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**MCRMC Update 07 ► Health Care | Abolish TRICARE**

The congressional commission has recommended a complete overhaul of the military health system — one that does away with Tricare, changes the medical command structure and seeks to improve Defense
Department coordination with Veterans Affairs. The goal of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission's recommendations, according to its final report released 29 JAN, is to preserve the quality of combat care that saved many troops' lives in Iraq and Afghanistan but also improve access to health treatment for those who use the system.

Under the recommendations, active-duty members and mobilized reserve component members still would receive medical care from the U.S. military, with easier access to specialty care in the civilian sector if they need it. But their family members, and retirees under 65 and their family members, would receive health care through commercial insurers, similar to the plans run under the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program. Active-duty families would receive an allowance to cover the cost of their insurance premiums, called the Basic Allowance for Health Care. Retirees below Medicare-eligible age would pay their premiums out of pocket, although at a lower cost than civilian plans as "recognition" of their service, commission members said. The program would be run from the Office of Personnel Management, just as the FEHBP is, negating the need for the massive Tricare contract management and oversight structure that now exists within the Pentagon, according to the report.

But this would not be FEHBP, commission members stressed, because that program does not provide options appropriate for military beneficiaries with their unique requirements, including the availability of military treatment facilities and readiness demands, the commission wrote. "By moving toward private insurance, beneficiaries of the plan would have improved access to health care. … It also solves some of the issues with mobilization and demobilization of reservists," said Bob Daigle, the commission's executive director. The move to commercial insurance would save active-duty families money, according to data provided by the commission. A family with no members currently qualifying for Tricare Young Adult could save, in 2014 dollars, $457 a year if they decide to enroll in a health maintenance organization, $493 a year if they opt for a preferred provider network plan and $464 a year for a flexible fee-for-service plan.

The savings would be even larger for families with adult children, because they would not have to pay premiums for Tricare Young Adult, since the Affordable Care Act mandates that insurers allow dependents to stay on their parents' plan until age 26 if the insured has no access to employer-provided care. For families who experience a catastrophic illness or injury, the commission recommended that DoD consider creating a program to help with those costs. To preserve the viability of military hospitals and clinics and preserve the skills of military physicians, Tricare Prime service areas — those regions within 40 miles of a military hospital or clinic — would be disbanded, and military family members, retirees and veterans with civilian insurance would be allowed to use military treatment facilities on a discounted basis to attract patients, including those with challenging medical conditions. "Allowing beneficiaries to choose from a selection of commercial plans … would improve the health benefits for military beneficiaries … [and also] create new tools with which DoD could attract patients to military hospitals," according to the report. Tricare for Life beneficiaries would continue to have the same access to care they now have, under the plan.

The commission also recommended that DoD create a four-star Joint Readiness Command led by a four-star flag or general officer that would lead much of the portion of the Joint Staff responsible for readiness, including a subordinate joint medical function run by a three-star. This structure, commissioners said, would improve coordination across the services in treatment, transportation and care for injured and ill troops. "Joint readiness today is at a high level because we've just been through more than a decade of war. This seeks to preserve that function," Daigle said. The recommendations also include changes to programs for beneficiaries with special needs, to more closely align them with state Medicaid programs — a codicil that advocates have pressed for in the past several years.
The commission also called for improving coordination between DoD and VA health services, to include creating a uniform drug formulary for smooth transition and monitoring of prescriptions, establishing standard reimbursement and complete the effort to create a joint electronic health record system. Members estimate that the changes to the health programs could reduce the Pentagon budget by $26.5 billion from fiscal 2016 to fiscal 2020 and $6.7 billion a year in savings by 2033. Commissioners said the savings would come from decreases in costs of providing health care benefits, decreased cost shares for some beneficiaries and increased cost shares for other beneficiaries, namely working-age retirees. Unlike the retirement portion of the report, which would apply to new recruits if approved by Congress, the health care portion of the recommendations would affect all family members, retirees and their families — except for those on Tricare For Life — once they were signed into law.

Joyce Raezer, executive director of the National Military Family Association, said she polled 20 military spouses shortly after the report's release and said most were "intrigued" by the recommendations, adding that the military system is in dire need of an overhaul, and in the absence of that occurring, the prospect of choice is appealing. "Generally, the option for choice in this arrangement ... they like that. The Tricare bureaucracy is cumbersome," Raezer said. But the spouses added they would need help understanding their options and choosing plans — the kind of information that cannot be provided only to the active-duty service member. They also wondered how such a system would work across state lines and overseas. "The biggest concern is about education," Raezer said. "We have been educating the whole country about health care with the Affordable Care Act right now. This means we'd need to educate retirees and family members." To read the full report go to http://projects.militarytimes.com/pdfs/2015-report-compensation.pdf. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime ] Jan 29, 2015 ++

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MCRMC Update 08 ► Shrink Retirement | Start 401K

A detailed proposal to revamp military retirement that was sent to Capitol Hill would shrink the size of future troops' pensions and end the 20-year, all-or-nothing aspect of the current benefits package by starting 401(k)-style investment funds with government contributions for lower-ranking troops. After a two-year study, the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission on 29 JAN publicly unveiled 15 major recommendations that would give individual troops far more control over shaping and managing their own retirement packages. One stunning feature of the new proposal is to give individual troops the option to forgo immediate monthly retirement checks and instead receive a lump-sum payment for the total value of their working-age retirement benefit between the time they leave service and the time they become eligible for their normal Social Security benefits, usually starting at age 67.

At its core, the new proposal would scale back the size of military pensions by 20 percent. Yet it preserves the current structure by continuing to offer the option of monthly checks immediately upon separation for those who serve 20 years. To supplement that diminished pension, the proposal calls for government
contributions to a 401(k)-style investment account — matching up to 5 percent of base pay — as well as a new lump-sum "continuation pay" for troops who go beyond 12 years of service. According to the commission's calculations, the proposed retirement benefit's total value could be higher than the current system if service members contribute at least 3 percent of their basic pay and also their lump-sum 12-year continuation pay to their TSP account. The total value of the proposed package would be significantly lower for troops who chose not to invest portions of their basic pay and continuation pay.

However, the commission's proposal would not save the Defense Department a large block of money. If adopted, the commission projects this alternative retirement plan would save the Pentagon less than $2 billion per year in the long run. That's less than 1 percent of the total Defense Department budget. The cost savings from the reduced pension are limited due to the expense of providing a new retirement benefit to troops who serve less than 20 years. Commissioners acknowledged that this proposal is not going to resolve the Pentagon leadership's concerns about rising personnel costs. "This is a small first step," said Larry Pressler, one of the nine commissioners who is a former congressman from South Dakota and a Vietnam war veteran. "This isn't going to solve the big issue." Commissioners emphasized that cost-savings was not their primary goal. Instead, they sought to modernize the current system and craft changes that appeal to today's generation of service members.

"The All-Volunteer Force increasingly comprises Service members born after 1980, members of the 'millennial' generation. Research has shown members of this generation change jobs frequently and tend to favor flexible retirement options, rather than the defined benefit pension plans preferred by previous generations," the commission wrote in its 280-page report. The commission's changes could apply only to future recruits and would grandfather today's service members under the current system — but would give them the choice to opt in. For example, today's young service members who have no interest in staying for 20 years might choose to opt into the new deal and receive government contributions to their investment account. The commission surveyed more than 150,000 active-duty and retired service members last year to gauge their preferences on compensation. Extensive analysis suggests that the new proposal would meet the force's current recruitment and retention needs, the commission said.

**Multiplier drops to 2.0.** The proposal calls for reducing the "multiplier" used to calculate military retirement. Today's system calculates future pension checks by taking the amount of basic pay members receive in their latter years of service and calculating a percentage by multiplying the number of years served times 2.5. That means troops who serve 20 years receive checks equal to 50 percent of their final pay. The proposal would lower that multiplier from today's 2.5 to 2.0, a change that over time shaves of thousands of dollars in total payments. For a retiree who served 20 years, pension checks would reflect only 40 percent of his final basic pay. For example, an service member who retires at the E-7 paygrade after 20 years of experience would hypothetically under the proposed system receive a pension with an estimated value of about $161,000, compared to $201,000 under the current system, according to data in the commission's report. For an officer leaving after 20 years as an O-5, the proposed system would offer a pension valued at about $569,000 compared to about $711,000 under the current system.

**12-Year Gate.** One potentially big change included in the commission's proposal is to give the defense secretary the authority to modify the 20-year service requirement to qualify for a retirement pension. That all-important milestone of 20 years could be adjusted up or down for "an occupational specialty or other grouping of members, as defined by the Secretary," the report says. The idea of continuation pay is likely to be popular with service members. Troops who clear the milestone of 12 years of service would receive a lump-sum that will be at least 2.5 times one month's basic pay, and could range as high as 13 months' basic pay. For example, an active-duty E-7 would receive at least $10,000 and an active-duty O-4 would get at least $17,000. The continuation pay would require agreeing to a four-year commitment, through 16 years of
The services could raise the continuation pay in particular career fields where they want to retain people. In most cases, retaining officers at today's rate would require continuation pays that exceed 10 months of basic pay, according to the commission's report. Service members would be encouraged to immediately put that lump-sum payment in their TSP account, but would have no legal requirement to do so.

**Lump-sum retirement.** The plan would inject a new major decision into the lives of retiring service members. Those who clear 20 years and earn a pension would have the option of taking monthly checks just like the kind offered today, or to request a lump sum. The proposal sketches out two lump-sum options. Troops can give up all monthly payments until age 67 in exchange for a check equal to the value of those working-age retiree benefits. Or they can ask for a hybrid arrangement that offers half the value in a lump sum immediately upon leaving the service and the other half spread out in monthly checks. Regardless of their decision, the monthly pension checks resume at age 67 for all retirees, according to the plan.

**Basic pay and matching contributions.** The TSP element of the plan may be more controversial because it calls for automatically diverting a small percentage of basic pay into the savings account. Typically money deposited into a TSP is not available for withdrawal without tax penalty until age 59 and a half. Under the plan, troops arriving at boot camp would be enrolled automatically in the Thrift Savings Plan, the 401(k)-style investment account for federal employees. They would receive government contributions to that account, which they can keep when it vests after completing two years of service. Initially, the government contribution would be a modest 1 percent of basic pay. After that, service members with between three and 20 years of service would be encouraged to contribute their own money to the TSP and the government would provide matching funds up to 5 percent of basic pay. The automatic enrollment in the TSP would include diverting 3 percent of troops' basic pay into the savings account. If they want to change that contribution level, they can contact their financial office to raise it or lower it to zero. However, every January all service members will be re-enrolled for a 3 percent contribution. "The military is very accustomed to reinforced training and by doing this every year, hopefully we will condition their thinking to the point where [they think] 'OK this must be a good thing,'” said Alphonso Maldon, the commission's chairman who is a former Army officer and former assistant secretary of defense for force management and policy.

**Financial literacy.** According to the commission's calculations, the proposed retirement benefit's total value could be higher than the current system if service members contribute 3 percent of their basic pay and their lump-sum continuation pay to their TSP account. The commission's survey showed that service members prefer options and want to have more control over shaping their own benefits package. The new proposal is underpinned with the hope or assumption that service members will make good, informed financial decisions and sacrifice short-term spending power for long-term financial security. But that flexibility also opens the door to financially risky decision-making. For example, a service member could choose to buy a family car with his or her 12-year continuation pay, which would reduce the long-term value of his or her investment account. Or, on a larger scale, a retiring service member could request his retirement benefit in a lump-sum check to start a new business. If that business goes bust, that retired veteran could be destitute just a few years after leaving the military. The commission acknowledged the issue in their recommendations and suggesting the Pentagon pencil in $75 million annually to administer on-going financial literacy education programs for service members. Troops would attend annual classes on money management, according to the plan.

The commission's report is hardly the first proposed overhaul of the military retirement system. In 2011, the Defense Business Board, a Pentagon advisory group, published a detailed proposal that would have replaced monthly pension checks with 401(k)-style investment accounts. That suggested the government contributions should be at least 16.5 percent of basic pay, with higher rates for deployed service members or high-demand career fields. That plan went nowhere after it was criticized by service members, disavowed by the Pentagon leadership and landed with a thud on Capitol Hill. Last March, the Pentagon's personnel and
readiness office broke its long silence on the topic and offered several detailed and complex alternatives to the current system: hybrid options that included both a TSP with government contributions as well as the promise of smaller, partial pension checks before traditional retirement age. That plan also included some lump-sum payments for troops staying at least 20 years, offering a "transition pay" equal to as much as three years' basic pay.


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**MCRMC Update 09 ➤ Commissaries & Exchanges | Consolidate**

Defense officials should think about consolidating commissaries and exchanges into a single defense resale system, according to the report from the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission released Thursday. After a two-year study, the commission publicly unveiled 15 major recommendations that would change a variety of military benefits. "Commissary and exchange benefits are valued by many service members, retirees and their families, and should be maintained," the commission recommended. "Let's stop for a minute and celebrate that the commission found that the basic commissary premise of selling at cost plus 5 percent is viable," said Joyce Raezer, executive director of the National Military Family Association. A consolidated resale organization would better sustain that benefit while over time reducing reliance on taxpayer dollars, commissioners said.

The commission recommends some cost-saving measures related to the consolidation, but they are far less than what defense officials have proposed. DoD has proposed cutting $1 billion in annual costs from the current $1.4 billion budget within a couple of years, but the commission's estimates would start saving in fiscal 2017 — $78 million — until it reaches $515 million in annual savings by fiscal 2021. Food would continue to be sold at cost in commissaries, but to reduce the need for taxpayer dollars, the stores would start making a profit on other items — new items like beer and wine, convenience items such as greeting cards, school supplies and cosmetics, and store brand products. The commission recognized that there would have to be some changes in laws and policies to allow these and other changes.

- Costs of transporting items overseas — now funded by taxpayer dollars, so that customers overseas pay the same for products in their stores as they would stateside — would be covered out of nonappropriated funds.
- Customers also might pay a 5 percent surcharge for similar items in the exchanges. "Conversely, allow the use of exchange profits to cover commissary costs currently covered by the surcharge," the report suggests
- The stores would also consolidate their logistics networks, consolidate their staffs and convert commissary staff from appropriated-fund employees (taxpayer-funded) to nonappropriated fund employees — funded by profits from sales, for example. They would consolidate retail space where multiple exchanges and commissaries are operated within close proximity.

Under the proposal, stores initially would maintain their own branding — such as the Navy Exchange — and directors would be appointed for each of the exchange systems within the consolidated agency. But over time, the branding and organizational structure could be modified. That consolidation would include the exchanges, but not the organizations currently managed by the exchanges. Part of the military services’ morale, welfare and recreation programs still would be funded from the organization's profits. But family advocates would like more details about how a consolidation would work, Raezer said. When she briefed the commission's recommendations to military spouses on her organization's staff, she said, the two primary
questions raised were: "How do you work out what's sold at what price?" and "How do you sort out how much money goes to morale, welfare and recreation?"

The commission's report said that in its survey, town halls and other public forums, commissary and exchange benefits frequently received strong support, "with a primary focus on commissary discounts, yet some service members did challenge the value of the commissary and exchange benefits. "Typically they were skeptical of the claimed savings and the quality of nonbranded products such as produce. "Even among skeptics, however, there was consistent acknowledgment of the additional benefit offered overseas, and in remote and isolated locations, where commercial alternatives are either not available or not comparable.”

Based on the commission's survey, the most important aspects of the commissary benefit were discounts and convenience. Go to [http://projects.militarytimes.com/pdfs/2015-report-compensation.pdf](http://projects.militarytimes.com/pdfs/2015-report-compensation.pdf) to read the full report. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | Jan. 29, 2015 ++]

MCRMC Update 10 ► Congress &Advocates | Wary Of Panel's Proposals

None of the major changes outlined in the new military compensation report released 29 JAN can become law without congressional action, and the commission has drawn up proposed legislation that is ready for lawmakers to vote on, if they choose to do so. The report is likely to spark renewed debate about the military compensation system, which has changed little in the past 40 years. Senior Pentagon leaders say it is costly and unsustainable and will erode the Defense Department's ability to invest in weapons modernization and high-tech research. The commission was created by Congress two years ago to address some of those concerns.

Still unknown is how large the commission's impact may be. Many experts say real change is unlikely in part because the commission's proposals will not get fast-tracked to an up-or-down vote but will instead move through Congress' normal arcane procedures. Yet some veterans' advocates say Congress may be spurred to action by several factors, including budget pressures created by the across-the-board spending cuts known as sequestration. And it may prove easier politically to tackle this sensitive topic now that far fewer troops are deployed in combat zones overseas than just a few years ago. "You have this appetite for change just as long as it saves money. This has created this opportunity, if you could call it that, to give something like this ... little scrutiny and quick implementation," said Mike Hayden, the director of government relations for the Military Officer Association of America, which opposes curtailing military benefits. One criticism that will swiftly emerge is that moving troops' retirement into individual investment accounts will saddle them with new responsibilities for managing money, with many lacking the requisite skills.

So far lawmakers are viewing the massive document as a conversation starter, not a blueprint. That's fine with outside advocates, who are warning not to rush the complex proposals for overhauling military retirement and health care. "This is going to take a couple of years of hearings and analysis to do right," said Norb Ryan, president of the Military Officers Association of America. "What we don't want to see is them mess up anything by moving too quickly on changes." Both the House and Senate Armed Services committees will hold hearings next week with officials from the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, the launch of what both congressional panels say will be a lengthy review of military pay and benefits.
The report includes 15 recommendations, including an end to the 20-year, all-or-nothing military retirement system in favor of a 401(k)-style investment plan. Commissioners also are pushing to dismantle the military health care system in favor of a new health care allowance program for troops. Some Congressional leaders initial reactions to the Commission’s report were:

- House Armed Services Committee Chairman Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX) said on Thursday the committee's review will focus on how those changes would affect recruiting and retention, noting that "the services must compete with the private sector for talent." Neither he nor Rep. Joe Heck (R-NV) — who oversees the committee's personnel panel — offered comment on the specific proposals.
- Heck's counterpart on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) said he did not support the idea of "abolishing Tricare" but said he hadn't fully reviewed the commission's proposal yet.
- Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) also expressed concerns about the health care changes, indicating that issue could be a sticking point on Capitol Hill.

MOAA president Norm Ryan said he has concerns about many of the specifics in the report, especially a proposal to abolish Tricare. Unlike the retirement changes, which won't affect current troops or retirees, closing hospitals and changing medical access would have an immediate and possibly devastating effect on the military community, he said. He also expressed concern about some of the retirement investment plans, noting that his group will be closely eyeing provisions to boost troops' financial savvy before backing any such plan. Still, he said he sees the report as a critical conversation starter, one that he expects won't simply end up unread on Capitol Hill shelves. "These aren't hairbrained ideas," he said. "This is a serious group of smart people, and there are a lot of plans in here that can help us for the future."

John Stovall, director of the American Legion's national security division, echoed that optimism. He noted that veterans groups briefed on the report early Thursday had concerns about many details but also optimism about the national conversation to come. "Getting rid of Tricare, I imagine, will be the proposal that sucks the most air out of the room," he said. "But many of these recommendations are immediately ready to be put into legislation and debated." Officials at Concerned Veterans for America praised the retirement and health care changes, saying both would provide "more choices and flexibility" to troops. VFW officials said "the devil is in the details" of the proposals.

Most observers tempered any expectation that Congress will be able to move quickly on any of the recommendations, even less controversial ones like expanding military child care options and updates to post-service education benefits. Mackenzie Eaglen, resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, said the report instantly becomes "the authoritative source" for future reform, but added she thinks there is little appetite for action in the near future. "Part of the reason is … because the Pentagon has chosen to cut end strength to ease pressure on personnel funding," she said. "This has bought both branches of government some time and given them breathing room to examine the issue for years, if they so choose." To read the full report go to http://projects.militarytimes.com/pdfs/2015-report-compensation.pdf. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Jan. 29, 2015 ++]

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**BRAC Update 40 ▶ DoD Proposal Expected in Budget Request**

A bipartisan group of New Jersey House members is urging the Defense Department to avoid proposing a new round of military base closures in its next budget request. “At a time when the United States faces
adapting threats from around the globe, including groups like [the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria], we cannot afford to diminish the capabilities we use to neutralize these threats, and protect our freedoms at home,” the lawmakers wrote in a letter to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel late last week. “One needs to look no further than the recent terror attacks in Paris to realize that the threat of terrorism at home and abroad is ever-present,” they added. The bipartisan group, led by Republican freshman Tom MacArthur, argues a new Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) is too costly and that there are “many better ways” for DOD to save money. New Jersey lawmakers who signed the missive include Democratic Reps. Donald Norcross and Frank Pallone Jr. and Republicans Leonard Lance, Chris Smith and Frank LoBiondo.

The Pentagon is expected to propose a new BRAC round to lawmakers when it sends its fiscal 2016 budget to Capitol Hill on 2 FEB. Congress has blocked DOD’s recent attempts to shutter facilities due to members’ concerns that a base-closing commission might axe facilities in their own districts. Garden State lawmakers have cause to be concerned. Three military sites in southern New Jersey — McGuire Air Force Base, Fort Dix and Naval Air Engineering Station Lakehurst — were selected for closure during the last BRAC round in 2005. The facilities were combined into Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in 2009, creating the state’s largest base and second-largest employer. MacArthur, Norcross and LoBiondo all sit on the House Armed Services Committee and could easily propose language to the National Defense Authorization Act barring the Pentagon from closing any installations. [Source: The hill | Martin Matishak | Jan 26, 2015 ++]
and the next secretary of defense, Ashton Carter, a domestic BRAC is still doubtful,” he said. “But there’s no question that without a European realignment plan, and execution, there would be no appetite to do it.” New leadership at the armed services committees, the starting point for every defense budget, will likely play a major role in the issue. Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee has been a vocal opponent of BRAC over several years as a committee member. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) who has assumed chairmanship of the Senate committee, has had less to say about BRAC, focusing instead on national security policy regarding Iraq, Syria and Ukraine.

As defense funding gets squeezed beginning in fiscal 2016, when sequestration budget caps return, many say the committees will no longer be able to avoid the issue. Advocates of a BRAC say domestic closures could free $2 billion to $3 billion in annual funding, although only after several years of upfront costs. Opponents counter that those expenses — estimated at $1.6 billion annually for five years — are ill-advised at a time of strapped budgets. They also point to the last round of BRAC, in 2005, which cost more than $36 billion, considerably higher than planned. DuBois and others say the 2005 BRAC was inflated by new military construction piggy-backed onto the total. Hale said the long-term money saved is worth any upfront investment, considering the budget challenges in years ahead. “I think it recognizes you need to spend a modest amount now to save a good amount later,” Hale said. A future BRAC would begin in 2017 at the earliest, according to past defense requests.

There may be budding support for the base closure process among some military communities. The specter of sequestration and planned manpower reductions across the services, particularly in the Army, are creating uncertainty, said Tim Ford, CEO of the nonprofit group Association of Defense Communities, which represents more than 250 towns, cities and states that have nearby military installations or units. Member communities know something is coming but feel they can’t do anything about it until the details become clearer, he said. A BRAC process allows members to offer input, defend their interests and plan ahead for the worst-case scenario. “I think where our communities are right now is we need to figure out a better way to manage this,” Ford said. “BRAC gives us a better way to follow this, give our input, and understand it better.” Ford said the planned cuts in Europe only add to the sense that BRAC is inevitable in the near future, if not this session. He believes that as Senate Armed Services chairman, McCain, in particular, will give the issue a practical look as the budget process moves ahead. “We don’t want BRAC,” Ford said. “In an ideal situation, we wouldn’t face any of this. We wouldn’t face sequestration. But we live in the reality Congress created, and that reality is cuts are occurring.” [Source: Stars and Stripes | Steven Beardsley | Jan. 25, 2015 ++]

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DoD Mobilized Reserve 13 JAN 2015  ➤  27,760 | Decrease of 2092

The Army National Guard, Army Reserve, and Navy Reserve announced a decrease in activated National Guard members and reservists in the week prior to 16 DEC, while the Marine Corps Reserve, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve, and Coast Guard Reserve announced an increase of activated National Guard members and reservists. The net collective result is a decrease of 2,092 activated National Guard members and reservists in comparison to those reported in the 1 JAN Bulletin. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve as of 13 JAN was 16,902; Navy Reserve, 2,778; Marine Corps Reserve, 924; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 5,856; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 300. This brings the total National Guard and reserve personnel who have been activated to 27,760, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and reserve personnel at http://www.defense.gov/pubs/Mobilization-Weekly-Report-150114.pdf?source=GovDelivery lists those
currently activated. Since 911 there have been to 904,063 reservists activated. [Source: DoD News Release No. NR-14-15 dtd Jan. 14, 2015 ++]

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Sequestration Update 45 ▶ HASC Chairman 2016 Priorities

This week new House Armed Services Committee Chairman, Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX), called for sequestration relief as one of his major priorities for the year, and warned Pentagon planners against proposing disproportionate cuts to military pay and benefits. “The problem with sequestration is not primarily about numbers and statistics,” said Thornberry. “It is about whether we have the capability to do what the nation needs and the times demand. It is also very much about the increased danger that comes from diminished training, aging equipment, and a tempo of operations that stretches our people and their families too far. It has to be fixed….That fix has got to pass the House of Representatives, it’s got to pass the Senate, and it’s got to be signed into law by the president.”

The Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 established automatic across-the-board budget cuts known as sequestration and continues to place America’s national defense capabilities at great risk. During the 2011 deficit reduction negotiations, the administration agreed to reduce the Pentagon’s budget by $487 billion over a ten year period. The later enactment of sequestration added $500 billion more in defense cuts. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 mitigated the spending cuts only in FY 2014 and 2015. Sequestration returns in full force in FYs 2016-2021 unless current law is changed. DoD will have to cut an additional $54 billion in FY 2016 and a total of $269 billion over the following five fiscal years. The next two weeks promise to be a critical time for the military community. The Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) will release proposals to reform military compensation and health care in late January.

Thornberry warned Pentagon planners against “nickel and diming [military] people to death” with proposals to cut military pay and benefits. The Chairman expressed hope the MCRMC review could provide a forum for thoughtful discussion on the future of military compensation, as opposed to the yearly back-and-forth battles between Congress and the administration. Thornberry’s comments indicate he may oppose burdening servicemembers, retirees, and families with a disproportionate share of budget cuts, but the ensuing debate will be the true litmus test.

President Obama did not directly address sequestration in his 20 JAN State of the Union address, but his 2 FEB FY 2016 budget proposal is expected to include a fix. What’s unclear is how the President might pay for budget relief. It could be through a combination of alternative spending cuts, closing corporate tax loopholes, and increasing the capital gains tax – all proposals laid out in his annual address. Such a plan may collide with a fiscally-wary Republican-controlled Congress, but it could serve as an important starting point for negotiations.

Outgoing Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel added urgency to repealing sequestration: “The progress we have made will quickly evaporate if sequestration returns in 2016. We need long-term budget predictability and we need the flexibility to prioritize and make the difficult decisions…we will not be able, this institution, to fulfill the commitments of the president’s defense strategies with the kind of continued abrupt, steep, large cuts that sequestration will demand.” Legislators on both sides of the aisle agree that sequestration’s across-the-board cuts must be avoided. Congress succeeded in passing a bipartisan proposal to temporarily avoid
Many commissaries would have their hours cut under a draft Pentagon proposal

If last year is any indication, lawmakers may not be receptive to suggestions about cutting the commissary budget to such a severe degree. In their fiscal 2015 budget request, DoD proposed cutting $200 million in DeCA funding, the first phase of a proposed three-year plan to slash the DeCA budget by $1 billion. In the end, lawmakers restored that $200 million to the budget. In the new draft plan for 2016, DeCA outlines $183 million in operating costs cuts, to include paring back the number of employees per store by an average of six, down to 45. The 241 commissaries in the system now average 51 employees per store.

Days of operation would be reduced at 183 stores, according to the draft. In one example provided, the commissary at Kaneohe Bay Marine Corps Base Hawaii would have its weekly operating days and hours reduced from seven days and 60 hours per week to five days and 49 hours per week. According to the draft, if the services wanted to add more operating hours for a particular base outside the model DeCA would use, they would have to provide funding out of their own budgets to cover the costs. The draft document says the proposed reductions in operating hours would save more than $29 million, while proposed cuts in days of operation would save $58 million. But in addition to the $183 million DeCA might save with these and other reductions, more drastic moves would be required for DeCA to achieve the remaining $139 million in savings requested by defense officials — involving fundamental changes to the law that applies to commissaries.

In that regard, one of the subtlest but most far-reaching changes would remove from law the longstanding requirement that commissary items be sold "at reduced cost." Over the years, the commissaries have consistently touted the fact that patrons save an average of 30 percent compared to off-base grocery stores. According to an analysis of the legislative proposals, removing those three words — "at reduced cost" —
from the law would be a recognition that “the commissary of the future will exist like a partially appropriated funded version of an exchange, rather than as an element of compensation.” Instead, items would be priced at levels “sufficient to finance operating expenses” of the stores. Under current law, taxpayer funds cover operating expenses so that commissary items can be sold at lower cost.

The proposals already are raising alarms in some quarters. "This is a death knell for commissaries," said Tom Gordy, president of the Armed Forces Marketing Council, when asked about the proposals. He said the plan would be a "death knell" for the commissary benefit as generations of troops have known it. "If it moves forward, it's an indication that DoD is saying, 'We'll no longer provide this benefit — it's a business.' This is not good for military families," Gordy said. Another legislative change proposed in the draft document would allow commissaries to sell beer and wine — everything that a commercial supermarket sells, except for distilled spirits. A number of other proposals in the draft document also would increase costs to customers if they become law, down to a 10-cent charge for each paper or plastic bag that a customer uses. Commissaries have been encouraging customers to bring reusable bags to the stores for years, and the stores sell such bags as well. [Source: NavyTimes | Karen Jowers | Jan. 23, 2015 ++]

DoD/VA VLER Update 10  ►  Connect Your Docs

Do you see a Non-VA health care provider? "Connect Your Docs” through VLER Health (Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record) can help your VA and non-VA health care providers have the best possible picture of your current state of health. (VLER) Health is a program that shares important parts of your Veteran health record between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and participating private health care providers. This sharing of information enables your health care providers to access important information about your health history so they can provide you the best possible care. This exchange occurs over a secure and confidential network known as the eHealth Exchange. This program is free and voluntary for Veterans, but requires your consent to participate. An easy way to do this from your home is through the VA eBenefits website. If you have not already, go to the eBenefits website and register. (It’s free!). Participating in VLER Health may:

- Reduce the need for you to carry paper records between appointments
- Give your provider immediate access to more health care information during a trip to the Emergency Room
- Reduce your chances of having duplicate tests done
- Increase your safety by providing a more complete health record, such as your medications and allergies

As a Level 2-authenticated eBenefits user, signing up is fast and easy, just follow the steps below:

- Go to https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits.portal
- If you are already registered, click on the Log-In button in the upper right hand corner
- Click on “Access my Documents”
- Scroll down to “Health” and look for Manage My Authorizations and Preferences (VLER)
- Click on “Manage My Authorizations and Preferences (VLER)”
- Click: “Share your Electronic Health Information with Non-VA Health Care Providers”

If you want to use the mail: You can send in your health care sharing preferences by either completing VA Form 10-0485 and Faxing, mailing or hand carrying it to your nearest VA Medical Center Release of Information Office (ROI). If you would like more information about this program, watch for eBenefits’
Suicides among members of the active-duty military personnel rose slightly in 2014, led by increases in the number of sailors and airmen who took their own lives, new Defense Department figures show. There were fewer suicides by Army soldiers and Marines, the two services that have seen the most combat in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last decade. According to preliminary Pentagon data, there were 288 (5.5 per week) confirmed and suspected suicides by active-duty personnel in 2014, compared with 286 in 2013. Both totals, however, represent a sharp drop from the 2012 number of 352. The data was obtained by The Associated Press. Over time the numbers may change, particularly if deaths that were initially believed to be suicides are found to be otherwise. The number of suicides by members of the active-duty National Guard and Reserve decreased a bit last year, after going up slightly in 2013. Those totals are included in the overall 2014 numbers.

A year ago, officials were a bit heartened to see the number of suicides in 2013 drop by more than 15 percent from 2012, but they have consistently warned that this is a very difficult problem to address. All of the services have beefed up programs to identify and reach out to troops who may having problems, encouraging service members to come forward if they need help and urging others to recognize and react to any signs of trouble in their unit colleagues. "We are working to better understand the trends and what they mean, but it's probably too early to know exactly why the numbers have risen," said Cdr. Chris Servello, a Navy spokesman. "Across the force we continue to educate sailors about warning signs, when and how to intervene and that it's OK to ask for help."

Analysis by Pentagon officials has shown that more often suicides involve young, white men, usually married, using a non-military-issued gun. Many times the victims had reported family or relationship stress. Military leaders have tried to create programs aimed at reducing stress and teaching troops about coping mechanisms and other tools to deal with daily pressures. According to the data, the number of Navy suicides increased from 43 in 2013 to 58 in 2014; Air Force suicides increased from 52 to 60. Marine suicides declined from 45 in 2013 to 35 in 2014, and Army suicides decreased from 146 in 2013 to 135 in 2014. According to the latest numbers available, the military suicide rate is sharply higher than the civilian rate. The civilian rate for 2012 was almost 13 suicides per 100,000 people. The military suicide rate for 2012 was 21.8 per 100,000. Military suicides hit a record high in 2012, at 352, but had begun a somewhat steady rise in 2006. [Source: The Associated Press | Lolita C. Baldor | Jan. 13, 2015 ++]
"National VSOs and MSOs," Hagel said in one memo, "are a critical component of our overall framework of care for our service members throughout all phases of their military service, but especially their transition to civilian life and veteran status." Nonprofit non-federal entities, he said, can be of critical importance to service members throughout their careers, and within the bounds of law and regulation, it's in the department's interest to maintain strong and positive relationships with them. "These memos serve to re-emphasize those privileges granted under the law or flexibilities authorized under current DoD policy," Hagel said. These initiatives direct immediate implementation of additional measures to facilitate consistent delivery across DoD, he said. The directives, Hagel said, also provide clarity to installation commanders on adjudicating requests for space or services.

