to immigrants who face serious legal trouble while still serving in the military. For veteran immigrants still going through the process of becoming American citizens, the legislation would require the Attorney General to recognize them as legal permanent residents and block any potential deportation order. For veterans already deported, it would require the Department of Homeland Security to create a new program allowing them to return to the United States as lawfully admitted permanent residents, with a chance at full citizenship.

In the last 18 years, U.S. immigration services have helped nearly 130,000 immigrants who joined the military gain American citizenship, thanks to expedited rules adopted in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. But veterans who served before that time or who failed to complete paperwork while in the military don’t enjoy the same legal protections as them. The American Civil Liberties Union estimates more than 200 U.S. military veterans have been deported in recent years, with the number steadily increasing amid the current administration’s crackdown on illegal immigration. The legislation would require the Department of Homeland Security to keep comprehensive records of veterans who are deported. It also guarantees veterans the military and veterans benefits for which they are eligible. Currently, those payouts and health care coverage are stopped when a veteran is deported.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | February 12, 2019 ++]



Navy Carrier Program Update 02 ► Surface Ship Torpedo Defense System A Failure

The US Navy has shed light on a previously highly classified project meant to protect aircraft carriers from the grave and widespread threat of torpedoes, and it's been a massive failure. Virtually every navy the US might find itself at war against can field torpedoes, or underwater self-propelled bombs that have been sinking warships for more than 100 years. US Navy aircraft carriers represent technological marvels, as they're floating airports powered by nuclear reactors. But after years of secretive tests, the US has given up on a program to protect the ships against torpedoes. The US Navy has canceled its anti-torpedo torpedo-defense system and will remove the systems from the five aircraft carriers that have them installed, the Pentagon's Office of the Director of Test and Evaluation said in a report on 5 FEB.

"In September 2018, the Navy suspended its efforts to develop the [surface ship torpedo defense] system. The Navy plans to restore all carriers to their normal configurations during maintenance availabilities" over the next four years, the report said. Essentially, the report said that over five years the program made some progress in finding and knocking down incoming torpedoes, but not enough. Data on the reliability of the systems remains either too thin or nonexistent. This leaves the US Navy's surface ships with almost no defense against a submarine's primary anti-surface weapon at a time when the service says that Russia's and China's submarine fleets have rapidly grown to pose a major threat to US ships.

The US ignored the threat of torpedoes, and now anyone with half a navy has a shot At the end of the Cold War, the US turned away from anti-submarine warfare toward a fight against surface ships. But now, Russia, China, and Iran reportedly have supercavitating torpedoes, or torpedoes that form a bubble of air around themselves as they jet through the water at hundreds of miles per hour. The new class of speedy torpedoes can't be guided, but can fire straight toward US Navy carriers that have little chance of detecting them. Torpedoes don't directly collide with a ship, but rather use an explosion to create an air bubble under the ship to bend or break the bow, sinking the ship. Other Russian torpedoes have a range of 12 miles and can zigzag to beat countermeasures when closing in on a ship.

In a combat exercise off the coast of Florida in 2015, a small French nuclear submarine, the Saphir, snuck through multiple rings of carrier-strike-group defenses and scored a simulated kill on the USS Theodore Roosevelt and half its escort ships, Reuters reported. Other US naval exercises have seen even old-fashioned, diesel-electric submarines sinking carriers. Even unsophisticated foes such as North Korea and Iran can field diesel-electric submarines and hide them in the noisy littoral waters along key US Navy transit routes.

The US has spent \$760 million on the failed system, The Drive reported. The US Navy can deploy "nixies" or noise-making decoys that the ship drags behind it to attract torpedoes, but it must detect the incoming torpedoes first. A US Navy carrier at 30 knots runs just 10 knots slower than a standard torpedo, but with a flight deck full of aircraft and personnel, pulling tight turns to dodge an incoming torpedo presents problems of its own. [Source: Business Insider | Alex Lockie | February 5, 2019 ++]

SASC Update 03 ► **Admiral Pressed on Navy's 2 Collisions**

In a tense exchange before the Senate Armed Services Committee, the four-star admiral who led the U.S. Navy's internal review into two deadly collisions in 2017 told members that while two ships had tragic accidents that year, the rest of the fleet was collision-free. Adm. Phil Davidson, now head of U.S. Pacific Command, was responding to a question from Sen. Angus King (I-ME) about warnings that readiness was slipping in the fleet, as detailed last week in an investigation by ProPublica. The report dug into the years preceding the collisions of the destroyers Fitzgerald and John S. McCain in Asia that claimed the lives of 17 sailors.



Sen. Angus King & Adm. Phil Davidson

King pressed Davidson about providing Congress with specific data regarding training and certifications of sailors prior to employment by the fleet, adding that the dual tragedies were preventable. Instead of responding to the question about providing specific data, Davidson bristled and appeared to respond to the criticisms implicit in the ProPublica article, which laid out years of reports and warnings from senior leaders about readiness. Davidson took issue with the idea that readiness issues in the fleet were kept secret, and he pointed to his testimony in 2016 that detailed funding shortfalls for readiness accounts. Then Davidson pivoted and attempted to point to places where the Navy has been successful. “These two collisions were a tragedy, there is no doubt about it,” Davidson said. “And all the senior leaders of the Navy feel a tremendous amount of accountability for it. But the fact of the matter is 280-odd other ships weren’t having collisions.”

Davidson tried to continue but was cut off by King, who told him his answer was underwhelming. “Airplanes are landing all over America, but just because they’re not crashing doesn’t mean they don’t need a high level of maintenance,” King responded. “To tell me that, that isn’t very convincing. Are you saying there were no failures that led to these collisions because there are 280 other ships that didn’t have collisions? Isn’t that the standard — no collisions?” Davidson agreed that no collisions was the standard, but added that other units had performed well in combat. “The other thing we need to remark upon is the combat performance,” Davidson continued. “We had ships in the Red Sea shooting down anti-ship cruise missiles; we’ve had extraordinary Tomahawk performance in that time frame; we had an aviation squadron shoot down a MiG aircraft in Syria.”

In another exchange with King, Davidson pointed to the Navy’s Comprehensive Review — led by Davidson — of the collisions, saying the Navy is making progress on the findings. “The Navy feels a huge amount of accountability for this,” Davidson said. “The Navy tasked me to review those two collisions, I produced a 170-page report with 58 recommendations and the Navy has been moving out on those recommendations.” King maintained that the issues were preventable. “I’m not suggesting otherwise,” King said. “What I’m suggesting — and I urge you to read that [article] — is we had a preventable problem. There were multiple warnings. It wasn’t acted upon. I want to be reassured it is being acted upon.” Davidson agreed to get data to King.

Comprehensive Review

Davidson's Comprehensive Review found that both the Japan-based 7th Fleet headquarters leadership and its ship commanders allowed training and proficiency to erode as they sought to keep ships underway to meet operational requirements. "The risks that were taken in the Western Pacific accumulated over time and did so insidiously," according to the review released Nov. 2, 2017. "The dynamic environment normalized to the point where individuals and groups of individuals could no longer recognize that the processes in place to identify, communicate and assess readiness were no longer working at the ship and headquarters level." The problems became easy to ignore because, prior to the mishaps, they were still getting the job done, the review argued.

The review also acknowledged that its surface warfare officers lacked sufficient navigation and seamanship skills, and recommended creating an "objective, standardized assessment program to periodically assess individual seamanship and navigation skills over the course of a surface warfare officer's career." Since the review, the surface force has instituted new training standards for its officers that includes more simulator time and periodic reviews throughout an officer's career. It is also constructing new simulators close to the waterfront to give bridge and combat information center watch teams more time to train together to prevent critical breakdowns in communication, such as what happened on the Fitzgerald prior to its collision.

[Source: DefenseNews | David B. Larter | February 12, 2019 ++]

USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) Update 19 ► Warning Signs Prior to the Collision

A new investigation into a deadly nighttime collision involving a U.S. Navy destroyer heading toward a secret mission in the South China Sea reveals several warning signs leading up to the tragic accident that took seven sailors' lives. ProPublica, a nonprofit that produces investigative journalism, published a series of reports this week on the destroyer Fitzgerald's June 2017 collision with a cargo ship off the coast of Japan. Titled "Fight the ship: Death and valor on a warship doomed by its own Navy," the report reveals multiple troubling mistakes made by Navy leaders, some of which were previously undisclosed. It also details courageous actions and heartbreaking choices from the ship's crew. ProPublica combed through more than 13,000 pages of investigative records and interviewed scores of Fitzgerald crew members, Navy officers and maritime experts. Here's a look at some of the report's findings:

1. Incomplete certifications.

Even as the destroyer was headed on a secret mission toward contested waters in the South China Sea, the Fitzgerald had not met its readiness requirements. "The Navy required destroyers to pass 22 certification tests to prove themselves seaworthy and battle-ready before sailing," ProPublica reported. "The Fitzgerald had passed just seven of these tests." Perhaps most troubling, according to the report, is that the Fitz "was not even qualified to conduct its chief mission, anti-ballistic missile defense."

2. There were other close calls.

As previously reported by Navy Times, the Fitzgerald had a series of near misses before the June 17, 2017, collision with a merchant vessel. The destroyer, ProPublica reported, had "maneuvered dangerously close to vessels on at least three occasions." But the incidents had gone mostly unreported. Eric Uhden, a prior-enlisted conning officer responsible for the safe movement of the ship, even told the Fitzgerald's second-in-command, Cmdr. Sean Babbitt, that there was a serious problem on the ship, ProPublica reported. "And the only way for things to get better here is for us to have a serious accident or someone to die," Uhden added.

3. A ship-wide blackout.

About a week before the collision, there was a fire aboard the Fitzgerald, according to ProPublica. It resulted in a ship-wide blackout, and the classified and unclassified email systems failed. "Officers used Gmail instead," ProPublica reported.

4. Radar problems.

Reports show that the Fitzgerald's radars weren't in full working order. Sometimes they didn't pick up nearby ships, ProPublica reported. The Fitz relied on a navigation system with 17-year-old software and since the screens didn't automatically update to show the presence of new ships, "a sailor had to punch a button a thousand times an hour" to refresh them, the report states. Perhaps more disturbing though was the belief that even if the radars had been fully functional, "it's not clear the crew knew how to operate them," ProPublica reported.

5. Ignored pleas.

The Fitzgerald was not the only tragic mishap in the Pacific in 2017. Less than two months later, the destroyer John McCain collided with an oil tanker near Singapore and 10 sailors were killed. Days after that accident, then-commander of 7th Fleet Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin was relieved of command. Now, he told ProPublica, he wants "the truth to come out." Aucoin -- who'd pleaded for more manpower, ships and training time -- told ProPublica that Navy leadership has not taken responsibility for undermining America's sea-fighting ability.

6. Crew dedication.

Despite the ship's problems, the Fitzgerald's crew responded courageously when the worst happened. Leaders helped get as many of their sailors as possible to safety, putting their own lives in danger to assist others. It was the crew's actions, the report states, that kept the Fitz afloat. "They worked in the dark, without power, without steering, without communications," the story states. "A young officer scribbled algebraic equations in a notebook to figure out how to right the listing vessel," ProPublica reported. "The crew bailed out the ship with buckets after pumps failed. As the Fitzgerald struggled to return to port, its navigational displays failed and backup batteries ran out. The ship's navigator used a handheld commercial GPS unit and paper charts to guide the ship home."

7. A commander's call.

The day before the collision, Cmdr. Bryce Benson, the ship's former commanding officer, had sailors report to duty at 6 a.m. for training. When the drills didn't wrap up until 11 p.m., Benson made a last-minute switch to his typical night orders. "Normally, Benson directed the officer of the deck to call him if the ship deviated from its planned course by more than 500 yards to avoid traffic," ProPublica reported. "But this night, Benson doubled the number to 1,000 yards, giving the officer more room to maneuver without having to wake him."

8. Possible confrontations.

One of the reasons Benson needed the rest, according to the report, is because he was concerned about the Fitz's upcoming mission. Even though it's common for COs to remain on the bridge during busy nighttime transits, Benson was worried about sailing into contested waters with territorial disputes off the coast of China, which, as ProPublica points out, "could result in confrontations with Chinese warships." That left a junior crew that had also had a long day of training in a challenging situation.

9. The crew was undermanned.

Before that mission, the Fitz had spent several months in the repair yards, and almost half of the crew had turned over, ProPublica reported. The new crew was "younger, less seasoned," the story states. That was "the highest percentage of new crew members of any destroyer in the fleet," ProPublica reported. "But naval commanders had skimped even further, cutting into the number of sailors Benson needed to keep the ship running smoothly," the story states. "The Fitzgerald had around 270 people total -- short of the 303 sailors called for by the Navy."

10. Key vacancies.

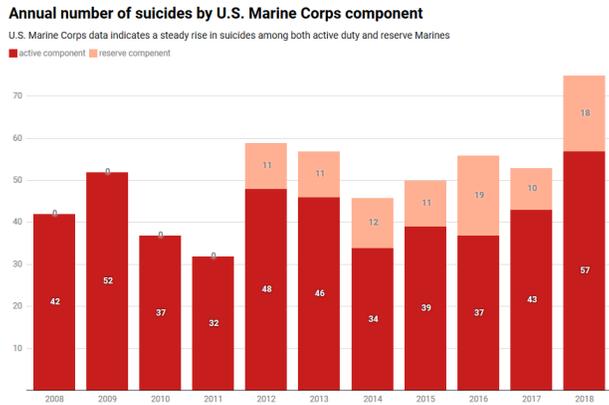
Vacancies left key positions aboard the Fitz unfilled -- despite frequent asks from its leaders to Navy higher-ups, ProPublica reported. "The senior enlisted quartermaster position -- charged with training inexperienced sailors to steer the ship -- had gone unfilled for more than two years," the report states. "The technician in charge of the ship's radar was on medical leave, with no replacement." That, they added, "made it difficult to post watches on both the starboard and port sides of the ship, a once-common Navy practice."

[Source: Military.com | Gina Harkins | February 9, 2019 ++]

USMC Suicides ► Reach Highest Level In A Decade

Every Marine who takes his or her own life is more than a number, but the numbers tell a distressing story: the Marine Corps is losing the battle against suicide. A total of 75 Marines killed themselves in 2018: 57 active-duty Marines and 18 Marines in the Selected Reserves, according to data the Marine Corps provided to Task & Purpose. As CNN first reported, 2018 saw the highest number of active-duty Marine suicides since 2009.

Of the active-duty Marines who took their own lives, 44 deaths were confirmed suicides while the remaining 13 are suspected as suicide pending notification from the Armed Forces Examiners System, the Corps data says. The suicide data for reserve component Marines does not include Individual Ready Reserve Marines, separated ore retired Marines, or attached sailors. By comparison, 43 active-duty and 10 Reserve suicides were reported in 2017, according to the Marine Corps data. In 2009, the number of active-duty Marine suicides was 52. No Reserve suicides were recorded for that year.



Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert Neller has devoted significant attention to curbing suicides. In a 25 JAN message to the Corps, Neller called suicide a "growing problem" and issued a personal appeal for Marines struggling with mental health issues, stress, and pain to seek help. "We will be there for you," Neller wrote. "Consider the lasting impact on your family, friends, and unit – none of whom will ever truly recover. Don't choose a permanent solution to a temporary problem that can be resolved with the help of your teammates. While there is no dishonor in coming up short or needing help, there is no honor in quitting. "MARINES NEVER QUIT ON EACH OTHER! For those who are struggling...our Marine Corps, our families, and our Nation need you; we can't afford to lose you."

At the start of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, suicides were widely viewed as linked to multiple combat tours, but the waning of combat operations has not seen a significant decrease in the number of Marines who kill themselves. In 2016, Neller told Marine Corps Times that the Corps was looking into the reasons why an increasing number of Marines who hadn't seen combat were taking their own lives. "Is it physical fitness? Is it their intelligence level? Is it their relationship? Is it money? Is it shame? Is it pride?" Neller said at the time. "Yes: It's everything." [Source: Task & Purpose | Jeff Schogol | January 27, 2019 ++]

Army Drones Update 03 ► Black Hornet | \$40M Contract Awarded For More

A pocket-sized helicopter drone that's been used by a select number of soldiers in real-world operations now might become standard kit across a multitude of platoons in the Army. The Army awarded a \$40 million contract to FLIR

Systems to provide the “Black Hornet” personal reconnaissance systems under the Army’s Soldier Borne Sensor program. It was first purchased by the Army in small quantities to meet recon needs of troops in Afghanistan in 2016. It weighs 18 grams, can shoot video and take snapshots with its camera, and previous versions had about a 25-minute flight time. Many mini-drones can only shoot video. The nano-drone, which has GPS-guided autopilot, will support platoon- and small unit-level surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities as part of the Soldier Borne Sensor program, according to a FLIR release.

The company states that the mini-drone “bridges the gap between aerial and ground-based sensors,” and it offers the same situational awareness as larger drones and the “threat location capabilities” of unmanned ground vehicles. “The United States Army’s selection of FLIR to provide the Black Hornet PRS in this initial delivery of the Soldier Borne Sensor program represents a key opportunity to provide soldiers in every U.S. Army squad a critical advantage on the modern battlefield,” James Cannon, president and CEO of FLIR Systems, told Army Times in mid-2018. At that time, the sensor systems program had purchased a batch of the mini-drones for testing. The recent announcement expands the program across the Army.



The exact number of drone systems \$40 million will buy was not available, but publicly reported figures suggest that could purchase as many as 1,000 drones. What wasn’t clear in the release was the version of drone that the Army bought. Army Rapid Equipping Force officials told Army Times last year that a newer version of the Black Hornet used in Iraq and Afghanistan by dismounted soldiers for the past two years will be nearly twice the size of the current drone, which weighs just 18 grams. The increased size will allow the new version to carry payloads, though officials did not disclose what types of payloads. [Source: ArmyTimes | Todd South | February 12, 2018 ++]

ACTS Database ► Expanded to Keep Tabs on all USAF Officer Ranks

The Air Force has quietly expanded a database used to keep tabs on airmen under investigation to include all of its officer ranks. The Automated Case Tracking System, or ACTS, in use by the service since 2003, previously had applied only to field-grade officers -- majors, lieutenant colonels and colonels -- in line for promotion. Last year, the Air Force expanded the database tracking to second lieutenants and above, Military.com has learned. ACTS is primarily used to record and track Inspector General investigations, which must be reported up to the service level, per Defense Department and Air Force policy, according to Air Force spokeswoman Erika Yepsen said in a recent email.

In 2012, the service expanded the database to include "all open investigations and adverse information for field grade officers, as directed by DoD, to comply with General Officer Promotions policy," she said. "The DoD policy required a 10-year look back for O-6 Colonels meeting an O-7 Brigadier General promotion board; therefore, the Air Force Inspector General determined that [its office] would collect and track open investigations and adverse information on all field grade officers [major, lieutenant colonel and colonel] to meet this requirement," she wrote.

To comply with changes to the processing of officer promotion appointments pending investigation the addressing of any other adverse information, "the collection of open investigations and adverse information was expanded for all officers, using the same database -- ACTS," Yepsen wrote. "Although the Air Force has historically done well at vetting

senior officers, we recently took steps to improve screening of junior officers by instructing all commanders to notify the local Inspector General when a commander-directed investigation, inquiry or any other investigation of any officer has been initiated and the resolution of such investigations," her email states.

ACTS primarily tracks IG investigations and dispositions, but also "administrative or adverse misconduct data not tracked by other Air Force databases, such as commander-directed investigations," Yepsen wrote. ACTS doesn't record criminal accusations and cases because those are tracked by the Air Force Office of Special Investigations and Security Forces databases, officials said. The data is available to inspectors general for review, with access based on their level. The IG at Air Force headquarters, for instance, can access all ACTS cases across the service. A major command IG may see only the ACTS cases within their respective command, while installation IGs may access cases only within their base, Yepsen said.

The policy change will not drastically alter the promotions system because withholding a promotion during an investigation is standard practice for all boards, per DoD Instruction 1320.04, "Military Officer Actions Requiring Presidential, Secretary of Defense, or Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Approval or Senate Confirmation." The centralized ACTS process "will improve the Air Force's oversight of alleged adverse information for junior officers," Yepsen said. [Source: Military.com | Oriana Pawlyk | February 8, 2019 ++]

Military Daycare ► **Critical Readiness Issue**

Defense leaders told Congress 7 FEB that if they want to improve military readiness, they have to think about bettering military daycare. "One common thread I hear at every fleet visit among sailors in all pay grades is accessibility and affordability of quality childcare," Russell Smith, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, told members of the House Appropriations Committee. "Lack of available and affordable childcare is a national issue for our generation. And for our Navy, it is a critical readiness issue." "Any investment that you can throw our way that supports childcare facilities ... we're grateful to take that." The comments came at a hearing looking at quality-of-life issues for service members, part of the annual budget process on Capitol Hill.



Improving service equipment and readiness continues to be a top priority among lawmakers looking ahead at military spending next year. But defense officials emphasized again that family support programs — and childcare in particular — are critical to keeping the force free of stress and focused on their missions. "Readiness is a three-legged stool," said Ronald Green, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. "We have unit readiness ... I have family readiness, and I have personal readiness. And every warrior tries to balance that same stool. "If we can't get the quality-of-life part right because we're funding the war-fighting part, then we're suffering on the battlefield because I can't focus." The Army alone will spend nearly \$500 million on childcare costs this year, the largest single expense in the service's family support programs.

Defense officials testified that more than 8,000 children of sailors and 3,000 children of airmen are on Defense Department waiting lists for base daycare, which they acknowledged results in significant family stress. Army and

Marine Corps leaders said they face less severe problems but still increasing demand for the services. “In some places it is a strict capacity issue. We just don’t have enough slots available,” said Kaleth Wright, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force. “But in many other places, ... we don’t have the qualified staff.” Solving that shortage may involve another lingering military quality-of-life concern: spouse unemployment.

Green and the other service officials said they are looking for ways to simplify the credentialing process for spouses with daycare experience, to get them working on military bases more quickly after family moves. For now, though, the process can still take up to year. Lawmakers promised to keep the issue in mind as the budget process progresses. That’s expected to drag on for most of the summer and fall, as Senate Republicans and House Democrats battle over military funding priorities. The president’s initial budget proposal, including his goals for family support program funding for fiscal 2020, is scheduled to be released in mid-March. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | February 8, 2019 ++]

Military Justice | Golsteyn ► **2010 Taliban Bomb Maker's Death Case**

Army Major **Mathew Golsteyn**, a decorated former Green Beret who has been charged in the death of a suspected Taliban bomber, defended his actions on 10 FEB ahead of an Article 32 hearing in March. During an interview on "Fox & Friends," Golsteyn said he is facing a minimum of life in prison or the death penalty if he is found guilty of premeditated murder — a charge he disputed vigorously. "Over these years, what the U.S. Army seems to be intent on doing is characterizing an ambush as murder. Those routine combat actions are now being characterized as murder," Golsteyn told "Fox & Friends."



Major Golsteyn's first TV interview since being charged in the death of a suspected Taliban bomb maker

Golsteyn said the Army has kept him from his legal counsel and his family by restricting him to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. "We’re seeing just how malicious and vindictive the Army is being," his wife, Julie, said in the "Fox & Friends" interview. "They’re trying to separate us as a family, keep Matt from his legal counsel, even going so far as to break us financially." The Army provided the following statement to Fox News on 10 FEB:

"On December 18, 2018, it was decided that Maj. Mathew Golsteyn will proceed to an Article 32 Preliminary Hearing, scheduled to start on Thursday, March 14, 2019, on Fort Bragg, N.C. The primary purpose of the hearing is to determine whether there is enough probable cause that Maj. Golsteyn violated Article 118 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), Premeditated Murder. Since recalled to active duty, Maj. Golsteyn has been afforded the respect his rank commands and privileges as any Soldier assigned to United States Army Special Operations Command. To protect Maj. Golsteyn's rights and maintain integrity of the legal process, it would be inappropriate to comment further on the case prior to the outcome of the Article 32 hearing."

Golsteyn, who faced years of on-and-off investigations after an incident that is said to have taken place during his 2010 deployment, was initially cleared by a military tribunal two years ago. However, the investigation into his actions was re-opened after he spoke with Fox News' Bret Baier. Golsteyn was deployed to Afghanistan with the 3rd Special Forces Group in 2010. Two Marines in his unit during that time were killed by hidden, booby-trapped explosives. Golsteyn and his men later found a suspected Taliban bomb maker nearby — though he was not on a list of targets U.S.

forces were cleared to kill, Fox News previously reported. After he was detained, Golsteyn said the man refused to talk to investigators. Under the rules of engagement, Golsteyn was ordered to release him, but he was worried that if he did so, the suspect would have targeted Afghans who were helping American soldiers. "There's limits on how long you can hold guys," he told Fox News' Bret Baier in 2016. "You realize quickly that you make things worse. It is an inevitable outcome that people who are cooperating with coalition forces, when identified, will suffer some terrible torture or be killed." Golsteyn told Fox News he killed the suspected bomb maker.

The case in December prompted a tweet from President Trump, who wrote that Golsteyn "could face the death penalty from our own government after he admitted to killing a Terrorist bomb maker while overseas." Golsteyn said that Trump's tweet gave his son a "sense of relief" because "someone was paying attention and cared about his dad."

"They're not looking for the truth. They're not seeking justice. This is wrong what they are doing to him. Matt served his country and loves his country," Julie Golsteyn said. "It's heartbreaking for me, as his wife, to watch him be dragged down by his own command." She said her husband submitted a letter on 8 FEB calling for the charges against him to be dismissed with prejudice. Golsteyn, who faced years of on-and-off investigations after an incident that is said to have taken place during his 2010 deployment, was initially cleared by a military tribunal two years ago. However, the investigation into his actions was re-opened after he spoke with Fox News' Bret Baier.

During her appearance on "FOX & Friends," his wife claimed that the Army has retaliated against him in a number of ways. "The Army has rescinded all of his leave and passes, so they are restricting him to Fort Bragg, which is separating him from our children, our family, his civilian employment, which they are desperately trying to make him lose," she told Pete Hegseth, adding that since his legal representation is in Washington, D.C., it was also hampering its defense efforts. "They also orchestrated a pay issue, so Matt will not see a check anytime in the near future."

She also told "FOX and Friends" that they will be asking for a congressional inquiry into the actions of the Army officers who are leading the case against her husband. "We would love to hear from President Trump on the matter if he can step in," she added. "I think he's been betrayed," his attorney, Phillip Stackhouse, told Fox News in December when asked how the Army has treated Golsteyn. Note: To watch the 10 FEB Fox News interview go to <https://www.foxnews.com/us/major-mathew-golsteyn-defends-himself-in-first-interview-since-being-charged-in-suspected-taliban-bomb-makers-death> and click on it. [Source: Fox News | Christopher Carbone | February 10, 2019 ++]

Military Justice | Gallagher ► 2017 Execution of Islamic State Prisoner

The U.S. Attorney's office has granted testimonial immunity to seven SEALs tied to the war crimes case against Chief Special Warfare Operator **Edward Gallagher**, who is accused of executing a wounded Islamic State prisoner in Iraq in 2017. As cooperating witnesses for a general court-martial convened by Navy Region Southwest commander Rear Adm. Yancy B. "Lurch" Lindsey, they already had been sheltered from any future criminal charges that could be brought under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. In exchange for sworn testimony against Gallagher, the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., has now extended that immunity to potential prosecution in civilian federal court. "DOJ immunity is neutral for the defense and the prosecution," said Navy Region Southwest spokesman Brian O'Rourke. "It just means that it affords witnesses the chance for them to give their testimony unfettered."

A large dossier of investigative and legal files provided to Navy Times revealed 8 FEB that several SEALs have sought both testimonial and transactional immunity. While testimonial immunity would protect these SEALs on the witness stand from being charged for crimes they admit under oath to committing, it doesn't necessarily shield them from the testimony of others who also provide evidence in a courtroom. For example, a SEAL might concede that he violated a law in his testimony but still could be prosecuted because of the sworn statements of fellow witnesses or other corroborating evidence that was obtained independently from his words in court. Transactional immunity offers

a SEAL blanket protection from future prosecution and it's routine for attorneys to seek both forms of protection for their clients.



Special Warfare Operator Chief Edward "Eddie" Gallagher at home and in Iraq in 2017

Because the SEALs are in operational teams or plan to return to deployable units, the military has asked Navy Times not to release their names. Prosecutors say that several of these SEALs have not only accused Gallagher of premeditated murder, but also could testify about a range of other alleged war crimes, including accusations that Gallagher used his sniper rifle to shoot at innocent civilians near Islamic State-controlled Mosul. Gallagher also is alleged to have threatened witnesses in an effort to cover up his misdeeds once SEAL Team 7 returned to California. Texas-based defense attorney Colby Vokey declined comment on the latest twist in the case because Gallagher's legal team had not been informed about the immunity offers from either the Attorney General's prosecutors or officials at Navy Region Southwest. "We're still expecting to hear back from DOJ on these requests for immunity," he said.

Gallagher is accused of stabbing to death a young Islamic State detainee and attempting to shoot innocent civilians with his sniper rifle near Mosul in 2017. Military prosecutors also have accused one of Gallagher's commissioned officers, Lt. Jacob "Jake" Portier, of allegedly covering up the war crimes, charges he's denied. On 12 FEB Gallagher and his attorneys return to a Naval Base San Diego courtroom in a bid to suppress evidence obtained by investigators, including his alleged confession to a troop chief petty officer. A different showdown looms there on 15 FEB, when Portier's civilian defense attorney, Jeremiah J. Sullivan III, squares off against lead Navy prosecutor Cmdr. Chris Czaplak.

In an attempt to probe what he considered an unlawful and draconian gag order instituted by military leaders to scuttle Portier's defense, Sullivan has vowed to call a slate of high-ranking witnesses from the SEAL community, including the commodore of Naval Special Warfare Group 1, Capt. Matthew D. Rosenbloom, as well as Rosenbloom's staff judge advocate, Lt. Keleigh Anderson, and NCIS special agent Joseph Warpinski, who spearheaded the law enforcement probe into the alleged war crimes. Also on his list are two potential star witnesses for the prosecution against both Portier and Gallagher — a special warfare operator first class who served as the lead petty officer in Team 7's Alpha Platoon during the 2017 deployment and a lieutenant who served as the assistant officer in charge of the SEALs near Mosul. [Source: NavyTimes | Carl Prine | February 9, 2019 ++]

Military Justice | Forbes ► **Failure to Disclose HIV+ Status Ruled Sexual Assault**

In a first for the military court system, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces upheld a conviction of sexual assault for a sailor who engaged in consensual sex with four women but failed to disclose that he was HIV-positive. The appellate court last week affirmed an earlier ruling in the case, U.S. v. Forbes. The women could not provide "meaningful, informed consent" to have sex with the sailor, Aviation Maintenance Administrationman 2nd Class Lamar Forbes, because they didn't have all the facts before consenting, the court found. Thereby, the government argued, they

were sexually assaulted. Previous military convictions for failing to disclose a positive HIV status have been for aggravated assault, failure to obey a lawful order requiring disclosure, or a lesser charge.

Following an investigation by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service in 2015, Forbes pleaded guilty to the charges and was sentenced to eight years of confinement, rank reduction to E-1 and a dishonorable discharge. He later appealed the conviction based on arguments that the sentencing was unduly harsh, and that the military judge in the original case accepted his guilty plea without explaining the nuances of a sexual assault charge under Article 120 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, according to Forbes' attorney, Robert Feldmeier.

Feldmeier said that Article 120 was never intended to make the "fraud of inducement" -- the lies people might tell before they engage in consensual sex, such as neglecting to inform someone of birth control status, marital status, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. -- a basis for a sexual assault charge. "[Forbes] did not misrepresent who he was or lie in any way about the sexual nature of the physical acts in which he engaged with the purported victims. He therefore did not commit [the type of] fraud [required for a sexual assault conviction, 'fraud of factum,']" Feldmeier said. Forbes tested positive for HIV in 2012 and was counseled to advise prospective partners that he was HIV-positive. Feldmeier said his client was on antiviral medications at the time of the sexual relationships addressed in the suit, and that his viral load at the time was "barely detectable." "He posed no transmission risk," Feldmeier said in an interview with Military.com.

In its ruling, the Navy-Marine Corps Court of Criminal Appeals noted that one of Forbes' victims had discussed getting tested but had been assured by him that "he was clean." Another victim told Forbes that she was taking medication that weakened her immune system because she had recently had a kidney transplant. But according to the court, the appellant "assured her that he 'wouldn't do anything to jeopardize that.'" "These two situations betray the callousness and deceit of the appellant and are particularly aggravating," wrote Navy Cmdr. Heather Partridge, NMCCCA judge. "Additionally, the appellant brazenly continue to have frequent, unprotected sexual intercourse with the two women despite knowing he was actively being investigated by NCIS."

Forbes has the option of appealing his conviction to the U.S. Supreme Court, a strong possibility as the ruling marks a first for the military court system, or what Partridge described as a "case of first impression." "Neither the parties nor we have identified a precedent for convicting a service member of sexual assault for failing to inform a sexual partner of his HIV status before engaging in an otherwise consensual sexual act," Partridge wrote. "That is not to say, however, that conduct such as the appellant's has gone unpunished in the military; there is much precedent for convicting service members for similar conduct." Whether Forbes will appeal, however, attorney Feldmeier couldn't say as of Friday. "My client is confined and I haven't been able to reach him as of yet," Feldmeier said. Forbes has now served more than three years of his eight-year sentence. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | February 11, 2019 ++]

Russian Military Strength Update 01 ► Filin | Makes Targets Hallucinate, Vomit

The Russian Navy reportedly has a new weapon that can disrupt the eyesight of targets as well as make them hallucinate and vomit. Russian state news agency RIA Novosti reported that a Russian military contractor has installed the weapon on two Russian warships. The weapon fires a beam similar to a strobe light that affects the target's eyesight, making it more difficult for them to aim at night. During testing, volunteers reportedly used rifles and guns to shoot targets that were protected by the weapon. The volunteers reported having trouble aiming because they couldn't see. Additionally, about half of the volunteers said they felt dizzy, nauseous and disoriented. About 20 percent of the volunteers reported experiencing hallucinations. The weapon, called the Filin, has reportedly been installed on the Admiral Gorshkov and Admiral Kasatonov, two Russian warships. The weapon is expected to be installed on more ships that are currently being built. The weapon was developed by Ruselectronics, a Russian state-owned developer of electronics and other technologies. [Source: The Hill | Michael Burke | February 4, 2019 ++]

Navy LCS Program Update 04 ► \$1.4B Wasted on Excess Helicopter Purchase

Dogged by cost overruns, design glitches and debates about the vessel’s ability to withstand modern sea battle, the Navy’s Littoral Combat Ship program has faced its share of controversy. But the Pentagon’s decision to scale back the size of the LCS fleet also led to the Navy buying more helicopters than it needs, costing taxpayers \$1.4 billion — plus ongoing charges to store the choppers — according to a report last month by the Defense Department’s Inspector General.

Initial plans drafted in 2007 called for the Navy to build 55 of the multi-mission warships but as the LCS program fell victim to delays, escalating costs and other headaches, the Pentagon winnowed the fleet to 32 vessels. And although the Navy had received only 11 littoral combat ships by early 2018, the pace for purchasing new MH-60 Seahawk helicopters for the vessels never abated, IG determined. For reasons left unexplained in the report, no one told the Navy office in charge of procuring the aircraft that the size of the LCS fleet had dropped. “There is not a formal process to notify dependent weapon system’s divisions of changes in program status,” investigators wrote. So while the service requires 473 of the MH-60R and MH-60S variants, it now has 531 of them in stock, according to the IG. “As a result, the Navy spent \$1.4 billion to procure 57 helicopters that were in storage and will spend more than \$2 million annually to store these helicopters until at least 2020 when additional LCSs are delivered,” the report states.

The Navy expects to receive the rest of its littoral combat ships in 2023 — nine years after the promised delivery date — but the "need for these helicopters will continue to be delayed if the LCS delivery schedule is delayed beyond October 2023,” according to the report. Officials eventually realized that the Navy was purchasing too many helicopters but they decided to keep buying all the birds they ordered anyway. “The Naval Air Systems Command conducted a study and determined that there would be a greater financial impact on the DoD to cancel the contract rather than purchase the additional MH-60R helicopters,” the report states.

Navy officials “expressed concern” with the IG’s finding and recommendations. “The (Deputy Director of Air Warfare) stated that although LCS was delayed, aviation made a conscious decision to continue procuring the H-60 aircraft based on the aircraft economic order quantity and expected LCS production improvements,” the report states. To mitigate the financial damage, the service plans to rotate the excess helicopters into operations every two to three years in order to reduce the accumulated flight hours across the fleet, according to the report. “The Navy will continue to keep a quantity of 57 excess MH-60 helicopters in preservation until receiving the LCSs or other ships and fielding the helicopters to operational units,” investigators wrote. This could allow the MH-60R to end its service life in 2042, with the MH-60S slated to retire in 2035. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | February 5, 2019 ++]

Military Payday Lenders Update 04: ► CFPB/DoD Financial Protections Lawsuit



A nonprofit organization wants to force the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the Defense Department to release records showing why the consumer agency pulled back on its enforcement of financial protections for service members. The nonprofit legal group Democracy Forward filed suit in federal court in the District of Columbia

Thursday, seeking to force the two federal agencies to respond to Freedom of Information Act requests asking for records concerning the rationale for, the legal analysis, and implementation of CFPB’s new policy that ended its specific monitoring of payday lenders and others to make sure they’re complying with the Military Lending Act and DoD’s rules implementing the law.

“The Trump administration is abdicating its legal and moral duty to protect military families from exploitation by predatory lenders,” said Democracy Forward Executive Director Anne Harkavy, in an announcement of the lawsuit. “That’s why we’re investigating how and why the administration is refusing to use the authority Congress gave it to police predatory lenders who profit off exploiting America’s service members and their families.”

According to Democracy Forward’s website, the organization was founded in 2017 “to help expose the rampant corruption in the Executive Branch and fight it in court on behalf of the people it hurts.” Among other things, the Military Lending Act limits interest rates that can be charged to active-duty members and their dependents to a 36 percent annual percentage rate. Last year, the CFPB stopped its regular examinations of payday lenders and others for compliance with that specific law. The consumer agency determined they didn’t have the authority to do those examinations, although they have been conducting the MLA exams for years.

Consumer advocates, military organizations, members of Congress and some defense officials expressed concern about the change, citing the need to be proactive in protecting service members from predatory lenders. With concerns that CFPB had pulled back on this authority based on an erroneous legal conclusion, Democracy Forward submitted FOIA requests to the CFPB and DoD in September, October and December seeking records related to the decision. Those requests have been denied.

On 17 JAN, CFPB submitted a legislative proposal, asking Congress for explicit authority to conduct these examinations, and strengthen its enforcement of financial protections for service members. In announcing the legislative proposal, CFPB Director Kathleen Kraninger said the bureau’s commitment to the well-being of service members “includes ensuring that lenders subject to our jurisdiction comply with the Military Lending Act so our service members and their families are provided with the protections of that law. “That’s why I have asked Congress to explicitly grant the bureau authority to conduct examinations specifically intended to review compliance with the MLA,” said Kraninger, who became director of the CFPB in December.

In an earlier interview with Military Times, Kraninger said she has heard from a number of lawmakers that this issue is important to them. “It makes perfect sense to make sure that Congress clarifies” the authority, she said. “As we’ve looked at our authority, it’s not clear in this respect.” Kraninger said CFPB examiners who monitor lenders for compliance with other laws and regulations do have the ability to highlight concerns or violations of the Military Lending Act. “If examiners see something related to the MLA, they absolutely cite it and make the company aware of it, and to the extent it needs to be taken to the next level, we have full enforcement authority when it comes the MLA,” Kraninger said. “What we’re seeking is narrow, explicit authority to do exams particularly on the MLA, to actively go in and do a concerted MLA-related exam.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | January 24, 2019 ++]

350 Ship Fleet Update 01 ► Navy May Back Off And Look At New Options

The Navy’s top officer said 1 FEB he’s rethinking the service’s previous plans to field a 355 ship fleet and expects a study with “a new number” later this year. “We want to make sure that we are moving forward in a very deliberate way — in an evidence-based way — so that we’re not counting on something that hasn’t been relatively proven,” the Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. John Richardson, told reporters at the Pentagon during an off-camera chat. “We also want to make sure we’re moving fast so that we don’t get disrupted or beaten.” Whatever the number might be — and there

are plenty of questions over what kind of hulls the Navy is looking to develop and buy — it is becoming increasingly clear the Navy is looking to make some bets on emerging autonomous and machine-learning technologies to put more unmanned ships in the water.



The Sea Hunter, an experimental unmanned submarine-hunter.

At a naval conference earlier this month, Navy officials talked up the possibilities inherent in two new unmanned programs: a medium-sized Unmanned Surface Vessel (USV) which should be about the size of the experimental 132-foot Sea Hunter launched in 2016, and a larger USV somewhere around the size of a corvette, but loaded with missile launchers. The smaller unmanned craft would spot targets for the larger ones and for the rest of the fleet, while also decoying enemy missiles away from targets with US sailors aboard. The Navy has said it wants to award a large USV contract by 2023.

Putting more unmanned vessels in the water to serve as floating pickets in front of carrier strike groups is one way to grow the fleet relatively quickly, while also saving on manning and equipping costs. But it's not clear if the Navy will consider floating rocket launchers and surveillance assets as full-fledged vessels worthy of counting toward the service's total number of hulls. While Richardson didn't offer any clues, his announcement of a new force structure assessment is significant, as the service and its allies in Congress and industry have pointed to the 355 number as the baseline of what the nation needs to confront China and Russia. Even before the Navy settled on 355, then-presidential candidate Donald Trump endorsed a 350-ship Navy based on a Heritage Foundation study.

"The 355 number came about from a number of studies," Richardson explained. "They all converged somewhere around the mid-300s in terms of numbers of platforms." It's important to note that while the admiral said "we'll get a new number" later this year, he added, "we may hold to it. We may not. The analysis is in progress." Richardson's comments come at a critical time for the Navy, as it looks to transform the size and shape of its fleet to counter the rapidly growing Chinese presence in the Pacific and Indian oceans, as well the increasingly sophisticated submarines being built by both China and Russia.

Advocates and some Navy officials have said the 355-ship goal can be reached by the early 2030s if shipbuilders pick up the pace on new construction and the Navy extends the lives of its existing fleet well past their original design parameters: amphibious ships to more than 50 years, Littoral Combat Ships for up to 35 years, and Arleigh Burke-class destroyers to 45 years, for example. But other estimates — including from the No. 2 Trump appointee in the Navy Department — extend into the 2050s. Despite misgivings from some analysts about how well big-deck aircraft carriers would survive an onslaught of Chinese missiles — including hypersonics — the Navy on 31 JAN inked a \$15.2 billion deal with Huntington Ingalls Industries-Newport News Shipbuilding to build the next two Ford-class aircraft carriers.

The Navy is looking to move past the Littoral Combat Ship program with a new frigate design, dubbed the FFG(X). That program is slated to begin production around 2022 or '23. The concept design phase for the FFG(X) is slated to go through June, with an award late this year. Several competitors have put forward mature designs. Besides Marinette and Austal upgrading their respective variants of LCS, General Dynamics' Bath Iron Works is partnering with Navantia to offer Spain's Álvaro de Bazán-class F100 frigate; Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri the Italo-French FREMM Multi-Mission Frigate; and Huntington Ingalls Industries has released artists' renderings of what it might compete, such as a militarized variant of its Coast Guard National Security Cutter.

Also the Navy looking for a Large Surface Combatant to replace its aging cruiser fleet, and is planning to award a contract by 2023. Earlier this month, Navy surface warfare director Rear Adm. Ronald Boxall told a conference that the replacement for the older Ticonderoga-class cruisers “may not be a cruiser.” He said his intent to do put a ship in the water that can bring capabilities that the current cruisers and destroyers don’t have. The big issues he is looking at are making sure the vessel has the space, weight, and electrical power to grow as technologies like command and control and directed energy mature and can be placed on more ships. [Source: Breaking Defense | Paul McLeary | February 01, 2019 ++]

Warships That Will Change The Future ► JDS Hyuga



The closest thing to an aircraft carrier that the Japanese Self Defense Forces has, the JDS Hyuga is a sight to behold. The Japanese Self Defense Force was set up by the United States after WWII in order to both break down Japan’s military might but also to ensure that the country could defend itself. The American’s won’t let the Japanese have aircraft carriers, but a helicopter carrier seems to be fine. And with constant threats from North Korea, we can understand why they want one.

The warship looks like an aircraft carrier with a flattop deck, but is not classified as an aircraft carrier. More than four helicopters can take off and land concurrently. "The ships use the helicopters on board for their primary mission of conducting anti-submarine activities. It is a 197m-long, 13,950t flat-deck vessel. The ship has a crew of 340 sailors and can only carry helicopters. As Japan was restricted under the pacifist constitution, it cannot possess offensive aircraft carriers.