In a letter sent to retired Army Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, president of the Association of the United States Army, and other nonprofit organizations, the defense secretary laid out six aspects of the initiatives which are designed to remove "unnecessary barriers and inconsistencies" in dealing with these organizations.

1. Installation commanders will provide available space and associated services on military installations allowing national VSOs and MSOs to provide VA-accredited representation services to transitioning service members.

2. All requests and decisions on installation access, use of space or logistical support will be made in writing.

3. Installation commanders are directed to be welcoming and supportive of nonprofit organizations that enhance morale and readiness of the force, and are consistent with mission requirements and security constraints.

4. Training and education will be provided in regular pre-command, judge advocate and public affairs officer training courses to educate personnel on the authorities and flexibilities associated with procedures and support to both accredited VSOs and MSOs, and military support nonprofit organizations.

5. DOD will use consistent and standard procedures to process requests for installation access with new tools and templates provided to aid in consistent and fair assessment and adjudication of requests for access and space.

6. Commanders are authorized to use official command communication channels, including Transition Assistance Program materials, to inform service troops of the availability of services and support on the installation provided by VSOs, MSOs and military-supporting nonprofits.

Hagel expressed pride in what he termed a major accomplishment, and explained the importance of the directives. "These directives underscore my belief that events and support provided by VSOs, MSOs and military-support nonprofits can be critically important to the welfare of our service members and families," he said. The department must maintain positive relationships with those organizations, Hagel said, to facilitate their delivery of services to military personnel who need them. [Source: DoD News, Defense Media Activity | Tyrone C. Marshall | Jan. 16, 2015 ++]

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DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ➤ Reported 16 thru 31 Jan 2015

“Fat Leonard” Case. A Malaysian defense contractor pleaded guilty 15 JAN in a corruption scandal of epic proportions, admitting that he bribed “scores” of U.S. Navy officials with $500,000 in cash, six figures’ worth of sex from prostitutes, lavish hotel stays, spa treatments, Cuban cigars, Kobe beef, Spanish suckling pigs and an array of other luxury goods. Leonard Glenn Francis, a businessman who charmed a generation of Navy officers while resupplying their ships in Asia, admitted in federal court in San Diego to presiding
over a decade-long corruption scheme involving his Singapore-based firm, Glenn Defense Marine Asia. The investigation has steadily escalated into the biggest corruption case in the Navy’s history, with Francis admitting that he bilked the service out of tens of millions of dollars by overcharging for food, fuel and basic services. Five current and former Navy officials have pleaded guilty so far, and prosecutors have made it clear they are targeting others. The Navy has also stripped security clearances from two admirals, including the chief of naval intelligence, for their alleged involvement with Francis, although they have not been charged with a crime.

Known in Navy circles as “Fat Leonard” for his girth, Francis, 50, agreed to forfeit $35 million in ill-gotten proceeds and could face up to 25 years in prison. But the most severe impact may turn out to be the blow to the Navy’s reputation, given the array of evidence that so many officers were corrupted so easily by a foreign defense contractor. “It is astounding that Leonard Francis was able to purchase the integrity of Navy officials by offering them meaningless material possessions and the satisfaction of selfish indulgences,” said Laura Duffy, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of California, whose office has led the investigation. “In sacrificing their honor, these officers helped Francis defraud their country out of tens of millions of dollars. Now they will be held to account.” The criminal investigation has spanned eight states and eight Asian countries, with more than 100 law enforcement agents involved, court records show.

In his plea agreement, Francis admitted that he and his firm defrauded the Navy by overcharging for hundreds of Asian port visits by U.S. ships and submarines. To ensure he didn’t get caught, he plied Navy officials with an array of temptations, including lavish meals, “top-shelf” alcohol, designer handbags, fountain pens, ornamental swords, computers, furniture and handmade ship models. Federal prosecutors disclosed that Francis has provided evidence against two more Navy officials who have yet to be charged: a lieutenant commander and a contract specialist whose names have not been made public. The unnamed contract specialist, a female civilian official based in Singapore for 20 years, was given a bottomless travel expense account, which she used to visit Bali, Bangkok, Dubai, Turkey and Greece, according to Francis’s plea agreement. In exchange, she worked as a mole for Glenn Defense Marine, handing over proprietary contracting information and advocating on the firm’s behalf.

The scandal erupted into public view in September 2013, when federal agents lured Francis to a San Diego hotel and arrested him in a sting operation. The Navy says that it began scrutinizing Francis in May 2010 but that he was repeatedly able to thwart criminal investigators by bribing a senior agent with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, who fed him sensitive files and helped to cover his tracks. Although Francis initially fought the charges against him, he agreed to cooperate with prosecutors in recent weeks. “Today Mr. Leonard Francis has taken accountability for his actions. He looks forward to a brighter future,” said Ethan M. Posner, one of his attorneys.
Navy leaders have condemned the unethical behavior of officers involved in the case and have acknowledged that the scandal could grow even worse. Navy Secretary Ray Mabus has pledged to set up a special disciplinary process, led by a four-star admiral, to review allegations against Navy personnel who avoid federal criminal charges but may have run afoul of ethical regulations. “The Navy holds its personnel to the highest standards and those who fall short are held accountable,” Rear Adm. Dawn Cutler, a Navy spokeswoman, said in a statement. “NCIS uncovered the criminal activity associated with this case and continues to cooperate with the Justice Department.” [Source: The Washington Post| Craig Whitlock| Jan. 15, 2015 ++]

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**Referral Bonus Program.** The Army paid a Texas couple nearly $4 million for supplying it with names of recruits who may have enlisted without their help, part of a bonus program blasted by a leading senator as a "mind-blowing" waste of taxpayer money, according to interviews and documents. The Army’s Referral Bonus Program — hatched in 2006 during the darkest days of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and buried in 2009 — paid as much as $2,000 per recruit. It mirrored a National Guard program so plagued with kickbacks that more than 800 soldiers have fallen under criminal investigations in the last few years, according to Sen. Claire McCaskill of Missouri, the ranking Democrat on the financial and contracting oversight subcommittee. Military investigators branded the scheme "sleazy but legal," McCaskill wrote in a letter to top Pentagon officials.

Rene Agosto, a former Army sergeant currently working as a civilian in Texas for the Air Force, developed a website called OfficialArmy.com to collect names of potential recruits. It featured images of troops and the official slogan, Army Strong. "Get a free consultation to discuss benefits of joining the army and answer any questions you may have," a screen shot collected by Senate investigators shows. A form seeking personal identification information, including Social Security numbers, also appears along with this disclaimer in fine print: "Voluntary information shared with the U.S. Army will not be shared with any other party and will be used for recruiting purposes only." The site, designed to look like the government-run Army online portal, attracted potential recruits and encouraged them to fill out a form with personal information.

Agosto and his wife Vanessa submitted those names — as many as 12 at a time — to Army recruiters and collected $3,845,000, according to the Army and McCaskill. "No one envisioned that someone would be bold enough to put up a fake Army website … and make $4 million in the process," McCaskill told USA TODAY. "They made $4 million by somebody sitting at a desk and going click, click. That's essentially what they did for $4 million in taxpayer money." Agosto, in an e-mail, said he had sought and received approval from Army recruiting officials for the website. He referred further questions posed by the newspaper to Army officials and declined to speak with USA TODAY.

Lt. Col. Don Peters, an Army spokesman, said the program was killed in 2009 after officials determined they could meet recruiting goals without paying the bonuses. McCaskill, in a letter to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Army Secretary John McHugh, called on them to consider firing Agosto and to install caps on bonus programs to prevent future scandals. "The Army is embarrassed," McCaskill said. "I think it's very awkward that these multi-millionaires are continuing to get more taxpayer money in their job." The millions paid to the Agostos could have been avoided with basic safeguards such as not allowing electronic referrals, caps on payments and requiring those who sought bonuses to have met with potential recruits, she said. "It was sloppy, dumb," McCaskill said. "It was a waste of taxpayer money. It is testimony to the fact that too often in every part of our government people aren't using a sharp eye to figure out if programs are effective and efficient in terms of using very precious taxpayer dollars. "This example is mind-blowing in its stupidity." [Source: USA TODAY | Tom Vanden Brook | Jan. 18, 2015 ++]
Hargett—Jonathan M. A former civilian employee of the Department of Defense, Jonathan M. Hargett, was sentenced 18 DEC to 40 months in prison on a charge of health care fraud stemming from a scheme in which he collected over $2.2 million after submitting fraudulent claims for federal health care benefits. Hargett, 42, formerly of Germany, pled guilty on Sept. 8, 2014, in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. He was indicted in October 2013, extradited from Germany, and returned to the United States in July 2014. Upon completion of his prison term, Hargett will be placed on three years of supervised release. The plea agreement also calls for Hargett to pay over $2.2 million in restitution to the United States. He also is subject to a forfeiture money judgment in the same amount. The government has seized more than $704,000 from Hargett’s bank accounts, and German authorities have seized or frozen over $500,000.

“Jonathan Hargett is headed to prison because he ripped off more than $2 million from the American taxpayer,” said U.S. Attorney Machen. “His bogus medical claims drained resources from a program designed to serve wounded veterans. Defending the integrity of federal health care programs is a top priority because it protects the funds needed to provide medical services to our veterans and other deserving citizens.” According to a statement of offense submitted to the Court at the time of the guilty plea, Hargett worked from 1996 through 2012 in various positions as a civilian employee for the Department of Defense in Germany. From January 2011 through May 2012, he was an intelligence analyst stationed in Heidelberg. Previously, he had served in the U.S. Army from 1992 to 1996. As a federal employee stationed overseas, Hargett was enrolled since 2002 in the Foreign Service Benefit Plan (FSBP), a health care benefit program. Because of his service in the Army, he also was eligible for health care coverage from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. For veterans working or residing abroad, the VA provides this coverage through its Foreign Medical Program (VA-FMP).

From January 2007 through April 2012, according to the statement of offense, Hargett carried out a scheme to submit fraudulent claims and invoices to the FSBP and the VA-FMP. The claims falsely represented that Hargett bought prescription medications and other pharmaceutical items from a pharmacy in Germany. They also falsely represented that he had received and paid for various health care items and services from a doctor in Germany. Hargett also created and submitted forged invoices and other fraudulent paperwork, and admitted creating many of the false invoices on his government computer at the U.S. Army base in Heidelberg, Germany. All told, Hargett submitted more than $2.5 million in false claims to the two government health care programs, for items and services Hargett never received and never paid for. As a result, Hargett wrongfully obtained more than $2.2 million, including about $943,519 from the FSBP and $1,261,512 from the VA-FMP. [Source: District of Delaware | US Attorney’s Office | Dec. 18, 2014 ++]

POW/MIA Update 49 ► New Combined Agency Not Yet Named

In what was likely his last major policy move, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel announced 9 JAN the formation of a new agency to coordinate disparate efforts at accounting for and recovering the missing and dead from the nation’s wars. The new agency within the Defense Department, which has yet to be given a name or a home headquarters, would merge the Defense POW/MIA Office (DPMO), the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), and several forensic laboratories under a new director to be appointed by President Obama.
Navy Rear Adm. Mike Franken, the former vice director for strategy at U.S. Central Command, will lead the new agency as interim director during the consolidation until a permanent director is named when the agency is fully operational next year. Air Force Maj. Gen. Kelly, McKeague, commander of JPAC, will serve as interim deputy director, and the Pentagon's oversight of the new agency will be led by Christine Wormuth, the Defense undersecretary for policy. Wormuth's chief advisor on POW/MIA issues will be Army Lt. Gen. Michael Linnington, a veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan.

In a statement, Hagel, who announced his resignation in November and is awaiting the confirmation of Ashton Carter as his replacement, said that the main goals of the new agency were to end the bureaucratic infighting that has plagued recovery efforts in the past. It will also seek to communicate and coordinate better with the families of the missing. "America will remain committed to always bringing home our missing and fallen," Hagel said. "The decisions we are announcing today will ensure we honor that solemn obligation."

Last year, Hagel appointed a Personnel Accounting and Consolidation Task Force to review recovery efforts following complaints from the families and Congress over "dysfunction" in the management system. The non-partisan Government Accountability Office also issued a report citing "long-standing leadership weaknesses and a fragmented organizational structure" within the existing structure of the POW/MIA accounting and recovery system.

Prior to the announcement, the interim leadership of the new agency met with veterans service organizations and representatives of family groups including Ann Mills Griffiths, head of the National League of POW/MIA Families. Griffiths said she was inclined to be skeptical but added that the changes outlined were "long overdue and hopefully there'll be a positive result." Bob Wallace, executive director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, said after the meeting with Franken, McKeague and Linnington that they "want to listen, want to engage." There will be areas of disagreement going forward, Wallace said, "but at least we’re dealing with credible individuals." More than 80,000 service members have been listed as missing since World War II, including more than 7,800 from Korea, and Hagel had been under pressure to meet a Congressional mandate that the Defense Department identify the remains of at least 200 MIAs annually by 2015. At national POW/MIA Day ceremonies in September, Hagel said that in 2014 the country had accounted for 71 service members from World War II, Korea and Vietnam, compared to 61 in 2013. "While this improvement is good, we must do better -- we will do better -- not only in more effectively accounting for our missing personnel, but also ensuring that their families receive timely and accurate information," Hagel said. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | Jan. 09, 2015 ++]

POW/MIA Update 50  ► DoD May Outsource to Private Organizations

As the Pentagon seeks to recover 27,000 missing American war dead, it may turn away from Hawaii — where much of that government effort has been centered — and to private organizations to outsource some research, recovery and identifications. Mark Noah, founder and president of Florida-based History Flight Inc., already has a proposal. For about $4 million over two years, History Flight and the Bode Technology Group, which provides forensic DNA analysis, would undertake family reference sample work and recoveries and identifications of service members from the Pacific battle of Tarawa, Noah said. Limited-scope historical and genealogy work and family DNA testing involving "unknowns" buried in cemeteries in Europe also would be performed, he said.

Noah's nonprofit group has already been to Tarawa and done that — more than 30 times, he noted. But that work so far has been done through fundraising and donations and not government funding. "History
Flight recovered over 14,000 American bones from Tarawa — and that's a fact," Noah said. Those remains, Noah said, were turned over to the Hawaii-based Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, whose Central Identification Laboratory makes identifications of formerly missing war dead. "In a two-year period, we could get at least 100 IDs from Tarawa from the existing number of remains that we've recovered already and what we can recover in the next two years," Noah said. It's a bold statement in a field that often comes with confused burial pictures and requires meticulous science to identify war dead, but the public-private partnership approach may portend the future for the recovery of more missing Americans.

According to the Defense Department, 1,149 Marines and Navy servicemen were killed in the Nov. 20-23, 1943, Battle of Tarawa. About 520 remain unaccounted for, the military said. JPAC, as the command is known, identified 87 service members in fiscal 2014 from all conflicts — far short of an annual goal of 200 set by Congress. More than 83,000 Americans remain missing from past wars, but the Defense Department contends about 27,000 are "recoverable." As part of the Pentagon's decision to reform what it acknowledged was a dysfunctional government MIA accounting effort, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel in 2014 announced a series of steps, including developing proposals for expanding public-private partnerships in identifying the missing. "The goal is to leverage the capabilities and efforts of organizations outside of government that responsibly work to account for our missing," the Pentagon said.

History Flight is among private organizations — the BentProp Project is another — whose passion for military history and desire to see MIAs repatriated has taken team members to jungles, atolls, mountaintops and other remote locations where Americans fell in battle. Noah, a commercial airline pilot who said he has been to Tarawa 25 times, maintains History Flight and Bode Technology can make Tarawa identifications faster and cheaper, yet with the level of scientific professionalism that JPAC is known for. JPAC was spending $100,000 a week when it went to Tarawa, Noah said. Noah said his proposal is for History Flight and Bode to enter into a pilot project to do the recoveries and identifications. "And so our proposal was basically to do the same (work on Tarawa) and work with JPAC and Bode Technology to get the job done" instead of what he calls the "asinine type of internecine squabbles" that elements within JPAC?engaged in. "There's a lifetime's worth of work to be done here (recovering and identifying MIAs), not just for a (nongovernmental organization) or the Pentagon, but for everybody," Noah said. "There's so much to be done."

Lt. Col. Joe Sowers, a Pentagon spokesman, said in an email that "we did receive and considered" a sole-source contract proposal from History Flight to conduct recovery operations on Tarawa. "We appreciate his proposal and have determined that if requirements are identified in the future, the department will pursue contract support of the requirements through full and open competition," Sowers said. Sowers said the Pentagon does not currently have any paid public-private partnerships involving JPAC-related research, recoveries or identifications. More than a year ago, the commanding general of JPAC told his staff that he wanted 75 to 100 identifications from Tarawa and to put together a proposal to work with History Flight, Noah said. In early December, Noah met with Republican North Carolina Rep. Walter Jones and Alisa Stack, then in a key decision-making role with the Pentagon's MIA accounting reorganization, to discuss the proposal, Noah said. Where it stands now is not clear, he said.

Noah calls Virginia-based Bode Technology a "top-quality lab — as good as anything in the world." Bode said on its website that its "extensive experience in DNA forensics" includes more than 80,000 forensic cases completed, processing more than 15,000 cases a year. Bode said it has assisted in identifying criminals and victims of war, terrorism, crime and natural disasters, including dead from the World Trade Center, war in Bosnia and U.S. soldiers dating back to the Vietnam War. The identification of American MIAs is currently done through JPAC's Central Identification Laboratory, which has been called "the gold standard of scientific rigor and excellence" for IDs. Under the Pentagon reorganization, however, the lab has seen an exodus of
key staff. Noah said History Flight has "top-quality research and recovery capabilities, and it's a perfect union (with Bode) to do this kind of work." Noah said his field staff includes forensic anthropologists, historians and geo­physicists — most with doctoral-level training.

Greg Fox, a former JPAC forensic archaeologist who was a recovery leader on a 2010 Tarawa mission and more recently was acting director of a JPAC satellite lab in Nebraska, said he hadn't seen History Flight's proposal, but he could comment on the challenge of making 100 IDs from Tarawa Atoll. Incomplete recoveries on Betio Island at the end of the war left "numerous" skeletal elements of already-identified Americans in the ground along with indigenous burials and 6,000 Japanese and laborers, Fox said. It may be possible to exclude some of the indigenous population or Japanese dead using an archaeological context, but "each individual bone and recovery context must be evaluated and/or tested to determine identity or origin," Fox said. Sorting out Americans among already-resolved and unresolved cases "is a rigorous and resource-intensive endeavor of monumental scale," Fox said.

Noah, however, said "in historically relevant areas, we found American bones (with) American boots, wearing American helmets, wearing American webbing gear." Some were wrapped in American ponchos, making it "so obvious" they were Americans, he said. American ID tags were also found with bodies. Japanese also could be identified, with some wearing Japanese helmets. One enemy combatant was still clutching a Japanese hand grenade in his bony fingers, Noah said. "We found another Japanese individual whose trigger finger was on the trigger of his rifle, and it was clearly a Japanese rifle," he said. Noah has believers in both the Pentagon and among families seeking the return of fallen kin from Tarawa.

Deno Zazzetti of Joliet, Ill., said his brother, Joseph, was an assistant driver in an amphibious landing vehicle tracked, or LVT, when he died on Tarawa. The family received a telegram on Christmas Eve in 1943 telling them Joseph, 21, had been killed in action. The Marine's body was never returned, and Deno Zazzetti believes he's now buried as an "unknown" at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl. "I have really nothing good to say about JPAC. JPAC to me is a bunch of guys covering their butts and their jobs," said the 84-year-old Zazzetti. "I've been looking into this for 65 years. I get most of my information, truthfully, from History Flight." [Source: The Honolulu Star-Advertiser | William Cole | 18, 20 15 ++]

POW/MIA Update 51 ► Identified MIAs Doubled in 2014

The beleaguered command tasked with finding the remains of lost U.S. troops said it has more than doubled the number of identifications of MIA remains in 2014 over the year before. The 107 identifications for 2014 by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command came primarily from remains linked to the Korean War (42), World War II (36) and the site of a 1952 crash of an Air Force cargo plane into Mount Gannett in Alaska (17). The number of identifications from the Vietnam War, at 12, was about half the average of 21 IDs made annually over the previous nine years.

John Byrd, JPAC's laboratory director, credits the increase to a mix of new procedures, increased lab space and developments in technology. “It’s success for us, big success for us,” Byrd said during an interview at his office at JPAC headquarters at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. “A lot of the programs that we’ve put together through the years are reaching maturity and bearing fruit now.” The words success and JPAC have not been associated often in the past couple years. A Defense Department Inspector General’s report in October concluded that the MIA accounting effort lacked clarity of mission, a strategic plan, a disinterment policy, a centralized database of MIAs and coordination with combatant commands and host nations. More
than 40 current and former employees complained of mismanagement, which taken as a whole “paint a picture of long-term leadership and management problems,” the report said.

Last year the defense secretary ordered an overhaul of the agency, which is now under way. Just how the restructuring and new personnel will mitigate shortcomings and increase the effectiveness in accounting for MIAs remains to be seen. JPAC spokesman Lee Tucker described the agency makeover as “a phenomenal opportunity” for “taking an already talented and great organization and doing nothing but improving it.” Asked how that assessment jives with shortcomings cited by the IG report, Tucker said, “I think that we’re being very responsive right now in addressing all those concerns head-on in forming an entirely new DOD agency. We’re not just putting Band Aids on here and there.” The increase in identifications for 2014 is the first sign of improvements to come, he said. The 107 remains identified won’t be officially “accounted” for until their nearest kin are contacted and they agree with JPAC’s findings, Byrd said.

We have an eclectic, diverse tool kit that takes advantage of the kinds of records that the military built up and maintained over the years,” Byrd said. One of JPAC’s most productive programs now is identifying a set of Korean War remains called K208. The remains were turned over to the U.S. in 208 boxes toward the end of that conflict and are estimated to hold the comingled remains of about 350 individuals, based on subsequent testing, Byrd said. Using the standard operating procedures of the time, U.S. mortuary personnel dipped the remains in a chemical bath to sanitize them before examination, he said. Among the chemicals was formaldehyde, which years later was discovered to have degraded DNA in the tissue and bones, which makes sampling difficult.

“We were stuck for a long time,” Byrd said. But “a lot of wheels turning between 2008 and 2012” helped produce last year’s identifications, he said. “In 2006 we were identifying one or two soldiers a year from the K208, and it had been that way since the early 1990,” Byrd said. In 2008, a separate lab was set up for the K208 remains. “That gave us the ability to take all of the remains out at one time and look at them as a large group,” Byrd said. “The problem with that group is that they’re comingled in a very massive way.” The lab developed a DNA protocol for “untangling” the comingled remains. “That protocol is one of the big breakthroughs that has helped speed things up,” Byrd said. “We’ve identified over 40 Korean war cases this year.” Thirty of those were J208 remains, with an additional 10 from remains disinterred from the graves of unknown soldiers buried at National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, also called the Punchbowl.

Another development over the past five years aided in identifying Korean War remains and, to a lesser degree, those from World War II: chest X-rays. Sometime around 2005, JPAC learned that the services had taken and stored chest X-rays of inductees during the 1940s and ’50s to screen for tuberculosis. Numerous times, JPAC queried the National Archives and Records Administration, which holds the bulk of military records in warehouses in St. Louis, but were always told their whereabouts were unknown, Byrd said. Then around 2008, the National Archives contacted JPAC “out of the blue” and said they were on the verge of recycling the entire stash of Army and Air Force X-rays for the minute amount of silver on each film.

JPAC retrieved about 7,500 X-rays belonging to soldiers or airmen missing from the Korean War and about 1,200 from the World War II era for those services. Although the X-rays were of the lungs, the neck vertebrae and collarbones are also captured in each shot. Bones and teeth have patterns and shapes that are unique to a person, much as fingerprints are, Byrd said. Technicians superimpose the induction X-ray over an image of found bones, which at times “match up perfectly,” he said. “Most forensic experts consider that kind of radiographic comparison to be positive identification, meaning that you can find uniqueness such that if you find a match, it shouldn’t be anybody else -- if it matches up on multiple points.” More recently, JPAC found and took possession of similar X-rays taken of inductees for the Navy and Marines. Each shot,
however, was loaded onto reels that contain hundreds of X-rays, and over the past year, JPAC has been unraveling the chaotic filing system. But in that time, they’ve found X-rays for 80 percent to 90 percent of the Marines missing from the Korean War. “For World War II we have a long way to go, but so far they culled out about 1,400 X-rays of missing sailors and Marines,” Byrd said.

A Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command recovery team works at a wreckage

Global climate change and melting glaciers played a role in retrieving and identifying 17 airmen from the cargo plane crash 62 years ago. In 2012, the crew of an Alaska Army National Guard Black Hawk unit on a training flight saw a tire, life rafts and oxygen bottles on a glacier, according to a report by ABC News. [Source: Stars and Stripes | Wyatt Olson | Jan. 21, 2015 ++]

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POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 150116 thru 150131

"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 (73,539) Korean War (7,685), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,638), 1991 Gulf War (0), and OEF/OIF (6). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD’s personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home. For a listing of all personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/accounted_for . For additional information on the Defense Department’s mission to account for missing Americans, visit the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) web site at http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo, or call or call (703) 699-1169. The remains of the following MIA/POW’s have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:
Family members seeking more information about missing loved ones may call the following Service Casualty Offices: U.S. Air Force (800) 531-5501, U.S. Army (800) 892-2490, U.S. Marine Corps (800) 847-1597, U.S. Navy (800) 443-9298, or U.S. Department of State (202) 647-5470. The remains of the following MIA/POW’s have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:

**Vietnam**

**Capt. David Chorlins**, U.S. Air Force, 602nd Special Operations Squadron, 34th Tactical Group, was lost Jan. 11, 1970, in Laos. His Skyraider was taking part in a night strike on truck traffic in the Mu Gia Pass when it was shot down. 1Lt Chorlins, age 24, was in a turn at 7,500 feet in preparation for his second pass when his craft was hit by 37mm AAA. The Spad caught fire and crashed before he had a chance to escape. He was accounted for Jan. 17, 2015. He will be buried with full military honors.

![Capt. David Chorlins](image)

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**Army Sgt. 1st Class James W. Holt**, 26, of Hot Springs, Ark., was lost Feb. 7, 1968, in Vietnam. He was assigned to Company C, 5th Special Forces Group. He was accounted for Jan. 10, 2015. He will be buried with full military honors on a date/location yet to be announced.

![Army Sgt. 1st Class James W. Holt](image)

**SYNOPSIS:** The Lang Vei Special Forces camp where Sgt. Holt was lost was situated in the northwestern corner of South Vietnam along Route 9, a mile and a half from the Laotian border. It had been established in late December 1966 as a result of the Special Forces Detachment A101 having been moved out of its
former Khe Sanh location. It seemed ill fated from the beginning. In March 1967, one of the worst tragedies to befall the Special Forces CIDG program during the war occurred. U.S. Air Force released napalm ordnance on the nearby village which spewed exploding fire over the camp, landing zone, minefield and village. 135 CIDG and native civilians were killed, and 213 were horribly wounded, burned or disfigured. Only two months later, on May 4, a Viet Cong night attack on the camp wiped out the Special Forces command group, all in one bunker, and killed the detachment commander and his executive officer, as well as seriously wounding the team sergeant. This attack was a prelude to the larger siege of Khe Sanh, and was a grim reminder of the dangerous neighborhood Special Forces had moved into.

By January 1968, several North Vietnamese Army divisions had encircled the Marine combat base at Khe Sanh, placing the more westerly Lang Vei Special Forces frontier surveillance camp in imminent danger. The camp was occupied by Detachment A101 commanded by Capt. Frank C. Willoughby. Willoughby was rebuilding and reinforcing the camp at the time, while soldiers and, dependents from the Kha tribal 33rd Laotian Volunteer Battalion streamed into the camp after being overrun by NVA tanks across the border. On the evening of January 24, the camp was pounded by mortars in conjunction with a heavy shelling of the Marine Khe Sanh base, which prevented any effective artillery support for Lang Vei. 1Lt. Paul R. Longgrear had only recently arrived with his HRE tribal 12th Mobile Strike Force Company to help shore up defensive firepower. The influx of the Laotians caused some problems. For example, the Lao battalion commander refused to take orders from the American captain, forcing the Company C commander, LtCol. Daniel F. Schungel, to come to Lang Vei on his first Special Forces assignment on February 6 to provide an Officer of equal rank.

Camp strength on February 6 totaled 24 Special Forces, 14 LLDB, 161 mobile strike force, 282 CIDG (Bru and Vietnamese), 6 interpreters and 520 Laotian soldiers, plus a number of civilians. Shortly after midnight on February 7, 1968, a combined NVA infantry-tank assault drove into Lang Vei. Two PT-76 tanks threatened the outer perimeter of the camp as infantry rushed behind them. SFC James W. Holt destroyed both tanks with shots from his 106mm recoilless rifle. More tanks came around the burning hulks of the first two tanks and began to roll over the 104th CIDG Company's defensive positions. SSgt. Peter Tiroch, the assistant intelligence sergeant, ran over to Holt's position and helped load the weapon. Holt quickly lined up a third tank in his sights and destroyed it with a direct hit. After a second shot at the tank, Holt and Tiroch left the weapons pit just before it was demolished by return cannon fire. Tiroch watched Holt run over to the ammunition bunker to look for some hand-held Light Anti-tank Weapons (LAWs). It was the last time Holt was ever seen.

LtCol. Schungel, 1Lt. Longgrear, SSgt. Arthur Brooks, Sgt. Nikolas Fragos, SP4 William G. McMurry, Jr., and LLDB Lt. Quy desperately tried to stop the tanks with LAWs and grenades. They even climbed on the plated engine decks, trying to pry open hatches to blast out the crews. NVA infantrymen followed the vehicles closely, dusting their sides with automatic rifle fire. One tank was stopped by five direct hits, and the crew killed as they tried to abandon the vehicle. 1Lt. Miles R. Wilkins, the detachment executive officer, left the mortar pit with several LAWs and fought a running engagement with one tank beside the team house without much success. Along the outer perimeters, the mobile strike force outpost was receiving fire. Both Kenneth Hanna, a heavy weapons specialist, and Charles W. Lindewald, 12th Mobile Strike Force platoon leader, were wounded. Hanna, wounded in the scalp, left shoulder and arm tried to administer first aid to Lindewald. The two were last seen just before their position was overrun. Harvey Brande spoke with them by radio and Hanna indicated that Lindewald was then dead, and that he himself was badly wounded. Daniel R. Phillips, a demolitions specialist, was wounded in the face and was last seen trying to evade North Vietnamese armor by going through the northern perimeter wire.
NVA sappers armed with satchel charges, tear gas grenades and flamethrowers fought through the 101st, 102nd and 103rd CIDG perimeter trenches and captured both ends of the compound by 2:30 a.m. Spearheaded by tanks, they stormed the inner compound. LtCol. Schungel and his tank-killer personnel moved back to the command bunker for more LAWs. They were pinned behind a row of dirt and rock filled drums by a tank that had just destroyed one of the mortar pits. A LAW was fired against the tank with no effect. The cannon swung around and blasted the barrels in front of the bunker entrance. The explosion temporarily blinded McMurry and mangled his hands, pitched a heavy drum on top of Lt. Wilkins and knocked Schungel flat. Lt. Quy managed to escape to another section of the camp, but the approach of yet another tank prevented Schungel and Wilkins from following. At some point during this period, McMurry, a radioman, disappeared.

The tank, which was shooting at the camp observation post, was destroyed with a LAW. Schungel helped Wilkins over to the team house, where he left both doors ajar and watched for approaching NVA soldiers. Wilkins was incapacitated and weaponless, and Schungel had only two grenades and two magazines of ammunition left. He used one magazine to kill a closely huddled five-man sapper squad coming toward the building. He fed his last magazine into his rifle as the team house was rocked with explosions and bullets. The two limped over to the dispensary, which was occupied by NVA soldiers, and hid underneath it, behind a wall of sandbags. At some point, Brande, Thompson and at least one Vietnamese interpreter were captured by the North Vietnamese. Thompson was uninjured, but Brande had taken shrapnel in his leg. Brande and Thompson were held separately for a week, then rejoined in Laos. Joining with them was McMurry, who had also been captured from the camp. The three were moved up the Ho Chi Minh trail to North Vietnam and held until 1973. The U.S. did not immediately realize they had been captured, and carried them in Missing in Action status throughout the rest of the war, although Brande's photo was positively identified by a defector in April 1969 as being a Prisoner of War. A Vietnamese interpreter captured from the camp told Brande later that he had seen both Lindewald and Hanna, and that they both were dead.

Several personnel, including Capt. Willoughby, SP4 James L. Moreland, the medic for the mobile strike force, and Lt. Quan, the LLDB camp commander, were trapped in the underground level of the command bunker. Lt. Longgrear also retreated to the command bunker. Satchel charges, thermite grenades and gas grenades were shoved down the bunker air vents, and breathing was very difficult. Some soldiers had gas masks, but others had only handkerchiefs or gauze from their first aid packets. The NVA announced they were going to blow up the bunker, and the LLDB personnel walked up the stairs to surrender, and were summarily executed. At dawn, two large charges were put down the vent shaft and detonated, partially demolishing the north wall and creating a large hole through which grenades were pitched. The bunker defenders used upturned furniture and debris to shield themselves. Willoughby was badly wounded by grenade fragments and passed out at 8:30 a.m. Moreland had been wounded and became delirious after receiving a head injury in the final bunker explosion.

Incredibly, the battle was still going on in other parts of the camp. Aircraft had been strafing the ravines and roads since 1:00 a.m. throughout the battle, the Laotians refused to participate, saying they would attack at first light. Sfc. Eugene Ashley, Jr., the intelligence sergeant, led two assistant medical specialists, Sgt. Richard H. Allen and SP4 Joel Johnson as they mustered 60 of the Laotian soldiers and counterattacked into Lang Vei. The Laotians bolted when a NVA machine gun crew opened fire on them, forcing the three Americans to withdraw. Team Sfc. William T. Craig and SSgt. Tiroch had chased tanks throughout the night with everything from M-79 grenade launchers to a .50 caliber machine gun. After it had become apparent that the camp had been overrun, they escaped outside the wire and took temporary refuge in a creek bed. After daylight, they saw Ashley's counterattack force and joined him. The Special Forces sergeants persuaded more defenders fleeing down Route 9 to assist them and tried second, third and fourth assaults. Between each
assault, Ashley directed airstrikes on the NVA defensive line, while the other Special Forces soldiers gathered tribal warriors for yet another attempt.