Equipped with 16 mk41 vertical-launch system cells for anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles, Hyuga accommodates two 20mm Phalanx anti-missile cannons and two triple 12.75in torpedo mounts for self-defense. The helicopter carriers are powered by combined gas turbine and gas (COGAG) propulsion. They are fitted with four General Electric LM2500 gas turbines, developing 25,000hp each. The propulsion system provides a maximum speed of 30kt. More than four helicopters can take off and land concurrently.

The Hyuga has two aircraft lifts, an enclosed hangar and is able to carry up to 11 helicopters. In terms of its size, it is comparable to modern small aircraft carriers, such as Italy’s MM Giuseppe Garibaldi, Spain’s Principe de Asturias and Britain’s Invincible. Hyuga is one of the largest warships built for the JMSDF and has given Japan its first real power projection capability since 1945. The vessel could also be instrumental for disaster recovery missions in the region, prone to earthquakes, floods, tsunamis and typhoons. The new vessel was unveiled on 11 April 2009. [Source: <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/hyuga-class> | February 2, 2019 ++]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ► Baby Shit thru BAM

Every profession has its own jargon and the Navy is no exception. Since days of yore the military in general, and sailors in particular, have often had a rather pithy (dare say 'tasteless?') manner of speech. That may be changing somewhat in these politically correct times, but to Bowdlerize the sailor's language represented here would be to deny its rich history. The traditions and origins remain. While it attempted to present things with a bit of humor, if you are easily offended this may not be for you. You have been warned.

Note: 'RN' denotes Royal Navy usage. Similarly, RCN = Royal Canadian Navy, RAN = Royal Australian Navy, RM = Royal Marines, RNZN = Royal New Zealand Navy, UK = general usage in militaries of the former British Empire

Beach – Ashore, or to be put ashore. "He screwed the pooch bigtime and they beached him."

Beagle - (RN/RAN) Wardroom steward.

(On her) **Beam Ends** – Strictly speaking, when a ship has gone through 90 degrees of roll, where her decks are vertical. In such case a ship would probably capsize (roll completely over). Can be used to refer to extreme rolls, even if less than 90 degrees.

Bearing Drift – The movement, left or right, of the bearing to an object in motion relative to your platform. It is an immediate indication of risk to you—if an object has no bearing drift and range is decreasing, for example, you will collide unless one or another (or both) platforms maneuver (see CBDR). Similarly, slow bearing drift may not indicate a safe condition if the other object is close.

Belay – (1) Stop. (2) Make fast. Derived from the practice of tying a line off (making it fast) using a belaying pin. (3) Disregard, as in "belay my last."

Bells – (1) A system of marking the time aboard ship. Each bell represents half an hour, and bells are rung in pairs, so five bells in the morning watch (0630 hours, or 6:30 a.m.) would be rung as *ding-ding, ding-ding, ding*. Bells are normally rung over the IMC during working hours. (2) Speed orders to the engine room, from the days when moving the engine order telegraph rang a bell in the engine room. "Ready to answer bells" means the engine room is ready for maneuvering orders.

Bell Tapper – One who is habitually a few minutes late, especially when relieving the watch.

Beltway Bandit – A company, or an employee of same, located near Washington, DC, which serves the defense industry. Many of the employees are former military personnel or military retirees.

Benny - A treat or reward, derived from 'benefit.'

Benny Sugg – (USN) Beneficial Suggestion program, a program where personnel were rewarded for making suggestions to improve some aspect of military life, usually living conditions.

BENO Box – Patrol station in the Eastern Mediterranean in the '80s. Occupied by various Carrier Battlegroups and Amphibious Groups. The BENO Box was notorious for long on-station assignments, during which time there would "Be No Liberty, Be No Women, Be No Nothing!"

Between the Devil and The Deep Blue (Sea) – See "Devil to Pay."

BFM - Basic Flight Maneuvers.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | February 14, 2019 ++]



USS Hornet (CV-8) ► Wreck Discovered Off the Solomon Islands

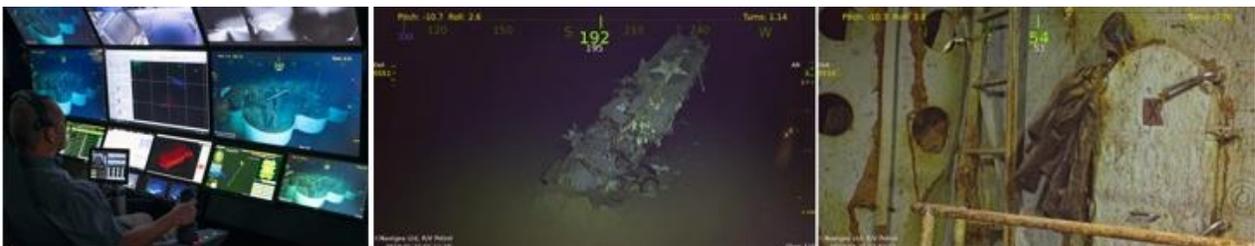
The wreck of the World War II aircraft carrier USS Hornet (CV-8) has been discovered off the Solomon Islands by a research organization set up by the late billionaire Paul Allen. The carrier was located in late January by the crew of the Research Vessel Petrel, resting on the floor of the South Pacific, according to a statement released by Allen's Vulcan organization on 13 FEB. Vulcan oversees Allen's network of organizations and initiatives, which includes R/V Petrel's research.



A smoke trail can be seen from a Japanese "Val," a type 99 shipboard bomber that struck the carrier Hornet's tower after being damaged by anti-aircraft fire just hours before the ship went under. Bursts of anti-aircraft fire fragmentation can be seen striking the water adjacent to the ship.

Researchers used information from national and naval archives to find the ship, as well as action reports from other vessels involved in the fateful Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands in 1942. The wreck was found at a depth of nearly 17,500 feet. "Positions and sightings from nine other U.S. warships in the area were plotted on a chart to generate the starting point for the search grid," explained Allen's organization in a statement. "In the case of Hornet, she was discovered on the first dive mission of Petrel's autonomous underwater vehicle and confirmed by video footage from the remotely operated vehicle."

Hornet is best known for her role in the famous Doolittle raid on Japan in April 1942. The air attack was conceived in the wake of Pearl Harbor, according to the Naval History and Heritage Command, and was the first raid on the Japanese homeland by U.S. planes. While none of the 16 B-25 bombers launched from Hornet made it to their designated landing strip in China, the raid was an important boost to U.S. morale. The aircraft carrier was also involved in the decisive battle of Midway in June 1942 when U.S. naval forces defeated a Japanese fleet.



Hornet was sunk during the brutal Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, which raged from Oct. 25 to Oct. 27, 1942. After enduring relentless attacks from Japanese bombers and torpedo planes, Hornet's crew was forced to abandon ship, Allen's organization noted. Attempts to scuttle the carrier by the U.S. Navy were unsuccessful, and it took four torpedoes launched by two Japanese destroyers to finally sink Hornet in the late evening of 26 OCT. Out of her crew of almost 2,200, 111 sailors lost their lives in the battle.

USS Enterprise, another Yorktown-class carrier, suffered extensive damage in the battle. "With the loss of Hornet and serious damage to Enterprise, the Battle of Santa Cruz was a Japanese victory, but at an extremely high cost," said retired Rear Adm. Samuel Cox, director of Naval History and Heritage Command, in a statement. "About half the Japanese aircraft engaged were shot down by greatly improved U.S. Navy anti-aircraft defenses. As a result, the Japanese carriers did not engage again in battle for almost another two years."

"We had Hornet on our list of WWII warships that we wanted to locate because of its place in history as an aircraft carrier that saw many pivotal moments in naval battles," said Robert Kraft, director of subsea operations for Vulcan, in a statement. "Paul Allen was particularly interested in historically significant and capital ships, so this mission and discovery honor his legacy." Allen, co-founder of Microsoft, died in October 2018 from complications of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The research organization established by him has located a host of historic military shipwrecks, including the wreck of the Hiei, one of the first Japanese battleships to be sunk by U.S. forces during World War II. The group has also found the wrecks of the USS Helena, the USS Lexington and the USS Juneau.

Vulcan's biggest discovery, however, came in 2017, when Allen and his team found the long-lost wreck of the USS Indianapolis in the Philippine Sea. Researchers across the globe are working to locate sites of World War II wrecks. The wreckage of a U.S. B-24 bomber, for example, was discovered in Papua New Guinea, in a separate project. The plane's wreck was found in 2018, 74 years after it was shot down during a fierce battle with Japanese forces. Last summer, a team of scientists from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California San Diego and the University of Delaware located the missing stern of the destroyer USS Abner Read, which was torn off by a Japanese mine in the remote Aleutian Islands. Seventy-one lives were lost following the incident on Aug. 18, 1943, although the crew's heroics kept the Abner Read afloat. Sailors worked quickly to shore up the damage and kept the main part of the Abner Read's hull watertight. Two nearby U.S. Navy ships towed the destroyer back to port.



Also last year, a decades-long mystery about the fate of a ship that disappeared during a World War II rescue mission was finally solved. The wreck of the Empire World, a Royal Navy tug, was discovered by coast guardsmen off the coast of Iceland. The ship sank on Nov. 10, 1944, with the loss of her 16 crew members. An extremely rare World War II Spitfire fighter plane flown by a pilot who later took part in the "Great Escape" was also recovered from a remote Norwegian mountainside last year. [Source: Fox News | James Rogers | February 12, 2019 ++]

The Battle of Dak To ► Airstrike Gone Terribly Wrong

After making three dry runs over the battlefield, the Marine Corps A-4 attack jet descended to 1,000 feet above the jungle and released two bombs. It was just past dusk on Nov. 19, 1967. For the American troops below, a vicious weeks

long fight that would eventually become known as the Battle of Dak To was about to take a horrible turn. Soldiers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade were dug in on the steep southern slope of Hill 875, fighting beside napalm fires and exposed to the guns of North Vietnamese Army shooting from tunnels nearby. Among them was Specialist Jon Wambi Cook — one of his infantry company's few surviving radio operators.

Barreling in on a shallow 10-degree angle at hundreds of miles per hour, the two bombs from the A-4 hit the ground near Cook. One was a dud. The other exploded in a huge orange fireball. Cook had seen many airstrikes before, but not like this. Instead of hitting his battalion's North Vietnamese foes, the bomb struck the branches of a lone tree along the Americans' perimeter, under which the battalion's remaining officers and noncommissioned officers on the ground had set up a command post with their radio operators. It was also a casualty-collection point where the most badly wounded soldiers were being treated by medics while awaiting medevac helicopters to take them off the hill. The bomb killed at least 20 men and wounded 10 more, including most of the remaining senior leaders and medics.

Alongside the medics was Maj. Charles Watters, a 40-year-old Catholic priest who served as the battalion's chaplain. Earlier in the battle, Watters had ventured out past the perimeter several times to rescue wounded soldiers, carrying or dragging them to safety, providing first aid and administering last rites to the dying — actions for which he was later awarded the Medal of Honor. The bomb blast killed him too. Protected by a pile of broken tree trunks that absorbed deadly fragments, Cook emerged unscathed. His radio crackled with voices. At first he thought North Vietnamese soldiers had broken through the lines and planted a bomb at the command post. "I thought it couldn't have been our guys," he said in a recent interview, "until I heard someone on the radio say: 'Stop. You're killing us.'"

The tactics for close air support in the Vietnam War had jet pilots flying several hundred miles an hour trying to put unguided "dumb bombs" beside maneuver units in the jungle. Fratricidal mishaps were a tragic feature of this manner of waging war. The errant strike at Hill 875 was one of the deadliest mistakes of its type. The New York Times recently obtained an unredacted copy of the Air Force's investigation into the incident. Written in January 1968, it offers finely detailed insights into an agonizing error from which the remains of three American soldiers have never been found, even after a mission almost half a century later to retrieve them. The report demonstrates the dangerous gamble of supporting troops in intensive ground combat before the era of so-called smart bombs, when the United States moved to almost exclusively using laser and GPS-guided bombs that made airstrikes much more accurate.

The bombs that killed Americans on Hill 875 were 250-pound Mk-81s fitted with Snakeye fins, according to the report. Designed three years earlier by the Navy's weapons center in China Lake, Calif., these fins popped out as the bomb fell away, decelerating the unguided bombs so that the low-flying aircraft that released them could pull far enough ahead to escape shrapnel and blast damage when the ordnance hit the ground. At the Battle of Dak To, the sky was crowded overhead. In addition to the Marine A-4s, a pair of Air Force A-1 Skyraiders was dropping napalm — intending both to kill North Vietnamese troops and to create fires on the ground that the pilots in faster A-4s could use as reference points for follow-on bombing runs. B-52s were approaching with plans to carpet-bomb. An AC-47 gunship was circling. The job of coordinating all these varied options and attacks fell to Capt. James E. Wrenn of the Air Force, who was flying a small Cessna propeller plane.

Lt. Col. Richard Taber, the pilot who the report indicated dropped the bombs, had flown 90 hours in combat since arriving in Vietnam roughly three months before. Taber flew with the call sign Hellborne 526-1 and commanded a Marine Corps A-4 squadron in Chu Lai. He was supposed to drop his bombs directly onto one of the napalm fires, but his bombs fell about 650 feet short and to the right, a miss the investigator labeled "a short round." It landed on Charlie Company, Cook's sister unit, which he had fallen in with amid the chaos of the fighting. How this mistake occurred remains unclear. The report said the A-4 may have approached the target area from a direction slightly off axis from what Wrenn directed, resulting in the bombs landing downslope from the intended target. But the investigation was ultimately inconclusive, declaring that "there is insufficient evidence to determine the exact cause of the short round" before blaming "improper release conditions." The investigator recommended that pilots undergo remedial training and that the investigation be closed, as it had revealed "no gross personnel errors nor evidence of equipment malfunction."

Today, Cook, who is now 72, lives in Azusa, Calif., and spends his days tending to his grandchildren nearby. Dak To, he said, is never far from his thoughts. “Not a day goes by that I don’t” think about it, Cook said. “I’ve always thought about it, but to actually share it with others, that took 35 or 37 years.” In March 2017, Cook returned to Hill 875 to help look for the remains of the three American soldiers who had never been recovered: Sgt. Donald Iandoli, Specialist Jack L. Croxdale II and Pfc. Benjamin David De Herrera. The mission did not find the missing men, and Cook surmises that their bodies were vaporized in the blast. But Cook’s participation in the search connected him with a military investigator who was also on the trip. “I mentioned that I wondered what the pilot felt, knowing that he was responsible,” Cook said. “It must have been hard for him to carry on.” The investigator’s answer surprised him. “If you read the report,” Cook recalled being told, “you might have a different opinion.”

Cook subsequently obtained a copy of the report in 2017, which, as far as he knew, had never been publicly released. A scholar who wrote about the fight for Hill 875 in the 1980s and an author who wrote a book about it in the 1990s both told *The New York Times* that they had never seen the report before, even after searching through files related to the battle in the National Archives. Upon reading it, Cook found that instead of taking responsibility, the Marine pilot’s statement to investigators criticized almost everyone but himself and his wingman. Taber blamed other pilots for being unprofessional over the radio, spoke of one pilot’s “imperious manner” and called out others for being sarcastic and impatient. He did, though, praise his own skills. “I have been dropping Snakeyes exclusively in my last 15 or 20 launches from the alert,” his statement reads. “I can recall no reported miss distance as great as 50 meters in range, and nothing approaching that in azimuth.” “Ordnance on target,” Taber added, “has almost always been reported as 100 percent.”

What the report did not show was the chaos on the ground, the horror the bomb had created for the very soldiers it was supposed to relieve. Cook can recall it all. As the initial shock of the explosion passed, he crawled in the dark to the smoking crater where the bomb hit. “That’s when you heard the moaning and the crying,” he said. “I got to the edge of the crater this bomb had made and realized it was where a lot of guys had congregated. This was where our C.P. — our command post — and all of our wounded from earlier in the day had been positioned.” Overhead, Capt. Dick Goetze of the Air Force flew his AC-47 “Spooky” gunship in a slow circle 3,000 feet above the dead and wounded troops, while one of his crew members tossed parachute flares out the back of the plane to help survivors on the ground see in the darkness. Goetze, his co-pilot and his navigator had all watched the bomb hit. “It was obvious when the explosion went off that it was in the wrong place,” he said in a recent interview. “We all said, ‘Oops, we just got the friendlies.’”

Earlier in the same flight, before the A-4’s Snakeyes struck, Goetze was ordered to leave the area by a different officer than Wrenn who was controlling the airspace above Hill 875 as night fell. Goetze was told that a number of “Buffs” — giant B-52 Stratofortress bombers — were on their way to carpet-bomb the area and that he needed to clear out. Goetze, who later retired as a two-star general, disobeyed his orders. He had seen B-52 carpet-bombing missions before, and he knew they were the wrong planes for the circumstances at Hill 875. “They’d just wipe everybody out,” he said. “So we refused to get off the target for that reason. Their target area was right on top of those guys. I got my hand slapped for that.”

As a flare from Goetze’s gunship floated close to the ground, it threw enough light sideways for Cook to peer into the crater. “All you saw was parts and pieces,” he said. He found a soldier he knew. “He said, ‘Hey, can you come get me?’” Cook said. “And as the flare got closer, I could see that he had been cut off from below the thighs. There was nothing there.” As his friend bled to death, Cook came upon a medic. “He said something about his arm,” he said. “It was stuck under him. I felt for it, and his arm was shattered from his shoulder to his elbow. There was just sinew and connective tissue connecting them.” Cook crawled from soldier to soldier. The survivors had more than wounds to worry about. They assumed their Vietnamese adversaries would launch an attack to finish them off, so they stayed vigilant. “We expected an all-out assault,” Cook said. “We had our rear covered, but it was just a matter of when they were going to start coming over the berm.” But the North Vietnamese soldiers never came.

Today the investigative report has circulated among witnesses and survivors, including Stephen Greene, a former warrant officer who flew UH-1D Iroquois helicopters in the 173rd's aviation platoon at the time of the Battle of Dak To. "The report could not show the desperation and extreme courage displayed in abundance," he said in an interview. "And it certainly did not explain what each of the survivors must live with forever."

Taber is now 89 and living in an assisted-care facility in North Carolina. In a telephone interview, he at first denied knowing anything about Dak To but eventually acknowledged that he flew over Hill 875 as Hellborne 526-1. Taber said that his air group commander, who was a friend of his from before that tour, grounded him after the attack. But two or three days later, he said, his commander ordered him back into the cockpit. "When I was restored to full flight duty, I took it as being absolved," he said. Half a century after the battle, he says he does not take responsibility for what happened. "I have no way of knowing," Taber said. "There were other aircraft on nearby targets." "I had prayed," he said, "that it was someone else." [Source: Aviation History Magazine | Robert Guttman | December 27, 2018 ++]

Military Music ► **It's A Long Way To Tipperary**

This famous world war I British anthem was first recorded by John McCormack(1884-1945) in 1914 with the VICTOR recording label. Several versions of the song were performed later by various singers. It became one of the most popular anthems sung by soldiers on the way to the Western Front during the early enthusiasm of summer 1914, the song was written by Jack Judge and Harry Williams some two years earlier in 1912. To listen to the song go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVM-tFAdADg>. Lyrics are as follows:

Up to mighty London came An Irish man one day,
All the streets were paved with gold, So everyone was gay!
Singing songs of Piccadilly, Strand, and Leicester Square,
'Til Paddy got excited and He shouted to them there:

It's a long way to Tipperary, It's a long way to go.
It's a long way to Tipperary To the sweetest girl I know!
Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square!
It's a long long way to Tipperary, But my heart's right there.

Paddy wrote a letter To his Irish Molly O',
Saying, "Should you not receive it, Write and let me know!
If I make mistakes in "spelling", Molly dear", said he,
"Remember it's the pen, that's bad, Don't lay the blame on me".

It's a long way to Tipperary, It's a long way to go.
It's a long way to Tipperary To the sweetest girl I know!
Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square,
It's a long long way to Tipperary, But my heart's right there.

Molly wrote a neat reply To Irish Paddy O',
Saying, "Mike Maloney wants To marry me, and so Leave the Strand and Piccadilly, Or you'll be to blame,
For love has fairly drove me silly, Hoping you're the same!"

It's a long way to Tipperary, It's a long way to go.
It's a long way to Tipperary To the sweetest girl I know!
Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square,
It's a long long way to Tipperary, But my heart's right there.

Extra wartime verse

That's the wrong way to tickle Mary, That's the wrong way to kiss!
Don't you know that over here, lad, They like it best like this!
Hooray pour le Francais! Farewell, Angleterre!
We didn't know the way to tickle Mary, But we learned how, over there!

[Source: Frontlines of Freedom | Denny Gillem | February 8, 2019 ++]

U.S. Army & Prohibition ► How The Army Was Impacted

On July 19, 1919, General John J. Pershing led the American contingent in London's parade to celebrate the Allied victory in World War I. Behind him rode an officer bearing a large, silk, four-starred flag, followed by his chief of staff, his British liaison, and his three aides, the newest of which was Colonel George C. Marshall. Then, eight abreast at ten-yard intervals, rode thirty American generals, followed by the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) band, "Pershing's Own," leading the "Composite Regiment", a select group of Regular Army officers and men – all six-foot or taller – chosen from the best U.S. troops in Europe.

With at least ninety American and regimental flags in their ranks, the blaze of color was breathtaking as they marched across Westminster Bridge, through the Admiralty Arch, and up the Mall past the king and queen waiting at Queen Victoria's Memorial. They conveyed a strong impression with their precision and sheer physical power, and Pershing called them "the finest body of troops I have ever seen in my life." Britain's Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill, agreed, but ruefully lamented: "**What a magnificent body of men never to take another drink.**"

Six months prior on January 16, 1919 Nebraska's lower house had voted 98-0 to ratify the 18th Amendment, the thirty-sixth state legislature to do so, thereby providing the two-thirds majority required to make Prohibition the law of the land in America. Six months after the London victory parade, the manufacture, sale, or transportation of "intoxicating liquors" would be illegal throughout the United States and its territories. Soldiers serving in the AEF were acutely aware of the changed country to which they would be returning. Three days after the amendment's ratification, Harry S. Truman, a captain in 129th Field Artillery still in France, presciently wrote to his fiancé: "It looks to me like the moonshine business is going to be pretty good in the land of the Liberty Loans and Green Trading Stamps."

One would imagine that Prohibition was a significant shock to the Army, whose history was soaked with alcohol. During the Revolutionary War, soldiers were issued four ounces of whiskey as part of their daily rations. George Washington himself had declared "the benefits arising from moderate use of strong Liquor have been experienced in all Armies, and are not to be disputed." Although Civil War camps were officially dry, taverns and sutlers (merchants who accompanied an army in order to sell provisions to the soldiers) selling illegal whiskey to soldiers thrived. Despite its profound effects on American society – and the modern romanticization of the era as one of speakeasies, flappers, and pinstriped gangsters – Prohibition had surprisingly little resonance within the U.S. Army.