On the fifth counterattack, Ashley was mortally wounded only thirty yards from the command bunker. Capt. Willoughby had regained consciousness in the bunker about 10:00 a.m. and established radio contact with the counterattacking Americans. The continual American airstrikes had forced the North Vietnamese to begin withdrawing from the camp. Col. Schungel and Lt. Wilkins emerged from under the dispensary after it was vacated by the North Vietnamese and hobbled out of the camp. The personnel in the bunker also left in response to orders to immediately evacuate the camp. They carried Sgt. John D. Early, who had been badly wounded by shrapnel while manning the tower, but were forced to leave SP4 Moreland inside the bunker. 1Lt. Thomas D. Todd, an engineer officer in charge of upgrading Lang Vei's airstrip, held out in the medical bunker throughout the battle. That afternoon, he was the last American to pass through the ruined command bunker. He saw Moreland, who appeared to be dead, covered with debris. Among the list of casualties

Maj. George Quamo gathered a few dozen Special Forces commando volunteers from the MACV-SOG base at Khe Sanh (FOB #3) and led a heroic reinforcing mission into Lang Vei. His arrival enabled the Lang Vei defenders to evacuate the area, many by Marine helicopters in the late afternoon. James William Holt was not included in the listed of survivors. His remains not found and he was listed as Missing In-Action. Missing In. The Defense POW/MIA Office on 10 JAN 2015 announced the identification of remains belonging to Sgt Holt. He will be buried with full military honors on a date/location yet to be announced.

The Defense POW/MIA Office announced the identification of remains belonging to Air Force Capt. Richard D. Chorlins, 24, of University City, Mo., who was piloting an A-1 Skyraider aircraft on a night strike mission over the Mu Gia Pass in Laos when his aircraft was shot down by enemy ground fire on Jan. 11, 1970. He was assigned to the 602nd Special Operations Squadron, 34th Tactical Group. He will be buried with full military honors on a date and location yet to be announced.

Korea

Army Sgt. Joseph M. Snock Jr., 21, from Westmoreland, Pa., was lost on Nov. 30, 1950, in North Korea, where it would be learned he died as a prisoner of war. He was assigned to Heavy Mortar Company, 31st Infantry Regiment. He will be buried with full military honors on a date/location yet to be announced.

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Cpl. C.G. Bolden, 2, U.S. Army, was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, He was taken Prisoner of War while fighting the enemy in South Korea on January 5, 1951 and died while a prisoner on April 30, 1951. He was accounted for Jan. 16, 2015. He will be buried with full military honors.

C G Bolden and wife Geraldine Bradford
The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced 16 JAN that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, unaccounted for from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Sgt. **Gilberto L. Sanchez**, 19, of New Braunfels, Texas, will be buried Jan. 23, in San Antonio. In late November 1950, Sanchez was assigned as a Medic to Medical Company, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT). The 31st RCT was deployed east of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, when it was attacked by overwhelming numbers of Chinese forces. On Dec. 1, 1950, remnants of the 31st RCT, known historically as Task Force Faith, began a fighting withdrawal to more defensible positions near Hagaru-ri, south of the reservoir. On Dec. 2, 1950, Sanchez was reported as missing in action.

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**Gilberto L. Sanchez**

Between 1991 and 1994, North Korea turned over to the U.S. 208 boxes of human remains believed to contain more than 400 U.S. servicemen who fought during the war. North Korean documents, turned over at that time, indicated that some of the remains were recovered from the area where Sanchez was believed to have died. To identify Sanchez’s remains, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools including mitochondrial DNA, which matched Sanchez’s sister and brothers, and Y-STR DNA analysis, which matched his brothers.

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The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced 20 JAN that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Marine Cpl. **William S. Blasdel**, 26, of Freeport, Ill., was buried June 9, 2014, in National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. In November 1950, Blasdel was assigned to Company H, 3rd Battalion, 11th Regiment, 1st Marine Division, when his unit was deployed south of the North Korean village of Yudam-ni on the western bank of the Chosin Reservoir. On November 28, Blasdel was in his forward observer position near Fox Hill, when his position was struck by enemy mortar rounds. It was during these attacks that his unit was overwhelmed and began a fighting withdrawal south. Blasdel was presumed to have been killed in action during the attacks. In late 1954, Chinese forces repatriated unknown remains they claimed to have recovered from Blasdel’s last known location. A military review board in December 1955, declared the remains as unidentifiable and the remains were transferred to Hawaii to be buried as unknown in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, known as the “Punchbowl.” In 2013, due to advances in forensic science technology, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) determined that the possibility of identifying the remains now existed. The unknown remains were disinterred for analysis and possible identification. In the identification of Blasdel, scientists from JPAC used
circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, to include dental comparison and radiograph comparisons, which matched his records.

William S. Blasdel

World War II

Marine Corps Pvt. Jack M. Redman, 20, from Watseka, Ill., was lost on Nov. 20, 1943, during the Battle of Tarawa. Redman was born on 17 November 1923 in Detroit. His family soon moved to Watseka, Illinois where he lived through high school. Jack excelled in all sports at Watseka High School along with his three brothers Hobe, Gene, and Merrill. He was All State as a fullback and earned a football scholarship to the University of Illinois. After one semester at U. of ILL, he joined the Marine Corps in January 1943. As a member of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines Jack spent time in New Zealand under intense training with the rest of the Second Division. His first combat action was the Tarawa invasion. He was killed on November 23, one of 9 Marines killed at Tarawa on the last day of the battle. His remains were never returned to the United States. His brother Hobe was wounded at Saipan and Gene was in the 3rd Division. He was accounted for Dec. 20, 2014. He will be buried with full military honors.

Jack Redman training in California on the left and at Tarawa on the right

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced 26 JAN that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing since World War II, have been identified and are being returned to his family for burial with full military honors. U.S. Army Air Forces 1st Lt. James F. Gatlin, 25, of Jacksonville, Fla., will be buried Jan. 30 in Bushnell, Fla. On Dec. 23, 1944, Gatlin and his crew of five were assigned to the 575th Bombardment Squadron, 391st Bombardment Group, 9th Air Force and were deployed to Germany. Gatlin was a copilot of a B-26C Marauder that crashed after being struck by enemy fire while on a bombing mission against enemy forces near Ahrweiler, Germany. Gatlin and four other crew members were reported killed in
action. His remains were not recovered during the war. One of the crew members parachuted from the aircraft but was captured and held as a prisoner of war by German forces. Following his release, he reported to U. S. officials that he had no knowledge of the fate of the remaining crewmen. Following the war, the American Graves Registration Command (AGRC) conducted investigations on the loss of Gatlin and his crew and successfully located the crash site, near Manderscheid and Bettenfeld. The remains of two crewmen were recovered. On May 27, 1999, a U. S. team investigating World War II losses in Germany visited a crash site near Bettenfeld. Two German nationals had researched the crash site and showed the team artifacts that were found and turned over remains collected from the site. Those remains were identified as Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Joe R. Sanchez, 20, of Los Nietos, Calif. He was accounted for in March 2011 and returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Between 2011 and 2014, Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) teams traveled to Bettenfeld and conducted operations at the crash site. To identify Gatlin’s remains, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used forensic identification tools to include mitochondrial DNA, which matched his cousins.


* VA *

VA Accountability Update 01 ▶ Care Data withheld on Cost and Quality

Members of a House subcommittee lashed out at the Department of Veterans Affairs on 28 JAN for withholding information they and budget researchers say is crucial to overseeing the VA’s ailing health care system and said they are considering legislation that will force department to release data. At a hearing to discuss the cost and quality of VA health care, an official with the Congressional Budget Office, which provides independent analysis for Congress, said the VA refused to provide his office basic information about their health care for a report released in December comparing the VA medical system to the private sector. “Additional data, particularly if it was provided on a regular and systematic basis, could help inform policymakers about the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of VHA’s services,” said Matthew Goldberg, the Congressional Budget Office deputy assistant director for national security.
The hearing of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health was held to discuss the cost and quality of VA care in comparison to the private sector, but much of it focused on the lack of data from the VA that Goldberg said made an already difficult comparison impossible. The report was commissioned in part to give lawmakers and VA officials a better idea of how to reform the VA in the wake of a national veterans’ health care scandal. Similar reports are done on Tricare, the Department of Defense’s health care program, but Goldberg said VA would not release similar patient and care information that the DOD provides, even with sensitive patient data redacted.

Goldberg’s statement prompted some congressmen to question the VA’s commitment to reform, and floated the idea of legislation forcing the department to release certain data. “Unfortunately, it became painfully apparent to me last year that the Veterans Health Administration, which operates the VA health care system, was either unable or unwilling to provide basic information about the services it provides,” said Rep. Dan Benishek (R-MI). “VA’s lack of transparency is echoed in the disappointing testimony — absent substance or detail — that VA provided for this morning’s hearing.” Dr. James Tuchschmidt, the VA’s acting deputy undersecretary for health, said he would work with Congress on releasing additional data, though he did not specify what the VA would release. “You have my commitment today to sit down with my staff and figure out what kind of data you need,” he said.

The department has been under fire since revelations last summer that some VA medical centers had created secret patient wait-lists to make it appear veterans were getting care faster than they were. The scandal cost former VA Secretary Eric Shinseki his job and his replacement, Bob McDonald, who promised top-to-bottom reform at the department, has been getting increasing criticism from lawmakers. “The new secretary is not changing the culture as far as I can see,” Rep. Mike Coffman (R-CO), said at the hearing. In response to Stars and Stripes’ questions, VA officials would not say why the department withheld the data nor whether it plans to release the information to Congress and the budget office in the future. “An open and honest working relationship with our Committee partners is vital for the improvement of VA care and services for our veterans,” VA spokeswoman Walinda West said. “We welcome constructive criticism and continually seek opportunities to directly discuss positive ways to improve our systems and organization.” [Source: Stars and Stripes | Heath Druzin | Jan. 28, 2015 ++]

Homeless Vets Update 64 ► VA Homeless PIT Count

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald is taking a firsthand look at the issue of homelessness among Veterans by participating in this year’s Point-in-Time (PIT) Count in Los Angeles, California. The PIT Count typically takes place in locations around the country during the month of January. Secretary McDonald remains committed to the goal of eliminating Veteran homelessness. The January 2014 PIT Count revealed that 49,993 Veterans were homeless on a single night representing a 33-percent decline in homelessness among Veterans since 2010. In FY 2014 alone, through VA’s various homeless programs, more than 72,000 Veterans and their family members were placed in permanent housing or prevented from becoming homeless. “There is no question that the goal to end Veteran homelessness is within reach, and we remain laser-focused on it,” said Secretary McDonald. “Ending Veteran homelessness in America is more than hitting a number, it’s about helping communities put a system in place that can house every Veteran experiencing homelessness today and prevent it in the future. I am so heartened that over 440 mayors, governors, county executives and other local officials have joined us and are committed to ending Veteran homelessness in their communities. We will continue our work until all Veterans have a place to call home.”
By estimating the number of homeless Veterans, the PIT Count gauges progress in achieving President Obama and VA’s goal of ending Veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. Annual data from the PIT Count also assists VA staff and partner agencies in targeting homeless resources where they are needed most. VA has a wide range of programs that prevent and end homelessness among Veterans, including health care, housing solutions, job training and education. Also since 2010 there has been nearly 43-percent reduction in unsheltered homeless Veterans.

As part of VA’s continued commitment to ending Veteran homelessness, Secretary McDonald, has directed his senior VA leaders to take part in this year’s count in cities across the United States and learn how the organizations they lead can continue to support VA’s efforts to end Veteran homelessness. Twenty senior VA leaders will participate in PIT counts everywhere from New York to California to places in between. The PIT Count is led by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) each year to estimate the number of Americans, including Veterans, who are homeless.

As a result of VA’s work with HUD, as well as the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness and other federal, state and local partners, significant progress has been made since VA’s initiative to end Veteran homelessness began in 2010. More information about VA’s homeless programs is available at [http://www.va.gov/homeless](http://www.va.gov/homeless). Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless should contact their local VA Medical Center and ask to speak to a homeless coordinator. [Source: VA News Release | Jan 28, 2015 ++]

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**VA Pharmacy Update 01  ► New and Improved VA Prescription Label**

VA asked hundreds of Veterans to tell us what they liked and didn’t like about the labels on their prescriptions. They heard you. The results led to this new patient-centric prescription label. They’ve cleaned up the look and made the following changes: Your name has been moved to the top of the label. Directions on how to take your medication are now larger and bolded. The date the prescription can no longer be refilled is clearly stated. The new design makes it easier to identify important drug and safety information. 4.8 Million Veterans Benefit from New Labels VA has now adopted this patient-centric prescription label as the standard format for all VA pharmacies. The 4.8 million Veterans receiving VA prescription benefits now receive prescription labels with standardized information.
Looking at the period from 2000 to 2011, pharmacists from VA’s National Center for Patient Safety (NCPS) identified 1,900 medication safety incidents in which a Veteran may not have understood their prescription label. Over 400 Veterans and 700 VA pharmacy staff participated in a national study to better understand why this was occurring. NCPS in conjunction with Pharmacy Benefits Management Services conducted this study to identify ways to redesign the prescription label that would support Veterans’ preferences and enhance their understanding of important drug information. According to Jeanne Tuttle, a National Pharmacist Program Manager with VA’s Pharmacy Benefits Management Services, “Improving and standardizing prescriptions labels is an important step, but ultimately our goal is to encourage Veterans to be active participants in improving their health outcomes. We want our Veterans to speak up and ask their pharmacist or provider if they are unclear on how to take their medication or what it is used for.”

Here is a snapshot of the results from the study by Keith W. Trettin, an NCPS program manager: The VA prescription benefit is one of the most frequently used by our Veterans. More than 4.8 million Veterans use this benefit and the number is growing by 1 percent per year. VA filled more than 143 million prescriptions for Veterans in fiscal year 2014, at a cost of approximately $3.7 billion. In support of the prescription benefit, VA employs more than 7,000 pharmacists and 4,000 pharmacy technicians. When Veterans understand how to take their medications correctly, they have improved health outcomes and total health care costs decrease. However, NCPS saw cases in which Veterans misinterpreted their prescription labels and subsequently had a poor clinical outcome. For example, Veterans have often misunderstood labels for diabetes medication that read “Take two tablets by mouth twice a day (half-an-hour before a meal)” to mean the medication should be taken before every meal — or — three times a day. This has resulted in patients experiencing hypoglycemia.

Studies have shown that depending on their literacy level, 25 to 88 percent of patients could not correctly state how to take their medications. The project evaluated Veterans’ literacy with current VA prescription labels, as well as comprehension and satisfaction with a proposed new patient-centric label, using an evidence-based, patient-centric evaluation model. The goal was to provide evidence that a standardized patient-centric label can increase each Veteran’s understanding of how to take his or her medications. The evidence is in and the new and improved patient-centric prescription labels are now the standard at all VA pharmacies. [Source: VHA | Hans Petersen | Jan. 26, 2015 ++]

Gulf War Syndrome Update 33 ➤ Pyridostigmine Bromide Study

A government-issued pill intended to protect troops from nerve agents may have made some troops more vulnerable to a chronic condition marked by headaches, cognitive problems, pain and fatigue, researchers say. People with certain genetic variations were 40 times more likely to contract Gulf War illness if they took pyridostigmine bromide, or PB, pills that the Defense Department issued to protect them from soman, a nerve agent, during the 1990-91 war, researchers concluded in a study funded by the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command and published this month in the journal Environmental Health. The study of 304 veterans provides compelling evidence that the illness has a physical rather than mental origin, experts said.

Veterans with Gulf War illness share symptoms such as persistent headaches, cognitive difficulties, widespread pain and fatigue. Although that profile overlaps symptoms from conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, Gulf War illness produces symptoms such as musculoskeletal problems that combat-stress illnesses don’t, and relatively few Gulf War veterans saw combat, said Lea Steele, a researcher
with Baylor University Institute of Biomedical Studies and lead author of the study. “The only possible conclusion is that something else caused it,” Steele said, though she cautioned that “you don't want to say it's definitive with one study.” The study's participants didn't know whether they had the genetic variation that made them more susceptible.

The research provides “extremely hard, convincing evidence that the cause of Gulf War illness must be toxic exposures,” said James H. Binns Jr., a Vietnam War veteran and Phoenix businessman who formerly chaired the Department of Veterans Affairs Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses. The Department of Veterans Affairs, which has held to the theory of a mental cause, said it “welcomes all additions to its scientific literature review.” One-fourth to one-third of the 700,000 people who deployed to the Middle East contracted the illness. With no ready explanation for why others didn't become ill, early research seized on stress as a possible cause. “VA scientists will review this new article and make sure that the Institute of Medicine Committee, currently engaged in a biennial review of Gulf War health issues, is aware of it and includes its findings in the literature review,” said Walinda West, a spokeswoman with the VA in Washington. West said the agency “is committed to its investment in Gulf War research,” noting that it formed a research group Jan. 15 to study Gulf War-related brain cancer possibly associated with exposure to chemical nerve agents during demolition of a munitions depot in Khamisiyah, Iraq, in March 1991 after the ceasefire. The VA expects to complete that study by spring, she said.

As for Gulf War illness, “There's been a theory for a long time that there's probably a gene-environment interaction that determined which people got ill and which people escaped,” said Robert F. White, chair of environmental health at the Boston University School of Public Health. The study in Environmental Health “doesn't explain everything,” White said. “It needs to be replicated. ... But it's kind of the first step in determining the genetic end of this.” Other studies have linked PB pills to Gulf War illness but were based on veterans self-reporting illnesses. When the pills were issued, the Food and Drug Administration hadn't yet approved them as a pretreatment for possible soman exposure but gave interim approval for the Gulf War. The Defense Department sought approval on the belief that Iraq used soman and other nerve agents against Iran in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War. Binns has criticized the VA for its reluctance to accept the growing body of evidence for the physical causes of the illness, but he doesn't fault the government's decision to give troops the pills. “I think people made the best decisions they could on the information that was known in 1991,” he said. Going forward, the study should alert the Pentagon to risks that troops face and the necessity for screening them before issuing PB pills, he said. It's unclear whether the Defense Department continued to issue them after that war.

One Gulf War veteran said finding a genetic link between the pills and illness is welcome news. “That's what I said to Congress when I was there,” said the Rev. Barry Walker, 75, of East Palestine, Ohio. “I blamed that pill.” The former Army chaplain served in post-war Korea, the Vietnam War, and was nearby when a Scud missile struck the barracks of the Hempfield-based 14th Quartermaster detachment in the First Gulf War. He became a national advocate for treating Gulf War illness as a physical malady, based on his experience and that of other veterans. The VA’s insistence of treating it as a mental illness similar to post-traumatic stress disorder has been frustrating, he said. “I don't believe it's that,” he said. “I have PTSD, but that's because I saw too many wars.” The physical symptoms he experienced after the Gulf War, which include fibromyalgia and fatigue, aren't what he experienced from Korea or Vietnam, he said. “I had sore back after Korea, but that's because I was blown out of a Jeep,” he said.

Steele, the study's author, said scientists studying Gulf War illness largely accept a physical cause. Several enzymes play a role in the body’s response to toxic chemicals, and variations in those enzymes could explain why some troops were more vulnerable than others. This study of one enzyme explains, at most, only 10
percent of the cases, she said. “We really need to look at the other enzymes as well,” Steele said. [Source: Pittsburgh Tribune-Review | Brian Bowling | Jan. 25, 2015 ++]

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**VA Regions**  ►  **New Five-Region Organization**

Veterans Affairs Department officials who promised to simplify the agency are touting major progress after settling on a single map of the United States. If that seems overly bureaucratic, keep in mind the department currently uses at least nine maps of America, subdividing the country into dozens of regional networks and administrative responsibilities for hundreds of programs. By midsummer, all VA agencies should be sharing the same latitude and longitude, coordinating efforts along a newly drawn five-region map to allow veterans a single point of entry for a host of office offerings. Officials offered few specifics on what they called "the biggest organizational change in VA history" but said the work will not immediately mean cuts to the 340,000-plus workforce. "This is not about losing jobs," said Bob Snyder, executive director of the MyVA program office. "There is more than enough work to do at VA. ... This is about improving the veterans' experience."

The veteran Affairs Office says that by mid-summer all offices should be coordinating efforts along the above newly drawn 5 Region map

Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald last fall touted the MyVA program as an overarching effort to provide better customer service to veterans by trimming excess layers like duplicative hotlines and single-subject offices to combat the public image of VA as an unwieldy bureaucracy. So far, the program has produced changes like better signage at hospitals and more independent authority for call center operators on veterans benefits issues. The map change, officials said, has the potential to improve communication and coordination between offices that previously had little interaction, creating more one-stop shops for veterans. But details on exactly how that will happen won't be decided for months.

Regional offices overseeing things like benefits processing, home loan awards, public affairs work, technology support and health care services will each have to determine how to realign their operations in
light of the new departmental map. Officials on a briefing call with reporters 26 JAN said the map announcement was designed to give an update on the greater MyVA simplification efforts, and to reassure veterans that work is taking place. In a statement, McDonald called the work a “first step in empowering veterans to interact with one VA” and a way to “improve the veteran experience by enabling veterans to more easily … access their earned care and benefits.” VA officers are expected to have plans in place to “ensure their structures are aligned within [the new map] framework” by the end of June. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Jan 26, 2015 ++]

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VA Appeals Backlog Update 02 ➤ Wait Times Average 1,937 Days

At a 22 JAN congressional hearing, The American Legion noted that decisions on about 288,000 veterans’ benefits claims have been appealed. “With appealed claims, you can no longer think in terms of how many days you’ve been waiting,” the Legion stated in its written testimony. “Appealed claims are measured in terms of how many years the veteran has been waiting.” Zachary Hearn, deputy director of benefits for the Legion’s Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division, amplified the Legion's views while testifying before the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. The hearing focused on the Department of Veterans Affairs’ appeals system for veterans’ claims. Veterans who have appealed their disability claims wait an average of 1,937 days for final decisions, according to numbers listed in VA’s Monday Morning Workload Report of 5 JAN. That time span is about 500 days longer than a standard four-year enlistment in the military.

Hearn told the committee that nearly 75 percent of claims presented at Board of Veterans’ Appeals (BVA) have either been improperly denied at a VA regional office, or inadequately developed and denied prematurely. Many claims were also appealed because their claims adjudicators failed to follow their legally mandated duties to assist veterans. In reviewing claims appeals, The American Legion often notes that VA claims adjudicators do not consider secondary medical conditions that have been caused or aggravated by previous service-connected conditions. If VA workers were compelled to consider those conditions, Hearn said, many remands for medical examinations would be eliminated. But such additional consideration is time-consuming. “While VA asserts it does not place a higher priority on the amount of claims adjudicated,” Hearn said, “its current work-credit structure does not address accuracy in its metric, which rewards speed over quality.”

The American Legion represented more than 9,100 veterans at the BVA between October 2013 and last September. About three-fourths of those claims were either granted outright to the veteran (28.1 percent) or sent back to regional offices because of improper work (46.4 percent). Once a BVA judge remands a claim, instructions are forwarded to VA’s Appeals Management Center for further development. Hearn said these remands, or returned claims, come with clear and distinct instructions from the judges, yet The American Legion consistently sees cases remanded multiple times, despite the instructions. “This is what is known as the ‘hamster wheel’ of remands, where a veteran remains in adjudication purgatory, waiting for VA to conduct proper development and finally render a decision,” Hearn said. "The greatest impact on the appeals process would be eliminating the need to appeal in the first place.”

While VA has published accuracy rates above 90 percent for claims processing, the Government Accountability Office reported last November that the Veterans Benefits Administration “does not follow accepted statistical practices and thus generates imprecise accuracy data.” “This is what veterans face: An adjudication process that rewards the quick and not the accurate, an appellate process that repeatedly notes
errors in development, and adjudication that may cause years of hardship for our nation’s veterans,” Hearn said. VA needs to eliminate its current work-credit structure, Hearn said, because it places greater emphasis on the quantity of claims adjudicated, rather than the quality of those adjudications. [Source: American Legion | Marty Callaghan | Jan. 22, 2015 ++]

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**VA Appeals Backlog Update 03 ► VA Officials Say Problem Not Major**

Lawmakers still are worried about the growing backlog of appealed benefits cases at the Veterans Affairs Department — but VA officials still don't think it's a major problem. Members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee renewed their questions about VA's benefits system and growing appeals workload 22 JAN, saying they are disturbed by reports that show an average wait of more than 3.5 years for appeals to be completed. The number of benefits cases awaiting appeal decisions has jumped about 10 percent in the last year, alarming lawmakers and outside advocates. VA planners have focused mainly on the backlog of first-time benefits requests in recent years, after that backlog grew to more than 610,000 cases in 2013 and became a national scandal. That total now sits at around 250,000 cases, but despite the dramatic drop, VA promises of reaching zero by the end of 2015 appear out of reach.

Department officials said 22 JAN that more work needs to be done to streamline the appeals process as well, but pushed back against narratives that the appeals system is getting worse. Beth McCoy, deputy undersecretary for field operations at the Veterans Benefits Administration, said that while the number of pending appeals cases has grown steadily, that's a function of the rising total of veterans claims, not an overwhelmed system. She said the rate of claims appeals of claims has remained steady in recent years, as has the rate of new awards for appealed cases. And she noted that more than 70 percent of veterans who appeal a benefits case are already receiving some payout from the department.

Rep. Ralph Abraham (R-LA), chair of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee's disability assistance panel, said reports of veterans waiting up to a decade for a final decision on their appeals are "alarming and unacceptable" and risk causing veterans to lose faith in the system. "These claims need to be adjudicated ... and the system needs to be thorough, swift and fair," he said. VA leaders have said they plan to look at significant changes to the appeals process as the first-time claims problem is resolved. Lawmakers have promised extra oversight into all facets of VA operations in light of the departments dramatic funding increases in recent budgets and last year's patient wait times scandal. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Jan. 22, 2015 ++]

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**VA Procurement ► Non-Public 2013 Acquisition Assessment**

Contracting officers in the Department of Veterans Affairs routinely altered dates on documents to ensure favorable ratings when actually they were behind schedule, according to a non-public audit obtained by the Washington Examiner. The move appears similar to what occurred with patient appointment times and case work, when VA employees recorded false dates to make it seem like patients weren’t being forced to wait as long for medical care or benefits. Many of them died waiting for care. The audit's conclusions are also important because all of VA’s major construction projects are currently far behind schedule and hundreds of millions of dollars over budget. "Contract specialists can (and apparently do) change the projected award date to accommodate delays and ensure a Green rating," according to an "acquisition assessment" for VA's eastern region by the Jefferson Consulting Group. The Washington, D.C.-based firm analyzes the
performance of federal agencies and was hired by VA's Service Area East Office to review its operations in 2011 and then again in 2013. It focused on its Office of Acquisition, Logistics and Construction Risk Management.

Officials with VA told the Jefferson auditors that the "Procurement Action Leadtime (PALT)" metric, which tracks how long it takes to award a contract, is "subject to manipulation" and "of questionable value." VA offices came out with implausibly high ratings, even though the reality was one of bureaucratic delays and dysfunction. "Seven of the eight SAO East VISNs, as well as all the VISNs in SAO Central and West, received a Green rating on PALT. In two cases, PALT standards were met 100% of the time," the audit says. VISN refers to individual sections and stands for Veterans Integrated Service Network. Contracting delays can cost taxpayers substantial amounts of money because the "requirement is often urgently needed at the time the requisition is submitted and contracting staff must turn to less competitive or non-competitive strategies to address the need." Yet despite recommendations in the previous assessment, little has been done to foster early involvement of the contract specialists to avoid delays.

Similarly, the 2011 review found that "there is little or no formal annual acquisition planning." It recommended that VA "establish an annual acquisition planning process," which VA said it did, but which Jefferson said in the 2013 review that it "does not agree" was accomplished. Auditors said the sheer size of the VA makes it difficult to manage. In 2012, the East office alone performed 140,000 contract actions totaling $4 billion. Many employees told auditors that top managers were aloof and more concerned about on-paper metrics than with learning how things were working on the ground. "We have not even met the current director of SAO East, much less learn about the vision," one said. "SAO East is very silent and unengaged. They conduct reviews and perform audits, but that's it," another said.

A personnel performance review system, according to the report, "has become more of a paper exercise than a tool." And an in-depth review of a sample of contract files indicated that problems were the norm, not the exception. "Despite the expressed commitment to VA’s Integrated Oversight Process, the Risk Management and Compliance Service file review… indicates significant non-compliance," the audit said. Sixty-five percent of procurement requests were flawed, 58 percent of justifications for not using competitive bidding were missing documentation, and 72 percent of determinations of "fair and reasonable price" were problematic. VA's construction program, which is part of the procurement office, is under scrutiny as last month, construction halted on a Denver-area hospital after a builder refused to perform any more work, saying VA was in breach of its contract and that the company had incurred $100 million in losses — the latest of four new hospitals to be far over budget and behind schedule, according to the Government Accountability Office.

On 19 JAN, VA said in a statement: “The situation in Denver is unacceptable to Veterans, taxpayers and Department leadership … Our obligation is to ensure VA doesn’t allow such an outcome to occur again by learning all we can from past mistakes and put in place corrective actions to improve future performance.” But the audit is replete with instances in which VA has not acted swiftly to correct other problems even after they have been identified.

- "The Assessment Team does not consider the above responses to be effective or timely ... The recommendations were made over 18 months ago. Whatever the components of the plan that was developed, it is clear that they have not been implemented," auditors wrote of a plan to increase communication.
- The audit also shows that the Denver disaster is not out of the ordinary. Auditors found a list of 16 purchase orders worth nearly $40 million with a handwritten note on the bottom saying that "All contracts above were not monitored and work has not started and contracts have expired."
• "A veteran-owned small business concern claimed they were on the brink of going out of business due to the government failure to pay for work performed," the audit added. Staff were "inundated" with such cases and "new issues and problems are being uncovered daily," VA staff told auditors.
• VA officials at DC headquarters have "clearly failed to perform this acquisition-related responsibilities," auditors wrote.
• The consulting firm also gave a failing "red" rating in the category of "effectively managing the acquisition process." It gave the same rating for "commitment from leadership," saying "efforts to establish fully effective internal control review processes are lacking." That means it has actually gotten worse since auditors identified the same problems in 2011, when they gave it a “yellow” rating in that category.

### Billions in contracts, but paperwork in disarray

This chart shows the percentage of various types of VA contract documentation that were missing, required information, or were otherwise problematic. It comes from an audit by the Jefferson Consulting Group for the VA's Service Area Office East.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>% of Files with Missing/Inadequate Documentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approved procurement request</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required funding document</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market research</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition plan</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicitation</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification for other than Full and Open Competition</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FedBizOpps pre-solicitation notice</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination of fair and reasonable price</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Award decision document</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility determination</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed contract</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper execution of modifications</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mistakes and mismanagement have led to more than $1.5 billion in cost overruns and years of delays in recent major Veterans Affairs construction projects, and veterans groups say that's only the start of the department's problems. By their estimates, VA planners are up to $65 billion short in their construction goals for the next decade, and the management problems and rising demand for veterans medical services could cripple the department in years to come. House and Senate lawmakers have promised close scrutiny of VA funding and projects for the coming year, after massive reform measures and more than $16 billion in new funding were approved by Congress last summer. [Source: Washington Examiner | Luke Rosiak | Jan. 20, 2015 ++]

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**VA Whistleblowers Update 18 ➤ 24+ Receive Retaliation Relief**

The Veterans Affairs Department said 20 JAN it is offering relief to more than two dozen employees who faced retaliation after filing whistleblower complaints about wrongdoing at VA hospitals and clinics nationwide. The actions follow settlements reached last year with three employees who reported widespread problems at the Phoenix VA hospital, including chronic delays for veterans seeking care and falsified waiting lists covering up the delays. The latest actions offer relief to about 25 VA employees, including a doctor who was reprimanded and retired after reporting significant errors at a Maryland clinic, and a nurse manager in Washington state who was fired after refusing to alter a performance evaluation for a subordinate. The
Special Counsel Carolyn Lerner applauded the VA for taking steps to protect employees who file whistleblower complaints. Lerner's office, which is independent from any government agency, is investigating more than 120 complaints of retaliation at the VA following employee allegations about improper patient scheduling, understaffing and other problems at the VA's 970 hospitals and clinics nationwide. VA Secretary Robert McDonald, who took over the agency last summer, has vowed to root out retaliation as the agency seeks to change a culture that he and other officials acknowledge has allowed and even encouraged reprisals against those who file complaints. "Secretary McDonald has taken whistleblowing within the VA seriously," Lerner said in a statement Tuesday. "He recognizes that an essential step toward improving veterans' care is to listen to employee concerns and protect them from retaliation."

Deputy VA Secretary Sloan Gibson said the department is committed to holding accountable those who retaliate against whistleblowers. Employees who blow the whistle on higher-ups because they have identified a legitimate problem "should not be punished" but instead should be protected, Gibson said, citing a similar comment last year by President Barack Obama. "Personally, I would add that you should be praised," Gibson said. Among those who settled complaints in recent weeks were Dr. Richard Hill, a primary care physician at Fort Detrick Army Base in Frederick, Maryland, and Coleen Elmers, a nurse manager at the VA hospital in Spokane, Washington.