There are two primary reasons for this. First, the Army had been living under various forms of prohibition long before the 18th Amendment's ratification. In 1832, during the Black Hawk War, Illinois militiamen consumed their entire two-week issue of whiskey by the campaign's second day. When Black Hawk attempted to surrender that day, the drunken militia instead attacked, and in the ensuing "Battle of Stillman's Run" Black Hawk and his roughly fifty warriors routed the 275 militiamen. Consequently, Andrew Jackson's Secretary of War Lewis Cass eliminated the whiskey ration. As the temperance movement gained increasing influence, in 1890, Congress banned "intoxicating beverages" to enlisted men at military posts located in states, territories, or counties with local prohibition laws. The Army considered beer and light wines to be non-intoxicating, however, and allowed their sale and consumption at the post commander's discretion.

Congress subsequently expanded Army prohibition with the so-called Canteen Act of 1901, which forbade "the sale of, or dealing in, beer, wine or any intoxicating liquors by any person in any post exchange or canteen or army transport or upon any premises used for military purposes by the United States." When America entered World War I, Congress extended alcoholic prohibition beyond the Army's post boundaries. The Selective Service Act of May 1917 prohibited intoxicating beverages "in or near military camps" – which the War Department implemented by establishing a prohibition zone five miles wide around each post – and made it illegal to sell to any serviceman in uniform. (The Army once again skirted the bill's intent by permitting beverages with less than 1.4 percent alcohol-by-volume). Thus, the 18th Amendment had little legal impact on the US. Army.

More importantly, perhaps, was the fact that like millions of their civilian counterparts, most officers and enlisted men simply chose to ignore the Volstead Act's enforcement of Prohibition. When General Pershing became Army Chief of Staff, each day after leaving the War Department he enjoyed staying up late with his aides, drinking, talking about his youth, and joking. Once when he and George Marshall were traveling on a train together and enjoying a bottle of Scotch, Pershing suggested they offer some to Senator George Moses in the next car. Pouring a little into a glass, they proceeded to where Pershing thought Moses was sleeping in a Pullman. "Senator Moses," whispered Pershing as he scratched a berth's closed green curtain. When there was no answer, Pershing raised the curtain, only to discover not Senator Moses, but an angry woman who cried: "What do you want?" Pershing dropped the curtain and bolted down the aisle like a frightened schoolboy, pushing Marshall ahead of him and spilling the scotch. "I had a hard time keeping out of his way," Marshall said, "because he was running up my back. But we got to the stateroom and got the door shut. Then he just sat down and laughed until he cried." Finally, wiping his eyes, Pershing noticed a little Scotch remained in the glass and mischievously suggested Marshall return and try it again. Not on your life, Marshall replied. "Get another aide."

Observance of Prohibition in the breach was also common amongst junior officers. While commanding tank battalions and living next door to one another in renovated barracks at Camp Meade, Maryland, Dwight Eisenhower and George Patton avidly partook in the new American pastime of making their own bootleg alcohol. Eisenhower distilled gin in an unused bathtub, while Patton brewed beer, storing it in a shed outside his kitchen. One summer evening there was a sudden noise outside the Pattons' barracks that sounded like a machine gun, followed by a series of soft booms. As their cook began screaming, Patton instinctively dove for cover. When they realized it was merely the beer bottles exploding from the heat, he rose, sheepishly explaining how much it had sounded like hostile fire. His wife Beatrice "laughed and laughed and called him 'her hero' and he got very red." Omar Bradley commanded an infantry battalion in the 27th Infantry Regiment in the 1920s and took advantage of the Hawaii Division's leisurely pace of duty to play golf several times a week. At the end of one round, the 33-year-old teetotaler drank his first glass of whiskey, which he liked enough to make "a habit of having a bourbon and water or two (but never more) before dinner" for the rest of his life.

This is not to say that all officers defied Prohibition, or that it was never enforced within the service. In an institution as socially conservative as the interwar Army, many officers were teetotalers for religious reasons. Alexander "Sandy" Patch – who would go on to successful corps and army commands in the Pacific and France during World War II – joined the Prince Georges County police in raiding speakeasies near Fort Washington, Maryland, where he commanded an infantry battalion. Patch had actually engineered the raids himself, believing the bootleggers were demoralizing his soldiers by selling them liquor. Patton's daughter Ruth Ellen recalls her father's commanding officer in Hawaii in the 1920s ordering Patton to bore through a wall to a neighboring Major's house to see if the neighbor was serving liquor at his New Year's party. (Patton refused, saying he would resign his commission first). Albert Wedemeyer, who as a major on the General Staff in September 1941 would draft the "Victory Plan" outlining America's grand strategy for the impending global conflict, was once fined and restricted to post for six months as a junior officer for drunkenness. Yet, such cases were the exception. As long as soldiers were ready for duty the next day and did not drink on duty, the chain of command generally condoned soldiers' drinking. Between 1926 & 1932 the entire Army averaged only eighty-nine convictions for drunkenness per year.

The risk of court-martial was sufficient, however, to make an assignment overseas more desirable. During the 1920s and 1930s, an average of 27 percent of the Army was deployed abroad at any given time, serving in “Colonial Army” outposts in Panama, Hawaii, the Philippines, and China. The latter two were especially popular for those seeking to escape Prohibition. The Philippines, despite being a U.S. territory, were exempt from Prohibition, and eighty percent of the officers on the foreign service roster selected it as their first or second preference. Manila’s Army and Navy Club was famous throughout the Orient and the Army, combining “the qualities of a hotel, casino, library, and assembly hall” while serving as the center of Manila’s social life. Membership was \$5-per-month, and a scotch and soda only cost thirty cents.

Similarly, in Tientsin, China, many of the 15th Infantry’s privates had been regimental sergeant majors during World War I, and its ranking noncommissioned officers were former captains and majors who had accepted the reduction in rank to remain on active duty until they qualified for retirement. “In the interwar army when promotions were glacially slow,” one study of U.S forces in China notes, “for men to give up their rank seems to be an excellent indicator that the China Station was perceived as good duty.” Indeed, one veteran of the regiment recalled that immediately outside the American barracks in Tientsin the “signs saying ‘Bar’ seemed to stretch into infinity.” Marshall, who served as the regiment’s executive officer from 1924-1927, noted in a letter to Pershing that: “Today is ‘pay day’ and we are up against the problem of cheap liquor and cheaper women.”

Ultimately, Prohibition failed to curb American’s thirst for alcoholic beverages, and it became obvious that criminals, not communities, were benefitting from its enforcement. Between April and December 1933, thirty-six states ratified the 21st Amendment, repealing the 18th Amendment and ending Prohibition. For the Army, Prohibition’s demise was as undramatic as its enactment fifteen years prior. Whereas Kevin Costner’s Elliott Ness in *The Untouchables* may have celebrated with a drink, the Army continued to abide by the 1901 Canteen Act and the World War I standard of 1.4 percent alcohol-by-volume on military posts. It was not until midway through World War II that the Army raised its intoxication standard to 3.2 percent alcohol, the level set by Congress a decade earlier. These measures continued in force until 1953, when it was determined that the Canteen Act of 1901 had been repealed, in effect, by 1951 amendments to the Universal Military Training and Selective Service Act. Thus, although Army troops in combat zones are still prohibited from consuming alcohol, all others are allowed to emulate George Patton’s toast at the West Point Dinner in ostensibly dry Kansas City, April 5, 1924:

*Good water is the greatest gift to set before a King,
But who am I, that I should have the best of everything?
Let monarchs gather round the pump and pass the dipper free!
Gin, whiskey, wine and even beer are good enough for me.*

[Source: Real Clear Defense | Benjamin Runkle | January 16, 2019 ++]

USS Thresher Memorial Update 01 ► Approved by Army for Arlington

The deaths of 129 men that essentially catalyzed modern submarine safety will finally be commemorated at Arlington National Cemetery, following memorial approval by the secretary of the Army. Kevin Galeaz, president of the USS Thresher ANC Memorial Foundation, announced the long-awaited recognition 4 FEB. The foundation received nearly \$60,000 in donations from USS Thresher families, former crew, submarine veterans and current and former Naval Sea Systems and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard employees. The donations will cover the cost of the memorial and ensure that funding will be in place to replace the monument in perpetuity. The Arlington National Cemetery commemorative monuments process requires six levels of approvals. Galeaz said they began in 2012.

The memorial is dedicated to the 129 men lost aboard USS Thresher (SSN-593) on April 10, 1963, during deep dive exercises 220 miles off the coast of Cape Cod. The Thresher tragedy was the largest submarine disaster ever

experienced by the United States, and led to the inception of the SUBSAFE program, which continues to protect men and women who serve on U.S. submarines. In the 55 years since the inception of SUBSAFE, only one submarine has been lost; the USS Scorpion, in what is believed to be due to a battery explosion. In the 46 years prior, the country saw a non-combat average loss rate of one submarine every three years. Thresher was built at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and commissioned in 1961.

The tragedy had a deep impact on the New England community. Approximately two dozen families of the men lost aboard the submarine still live in New Hampshire, and a number of other families live in Maine. In Kittery, the flagpole at the traffic circle stands as a Thresher memorial. "The hallowed grounds of Arlington is the most suitable location from the family perspective for this memorial," Galeaz said. "Three million people visit there a year. How better can we perpetuate the legacy of the men lost? That's what the family members want. They want the legacy of their loved ones preserved." At the 50th anniversary, Galeaz said family members were "very concerned this would never happen," and that the tragedy would simply remain a local event recognized in small memorials around the country. "They now are literally so thankful that their loved ones are going to be remembered," he said. "I served on submarines. Every time I dove, I surfaced because of Thresher. I had the opportunity of coming home to my family because of the men lost on Thresher."

Senators and members of Congress joined the push for a Thresher memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. Led by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, (D-NH) a letter of support was sent to the secretary of the Army co-signed by Sen. Maggie Hassan, (D-NH), Maine Sens. Susan Collins (R) and Angus King (I), and Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D). Former New Hampshire Congresswoman Carol Shea-Porter led a letter of support signed by 15 members of the House Armed Services Committee. The New Hampshire delegation issued statements 5 FEB in response to the Army's approval of the memorial.

"At long last, the 129 brave men who perished aboard the USS Thresher more than five decades ago will receive a memorial at Arlington National Cemetery to honor their legacy," Shaheen said. "This monument is so important for the families who lost loved ones on that fateful day, and is incredibly meaningful to the Seacoast community. I applaud the advocacy of the USS Thresher Arlington National Cemetery Memorial Foundation, who helped spearhead this effort, and I look forward to an official announcement on the Army's plan to make this project a reality."

[Source: Military.com| Hadley Barndollar | January 39, 2019 ++]

War Memorials ► National World War II Memorial



The newest and largest of the war memorials in Washington, DC, is the [National World War II Memorial](#), which was dedicated in 2004. Sitting on 7.4 acres at the end of the Reflecting Pool across from the Lincoln Memorial, the World War II Memorial features two triumphal arches (one representing the "Atlantic," the other "Pacific") and 56 granite columns inscribed with the names of the 48 states (from 1945) and eight U.S. territories. A large central fountain contributes to the bombast of the site. [See more photos](#) of the World War II Memorial.

Post WWII Photos ▶ **Expelled Germans Returning Home**



Sudeten Germans make their way to the railway station in Liberec, in former Czechoslovakia, to be transferred to Germany in this July, 1946 photo. After the end of the war, millions of German nationals and ethnic Germans were forcibly expelled from both territory Germany had annexed, and formerly German lands that were transferred to Poland and the Soviet Union. The estimated numbers of Germans involved ranges from 12 to 14 million, with a further estimate of between 500,000 and 2 million dying during the expulsion. (AP Photo/CTK)

Every Picture Tells A Story ▶ **Not A Total Loss**

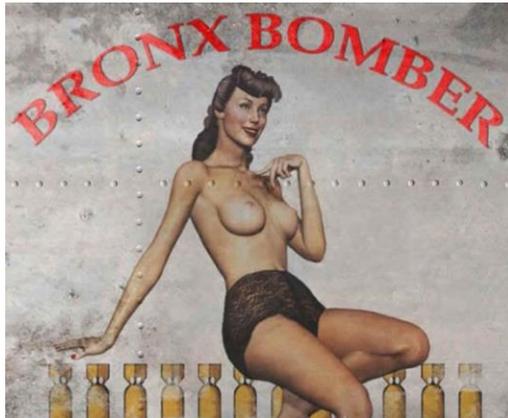


“Not a total loss Chief... we brought the prop home with us!” Master Sergeant James Smith, the Crew Chief for a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress named *Patches*, inspects the damage to “his” ship after a 379th Bomb Group raid to Pas de Calais on 8 May 1944. The prop, blown off after it was struck by flak, embedded itself in the wing and fuselage, just missing the head of Staff Sergeant Jack Guill, *Patches*’ radio operator. The pilot, 2nd Lieutenant Walter Miller of Louisiana, nursed the busted Fortress home to RAF *Kimbolton*, but we can only imagine the worries they had about damage to the wing or the possibility that the prop might fly off and strike the horizontal stabilizers.

Military History Anniversaries ▶ **15 thru 29 FEB**

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 15 thru 29 FEB**.” [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | February 2019 ++]

WWII Bomber Nose Art [24] ▶ Bronx Bomber



Medal of Honor Citations ▶ Harry R. Harr | WWII



*The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the
MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously
To*

Harry R. Harr

Rank and organization: Corporal, U.S. Army, Company D, 124th Infantry, 31st Infantry Division

Place and date: Near Maglamin, Mindanao, Philippine Islands, 5 June 1945

Entered service: East Freedom, Pa. November 1942

Born: February 22, 1921 Talala, Oklahoma

Citation

He displayed conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity. In a fierce counterattack, the Japanese closed in on his machinegun emplacement, hurling hand grenades, one of which exploded under the gun, putting it out of action and wounding two of the crew. While the remaining gunners were desperately attempting to repair their weapon another grenade landed squarely in the emplacement. Quickly realizing he could not safely throw the unexploded missile from the crowded

position, Cpl. Harr unhesitatingly covered it with his body to smother the blast. His supremely courageous act, which cost him his life, saved four of his comrades and enabled them to continue their mission.



Harr, age 24 at his death, was buried in Alto Reste Burial Park, Altoona, Pennsylvania Plot Section C, Lot 190. [Source: <https://history.army.mil/moh/wwII-g-1.html> | February 2019 ++]

*** Health Care ***



TRICARE Pharmacy Tiers ► Fourth Tier Is Planned

TRICARE is planning to add a new tier of drugs to its three-tier medication formulary - one that's made up of drugs excluded from coverage by TRICARE. Medications now fall into one of the existing tiers: Generic (Tier 1), Brand Name (Tier 2), and Generic and Brand Name (Tier 3, also known as "non-formulary"). The addition of a fourth tier (to be referred to as "Excluded" or "Not Covered"), according to officials who recently briefed MOAA on the development, "aligns TRICARE's pharmacy benefit with current industry standards among commercial health care plans." The new tier will require beneficiaries to pay the full out-of-pocket cost for the drug.

So, where did this idea come from? Last year's National Defense Authorization Act included a provision allowing the DoD Pharmacy and Therapeutics (P&T) Committee, which resides in the Defense Health Agency (DHA), to identify the drugs to be excluded from TRICARE coverage. The P&T Committee may recommend, and the head of the DHA may approve, partial or full exclusion of a drug. The Beneficiary Advisory Panel, an appointed group of stakeholders to include one member from MOAA and one from The Military Coalition who represent TRICARE beneficiaries, will also have the opportunity to provide recommendation and comments in this process.

Specific criteria for placing any drug in the fourth tier will focus on the drug's efficacy, safety, and outcome characteristics. Tier 4 drugs would include those that:

- Offer little to no relative clinical benefit from an effectiveness perspective;
- Pose a significant safety risk that may outweigh any potential clinical benefit;
- Have available alternatives; and/or
- Are considerably more expensive compared with covered alternatives.

TRICARE is developing plans to minimize the impact on beneficiaries by:

- Evaluating only a limited number of drugs per quarter for possible exclusion status;
- Identifying available alternatives;
- Creating an extended implementation period (to allow for beneficiaries to discuss alternatives with their provider); and
- Provide affected beneficiaries with a mailed letter from Express Scripts which will notify them of the change 30 to 60 days prior to the implementation, and of what steps they need to take.

Are there specific drugs ready to be slated for this change? Not at this time: The review process will determine which drugs meet the criteria outlined above. That process, which begins in February for the first drugs under consideration, can take up to six months from the time a recommendation is made before changes are implemented and beneficiaries are affected, officials said. Beneficiaries can find out all drugs TRICARE currently covers by searching the TRICARE Formulary or calling Express Scripts at (877) 363-1303.

While MOAA understands the rationale for establishing a fourth tier as an approach to formulary management, they will remain vigilant and closely examine the drugs recommended for exclusion. This commitment, and your feedback, will be key to ensuring the leaders of the Defense Health Agency are aware of the impact these changes have on their beneficiaries. [Source: The MOAA Newsletter| Kathryn Beasley | January 31, 2019 ++]

Tricare/CHAMPUS Fraud Update 20 ► Compound Drug Kickback Scheme

A Texas woman has pleaded guilty to her involvement in a multi-million dollar Tricare scheme. Of those who have already pleaded guilty in this matter and are awaiting sentencing is a medical assistant from Conway. **Jennifer Sorenson**, 41, of McKinney, Texas, on 19 DEC 2018 pleaded guilty in the United States Eastern District Court of Arkansas to conspiring to violate the Anti-Kickback statute, U.S. Attorney Cody Hiland said in an announcement. Following her guilty plea, Sorenson faces up to five years in prison and could be ordered to pay a \$250,000 fine. The Texas woman is the seventh to plead guilty in the Tricare scheme.

In October, **Brad Duke**, 44, of Little Rock, **Charlotte Leija**, 38, of Conway, **Michael "Chance" Beeman**, 48 of Maumelle and **Michael Sean Brady**, 50, of Little Rock each pleaded guilty for their separate roles in the scheme. Chris Givens, a spokesman for the Eastern District of Arkansas, said Duke orchestrated the scheme. Patient recruiters forwarded beneficiary insurance to Duke, and from there it was routed to Leija -- a local medical assistant. Leija was instructed to file the prescriptions under the doctor's name under which she worked for. In less than a year, the Tricare scheme generated more than \$10 million in compound prescriptions for more than 100 Tricare beneficiaries stretching across the nation from as far west as Chula Vista, California, to as far east as Foxborough, Massachusetts.

"Duke marketed drugs for a Mississippi compounding pharmacy, earning commission whenever affiliated doctors prescribed its drugs," Givens said. "For a time in 2014 and 2015, Tricare (our military's health insurer) paid exorbitant sums -- up to tens of thousands of dollars per patient, per month -- for certain compounded drugs. Duke sought to capitalize on this by paying one set of kickbacks to Patient Recruiters to send him Tricare beneficiary information and another set of kickbacks to Leija to rubber stamp prescriptions in their names." Duke paid his patient recruiters more than \$2 million for seeking out Tricare beneficiaries. Leija received more than \$250,000 for issuing the prescriptions.

Hiland has said his office works hard to pinpoint criminals taking advantage of other residents and will continue to do so. "Duke's scheme resulted in millions of dollars of fraud and waste to our taxpaying citizens," he said. "This office is determined to root out the criminal fraud in our nation's health care programs." More charges involving additional defendants are expected to follow. "These pleas are a reflection of Duke's greed to promote prescription for compounded drugs in a kickback scheme for his own profit," Diane Upchurch, the special agent in charge of the FBI's

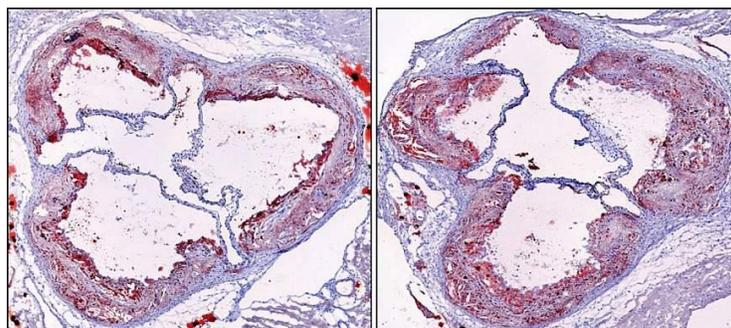
Little Rock Field Office, said. "The United States Attorney's Office, HHS-OIG, and the FBI will aggressively pursue providers who violate the law for personal gain."

Acting Special Agent in charge of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Inspector General's (HHS-OIG) Dallas Regional Office Artie DeLaneville said these types of schemes affect residents nationwide. "Any time fraudulent claims are submitted for payment, the nation's health insurance programs suffer," he said. "Along with our law enforcement partners, this office will continue the important mission of protecting the financial integrity of our nation's health care systems and bringing to justice those individuals who deliberately manipulate those systems to obtain federal dollars to which they are not entitled, especially funds designated for providing vital health care services to our military veterans." Anyone who was approached or knows someone who was approached about getting compounded prescription drugs should notify officials by email via usaare.TRICAREtips@usdoj.gov. [Source: Log Cabin Democrat, Conway, Ark. | Marisa Hicks | December 20, 2018 ++]

Heart Disease Update 04 ► How Sleep Protects Against It

Researchers say they are closer to solving the mystery of how a good night's sleep protects against heart disease. In studies using mice, they discovered a previously unknown mechanism between the brain, bone marrow, and blood vessels that appears to protect against the development of atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries — but only when sleep is healthy and sound. The study, funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), part of the National Institutes of Health, will appear in the journal *Nature*.

The discovery of this pathway underscores the importance of getting enough, quality sleep to maintain cardiovascular health and could provide new targets for fighting heart disease, the leading cause of death among women and men in the United States, the researchers said. "We've identified a mechanism by which a brain hormone controls production of inflammatory cells in the bone marrow in a way that helps protect the blood vessels from damage," explained Filip Swirski, Ph.D., the study's lead author who also is an associate professor at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston. "This anti-inflammatory mechanism is regulated by sleep, and it breaks down when you frequently disrupt sleep or experience poor sleep quality. It's a small piece of to a larger puzzle."



Plaque from the artery of a mouse model of atherosclerosis that experienced a normal sleeping pattern (left) and an image of arterial plaque from a mouse model that underwent sleep fragmentation (right). The amount of arterial plaque in the sleep-fragmented mouse is significantly larger.

Swirski noted that while other similar mechanisms may exist, the findings are nonetheless exciting. Recent research has linked sleep deficiency and certain sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea, to an increased risk of obesity, diabetes, cancer, as well as heart disease. But scientists have known little about the cellular and molecular underpinnings that could help explain the link between sleep and cardiovascular health. Poor or insufficient sleep is a major public health

problem affecting millions of people of all ages. Studies show that getting enough quality sleep at the right times is vital for health, but fewer than half of adults in the United States get the recommended seven to eight hours per day.

To learn more about the impact of this deficiency on cardiovascular disease, the researchers focused on a group of mice that were genetically engineered to develop atherosclerosis. They disrupted the sleep patterns of half the mice and allowed the other half to sleep normally. Over time, the mice with disrupted sleep developed progressively larger arterial lesions compared to the other mice. Specifically, the sleep-disrupted mice developed arterial plaques, or fatty deposits, that were up to one-third larger than the mice with normal sleep patterns. The sleep-disrupted mice also produced twice the level of certain inflammatory cells in their circulatory system than the control mice — and also lower amounts of a hypocretin, a hormone made by the brain that is thought to play a key role in regulating sleep and wake states.

The researchers also showed that sleep-deficient, atherosclerotic mice that received hypocretin supplementation tended to produce fewer inflammatory cells and develop smaller atherosclerotic lesions when compared to mice that did not get the supplementation. These results, they said, demonstrate that hypocretin loss during disrupted sleep contributes to inflammation and atherosclerosis. But they cautioned that more studies are needed, particularly in humans, to validate these findings and especially before experimenting with hypocretin therapeutically. Still, health experts say, targeting the newly discovered biological mechanism — a so-called neuro-immune axis — could be a breakthrough that one day leads to new treatments for heart disease, sleep, and other disorders.

"This appears to be the most direct demonstration yet of the molecular connections linking blood and cardiovascular risk factors to sleep health," said Michael Twery, Ph.D., director of the National Center on Sleep Disorders Research at NHLBI. Circadian biology refers to the 24-hour internal body clock that governs the expression of many genes in most every tissue and the regulation of sleep and wake cycles. "Understanding the potential impact of poor sleep and circadian health on blood cell formation and vascular disease opens new avenues for developing improved treatments," Twery added. [Source: NIH News Release | February 13, 2019 ++]

Implants ► **DARPA's New Program to Create Bioelectronic Ones to Help Heal Wounds**

The Defense Department's research wing has created a new program office to develop bioelectronic implants that stimulate tissue recovery in complex wounds, such as those suffered by troops in battle. The **Bioelectronics for Tissue Regeneration** program, which the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency announced 5 FEB, is looking for advancements in biosensors, actuators and artificial intelligence that could "dramatically improve" tissue regeneration. DARPA will host a proposers day on 1 MAR in Arlington, Virginia to provide more information to interested researchers.

The Pentagon is exploring bioelectronics as a means to improve military readiness. According to the Defense Department, 23 percent of blast injuries sustained by soldiers will not fully close, and nearly two-thirds of military trauma patients suffer a condition known as heterotopic ossification, "a painful experience that can greatly limit future mobility." Under traditional "passive" approaches to treatment, catastrophic damage to bones, skin and nerves take months to years to heal and often patients don't fully recover. DARPA's BETR program wants to connect technology to human tissue to monitor, accelerate and improve the body's recovery process.

"Wounds are living environments and the conditions change quickly as cells and tissues communicate and attempt to repair," said Paul Sheehan, BETR program manager. "An ideal treatment would sense, process and respond to these changes in the wound state and intervene to correct and speed recovery. For example, we anticipate interventions that modulate immune response, recruit necessary cell types to the wound or direct how stem cells differentiate to expedite healing."

One of the important breakthroughs BETR is hoping for is a mechanism for monitoring the body’s physiological processes in real time. Whereas the application of an adaptive treatment like antibiotic ointment is useful in treating cuts, completely wiping out natural bacteria can impair healing. “Thus, without feedback, antibiotics can be counterproductive,” Sheehan said. Bioelectronics could monitor changes in bacteria within the wound and use an available signal—optical, biochemical, bioelectric or mechanical—to monitor healing and stimulate or reduce the body’s physiological processes when necessary.

“By the conclusion of the four-year BETR program, DARPA expects researchers to demonstrate a closed-loop, adaptive system that includes sensors to assess wound state and track the body’s complex responses to interventions; biological actuators that transmit appropriate biochemical and biophysical signals precisely over space and time to influence healing; and adaptive learning approaches to process data, build models and determine interventions,” DARPA said. [Source: Nextgov | Frank Konkel |February 11, 2019 ++]

Opioid Addiction Update 05 ► MHS Prescription Drug Monitoring Program

The Military Health System Prescription Drug Monitoring Program "will allow civilian and military providers to review patient opioid prescription histories to ensure there are no overlapping opioid prescriptions that can worsen an opioid use disorder or cause an overdose," said Navy Vice Adm. Raquel C. Bono, director of the Defense Health Agency, in an announcement. Through prescription drug monitoring programs, medical providers and pharmacies can track how many controlled substance prescriptions a patient receives, and the quantity and strength of the medications. Concerns have been raised about DoD’s inability to provide this data to the states, and to get data from the states, in ongoing efforts to battle the nationwide opioid addiction crisis.



Defense Health Agency officials are negotiating agreements with the states to begin the process for sharing prescription data; nine states and territories have signed. The intent is to have all states connect to the network in the near future, according to an announcement from the Defense Health Agency. DoD began sharing its controlled substance prescription information through the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy’s Prescription Monitoring Program Interconnect System on 20 DEC. This system allows civilian providers to see information for patients who received their controlled substance medications at a military hospital, clinic or pharmacy.

Lawmakers included a provision in the fiscal 2019 National Defense Authorization Act that required DoD to set up the Military Health System Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, comparable to drug monitoring programs operated by the states. It was a challenge to share the data previously because of operational security, officials said. In her statement, Bono thanked Congress for giving DoD the tool to help protect its patients from the dangers of opioid disorders. The monitoring program “will give the Military Health System and civilian sector alike a powerful tool for opioid safety that also meets our unique requirements for operational security,” she said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | February 8, 2019 ++]

Liver Disease Update 02 ► Y-90 Radioembolization | Hepatitis C Tumor Treatment

The liver is one of the body’s most important organs. It performs various critical functions to keep the body free of toxins and harmful substances. Unfortunately, some Veterans have Hepatitis C virus, a damaging liver infection, as the result of various exposures during their military service. In addition, these same Veterans are counted among the 42,000 Americans that are diagnosed with liver cancer and related tumors each year because of Hepatitis C. Thankfully, VA North Texas’ interventional radiology team is giving its affected patients an opportunity to eliminate these tumors with a procedure that can have them home and resting the very same day.

Y-90 Radioembolization is a minimally invasive procedure to treat and eliminate liver tumors without surgery. Tiny glass or resin beads filled with the radioactive isotope Yttrium-90 are placed inside the blood vessels that feed a tumor. This blocks the supply of blood to the cancer cells and delivers a high dose of radiation to the tumor while sparing normal tissue. It can help extend the lives of patients with inoperable tumors and improve their quality of life. The interventional radiology and nuclear medicine teams work together to make this all possible. Nuclear medicine has a critical role in calculating the correct Y-90 dose for the patient, handling of the isotope, and the overall procedure safety.

“Y-90 is very good at treating the larger tumors and it’s better than anything else available,” said Dr. Jorge Lopez, interventional radiologist at VA North Texas. “Y-90 is an amazing outpatient procedure. The patient goes home that day, compared with surgery, where you may be in the hospital three to five days with a few months of recovery.” During a pre-screening, the patient gets an ultrasound on their liver and if there is something suspicious, they get an MRI or CAT scan to find the tumor. “We have many patients with hepatitis C and a certain number of those will develop cirrhosis,” said Dr. Gordan Butler, VA North Texas, an interventional radiologist. “A lot of time tumors are found early because of the screening program, and sometimes there are many tumors, or they are large, so one way to treat those patients is with Y-90.”

The radiation from Y-90 continually decreases over a two-week period and disappears after 30 days. The tiny microspheres remain in the liver without causing any problems. Y-90 offers VA North Texas patients a minimally-invasive way to prolong their quality of life and get them back to their families, friends and daily routines in a very short amount of time. For VA North Texas interventional radiologists, the procedure offers greater opportunity to blend technology and care. “The mission of the VA is to repay a promise made to the Veterans by providing exceptional healthcare services,” said Lopez. “This is one of the areas where we deliver that exceptional care.” [Source: Vantage Point | February 8, 2019 ++]

Snow Shoveling ► Ways to Clear Snow Safely Without Hurting Yourself

Mother Nature has spoken and the winter storm has arrived. Now it’s time for the hard part: clearing a driveway or sidewalk covered in snow. Depending on the temperature and amount of snow to be moved, such a task can be daunting, and without proper precautions, painful as well. There are, however, ways to clear snow safely.

According to Army Col. Cynthia Perry, a physician at Guthrie Ambulatory Health Clinic in Fort Drum, New York, an area accustomed to harsh, snowy winters, the most important consideration when preparing to shovel snow is dressing properly for the weather. Layers of clothing for warmth, non-skid shoes or boots to help prevent falls, and gloves to protect hands and fingers, are all part of the equation. “Ensure you’re wearing layers that can be removed or loosened, if needed,” said Perry. “Cold injury to extremities makes us less stable, certainly less dexterous, and

hampers coordination of fingers and feet, creating an environment for slips, trips, and falls.” Perry also advised wearing bright colors for visibility and making sure to tell someone that you will be outdoors shoveling to ensure if a mishap occurs, help is nearby.

“Snow shoveling is akin to a vigorous aerobic workout, so a person’s overall health is key to preventing injuries,” said Army Lt. Col. Michael S. Crowell, chief, Physical Therapy, Keller Army Community Hospital and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. “Someone in good physical health year-round is going to have an easier time shoveling than someone who is in poor health or not a regular exerciser.” Snow shoveling injuries can span a wide spectrum, from the nuisance of a sore back or shoulder to a life-threatening cardiac event. “Many people’s bodies are unaccustomed to the physical exertion required to shovel snow,” said Perry, “but those with heart disease risk factors, such as uncontrolled blood pressure, or people who smoke have to be extra careful.” Perry suggested that trying to carry on a conversation while shoveling snow is an effective way to check exertion level. “If you find yourself out of breath, take a break.”

According to Crowell, another group can be vulnerable to cardiac or musculoskeletal snow-shoveling injuries. “Youth doesn’t make you invincible to injury,” he said. “I’ve treated young soldiers with wrist or collarbone fractures or other injuries that could be prevented with some common sense.” The body’s ability to adjust to cold weather is another important injury risk, especially for those unaccustomed to such climates. “This is especially true for members of the military who often deploy to a variety of locations and climates,” says Crowell. “Even learning to walk on snow and ice is a skill.” Some additional expert tips: Try not to scoop the snow; push it instead. Break shoveling into multiple short segments to minimize exposure to the cold and to give the body time to rest and recover. Or perhaps the best option of all: find a willing helper to do the shoveling for you. [Source: Health.mil | February 5, 2019 ++]

Dental Care Update 02 ► How & When to Brush Children’s Teeth

February is National Children’s Dental Health Month and this year’s theme is “Brush and clean in between to build a healthy smile.” Army Col. Georgia G. Rogers, consultant to the U.S. Army Surgeon General for Dental Public Health, recommended children brush for at least two minutes, twice a day to reduce the bacteria that can cause tooth decay. Parents should begin brushing their child’s teeth as soon as they are visible in the mouth. An adult should always assist children under the age of eight years of age with tooth brushing.

“Using fluoride toothpaste the right way is the most important part of brushing. Children 2-3 years old only need a small smear or rice-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste across the brush. Use a pea-sized amount for children 3-6 years old. Brush the toothpaste on all surfaces of the teeth, then rinse the brush off and brush the tongue and roof of the mouth,” said Rogers. Army Lt. Col. Tom Stark, consultant to the U.S. Army Surgeon General for Pediatric Dentistry, said, “most small children cannot control their swallowing reflex until age six or so, to have them spit several times to remove the excess toothpaste. If small children have difficulty spitting, have them look down at the sink drain and say ‘Patoeey!’ very forcefully.” Children shouldn’t eat or drink for at least 20 minutes after brushing to let the fluoride stay on their teeth longer and fight decay. “Brushing right before bedtime is particularly important to prevent decay,” added Rogers.

Children's dental health is important because children need healthy mouths to learn to speak properly, interact socially with family and friends, and chew healthy, high fiber foods such as vegetables and fresh fruits. According to Rogers and Stark:

- Children who have poor oral health often miss more school and receive lower grades than children who don’t. This is because mouth problems like untreated tooth decay can interfere with eating and cause pain that keeps them from paying attention in school or getting the sleep that they need.

- The two most important things parents can do are clean their children's mouths twice a day, and avoid sugar. Repeated exposure to any kind of sugar, or simple starches in foods and drinks, feeds the bacteria in the mouth that cause tooth decay or cavities. Eating or drinking meals, snacks or sugary beverages such as juice more than five times a day significantly increases a child's risk for cavities.
- Consuming snacks or drinks right before bedtime is the most dangerous, because our saliva flow slows down when we sleep, so the acids produced by bacteria aren't washed away or neutralized.
- An often overlooked source of sugar among small children is liquid medication for congestion, allergies, pain, or fever. Drinking water or brushing after taking liquid medicine reduces your child's risk for cavities.

You don't need to floss a child's teeth unless they are touching each other. Most children have baby teeth with spaces in between them until about 3-4 years old, so brushing performed correctly by an adult is enough to remove food debris and plaque. Once a child's teeth start to touch together tightly, an adult will need to help them floss. Flossing is the best way to clean away bacteria and food debris between teeth that touch. Permanent molars start to appear by age six, and placing dental sealants over the grooves in the chewing surface has been shown to help prevent cavities. [Source: Health.mil | Wesley P. Elliott | February 5, 2019 ++]

Malaria Drugs Update 01 ► Lariam | Impacted Vets Plead with Panel for Thorough Review

Former troops who say they were sickened by the malaria drug Lariam, or mefloquine, and their advocates urged members of a scientific panel on 29 JAN to talk to veterans and examine their medical records when considering the potential chronic health effects of malaria medications. A National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine committee has started an 18-month review of all available scientific research on malaria drugs used to prevent the debilitating disease. Committee members are looking to see what role, if any, the medications have played in causing neurological and mental health symptoms, such as dizziness, vertigo, seizures, anxiety and psychosis, in some patients. The panel said it is looking particularly at mefloquine and a related new drug, tafenoquine, but will review all malaria medications to distinguish any relationship between the drugs and long-term health effects in adults.

At the panel's opening meeting in Washington, D.C., several veterans urged it to "look at this very, very closely." Retired Col. Timothy Dunn described himself as a hard-charging, motivated Marine in perfect health before he took mefloquine in September 2006. But the first time he took it, he experienced nightmares and anxiety, he said, and the symptoms got worse with each subsequent dose. He stopped taking the medication after he returned home, but the symptoms still persist, 12 years later, including tinnitus, dizziness, anxiety and depression. "Ladies and gentlemen ... there probably are many veterans out there who think they are losing their minds or thought they were depressed and have never related it to this awful mefloquine drug," Dunn said.

Retired Navy Cmdr. Bill Manofsky, the first veteran diagnosed by the Department of Veterans Affairs as having symptoms directly related to taking mefloquine, told the panel he has referred 280 veterans for medical care, including about 100 to the VA's War Related Illness and Injury Study Center for possible mefloquine poisoning. He asked the panel to look at all available information. "The medical records are not going to show up in the literature," Manofsky said. In most National Academies reviews, panelists interview subject-matter experts and review all available documentation on an issue, including federal government documents, academic reviews and previous studies. In earlier studies of military-related environmental exposures, National Academies panelists often were unable to draw any conclusions because the research or data on a topic simply doesn't exist.

Dr. Remington Nevin, a former Army preventive medicine specialist who now serves as executive director of The Quinism Foundation, a non-profit organized to support research into the effects of mefloquine and tafenoquine, expressed concern that the VA requested the National Academies review knowing the panel's findings would prove inconclusive. "Your work of the next 18 months is premature ... certain powerful and entrenched interests would love

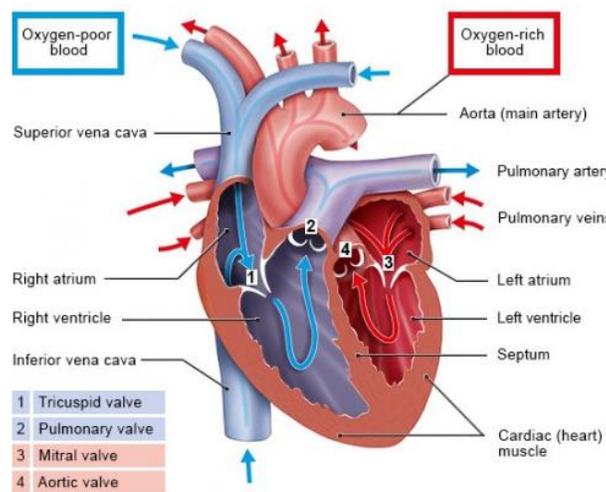
nothing more than for the National Academies to conclude after 18 months that there is insufficient evidence for the existence of [mefloquine-related illnesses], or insufficient evidence to justify VA acting," Nevin said.

An unknown number of U.S. troops, Peace Corps volunteers and some State Department employees have said they are permanently disabled from taking mefloquine, a once-a-week medication prescribed for personnel stationed in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq and parts of Africa. The Defense Department began phasing out its use in 2009 out of concern for possible neurological side effects. In 2013, the Food and Drug Administration placed a "black box" warning on mefloquine, saying the drug can cause ongoing or permanent neurological and psychiatric conditions, including dizziness, loss of balance, ringing in the ears, anxiety, depression, paranoia and hallucinations, even after discontinuing use.

At their inaugural meeting, the National Academies members also heard from federal officials who set policy on medications and monitor their effects, including the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, the FDA, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. During his presentation, Dr. Loren Erickson, a retired Army infectious disease specialist who now serves as the VA's chief consultant for post-deployment health, said the VA is "excited to [have] the academy review the issue," as it's one that has been a topic of consideration by the VA for years. "We all have an interest in seeking the truth." The VA contracted with the National Academies to conduct the review. Panel members noted that the final report will include observational findings but will not make any recommendations to the VA on how to handle disability claims or health benefits related to malaria drug exposure. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | February 4, 2019 ++]

Heart Valves ► Coping With Their Diseases

Your heart has four valves that function a bit like one-way gates. They make sure that the blood is pumped through your heart in the right direction. Oxygen-poor blood flows into the lungs, and oxygen-rich blood flows out of the lungs and into the body again. Heart valve diseases are usually caused by damage to the heart valves over time. For this reason, doctors call them "acquired" heart valve defects. These defects generally arise in older people due to wear and tear. Heart valve problems in children are usually present at birth (congenital) and are treated in a different way. There are two types of heart valve disease: In valve stenosis, the valve flap can no longer open properly, making the valve narrower. In regurgitation, the heart valve can't close properly. Sometimes both problems occur together.



The heart valves ensure that the blood flows in the right direction

Symptoms

Heart valve disease only becomes a problem if the heart can no longer pump enough blood into the body. If a heart valve is only slightly leaky or only slightly narrow, the heart can often compensate by pumping a bit harder. As a result, mild cases of heart valve disease may go unnoticed for a long time. But if a valve is very damaged, the blood builds up in the heart or lungs and ultimately in all of the blood vessels. This leads to symptoms such as the following:

- Weakness, drop in performance
- Swelling (edema), particularly in the lower legs
- An irregular, fast or slow pulse
- Shortness of breath and coughing, particularly at night
- Chest tightness and chest pain
- Fainting

Causes & Prevalence

In countries like Germany, wear and tear is the most common cause of heart valve disease: The heart valves may gradually become thick or stiff over time, and can then no longer move as easily. But there are other, rarer causes: For instance, heart valves may become damaged during an acute bacterial infection of the inner layer of the heart (endocarditis). Endocarditis can also suddenly make mild cases of heart valve disease worse. A condition known as rheumatic fever – often following a bacterial infection elsewhere in the body – can also lead to heart valve disease. But that is very rare in countries like Germany nowadays.

Some people are born with one or more abnormally shaped heart valves. This increases the risk of the valve becoming narrow or no longer closing properly over time. Sometimes the heart valves are healthy but the heart has become so big that the valves can no longer close properly. Various things can make the heart become enlarged. These include heart failure, a heart muscle inflammation, blood circulation problems in the heart muscle, long-term high alcohol consumption or metabolic diseases. Heart valves may also no longer work properly if nearby heart muscle tissue has been damaged – for instance, due to a heart attack.

In industrialized countries, heart valve diseases mainly occur in older people. In most cases, either the aortic valve is too narrow or the mitral valve no longer closes properly: About 13 out of 100 people over the age of 75 have problems with one of these two heart valves. Heart valve problems are somewhat more common in men than in women.

Outlook

The heart can often compensate for a narrowed or leaky valve over years or even decades. But the heart muscle has to work harder. This makes it grow thicker and the heart becomes enlarged. If the heart has to work harder over a long period of time, it can't return to its normal size and the problem gets worse. The thickened heart muscle is less elastic, the ventricles become “worn out” and the heart is weaker overall. At first this only causes noticeable symptoms during strenuous physical activities, but eventually the symptoms occur at rest too. If the heart becomes very weak, it can lead to life-threatening heart failure (cardiac insufficiency).

Other heart conditions can make the symptoms of heart valve damage worse. The main heart conditions that have this effect are coronary artery disease and irregular heartbeats such as atrial fibrillation. Heart attacks can also cause previous heart valve damage to suddenly become more noticeable. But heart attacks sometimes lead to acute heart failure even if none of the heart valves were damaged before.

Heart valve problems may get so bad that the heart can no longer pump enough blood around the body despite working as hard as it can. This leads to a vicious circle: Because the heart no longer gets enough blood itself, it can soon become weak. If the heart can't pump enough oxygen-rich blood around the body, it's known as heart failure. Damaged heart valves can also lead to an irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia). People may develop lung problems too because the blood starts building up there. This can result in high blood pressure in the lungs or a build-up of fluid in the lung tissue (pulmonary edema). Both of these conditions cause severe breathing difficulties.