- Hill complained about a lack of clerical staff at his primary care unit, which he said led to significant errors in patient care and scheduling problems. Instead of fixing the problem, VA reprimanded Hill last May. He retired two months later. As part of the settlement, the VA agreed to expunge Hill's record of any negative personnel actions.
- Elmers filed a complaint last year with the VA's Office of Inspector General about a fraudulently altered performance evaluation of one of her subordinates, which Elmers had refused to change. A supervisor later moved to fire Elmers for "lack of candor" and failure to follow instructions. The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, a quasi-judicial agency that hears appeals of executive branch actions, granted the special counsel's request to put off the firing until the counsel's office completes an investigation.
- The VA agreed to reverse a decision to fire Mark Tello, a nursing assistant at a VA hospital in Saginaw, Michigan, who reported improper staffing that he said could result in serious patient care lapses. The VA agreed to place Tello in a new job and award him undisclosed back pay.
- The VA agreed to find a new job for Rachael Hogan, a registered nurse at a VA hospital in Syracuse, New York, who disclosed to a superior a patient's rape accusation against a VA employee. When the official delayed reporting the accusations to police, Hogan warned the manager about the risks of failing to file a timely report. VA managers had threatened to fire Hogan. Under the settlement, the VA agreed to place her in a new job under a different supervisor. The Syracuse facility also will pay for whistleblower-protection training for managers at the site.

[Source: The Associated Press | Matthew Daly | Jan. 15, 2015 ++]

VA Gulf War Advisory Committee Update 07 ➤ New Study/Members

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is announcing the appointment of new members to the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) on Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses. VA will appoint Stephen L. Hauser, MD as
committee chair for a term through September, 2016. Dr. Hauser is the Robert A. Fishman Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of Neurology at the University of California, San Francisco. A neuroimmunologist, Dr. Hauser’s research has advanced the understanding of the genetic basis, immune mechanisms and treatment of multiple sclerosis. Additional appointees include Ronnie D. Horner, PhD, who is a Professor of Epidemiology in the Department of Health Services Policy and Management at the Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina; Frances E. Perez-Wihite, a former US Army Officer who served as a Lieutenant in Desert Shield in 1990; and Scott S. Young, MD, a former Navy flight surgeon during the Gulf War, who currently heads Kaiser Permanente’s Care Management Institute, an organization dedicated to creating and supporting high quality care delivery programs. These new members will serve terms through September 2017.

“VA is incredibly excited about the fresh perspective these new members will bring to the RAC, and we will continue to invest in research to understand and treat Gulf War Veterans’ illnesses,” said Secretary McDonald. VA will also begin a study to examine brain cancer in Gulf War Veterans. The formation of the study was prompted by a discussion between VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald and members of the RAC. The members expressed concerns over the possible association between exposure to chemical nerve agents and brain cancer in Gulf War Veterans. “Formation of this workgroup of VA subject matter experts to study research literature on the incidence of brain cancer in Gulf War Veterans is the latest VA effort on their behalf,” said Secretary McDonald. Some Veterans may have been exposed to chemical weapon agents during the demolition of the munitions depot in Khamisiyah, Iraq, in March 1991 after the Gulf War ceasefire. VA expects to complete the brain cancer study by the spring.

The RAC was established by section 104 of Public Law 105-368 to provide advice to VA on proposed research studies, research plans or research strategies relating to the health consequences of military service in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the 1990-1991 Gulf War (Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm). The Committee periodically releases reports that summarize and make recommendations regarding research on the health of Gulf War Veterans. [Source: VA Press Release Jan. 15, 2015 ++]
incorporate tennis into their existing rehabilitation programs. Together, we are striving to provide an opportunity for our Veterans to stay active and fit in tribute to their sacrifice and bravery.” With more than eight million Veterans enrolled, VA operates the largest integrated health care delivery system in the United States. The USTA Foundation is the philanthropic arm of the US Tennis Association. [Source: VA News Release Jan. 16, 2015 ++]

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National Veterans Wheelchair Games Update 01  ►  2015

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is accepting applications for the 2015 National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Registration began in early January and will close 15 APR. The National Veterans Wheelchair Games is a sports and rehabilitation program for military service Veterans who use wheelchairs for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, amputations or certain neurological problems. Each year, hundreds of disabled Veterans travel from around the country to compete in the Games, which is the largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world. With them, they bring the fighting spirit and tenacity that defines the Veterans of our Armed Forces. “I encourage all eligible Veterans to take this opportunity to prove yet again that disability does not mean inability,” said VA Secretary Robert McDonald.

Competitive events at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games include air guns, archery, basketball, bowling, field events, hand cycling, a motorized wheelchair rally, nine-ball, power soccer, quad rugby, slalom, softball, swimming, table tennis, track, trapshooting and weightlifting. Athletes compete in all events against others with similar athletic ability, competitive experience or age. The 2015 National Veterans Wheelchair Games will take place in Dallas, Texas, from June 21-26. The Games are cosponsored by VA and Paralyzed Veterans of America, VA’s partner in this annual event since 1985. For more information, refer to http://www.wheelchairgames.org or follow VA Adaptive Sports on Twitter at @VAAdaptiveSport. [Source: VA News Release Jan 14, 2015 ++]

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Dependents’ Educational Assistance Update 03:  Fry Scholarship Changes

The VA Fry Scholarship Program has undergone a few changes which surviving families should be aware of. This scholarship is available for children and spouses of active duty service members who die in the line of duty on or after 9/11/01. Highlighted changes include:

- Eligible spouses and children may receive 36-months of full in state tuition, a housing stipend, and a book allowance.
- Children can use the benefit until they turn 33.
- Spouses have 15 years from the date of the service member’s death to use the benefit; eligibility is voided upon remarriage.
- Spouse DIC will not be impacted by use of the Fry Scholarship. However, children cannot simultaneously receive both benefits.

You can apply for the Fry Scholarship online at http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-22-5490-ARE.pdf. For more details on these changes and any further questions on education benefits, contact TAPS Education Support Services at education@taps.org or call toll free 1-800-959-8277. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update Jan. 16, 2015 ++]
Waco TX – A former Waco Veterans Affairs Regional Office employee who concocted a fraudulent scheme that defrauded the federal government out of more than $650,000 was sentenced to almost four years in prison on Jan. 21. Kristin Galloway, 32, the pregnant mother of two small children, was sentenced to 46 months in federal prison, fined $1,000 and ordered to pay $154,400 in restitution. She pleaded guilty in October to theft of government property. Galloway, who worked at the Waco VA regional office for seven years, apologized to her family for bringing it stress, worry and shame and asked U.S. District Judge Walter S. Smith Jr. for mercy.

According to records filed in the case, Galloway, a rating veterans service center representative, fraudulently posed as a veterans’ service representative with a veterans organization and offered to assist veterans in obtaining VA benefits for a fee. VA investigators discovered she used her employment at the VA to gain access to a veteran’s files and unlawfully increased his disability rating to 100 percent service connected, court records show. The change in his status generated a $261,683 retroactive payment. After meeting with the veteran, Galloway created a Chase Bank account in his name without his knowledge. She also created an email address in the veteran’s name and had all VA correspondence intended for him diverted to her mother-in-law’s address, according to court records. She then created a fake Facebook account for “Cynthia Christy,” the alias Galloway used during her fraudulent scheme, officials said. She also used two prepaid cellphones to conceal her identity.

Galloway also used her job to submit and backdate a forged VA application for benefits for a family member, records show. She opened a post office box as part of her scheme so she could intercept VA correspondence to the family member. Galloway also fraudulently rated a claim for another veteran and received $154,000 from the veteran the day after the veteran received his retroactive VA payment of $386,753, according to the records. Agents with the Veteran Affairs Office of the Inspector General launched an investigation in the fall of 2012, shutting down the accounts and intervening before Galloway could collect on any more money, Assistant U.S. Attorney Greg Gloff said.

Agent Rachel Malone of the Inspector General’s Office testified Wednesday at Galloway’s sentencing hearing that she and her family lived a lavish lifestyle in a $300,000 home. They took an overseas trip, spent $15,000 on furniture and another $12,000 during another shopping spree. She also had LASIK eye surgery, Malone said. “It’s important that the veterans who served our country be able to get the benefits and help they need from the VA,” Gloff said. “When people like this defendant take it upon themselves to defraud the government and use that money for their own personal needs, it takes money away from those deserving veterans.” [Source: Waco Tribune | Tommy Witherspoon | Jan. 21, 2015 ++]

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Construction successfully completed and invoiced the United States 68 times on those contracts for a total of $6.5 million.

The government, through the Small Business Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs, encourages businesses that are majority owned and operated by service disabled veterans through a federal government procurement program that sets acquisitions aside for exclusive competition among service disabled veteran owned small businesses. The settlement resolves allegations that Veteran Construction was not owned and controlled by a service disabled veteran, and thus should neither have received the government contracts, nor invoiced the government for work performed on those contracts. Veteran Construction admitted that it is liable to the United States for its conduct under the False Claims Act. In addition to the $1.3 million payment by Veteran Construction, the company has agreed that it shall never seek to obtain any government contracts set aside for veterans of the United States military and will not seek any government contracts at all for three years from the settlement. The company agreed that none of its current or former members will maintain more than a 10 percent ownership interest in any company seeking to obtain government contracts set aside for veterans of the United States military for three years. [Source: Dist. Of NJ | US Attorney’s Office | Jan. 20, 2015 ++]

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VAMC Tomah WI ► VA Asked to Investigate ‘Candy Land’ Allegations

A Wisconsin Congressman is calling on the Department of Veterans Affairs to investigate allegations of rampant opiate prescriptions to veterans being treated for post-traumatic stress at the Tomah VA Medical Center. U.S. Rep. Ron Kind sent a letter 12 JAN asking VA Sec. Robert McDonald to look into the findings of a report published by 9 SEP by the nonprofit Center for Investigative Reporting. The story said the number of opiates prescribed more than quintupled over the past decade, even as the number of veterans seeking care at the hospital declined. According to the report, patients have even taken to calling the Tomah facility "Candy Land." Kind requested "an immediate investigation into the use of painkillers," including comparisons of opiate prescription rates between the Tomah hospital and others in the VA system. "Although I remain convinced that our Wisconsin facilities provide quality care for our veterans," Kind wrote, "these reports about inappropriate prescription levels are alarming and we must address these issues head-on."

The La Crosse Democrat also notes a report by the VA's Office of Inspector General, which showed that in 2012, three providers at the Tomah facility were among the highest prescribers of opiates in the entire Great Lakes network, which serves more than 220,000 veterans in three states. According to the OIG report, a Tomah provider was the top prescriber in the network, dispensing more than twice the amount of opiates as the 10th highest provider in the network, despite having fewer patients. The OIG report found "no conclusive evidence" of criminal activity or clinical incompetence, but it did say the high prescription rate "raised potentially serious concerns." Kind asked what the VA has done to implement recommendations of the report, which was signed on 14 MAR but does not appear among published reports on the OIG website

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, whose office previously looked into similar complaints, called the report "troubling." "It is our expectation that at the very least, the suggestions and recommendations put forward by the Office of Inspector General report will be put into place and it is now the job of Secretary McDonald to see to it that these recommendations are implemented," said a spokesman for the Democratic senator. Tomah VA Director Mario DeSanctis said he would look into the CIR findings. "We are taking these allegations very seriously," DeSanctis said in a prepared statement. "We will investigate each accusation to the fullest extent to swiftly take appropriate action and share these findings with the public. The number one mission of
the Tomah VA Medical Center is providing veterans with quality care that they have earned through their service.” [Source: La Crosse Tribune | Chris Hubbuch | Jan. 13, 2015 ++]
other VA physicians in this region. The Center for Investigative Reporting interviewed current and former hospital staff members at the Tomah VA and reported that patients there showed up to appointments stoned on painkillers and muscle relaxants, dozed off and drooled during therapy sessions, and burned themselves with cigarettes. In August, a 35-year-old Marine Corps veteran died of an overdose in the inpatient psychiatric ward, the center found.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald announced 26 JAN that he will launch an investigation into a Tomah VA medical center that came under scrutiny for overprescribing opiates after a Marine died there. The month long investigation to begin this week will look into allegations about the use of opiates as well as retaliation against employees, McDonald said in a statement. [Source: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel | Jason Stein | Jan. 21, 2015 ++]

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VAMC Denver CO Update 02 ➤ Replacement Medical Center

VA Issues the Statement on Denver VA Replacement Medical Center: The Department of Veterans Affairs continues to work to complete the Denver replacement VA Medical Center project without further delay while delivering the best value to taxpayers under current circumstances. The situation in Denver is unacceptable to Veterans, taxpayers and Department leadership. Our obligation is to ensure VA doesn’t allow such an outcome to occur again by learning all we can from past mistakes and put in place corrective actions to improve future performance. Veterans and taxpayers also expect a thorough review be completed and those responsible are held accountable. With these objectives in mind, the following actions are being taken:

As previously announced, VA is partnering with the Army Corps of Engineers to advise on the current construction and on the overall management of this project as part of the transition to negotiate a long-term contract and manage the project until completion. Today, we are announcing that VA has requested that the Corps complete a detailed examination of the VA major construction program to improve management processes, structures, and controls in project oversight and delivery. The Department is also convening an Administrative Investigation Board to review all aspects of the Denver project to determine the facts that led to the current situation and gather evidence of any misconduct or mismanagement that contributed to this unacceptable outcome.

Effective immediately, the Department’s Construction and Facility Management organization will report to the Deputy Secretary through the Office of Management. VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson was onsite at the Denver replacement project today and will continue regular visits to the site. VA senior leadership is actively engaged on the project, and the facility construction continues to progress. We are continuing to work with our partners to ensure timely completion of the project for the Veterans of the Colorado area. [Source: VA Press Release Jan. 19, 2015 ++]

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VAMC West Los Angeles Update 12 ➤ Lawsuit Settlement

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert A. McDonald and attorneys representing homeless veterans in Los Angeles announced an agreement that dedicates the West Los Angeles VA campus to serving veterans in need, and commits the department to design a plan to help end homelessness among veterans in Los Angeles County. The agreement is an important step forward in carrying out President
Obama’s commitment that no veteran should live on the streets, or forego necessary medical and psychological services. “This agreement offers VA a historic opportunity to build new community relationships in Los Angeles and continue the work needed to end veteran homelessness here,” said Secretary McDonald. “VA is proud of the progress we’ve made in ending veteran homelessness—down 33 percent since 2010—but we won’t be satisfied until every veteran has a home.”

Under the agreement, Secretary McDonald and plaintiffs’ representatives will develop by 13 FEB, 2015 a written plan to help end veteran homelessness in Greater Los Angeles. The plan will focus on serving veterans, particularly homeless veterans, women veterans, aging veterans and veterans that are severely disabled. Secretary McDonald will appoint a Special Assistant, who will report directly to him, to oversee the plan’s implementation with the necessary resources and support. “This historic agreement, forged through the leadership of Secretary McDonald, creates a partnership that will be invaluable to help end veteran homelessness in Los Angeles, provide needed medical care and services, and make concrete our commitment to those who served our nation’s highest calling,” said Ron Olson, one of the counsels for the organizations bringing the lawsuit.

Under the agreement, Secretary McDonald will also launch an accelerated process to develop a new long-term Master Plan for the future use of the West Los Angeles campus. This Master Plan, which is targeted to be completed by October 16, 2015, will prioritize the provision of bridge housing and permanent supportive housing. It will also describe an exit strategy for third-party land use agreements that do not comply with applicable laws, and do not fit within the Master Plan. Representatives from the veterans’ community will be actively involved in providing input to the Master Plan, along with other stakeholders, including the local community.

Attorneys for homeless veterans agreed to pursue a dismissal of the lawsuit Valentini v. McDonald, which was filed in 2011. Plaintiffs are represented by the ACLU Foundation of Southern California, Public Counsel, and Inner City Law Center, with the pro bono support of Arnold & Porter LLP, Munger, Tolles & Olson LLP, and Harvard Law School Professor Laurence H. Tribe. The landmark case was a major impetus behind realizing the vision of eliminating homelessness in Los Angeles among veterans who entered the military to serve the nation. “The Department of Justice is pleased to have come to a positive resolution in this nearly four year litigation,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Joyce R. Branda for the Justice Department’s Civil Division. “Ending this litigation will facilitate the continuing partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs and key stakeholders to end veteran homelessness in greater Los Angeles in 2015 and beyond.”

The campus, wedged between Westwood and Brentwood, is the largest undeveloped property on the Westside, and part of the VA’s largest health center. Its rolling greens were deeded to the government more than a century ago as a home for old soldiers. For 80 years, the VA campus provided shelter and services for thousands of disabled veterans. In the 1960s, it stopped accepting new residents, and structures were either converted to other uses or allowed to deteriorate. Over the years, residents called for preserving the land as a park. The VA at one point proposed developing condominiums and offices to generate funding for veteran healthcare. Bobby Shriver, a former Santa Monica mayor who lobbied for converting the underused buildings into therapeutic housing for veterans, said when the suit was filed that years of negotiations with the VA and federal officeholders had failed. The suit was filed on behalf of Vietnam Veterans of America and 10 veterans who became homeless because of traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress disorders or severe mental impairments. Four years ago, the state opened a veterans home on the property, but the kitchen was too small to feed the residents and the building remains half-empty. [Source: VA News Release | Jan. 28, 2015 ++]
The Philadelphia VA Medical Center abruptly canceled plans 14 JAN to pay bonuses for speeding up claims processing, after employees said they feared the bonuses would encourage them to make hasty decisions and deny deserving veterans their rightful benefits. The bonus program, first reported by The Washington Times on 13 JAN, offered $15,000 bonuses to teams that met processing targets and offered breakfast, lunch or snacks to teams that processed the most claims. But Diana Rubens, director of the Veterans Affairs regional office in Philadelphia, wrote employees that she had heard complaints from employees that they feared the incentives would force them to make bad decisions, so the program was “rescinded, effective immediately.”

“Given the return to mandatory [overtime] and, frankly, the concerns expressed by some and reported in the media that we would turn to bad behavior in an effort to pursue the incentive to the disservice of veterans, we will not pursue that incentive,” she wrote in her email message to her employees.

The VA has been under pressure to improve services after an internal investigation found that offices throughout the country were ensnared in bureaucratic red tape and kept secret waiting lists that prevented veterans from receiving timely care. But some VA employees said the bonus program, rather than improving care, would push employees to speed through easy cases. Denials are easier than approvals, they said, so veterans could miss out on benefits they deserve. The American Legion condemned the bonuses and said employees should be awarded for the quality, not quantity, of work. “These incentives being offered in Philly are another example of VA leadership gone astray,” said Louis Celli, director of the American Legion Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division.

Ms. Rubens, the leader at the Philadelphia VA, said she wasn’t sure what else to do to speed up the process at the VA other than offer bonuses. In her email to employees, she said she was creating a suggestion box to solicit other ideas. She said her office is supposed to process 36,600 claims this year and is already 3,000 short. The goal is to complete claims in 125 days, but the Philadelphia office has claims pending for 164 days. The wait time has worsened over the past two weeks, Ms. Rubens wrote in the email. “How do we close that gap?” she wrote. A VA representative said the regional office decided that requiring employees to work mandatory overtime was a better way of cutting the backlog than bonuses. The VA initially said the bonus program would review the work for quality assurance. The incentive program would allow the VA to “recognize team efforts that allow us to achieve exceptional performance while still maintaining quality standards,” the VA said in a statement. It said the Philadelphia office had a 92.8 percent accuracy rate for claims processing last year.

The VA came under fire last year when a whistleblower said veterans were dying while waiting for care on secret lists in Phoenix. An investigation found a systemic problem at several facilities of employees keeping veterans off official waiting lists and making wait times appear shorter, which would allow them to collect bonuses. The Philadelphia facility is under investigation for data manipulation, including hiding or shredding returned mail that could not be delivered and cherry-picking easy claims to process to misrepresent performance, according to testimony from Linda Halladay, the assistant inspector general for audits and evaluations who appeared before the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs in October. [Source: The Washington Times | Jacqueline Klimas | Jan. 14, 2015 ++]
Ask Americans if someone in their family served in the military, and the answer is probably no. After all, fewer than 1 percent of Americans serve these days. But ask if one of their grandfathers served, and you’ll likely get a different answer. Between World War II and the wars in Korea and Vietnam, millions of men were drafted into service — and both men and women volunteered. Now, that generation of veterans is getting older. And as many of them near the end of their lives, aging into their 80s and 90s, the demand for hospice care has been growing with them. That means that the Department of Veterans Affairs is spending a lot more on what’s known as end-of-life care. “I think they call it end-of-life care,” notes Thomas O’Neil, a 68-year-old resident at the St. Albans VA hospital in Queens, N.Y. “But whatever it is ... they treat you like gold. If you're going to be sick, this is the place to be.”

O’Neil served a year in Vietnam, from 1966 to 1967, at a time when the war was killing more Americans in a year than the total U.S. casualties from Iraq and Afghanistan combined. “The only good thing was the nighttime, because you knew another day closer to coming home,” he says. “To be honest with you, I was scared. I was very scared the whole year — and I don’t think I was the only one.” When he came home, he didn’t talk to anyone about the war. O’Neil says he nearly drank himself into the grave. In 2011, he finally went to the VA to treat the post-traumatic stress disorder he’d been enduring for 40 years. Last year, he learned he has terminal cancer. “They can tell you you got three months. They don’t really know,” he says. “I came to terms with this. I’m not happy with the diagnosis, but I came to terms with it.”

Coming to terms with the end of life can be a bit different for veterans, says Dr. Alice Beal, who directs VA palliative care for most of New York City. “If a veteran's been in combat, a veteran's likely to have killed,” Beal says. “I think no matter what your culture is, when you meet your maker — even if it's been to save your buddy, to save your life, to save your country — it's just a burden the rest of us haven’t even thought
of. Sometimes that means vets want to tell their stories at the end of life, Beal says. Sometimes the stories come unbidden. "If you've had blood on your hands, it comes up," she says. "People who have PTSD, maybe have not had it unmasked their whole life, but as they're dying, all of a suddenly they get flashbacks." Beal says the goal in hospice is to make life as good as it can be for as long as possible; that usually means focusing on relieving pain for the last weeks or months of life. The hospice ward is a contradiction: It's brightly decorated, and at the entrance there's a fish tank and an electric fireplace. But there's also usually a room recently vacated, with an American flag draped on the bed and a lantern on the nightstand honoring a veteran who passed on. "It's a real toss-up between respect and release. Around here we tend to be full of life," Beal says. "But you don't want to be too joyful in the presence of a family who is grieving."

A hospital bed is draped with a flag after a veteran died in the hospice ward at St. Albans VA in Queens, N.Y.

All VA facilities now have a palliative care team, but only a fraction of veterans enter VA hospice, according to Dr. Scott Shreve, who directs VA hospice care nationwide. Shreve says the vast majority prefer to stay in their communities and near family instead. The VA and the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization are collaborating on a project called We Honor Veterans, to help civilian hospice workers ask the right questions. Volunteers with We Honor Veterans sometimes show up to find elderly veterans who haven't mentioned much about serving in the military to their family or community, like 92-year-old Florence Keliher, in Hallowell, Maine. "I served during World War II in the Army Nurse Corps. I was on Tinian, the little island in the South Pacific," Keliher says. "We had a ward full of patients — airplane crashes and things like that. They flew from Tinian to Japan to bomb. Some had trouble taking off sometimes."

Keliher's son, Pat, who lives up the road, says he never heard much about his mother's time at war until a grandchild asked to type up some of Keliher's stories: "The patients we nursed in the wards on afternoon duty broke our hearts. It sounds like a cliche, but they were so young. Malaria, horrible burns. ... I was only 23 years old, but I felt much older than the patients I tended, some of whom called for their mothers in their distress." Besides Keliher's kids and grandchildren, a volunteer with Beacon Hospice also visits her regularly as part of the We Honor Veterans campaign. They play cribbage and swap stories. Shreve says only half the community hospices nationwide are taking advantage of the We Honor Veterans program, which is free. He'd like to see more of them get on board. That's because half a million veterans will be needing end-of-life care each year for the next five years. For more on the We honor Vets program refer to www.wehonorveterans.org

[Source: NPR | Quil Lawrence | Jan. 28, 2015 ++]
A memorial dedicated to those who served in the Persian Gulf War is inching closer to becoming a reality. The National Desert Storm War Memorial (NDSWM) was approved by Congress in December, and it now goes to the National Park Service for the process of selecting a site. "This was a very important, pivotal point in our history, and there were several hundred folks who didn't come back, and they deserve to be remembered," said Scott Stump, chief executive officer of the National Desert Storm Memorial Association. Stump, who served as a Marine infantryman in Saudi Arabia during the war, has led the effort to create and build the memorial, which began as an idea that came up while he was on the phone with a fellow Marine and Desert Storm veteran about four years ago, just before the 20th anniversary of the war.

Stump, who has volunteered during Honor Flights, which bring World War II veterans to see their memorial, said he hopes his fellow veterans won't have to wait that long for their memorial. The World War II memorial in Washington, D.C., opened to the public in 2004, nearly 60 years after the war ended. "I love everything about that memorial, but if there's one thing I hate, it's that they waited too long," Stump said. The journey to receiving Congressional approval for the Desert Storm memorial has been long and difficult, he said. "I almost gave up, but this is too important to quit," he said. "I realize what a tremendous victory it is just getting to this point, but there's also a lot of work left to do. There are a lot of people who didn't come home. We owe it to them."

The memorial also is meant to honor the 30-plus countries who participated in the war alongside the United States, Stump said. "This memorial isn't just about us, but the 33 countries … that came together and got this done," he said. The U.S. launched Operation Desert Shield after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and deployed more than 120,000 Iraqi troops into the tiny Gulf state within three days. U.S. troops took up defensive positions in Saudi Arabia under Operation Desert Shield, and the pressure mounted when Hussein showed no signs of withdrawing. On Jan. 17, 1991, the five-month buildup became Operation Desert Storm as allied aircraft attacked Iraqi bases and Baghdad government facilities. The six-week aerial campaign climaxed with a massive ground offensive Feb. 24-28, routing the Iraqis from Kuwait in 100 hours before U.S. officials called a halt. Almost 300 U.S. troops died while serving in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm; 147 of those were battle deaths. Another 467 troops were wounded in action.

Stump said he has heard from some who don't think Operation Desert Storm deserves to be memorialized. "People have said, 'why would you need a memorial for a 36-hour skirmish?'" he said. "Really? Tell that to the people who were there. Myself, as an infantryman, we were prepared for an absolute bloodbath."
credited the military's leaders at the time – many of them Vietnam War veterans determined not to repeat history – for the success of the war and how quickly it ended. "I think it's absurd to judge the relevancy of any war based on casualties," he said. Operation Desert Storm also was a turning point in America's relationship with its military, Stump said. "That was when America was back," he said. "We knew our military could come through and get the job done. We were able to heal a country from the open wounds of Vietnam and set the stage for the way our troops are treated today.

To design the memorial, the association solicited feedback from hundreds of Desert Storm veterans and their families over a three-month period, Stump said. Based on that feedback, the memorial's proposed design incorporates two key elements: the sweeping left hook attack into southern Iraq and the 34-country coalition, he said. The left hook maneuver, which makes the memorial resemble a seashell, "was the maneuver that broke it all open" during the ground war, Stump said. Now that the Desert Storm memorial has been approved, Stump and his team are turning their attention to fundraising. The memorial association is behind on its fundraising efforts because it wanted to ensure the memorial would be approved first, Stump said. Most of the money that's been poured into this effort so far has been paid for out-of-pocket by Stump and his team. "This was a grassroots deal," Stump said.

The National Desert Storm and Desert Shield War Memorial Act authorizes the memorial association to establish "a commemorative work on federal land in the District of Columbia to commemorate and honor the members of the armed forces that served on active duty" during that war, but it prohibits the use of federal money to pay for the memorial. Stump said the memorial association needs $50,000 to $100,000 to start, as "seed money" to get the ball rolling on the memorial. Any money raised will "help directly with the design process, site selection" and other expenses, Stump said. In all, Stump said it could take as much as $30 million to complete the memorial. The goal is to break ground on the eventual memorial site in early 2016, to coincide with the 25th anniversary of Operation Desert Storm.

In addition to raising money, the memorial association also is working with federal authorities to determine where the memorial will be built. The goal is to have it on or near the D.C.’s National Mall, but it's too early to know where it will end up, Stump said. One obstacle to building on the National Mall is a moratorium prohibiting new or unapproved memorials, he said. As he prepares to move forward with the memorial, Stump said he hopes the nation will rally around it. "I really hope this is something really important for our country," he said. "I hope people haven't forgotten about it or minimized it. This helps tell the story of the sacrifices that were made to make our country what it is today." For more information on the Association or to donate refer to [http://www.nationaldesertstormwar memorial.org/](http://www.nationaldesertstormwar memorial.org/). [Source: ArmyTimes | Michelle Tan | Jan. 21, 2015 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 30 ➤ Court Allowing Lawsuits

The Supreme Court is allowing lawsuits involving open-air burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan and a soldier’s electrocution in a base shower to move forward against two of the largest American military contractors, according to wire reports. The lawsuits were filed against KBR Inc. and Halliburton Co., which had filed appeals saying the lawsuits should be thrown out because the company was operating as an arm of the military in Iraq and Afghanistan. Two of the lawsuits include claims that troops suffered health problems related to their exposure to burn pits and toxic chemicals on American bases in Iraq and Afghanistan. Another claims that shoddy electrical work led to the electrocution death of Staff Sgt. Ryan Maseth, who was killed in a base shower in Iraq.
In general, the government cannot be sued in such cases, but private contractors working on behalf of the government have presented a legal gray area. Supreme Court justices offered no comment for their decision, according to the Associated Press. The Obama administration has sided with the contractors. Open burning of waste was commonplace at bases in Iraq and Afghanistan, and many troops suspect respiratory problems they have suffered after their deployments may be linked the clouds of smoke that often hung over bases.

The burn pit decision could open the door to thousands of troops who were potentially exposed to toxic chemicals and encourage more law firms to take up their cases, said Kelly Kennedy, a spokeswoman for Bergmann and Moore law firm, which focuses on veterans’ claims. “If there’s money to be made, people will investigate those claims more thoroughly,” said Kennedy, who reported on burn pit exposure for Army Times and USA Today. William Hartung, an author and director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy, said the decision could lead contractors to charge more if they think they are more vulnerable to lawsuits. But the most immediate effect may be to deter contractors from doing shoddy work. “To the extent that this decision changes the behavior of contractors in war zones, it should be for the better,” he said. “It’s unlikely that many other contractors would engage in the level of malfeasance that Halliburton was allegedly involved in, so I don’t think it should be a concern for contractors who conduct themselves properly.” [Source: Stars and Stripes | Heath Druzin | Jan. 20, 2015 ++]

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Medicaid Eligible Vets Update 03 ► Missouri Earning Limit Proposal

A Missouri Republican proposed expanding Medicaid coverage to low-income military veterans and their families 20 JAN as a slimmed down alternative to a broader Medicaid expansion that has been opposed by many of his GOP colleagues. The bill by Sen. Ryan Silvey would expand Medicaid coverage for veterans and their families making up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level, which is $29,685 for a family of three. “The other proposals that I have will cover not only veterans but everyone, but I felt it was important to try and solve this problem for this group,” Silvey, R-Kansas City, said. Missouri is one of 23 states that has not used a provision of President Barack Obama’s health law to expand Medicaid, a joint federal and state program that provides health care to low-income individuals. Missouri’s Republican legislative leaders have said there’s little chance for any expansion this year.
As part of the federal Affordable Care Act, states that expand Medicaid coverage for families and individuals making up to 138 percent of federal poverty can receive more federal funding. Currently, able-bodied adults without children do not qualify for Medicaid in Missouri. Parents making less than about 19 percent of federal poverty, or $3,612 for an adult with two children, do qualify. Many working Missourians fall into what Silvey and others call a coverage gap, making too little to qualify for subsidies to pay for insurance through a government exchange, but too much to qualify for Medicaid. This includes working age adults under 65 making less than $11,670 for a single person. Silvey said early estimates were at least 22,000 spouses of veterans would qualify for Medicaid under the proposal.

Dewey Riehn, Veterans of Foreign Wars legislative chairman, said expansion would benefit many veterans and their families. Veterans might already be covered through programs run by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, he said, but "there is nothing for the family." Riehn said he personally supported full expansion of Medicaid but that his group works specifically on behalf of veterans. Even a bill aimed at assisting veterans may not have enough support to move forward in the Legislature. "I think the opposition is more fundamental than who it goes to," said Sen. Ed Emery, R-Lamar. "My concerns would be the same." Emery said he agreed the government should take care of those who served in the military but said he thought that should be done through specific veterans' programs.

Silvey said Missouri has already expanded Medicaid in other ways, by adding services such as dental care, and has considered whether to increase the amount of money and other assets that individuals can save and still qualify. "If we're already OK with having the debate of increasing the asset limit, or adding back procedures that were recently cut ... we ought to be putting money into taking care of our veterans," Silvey said. [Source: Bloomberg BusinessWeek | Marie French | Jan. 20, 2015 ++]

Devil's Brigade ► Congressional Gold Medal Recipient

The surviving members of a legendary force of Canadian and U.S. soldiers will be honored in Washington for their courage and bravery -- and the rough-and-tough tactics that helped win the Second World War. Known as the Devil's Brigade, the elite fighting force was made up of roughly 1,800 Canadians and Americans, many of them lumberjacks, miners and rural tough guys with survival skills. They were tasked with getting behind enemy lines and waging unconventional warfare against the enemy. The surviving veterans will be presented with a Congressional Gold Medal on 2 FEB by leaders of the U.S. House and Senate. "It was the only unit formed in WWII with troops from the U.S. and Canada -- building on the special bond between the two countries," according to a statement issued by House Speaker John Boehner's office. "The unit was instrumental in targeting military and industrial installations." Boehner will take part in the ceremony, along with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid, and House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi.

The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest civilian honour the United States Congress can bestow. Fewer than 150 of the medals have been awarded since the first was given to George Washington. A single medal will be struck and awarded to the unit as a whole. Approximately 230 members of the unit are still alive. Herb Peppard, a 94 year-old Truro, N.S. man, will be among those travelling to Washington for the ceremony. “I’m surprised we’d be given it, as there are a lot of American units that deserve it. But I’m very appreciative of it. There’s not many of us still alive, and I don’t expect there will be many of us there,” he told the Truro Daily News.
Members of the First Special Service Force pause for a photo near Anzio, Italy in 1943 and a January 1944 picture showing Private N.L. Shauer (right) of the Devil's Brigade bringing in a German prisoner near Venafro, Italy

Officially known as the First Special Service Force, the elite Montana-based unit was formed in 1942. Members were trained to engage in what was then wildly unconventional warfare against the Nazis. Their skill set included hand-to-hand combat, mountain climbing, parachuting, and cold weather survival skills. Their nickname, the Devil's Brigade, came from a journal they captured from a German captain. In one entry he described "the Black Devils" who were all around -- a description likely due to the fact members would blacken their faces before going on raids. "We never know where they're going to hit or strike next," the German officer wrote. They took a liking to the name, and later came up with the idea of leaving calling cards with the logo -- a red spearhead with the words "USA CANADA" and the bleak warning "the worst is yet to come," written in German.

Many of their missions were considered impossible -- virtual suicide missions of the James Bond variety, such as destroying German nuclear research capabilities in Norway. In one famous battle, they managed to take the Germans by surprise, by scaling the back of a mountain and launching a surprise attack in the dark against the soldiers who had the advantage of higher ground and sweeping viewpoints. The Devil's Brigade would go on to liberate towns in Italy and France, and capture a stunning 30,000 prisoners of war in just two years, never losing a battle. Despite its successes, the First Special Service Force was disbanded after two years. But its legend lived on in the form of sometimes unintentionally hilarious Hollywood films.

In 1968's "The Devil's Brigade," actor Jeremy Slate plays a straight-laced Canadian sergeant who picks a fight with a burly American bully in order to demonstrate the techniques he will teach the unit as hand-to-hand combat instructor. "Is it true that all you Yanks are thieves and murderers?" Slate asks, before dispatching the enraged American. By the end of the film, the Canadians and Americans have bonded as a fighting force. And in Quentin Tarantino's "Inglourious Basterds," Brad Pitt commands an elite and unorthodox fighting unit while wearing the uniform and insignia of the Devil's Brigade. [Source: CTVNews.ca | Andy Johnson | Jan. 18, 2015 ++]

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The Independent Budget FY 2016  ►  Policy Priorities

For veterans advocates, 2014 was a year of scandals and crises at the Veterans Affairs Department. Now, those outside groups want 2015 to be a year of fixing all the other pressing problems that have been ignored. On 15 JAN, the four leading veterans groups behind the annual "independent VA budget" released their policy priorities for the new congressional session, a 124-page document that covers a host of coming
problems for the community and existing headaches they have been lamenting for years. "We’ve argued for a while that the department has been underfunded," said Carl Blake, associate executive director for Paralyzed Veterans of America. "We're seeing these problems compound over time. The dollars are just not growing at the same rate as the demand."

The coalition's top priorities include fixing VA's wait time problems, eliminating its benefit claims backlog, addressing growing VA infrastructure problems, expanding caregiver programs to veterans of all eras, and making sure female veterans have adequate health care and support services. They are ambitious goals, but not new complaints from the veterans community. Coalition members are hoping that the new emphasis can help capitalize on congressional momentum from last year, when VA's wait times scandals not only drew lawmakers' attention but prompted legislative action as well.

Last spring, revelations that veterans were facing lengthy delays to get medical appointments led to investigations into records manipulation by VA supervisors and eventually the resignation of former VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. Lawmakers responded with more than $16 billion in funding for new private care options for veterans and new appointment space for VA physicians. Blake said advocates have been watching VA's response warily, acknowledging improvements but also seeing reasons for concern about the slow pace of change. "We wouldn't be so naive to say VA has already fixed the problem," he said. Coalition officials want more funding for staff hiring and appointment space, and for lawmakers to ensure that problem employees are held accountable, to ensure similar problems won't resurface.

Joe Violante, national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans, said coalition officials also are concerned with the lingering claims backlog problems, and whether VA will be able to meet its stated goal of zeroing out the overdue cases by the end of 2015. He also said advocates will push lawmakers to keep a close eye on VA's claims appeals, which have grown steadily in recent years. Construction projects have made headlines recently because of dramatic cost overruns and missed completion deadlines, but the new recommendations also point to an aging infrastructure for the department that may need as much as $55 billion in new funding to adequately catch up to system demand.

Coalition members said they hope the policy recommendations are not only a challenge to lawmakers already conducting VA oversight but also an education tool for members of Congress who have not closely followed veterans issues in the past. The veterans coalition — which includes Veterans of Foreign Wars and Amvets along with PVA and DAV — will release specific budget recommendations next month, at the same time that the White House's fiscal 2016 budget proposal is unveiled. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Jan. 16, 2015 ++]
The Military Coalition Update 03 ▶ Policy Priorities for 114th Congress

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Vet Awardees ▶ Thomas Conway | Denied Navy Cross | WWII

Over two dozen veterans can recount how Chaplain Lt. Thomas Conway kept their hope alive as sharks swarmed the remains of the USS Indianapolis on July 30, 1945. But a letter written in 1948 stating Conway...
went down with the sinking ship could be the reason behind the denial of a Navy Cross — a decision one Connecticut veterans organization wants to reverse. "A journey of a thousand miles starts with one step, so we started," said committee secretary Robert Dorr. The Navy denied last month the request from the Waterbury Veterans Memorial Committee to award Conway the Navy Cross, the second highest military decoration for valor for extraordinary heroism in combat. Conway was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart. A bench erected by the committee in a city park commemorates two fallen chaplains from Waterbury — Conway, and Lt. Neil Doyle, who died on New Georgia Island in 1943 and, for his service, received the Distinguished Service Cross.

Father Conway prepares a burial at sea for nine men killed on the USS Indianapolis after an attack 24 Mar 1945, off Okinawa

Father John Bevins, a retired Naval chaplain at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception — the same parish where Conway was baptized — approached the 15-member committee in 2013 to have the same honor administered for his fallen parishioner. Because the request was beyond the three-year limit in which a nomination may be submitted through appropriate channels, the committee went through Connecticut Sens. Chris Murphy and Richard Blumenthal to pass along the nomination to Navy Secretary Ray Mabus. "We gathered together every recorded story, every magazine article, every newsletter ... and when you're looking through these newsletters, when they're talking about heroism, they're talking about Father Conway," Dorr told Military Times on 19 JAN.

It went beyond keeping the men together, Dorr said. The Indianapolis (CA-35), midway between Guam and Leyte Gulf, was hit by two torpedoes fired by the I-58 Japanese submarine. Conway floated from group to group of about 67 men called "the swimmers," praying, and reeling in sailors who began to drift away. "We put together a compelling case," Dorr said of the nomination the committee submitted in September. The stepping stone, Dorr said, was looking at past chaplains who received such high honors, one being Cmdr. George Rentz. "There are considerable similarities," said Vietnam veteran Doug Sterner, a military historian and Military Times contributing editor. During the sinking of the USS Houston on Feb. 28, 1942, after a Japanese attack in the Pacific, Rentz sacrificed himself so sailors could climb aboard a pontoon, according to his Navy Cross citation provided by Sterner. "We believe that [Conway's] service was equal to or greater than Cmdr. George Rentz," Dorr said.
However, Conway's heroic actions "never happened," Dorr said, because "the captain believed that Father Conway went down with the ship on July 30, and his letter was written in the official 1948 history of the Navy chaplains' corps." Dorr said evidence and testimony from survivors shows Conway died 2 AUG. The letter was written by Indianapolis' commander, then-Capt. Charles McVay, who nominated a number of his officers and crew for personal decorations. McVay later went on to be court-martialed for putting his ship in harm's way for "failure to zigzag." But even after the widely publicized trial, McVay nominated others for awards — just not Conway.,” R. Claussen, writing on behalf of Secretary Mabus, states in the denied request sent to Sen. Murphy's office. (Claussen's title is not provided in the document):

- "Your letter asserts that Captain McVay did not know of Lieutenant Conway's actions, and if he had known, he would have nominated his chaplain for the Navy Cross
- "Based on our review of official records, it was not possible to establish whether Captain McVay knew any details of Chaplain Conway's actions," Claussen writes. "What is known is that Captain McVay did not personally witness all of the actions of every officer and Sailor he nominated for awards. Regulations only required that he know of the action, and had eyewitness testimony of others to substantiate them.
- "We could find no evidence of any such claim having been made via official Navy channels, or recorded in official Navy documents. There appears to have been ample opportunity for those survivors to convey this information to Captain McVay."

"I find the lack of awards to Father Conway ... rather inequitable," Sterner said in an email to Military Times. "I think in Conway's case, he probably was as much a victim to the embarrassment the Navy had with the debacle surrounding the Indianapolis sinking, and subsequent sadly handled inquiry, as he was to the sea." "We've asked the Navy to revisit McVay's letter," Dorr said. "And in the response no one addressed that. They didn't say, 'Oh my God, you're right — there is an error in the official 1948 history.'" All they cared about, Dorr said, was 10 U.S. Code 1130, "Consideration of proposals for decorations not previously submitted in timely fashion" regulations to submit the award, which are: the submission must be originated by a Chief Warrant Officer 2 or above; the commissioned officer was in the intended recipient's chain of command or had firsthand knowledge of the heroic act; and that the officer was senior to the intended recipient in either grade or position at the time of the act, according to the documents Murphy's office received from Claussen.

Because of the passage of time, this would preclude any enlisted men from making a recommendation for an award for Father Conway, Dorr said. And whoever's left to tell Conway's story might not cut it, he said. There are 37 survivors from the Indianapolis today, Dorr said. "They would like to see this — they're getting together for their last and final reunion July 23 in Indianapolis for the 70th anniversary of the sinking," he said. The committee recently submitted a request to the Congressional Research Service through Murphy's office to look into any award recommendations that fall outside the scope of that regulation, Dorr said. "We're delighted that Father Conway's story is being told," Dorr said, "and that the sacrifice of the men of the Indianapolis is again recognized." "But if they're going to do it for somebody, why not Father Conway?"

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Oriana Pawlyk | Jan. 20, 2015 ++]

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**Vet Awardees**  ➤  Jesse Baltazar | Purple Heart | WWII

Former soldier and airman Jesse Baltazar received the Purple Heart on 20 JAN, more than 70 years after he was wounded in action in the Philippines and forced to participate in the infamous Bataan Death March.
Baltazar joined the U.S. Armed Forces Far East, also known as USAFFE, in 1941 after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and threatened to invade his native Philippines. The Philippines was a U.S. territory at the time. “The war broke out and … they needed men,” Baltazar told reporters when asked why he chose to join the U.S. military. Baltazar “answered the call to arms when the homeland was attacked,” Army chief of staff Gen. Ray Odierno told attendees at the award ceremony at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Va.

World War II veteran Jesse Baltazar salutes, as his wife, Margrit, stands beside him during a ceremony at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Va., where he received the Purple Heart from Army chief of staff Gen. Ray Odierno

Baltazar, a member of the Army’s 71st battalion, was wounded in the leg by shrapnel when Japanese planes bombed his camp on Mar. 15, 1942. Because facilities and supplies were limited, he had to undergo surgery in the jungle, with little anesthesia. A few weeks later, U.S. and Filipino troops on the Bataan peninsula were forced to surrender when the Japanese took over the Philippines after months of fighting. The Imperial Japanese Army forced their prisoners to march 60 miles. The POWs were subjected to physical abuse and disease, and many died. The event became known as “the Bataan Death March.” Still recovering from his wounds, Baltazar was forced to use a bamboo stick as a cane when the march began. Three days into the ordeal, he managed to escape, hiding on a fishing boat until he was able to return home. Baltazar later joined the Filipino resistance movement, which waged a guerrilla war against Japanese troops until American forces returned to liberate the islands in late 1944.

Despite being wounded in action, Baltazar was not awarded the Purple Heart at the time because the Army lost some of his records. Over the past two years, his family and other supporters helped him reconstitute his records and campaigned for him to receive the medal. Secretary of State John Kerry, a Vietnam veteran, lent his weight to the effort, according to Baltazar. “This award is 70 years overdue,” Odierno said. “It’s important for all of us who have worn the uniform of the United States Army [to] ensure that those who have earned awards through their service be recognized, especially those who have served with distinction and sacrificed selflessly for this great nation of ours.”

Baltazar’s wife and five children were on hand to see him finally get the recognition he earned. “We have heard these stories of how he was wounded, since we were little children,” Baltazar’s son, Thomas, told reporters. “And really the question came up a couple years ago [when Jesse Baltazar was writing a book about his service]: where’s the Purple Heart? ... And through a series of events we come to this day, and it’s fantastic for our family.” Jesse Baltazar expressed gratitude for receiving the recognition. “I’m very grateful that finally I got it, and that all the members of my family were here today to witness it,” he told reporters. “I’m sure they’ll never forget it, and they can pass [the story and the medal] on to the next generation.”

Baltazar’s career in public service didn’t end after World War II. After he was discharged from the Army, he moved to the United States and received an Air Force commission in 1948, becoming the first native-born
Filipino to join that service. He served in the Korean War as part of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, and later retired at the rank of major. After he left the military, Baltazar joined the U.S. State Department, and served as a deputy provincial adviser in Vietnam from 1966 to 1970. He retired from the State Department in 1988, but later returned as a contractor. “It’s a story of valor and courage. A story of an America patriot, soldier, airman and diplomat,” Odierno said when reflecting on Baltazar’s decades of public service. Thomas Baltazar, 57, followed in his father’s footsteps, and served in the U.S. Army for 26 years before retiring at the rank of colonel. “He’s my role model,” the younger Baltazar said. “We are all about service [in my family], and it’s because of [Jesse].” Jesse Baltazar, 94, was asked the secret to his longevity. “Eat a lot of vegetables,” he joked. [Source: Stars and Stripes | Jon Harper | Jan. 20, 2015 ++]

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Vet Awardees ➤ John C. Campbell | Purple Heart | Vietnam

Former Staff Sgt. John C. Campbell will finally receive his Purple Heart on 26 JAN, 45 years after he was wounded in Laos. Rep. Derek Kilmer (D-WA) will present Campbell with the award at a ceremony Sunday at the American Lake Chapel at the Veterans Affairs Department hospital in Lakewood, Wash. Campbell joined the Air Force in 1966 and volunteered to go to Vietnam, where he was stationed at Tuy Hoa Air Base, which was attacked by a battalion-strength enemy force at the start of the Tet Offensive, according to a program for Sunday's ceremony that Campbell wrote. Later, Campbell served a temporary duty assignment with the Royal Thai Air Force, during which he went on several classified missions to Thailand and Laos.

On Jan. 1, 1970, Campbell was severely wounded while he and his team were hit by "a substantial enemy attack" while on a classified mission inside Laos, the program says. Details of the mission and the nature of his injuries were not immediately available. Campbell, who left the Air Force in July 1970, spent 44 years trying to prove he was wounded in combat, but he had to wait until his mission was declassified, according to the program. Finally, he was awarded the Purple Heart on June 27 and it was backdated to Jan. 1, 1970. He will see his award on Sunday for the first time. [Source: AirForceTimes | Jeff Schogol | Jan. 23, 2015 ++]
**Homeless Vets Update 63 ► New Orleans Ends Vets Chronic Homelessness**

New Orleans is one of the first cities in the US to end chronic homelessness among veterans of the US military, according to a report from city officials. The actions were a response to an initiative from First Lady Michelle Obama. On July 4, 2014, New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu pledged that the city would find homes for all military veterans living on the streets. Authorities in Louisiana now claim that New Orleans has essentially ended all veteran homelessness. Initially, the homeless population of New Orleans was estimated at 193. In mid-JAN Mr Landrieu revealed that the city actually had found housing for 227 homeless veterans. To The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA), this highlights the fluid and ever-changing nature of homelessness. While TREA congratulates New Orleans on its efforts and hope that they continue in the future, they believe that claiming that veteran homelessness in the city has been ended may be premature.

In addition to New Orleans, Phoenix and Salt Lake City also claim to have ended chronic veteran homelessness. Chronic homelessness is defined as when a person spends an extended period of time without a roof over their head, often caused by mental-health problems or addiction. Emergency homelessness is defined as an unforeseen circumstance that forces a person on the streets, such as the loss of a job or exorbitant medical bills. Obviously, the circumstances that could lead to emergency homelessness cannot be prevented. But apparently New Orleans has created a safety net to catch those veterans who do fall into such a situation. Part of the plan included converting a formerly closed school building into apartment units. In New Orleans homeless veterans can qualify for up to five months of rental assistance, which allow additional time for the city and assisting organizations to seek a permanent housing option. [Source: TREA: News for the Enlisted Jan. 19, 2015 ++]

**Vet Jobs Update 169 ► WV Job Seekers Free Hotel Rooms**

Hilton Worldwide and WorkForce West Virginia announce “Operation Opportunity Initiative,” which will provide hotel accommodations to assist veterans with job interviews, skills training, housing searches, and any employment testing that would make travel a necessity during a job search. The rooms will be provided at no charge to the veteran. The program is available for veterans, current military servicemen and women, National Guard, Reserve members, and eligible spouses. WorkForce West Virginia staff will verify eligibility, job search activity, and also assist veterans with the application process at local offices throughout the state. For more information call 1-800-252-JOBS (5627) or TDD: 304-558-1549, or visit the WorkForce West Virginia website http://www.wcommerce.org/business/workforcewv/default.aspx [Source: NAUS Weekly Watchdog | Lisa Cornwell | Jan. 04, 2015 ++]

**Vet Jobs Update 170 ► Hiring Benchmark Included in Labor Dept. Rule**

 Contractors will have to start collecting annual data on their veteran hiring practices in 2015, according to an updated Labor Department regulation. The rule, released last fall, is a significant modification to a 1974 rule related to the hiring of veterans after the Vietnam War and an example of the government’s push to use data to study industry trends. The new rule requires companies that hold government contracts worth $100,000 or
more to submit annual reports about veterans in their workforce, with the first report due between August 1 and September 30 this year. The department will assess whether contractors are compliant with the new ruling or at least have a plan in place to increase their veteran hiring initiatives, and could use yearly data to spot patterns in veteran employment. For post-9/11 veterans, the unemployment rate is still higher than that of the overall population. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in December, the unemployment rate for this group was nearly 7 percent, compared with 5.6 percent for the rest of the country.

The update also streamlines reporting requirements for contractors by cutting in half the number of categories for which companies have to collect data. The Labor Department estimates that this will save companies more than $18 million over the next decade. In addition, the rule introduces the concept of a veteran hiring benchmark. Companies need to eventually show that the percentage of veterans in their workforce is the same as the total share of veterans in the national population — about 7 percent. There is some flexibility for companies to determine their own benchmark by setting a hiring goal based on the proportion of veterans in their state’s population. The benchmark is not mandatory, but a tool for employers to assess where they stand when it comes to hiring veterans, said Jeffrey Bozman, a contracting attorney at District law firm Covington & Burling and a former Marine Corps officer. For Washington-area contractors, the effect of the new rule is expected to be minimal, Bozman said, since many already employ a large share of veterans. [Source: The Washington Post | Amrita Jayakumar | Jan. 25, 2015 ++]

POW/MIA Update 48 ► The Omori Flag | ‘Unbroken’

Although Petty Officer 1st Class Denny Landrum died in 1980, the Navy electrician’s mate lives on through vibrant strokes of colored pigment. Between beatings, mock executions and torture at the Omori Prison Camp during World War II, Landrum and fellow POWs Raymond Jakubielski, Lorenzo Miriszio and Norman Albertsen painstakingly sewed bed sheets together and pilfered colored pencils from their Japanese guards. They created an American flag even though they faced execution if caught and had been threatened with court martial by their superiors, who feared all the prisoners might be punished for the act of defiance. The 6-by-4-foot flag was used to signal allied planes that were appearing overhead. They eventually greeted their liberators on Aug. 29, 1945, waving the flag from atop a stolen firefighting tool.

Jerry Landrum poses with the Omori flag at its current home at the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond.

The Japanese prison camp and its now infamous resident tormentor, Mutsuhiro Watanabe, nicknamed “The Bird,” have been immortalized in Angelina Jolie’s Oscar-nominated film “Unbroken,” about another
Omori prisoner, Louis Zamperini. The popularity of the film, based on Laura Hillenbrand’s 2010 book, has drawn renewed interest in the flag, which disappeared after the war. It was found almost two years ago and is on loan to the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond, where it will appear until spring. Denny’s son, Jerry Landrum, said the flag, like the movie, is bigger than one man or a handful of men armed with colored pencils; it is about the hundreds who refused to back down despite horrendous conditions and insurmountable odds. “It’s not about Dad,” Jerry Landrum told Stars and Stripes by phone. “It’s for all of them. They couldn’t have survived it if they didn’t help each other… [The flag] meant so much to them. They were patriotic and they were going to put it out there and risk everything.”

For Landrum, the war memorial has become a place of solemn reflection, where he often goes to look at the flag, remember his father and trade stories with the families of his father’s shipmates. He and his father had been looking for the flag since the 1960s. Jerry took over the mission when his father died in 1980 of complications from beriberi, a disease linked to his poor nutrition in prison. He was 56. Jerry Landrum called Naval History and Heritage Command curator Allison Russell as part of his search. In April 2013, she located the flag in off-site storage where it had been perfectly preserved for decades. “We had no idea what happened to it,” Jerry said. “It was emotional” when it was found. Sen. Mark Warner intervened on behalf of the family to bring it to Landrum’s hometown, where it has become quite a draw. “The story just kind of grabs people,” said memorial spokesman Jeb Hockman. “They get up close and they see the pencil lines. You can see how hard these guys worked on this flag. It really touches people.”

As a youth, Denny Landrum was tall, thin and athletic, with a pointed chin and wide, toothy smile. He was stubborn and had a sharp sense of humor. During World War II he was stationed aboard the submarine USS Grenadier, where he was nicknamed “Slim.” The crew of 76 became a family while patrolling off Japan’s coast and in the central Pacific. They sunk Japanese transports and other enemy vessels and manned the picket line in the Battle of Midway, according to Navy records. According to the records and a diary Denny Landrum kept in captivity, the Grenadier left Australia on March 20, 1943. Enemy aircraft bombed it April 22 off the coast of Thailand. After a day of fighting fires and trying to save the ship, they surfaced, scuttled the sub and got in the water. One crewmember read stories from Reader’s Digest aloud while they awaited capture, Jerry Landrum said. They were first taken to Penang on the Malay Peninsula, then to Singapore and later to Japan, where they spent time in several prison camps before ending up at Omori. Navy records state they were tortured for intelligence information.

Jerry Landrum has pieced together the brutality his father suffered at the hands of the camp guards and “The Bird” — who was named to Douglas MacArthur’s list of 40 most-wanted Japanese war criminals — through notes left by his father and from talking to his shipmates and their families. There was a botched unnecessary surgery by a drunken Japanese camp doctor who operated on Landrum before the anesthesia kicked in. The Bird saw Landrum beaten with a wooden club until he was unrecognizable after he found his diary, which lacked his stamp of approval. He later returned it — complete with stamp that can still be seen today — because he was so impressed by Landrum’s ability to take the punishment. Landrum was cut from his throat to his groin with a bayonet, knocked out with rifle butts, had his jaw and joints broken, was trudged before a firing squad several times and starved with other prisoners.

Yet Landrum never folded or lost his sense of humor. When English-speaking Japanese officers arrived at the camp, one guard asked him how to greet them in English. “Good morning you son-of-a-bitch,” Landrum told him. Jerry Landrum said it was the only beating that his father said he didn’t mind taking. When they were liberated, Landrum’s jubilation was captured in an iconic photograph of him waving the Omori flag, clad in rags, suffering from malnutrition. After the war, Denny Landrum was frustrated with his body’s limitations from the years of abuse, but he tried not to show it. He couldn’t provide for his family the way he wanted, yet he remained defiant about life’s challenges, just like he did with the prison guards. “He
said he never got knocked out with their hands and feet,” Jerry Landrum said. “He wasn’t impressed” by their fighting ability.  [Source: Stars & Stripes | Matthew M. Burke | Jan. 15, 2015 ++]

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**OBIT | Edward Saylor | WWII ➤ 28 Jan 2015**

Lt. Col. Edward Saylor, one of the last surviving Doolittle Raiders who flew a daring bombing mission over Japan just four months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, died Wednesday near Seattle. He was 94. With Saylor’s death, only three of the most storied group of airmen in American history remain. When the young men — all volunteers — took off from an aircraft carrier some 600 miles at sea on April 18, 1942, they numbered 80. The raid exacted little damage on the intended targets. All of the bombers were lost. But the mission boosted the spirits of the American people — who were still reeling from the attack on Pearl Harbor — and cast doubt in the minds of the Japanese, Lt. Col. James “Jimmy” Doolittle, the mission planner, would later write in his autobiography.


Saylor was part of Crew 15 that nearly didn’t take off from the aircraft carrier Hornet, said Brian Anderson of New Hampshire, a longtime friend who successfully lobbied for the Congressional Gold Medal the surviving Doolittle Raiders are set to receive later this year in a ceremony in Washington, D.C. "Ed was a super guy. He had a great smile and was a gentle individual,” Anderson said Thursday in a telephone interview with Air Force Times. "What a lot of people don’t know is that he saved Aircraft 15 to go on the mission. It had an engine problem. If Ed had not fixed the problem, they would have pushed his B-25 overboard,” he said. Saylor managed to rebuild part of the bomber’s engine aboard the heaving aircraft carrier without the tools he needed, Anderson said. “The rest is history. Plane 15 took off with no issues thanks to the work of Ed Saylor.”

Saylor was born in 1920 in Brussett, Montana. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1939 after seeing a poster that promised $78 a month as a mechanic and good peacetime pay as the country still recovered from the Great Depression, he told Air Force Times in 2009. He became a flight engineer on the B-25. When the call went out in early 1942 for volunteers for a secret mission, Saylor signed up. He did not expect that he would one day be called a hero. In his late 80s, Saylor still did not see himself as such. "There is no way you
can call yourself a hero," he said in 2009. "That is for someone else to say." After the raid, Saylor transferred to England and accepted a commission, Anderson said. He retired in 1967 after 28 years in the Air Force. In the years that followed, Saylor "dabbled in real estate and construction. He and his wife, Lorraine, had a restaurant."

Lorraine Saylor died in 2011 after 69 years of marriage. They had three children and a host of grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren. "When given the chance to tell the story, he was always eager. The Doolittle Raiders always had time for people and fans to sign autographs and answer questions," Anderson said. "He was just a very gracious gentleman. I'm just honored I had the chance to call him my friend." Anderson last saw Saylor over Veterans Day weekend at an event in Washington, D.C. "I got to spend a lot of time with Ed. It seemed like he was doing fine. I find out he was in hospice and now he’s gone." Saylor requested a quiet burial. "He just wants to be laid to rest next to his wife. He's requesting in lieu of flowers that people make a donation to the Wounded Warrior Foundation," he said. The three surviving Doolittle raiders are Lt. Col. Richard Cole, Staff Sgt. David Thatcher and Lt. Col. Robert Hite. "This is the Air Force legacy," Anderson said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Kristin Davis | Jan. 29, 2015 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 26 Jan 2014

Retiree Appreciation Days (RADs) are designed with you in mind. They're a great source of the latest information for retirees and Family members in your area. RADs vary from installation to installation, but, in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups, and various other services. Some RADs include special events such as dinners or golf tournaments. Due to budget constraints, some RADs may be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, scheduled appearances of DFAS representatives may not be possible. If you plan to travel long distances to attend a RAD, before traveling, you should call the sponsoring RSO to ensure the RAD will held as scheduled and, if applicable, whether or not DFAS reps will be available. The current schedule is provided in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “Retiree Activity\Appreciation Days (RAD) Schedule”. Note that this schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\veterans related events such as town hall meetings, resource fairs, stand downs, etc. For more information call the phone numbers of the Retirement Services Officer (RSO) sponsoring the RAD as indicated in the attachment. An up-to-date list of Retiree Appreciation Days can always be accessed online at

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

[Veteran Hiring Fairs ► Feb 01 thru 28 2015]

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 6 weeks. For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. visit the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s website at http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events.

Los Angeles, CA - Los Angeles Recovering Warrior & Caregiver Employment Conference
February 4 - 9:00 am to 4:30 pm  Details  Register

Detroit, MI - Detroit Hiring Fair
February 7 – 8:30 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

Hartford, CT - Hartford Hiring Fair
February 11 - 10:00 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

Quantico, VA - Quantico Hiring Fair
February 11 - 10:00 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

Saint Paul, MN - Minneapolis/St. Paul Hiring Fair
February 12 – 9:30 am to 2:00 pm  Details  Register

Virtual Job Fair
February 12 - 11:00 am to 3:00 pm  Details  Register

Bellevue, NE - Omaha Hiring Fair
February 18 - 10:00 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

Dallas, TX - Dallas Hiring Fair
February 24 – 08:30 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

Camp Pendleton, CA - Camp Pendleton Military Spouse Networking Reception
February 25 – 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm  Details  Register

San Diego, CA - Camp Pendleton Military Spouse Hiring Fair
February 26 – 10:00 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

[Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Assn 30 Jan 2015++]

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Sgt. Clyde Bonnelycke and his Marines were pinned down by Viet Cong forces who were raining down small arms and automatic weapons fire from fortified sites north of the Cua River in Quang Tri Province. The grunts of Company C, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, were there on Jan. 19, 1968, in support of a vastly outnumbered friendly unit operating near the demilitarized zone. Bonnelycke knew he had to act to repel the onslaught coming from a bunker that was nearly in spitting distance. In a life-or-death maneuver, he charged through a hail of enemy rounds to the site just 80 feet away, uncorked a grenade and tossed it in, wiping out the enemy and silencing the hostile gunfire. This brave act enabled his platoon to carry out its attack and defeat the enemy, with 23 confirmed kills in the fighting.
Retired Army Master Sgt. Clyde Bonnelycke may be the only service member to earn a Silver Star both as a Marine and as a soldier.

The 28-year-old returned home that summer to Tacoma, Washington, where his father was serving as an Army officer at nearby Fort Lewis. As a combat vet with 10 years in the Corps, Bonnelycke quickly found that civilian life was not for him. So he raised his right hand and joined the Army. “Every Marine is an infantryman, and that is what I knew,” he said in a recent interview with Military Times. “That’s why I chose the Army Infantry.” He was assigned to the 3d Infantry Division in Germany — a major disappointment. “I wanted to go back where the fighting was at,” said Bonnelycke, now 74. Bonnelycke finally returned to Vietnam in 1969 as a platoon sergeant with Company C, 2d Battalion (Airmobile), 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division.

Just about 18 months after the battle in which he earned the Silver Star as a Marine, he was with his platoon’s point element in TayNinh Province when enemy forces ambushed them, wounding several soldiers. Bonnelycke maneuvered to his wounded machine gunner and picked up the weapon, then laid down a base of fire, enabling his platoon to mount its attack. Bonnelycke kept firing until he was out of rounds, then seized several grenades and attacked an enemy bunker, silencing it. For his actions that day, Bonnelycke received his second Silver Star. And he wasn’t done yet. Exactly one month later, on Aug. 12, 1969, now-Staff Sgt. Bonnelycke earned yet a third Silver Star: When enemy forces launched an intense rocket, mortar and ground attack on his base, evacuated the wounded personnel to safety, then sprayed suppressive fire on the enemy with a machine gun, grabbing another weapon when his ran out of ammo.

Bonnelycke, who retired as a master sergeant after 10 years as a Marine and 19 years of Army service, lives in Lytle, Texas. When advised by a Military Times staff member that no record could be found of any other service member earning a Silver Star as both a Marine and as a soldier, he said, “Really? Can I hand the phone to my wife and have you tell her that?” [Source: NavyTimes | Doug Sterner | Jan. 19, 2015 ++]

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WWII Vets 79 ► Gunn~James

Lt. Col. James Gunn III bailed out of his B-24 during a bombing run over Romania in August 1944. He found himself to be the highest-ranking member of a 400-officer prisoner-of-war camp in Bucharest (plus two other camps, for a total of nearly 1,200 Allied POWs). He then learned via smuggled radio that his host nation had surrendered to Allied forces, triggering German air raids on the city. That’s when Gunn’s story of World War
II heroism veered toward the stuff of legend — a story capped 17 OCT at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas, when his 99-year-old-widow, Aileen, and family members accepted his Silver Star.

James Gunn III, who retired as an Air Force colonel in 1967 and made an heroic escape from Romania as an Army lieutenant colonel in 1944 that led to the rescue of more than 1,100 prisoners of war, has been awarded a Silver Star posthumously.

Seven decades earlier, stranded amid Bucharest’s chaos and attempting to secure a safe return for more than 1,100 POWs without a way to contact Allied forces, Gunn tracked down senior Romanian military officials and requested a plane to fly to Italy, promising to organize an attack on the nearby German-held airfield ... and begin plans for a rescue mission, according to Gunn’s account published in Aerospace Historian in 1966 and later entered into the Congressional Record. His first attempt as a passenger on an aging Savoia-Marchetti ended in about 20 minutes, when the pilot turned the plane around for reasons unclear to Gunn. Then, in a scene most movie scriptwriters would reject as unrealistic, a Romanian flying ace who would turn out to be a member of the nation’s royal family presented Gunn with a new travel plan: “If you will ride in the belly of a Messerschmidt, I will take you to Italy.” Gunn “agreed without hesitation,” he would recall in the magazine piece. Radio equipment was removed so Gunn could fit in the plane, American flags were painted on the side of the plane in hopes of deterring Allied firepower, and Gunn drew a map on a piece of cardboard for Capt. Constantin Cantacuzino to follow into friendly territory.

Gunn flew with no parachute, no way of escape should the plane crash or catch fire, and not even enough room to sit up. It was a two-hour trip, according to a contemporary account in the November 1944 edition of Air Force — which was, at the time, the “official service journal of the U.S. Army Air Forces.” When the Messerschmidt landed, the Romanian pilot popped out and asked for a screwdriver to remove the access panel used to secure his passenger. “A soldier cried, ‘Look at those GI shoes coming out!’ ” according to the Air Force report. Gunn began contacting high-ranking headquarters staff “as soon as I gained my equilibrium,” he wrote in his account. Soon after, plans were underway for fighter strikes against German bombers and for what would become an airborne evacuation of nearly 1,200 prisoners of war aboard specially configured B-17s.