Diagnosis

Doctors can often already determine whether someone has heart valve problems by giving them a thorough physical examination and listening to their heart with a stethoscope. An ultrasound scan of the heart (echocardiogram or “echo”) can be done to confirm the diagnosis and find out how severe the heart valve disease is. It sometimes makes sense to do an echocardiogram from inside the food pipe rather than from outside the body. Like in an examination of the stomach (gastroscopy), this involves inserting a tube into the food pipe. But the tube is only pushed down far enough so that it is next to the heart. The tube has an ultrasound transducer attached to the end of it, which is used to examine the heart.

If someone is diagnosed with heart valve disease, doctors check to see how healthy they are otherwise. This is important because the most suitable treatment will also depend on your overall health. The tests and examinations done for this purpose may include the following: An ECG (electrocardiogram) and an exercise electrocardiogram (exercise stress test); Blood pressure measurement; Blood tests; An X-ray examination, possibly a CT scan (computed tomography) or MRI scan (magnetic resonance imaging). Cardiac catheterization may also be needed – for instance, if it is thought that the coronary arteries might be too narrow as well. This examination involves inserting a thin tube (catheter) into the heart through a blood vessel, and injecting a special dye into the coronary arteries (coronary angiography). The doctor can then take a closer look at the arteries on a screen.

Prevention

Some people have a higher risk of heart valve complications due to endocarditis (inflammation of the inner layer of the heart) – for instance, if they are born with a heart valve defect or if they have already received an artificial heart valve. They may be given antibiotics just before having procedures such as tooth or gum surgery. The antibiotics kill bacteria that could otherwise enter the bloodstream from the mouth and infect the inner layer of the heart. Sometimes, but only rarely, people need to take antibiotics for the rest of their life. This may be the case for people who have developed severe heart valve problems due to rheumatic fever. The aim of treatment with antibiotics is to prevent further episodes of rheumatic fever. Smoking not only increases your overall risk of cardiovascular (heart and blood vessel) disease – it can also damage the heart valves. Because of this, not smoking, or trying to stop smoking, is one of the most important things you can do to prevent heart valve problems.

Treatment

Whether treatment is needed – and, if so, which treatment – will depend on many factors. For instance, which heart valve is damaged and how severely it is affected. Other important factors include the person's symptoms, age, their general health and individual needs. If heart valve disease has to be treated, there are two main treatment options: The faulty heart valve can either be replaced with an artificial heart valve or repaired through a different procedure. The operation may be done through open heart surgery or using a catheter. Some people might have to take medication for the rest of their life after having this treatment. Because heart valve disease doesn't normally require urgent treatment, there is usually enough time to carefully consider the treatment options together with your doctor.

Rehabilitation

Heart valve surgery in a hospital is usually followed by a cardiac rehabilitation program. This helps people to get used to physical exercise again and then gradually increase the intensity. Cardiac rehabilitation improves your physical fitness and quality of life. Your medication is adjusted and your heart is checked regularly too. Some people are scared of being too active after surgery in case it makes their heart problems worse again. As well as exercise, the rehabilitation program involves having talks and learning strategies to help you cope better with the situation. Many people find that this helps them to develop a better feel for how far they can go.

Everyday life

If you have been diagnosed with heart valve disease but it hasn't been treated yet, knowing about it might make you feel anxious. Symptoms such as weakness and tiredness can be a particular problem if they limit what you can do in everyday life. It's often difficult to make a treatment decision. It can be helpful to discuss any questions or concerns

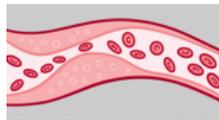
you may have with your friends, family and doctor. Our list of questions can help to prepare for doctor's appointments. You can choose the most relevant questions, print them out and take them along. Decision aids can help too: They allow you to see your own situation more clearly, compare the pros and cons of different treatment options, and find out what's most important to you.

After heart surgery, people have to take things easy for a while and won't be able to do everything on their own. You can already contact your health insurer before the operation to apply for assistance – for instance, household help. This has to be prescribed by a doctor. It is also a good idea to talk to your family and friends about whether, when and how they could help you.

[Source: <https://www.informedhealth.org/heart-valve-diseases.3324.en.html> | February 1, 2019 ++]

Cholesterol Update 04 ► **Control It to Protect Yourself from Heart Attack and Stroke**

Have you had your cholesterol checked? Most adults should have a cholesterol test every 4 to 6 years. That's because nearly 78 million American adults have high levels of the type of cholesterol that's linked to heart disease and stroke. Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that your body needs to function properly. It travels through your bloodstream to reach the cells that need it. Your cells use cholesterol for many important functions, like making hormones and digesting fatty foods. But too much cholesterol in your blood can cause waxy buildup called plaques in blood vessels. "These plaques can eventually become inflamed and rupture, leading to a clot," explains cholesterol expert Dr. Ronald Krauss at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland. If a clot blocks blood flow through an artery in the heart, it can cause a heart attack. "Or, if this happens in the artery of the brain, it can cause a stroke," he says.



Cholesterol travels through the bloodstream in particles called lipoproteins. There are different types of lipoproteins that have different effects. Low-density lipoproteins, or LDLs, contribute to plaques. LDL cholesterol is sometimes called "bad" cholesterol. "Many people in this country have too many of these LDL particles in the blood," Krauss says. Studies have found that lowering LDL cholesterol levels reduces heart disease and stroke. The most common cause of high LDL cholesterol is an unhealthy lifestyle. Excess body weight and eating a lot of animal fats are linked to high levels of LDL cholesterol. The genes that you inherit from your parents, other medical conditions, and certain medicines can also cause high cholesterol.

You may also have heard about "good" cholesterol: high-density lipoproteins, or HDL. HDL particles absorb cholesterol and carry it to the liver. The liver then flushes it from the body. That's why scientists previously thought that raising levels of HDL cholesterol might lower your risk for heart disease and stroke. But recent research suggests that HDL cholesterol works better in some people than others. And clinical trials haven't found that medicines aimed at raising HDL cholesterol reduce the risk of heart attack. There's still a lot to learn about HDL.

Lab tests can measure the different types of cholesterol in your blood. How often you should get tested depends on your age and other risk factors, including a family history of high cholesterol or heart disease. If tests show that you have a high level of LDL cholesterol, your doctor may order additional tests. You can try to lower it by eating a heart-healthy diet, being physically active, and losing excess weight. For some people, lifestyle changes aren't enough to lower LDL cholesterol. Your biological makeup can be a strong influence on cholesterol buildup, too. In these cases, a type of drug known as a statin is the usual treatment. Doctors may combine statins with other drugs.

If your LDL cholesterol is very high, Krauss says it's important that your family members get tested, too. If your genes put you at risk for high cholesterol, your close relatives might have a similar risk. Talk to your doctor about getting tested. And remember that heart-healthy lifestyle changes can not only lower cholesterol levels but also bring many long-term health benefits. [Source: NIH News in Health | February 2019 ++]

Stroke Update 10 ► Prevention



Stroke is the leading cause of serious, long-term adult disability in the United States. The effects of a stroke range from mild to severe and can include paralysis, problems with thinking, difficulty with speaking, and emotional problems. According to the National Institutes of Health, each year nearly 800,000 Americans experience a new or recurrent stroke. Approximately 610,000 of these are first attacks, and 185,000 are recurrent attacks. Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in the US, killing nearly 133,000 people a year and accounting for one of every 19 deaths. Nearly three-quarters of all strokes occur in people over the age of 65 and the risk of having stroke more than doubles each decade after the age of 55.

Americans have shown that stroke is preventable and treatable. In recent years, a better understanding of the causes of stroke has helped Americans make lifestyle changes that have cut the stroke death rate nearly in half. To protect yourself and your loved ones from the serious effects of stroke you should learn and reduce your risk factors, learn the warning signs of stroke, and know what to do if you notice the warning signs. The following explains stroke, stroke causes and symptoms, and how to reduce your risk of a stroke.

What is a stroke? A stroke occurs when a blood vessel that carries oxygen and nutrients to the brain is either blocked by a clot or bursts. Brain cells in the immediate area begin to die because they stop getting the oxygen and nutrients they need to function.

What causes a stroke? A blockage of a blood vessel in the brain or neck, called an ischemic stroke, is the most frequent cause of stroke and is responsible for about 80 percent of strokes. When a weakened blood vessel ruptures and spills into brain tissue, it's called a hemorrhagic stroke. The most common cause for the rupture is uncontrolled hypertension or high blood pressure.

What is a TIA? A transient ischemic attack is considered a "warning stroke." A TIA is a type of stroke where the stroke symptoms last only a few minutes and generally stop. A TIA is a serious medical event that needs prompt medical attention.

What are the symptoms of a stroke?

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding speech
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination

- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

What should you do if a stroke occurs? If you believe you are having a stroke, or someone you know is having a stroke – Call 911 immediately. Making the decision to call for medical help can make the difference in avoiding a lifelong disability.

How can I reduce my risk of stroke? Some risk factors for stroke you can't control such as increasing age, gender, family history and race. The best treatment for stroke is prevention. You can reduce your risk of having a stroke by taking action to improve your health. The following risk factors can be managed with lifestyle changes, such as diet, exercise and medications, if needed:

- High blood pressure or hypertension-High blood pressure is the leading cause of stroke and the most significant controllable risk factor. If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, work with your healthcare provider to reduce it.
- Smoking- Cigarette smoking is the number one preventable risk factor for stroke. Using oral contraceptives combined with cigarette smoking greatly increases stroke risk.
- Physical inactivity and obesity- Physical inactivity and obesity can increase your risk of stroke, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and high blood cholesterol.
- Eat healthy- Limit foods high in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol. Diets high in sodium can increase blood pressure, and diets with high calories can lead to obesity.
- Diabetes-If you have Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes, keep blood sugar controlled. Having diabetes increases one's risk for stroke.
- Illegal drug use- cocaine and heroin use have been associated with an increased risk of stroke.

Where can I learn more about stroke? Talk to your doctor about your personal risk factors for having a stroke. Comprehensive information about stroke prevention and treatment can be found on the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke website <https://www.ninds.nih.gov>.

[Source: The Hill | Peter Sullivan | January 27, 2019 ++]

Medicaid Fraud Update 97 ► Disclosures 01-14 FEB 2019

Capistrano, CA -- Ryan Sheridan, the former owner of Braking Point Recovery Center, is among six people being federally charged for their roles in a \$48 million health care fraud conspiracy, according to the Department of Justice. He was arrested 7 FEB and appeared in federal court. Braking Point offered detox, intensive outpatient treatment, day treatment and residential living rehabilitation services for those struggling with drug and alcohol addiction. The following people were named in the 60-count indictment:

- Ryan Sheridan, 38, of Leetonia
- Jennifer Sheridan, 40, of Austintown
- Kortney Gherardi, 29, of Girard
- Lisa Pertee, 50, of Sunbury
- Thomas Bailey, 44, of Poland
- Arthur Smith, 54, of Austintown

They're all charged with conspiracy to commit health care fraud related to their work at Braking Point Recovery Center. Investigators said Medicaid was billed \$48 million for drug and alcohol recovery services that were not provided, were not medically necessary, lacked proper documentation or had other issues that made them ineligible for reimbursement. "These defendants are accused of stealing tens of millions of dollars from taxpayers through

fraudulent billing and other crimes," said U.S. Attorney Justin Herdman. "These defendants profited off the suffering of others. We will hold accountable anyone who tries to illegally take advantage of the drug epidemic." Additional charges include health care fraud, money laundering, operating a drug premises, conspiracy to distribute controlled substances and use of a registration number issued to another to obtain controlled substances, among other offenses.



California Addiction Treatment Center

The defendants are accused of using Smith's Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) data waiver to get over 3,000 doses of Suboxone, a medication used to treat opioid addiction, without Smith having seen patients. "While the vast majority of the healthcare professionals in this country are committed to saving lives, there are a few who are merely drug dealers hiding in plain view and driven by greed," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Timothy Plancon. Ryan Sheridan is accused of making numerous financial transactions with money he got from unlawful activities, including health care fraud and conspiracy to commit health care fraud. Investigators said Bailey dispensed Suboxone when he didn't have the authority to do so. "These scams are a sucker punch in the face to every family with loved ones struggling with addiction," said Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost. "We will work with our partners to achieve justice -- and get our money back."

Ryan Sheridan also owned and operated other businesses, including Braking Point Health and Fitness LLC and recovery/sober houses. Between January 2015 and October 2017, investigators said the facility billed Medicaid for drug and alcohol services that:

- Were coded to reflect a service more costly than was actually provided
- Did not have proper documentation
- Did not have proper assessment documentation with valid diagnoses
- Were billings for patients that didn't have a diagnosis from a doctor
- Were related to treatment at unlicensed in-patient beds
- Were for case management services when the clients were working out at Sheridan's gym
- Were based on quotas provided to the nurses to bill four to five hours of treatment each day, even if the treatment was not medically necessary
- Were for in-patient detox and drug treatment services that were actually provided in an outpatient setting

Between May 2015 and October 2017, investigators said Braking Point submitted about 134,744 claims to Medicaid, totaling over \$48.5 million in services. Medicaid paid Braking Point over \$31 million of that, investigators said. Medicaid stopped paying in October of 2017. In October of 2017, investigators raided the two facilities in Austintown and Whitehall, Ohio, as well as Ryan Sheridan's Leetonia home. Prosecutors seized \$3 million in property in Columbiana, Mahoning and Trumbull counties and eight automobiles, including "Back to the Future," "Ghostbusters" and "Batman" replicas. [Source: WKBN-27 | February 07, 2019 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 487 ► Preventing Winter Injuries - Cost Tool - Newborn/Adopted Children

Preventing Winter Injuries -- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says cold weather can cause extra strain on your heart. Outside of heart strain, cold-weather injuries such as hypothermia, frostbite, and falls can occur if you aren't careful. You should know your TRICARE options for getting care in case an injury occurs. In this week's article titled "Preventing Winter Injuries with TRICARE," we highlight tips to prevent, spot, and treat winter injuries. For example, to combat heart strain and overexertion in the winter, you should:

- Take frequent rest breaks when shoveling snow or performing other hard work in the cold.
- Avoid drinking alcohol before or immediately after shoveling; and,
- Learn the warning signs of a heart attack.

Hypothermia is a dangerous condition that can occur when people are exposed to extremely cold temperatures. If someone is experiencing hypothermia, he or she may show signs of:

- Intense shivering
- Feeling tired or sleepy
- Feeling disoriented or confused; or,
- Loss of coordination

The best way to prevent hypothermia is to dress in warm, loose-fitting layers of clothing. Also, you want to wear a water-resistant coat to keep dry when going outside in the cold.

There's also frostbite, which occurs when a body part freezes and results in loss of feeling and color in affected areas. Frostbite most often affects the fingers, toes, nose, cheeks, chin, and ears. It's important to cover these body parts when going outside in winter. Signs of frostbite may be:

- Redness or pain in any skin area
- Numbness
- Tingling or stinging
- Aching; or,
- Bluish or waxy looking skin

Learn about winter injuries, tips to prevent them, and more in this week's winter safety article at TRICARE.mil/news.

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Compare Cost Tool -- Do you have questions about your TRICARE costs? Your health care costs depend on your health plan, and who you are. For example, if you're an active duty family member enrolled in TRICARE Prime, you'll pay different costs than a retiree enrolled in TRICARE Select. To help you make informed choices, you can view and compare costs between TRICARE plans using the TRICARE Compare Cost Tool. Visit TRICARE.mil/costs/compare. With this Cost Tool, you can see TRICARE costs, including copayments, enrollment fees, and payment options. Active duty service members pay nothing out of pocket for any type of authorized care. There are no costs for services received at a military hospital or clinic, except for a per-day fee when using inpatient care.

Active duty family members only pay for care when using a TRICARE Prime plan if they get care without a referral. As well as when they use TRICARE Select, or use a network pharmacy or TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery. To get started using the compare plans feature, you must choose your health plan, sponsor status, and the date the sponsor entered the uniformed services. You can compare the health care costs of multiple plans at one time. Take command of your health by learning about your health plan costs. For more information, visit www.TRICARE.mil/costs.

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Newborn/Adopted Children & DEERS -- All newborn and adopted children must be registered in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, also known as DEERS, within 90 days, or within 120 days if overseas. To do this, the sponsor must go to a uniformed services ID card office with one of the following documents:

- The child’s birth certificate
- A certificate of live birth from the hospital, or A record of adoption, or letter of placement of your child into your home by a recognized placement adoption agency or the court.

If your child isn’t registered in DEERS within the given time period, they’ll only be able to receive care at a military hospital or clinic, if space is available. The sponsor can only enroll the child in an eligible TRICARE plan after another Qualifying Life Event, or during the annual TRICARE Open Season. Also, newborn and adopted children of TRICARE Reserve Select and TRICARE Retired Reserve members can’t qualify for coverage and enroll in either plan until they are registered in DEERS.

Visit www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl to find a uniformed services ID card office in your area. For more information on newborn and adopted child coverage, go to www.TRICARE.mil/baby. You can also download the TRICARE Maternity Care Brochure at www.TRICARE.mil/publications.

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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> | January 31, 2019 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 488 ► Dental Program - Dental Options Webinar - TRICARE.mil Web Tools

TRICARE Dental Program – During National Children’s Dental Health Month, take time to learn about the TRICARE Dental Program, or TDP. Whether you’re eligible to enroll in the TDP depends on your status or that of your military sponsor. United Concordia administers the TRICARE Dental Program. This voluntary program is available stateside and overseas to eligible:

- Active duty family members
- National Guard and Reserve members and their family members; and to
- Survivors

There are other dental options if you’re an active duty service member, retiree, or retiree family member. To be eligible to enroll in TDP, your sponsor must have at least 12 months left on his or her military service commitment at the time of enrollment. There are three ways to enroll in the TDP: online, by phone, or by mail. Before you enroll, make sure your information is up to date in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS. United Concordia may reject your enrollment if information is missing from your enrollment form or if the information doesn’t match what’s in DEERS. For more information about TDP eligibility and enrollment, visit TRICARE.mil/tdp. And check out the article, “Get Dental Coverage through TRICARE Dental Program,” at TRICARE.mil/news.

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TRICARE Dental Options Webinar – Join the “TRICARE Dental Options for You and Your Family” webinar on February 21st. This webinar will help you understand TRICARE dental options for active duty service members, National Guard and Reserve members, and their eligible family members. The webinar will focus on how to get dental benefits through the TRICARE Active Duty Dental Program and TRICARE Dental Program. The webinar will also provide information on eligibility, covered services, and costs. Remember, these dental options are separate from TRICARE health care options. Learn more about TRICARE dental coverage at www.TRICARE.mil/dental. To register for the upcoming webinar, sign up for email updates at www.TRICARE.mil/subscriptions.

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TRICARE.mil Web Tools - TRICARE online tools can help you learn what health plans you may be eligible for. They can also help you compare plan features and costs. If you aren't sure what health plans you may be eligible for, start by using the TRICARE Plan Finder at www.TRICARE.mil/planfinder. After you answer a few questions, the tool will display the plans you may be eligible for based on who you are and where you live. Keep in mind, different family members may be eligible for different plans. If you want to compare several health plans, use the Compare Plans tool at www.TRICARE.mil/compareplans. Select the plans you're interested in learning more about and the results will display in a table. You can compare the main features and costs of each plan, including:

- Cost for a primary or specialty care visit
- Annual deductible
- Maximum out-of-pocket costs and,
- Enrollment requirements.

The TRICARE Plan Finder and Compare Plans are just two helpful online tools that make it easier to determine the right health plan for you and your family.

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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> | February 8, 2019 ++]

* Finances *



IRS Collection Policy Update 07 ► What they Can do If You do Not File

Pull out your shoebox of receipts and clear your calendar. Tax filing season is here. But what happens if you don't file your taxes? Will the IRS really even notice? Um, yes. Even if you don't file, your boss, mortgage company and bank are reporting forms to the IRS with your name and Social Security number. Once the IRS catches up, the consequences can range from mildly annoying to your-life-will-never-be-the-same-again. Following is a look at exactly what could happen if you fail to pay your taxes.

1. You could get hit with penalties

IRS penalties can include:

- Failure-to-file penalty: If you don't file taxes, the IRS generally charges 5 percent of the amount owed for each month or part of a month that a return is late.
- Failure-to-pay penalty: If you file a return but don't pay the taxes due, your penalty is generally 0.5 percent of your outstanding balance for every month or part of a month that you don't pay.
- Interest: On top of the fines, you'll pay interest — at the federal short-term rate plus 3 percent, compounded daily — on the amount you owe.

2. You could forfeit your refund

If you have a refund coming but don't get around to filing, your refund can disappear. For you to receive a refund, the IRS generally requires you to file the corresponding return within three years of its due date.

3. The government could put a tax lien on your property

Once the IRS is done playing nice, the agency will start to do things that really make life difficult. First, they assess a federal tax lien — a claim against your home, personal property or financial accounts. A tax lien is like the government claiming dibs on something of value you own. They aren't taking your assets yet but are saying they could. Meanwhile, a lien can make it difficult to sell or refinance your home.

4. The government may seize your assets

The next step after a lien is a levy. After putting a claim — the lien — on your property, the government uses a levy to take it. If you get a notice of intent to levy, do not ignore it. Scrape together whatever money you can find and call the IRS to make a payment arrangement. Otherwise, federal agents can seize your house, car, boat or investments to pay your tax debt.

5. The government can garnish your income

It isn't just your current assets the IRS can seize. It can institute a wage levy, taking your paycheck. The amount the IRS can take exceeds what other debt collectors are allowed and depends on a formula that takes into account your income, dependents and amount owed. In some cases, you might be left with less than \$500 a week to live on. The IRS can even take 15 percent of Social Security retirement payments to pay off tax debts.

6. Anyone can find out about your debt

It's bad enough to be in debt; it's worse when other people know. And a tax lien is a public record — meaning that not only can lenders find it, but potential landlords and employers can, too.

7. The IRS will summon you

At some point after sending you notices, including an Information Document Request, the IRS may issue a summons to obtain information from you or compel your testimony to help with their investigation, according to Brager Tax Law Group, a law firm in the Los Angeles area. If you get a summons, get an excellent tax attorney to accompany you to the meeting and do most of the talking.

8. You might have to file for bankruptcy

Let's take this to its logical end. You didn't or couldn't pay your taxes so you were charged penalties and interest. The government swooped in and collected your assets. Then they started garnishing your checks. Now, you don't have enough left over each week to pay the bills. Where does this end for you? In bankruptcy court. However, this might not be the end, as filing for bankruptcy protection does not remove prior tax liens, says legal website Nolo. In certain circumstances, such as if you failed to file a return, filing for bankruptcy may not even wipe out all your tax debt.

9. You could go to jail

What is the most awful thing that can happen if you don't pay your taxes? You could go to jail. Now, granted, you have to be really trying hard to get sentenced for tax evasion. The IRS doesn't lock up folks who are simply having trouble paying their bill. H&R Block says that the people who find themselves facing criminal charges are those who willfully try to defraud the government and refuse to cooperate during the collections process.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Maryalene LaPonsie | February 4, 2019 ++]

Tax Refund Update 02 ► How to Best Use It

If you're expecting a tax return this year, chances are you are already thinking about how to spend it. Have you thought about where this additional money can put you financially? Think of your tax return as just another paycheck that comes in, and give that money a purpose.

Here are some smart ways to spend your tax refund:

Start or add money to your emergency fund

If you don't already have an emergency fund, perhaps this is the perfect time to get one started. You never know what life could throw your way, and many of us are one paycheck away from being in a serious financial crisis.

Pay down/off high-interest debt

If you have any loans or credit cards with high interest rates, pay them down or off completely. This will surely put your refund to work and help relieve some of those high monthly payments.

Apply a principal payment to your mortgage

You could potentially save thousands of dollars in interest when you make an additional payment straight into principal. Check with your mortgage company first to ensure there are no additional fees or penalties.

Home repairs/improvements

Perhaps you have a home improvement project you have been wanting to start, but just didn't have the fund to cover it. Making repairs is not only good for you in the sense that you get to cross it off your to-do list, but it will also boost the value of your home.

Invest in you

While all of the above are ways to help you succeed and get ahead financially, you also need to remember that it is okay to invest in yourself. Whether that is taking a portion of your refund to invest in your education or health, those are two investments that you will reap the benefits of for years to come. Also, don't be afraid or feel guilty about treating yourself out to dinner, or perhaps a date night with your spouse. You've worked hard and we all deserve a break.

[Source: USAA | Angela Caban | February 7, 2019 ++]

Timeshares Update 02 ► Never Buy New If At All

There are two basic types of timeshares. First, there's a deeded timeshare. It's real estate — real property you can pass down to your heirs. More common these days, though, are vacation interval plans, points that can be used at a variety of properties on a variety of dates. These aren't technically real property; they're personal property. Whichever kind of timeshare you choose, they are not — repeat, “not” — an investment. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) website says of them: The value of [timeshares] is in their use as a vacation destination, not an investment. Because so many timeshares and vacation interval plans are available, the resale value of yours is likely to be a good deal lower than what you paid.

So let's get this straight: Timeshares are not a way to make money. In fact, they're not a way to break even. Sure, they're a way for you to vacation with your family. But don't ever consider this an investment, because it certainly is not one. If you're going to buy a timeshare, buy it on the secondary market. You'll be amazed at the number of people out there who will literally give you their timeshare for nothing. Why? Because they want to get out from under giant annual maintenance fees. After purchasing a timeshare, you could easily be on the hook for a \$1,000 a year in maintenance fees, whether you use your timeshare or not. Some people can't afford that anymore, or they simply don't want to do it anymore. They just want out.

Another tip: If you do get a timeshare, for God's sake, don't borrow money to do it. That's likely to make it virtually impossible for you to sell it, unless you pay off the loan first. Of course, as with anything in life, there are going to be exceptions. There's probably a timeshare somewhere that people are clamoring to buy on the secondary market, or one that's gone up in value. But in this writer's experience, it's super, super rare. Therefore, always buy on the secondary market and don't ever borrow to buy. Where is the secondary market? [Ebay](#) has a ton of listings. Other sites include [Redweek.com](#) and TUG, which stands for [Timeshare Users Group](#). Bottom line: If you buy a timeshare, plan

on keeping it, and paying the maintenance fees on it, for many years to come. Because you be assured, that's exactly what you'll be doing. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | February 11, 2019 ++]

Social Security Q & A ► 190201 thru 190215

(Q) What happens if my SSDI or SSI claim is denied?

A: Social Security can make mistakes! You must appeal! This means Social Security will look at your case again. If you are computer savvy you can file an appeal on line at www.socialsecurity.gov. But first review the information at <https://www.ssa.gov/forms/ha-501.html>. There are four levels of appeals. Social Security pushes online applications and appeals as quick and easy. Be careful! Actually many people find the forms difficult and confusing. They often report giving up in frustration. Claimants also report the presence of many misleading websites. These websites appear to be helpful but are actually attempts to offer their services. You may or may not be ready to accept! Once committed to an online representative it is difficult to change your mind!

The safest way is to call your local Social Security office or 1-800-772-1213. Explain that you want to appeal your claim. You do not want to appeal on line! There is just too much at stake to be unsure! The necessary forms will be promptly forwarded to you. Fill out the forms as best you can. Call your local Social Security office if you need help more help. You must make your request within 60 days from the date you receive your denial letter. Social Security assumes you received the letter five days after the date on the letter. Social Security uses many regulations to prevent you from getting paid. Recent numbers show that over 60 percent of initial applications are denied. You should be prepared for a couple of things as your appeal progresses:

- You know how to review your electronic folder. If you have a question on this call local Social Security office or 1-800-772-1213 and ask how to do it.
- You may have to appear before an Administrative Law Judge. If so, do you want to be accompanied by a lawyer and are you prepared to pay that expense. Note there are some that do not charge unless they win the case.

[Source: Louisiana Social Security Lawyer | Hallman Woods | November 30, 2018 ++]

Social Media Sales Scam ► How it Works

Everyone loves a good sale. The only problem is, scammers do, too. Recently, scammers have been targeting consumers on social media with misleading ads for sales that claim to offer deeply discounted name brand products.

How the Scam Works

- You are scrolling through your social media feed when you come across an advertisement that offers name brand shoes, clothes, or electronics for a great price. One recent ad promoted discounts of up to 95% off!
- If you click on the ad or type in the promoted URL, it will lead you to a website where you can "shop the deals." But unfortunately, many scammers never intend to send you anything at all. They simply steal your credit card information when you are prompted to pay. Other scammers do mail you a product, but it's a cheap counterfeit version. In other versions, the phony sites can download malware onto your computer and give scammers access to your personal information, password history, and more.

How to Avoid Fake Sale Scams

- Know where you shop. Be wary of purchasing items online from retailers you are not familiar with. Even if you think you are on the website of a reputable company, double check the web address before you make a purchase to be sure scammers haven't redirected you to an imitation site.
- Beware off-brand URLs. Scammers often register domain names that are similar to popular sites or contain the name of a well-known brand. Real sales are almost always advertised on a company's main website, so be wary if you can't find that "great deal" you saw advertised elsewhere.
- Look for a secure connection and a privacy policy. Before you enter your personal information in any website, check for a secure connection. To do this, make sure the URL begins with "https://" and includes a lock icon on the purchase page. The lack of a privacy policy is also a red flag.
- Use your credit card. Paying with a credit card gives you the advantage of being able to dispute fraudulent charges. This is the safest payment method for purchasing items online.

For More Information

For more information about HTTPs, see www.BBB.org/BBBsecure. For ways to protect yourself from scammers when shopping online, read www.BBB.org/ShoppingOnline. For tips on avoiding scams and fraud, check out www.BBB.org/AvoidScams. If you've been the victim of an online shopping scam, warn other consumers by reporting the incident in www.BBB.org/ScamTracker. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | February 1, 2018 ++]

Government Agency Call Scams ► BBB Sees More Phony Government Agency Calls

In 2018, BBB Scam Tracker received more than 500 reports about scam calls claiming to be from Medicare representatives. Protect yourself and your loved ones from this unfortunately common scam.

How the Scam Works

- You receive a call that appears on your caller ID as Medicare or Social Security Administration. In one version of this scam, when you pick up the phone, a Medicare impersonator offers you something for free, such as a back or knee brace, medical equipment, or new Medicare cards. All you have to do is share some personal information, such as your Social Security number, to "confirm" your identity.
- In another version, scammers attempt to intimidate you by claiming there is a problem with your Medicare or Social Security benefits. They may claim there has been suspicious activity on your account and if you don't give them the information they need right away, you are in danger of losing your benefits or worse.
- Sometimes, scammers even use robocalls to tell you there is a problem and ask you to call a different number to resolve it. Regardless of the method, the scammer's goal is to steal your personal information for their personal benefit.

How to Protect Yourself

- Don't answer calls from unknown numbers. If you receive a call from a number you haven't saved to your contacts, or if your caller ID says "unknown," don't pick up the phone. Also, be aware that scammers can dupe caller ID and mask their true phone number.
- When in doubt, hang up. If you do answer a call from an unsolicited caller and are greeted by a robocall or even a person who claims to be with a government agency, just hang up. Don't press any buttons, don't engage in conversation and don't ask to be removed from the calling list.
- Know how government agencies work. Government agencies don't call consumers unsolicited. Instead, they send letters if they need to contact you.

For More Information

If you receive a particularly convincing call from someone claiming to be an SSA employee, hang up and call their toll-free number at 1-800-772-1213 to verify the issue. Likewise, you can call 1-800-MEDICARE to verify Medicare

issues. You can learn more by reading www.BBB.org/HealthcareScam and www.BBB.org/AvoidScams. If you have received a call from a government agency impersonator, help others avoid falling victim and report the details of the call to www.BBB.org/ScamTracker. If you have been the victim of identity theft, go to www.IdentityTheft.gov for more information and a personalized recovery plan. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | February 8, 2019 ++]

Medicare Telephone Scam 2 ► Medicare Numbers

The New River Valley Agency on Aging [a governmental cooperative serving the counties of Giles, Montgomery, Floyd and Pulaski and the City of Radford] has received an alert on a Medicare scam unfolding in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Scammers are representing themselves as Medicare representatives and altering the appearance of the caller ID to make it seem as if the call is coming from 1-800 Medicare (1-800-633-4227). So far, Virginia Senior Medicare Patrol has received complaints from a dozen beneficiaries who fell for the scam and provided their new Medicare number. Some beneficiaries were asked for their height and weight. It is believed that the scammers are using this information to order Durable Medical Equipment supplies that are not necessary or needed.

If a consumer responds to a caller and gives out personal identifying information accidentally, or even if they feel their number may have been compromised (for example, if their mail was opened), they should call 1-800-Medicare and request a new number, indicating they feel they were scammed. Customer service reps at Medicare will note in the person's record and will ask additional questions needed to request a re-assignment. To avoid being scammed, remember these helpful tips:

- Medicare will likely never call a beneficiary. They will never ask for your Medicare number -- they have your number and identifying information in their database.
- Never give out personal or identifying information over the phone, even if the caller ID appears to be from a local personal or business number. Fraudulent calls are now being "spoofed," or bounced from local numbers in your area.
- If a caller pressures you over the telephone, you have the right to hang up and terminate the call.

[Source: The Roanoke Times | Shannon Hammons | January 29, 2019 ++]

Tax Burden for Maine Retired Vets ► As of FEB 2019

Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retire in Maine:

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 5.5% (food and prescription drugs exempt)

Gasoline Tax: 48.41 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 55.61 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$2.00/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 5.8%; High – 7.15%

Income Brackets: Three. Lowest – \$0 to \$21,449; Highest – \$42,900 to \$101,550. Bracket levels adjusted for inflation each year. Release dates for tax bracket inflation adjustments vary by state and may fall after the end of the applicable tax year.

Personal Exemptions: Single – na; Married – na; Dependents – na

Additional Exemptions: None.

Standard Deduction: \$11,800 Single & \$23,600 married. Note: Deduction or exemption tied to federal tax system. Federal deductions and exemptions are indexed for inflation.

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: You and your spouse (if married) may each deduct up to \$6,000 of eligible pension income that is included in your federal adjusted gross income. Retirement income may qualify for a Pension Income Deduction, including federal pensions, state pensions, military pensions, most private pensions, employee annuities, local government pensions, teachers' pensions, SIMPLE plans, and some deferred compensation plans. However, some private pensions and IRAs may not qualify for this deduction, so it is important to check with Maine Revenue Services before deducting them. A new law amends the income tax subtraction modification for certain retirement benefits to raise the \$6,000 limit to \$10,000. The subtraction modification is expanded to include all federally taxable pension income, annuity income and individual retirement account distributions, except pick-up contributions for which a deduction has been allowed.

Retired Military Pay : Fully exempt

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

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

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

Property Taxes

All real estate and personal property of Maine residents is subject to local and, if authorized by the legislature, state property taxes. Local property taxes, based upon assessed valuation, are assessed, levied and collected by municipalities. Homestead and Veteran's Exemption programs, administered by the state, are available to reduce property taxes for those who qualify. The Homestead Exemption program provides a measure of property tax relief for certain individuals that have owned homestead property in Maine for at least 12 months and make the property they occupy their permanent residence. Property owners receive an exemption of \$20,000 on the assessed value of their home. [Click here](#) for more information.

A Veteran exemption of \$6,000 is available to those who served during a recognized war period, are 62 years or older, are receiving 100% disability as a veteran or became 100% disabled while serving. Paraplegic veterans who received a federal grant for a specially adapted housing unit may receive a \$50,000 exemption. A Blind Exemption of \$4,000 is available to those who are legally blind.

Maine offers a Property Tax Fairness Credit (PTFC) program for residents who pay property tax or rent. The maximum refund is \$1,600. The benefit is based on any property tax amount that is more than 6% of a resident's adjusted gross income, and the credit is 50% of that amount. To qualify for the program, a Maine resident must own a home or pay rent, be a Maine resident during any part of the tax year, and have a household adjusted gross income that is not more than: \$33,333 a year for a household of 1 (filing as single individual), \$43,333 for a household of 2 (filing jointly or as head of household with 2 personal exemptions), or \$53,333 for a household of 3 or more (filing jointly or as head of household with 3 or more personal exemptions). For additional information, [click here](#).

For more information on property tax relief programs, [click here](#). For property tax exemptions, [click here](#).

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

For decedents dying on or after Jan. 1, 2013, Maine imposes a tax on estates based on the value of the Maine taxable estate, even if there is no federal estate tax. The Maine taxable estate is equal to the federal taxable estate plus taxable gifts made during the one-year period ending on the date of the decedent's death and the value of Maine elective property, and, for estates of decedents dying before Jan. 1, 2016, decreased by any Maine qualified terminable interest property (QTIP) property. For estates of decedents dying on or after Jan. 1, 2017, the annual exclusion amount is \$5,490,000. For estates of decedents dying on or after Jan. 1, 2016, but before Jan. 1, 2017, the annual Maine exclusion amount is equal to the federal annual exclusion amount. For estate of decedents dying on or after Jan. 1, 2013, but before Jan. 1, 2016, the annual Maine exclusion amount is \$2,000,000. For further information, visit the Maine Revenue Services website or call 207-626-8475.

Other State Tax Rates

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

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

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For further information visit the Maine Revenue Services site <http://www.state.me.us/revenue> or call 207-626-8475.

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#MAINE> | February 2019 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 01 thru 14 FEB 2019

- **God Bless America.** Taking you back in time, go to <https://youtu.be/TnQDW-NMaRs> and listen to Kate Smith as she introduces the song for the first time.
- **Smoking.** Vaping now appears to be more common in the military than smoking regular cigarettes. Across the service branches, 7.4 percent of service members smoked cigarettes daily in 2015. For electronic cigarettes: 11.1 percent of service members said they were daily e-cigarette users.
- **Guntrucks of Vietnam.** Check out the 51 minute Smithsonian clip on the magnificent story of camaraderie, ingenuity, and never leaving a brother behind at <https://www.sho.com/pr/smithsonian/sp/title/gun-trucks-of-vietnam?c=711c2p4u2a6u3l2i7v4o7r18290d5i2u>.
- **Car Theft.** It can happen to you. Check out <https://biggeekdad.com/2018/01/thieves-unlock-car-without-key> and https://youtu.be/BRe_Tr7pMi8 to see an actual theft, how they do it, and what to do with your keys to prevent it happening to you.
- **Cocaine Smuggling.** The U.S. Coast Guard has seized nearly 35,000 pounds (15,000 kilograms) of cocaine from apparent drug smuggling vessels in the eastern Pacific Ocean. The drugs were off-loaded 5 FEB in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Cmdr. Michael Sharp told reporters the drugs were found over the last three months aboard fishing vessels and go-fast boats outfitted to conceal contraband and evade authorities.

- **SOTU Text.** At <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2019/trump-state-of-the-union-2019-live-fact-check-transcript-2/5/19> can be found the text of the president’s State of The Union address.
- **Potpourri.** Life is full of surprises and sometimes they are caught on camera like these incredible moments in the 9 minute video at https://youtu.be/VRB762N2RH8*.
- **Drones.** The development of unmanned aerial vehicles is one of the most promising areas of modern military aviation. Drones have already led to significant changes in the tactics of warfare, it is expected that in the near future their value will increase even more. Go to <https://youtu.be/muEJGEQAIYk> to view the 10 best military drones in the world.
- **International Space Station.** Check out <https://www.youtube.com/embed/doN4t5NKW-k> to take a 25 minute tour what it is like to live on the orbital lavatory.
- **Music.** The people of Sabadell, Spain are treated to some awesome street classical music in this entertaining flash mob created by Banco Sabadell to celebrate their 130th anniversary. The musical performance at <https://youtu.be/GBaHPND2QJg> features over 100 people in the Vallès Symphony Orchestra and the choirs of Lieder and Friends of l’Opera and the Choral Belles Arts.
- **Trump Approval Rating.** President Donald Trump received an approval rating jump in the week following his State of the Union address. Rasmussen reports that the president’s approval rating is now at 52 percent, a nine-point jump in just ten days. Trump’s approval rating hit a low of 43 percent at the end of January, but strong jobs numbers released in February and a successful State of the Union address appear to have had an effect on his approval numbers.
- **Music.** Mongolia's Enkh-Erdene ("The Mongolian Cowboy") competed for a shot to advance in the competition, on the series premiere of THE WORLD'S BEST, Sunday, Feb. 3, on the CBS Television Network. He neither speaks nor understands English. Regardless his Country Western rendition is remarkable. Check it out at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEtnKTOk0ds&frags=pl%2Cwn>.
- **Tax Forms.** For 2018, you will no longer use Form 1040A or Form 1040EZ as you may have in the past. Instead, you will use the redesigned Form 1040, which now has six new numbered schedules in addition to the existing schedules such as Schedule A. Go to <https://apps.irs.gov/app/picklist/list/formsPublications.html> to download your forms.
- **Magic Clerk Valentine’s Day.** Go to <https://biggeekdad.com/2013/03/magic-clerk-valentines-day> and watch Magician, Comedian, and Actor Michael Carbonaro is the Magic Clerk who amazes customers at a convenience store a few days before Valentine’s Day.
- **Afghanistan.** The U.S. military conducted more airstrikes in Afghanistan last year than in the three previous years combined, making 2018 the most kinetic year for airstrikes in the country in at least a decade.
- **Football.** Check out the new Mercedes-Benz stadium at <https://youtu.be/-wqyHV3T-80>. Completed in 2017 and located in Atlanta, Georgia it will be the venue for the 2019 Super Bowl

[Source: Various | February 14, 2018 ++]

Trump Foreign Policy Update 04 ► Great Nations Do Not Fight Endless Wars

President Donald Trump made the case for drawing down the number of American troops fighting overseas and boosting up those deployed along the southern U.S. border in his annual State of the Union address 5 FEB. Among pleas for bipartisan unity on national issues and attacks on political foes for opposing his policy priorities, the commander in chief promised a national audience that troops in the Middle East and Afghanistan will be returning home soon. “Our brave troops have now been fighting in the Middle East for almost 19 years,” he said. “In Afghanistan and Iraq, nearly 7,000 American heroes have given their lives.

More than 52,000 Americans have been badly wounded. We have spent more than \$7 trillion in the Middle East. “As a candidate for president, I loudly pledged a new approach. Great nations do not fight endless wars,” he said to bipartisan applause. Trump, who made the nation’s economic progress a centerpiece of his speech, said that progress could be stymied by “foolish wars, politics, or ridiculous partisan investigations” — a barb for House Democrats expected to delve into his campaign’s ties to Russia and other topics.

The speech came just hours after the Senate approved a Middle East policy bill that, in part, urged Trump not to precipitously withdraw troops from Syria and Afghanistan. The bill language on the two wars was authored by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and passed with a broad bipartisan support, 77-23. Earlier in the day, McConnell acknowledged the Trump administration has overseen “huge progress in the fight against Islamic State group militants,” but threats remain. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., called the withdrawal from Syria without the ISIS’ defeat another of Trump’s “broken promises.”

But Trump in his address insisted that coalition forces “have liberated virtually all of that territory from the grip of these bloodthirsty monsters,” echoing his recent comments declaring victory in the Syria fight. “Now, as we work with our allies to destroy the remnants of ISIS, it is time to give our brave warriors in Syria a warm welcome home,” he said. In Afghanistan — where U.S. officials have begun negotiations with Taliban remnants on a permanent cease fire — Trump said that “the hour has come to at least try for peace” and said he expects more troop reductions in the near future. About 2,000 troops are currently stationed in and around Syria and another 16,000 in Afghanistan. Defense Department leaders have claimed progress in both areas over the last year, but repeatedly warned in congressional testimony that too rapid a withdrawal could lead to regional instability.

One area seeing a troop increase is the controversial southern border deployment. About 2,300 active-duty troops are currently deployed across several states in support roles with the Department of Homeland Security, providing construction, logistics and intelligence services. Democrats in Congress have blasted that mission as militarizing the national immigration debate. But the president, who has been battling with lawmakers over more than \$5 billion for his proposed border wall project, insisted in his address the military presence is needed because of the grave security threat facing America. “As we speak, large, organized caravans are on the march to the United States ... I have ordered another 3,750 troops to our southern border to prepare for the tremendous onslaught,” he said. “This is a moral issue. The lawless state of our southern border is a threat to the safety, security, and financial well-being of all Americans.”

On defense spending, Trump said his administration had “begun to fully rebuild the United States military,” with \$700 billion for fiscal 2018 and \$716 billion for fiscal 2019. He reiterated that he has pressured foreign allies to increase their defense spending because “the United States was being treated very unfairly by NATO.” The commander in chief made no mention of plans for a \$750 billion defense budget proposal for fiscal 2020 or — with Washington mired in fiscal 2019 budget negotiations — what the path might be for a bipartisan compromise for next year. He also claimed the recent U.S. withdrawal from the Intermediate Forces Treaty with Russia as a victory, suggesting he might negotiate a new agreement that includes China. “Or perhaps we can’t, in which case, we will outspend and out-innovate all others by far,” Trump said.

On North Korea, Trump claimed his bold bilateral peace initiative had averted war. The U.S. president plans to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un again in late February. “If I had not been elected President of the United States, we would right now, in my opinion, be in a major war with North Korea,” he said, to a smattering of applause. “Much work remains to be done, but my relationship with Kim Jong Un is a good one.”