After the war, Gunn transitioned to the newly formed Air Force and would serve throughout Europe as well as in the Pentagon before taking his final assignment, as vice commander of Lackland Military Training Center, in 1966. He retired a year later as a colonel and would remain part of the San Antonio community...
until his death in 1999. “It was my father’s request that not much be done about this until he died,” said retired Air Force Maj. William Gunn on his father’s honor. Gunn, 68, said he’d heard parts of his dad’s story during social gatherings, but to get his father to spill details, “I basically had to pull it out of him.” Eventually, the father agreed to be interviewed by the son so the younger Gunn could pass on his memories — memories that began to fade in the colonel’s later years. A proposal for Gunn to receive the Medal of Honor came on the heels of “War of the Cottontails,” a book written by one of Gunn’s fellow bomber pilots over Romania that recounted Gunn’s heroics. In 2009, the Army ruled that Gunn’s actions merited a Silver Star.

Then, this summer, Lt. Col. William McKnight with U.S. Army North “sent unsolicited letters to people named Gunn,” William Gunn said, as the command attempted to reach next of kin for a possible ceremony. At first expecting to find children or grandchildren, William Gunn was happy to inform Army officials at JBSA that “well, actually, my 99-year-old mother is three miles away.” Lt. Gen. Perry Wiggins, commanding general of U.S. Army North, presented the award a few months after the letter went out. “I had kind of anticipated a fairly small ceremony ... and I think they pull out all the stops,” William Gunn said. “I was astonished the number of people who stopped by on a very busy day.” More than 200 attended the event, according to a news release, including the 99-year-old guest of honor, who uses a wheelchair. The ceremony had been delayed until October so Aileen Gunn would escape some of the oppressive Texas heat. “It’s been awhile since I’ve seen a three-star on his knees, [as he was] hanging the medal around her neck,” William Gunn said. That’s not something you see every day. ... She was, I could tell, pleased beyond description.”

[Source: ArmyTimes | Kevin Lilley | October 21, 2014 ++]

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**America's Most Beloved Vets**  ➤  Korean War (3)

Rodolfo Hernandez  ➤  Ted Williams  ➤  Tibor Rubin  ➤  Young-Oak Kim

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• Rodolfo “Rudy” Hernandez, the son of California migrant workers charged an enemy advance and survived a grenade explosion that blew off part of his skull.

• Before "The Kid" was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Ted Williams flew combat missions with the VMF-311 Tomcat fighter squadron in Korea.

• The Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor Tibor "Ted" Rubin was wounded twice in Korea and fed fellow GIs during his 30 months in a North Korean POW camp.

• A veteran of World War II, Young-Oak Kim left his laundry business to re-enlist and fight for his father’s country, helping push Chinese troops back across the 38th Parallel.

*Vet State Benefits & Discounts* ➤ Illinois 2015

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 & Discounts – IL" for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the following refer to http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/illinois.html and http://www2.illinois.gov/veterans/Pages/default.aspx.

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

The 114th Congress is now in office, and secretary of defense nominee Ashton Carter awaits confirmation. Many observers in the press are speculating what this turnover in congressional and Pentagon leadership means for the military community. Carter is known within Pentagon circles as a reformer on acquisition costs, while incoming Armed Services Committee Chairs Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX) also have signaled plans to tackle acquisition reform. But acquisition will not be the only item these three will face. There are several issues over the coming months that will drive the discussion.

- By 1 FEB, the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) will issue its anticipated report detailing proposals to overhaul military compensation and personnel programs.
- At the same time, the White House will release its FY 2016 budget request. The request must grapple with the budget caps established by sequestration that return in full force Oct. 1.

Somehow Congress will need to address the conflict between the budget submission, which is expected to exceed sequestration’s limits, and the caps established by the law. Can Congress find cost-saving reforms in time? Acquisition reform can take years to yield savings. Sequestration’s budget rules limit where money can be cut to the point where Congress has forced itself to make the false choice between people programs or weapon systems. But infrastructure and weapons programs are political hot buttons that often generate “not in my backyard” cries from legislators. What’s the quickest way to show savings in the accounting books? Draw down troop levels and shift personnel costs onto the backs of servicemembers and their families.

The next few months will include a flood of activity for the new secretary of defense, Congress, and MOAA, with political posturing and the formulation of defense bills. The question is whether the MCRMC recommendations will affect the FY 2016 defense bill process. The first year of a new Congress provides greater opportunity to implement sweeping reforms. Legislators arrive in Washington emboldened by a sense of popular mandate in their first year, without the fear of an upcoming election. It’s unlikely any MCRMC recommendations will be included in the White House budget submission, as budget planners have been working for months on the FY 2016 proposal. However, this won’t stop members of Congress from trying to include them in the defense bill markup process, especially if the proposals come with a blessing from Pentagon leadership.

That endorsement might come quickly. The Military Times already has reported Pentagon leaders plan to take a month to review the MCRMC recommendations and finalize a position for the new secretary — all in advance of the markup timelines. MOAA’s biggest concern is that the new Congress will look at the Pentagon and the MCRMC proposals with the purpose of saving money or cutting the budget and will make decisions based on arbitrary budget caps, without considering how compensation and benefits are necessary to recruit and retain a high-quality all-volunteer force. The bottom line: The next few months will be very busy, and all hands on deck will be needed to make sure their voice on the pay and benefits needed to sustain the all-volunteer force is heard by legislators. Also, that shortsighted budget savings don’t come at the expense of the health of the all-volunteer force. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | Mike Hayden | Jan. 13, 2015 ++]
VA Hearing & Vision Benefit Update 04  ►  H.R.353 Hearing Act

U.S. Representative Sean Duffy (R-WI-07) and Rep. Walz (D-MN-01) introduced H.R.353, Veterans Access to Healthy Hearing Act, which will provide much needed options for hearing impaired Veterans. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), both our aging Veterans and younger Veterans returning from the battlefield are seeking help from the VA for hearing loss more than any other service-related disability facing them today. VA audiology clinics can’t keep up with the increased demand and frustrated Veterans are living in a non-hearing world with no one to turn to. Rep. Duffy’s bill would cut Veteran wait times by allowing hearing instrument specialists to be added to the list of the VA's approved care providers. Rep. Duffy offered, “Veterans in my district are driving up to 90 miles one way just to get hearing services from an audiologist at the Veteran’s Administration. These Veterans could receive the same service from a local hearing instrument specialist, but under current law, the VA is only allowed to use audiologists.

Todd Beyer, a hearing specialist in Marshfield, WI expressed his support of the measure offering, “As a hearing aid specialist who regularly sees Veterans who are in need of hearing help, I know the VA can and must do better. I, along with my colleagues with the International Hearing Society, applaud Representative Duffy for championing legislation to make hearing care more accessible for our heroes. Our Veterans deserve the best and most convenient care possible so they can lead happy, engaging lives, and passage of this bill would have a tremendously positive impact on their lives. Reps. Duffy and Walz originally introduced the bill in the 113th Congress and received high interest from the Veterans Affairs Committee. Duffy added, “We saw strong interest on this issue from the VA Committee last Congress and have every hope that we’ll get it to the Floor for a vote this Congress.” [Source: TREA News for the Enlisted | Jan. 26, 2015 ++]

Gold Star Father Act  ►  S.136 Would Provide Federal Hiring Preference

U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) have reintroduced legislation that would expand federal hiring preferences to include fathers of service members who have been killed in action or permanently and totally disabled. The Gold Star Fathers Act of 2014 passed the Senate by unanimous consent in September of 2014, but “House inaction killed the bill,” Brown said. “When a service-member is killed in action or permanently and totally disabled, the government should do its part to be there for grieving parents—no matter if they’re fathers or mothers,” Brown said. “The Senate passed this legislation last year by unanimous consent but the House failed to act. It’s time we honor the sacrifice of Gold Star fathers by passing this legislation and ensuring that fathers receive the same preferences as mothers and spouses.”

Brown’s legislation is the result of efforts by Canton resident and Gold Star father, Scott Warner. Warner’s son, Heath, was killed in action in Iraq in November of 2006 during his deployment as a U.S. Marine. Following the death of his son, Warner became involved with a local Gold Star family support group. At a community meeting in Canton, Warner presented his experiences to a representative from Brown’s office. Currently, Gold Star mothers and unmarried widows and widowers receive a ten point hiring preference for federal employment, similar to the federal hiring preferences given to veterans. The Gold Star Fathers Act of 2015 amends federal code to provide fathers of deceased or permanently and totally disabled service members with the same hiring preferences as mothers, widows, and widowers.
In July of 2014, Brown joined Warner and Jon Reiss, the Executive Director of the Cuyahoga County Veterans Service Commission at the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument in Cleveland to call attention to the legislation and urge Congress to move swiftly toward passing the bill. The bill would amend chapter 21 of title 5, United States Code, to provide that fathers of certain permanently disabled or deceased veterans shall be included with mothers of such veterans as preference eligible for treatment in the civil service. [Source: The Portsmouth Daily Times, Ohio | Frank Lewis | Jan. 15, 2015 ++]

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VA Bonuses Update 23 ► H.R.280 Would Allow Recoupment

Are you a Veterans Affairs Department manager who has gotten a bonus? One lawmaker wants to give the agency the power to take it back. Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, introduced legislation 13 JAN that would give the VA secretary the authority to revoke bonuses given to executives. The VA paid more than $380,000 in bonuses to executives at 38 hospitals that are under investigation for falsifying wait times for medical care, according to Miller. The VA has been reeling from investigations showing the agency falsified waiting lists in order to boost performance ratings, harming its patients and forcing veterans to wait months for medical care - a scandal that originally focused on the Phoenix health care system before expanding across the country. "Ideally, VA employees and executives who collected bonuses under false pretenses should be subject to prosecution when warranted, but at a minimum their bonuses should be paid back in full," Miller said. "I urge my colleagues to support this bill so the VA secretary will have another tool to instill some much-needed accountability throughout the department." Under the bill the secretary would issue an order for an employee to pay back part or all of a bonus. The employee would have a chance for a hearing before a final decision is made. The bill states that there would be no further appeal or review process. [Source: FederalTimes | Andy Medici | Jan. 13, 2014 ++]

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VA Bonuses Update 24 ► 2007 thru 2013 Performance Award Lists

Veterans Affairs executives in charge of four hospital projects currently over budget and years behind schedule were given bonuses, despite the administration admitting failures in their jobs. FOX31 Denver asked for information about “performance awards” or bonuses since 2007. Documents they obtained (listed below) showed executives in the VA were given $22 million dollars in bonuses over the last six years. While most of the bonuses are most likely deserved it does give some insight on the positions of those receiving them and the amounts being awarded.

Performance awards


[Source: FOX31 Denver | Tak Landrock | Jan. 21, 2015 ++]

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PTSD Update 184 ► Therapy Dog Training Bill H.R.359

Rep. Steve Stivers (R-OH) has introduced legislation that would establish a dog training program for veterans with post-traumatic stress. Stivers said the program would help veterans who are dealing with psychological disorders from experiences in combat. "As a nation, we share a moral obligation to care for our veterans when they return home and to provide them with meaningful therapies to help them deal with any service-related issues they may have — whether physical or mental," Stivers said in a statement. "I have personally met veterans whose lives have been dramatically improved through working with a service dog." Stivers added. The legislation would establish a pilot program at up to five medical facilities run by the Department of Veterans Affairs, which would coordinate with local therapy dog training organizations. The therapy dogs would ultimately be partnered with veterans who have physical disabilities upon completion of training.

[Source: The Hill | Cristina Marcos | Jan. 15, 2015 ++]

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VA SES Management Update 01 ► Accountability Reforms Bill

In a 22 JAN House Veteran Affairs Committee (HVAC) press release, HVAC Chair Jeff Miller (R-FL) introduced the Increasing VA Accountability to Veterans Act of 2015. The bill would give the Department of Veterans Affairs secretary more authority to hold corrupt executives accountable, limit the amount of time VA senior executive service (SES) employees can spend on paid administrative leave and reform certain aspects of the department’s performance appraisal system for its senior executives. Specifically, the bill would:

- Increase accountability by allowing the VA secretary to reduce an SES employee’s retirement pension upon conviction of a crime that influenced their work performance by reducing the years of service creditable to the employee’s pension.
- Reduce waste by limiting the amount of time VA senior executives could spend on paid administrative leave to 14 days unless the secretary can show good cause for an extension.
- Help end VA’s sordid bonus culture by reforming VA’s SES performance appraisal system so only 30 percent of senior executives could receive top performance ratings and qualify for bonuses.
- Require additional transparency regarding SES performance outcomes and require that all SES employees change jobs within the department at least once every five years.

Chairman of U.S. House Veterans Affairs Committee Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., wants to give the VA more authority to deal with bad senior execs.
The VA has come under fire from veteran groups and lawmakers for not doing enough to punish VA employees who manipulated wait lists and scheduling systems to boost performance numbers. Initial investigations showed systemic wait list and medical care issues and forced the resignation of then-secretary Eric Shinseki. Miller said that despite earlier legislation strengthening the VA’s ability to fire senior executives, the agency has not held the appropriate people accountable or used its enhanced firing authority effectively. The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 passed by Congress 7 AUG gave the VA secretary the power to more easily fire and demote senior execs, which proponents say is crucial to reforming the agency. "More than nine months after the VA scandal, Americans are asking ‘where is the accountability?’ Unfortunately, VA doesn't have a good answer to this question. That’s why our focus remains on giving the VA secretary more tools to ensure corrupt and incompetent executives face serious consequences for mismanagement and malfeasance that harms veterans," Miller said in a statement. [Source: FederalTimes | Andy Medici | Jan. 22, 2015 ++]

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VA Appeals Backlog Update 04 ► Titus Bill Would Create Task Force

A bill re-introduced 22 JAN by Rep. Dina Titus is the latest bid by Congress to get its arm around the handling of disability benefits for military veterans. The Titus measure would create a task force to recommend how the Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress can improve how the VA manages appeals of rejected claims “so veterans receive accurate decisions in a timely fashion.” More than 300,000 appeals are pending, including about 1,400 from Nevada veterans, Titus said in a statement with the legislation. Nationally, the average length of time to receive a decision on an appeal is 1,255 days — nearly 3½ years, she said. A push by the VA to reduce a backlog of initial benefit applications has just created a chokepoint further down the line. Titus, who sits on the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, said trading a claims backlog for an appeals backlog was like “trading a devil for a witch.”

Benefit claims by veterans in Nevada are processed by the regional VA office in Reno, which has a reputation as one of the poorer-performing outposts in the agency. In 2013, the office was so overwhelmed with disability claims that it sent half of them to out-of-state VA offices for decisions. Sen. Dean Heller (R-NV), who sits on the Senate committee that oversees veterans programs, said fixing the claims process will be a priority this year. Nevada is home to roughly 300,000 veterans. “I believe the disability claims backlog is one of the most pressing issues our veterans are facing,” Heller said at a committee meeting 21 JAN. Heller and Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA) formed a “VA claims backlog working group” among senators in the last Congress. They produced a bill containing a series of reforms to streamline the claims process. Heller said some of the suggestions were implemented by the VA or passed by Congress in some form last year. Senate aides said Heller and Casey are preparing to introduce an updated bill. [Source: Stephens Washington Bureau | Steve Tetreault | Jan. 22, 2015 ++]

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Vet Bills Submitted to 114th Congress ► 150113 to 150130

For a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 114th Congress refer to this Bulletin’s “House & Senate Veteran Legislation” attachment. Support of these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indication of that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At
https://beta.congress.gov you can review a copy of each bill’s content, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor or cosponsor of it by entering the bill number in the site’s search engine. To determine what bills, amendments your representative/senator has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on go to:

- https://beta.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22legislation%22%5D%7D
- Select the ‘Sponsor’ tab, and click on your congress person’s name.
- You can also go to http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php

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

- http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm
- http://www.house.gov/representatives

Tentative 2015 Legislative Schedule 114th Congress, 1st Session: To be determined.

FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF VETERAN RELATED LEGISLATION INTRODUCED IN THE HOUSE AND SENATE SINCE THE LAST BULLETIN WAS PUBLISHED:

- **H.R.182**: VA Veteran Enrollment Reporting. To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to permit the centralized reporting of veteran enrollment by certain groups, districts, and consortiums of educational institutions. Sponsor: Rep Calvert, Ken [CA-42] (introduced 1/7/2015)
- **H.R.288**: VA Beneficiary Travel Program. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for coverage under the beneficiary travel program of the Department of Veterans Affairs of certain disabled veterans for travel for certain special disabilities rehabilitation, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Brownley, Julia [CA-26] (introduced 1/13/2015) Related Bills: S.171
- **H.R.294**: VA Non-Department Foster Home Program. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into contracts and agreements for the transfer of veterans to non-Department medical foster homes for certain veterans who are unable to live independently. Sponsor: Rep Miller, Jeff [FL-1] (introduced 1/13/2015)
- **H.R.303**: Retired Pay Restoration Act. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit additional retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability to receive both disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for their disability and either retired pay by reason of their years of military service or combat-related special compensation. Sponsor: Rep Bilirakis, Gus M. [FL-12] (introduced 1/13/2015)
- **H.R.313**: Federal Employee Disabled Vet Leave Policy. A bill to amend title 5, United States Code, to provide leave to any new Federal employee who is a veteran with a service-connected disability rated at 30 percent or more for purposes of undergoing medical treatment for such disability, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Lynch, Stephen F. [MA-8] (introduced 1/13/2015)
- **H.R.315**: Philippine Vet Benefit Policy. A bill to require the Secretary of Defense to establish a process to determine whether individuals claiming certain service in the Philippines during World War II are eligible for certain benefits despite not being on the Missouri List, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Meng, Grace [NY-6] (introduced 1/13/2015)

- **H.R.333**: Disabled Veterans Tax Termination Act. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability rated less than 50 percent to receive concurrent payment of both retired pay and veterans' disability compensation, to extend eligibility for concurrent receipt to chapter 61 disability retirees with less than 20 years of service, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Bishop, Sanford D., Jr. [GA-2] (introduced 1/13/2015)

- **H.R.342**: Commissary/Exchange Eligibility Extension. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to extend military commissary and exchange store privileges, without time-period limitation, to members of the Armed Forces who are involuntarily separated with a service-connected disability and also to extend such privileges to their dependents. Sponsor: Rep Denham, Jeff [CA-10] (introduced 1/14/2015)


- **H.R.353**: Veterans' Access to Hearing Health Act of 2015. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to include licensed hearing aid specialists as eligible for appointment in the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Duffy, Sean P. [WI-7] (introduced 1/14/2015)

- **H.R.356**: VA VOC REHAB Action Plan. A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and publish an action plan for improving the vocational rehabilitation services and assistance provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep Maloney, Sean Patrick [NY-18] (introduced 1/14/2015)

- **H.R.359**: Therapy Dog Training VA Pilot Program. A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on dog training therapy. Sponsor: Rep Stivers, Steve [OH-15] (introduced 1/14/2015)

- **H.R.366**: VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. To reauthorize the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, to provide assistance to small businesses owned by veterans, to improve enforcement of employment and reemployment rights of members of the uniformed services, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Cohen, Steve [TN-9] (introduced 1/14/2015)

- **H.R.421**: Classified Veterans Access to Care Act. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the mental health treatment provided by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to veterans who served in classified missions. Sponsor: Rep Sinema, Kyrsten [AZ-9] (introduced 1/20/2015)

- **H.R.473**: VA Accountability to Veterans Act of 2015. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the accountability of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Miller, Jeff [FL-1] (introduced 1/22/2015)

- **H.R.474**: Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for a five-year extension to the homeless veterans reintegration programs and to provide clarification regarding eligibility for services under such programs. Sponsor: Rep Wenstrup, Brad R. [OH-2] (introduced 1/22/2015)

- **H.R.475**: VA Educational Assistance Improvement. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs relating to educational assistance, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Wenstrup, Brad R. [OH-2] (introduced 1/22/2015)
- H.R.476: **VA Education Course Approval.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the process of approving courses of education pursued using educational benefits administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Wenstrup, Brad R. [OH-2] (introduced 1/22/2015)

- H.R.483: **WWII Filipino Children VISA Numerical Limitation Exemption.** A bill to exempt children of certain Filipino World War II veterans from the numerical limitations on immigrant visas and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Takai, Mark [HI-1] (introduced 1/22/2015)

- H.R.498: **VA Vet Center DPRIR & DIR Access.** A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense to jointly ensure that the Vet Centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs have access to the Defense Personnel Record Image Retrieval system and the Veterans Affairs/Department of Defense Identity Repository system. Sponsor: Rep Denham, Jeff [CA-10] (introduced 1/22/2015)

- H.R.502: **Increasing VA Accountability to Veterans Act of 2015.** A bill to establish a pilot program to improve the management and accountability within the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to provide oversight of the Veterans Health Administration, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Kilmer, Derek [WA-6] (introduced 1/22/2015)

- H.R.517: **VA Claim Appeal Backlog Task Force.** To establish a task force to evaluate the backlog of appeals to claims submitted to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep Titus, Dina [NV-1] (introduced 1/22/2015)


- H.R.563: **VA Merchant Mariner Equity Compensation Fund.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish the Merchant Mariner Equity Compensation Fund to provide benefits to certain individuals who served in the United States merchant marine (including the Army Transport Service and the Naval Transport Service) during World War II. Sponsor: Rep Hahn, Janice [CA-44] (introduced 1/27/2015)

- H.R.571: **VA Whistleblower Treatment.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the treatment of whistleblower complaints by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Miller, Jeff [FL-1] (introduced 1/27/2015)

- H.R.572: **VA Non-Department Vet Care.** A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to use existing authorities to furnish health care at non-Department of Veterans Affairs facilities to veterans who live more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest medical facility of the Department that furnishes the care sought by the veteran, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Mullin, Markwayne [OK-2] (introduced 1/27/2015)

- H.R.577: **VA Non-Department Vet Care.** A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to use existing authorities to furnish health care at non-Department of Veterans Affairs facilities to veterans who live more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest medical facility of the Department that furnishes the care sought by the veteran. Sponsor: Rep Zinke, Ryan K. [MT] (introduced 1/27/2015)

- H.R.593: **VAMC Aurora CO Construction Authorization.** A bill to extend the authorization for the construction of the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Aurora, Colorado, and to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into an agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers to manage such construction. Sponsor: Rep Coffman, Mike [CO-6] (introduced 1/28/2015)

• H.R.621 : **SECVA Grant Authority.** To authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make grants with minority serving institutions for the purpose of establishing verified delivery systems to address social and academic problems facing veterans enrolled at such institutions, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Vargas, Juan [CA-51] (introduced 1/28/2015)

• S.41 : **Veterans Travel Tax Relief Act of 2015.** A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide for a deduction for travel expenses to medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs in connection with examinations or treatments relating to service-connected disabilities. Sponsor: Sen Heller, Dean [NV] (introduced 1/7/2015)


• S.136 : **Gold Star Fathers Act of 2015.** A bill to amend chapter 21 of title 5, United States Code, to provide that fathers of certain permanently disabled or deceased veterans shall be included with mothers of such veterans as preference eligibles for treatment in the civil service. Sponsor: Sen Wyden, Ron [OR] (introduced 1/8/2015)

• S.151 : **Filipino Veterans Promise Act.** A bill to require the Secretary of Defense to establish a process to determine whether individuals claiming certain service in the Philippines during World War II are eligible for certain benefits despite not being on the Missouri List, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Heller, Dean [NV] (introduced 1/13/2015)

• S.167 : **Clay Hunt SAV Act.** A bill to require the Secretary of Defense to establish a process to determine whether individuals claiming certain service in the Philippines during World War II are eligible for certain benefits despite not being on the Missouri List, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen McCain, John [AZ] (introduced 1/13/2015)

• S.171 : **VA Beneficiary Travel Program.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for coverage under the beneficiary travel program of the Department of Veterans Affairs of certain disabled veterans for travel in connection with certain special disabilities rehabilitation, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Tester, Jon [MT] (introduced 1/13/2015)

• S.172 : **Veteran Immunizations.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for certain requirements relating to the immunization of veterans, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Tester, Jon [MT] (introduced 1/13/2015)

• S.207 : **VA Care for 40 Miles Plus Vets.** A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to use existing authorities to furnish health care at non-Department of Veterans Affairs facilities to veterans who live more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest medical facility of the Department that furnishes the care sought by the veteran, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Moran, Jerry [KS] (introduced 1/21/2015)

• S.218 : **Vet Emergency Medical Services Training.** A bill to facilitate emergency medical services personnel training and certification curriculums for veterans. Sponsor: Sen Enzi, Michael B. [WY] (introduced 1/21/2015)

• S.223 : **Homeless Vet VA Pilot Program.** A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot program on awarding grants for provison of furniture, household items, and other assistance to homeless veterans to facilitate their transition into permanent housing, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Boxer, Barbara [CA] (introduced 1/21/2015)

• S.241 : **Vet Widow Temporary Compensation.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the payment of temporary compensation to a surviving spouse of a veteran upon the death of the veteran, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Tester, Jon [MT] (introduced 1/22/2015)

• S.242 : **Federal Employee Disabled Vet Leave Policy.** A bill to amend title 5, United States Code, to provide leave to any new Federal employee who is a veteran with a service-connected
disability rated at 30 percent or more for purposes of undergoing medical treatment for such disability, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Tester, Jon [MT] (introduced 1/22/2015)

- **S.244: Review of VA TBI Assessment Process.** A bill to require an independent comprehensive review of the process by which the Department of Veterans Affairs assesses cognitive impairments that result from traumatic brain injury for purposes of awarding disability compensation, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Tester, Jon [MT] (introduced 1/22/2015)

- **S.271: Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2015.** A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit certain retired members of the uniformed services who have a service-connected disability to receive both disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for their disability and either retired pay by reason of their years of military service or Combat-Related Special Compensation, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Reid, Harry [NV] (introduced 1/27/2015)

- **S.285: VAMC Aurora CO Construction authorization.** A bill to authorize the construction of a replacement medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Aurora, Colorado, and to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into an agreement with the Chief of Engineers to act as the construction agent with respect to such construction, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Gardner, Cory [CO] (introduced 1/28/2015) Related bills: H.R.593

- **S.290: VA Employee Accountability.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the accountability of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Moran, Jerry [KS] (introduced 1/28/2015)

- **S.297: VA Intermediate Care Technician Pilot Program.** A bill to revive and expand the Intermediate Care Technician Pilot Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Kirk, Mark Steven [IL] (introduced 1/28/2015)


* Military *

**Military Drawdown ➤ Enlisted Involuntary Early Separation Program**

Involuntary separations of up to 12 months ahead of a soldier's ETS have been authorized for certain Regular Army enlisted soldiers who are assigned to units scheduled for deployment or deactivation, and who decline to re-enlist or extend as the Army draws down. The special policy, called the Enlisted Involuntary Early
Separation Program, mirrors a similar policy in effect during 2014. The program applies to three categories of active component (Regular Army) soldiers:

- **Units Scheduled for Contingency Deployment**: Soldiers assigned to units that are deploying in support of a named contingency, such as Resolute Support in Afghanistan, and who will have six months or less of service remaining when their unit arrives in theater will be involuntarily separated up to 12 months in advance of their contracted ETS if they do not re-enlist or extend to stay with the unit through the deployment.

- **Units Scheduled for Inactivation**: Soldiers assigned to inactivating units with ETS between the inactivation date and inactivation plus 365 days, and who elect not to re-enlist or extend, will be involuntarily separated up to 12 months before their ETS.

- **Units Scheduled for Korea Rotation**: Soldiers who do not re-enlist or extend to meet the service remaining requirement for a Korea rotation plus 90 days, and who cannot be effectively used by other units at the same installation, will be subject to involuntary early separation.

Soldiers who are subject to involuntary release will be notified of their early separation by their chain of command. The approval authority will be a commander with special courts martial convening authority, typically a colonel or general officer. Soldiers who are given an adjusted ETS, but who subsequently want to re-enlist or extend, should contact their local career counselor. Commanders can request an exception to policy from the Human Resources Command. It does not apply to soldiers with fewer than 36 months of service, and career soldiers who would have 15 years of total service at the time of involuntary separation from active duty. As a drawdown tool, it complements the Enlisted Voluntary Separation Program for soldiers who are denied re-enlistment, or who want to leave service early to accept employment in the civilian sector. Both programs are expected to remain in effect during calendar 2015.

The Army plans to inactivate six brigade combat teams this year as part of a sweeping reorganization and drawdown for reaching an active component end strength of 490,000 soldiers by 30 SEP. The manning goal is about 10,000 fewer troops than are in the force now. Barring unexpected changes, the Army will have 32 brigade combat teams when it reaches 490,000 soldiers in September. Two of the brigades slated for inactivation this year, the 2nd BCT of the 4th Infantry Division, Fort Carson, Colorado, and the 2nd BCT of the 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Georgia, were taken off the active rolls in mid-January Other brigades slated for inactivation this year include 1st BCT of the 2nd Infantry Division, which has been forward deployed in South Korea for nearly 50 years. Known as the Iron Brigade, this unit will be replaced by a rotational BCT from the United States. The 2nd BCT of the 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas, will pull the first nine-month Korea rotation, beginning in June.

The Involuntary Early Separation Program now in effect is similar to another program used in 2009-2012 when the Army phased out the stop-loss and stop-move policies that generally required short-timers to remain with their units through the end of a deployment, even if their enlistments expired. Separations under the 2015 program will be administered under the provisions of Army Regulation 635-200 (Administrative Separations), which authorizes early outs "for the convenience of the government." While technically classified as involuntary separations, soldiers who are forced to leave service early under this program remain eligible for regular post-service benefits, such as Veterans Affairs programs and the post-9/11 GI Bill. as stipulated in drawdown legislation enacted by Congress in 2012, this type of separation "does not affect any right, privilege or benefit that soldiers are otherwise entitled had they completed their enlistment or extended enlistment, except that the soldiers are not eligible for pay and allowances for the period not served."

Soldiers who are separated under this program will be issued a DD Form 214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty) that indicates they were separated because of "insufficient retainability." The
separation designator codes will be LBM (service-initiated release) or JBM (transfer to another component). The Army will not recoup any unearned portions of enlistment or re-enlistment bonuses as a result of this program. Additionally, soldiers with an adjusted expiration term of service, or ETS, date cannot be forced to sell back unused leave. Depending on accrued leave, and a soldier's election to take transition leave, commanders have the flexibility to adjust ETS dates by one to three months, but not beyond the soldier's contractual ETS. Separation pay is not authorized for soldiers who are assigned to units scheduled for a contingency deployment (such as Afghanistan), but is authorized for soldiers assigned to inactivating units and brigades slated for deployment to Korea. [Source: ArmyTimes | Jim Tice | Jan. 23, 2015 ++]

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**Chief of Naval Personnel ➤ Worldwide All Hands Call 3 Feb**

The Chief of Naval Personnel (CNP) is scheduled to speak with Sailors around the world in an all-hands call broadcasting and streaming online live Feb. 3 at 1 p.m. EST. CNP Vice Adm. Bill Moran and Fleet Master Chief for Manpower, Personnel, Training and Education (MPT&E) April Beldo will update Sailors on the issues that affect them and their families and open the floor to live questions from the fleet via satellite and social media. Sailors are encouraged to begin sending in questions and comments now by tweeting @USNPeople or emailing usnpeople@gmail.com. The programs and policies under the office of the chief of naval personnel directly impact Sailors and include the following:

- Pay and allowances
- Advancements
- Uniforms
- Education and training
- Family support policies
- Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR)
- Fitness and nutrition
- Personnel programs and polices

More than just asking questions, Moran and Beldo encourage Sailors to use this opportunity to share their feedback--what's working in the fleet, what isn't and what ideas they have to make our existing policies better. The event will be broadcast on Direct to Sailor (DTS) and DoD News. Online streaming will be available on [http://www.navy.mil](http://www.navy.mil). For more news from Chief of Naval Personnel, follow @USNPeople on Twitter. [Source: Navy Press Release Jan. 22, 2015 ++]
Awards Revocation ► Failure to Maintain Professional Standards

Army commanders, in a new message, have been reminded they have the power to revoke a soldier's awards and ribbons if their subordinates fail to maintain professional standards. Commanders with award approval authority can prevent their soldiers from receiving everything from a valor medal to a Parachutist badge. The move not only takes away decorations, but could also negatively impact a soldier's chances at promotion. Human Resources Command sent its reminder via a 5 JAN MILPER message, providing clarification of the rules to assist commanders wanting to exercise their revocation authority. It's no coincidence the message comes at the same time the Army is going through a wrenching drawdown that has seen a renewed emphasis on standards and discipline. Similar hard-nosed policies have been applied to recruiting and retention programs, promotions and reduction in force boards.

Top 3 Army Valor Medals: Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross & Silver Star

The existing rules, spelled out in Army Regulation 600-8-22 (Military Awards), are expected to get even tougher in the future. The next revision will likely contain a provision that would prohibit most awards for soldiers who fail the Army Physical Fitness Test. Such a rule already exists for soldiers who are not in compliance with weight control standards, and soldiers who are flagged for adverse personnel actions. In some cases, once the soldier meets the Army standard and a flag is lifted, he or she again is eligible for career-enhancing actions, such as promotions and awards. Awards are important as they can result in promotion points for sergeant and staff sergeant, and can provide a leg up for officers and senior NCOs being considered by centralized promotion boards.

The existing policies apply to the revocation of personal decorations such as the valor medals, the Meritorious Service Medal and the Army Commendation and Achievement Medals, and to combat and special skill badges and tabs, such as the Combat Infantryman Badge, Combat Action Badge, Special Forces Tab, Parachutist Badge, the Marksmanship Badges and the Ranger Tab and Sapper Tab. Revocations typically can be triggered by a dismissal from service, dishonorable discharge or conviction by courts martial based on such actions as desertion in time of war or cowardice. The regulation does not allow a commander to indiscriminately and retroactively strip all of a soldier's medals. But if the commander learns a soldier acted criminally, or even unprofessionally, during the same period of time he or she performed actions meriting an award, the soldier could lose his decoration.