Trump made only a passing mention of veterans policy in the speech, but invoked the memory of World War II troops as a charge to lawmakers to set aside political differences for the good of the country. Three veterans from the war were among the president’s guests at the event. “We must choose whether we will squander our inheritance or whether we will proudly declare that we are Americans,” he said. “We do the incredible. We defy the impossible. We conquer the unknown ... “No matter the trials we face, no matter the challenges to come, we must go forward together.” That message of unity will be put to a test in coming days. Trump and Democratic lawmakers must reach a compromise on border wall funding by 15 FEB or risk another government shutdown similar to the month-long one

which stretched from late December to late January. [Source: DefenseNews | Leo Shane III & Joe Gould | February 5, 2019 ++]

INF Russian Treaty Update 01 ► Talks Fail | Irreconcilable Differences

The United States and Russia announced 31 JAN that they had failed to reconcile their differences over a Cold War-era nuclear pact, something some experts warn could spark a new arms race in Europe. The U.S. accuses Russia of violating the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty — or INF Treaty — which was signed in 1987 and bans all land-based missiles with a range of 310 to 3,400 miles. Moscow denies this and accuses Washington of violating the treaty. In December, the Trump administration warned Russia that it would walk away from the treaty if it did not comply by 2 FEB, Both sides have been meeting in Beijing, but Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov on 31 JAN said the talks had failed.



Components of a Russian cruise missile system are displayed near Moscow. The U.S. has for years accused Russia of violating the INF Treaty.

"Unfortunately, there is no progress," he told the Russian news agency RIA Novosti according to a translation by Reuters. "As far as we understand, the next step is coming, the next phase begins, namely the phase of the United States stopping its obligations under the INF, which will evidently happen this coming weekend." His U.S. counterpart, Andrea Thompson, undersecretary of state for arms control and international security affairs, said Washington will most likely announce the suspension of the INF Treaty in the coming days. "The Russians still aren't in acknowledgment that they are in violation of the treaty," she told Reuters. However, Thompson did add that "diplomacy is never done."

The INF Treaty was designed to keep ground-based nuclear weapons out of Europe. Russia says that the U.S. Aegis missile defense system deployed in Europe could be adapted to fit treaty-violating cruise missiles. The U.S. has for years accused Russia of violating the treaty with its Novator 9M729 missile. "These new missiles are hard to detect, they are mobile, they are nuclear capable," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said last week, referring to Russia's 9M729. "They can reach European cities and they reduce the warning time." However, even those experts who agree with the U.S. allegations have cautioned that ripping up the agreement carries significant risks, both for the Trump administration and the security of Europe.

Even a hollow agreement, they say, goes some way to curtailing the development and deployment of weapons that could target European capitals and military targets. Without it, it would be a free-for-all. "One concern is that in the medium-term there may be the temptation to return intermediate-range missiles, potentially including nuclear weapons, to Europe," Karl Dewey, an analyst at Jane's by IHS Markit, told NBC News when President Donald Trump announced his intentions in October.

All this comes at a time when Trump's mixed messages have caused alarm among NATO allies about whether the president would truly commit to the principle of mutual defense if Europe were attacked. "Accompanying any return of nuclear weapons will be the lingering concerns ... whether the U.S. would be prepared to protect its European allies in a nuclear war in the European theater — i.e. trade Boston for Berlin, Wisconsin for Warsaw," Dewey added. Some backed Trump's ultimatum last year, saying it might bring the Russians to the negotiating table rather than risk an arms race they could not afford. Others wondered whether the treaty had more to do with the U.S. wanting to keep apace with China, whose weapons are not bound by the INF Treaty.

James Nixey, head of the Russia and Eurasia Program at the London think tank Chatham House, said that although Russia is violating the agreement, it was a mistake for the U.S. to walk away rather than try to enforce it more effectively. "Without wishing to pass off any moral equivalence here, both sides are being very stubborn," he said. "Nobody wants to make any concessions, nobody wants to admit they're wrong, nobody wants to seem to give an inch because it looks like weakness or inferiority." He believes that the Trump administration should have opted for a middle ground. "The answer isn't rolling over and letting it happen, and the answer is not walking away," Nixey said. "The answer is: If you don't comply on one aspect of the treaty we will do something about it." [Source: NBC News | Alexander Smith | January 29, 2019 ++]

DPRK Missile Program Update 04 ► Dispersing to Prevent “Decapitation” Strikes

North Korea's nuclear and missile programs “remain intact” and its leaders are dispersing missile assembly and testing facilities to prevent “decapitation” strikes, U.N. experts said in a new report. The experts' report to the Security Council, seen Tuesday by The Associated Press, says the country continues to defy U.N. sanctions, including through “a massive increase in illegal ship-to-ship transfers of petroleum products and coal.” The Democratic People's Republic of Korea — the country's official name — also continues to violate an arms embargo, a ban on luxury goods and financial sanctions, the experts said.

The report was sent to council members as U.S. President Donald Trump is preparing for a second summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. At their June summit in Singapore, Trump promised “security guarantees” to Pyongyang and Kim recommitted to the “complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.” But there were no signs in the experts' report that Kim has taken any steps toward eliminating his nuclear arsenal or intercontinental ballistic missiles, which he boasted could reach the U.S. mainland. "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs remain intact," the experts said. "The panel found that the DPRK is using civilian facilities, including airports, for ballistic missile assembly and testing with the goal of effectively preventing 'decapitation' strikes," they said. It also "found evidence of a consistent trend on the part of the DPRK to disperse the assembly, storage and testing locations."

The panel said it is continuing to investigate companies, entities and individuals in Asia who are on the U.N. sanctions blacklist and “clandestinely procured centrifuges for the DPRK's nuclear program” — and who attempted to sell “a wide range of military equipment to armed groups and governments in the Middle East and Africa.” The experts also painted a picture of continuing wide-ranging efforts by the DPRK to evade U.N. sanctions. The massive increase in ship-to-ship transfers “render the latest United Nations sanctions ineffective by flouting the caps on the DPRK's import of petroleum products and crude oil as well as the coal ban imposed in 2017 by the Security Council in response to the DPRK's unprecedented nuclear and ballistic missile testing,” the experts said.

They quoted one unnamed country as saying the DPRK obtained more than the cap of 500,000 barrels of refined petroleum products in 2019, but said another unnamed country questioned the figure. And the experts said: "Global banks and insurance companies continue to unwittingly facilitate payments and provide coverage for vessels involved in ever-larger, multimillion-dollar, illegal ship-to-ship transfers of petroleum products, as well as an increasing number of ship-to-ship coal transfers and attempted trans-shipments." As for the arms embargo, they said the DPRK attempted

to supply small arms, light weapons and other military equipment via foreign intermediaries to Houthi Shiite rebels in Yemen as well as Libya and Sudan. The experts said they also investigated DPRK involvement in gold mining in Congo, construction of a military camp in Sierra Leone and the same of fishing rights in waters surrounding the country, and other activities around the world banned under U.N. sanctions. [Source: The Associated Press | Edith M. Lederer | February 5, 2019 ++]

How to Buy a Refrigerator ► Step by Step Procedure

Following is an article that addresses something we all eventually have to do. At least I have had to do a least 3 times in the last forty years. Something to file away for when you need to buy one. Rather than edit it, I have printed it almost exactly as written:



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I had hours to replace a failing refrigerator. Here's how I got the perfect appliance at the perfect price in a matter of minutes. My wife and I were lying in bed the other night, and suddenly we began hearing a loud knocking noise coming from the kitchen — more specifically, from the freezer compartment of our 14-year-old refrigerator. The end was near. It's not like I didn't see it coming. I've personally replaced the ice-maker in this refrigerator twice — thanks, YouTube! — and had an appliance repairman fix it twice, at a couple of hundred bucks a pop. This refrigerator even starred in the Money Talks News story back in 2013 at <https://youtu.be/V2NuEKNpiiA>. I'd finally had enough. I needed to replace it, and fast, since it could give up the ghost at any minute and spoil everything — literally. I honestly wasn't sure it would make it through the day. Thank God for emergency funds. Here's how I went about shopping for and buying a new refrigerator, step by step:

Step 1: Measure

As you can see in the above video, my refrigerator is surrounded by cabinets, so there's no margin for error. It's also "cabinet depth," so it doesn't stick out into the kitchen. That severely limits my replacement choices. I took a tape measure and measured all the dimensions — height, depth and width — twice.

Step 2: A text to Howie

My friend and father-in-law, Howard Steinman, has managed an appliance store in Queens, New York, for decades. My next step was to text him and get his recommendations. He asked for the model number of my current GE refrigerator and said he'd scope out options for me. While you may not have a Howie, you might have friends who have recently purchased a refrigerator. Maybe they did some footwork that would lessen yours. There's also no law against calling an appliance repair person and asking for their recommendations concerning reliability. After all, if anyone knows bad brands, it's the folks who fix them. This I had already done when I did the above story. My repair guy's answer was basically this:

"I don't care if you buy a \$700 Whirlpool or a \$12,000 KitchenAid. All refrigerators these days use circuit boards — sensitive electronics that don't do well in a damp, dusty environment. And most are made in China. So, an appliance that used to routinely last 20-plus years now breaks down in under 10. In short, they're all crap."

Hopefully, an expert you consult will have more optimistic news, but I doubt it. See “[Why Modern Appliances Don’t Last.](#)” While waiting to hear back from Howie, I continued my search.

Step 3: Consumer Reports

I’m a big believer in Consumer Reports. The staff of this nonprofit publication go out and buy products, then rigorously test them in their own laboratories. With refrigerators, for example, they test for predicted reliability, thermostat control, temperature uniformity, energy efficiency, noise, ease of use and last, but definitely not least, owner satisfaction. Then they combine all this stuff and assign an overall rating to each model, which makes the shopping process easy. I visited CR headquarters a few years back: It’s impressive. So, this is the source I turn to for information and recommendations on everything from appliances to cars.

I get Consumer Reports free as a member of the media. The typical price is \$35 a year for a digital membership and \$55 for both digital and print. Not cheap, especially since you probably won’t use it often. There may, however, be a workaround. Check your local library. Odds are your library has a membership to Consumer Reports. If so, you might be able to peruse product ratings online for free from the comfort of your home. Consumer Reports’ [refrigerator buying guide](#) (available without a membership) helped me decide to go with a French-door configuration, as well as helping me decide on other features I wanted. Then, I went to CR’s [ratings for French-door refrigerators](#) (membership required) to see their top picks. Here’s what that looked like:

Overall Score	Brand & Model / Price	Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Thermostat control	Temperature uniformity	Energy efficiency	Noise	Ease of use	Number of doors	Cabinet-depth model	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)
Three-door French-door											
OVERALL SCORE 78	LG LFXC24726S Price: \$3,060 Shop	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	•	23.5
ADD TO COMPARE											
OVERALL SCORE 77	GE Cafe CYE22TSHSS Price: \$2,790 Shop	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	•	22.2
ADD TO COMPARE											
OVERALL SCORE 77	GE Profile PYE22PSKSS Price: \$2,970 Shop	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	•	22.2
ADD TO COMPARE											
OVERALL SCORE 77	GE GYE22HSKSS Price: \$2,610 Shop	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	•	22.2
ADD TO COMPARE											
OVERALL SCORE 75	LG LFX21976[ST] Price: \$2,700 Shop	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	•	21
ADD TO COMPARE											

As you can see, the LG LFXC24726S was the top-ranked model, although there wasn’t much difference among the top five. However, three of the top five models were made by GE, the brand that destroyed my Zen and sent me on this quest in the first place. And I’m apparently not alone: All three of the GE models in this lineup had a “fair” rating for both owner satisfaction and reliability. Both LG models had a “very good” rating for owner satisfaction and “good” for reliability. So long, GE. The only other LG in the list had a comparable overall rating and cost a bit less, but it didn’t hold quite as much, which was also important to me.

Step 4: Check in with Howie

A couple of hours had gone by since I’d texted Howie, so I sent him a new text telling him the model I’d tentatively selected. He responded that it was a good pick. He also suggested a couple of GE refrigerators as additional options,

but that's ground we've already covered. I don't reward brands that mess with my Zen. That settled that. It was LG for me. Now all I had to do was see if I could find and get a deal on the LFXC24726S.

Step 5: Find it

My refrigerator was threatening to die at any minute, so I needed to find its replacement yesterday. My next move was a trip to [Amazon](#), where I tend to make 90 percent of my purchases. Alas, no luck. They didn't have that model. Next: [Home Depot's site](#). They sold my model but said it couldn't be delivered for two weeks. Finally, I checked [Lowe's site](#): Eureka! They had one in stock at a nearby store.

Step 6: A trip to Lowe's

Since this refrigerator cost as much as a decent used car, I wasn't about to buy it without seeing it in person. So, even had I bought it online, I wouldn't have done so without first seeing it somewhere locally. Nor am I stupid enough to buy the centerpiece of our kitchen without consulting my wife, Sara. I made a date with Sara to meet at the local Lowe's on her way home from work. Before going to Lowe's, I called to make sure they actually had this model in stock. The phone rang for 15 minutes. Nobody ever picked up. Since the wife was already en route, I took a chance and went to the store.

Step 7: The purchase

When I got to Lowe's, I found my wife and together we found the LG LFXC24726S. What we couldn't find was anyone who worked in the appliance department. Much to my wife's chagrin, after a few minutes, I yelled, "**Does anybody work here?**" That produced results. An employee from another department came over, followed shortly thereafter by a manager, who explained the appliance person was at dinner. I calmly replied that I wanted to buy an LG LFXC24726S, but because of the massive mess they'd made of my Zen, I expected a massive discount as reparations. Lowe's had the LG LFXC24726S on sale for \$2,600. They sold me the floor model — the only one they had — for a little more than \$2,000, including free delivery. It was in my kitchen 48 hours later.

Conclusion

Shopping for appliances sucks. But it's easier if you can create a "buyer's funnel" to follow, much like the one I described above. My funnel began with all the refrigerators in the world. I eliminated many by checking out a buying guide and deciding on the features I needed. I eliminated many more by focusing only on the top-ranked models. Since I was in a hurry, finding my pick locally ultimately eliminated all but one. This entire process, from initial search to switching food from the old refrigerator to new, took about five hours of effort spread over three days. But it was time well spent. My Zen has been restored. At least, until the next thing breaks down.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | February 4, 2019 ++]

Iran Military Posture ► Result of Three 20th Century Invasions

Iran's aggressive military posture is often attributed to its quasi-theocratic revolutionary government. However, the Middle Eastern state also had the misfortune of experiencing three devastating, unprovoked invasions in the 20th century. The first Iranian invasion occurred near the end of World War I. The state — then called Persia — remained neutral in World War I, but that didn't prevent British, Russian and Ottoman armies from entering Iran to seize its oil, food and roads. The second was the Soviet and British invasion in 1941 despite the Shah remaining neutral when World War II broke out, The last and best known of these, the Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988, killed hundreds of thousands of Iranians, many of them civilians. Iran eventual defeated Iraq despite both the United States *and* the Soviet Union supplying weapons to Iraq. To learn more about first two invasions refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**British & Soviet Iran Invasion 1941**". [Source: War Is Boring | Sebastien Roblin | November 19, 2018 ++]

Interesting Ideas ► Bracelets



Use a paper clip to put bracelets on yourself

One Word Essays ► Scary



Have You Heard? ► Eating In The fifties | Paddy | Things You Learned From your Parents

Eating In The fifties

- Pasta had not been invented. It was macaroni or spaghetti.
- Curry was a surname.
- Taco? Never saw one till I was 15.
- Pizza? Sounds like a leaning tower somewhere.
- Bananas and oranges only appeared at Christmas time.
- All chips were plain.

- Oil was for lubricating, fat was for cooking.
- Tea was made in a teapot using tea leaves and never green.
- Cubed sugar was regarded as posh.
- Chickens didn't have fingers in those days.
- None of us had ever heard of yogurt.
- Healthy food consisted of anything edible!
- Cooking outside was called camping.
- Seaweed was not a recognized food.
- 'Kebab' was not even a word, never mind a food.
- Sugar enjoyed a good press in those days, and was regarded as being white gold.
- Prunes were medicinal and stewed.
- Surprisingly Muesli was readily available. It was called cattle feed.
- Pineapples came in chunks or were round with a hole in the middle, in a tin; We had only ever seen a picture of a real one.
- Water came out of the tap. If someone had suggested bottling it and charging more than gasoline for it, they would have become a laughing stock.
- There were three things that we never ever had on/at our table in the fifties ...Elbows, hats and cell phones! ...and there was always two choices for each meal..."Take it" or "Leave it"

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Paddy

Paddy had been drinking at his local pub all day and most of the night.

Mick, the bartender says, 'You'll not be drinking anymore tonight, Paddy'.

Paddy replies, 'OK Mick, I'll be on my way then'. Paddy spins around on his stool, steps off and falls flat on his face.

'Damn' he says and pulls himself up by the stool and dusts himself off. He takes a step towards the door and falls flat on his face, 'Oh bloody damn!'

He looks to the doorway and thinks to himself that if he can just get to the door and some fresh air he'll be fine.

He belly crawls to the door and shimmies up to the door frame. He sticks his head outside and takes a deep breath of fresh air. Feeling much better, he takes a step out onto the sidewalk and falls flat on his face.

'Be-Jesus... I'm in bloody trouble,' he says.

He can see his house just a few doors down and crawls to the door, hauls himself up the door frame, opens the door and shimmies inside.

He takes a look up the stairs and says, 'No bloody way....'

He crawls up the stairs to his bedroom door and says, 'I can make it to the bed'. He takes a step into the room and falls flat on his face. He says 'Damn it!' and crawls into bed.

The next morning, his wife, Jess, comes into the room carrying a cup of coffee and says, 'Get up Paddy. Did you have a bit to drink last night?'

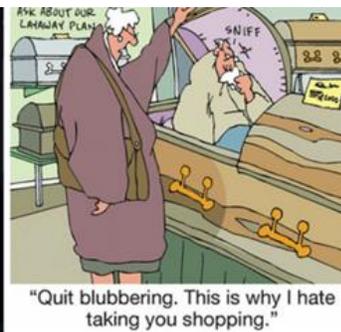
Paddy says, 'I did, Jess. I was bloody pissed. But how did you know?'

'Mick phoned. You left your wheelchair at the pub.'

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Things You Learned From your Parents

- **TO APPRECIATE A JOB WELL DONE**—"If you're going to kill each other, do it outside... I just finished cleaning."
- **RELIGION**—"You better pray that will come out of the carpet."
- **TIME TRAVEL**—"If you don't straighten up, I'm going to knock you into the middle of next week!"
- **LOGIC**—"Because I said so, that's why."
- **MORE LOGIC**—"If you fall out of that swing and break your neck, you're not going to the store with me."
- **FORESIGHT**—"Make sure you wear clean underwear, in case you're in an accident."
- **IRONY**—"Keep crying, and I'll give you something to cry about."
- **OSMOSIS**—"Shut your mouth and eat your supper."
- **CONTORTION-ISM**—"Will you look at that dirt on the back of your neck!"
- **STAMINA**—"You'll sit there until all that spinach is gone."
- **WEATHER**—"This room of yours looks as if a tornado went through it."
- **HYPOCRISY**—"If I told you once, I've told you a million times. Don't exaggerate!"
- **CIRCLE OF LIFE**—"I brought you into this world, and I can take you out."
- **BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION**—"If all the other kids jumped off a cliff, would you?!"
- **ENVY**—"There are millions of less fortunate children in this world who don't have wonderful parents like you do."
- **ANTICIPATION**—"Just wait until your father gets home."
- **RECEIVING**—"You are going to get it when you get home!"
- **MEDICAL SCIENCE**—"If you don't stop crossing your eyes, they are going to get stuck that way."
- **ESP**—"Put your sweater on; don't you think I know when you are cold?"
- **HUMOR**—"Wipe that smirk off your face or I'll show you what's funny!"
- **HOW TO BECOME AN ADULT**—"If you don't eat your vegetables, you'll never grow up."
- **GENETICS**—"You're gonna grow up just like your crazy uncle!"
- **ROOTS**—"Shut that door behind you. Do you think you were born in a barn?"
- **WISDOM**—"When you get to be my age, you'll understand."
- **JUSTICE**—"One day you'll have kids, and I hope they turn out just like you !"
- **CHOICE**—"Do you want me to stop this car?"



The Army Corps of Engineers spent \$60 BILLION to protect New Orleans alone. Divided by 138 MILLION tax payers in the US that is about \$435 per tax payer to protect 395k people from a storm that MIGHT happen in the next 50 years.

Trump's current WALL plan would cost \$5.7 BILLION to protect an entire nation. Divided by 138 MILLION tax payers in the US that is about \$41 per tax payer to protect 320 Million peoples homes, business and family members from REAL CRIME and REAL DRUG DEATHS that ARE HAPPENING RIGHT NOW.

"Quite frankly, for Trump to receive a nice welcome in California he'd have to come in illegally."

Dennis Miller



"Y'all think the wall won't work? The Chinese built a wall 2000yrs ago and they still don't have no Mexicans"

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- <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions in Word format)
- <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS)
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Notes:

1. The Bulletin is provided as a website accessed document vice direct access. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 19,754 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others were deleted from the active mailing list.
2. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.
3. New subscribers and those who submit a change of address should receive a message that verifies their addition or address change being entered in the mailing list. If you do not receive a message within 3 days it indicates that either I never received you request, I made an error in processing your request, or your server will not allow me to send to the email addree you provided. Anyone who cannot reach me by email can call (858) 842-1111 to ask questions or confirm info needed to add them to the directory.

4. If you have another email addree at work or home and would like to receive Bulletin notices there also, just provide the appropriate addree to raoemo@sbcglobal.net.

5. Past Bulletin articles as well as an index of all previously published article titles are available on request to raoemo@sbcglobal.net. Bear in mind that the articles listed on this 200 page plus index were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or become outdated.

6. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. To aid in continued receipt of Bulletin availability notices, recommend enter the email addree raoemo@sbcglobal.net into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html (PDF Edition), www.veteransresources.org (PDF & HTML Editions), <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions), or <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you can access the Bulletin at any of the aforementioned sites it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my email. Either your server considers it to be spam or I have somehow incorrectly entered or removed your addree from the mailing list. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the validated mailing list. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at any of these sites let me know.

7. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. At the end of each article is provided the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that that the information was reformatted from the original source and/or editorialized from more than one source. Because of the number of articles contained in each Bulletin there is no why that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken from previously reliable sources. My staff consist of only one person (myself) and it is a 7/10-12 endeavor to prepare and publish. Readers who question the validity of content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.

8. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin to other vets or veteran organizations.

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