Approval authorities can "revoke, or recommend the revocation, of an award that would not have been originally approved if subsequent facts had been known at the time of the original approval," HRC stated in its memo. The rules work differently for badges. For example, Aviation Badges can be revoked when a soldier refuses to fly or has a fear of flying or combat, while the Parachute Rigger Badge can be revoked if a soldier refuses an order to make a jump with a parachute he or she has packed. The guidance also states:
- When commanders have substantiated evidence of a soldier's unfavorable character of service, they should initiate a request through channels to the award approval authority to revoke the approved award.
- The award approval authority will inform the affected soldier, in writing, of the revocation of the award that the soldier received during the period of misconduct.
- Soldiers who have an award revoked will be notified that they can appeal that decision to the HRC commander, a two-star general. The revocation, recommendation, referral and appeal (if submitted by the soldier) will be forwarded to the HRC commander for a final decision.
- Revocation orders will be filed in the commendatory section of a soldier's official personnel file.

[Source: ArmyTimes | Jim Tice | Jan. 18, 2015 ++]

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**SAGM**  ►  Army’s New Small Arms Grenade Munition

In the olden days, soldiers killed when they fired a bullet at an enemy they could see. Then came indirect fire—lobbing mortars from afar, hoping for a lucky hit. Now the Army is working on a new round, combining the best of both, by reducing the bad guy’s ability to hide. Troops on the battlefield like to be “in defilade”—protected from enemy fire by physical obstacles. The Army’s new Small Arms Grenade Munition (SAGM) round is designed to remove the advantage offered by such cover: it explodes in midair after it has cleared whatever shield the enemy is hiding behind. “It has a sensor that will sense defilade or walls or anything that somebody will be hiding behind,” SAGM chief Steven Gilbert says in a Pentagon release. “And basically detects it without the need of a laser range finder.” He has estimated the new round would more than double the lethality of existing grenade rounds at ranges of up to 500 meters.

Such a capability would have come in handy in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, where anti-U.S. forces routinely sought shelter in walled compounds. “Warfighter lacks ability to engage combatants in defilade,” a 2012 briefing slide grumbled. “Grenade overshoots the target.” The new round would give U.S. troops “a higher probability of achieving a first-shot kill against enemy personnel,” Gilbert adds, and could “defeat personnel targets in defilade positions at increased ranges with greater accuracy and lethality.”

![Image of related infographic]

Army engineers have spent three years mating sensors to explosives to ensure the round explodes at a “sweet spot” designed to increase the chances of a kill.
The Army’s Joint Service Small Arms Program, part of the service’s Armament Research, Development and Engineering Center (known to friends as JSSAP-ARDEC) at New Jersey’s Picatinny Arsenal, has been developing the thumb-shaped, four-inch round for the past three years. It’s the ultimate fire-and-forget weapon: the soldier doesn’t need to do anything before firing, other than point it toward whatever obstacle the enemy is using for defensive cover. “All the soldier would need to do is aim the weapon and fire it,” Gilbert told the Army’s C. Todd Lopez. “He’d have to have good aim…or the round won’t detect the wall. You have to have some sort of accuracy.”

Among Pentagon wags, “close enough” has long been deemed good enough for nuclear weapons. It could also end up being good enough for the Small Arms Grenade Munition if a formal Pentagon evaluation, set to begin in July, pans out. [Source: Time Magazine | Mark Thompson | Jan. 05, 2014 ++]

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Project Blue Book ► UFO Files Now Online

The truth is out there — and it's now on the web. The fabled Project Blue Book, the Air Force's files on UFO sightings and investigations, have tantalized and frustrated extraterrestrial enthusiasts for decades. But this week, nearly 130,000 pages of declassified UFO records — a trove that would make Agent Fox Mulder's mouth water — hit the web. UFO enthusiast John Greenewald has spent nearly two decades filing Freedom of Information Act requests for the government's files on UFOs and other phenomena. On 12 JAN Greenewald posted the Blue Book files — as well as files on Blue Book's 1940s-era predecessors, Project Sign and Project Grudge — on his online database, The Black Vault (http://www.theblackvault.com/).

Project Blue Book was based at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. Between 1947 and 1969, the Air Force recorded 12,618 sightings of strange phenomena -- 701 of which remain "unidentified." According to a 1985 fact sheet from Wright-Patterson, posted online by the National Archives, the Air Force decided to discontinue UFO investigations after concluding that "no UFO reported, investigated and evaluated by the Air Force has ever given any indication of threat to our national security [and] there has been no evidence indicating that sightings categorized as 'unidentified' are extraterrestrial vehicles." Wright-Patterson also said the Air Force has not seen any evidence suggesting the sightings "represent technological developments or principles beyond the range of present-day scientific knowledge."

Skeptics smelled a whitewash. The private and now-defunct National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, for example, charged throughout the 1960s that the federal government was covering up what it knew about UFOs and pushed for congressional hearings. The National Archives has made these files available to public on microfilm in its Washington headquarters. Parts of the Project Blue Book files have previously been posted online in various locations, Greenewald said. But his webpage is the first time the complete files have been posted in PDF form in a searchable database, he said.
The more than 10,000 cases include a 1950 incident at Holloman Air Force Base in Alamogordo, New Mexico, where an Air Force Office of Special Investigations agent reported a star-like craft that shifted from a bright white color to red and green as it moved erratically in several directions. And in 1965, Air Force Maj. Jack Bond, the deputy for reconnaissance at the Directorate of Advanced Recon Planning, reported seeing an unidentified object moving in a sine wave pattern while on a flight out of Wright-Patterson. Bond said the object strongly reflected the sunlight as it rose and appeared gray as it descending. It rose and fell three times at varying speeds, before leveling off and accelerating away at more than 600 knots. The investigator dismissed Bond's observation as a mirage caused by the sun, due to the motion of Bond's plane and the hazy atmospheric conditions.

One thing you won't find online are records related to the alleged 1947 Roswell, New Mexico, incident, where conspiracy theorists maintain the military recovered a crashed alien spacecraft and its occupants. But Roswell does pop up several times in the files. There are several blurry photographs of lights in the sky taken at Roswell in 1949, for example. And in 1950, airmen there spotted a circular object 10 feet in diameter with a bluish-white color going fast at 8,000 feet and taking a sharp turn to the right. The National Archives maintains it "has been unable to locate any documentation among the Project BLUE BOOK records which discuss the 1947 incident in Roswell, New Mexico." But that is just what they would say, wouldn't they?


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**Medal of Honor Citations**

► Van Noy, Junior N. WWII

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

**Junior N. Van Noy**

**Rank and organization:** Private, U.S. Army, Headquarters Company, Shore Battalion, Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment

**Place and date:** Near Finschafen, New Guinea, 17 October 1943

**Entered service at:** Preston, Idaho in February 1943

**Born:** August 09, 1924 in Grave Idaho

**Citation**
For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action with the enemy near Finschafen, New Guinea, on 17 October 1943. When wounded late in September, Pvt. Van Noy declined evacuation and continued on duty. On 17 October 1943 he was gunner in charge of a machinegun post only 5 yards from the water's edge when the alarm was given that 3 enemy barges loaded with troops were approaching the beach in the early morning darkness. One landing barge was sunk by Allied fire, but the other 2 beached 10 yards from Pvt. Van Noy's emplacement. Despite his exposed position, he poured a withering hail of fire into the debarking enemy troops. His loader was wounded by a grenade and evacuated. Pvt. Van Noy, also grievously wounded, remained at his post, ignoring calls of nearby soldiers urging him to withdraw, and continued to fire with deadly accuracy. He expended every round and was found, covered with wounds dead beside his gun. In this action Pvt. Van Noy killed at least half of the 39 enemy taking part in the landing. His heroic tenacity at the price of his life not only saved the lives of many of his comrades, but enabled them to annihilate the attacking detachment.

The Great Lakes steamer Junior N. Van Noy, converted as one of ten U.S. U.S. Army Port Repair ships to be operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in rehabilitating war damaged ports. All port repair ships were named for Engineers killed in action. Private Van Noy was in an Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment. His birthname was Nathan Kilby Van Noy Jr.

Grace Cemetery Grace, Idaho
Aviation Art 81 ► Flug Zum Absprungplatz

Flug Zum Absprungplatz
by Mark Postlethwaite

Junkers 188s of I/KG6 transiting from Chièvres, Belgium to Münster-Handorf before their night bombing raid on London 15th October 1943. On the night of 15th October 1943, I/KG6 was tasked with its first major operational sortie against the British mainland. The Junkers 188s were loaded with bombs at their forward base of Chièvres but then had to make a transit flight to Münster-Handorf in order to refuel. As night fell, five aircraft departed Münster-Handorf and headed for London. The first off was Hauptmann Helmuth Waldecker in 3E+BL closely followed by Leutnant Karl Geyr in 3E+HH. Geyr and his crew flew low level to the Dutch coast and then climbed to 20,000 to follow a Knickebein beam towards Harwich. After following
a deliberately erratic course to confuse night fighters, they dropped their bombs on London and headed for home. Within minutes of dropping their bombs however, their Ju188 was hit by flak, ten minutes later one of the crew spotted the dark shape of a Mosquito night fighter moving across the night sky. Immediately four bursts of cannon fire ripped into their aircraft and their fate was sealed. With the fuel tanks on fire and all but the pilot wounded, the aircraft spun out of control and crashed near Birchington in Kent, only the pilot, Karl Geyr, survived. [Source: http://www.brooksart.com/Fluzum.html Jan 2015 ++]

Military Trivia 99 ► Sub Service Insignia Origin

The origin of the US Navy's Submarine Service Insignia dates back to 1923. On 13 June of that year, Captain Ernest J. King, USN, later to become Fleet Admiral and Chief of Naval Operations during WWII, and at that time Commander Submarine Division THREE, suggested to the Secretary of the Navy, via the old Bureau of Navigation, that a distinguishing device for qualified submariners be adopted. A Philadelphia firm, which had done work for the Navy previously, was approached with a request that it undertake the design of a suitable badge. Two designs were submitted by the firm and these were combined into a single design that is still in use today: a bow view of a submarine proceeding on the surface with bow planes rigged for diving, flanked by dolphins in horizontal positions with their heads resting on the upper edge of the bow planes.

These Dolphins are the fish, also known as Dorado or Mahi Mahi, not the sea mammal many people are familiar with. They were chosen for the insignia because they are the mythical attendants to Poseidon. The officer's insignia is a gold plated metal pin worn centered above the left breast pocket and above the ribbons or medals. Enlisted men wore the insignia, embroidered in silk, in white on blue for dress blue clothing, and in blue on white for dress white clothing. This was sewn on the outside of the right sleeve, midway between the wrist and elbow. The device was two and three-quarters inches long. In mid-1947 the embroidered device shifted from the sleeve of the enlisted men's jumper to above the left breast pocket. Subsequently, silver metal dolphins were approved for enlisted men. [Source: USSVI Dallas Base newsletter Up Scope Feb 2012 ++]

Military History ► Japanese Surrender Flights

For many in the Japanese military it was the first time they heard the voice of their Emperor. He was asking them to do the single most dishonorable thing they could think of - surrender. Many Japanese officers would kill themselves rather than surrender; many would vow to fight on to the death. One soldier in the Philippines, Hiroo Onoda, continued fighting from the jungles of Lubang Island for thirty more years (he died 16 January 2014). In light of this Japanese aviators' had a powerful, nearly pathological sense of pride in themselves, their service and Japan. The aircraft which would carry delegations for peace talks, which they would have to fly, would themselves become flying white flags of surrender - an almost unbearable indignity. With the onslaught of kamikaze attacks, suicidal charges and mass Masada-style suicides of both belligerents and
civilians, the Americans had no trust in Japanese envoys who might just as easily immolate themselves as actually surrender.

General Douglas MacArthur required, as proof of their peaceful intentions, that the aircraft carrying the envoys from Japan to Iejima (Ie Shima to the Americans), the small Okinawan island designated as the trysting place, be painted white all over and that their beloved, honoured, ancient, and storied hinomarus be painted over in white and then replaced by the Christian cross... a green Christian cross. One can only imagine the emotions, the utter indignity of what this meant to the Japanese who had to mix the paint and spray it over the marks of Japanese courage and honour that were the red hinomarus. Say all you want about Japanese cruelty and behaviour during the war, there is no denying their pride, sense of duty and honour and their personal courage. There was a code, a warrior brotherhood, a history of truths, legends and myths, and it was all over-sprayed in the battle colour of failure-white. The instructions to end the war immediately were clear, and the indignity was given to the aviators... the first to strike at the Americans on December 1941. To learn more on how the surrender was facilitated and the aircraft that were used refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “WWII Green Cross Flights”.

D-Day ► Transferring Casualties for Evacuation 8 Jun

Casualties from the initial invasion are transferred from an LCM to a larger ship for evacuation from the Normandy area. The photograph was released on June 8, 1944.

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WWII Prewar Events ► Harvest Festival Preps Germany Oct 1935

The German army demonstrated its might before more than a million residents during the nationwide harvest festival at Bückeburg, near Hanover, Germany, on Oct. 4, 1935. Here are scores of tanks lined up just before the demonstration began. Defying provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany began rearming itself at a rapid rate shortly after Hitler came to power in 1933

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General Charles de Gaulle (center) shaking hands with children, two months after the German capitulation in Lorient, France, in July of 1945. Lorient was the location of a German U-boat (submarine) base during World War II. Between January 14 and February 17, 1943, as many as 500 high-explosive aerial bombs and more than 60,000 incendiary bombs were dropped on Lorient. The city was almost completely destroyed, with nearly 90% of the city flattened.

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Spanish American War Image 68 ▶ Sentry Duty Pasig River Aug 1898

American soldiers guarding a bridge over the Pasig River after the battle of Manila, August 13 1898

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Military History Anniversaries ▶ 01 thru 28 Feb

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 30 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 28 Feb”.

96
WWI in Photos 120 ► British Motorcycle Troops 1915

1915, British soldiers on motorcycles in the Dardanelles, part of the Ottoman Empire, prior to the Battle of Gallipoli

Faces of WAR (WWII) ► American Glider Troops' Airborne Unit

American glider troops' airborne unit on parade at an airfield before Eisenhower's D-Day invasion during WWII May 1944
**Tricare Breast Feeding Coverage Update 01 ► On Hold**

A change in law enacted in December requires Tricare to pay for costs related to breast-feeding but new mothers may have to wait some time to receive the benefit. Under a provision of the 2015 Defense Authorization Act, Tricare will cover the cost of lactation support, supplies and counseling, but the Defense Health Agency must first develop a policy addressing the details of Tricare coverage, spokesman Kevin Dwyer said 20 JAN. And "until the policy ... is approved, these services and supplies are still not covered," he said. The legislation, signed by President Obama 19 DEC, is designed to address a discrepancy between coverage for breast-feeding expenses in the Affordable Care Act and those of Tricare, which currently pays only for hospital-quality breast pumps for use in medical facilities and under certain conditions for premature infants. The Affordable Care Act requires insurers to cover the full cost of renting or providing pumps as well as lactation counseling and support.

Dwyer recommended that new parents save receipts for services and supplies in case the new policy allows for reimbursement. Roughly 100,000 babies are born to Tricare-eligible families each year, according to the Defense Department. An estimated 79 percent of newborns in the U.S. in 2011 initially were breast-fed, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, although that number declined to 49 percent by 6 months of age. Cary Seely, vice president for provider relations at Pumping Essentials, a nursing supply company, said their business has received calls from Tricare beneficiaries asking about coverage and the new law. "Hopefully, Tricare's reimbursement rates will align [with the costs of efficient pumps]," Seely said. "It's one thing to cover breast pumps and supplies, and another to provide for a quality product to prolong and increase breast-feeding rates, which is the point of the ACA." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | Jan. 21, 2015 ++]

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**PTSD Update 183 ► MRT A Real Game Changer**

The headquarters of Oakley, a maker of recreational and military gear, looks as if it belongs in a war zone. It’s a massive bunker with exposed steel pipes, girders and blast walls. Even the dais in the auditorium is armored. But on a recent afternoon, the talk inside the building, set atop an arid, inland hillside in Orange County, is not about fighting wars but about caring for warriors. Doctors, scientists and veterans approach the podium at a conference to present some of the latest tools to help vets recover from wounds both mental and physical: bionics, virtual reality, magnetic waves. A session called “Healing the Warrior Brain” features a trim, bleach-blonde former Army staff sergeant named Jonathan Warren, who recounts on video his struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder after combat in Iraq.
His flashbacks, panic attacks and booze benders were well chronicled: For a year, the Los Angeles Times tracked Warren’s efforts to find peace, including his VA therapy. It didn’t work, he says. But now a different Jon Warren is here to say that he is finally free of symptoms, one year after that 2013 story ran. No longer does his worst memory of the Iraq war — failing to rescue his best friend, who nearly burned to death after their Humvee hit a roadside bomb in 2006 — grasp his psyche and inflict guilt. That’s because of a revolutionary new treatment that retuned his brain, he says, and set “my frequencies right.” Now he’s able to proudly embrace his military service, “to keep the memory, to be able to go there,” Warren tells the audience, “and not be controlled by it.”

Iraq war veteran Jon Warren

The 32-year-old veteran, who also suffered traumatic brain injury in the blast, credits his recovery to something called magnetic resonance therapy, or MRT — a procedure that pulses energy from magnetic coils into his cortex. He and scores of other combat vets have been drawn by word of mouth to a private clinic here for what some of them call “brain zapping.” The unproven procedure is offered at the Brain Treatment Center, located in an unremarkable office park, free of charge to former service members. The vets exit telling of a miracle cure, a transformation to tranquility that they, their buddies and families can hardly believe. “It saved my life,” they say, one after another. “I got my husband back,” their wives say. Glowing testimonials also flow from the parents of autistic children treated here, who say they’ve seen breakthroughs beyond all expectation: children who are truly communicating for the first time, learning normally, behaving like other youngsters instead of dwelling in unknowable private worlds. Is this a product of science? A matter of faith? Or simply a mystery? Yes, yes and yes.

As doctors take on stubborn, baffling neurological disorders such as PTSD, autism and Alzheimer’s disease, they are turning to esoteric treatments that require journeys to unexplored frontiers. “As humans, we can identify galaxies light-years away, we can study particles smaller than an atom. But we still haven’t unlocked the mystery of the three pounds of matter that sits between our ears,” President Obama said in launching an initiative to understand and map the brain. The goal of the brain initiative is to harness private, academic and federal research along the lines of the Human Genome Project, this time using experts in physics and medicine to focus on the brain’s nearly 100 billion neurons and 100 trillion connections — the circuitry that governs thought, learning and behavior. Some doctors think the plan is too focused on mapping and not enough on exploring potential cures. One of them is Yi Jin, the Brain Treatment Center’s medical director. The affable, China-born psychiatrist has plowed ahead with MRT for PTSD, autism and other disorders despite limited evidence that it works. “We are not claiming efficacy, but we are seeing clinical responses that are positive,” the doctor says cautiously in an interview, offsetting some bolder testimonials of swift, remarkable improvement in quality of life.

In 2008, the Food and Drug Administration approved the magnetic procedure — applied through what is called transcranial magnetic stimulation — for drug-resistant major depression. Published studies in recent years — one with 20 PTSD patients, another with 30 — reported significant reduction in symptoms in
patients receiving this TMS care. The procedure has been shown to be safe and is offered for depression at medical centers including Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. Jin uses the treatment off-label, customizing it, he says, to realign and synchronize the firing of neurons in each patient’s brain depending on the condition: People with Alzheimer’s, anxiety, sleep and eating disorders, addiction and tinnitus (ringing in the ears) have gone under the coils that emit the magnetic fields. He calls it “noninvasive neuromodulation.” In May, the clinic became a research affiliate of the University of Southern California’s Center for Neurorestoration, whose director touts MRT’s potential as “a real game-changer for the treatment of neurological diseases.”

More than 100 vets have been through treatment since Jin started offering it in 2013. Many say they had given up on VA approaches to PTSD — which include behavior therapy, medication and virtual re-exposure to trauma — before finding their way to the clinic. “One hundred percent responded with very visible change,” Jin says. In June, a National Institutes of Health advisory group on the president’s brain initiative listed magnetic treatment as among those that “need to be better elucidated” as regards the potency, scale and duration of their effects. But parents of autistic children often are desperate for a cure and willing to pay Jin’s clinic $11,500 and up for a month of daily treatments, usually lasting 30 minutes each and not covered by insurance. Since opening the Newport Beach center four years ago, Jin estimates, he has used the procedure on about 1,000 people, the large majority of them being treated for autism. Evidence supporting the therapy’s value for autistic patients comes from trials conducted at the University of Louisville with more than 200 higher-functioning autistic children. About 90 percent of them showed improvement, says Manuel Casanova, the psychiatrist and neuroscientist who carried out the federally funded studies. “You can actually make a difference,” he says. But how much of a difference and for how long? Casanova is forthright: “I do not have good answers.” A more expansive trial, involving more research centers, is needed.

Last spring, Jin and others with the center made the rounds in Washington, briefing officials at the Pentagon and VA and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) on their PTSD findings. They urged a pilot program to give vets immediate access to the treatment, which they said could be simply implemented with a couple of MRT machines, which cost about $50,000 each. But VA needs controlled clinical trials. So, striving to gain credibility, the center launched a double-blind trial in October for 48 vets who reported PTSD symptoms, and it expects to launch one for 400 autistic patients early this year — both at the University of California at San Diego. “Right now it’s like we’re selling snake oil,” acknowledges Kevin Murphy, a pediatric radiologist and oncologist running the PTSD and autism trials. “It’s hard to believe, and if I hadn’t had my own son treated, I wouldn’t have believed it.” Murphy says that after three to four months of magnetic therapy, his 10-year-old, who has Asperger’s syndrome, showed major improvement, to the point of no longer needing a constant one-on-one school aide, reading at a high school level and acing spelling tests when before he could barely write. “I have colleagues saying, ‘What’s the mechanism?’” Murphy says after his talk at the Oakley conference. “I say I don’t know. I’m not at the point where I can say I understand these things.” It’s like magic, then? Yes, he says, then mentions a medieval cure. “It’s like gold dust on the belly.”

On a recent day at the Brain Treatment Center, a former Marine helicopter crew chief reclines in a medical suite, eyes closed, while a bearded ex-Army squad leader holds a paddle-shaped wand over the forehead of his fellow Iraq combat veteran. Click-click-click. For six seconds, a staccato beat ensues from the device. Then 54 seconds of silence before the clicking resumes. “It’s almost like a magnetic massage, a little tickle,” says Ryan Wood, the man with the wand, who swears by the PTSD treatment he received here himself. Jin has hired 10 veterans, including Wood, 30, who is the center’s operations coordinator, and Jon Warren, 32, who does outreach to fellow veterans. “It’s like waking up from a good nap,” says Joseph Hummel, 37, the ex-Marine, who witnessed four comrades die in a fiery helicopter crash at the start of the Iraq war in 2003. “It’s like taking a 10-minute snoozer at 2 o’clock, and you feel like you’ve slept 16 hours. Hummel, an insurance agent, says his PTSD manifested in chronic insomnia, explosive anger and excessive drinking; he says he was able to sleep normally for the first time in years after his first treatment in March and awoke a
far calmer man. He decided if it worked so immediately for him, it might help his 15-year-old stepson, Andrew, who is autistic.

Andrew used to communicate mainly by reciting random lines from movies, his parents say. Andrew may have thought he was connecting with people — but in fact, his parents say, he never really engaged in two-way conversations, and never started them. He separated himself from the family. Now the teenager’s mother, Joleen Hummel, is sitting in the center’s waiting room while Andrew undergoes treatment just a few hours after her husband did. She’s recalling what happened after her son’s first appointment last year. “He walked out of the treatment door — he was cracking up and laughing, and he just doesn’t do that,” she says. “Right away there was something.” That night, she had an actual conversation with her son. “He was like my child for the first time, talking to me about his future, asking questions about autism, asking me about heaven, what happens when you die. It was like having a conversation with a 14-year-old child I’d never met. “We talked until we couldn’t talk anymore.” Her face, framed by long brown hair, reflects a profound joy. “I’ll never forget that.”

On several occasions, Jin has met with Peter Chiarelli, a blunt-spoken retired general who once led efforts to reduce the Army’s alarming suicide rate. Now he is chief executive of One Mind, a nonprofit dedicated in part to finding ways to treat what Chiarelli calls post-traumatic stress. (To avoid the stigma attached to mental illness, the group does not use the word “disorder” in referring to PTSD.) He and Jin say the condition, to be better treated, must be better diagnosed. They are highly critical of the current VA self-reporting method, a 20-item questionnaire that asks vets to recount, for example, how much were they bothered — on a scale of 1 to 5 — in the past month by “repeated, disturbing, and unwanted memories of the stressful experience.” “You can’t prove it one way or another,” says Chiarelli, who was a top commander in Iraq. “I’m here to tell you that 50 percent who say they have PTS — or some percentage of people — do not have PTS.”

As disability certifications for PTSD have become easier to recent years — VA eased documentation requirements in 2010 — and the number of claimants has soared, the agency has been grappling with false benefit claims. While the total number of vets who suffer from the disorder is uncertain — many avoid reporting it — PTSD has clearly climbed in the aftermath of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The disorder is the third-most-common service-connected disability in the past 13 years, VA says. Nearly 250,000 recent veterans have received a disability designation of that sort. Jin thinks he has found the route to solid diagnoses in the electroencephalography readings of vets, taken before the magnetic treatment and then at regular intervals afterward to measure how neurons are behaving. It’s right there: You can monitor the patient’s progress, according to Jin. The retired general agrees that “we need to understand the biology” of the condition — but, again, where is Jin’s evidence of success? What about all those vets at his clinic who tell of marriages saved, suicides averted, careers restored — all by painless half-hours under the coils.

To a man they say . . . “I know, I know,” Chiarelli interjects. “I can go and find you the same group of men that will tell you hyperbaric oxygen is the answer. I can find you a group of men that will convince you that riding horses is the answer. I can go find you a group of men who will tell you that floating on a river and catching fish is the answer.” Maybe they all are answers. Every vet is different. In the clinic hallway awaiting treatment stands Scott Ralston, 6-foot-6, a former Marine sergeant who survived service in Fallujah. But this warrior will tell you that he could not defeat the uncontrollable anger, the terrible isolation and sense of failure that followed in civilian life. That he spent days of the week prepared to kill himself — until he found the doctor who turned his life around, Jin. Ralston, 33, has received more than 80 treatments since the end of May. Just being around other vets has helped, sure, Ralston says, but he is certain the zapping does, too. “I felt so extinguished, but now I feel a spark in there that wasn’t there,” Ralston says. “It’s a new life for me.” A miracle? You take them where you find them. [Source: The Washington Post | Richard Leiby | Jan. 12, 2015 ++]
Athlete's Foot ➤ Cause and Treatment

Many people will have athlete's foot at some time throughout their life. It is more common in men and older people. It is estimated that 3 to 15% of the population are affected. It is usually the gaps between the toes that are affected. To prevent athlete's foot from developing at all, it is important to keep your feet dry. Athlete's foot (tinea pedis) is particularly common between the little toe and the adjacent toe. The fungus can cause the skin to redden and crack. The affected areas flake and may become itchy. The skin can also turn white and thicken and is often slightly swollen. If the infection spreads across the sole of the foot it is referred to as moccasin athlete’s foot. The soles of the feet, the heels and the edges of the feet are then dry, scaly and may be itchy. Moccasin athlete's foot is sometimes mistaken for other conditions such as dermatitis. A more rare kind of athlete's foot causes an acute inflammation which reddens the skin and forms ulcers. The skin can become itchy and feel tight.

Your doctor will first ask you about your symptoms, and then closely examine the affected areas. A skin sample is sometimes taken to avoid mistaking athlete's foot for another skin condition. That involves scraping off a small amount of skin and treating it with a chemical agent to identify fungal spores under a microscope. The results are often available the next day. On rare occasions a fungal culture will be grown in a laboratory in order to determine the exact strain of fungus. That takes around three weeks.

Athlete's foot is usually caused by fungi (dermatophytes) that infect the skin. They can enter the skin through small cracks and grow on the top layer of skin. The fungi are passed on either through direct contact or via flakes of skin. That can happen if bare feet come into contact with infectious flakes of skin in communal showers, for example. The same fungi can also infect nails. Skin fungi need moisture and warmth to spread. Our feet offer a perfect environment for them, because we wear shoes for most of the day and so our feet are often warm and moist. The skin on our feet also contains a lot of keratin, a protein that can be found in the top layer of skin. Skin fungi mainly feed on keratin. The following factors can put you at higher risk of getting athlete’s foot:

- Genetic predisposition, Allergies and dermatitis, or Particularly sweaty feet
- A weak immune system, possibly due to a serious illness or taking medication that weakens the immune system for a long time, like cortisone
- Circulation problems in the legs, for example as a result of diabetes or narrowed blood vessels
- Some sports, especially running and swimming
- People who always have to wear sturdy shoes at work, for example safety boots or rubber boots, are also at higher risk.

Athlete's foot can usually be treated effectively with creams, gels or sprays that are available from pharmacies without a prescription. These products contain an ingredient that stops the growth of the fungus or kills it. But the treatment does require some patience. Home remedies such as tea tree oil or foot baths containing herbal products are sometimes recommended. But there is no scientific that they are effective against athlete's foot. Tablets are also an option if athlete's foot cannot be successfully treated topically. But that is only rarely necessary and must be given careful consideration because the risk of side effects is higher.


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Tricare Pharmacy Copay Update 12 ► 2015 Copays

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) outlines the following pharmacy copay changes that will begin February 1, 2015:

- $3 increase to all categories – exception: generic drugs filled at the TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy
- No copay changes for drugs filled at a Military Pharmacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Copays Effective Feb 1, 2015</th>
<th>Formulary Generic Drugs</th>
<th>Formulary Brand-Named Drugs</th>
<th>Non-Formulary Drugs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military Treatment Facility (MTF) (up to 90-day supply)</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy (up to 90-day supply)</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$16 (from $13)</td>
<td>$46 (from $43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Retail Pharmacy (up to 30-day supply)</td>
<td>(up $3)</td>
<td>$20 (from $17)</td>
<td>$47 (from $44)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Copays at non-network retail pharmacies are based on network retail copays, so they are also increasing accordingly.

[Source: NAUS Weekly Update  | Jan. 16, 2015 ++]

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Nuts ► Health Benefits

Nuts, if you eat them in moderation, are full of healthy nutrients for your heart and may even help you ward off other diseases like cancer. So why do only 4 in 10 of Americans eat them on any given day — and a measly 1 in 10 eat them daily? Back in 2010, new federal nutrition guidelines recommended eating nuts as an additional source of protein and nutrients. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) decided to take a look at how many Americans age 20 and older actually took that advice in 2009 through 2010, the most recent data available. Here’s what the CDC’s new report found:

- The older you get, the more nuts you eat. Those 60 and older eat the most nuts — about 43 percent compared to 35 percent of those age 20 to 39 — and older women eat more than older men.
• Most don’t eat the recommended amount. The Food and Drug Administration recommends 1½ ounces of nuts daily for heart health, but only 14 percent of men and 12 percent of women eat that amount each day. And 60 percent don’t eat any nuts.

• There is some good news. About 80 percent of Americans who do eat nuts eat them plain, meaning not as an ingredient in candy, cookies, cereal or some other mixed product.

Most health experts agree we should add nuts to our daily diet, although with a caveat. “Nuts do indeed have wonderful health benefits,” including important omega-3 fatty acids, says dietitian Rebecca Solomon, director of clinical nutrition at Mount Sinai Beth Israel in New York, who was not part of the study. But she cautions that moderation is key. A 1½-ounce handful of nuts is about 240 calories. “If you add 240 calories’ worth of nuts to your daily diet without reducing 240 calories elsewhere, the result would be weight gain.” Don’t eat the whole bag at one sitting, Just a small handful each day. And to help you choose which nuts to munch, here are some guidelines:

**Best for calorie-counters:** The lowest-calorie nuts, at 160 per ounce, are almonds (23 nuts; 6 grams protein, 14 grams fat); cashews (16 to 18 nuts; 5 grams protein, 13 grams fat); and pistachios (49 nuts; 6 grams protein, 13 grams fat). Highest in calories at 200 an ounce — along with lower amounts of protein and higher amounts of fat — are macadamia nuts (10 to 12 nuts; 2 grams protein, 21 grams fat) and pecans (18 to 20 halves; 3 grams protein, 20 grams fat).

**Best for your heart:** Walnuts. While all nuts contain heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids, walnuts contain twice as much of these antioxidants as any other kind of nut, a 2011 study found. Many other studies have also linked walnuts with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, as well as reducing inflammation and lowering LDL cholesterol and triglycerides levels.

**Best for weight loss:** Almonds. People who snack on 1½ ounces of almonds daily lose more weight and keep it off than those who skip the nutty snack, a City of Hope National Medical Center study* found. Almonds’ high fiber content also helps keep dieters from feeling hungry as often, which in turn helps prevent weight gain (* [http://www.nature.com/ijo/journal/v27/n11/abs/0802411a.html](http://www.nature.com/ijo/journal/v27/n11/abs/0802411a.html)).

**Best for strong bones:** Almonds and cashews. Just an ounce of calcium-rich almonds provides 26 percent of your daily needed amount of the bone-strengthening mineral. A lack of magnesium can also increase the risk of osteoporosis, and while almonds contain magnesium, cashews have even more — 20 percent of the daily magnesium you need for strong bones.

**Best for extra protein:** Peanuts. Yes, we know, peanuts aren’t really a nut. They’re a legume. But they get lumped in with nuts, and compared to their nut buddies, they have the most protein — 7 grams per serving. Research has also shown peanuts can help with lowering LDL, the so-called bad cholesterol.

**Best for prostate cancer protection:** Any nuts — an ounce a day. A 2013 study in JAMA Internal Medicine found that men diagnosed with early-stage prostate cancer who added an ounce of nuts to their daily diet, as well as more olive oil, lowered their risk of developing advanced prostate cancer.

[Source: AARP | Candy Sagon | Dec. 29 2014 ++]
Health Care Reform Update 60  ➤ TRICARE Self-Attest Reporting

As tax season begins, Defense Department officials want to remind TRICARE beneficiaries of changes in the tax laws, which require all Americans to have health care insurance or potentially pay a tax penalty. For the first time since the Affordable Care Act passed in 2010, all U.S. citizens, including service members, military retirees and their family members, must report health care coverage on their 2014 taxes, said Mark Ellis, a Defense Health Agency health care operations program analyst. For this year only, taxpayers will "self-attest" on their 2014 tax forms to each month in which they had health care coverage, he said. The act mandates that health care must meet minimum essential coverage, and TRICARE coverage meets that criteria for the majority of service members and their families, Ellis said.

TRICARE Prime, TRICARE Standard, TRICARE for Life, TRICARE Overseas, TRICARE Remote and the Uniformed Services Family Health Plan meet the minimum essential coverage, he added. When purchased, premium-based plan such as TRICARE Reserve Select or TRICARE Retired Reserve also fulfill the act's requirements. Uniformed service members who have questions about TRICARE, the act and the individual coverage mandate can visit the TRICARE website to download a fact sheet on TRICARE and the act, with TRICARE plans compared to minimum essential coverage, Ellis said. Military beneficiaries that are solely eligible for care in military hospitals and clinics, for example, parents and parents-in-law, have an automatic exemption from the tax penalty for tax year 2014 only. (NOTE: The TRICARE and ACA fact sheet is available at http://www.tricare.mil/~media/Files/TRICARE/Publications/FactSheets/ACA_FS.pdf)

The site also has suggestions for those who need to purchase coverage to meet the act's minimum requirements, he noted. That could include retired reservists, Selected Reserve members, young adults up to age 26 and those who leave military service but need transitional coverage, Ellis said. TRICARE beneficiaries with tax questions should contact the Internal Revenue Service or their tax advisers, he emphasized. "The experts there can help them," Ellis said.

Editor's Note: An earlier version of this story stated that TRICARE would send tax forms to its customers in January 2015. That was incorrect. TRICARE customers, like all filers, will self-attest on their 2014 tax returns, no health care coverage forms will be mailed.

[Source: DoD News, Defense Media Activity | Terri Moon Cronk | Jan. 15, 2015]
Tax Assistance Update 02 ► H&R Block Free Tax Preparation Available

With the new year comes the annual dread of tax-filing season and the confusion and stress that can go along with it, especially for military families whose tax returns can be further complicated by frequent relocations, involvement of rental properties and other aspects of military life. To ease the burden, the Defense Department, through Military OneSource, is teaming again this year with H&R Block to offer no-cost tax preparation to the military community with a promise of guaranteed accuracy, a service that otherwise could cost military families hundreds of dollars or more.

Military OneSource (http://www.militaryonesource.mil) offers no-cost tax consultation and no-cost tax preparation and filing to service and family members, as well as to reservists regardless of activation status, survivors, and separated service members until 180 days after their retirement, discharge or end-of-tour date, Anthony Jackson, a Military OneSource program analyst, told DoD News. Because it’s online, the service is available to eligible tax-filers regardless of where they are. “They can do one federal and up to three state tax returns -- again, at no cost to the service or family member,” Jackson said.

This year, he said, the service is adding features to accommodate those with special tax-filing needs. “If your tax situation includes rental property, charitable deductions or mortgage interest, this software can accommodate those particular situations,” he explained. Tax experts also are available by phone at no cost for anyone who may have questions before they get down to using the online tax preparation software. “You’re getting individuals when you’re talking -- tax consultants who are thoroughly educated on the military situation, no matter what it is,” Jackson said, including knowledge of special tax exemptions for combat duty and other situations unique to the military. The tax service being offered by Military OneSource became active 13 JAN. Military OneSource was established by the Defense Department in 2002 to provide comprehensive information on military life free of charge. [Source: DoD News, Defense Media Activity | Nick Simeone | Jan. 13, 2015 ++]

Survey Scams ► How They Work

Who couldn't use some extra cash? Don't let the promise of a free gift card fool you into taking a scam "survey." These fraudulent emails and social media posts are really a way to promote dubious products and capture personal information.

How the Scam Works:

- You receive an email or see a social media post urging you to claim a free gift card. "Alert: Walmart $100 Holiday Rewards are About to Expire! Claim Now," reads the subject line of one version. Just complete a short customer satisfaction survey, reads the message, and you will receive a gift card.
The survey starts off with standard questions about how often you shop at the store and how you rate the website. But when you get to the end of the survey, you find there is no gift card after all. Instead, the site is offering $50 or $100 off a variety of dubious products, such as free credit reporting, wrinkle cream and background checks.

In other versions of this scam, the "customer survey" asks for personal information, such as address and credit card number. Con artists can use this information for identity theft.

How to Spot a Customer Survey Scam:
1. Don't believe what you see. It's easy to steal the colors, logos and header of any other established organization. Scammers can also make links look like they lead to legitimate websites and emails appear to come from a different sender.
2. Legitimate businesses do not ask for credit card numbers or banking information on customer surveys. If they do ask for personal information, like an address or email, be sure there's a link to their privacy policy.
3. When in doubt, do a quick web search. If the survey is a scam, this is likely to reveal an alert or bring you to the organization's real website, where they may have posted further information.
4. Watch out for a reward that's too good to be true. If the survey is real, you may be entered in a drawing to win a gift card or receive a small discount off your next purchase. Few businesses can afford to give away $100 gift cards for completing a few questions.
5. Don't act immediately... think first. Many scams urge you to act right now. (This scam's subject line, "Holiday Rewards are About to Expire! Claim Now!" is a perfect example.) Scammers hope to fool you into clicking before you think.

To find out more about other scams, check out BBB Scam Stopper at http://www.bbb.org/council/bbb-scam-stopper
Gmail Email Scam  ➤  How it Works

Have a Gmail account? Watch out for scam emails posing as messages from Google. They may look like official notices about your account, but they carry malware.

How the Scam Works:
- You receive an email that appears to be a message about your Google or Gmail account. One version of this scam informs you that "You have exceeded your email limit quota." Another tells you that "you have a deferred email." The text is hyperlinked in both, implying that you should click for more information. Don't do it!
- Clicking on the link will download malware to your computer. Once on your machine, it can hunt through your files for personal and banking information. This opens you up to the possibility of ID theft.
- These scam emails are particularly tricky because they look so real. They have details like Google's address in the footer. One version actually has a link to "unsubscribe" and "change my notification settings." Be sure not to click these links because they also may contain malware.

How to Spot a Scam Email:
1. Check out the "From" field: Scammers have the ability to mask email addresses, making the message appear to come from a legitimate source. But they don't always use it. In this scam, the "Google" emails aren't actually from a @google.com address.
2. Watch for typos, strange phrasing and bad grammar. Scammers can easily copy a brand's logo and email format, but awkward wording and poor grammar are typically a giveaway that the message is a scam. In the example above, the phrases "limit quota" and "deferred email" are a sign that something's not right.
3. Hover over URLs to reveal their true destination. Typically, the hyperlinked text will say one thing, but the link will point somewhere else. Scammers either set up fake websites or hack into third-party sites and use them to host malware.
4. Watch for lookalike URLs. Be wary of sites that have the brand name as a subdomain of another URL (i.e. brandname.scamwebsite.com) or part of a longer URL (i.e. companynamecustomersupport.com).

For more information about scams impersonating Gmail and other Google products, check out https://support.google.com/faqs/answer/2952493?hl=en. To find out more about other scams, check out BBB Scam Stopper at http://www.bbb.org/council/bbb-scam-stopper.
Ransomware Scams  ►  How They Work

Your computer screen freezes with a pop-up message—supposedly from the FBI or another federal agency—saying that because you violated some sort of federal law your computer will remain locked until you pay a fine. Or you get a pop-up message telling you that your personal files have been encrypted and you have to pay to get the key needed to decrypt them. These scenarios are examples of ransomware scams, which involve a type of malware that infects computers and restricts users’ access to their files or threatens the permanent destruction of their information unless a ransom—anywhere from hundreds to thousands of dollars—is paid.

Ransomware doesn’t just impact home computers. Businesses, financial institutions, government agencies, academic institutions, and other organizations can and have become infected with it as well, resulting in the loss of sensitive or proprietary information, a disruption to regular operations, financial losses incurred to restore systems and files, and/or potential harm to an organization’s reputation. Ransomware malware has been around for several years, but there’s been a definite uptick lately in its use by cyber criminals. And the FBI, along with public and private sector partners, is targeting these offenders and their scams.

When ransomware first hit the scene, computers predominately became infected with it when users opened e-mail attachments that contained the malware. But more recently, we’re seeing an increasing number of incidents involving so-called “drive-by” ransomware, where users can infect their computers simply by clicking on a compromised website, often lured there by a deceptive e-mail or pop-up window. Another new trend involves the ransom payment method. While some of the earlier ransomware scams involved having victims pay “ransom” with pre-paid cards, victims are now increasingly asked to pay with Bitcoin, a decentralized virtual currency network that attracts criminals because of the anonymity the system offers.

A fairly new ransomware variant has been making the rounds lately. Called CryptoWall (and CryptoWall 2.0, its newer version), this virus encrypts files on a computer’s hard drive and any external or shared drives to which the computer has access. It directs the user to a personalized victim ransom page that contains the
initial ransom amount (anywhere from $200 to $5,000), detailed instructions about how to purchase Bitcoins, and typically a countdown clock to notify victims how much time they have before the ransom doubles. Victims are infected with CryptoWall by clicking on links in malicious e-mails that appear to be from legitimate businesses and through compromised advertisements on popular websites. According to the U.S. CERT, these infections can be devastating and recovery can be a difficult process that may require the services of a reputable data recovery specialist.

Also a growing problem is ransomware that locks down mobile phones and demands payments to unlock them. The FBI and our federal, international, and private sector partners have taken proactive steps to neutralize some of the more significant ransomware scams through law enforcement actions against major botnets that facilitated the distribution and operation of ransomware. For example:

- **Reveton ransomware**, delivered by malware known as Citadel, falsely warned victims that their computers had been identified by the FBI or Department of Justice as being associated with child pornography websites or other illegal online activity. In June 2013, Microsoft, the FBI, and our financial partners disrupted a massive criminal botnet built on the Citadel malware, putting the brakes on Reveton’s distribution. FBI statement and additional details.

- **Cryptolocker** was a highly sophisticated ransomware that used cryptographic key pairs to encrypt the computer files of its victims and demanded ransom for the encryption key. In June 2014, the FBI announced—in conjunction with the Gameover Zeus botnet disruption—that U.S. and foreign law enforcement officials had seized Cryptolocker command and control servers. The investigation into the criminals behind Cryptolocker continues, but the malware is unable to encrypt any additional computers. Additional details. If you think you’ve been a victim of Cryptolocker, visit the Department of Homeland Security’s U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team (CERT) CryptoLocker webpage https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/alerts/TA13-309A for remediation information.

**How to Protect Your Computer from Ransomware**

- Make sure you have updated antivirus software on your computer.
- Enable automated patches for your operating system and web browser.
- Have strong passwords, and don’t use the same passwords for everything.
- Use a pop-up blocker.
- Only download software—especially free software—from sites you know and trust (malware can also come in downloadable games, file-sharing programs, and customized toolbars).
- Don’t open attachments in unsolicited e-mails, even if they come from people in your contact list, and never click on a URL contained in an unsolicited e-mail, even if you think it looks safe. Instead, close out the e-mail and go to the organization’s website directly.
- Use the same precautions on your mobile phone as you would on your computer when using the Internet.
- To prevent the loss of essential files due to a ransomware infection, it’s recommended that individuals and businesses always conduct regular system back-ups and store the backed-up data offline.

The FBI—along with its federal, international, and private sector partners—will continue to combat ransomware and other cyber threats. If you believe you’ve been the victim of a ransomware scheme or other cyber fraud activity, please report it to the Bureau’s Internet Crime Complaint Center. For more information on ransomware in general, visit the U.S. CERT website https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/alerts/TA14-295A. Source: http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2015/january/ransomware-on-the-rise/ransomware-on-the-rise | FBI | Jan 20, 2015 ++

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Tax Burden for Ohio Retirees ➤ As of Jan 2015

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

Sales Taxes
State Sales Tax: 5.5% (food, newspapers, magazine subscriptions, telephone service and prescription drugs exempt); Counties levy additional sales taxes which may add up to 2.25% in additional sales tax. Click here for details.
Gasoline Tax: 46.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)
Diesel Fuel Tax: 52.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)
Cigarette Tax: $1.25/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes
Tax Rate Range: Low – 0.587%; High – 5.925%
Income Brackets: Nine. Lowest – $5,100; Highest – $204,200; Several cities levy municipal income taxes.
Personal Exemptions: * Single – $1,700; Married – $3,400; Dependents – $1,700. (*Add an additional $20 per exemption tax credit.)
Standard Deduction: None
Medical/Dental Deduction: Unreimbursed medical/dental expenses, premiums for long-term care insurance, and unsubsidized health insurance premiums are deductible.
Federal Income Tax Deduction: None
Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security is exempt. Credit of up to $200 if retirement income is at least $8,000, plus a one-time credit on lump sums. Seniors 65 and over may claim a $50 credit. Only one credit is allowed for each return. Out-of-state government pensions can be applied toward the retirement income credit. Taxpayers can deduct the following benefits only to the extent that they are included in the taxpayer’s federal adjusted gross income: Social Security, Tier 1 and Tier II railroad benefits, and supplemental and other railroad benefits.
Retired Military Pay: Military retired pay of taxpayers who retired from service in the active or reserve components of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or from the National Guard can deduct their military retirement income to the extent that income is not otherwise deducted or excluded in computing federal or Ohio adjusted gross income. Taxpayers who served in the military and receive a federal civil service retirement pension are also eligible for a limited deduction if any portion of their federal retirement pay is based on credit for their military service. These retirees can deduct only the amount of their federal retirement pay that is attributable to their military service. Military taxpayers refer to http://www.tax.ohio.gov/ohio_taxes.aspx and http://www.tax.ohio.gov.
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**  
The taxable base is the assessed value of land and buildings. Assessed value is 35% of market value, except for certain agricultural land. County auditors must reappraise all real estate every six years. A homestead exemption is available to the homesteads of qualified homeowners who are either at least 65 years old, permanently and totally disabled, or at least 59 years of age and the surviving spouse of a deceased taxpayer who had previously received the exemption. For more details, refer to [http://www.tax.ohio.gov/ohio_taxes.aspx](http://www.tax.ohio.gov/ohio_taxes.aspx)

There is a homestead exemption available. Homestead exemption property tax reductions are granted to homeowners who are at least 65 years of age; permanently and totally disabled; or to surviving spouses at least 59 years of age if the deceased had previously received the exemption. In tax year 2010, a total of 854,251 real property homestead exemptions were granted; the average reduction in taxes was $441 per homestead; and the total reduction in real property taxes was $378,743,424.

**Inheritance and Estate Taxes**  
On June 30, 2011, Ohio Governor John Kasich signed the 2012 – 2013 budget into law, which eliminates the Ohio estate tax effective for deaths occurring on or after January 1, 2013. Ohio does not have an inheritance tax.

For further information, visit the Ohio Department of Taxation site [http://ohio.gov/looking/tax](http://ohio.gov/looking/tax).


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**Tax Burden for Arkansas Residents** ► As of Jan 2015

**Personal income tax**  
- Arkansas collects income taxes from its residents at the following rates.  
  - 1 percent on the first $4,199 of taxable income.  
  - 2.5 percent on taxable income between $4,200 and $8,299.  
  - 3.5 percent on taxable income between $8,300 and $12,399.  
  - 4.5 percent on taxable income between $12,400 and $20,699.  
  - 6 percent on taxable income between $20,700 and $34,599.  
  - 7 percent on all taxable income more than $34,600.  
- In 2003, the state enacted a 3 percent individual income tax surcharge on all residents of Texarkana, both the portion of the city within Arkansas' border as well as that within Texas. Residents are allowed certain income tax exemptions under Arkansas' claiming the state's [Border City Exemption](http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-by-state).
- Arkansas state [tax returns](http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-by-state) are due April 15, or the next business day if that date falls on a weekend or holiday.
- Taxpayers who receive an individual retirement account distribution after reaching the age 59 1/2 don't have to pay tax on the first $6,000 from the account. Premature distributions made on account of the participant's death or disability also qualify for the exemption.
Sales taxes

- Arkansas' gross receipts (sales) tax and compensating (use) tax rate was increased March 1, 2004, to 6 percent (from the previous 5.125 percent).
- Effective July 1, 2004, the state also mandated that various services be subject to sales tax collection. They include wrecker and towing services; dry cleaning and laundry; body piercing, tattooing and electrolysis; pest control; security and alarm monitoring; self-storage facilities; boat storage and docking; and pet grooming and kennel services.
- In addition to the state sales tax, there are more than 300 local taxes in Arkansas. Cities and counties have the authority to enact additional local sales and use taxes if they are passed by the voters in their area. You can find your local sales and use tax rates at the Office of Excise Tax Administration's Local Tax Lookup Tool.
- Since 2008, sales of services in Texarkana that were previously exempted in accordance with Texas law have been subject to Arkansas state and local sales tax if the service is subject to tax in Arkansas.
- On July 1, 2009, the tax rate on sales of food and food ingredients was cut to 2 percent.

Personal and real property taxes

- Political subdivisions, including counties, cities and school districts, collect taxes on real property (such as a house or land) and personal property (automobiles, pickup trucks, recreational vehicles, boats and motors, motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles). Property tax records are managed by the assessor of each Arkansas county.
- These ad valorem taxes are based according to item value only. Assessment is based on 20 percent of the true market value for real property and on the usual selling price for personal property. The tax due is calculated as the assessed value times the local millage rate.
- Personal property must be assessed each year before May 31 (without penalty). The taxable assessed value of homesteads will not increase more than 5 percent above the previous taxable assessed value except when new additions or substantial improvements are made to the property. However, the taxable value of the homestead will continue to increase each year until it equals 20 percent of market value. Taxes are due by Oct. 10 of the following year. You can find your local assessor by consulting the state map of counties. Property taxes can be paid online.
- Arkansas homeowners may receive up to a $350 property tax credit on their homesteads. Eligibility for the credit is confined to a homeowner's principal place of residence. Nursing home or retirement center residents who own a home are also eligible for the credit, as are people who have deeded their homes to others while retaining a right to live in it until they die (a life estate). Contact your local assessor's office for details.
- In certain cases, disabled veterans are exempt from all state taxes on real and personal property. This tax exemption also is available to widow or widowers who do not remarry, as well as to dependent minor children of military personnel who were killed in action, died of service-related disabilities or who are missing in action. More information is available from the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs website.

Inheritance and estate taxes

- Because the Arkansas estate tax is based on the federal estate tax law, in conjunction with the repeal of the federal credit for state death taxes, the Arkansas tax is no longer in effect.
- There is no inheritance tax.

Other Arkansas tax facts

- Arkansas taxpayers can check the status of their refunds online.
Arkansas' Miscellaneous Tax Section handles various areas of taxation including: timber processing; severance tax on natural resources; cigarettes; tobacco products; cigarette paper; imported wine; domestic wine; liquor and beer; amusements; real soybean promotion; swine pseudo rabies eradication; merchandise vending; beauty pageant registration fees; bromide and museum fund; waste tires; corn and grain sorghum property transfers; soft drinks; brucellosis assessment; beef, wheat and rice promotion; catfish feed assessment; and construction permit surcharges.

Arkansas does not collect an intangible personal property tax.

Additional information on Arkansas taxes is available at the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration website http://www.dfa.arkansas.gov/Pages/default.aspx.


Thrift Savings Plan 2015  ►  Share Prices + YTD Gain or Loss

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<tr>
<th>Average Annual Returns (As of December 2013)</th>
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<td>L Income</td>
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<th>Monthly Returns (Past 12 Months)</th>
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TSP Share Prices as of Jan 30, 2015

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<td>F Fund</td>
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<td>C Fund</td>
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<td>S Fund</td>
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* General Interest *

Notes of Interest ▶ 16 thru 31 Jan 2015

- **USS John Stennis.** The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS John Stennis has left Puget Sound for a training mission after a $240 million overhaul. The first stop for the 20-year-old Stennis after leaving Bremerton 12 JAN was Naval Magazine Indian Island, where it was scheduled to pick up 6 million pounds of ammunition.

- **COLA Watch.** The December Consumer Price Index of 229.909 declined 0.7 percent for the second consecutive month and 1.8 percent from the FY 2014 COLA baseline. The Consumer Price Index for January 2015 is scheduled to be released on February 26, 2015.

- **Shinseki.** Retired U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric K. Shinseki has been elected to the board of directors of First Hawaiian Bank. He previously served on the bank's board from 2006 to 2008.

- **American Sniper.** The U.S. military community has done its part to make “American Sniper” the most popular movie in the world. Over the weekend, the movie pulled in more than $105 million, a record for a four-day opening. It was also a big hit at Army and Air.

- Force Exchange Service theaters, with the average attendance for the Iraq war film almost three times higher than attendance for other films being shown.
• **VA Security Audit.** A six-month security audit of the Department of Veterans Affairs’ network by cybersecurity firm Mandiant found none of the agency’s domain controllers — long thought to have been infiltrated by foreign hackers — show any signs of compromise.

• **Indiana DVA.** The Indiana Department of Veterans’ Affairs would be required to have a designated coordinator for issues involving female military veterans under a bill advancing in the state Legislature… The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee voted 7-0 on 20 JAN to send the proposal to the full Senate for consideration.

• **Climate Change.** The Senate on 21 JAN overwhelmingly voted, 98-1, in favor of an amendment stating that "climate change is real and not a hoax." A second measure that stated that human activity "significantly" contributes to climate change drew just five Republican votes.

• **Airport Screening.** TSA announced it had discovered 2,212 firearms in carry-on luggage during the year 2014, in over 224 airports. Most were loaded.

• **Anger Management.** If you or your spouse have a problem with anger check out VA’s online AIMS course at [http://www.veterantraining.va.gov/aims/](http://www.veterantraining.va.gov/aims/). This course is based on training that was developed specifically for Veterans and has been successfully used by Veterans and Service Members around the world. It offers a wide range of practical skills and tools to manage your anger and develop self-control over your thoughts and actions.

• **Auschwitz.** At least 1.1 million prisoners died at Auschwitz, around 90 percent of them Jewish; approximately 1 in 6 Jews killed in the Holocaust died at the camp. In the course of the war, the camp was staffed by 6,500 to 7,000 members of the German Schutzstaffel (SS), approximately 15 percent of whom were later convicted of war crimes.

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**Food Spoilage ► Tips to Reduce**

According to data from the USDA, American food expenditures in 2013 averaged $4,504 per person, split about evenly between food eaten at home and calories consumed on the go. You can reduce how much you spend by practicing proper food storage and eliminating the need to chuck rotten food in the trash. Here are some tips to get you started:

1. After opening items packaged in jars or cartons, such as salsa, spaghetti and cottage cheese, store them upside down to keep mold at bay and your items fresh longer.

2. Wrap your salad greens in a paper towel to keep them from becoming slimy and inedible.

3. Keep the wrapper on blocks of cheese when you cut. Touching the cheese directly can transfer bacteria from your hands and encourage mold growth.

4. It’s an old wives’ tale that leaving the avocado pit in half an avocado or guacamole will keep it from browning. What does work is to lightly press plastic wrap on to it to minimize its contact with air.

5. Store your flour in the freezer to keep it fresh and avoid any icky bug infestations.

6. Store foods in the proper location to reduce food spoilage.
   - Place milk and other dairy products, such as cream or yogurt, on the shelf of your refrigerator, even if the door has a built-in space for a milk jug. The door of the refrigerator is too warm for milk, which can cause it to spoil more quickly.
   - Some vegetables and fruits will rot more quickly if stored in cold temperatures. Tomatoes should stay out on the counter as should tropical fruits. Store potatoes in a cool, dark place and not the refrigerator.
• Store meats in the coldest part of the refrigerator, typically the meat drawer on the bottom shelf. Keeping meats on the lowest level of the refrigerator will prevent them from contaminating other foods, too. Meat drippings can fall onto other foods if the meat is stored upon a higher shelf.

7. Keep certain fruits and vegetables separate to prevent food spoilage. Some fruits, such as apples, peaches, and bananas, release ethylene gas as they age. Other fruits and vegetables, such as carrots, berries, and leafy greens, absorb the ethylene. Ethylene causes fruits to ripen, but can also lead to spoilage if there is too much.

8. Pour dry goods, such as rice, grains, and pastas, into plastic or glass containers with an air-tight seal to reduce food spoilage. Insects can live on the cardboard boxes that many dried goods come in. They eat the glue that holds the boxes together and may work their way into the packages.

9. Arrange foods in your pantry by order of purchase to cut down on food waste. Put the oldest packages in the front and newer purchases in the back.

[Source: Various | Jan 2015 ++]

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Space “A” Travel ► Recap of Thailand/US Trip

Following is an account of one traveler’s experiences while traveling Space A from Thailand to states and back. If offers some insight into what one could expect if they decide to take this trip.

My Personal Space A Travel. In October and November 2014, I traveled round trip to the US via Japan. I left RSAF Paya Labar (http://www.spacea.net/rsaf-paya-lebar), went to Yokota AB, then to Travis AFB. I rented a car on base at Travis, then drove to Texas and returned five weeks later to Travis, then flew back to Singapore with stops in Hawaii and Japan. Overall the trip went OK, except for a five day delay in Japan due to a typhoon.

There is no Space A to or from Thailand. You have to go commercial to Singapore or Japan and then make your Space A connection. I left Bangkok in late October and flew commercial to Singapore’s Changi airport. I arrived in the early afternoon and checked in to the Hotel Jen. It is a decent hotel in a good location, about 20 minutes from the airport and 20 minutes from RSAF Paya Labar by taxi. The hotel rates are around $140 US a night (https://www.hoteljen.com/en/singapore/orchardgateway/about). Cheaper lodging is available in Singapore, but I cannot speak for the quality of those rooms. Both my taxis were in non-peak travel hours. Morning or evening rush hour may take longer. The taxi fares, if I remember right, were around 25 Singapore dollars for each ride. The taxis are clean, always metered and the drivers are polite and speak good English. There is one Department of Defense hotel in Singapore, known as The Sling Inn (https://www.dodlodging.com/html/AF-singapore.htm). I have never stayed there. I tried making a reservation once. The front desk person said the rooms were and are usually full. In addition, it is reportedly a long trip for a taxi to

After spending one night in the hotel, I took a taxi to the AMC Pax Terminal. As I have written before, the taxi must drop you off in the parking lot just outside the gate. RSAF Paya Labar is a Singaporean military facility, and the gate is staffed by uniformed and armed Singaporean military personnel. The PAX terminal lies approximately 75 yards inside the gate, on the left. You should have no problem getting through the gate. I processed through in about 20 minutes, spent about a half hour in the waiting room, then took the bus to a
waiting chartered Boeing 757. It took us to Yokota AB near Tokyo, Japan. The flight was fine, not crowded, and took around eight hours.

I have stayed there several times and it has always been a good experience. As mentioned previously, I did have to wait for five days, because of a typhoon. For information on what is available at Yokota for Space “A” passengers refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “Passenger Travel Information – Yokota”. When flights resumed, I was manifested on a C5A to Travis AFB. When I and the other Space A travelers reported early in the morning for our flight, we were greeted by a young Senior Airman who informed us that our aircraft destination had been changed from Travis AFB to Joint Base Lewis McChord in the state of Washington. We had five minutes to decide if we wanted to go on this flight or wait for another Travis bound plane. All of us decided to take the JBLM flight as we had been waiting for so long for the typhoon to pass. The flight was full. About seven hours into the flight, we were informed by the flight crew that the destination had been changed back to Travis AFB, due to bad weather en route. We were jubilant. That was where we wanted to go and we had heard that JBLM was not a full service Space A facility.

We arrived at Travis AFB around 0400. It was a brilliant night, with stars all around and a full blood moon. We were met by a professional USAF ground crew and a customs agent. Processing went quickly, and we were taken by bus to the PAX terminal. I was a bit concerned about lodging, as we were late unexpected arrivals. It was a short walk from the terminal, so I decided to go to the hotel. It was a nice cool early morning walk to the Westwind (http://af.dodlodging.net/properties/Travis-AFB). I checked at the front desk. They had plenty of rooms. During non-peak travel (summer months, Christmas, and mid-April) there are usually rooms available. Front desk staff informed me two weekends every month the Inn is full, because of USAF reserve weekends. During the week, there is usually no problem, as long as the kids are in school.

The next afternoon, after I woke up, I walked down to the BX. The walk took about fifteen minutes. Just ask at the front desk how to get to the BX. The first thing I did was get a prepaid SIM card from AT&T. It cost 60 dollars for one month for a full service plan. Then I went to the Enterprise car rental office in the BX. I rented a VW beetle for a month and went about my travel. One month later, I was back at Travis. I left my VW in the long term parking lot across the street from the PAX terminal, dropped the keys in the Enterprise key return box just outside the terminal door, and caught a C5A to Hawaii.

We arrived at Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam (JBPH-H) around 1400. I had about fourteen hours to kill before our flight to Japan, so I rented a car at the onsite Enterprise car rental office and toured Oahu. I came back returned the car, and we left on a C5A for Yokota AB. The flight was routine. I spent one day at Yokota and caught a C17 to Singapore. Overall, the Space A trip was a good one, typhoons notwithstanding.

[Source: RAO Thailand Newsletter | Darrell Brown | Sep-Dec 2014 ++]

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Cellphone Rescue ► What to Do When it Gets Wet

It fell in the toilet. The clumsy waitress knocked a glass of water onto it. You forgot it was in your pocket when you jumped into the pool. That’s just a few of the hundreds of ways your phone could come into life-threatening contact with liquid. According to TekDry, more than 22 million Americans give their phone an accidental bath each year. When it happens to you (and it will), as soon as you’re done freaking out, you’ll probably begin frantically tapping all the buttons, blowing on it, or blasting it with a hair dryer to quickly get
rid of all that water. While those are all well-meaning actions, guess what? Totally the wrong approach. Here’s what you should do.

- **First, retrieve it as quickly as possible.** If your phone is still in the bottom of the jacuzzi or the toilet, get it out ASAP. The longer it’s in the liquid, the greater the likelihood damage will be.

- **Once the device is no longer submerged, if you can, take that battery out.** Don’t even bother powering it off, don’t press any other buttons, just open up the phone and pull the battery out. If you can’t do that though — if you own an iPhone or another device that’s impossible to quickly pry apart — you’ll have to settle for just carefully powering the device off. You want to cut off power in the device as quickly as possible to prevent the possibility of a short circuit.

- **Do not blow-dry it or stick it in the oven.** The heat can damage the delicate electronics inside. What you should do is give it a quick wipe with a clean towel, making sure no water accidentally ends up draining into its ports or other openings. If there are traces of water trapped inside cracks or indentations in the case, try carefully and conservatively using compressed air to blow it out. Just be careful not to blow the water further inside the phone.

- **Rice Option.** Many folks swear by stuffing your phone in a bag of dry rice, and letting it sit for 24 to 36 hours or more. This is cheap, easy, and can be done in a pinch. But this method could have some negatives: If the rice absorbs the water well, you may be left with a mushy rice mess stuck in its creases and I/O ports. Those with skin in the game (as you’ll see below) also say that the starch from the surface of the rice can get inside your phone and muck it up. To be safe, wrap the phone loosely in a paper towel before dropping it into the rice.

- **Synthetic Desiccants.** The smartest option is to keep synthetic desiccants on-hand. They are far less messy, and they work more quickly and efficiently than rice. The trick is that for the desiccant to do its magic, it needs to be in a sealed container so that it can absorb water only from your phone, and not from the outside air. Also, you need to have enough of the desiccant present to absorb all the water.
  - The $20 Bheestie Bag is one option you can order and keep on the shelf at home. You can drop your phone in the airtight plastic pouch periodically (like after your jeans get soaked in a rainstorm) to make sure no lingering moisture starts doing damage inside your handset, or just use it if your phone encounters a full-on liqui-ergency.
  - Dry-All is another product you can buy and keep with you just in case. Same deal as the Bheestie Bag: you just seal up your phone inside the pouch, which is filled with desiccant, and then wait the specified amount of time (24 to 48 hours) to let your phone dry out. You can grab a pouch for as cheap as $6 on Amazon.
Drybox is another option. You can use its website to find retailers in your city that have a Drybox you can use on-site. After you’ve powered down your phone post-plunge, you just head to one of these Drybox locations and within minutes, your gadget should be bone dry and restored. While San Francisco had many to choose from, other cities like Houston, TX, and Santa Barbara, CA did not have any Dryboxes nearby, so do your research.

Of course, the smartest thing you can do is begin hoarding the desiccant packets you’re already getting for free. Start now: Every time you see a loose desiccant packet in a box with a new pair of shoes, a hard drive, a shipment of spices, or whatever, pull it out and save it. Dump them all into a plastic or glass container you’re certain has an air-tight seal. After you’ve collected a bunch of them, you have an emergency phone-rescue pod ready to go. Just drop the dunked phone into the container, seal it up, and you’ll get the same results as any of those other commercial options.

Following these tips, there’s a good chance your phone could survive its untimely spill. But if it takes an especially big plunge, you could be SOL. In which case, it’s time to either use a professional cellphone drying service or buy a new handset. Two of these are:

- **TekDry.** A Denver-based startup, says it can fix wet cellphones and many other electronic devices (including laptops and tablets) in just 20 minutes – no rice required. TekDry’s co-founder Craig Beinecke doesn’t have much regard for that old standby. The problem is, putting your phone in rice is even less effective than just leaving it on the counter to air-dry, according to a recent test commissioned by Beinecke and his co-founders. And because the drying is slow and usually incomplete, the water inside has more time to cause corrosion and other damage. Their patented TekDry process uses a combination of negative pressure (a vacuum) and low heat to draw water out of a device. Sensors on the machine keep track of the humidity in the drying chamber. The company charges $69.99 to repair a wet cellphone, $149.99 for a tablet and $249.99 for a computer. If the company can’t fix it, you won’t be charged anything.

- **DryBox Rescue.** This company’s technique is to rapidly extract water from your phone. According to its website [http://dryboxrescue.com](http://dryboxrescue.com), DryBox is available in several locations across the U.S. The service usually costs between $20 and $50 and works in 30 minutes. DryBox is available in several locations across the U.S. The service usually costs between $20 and $50 and works in 30 minutes.

[Hanoi Jane ► Understands Vet’s Feelings About Her]

Jane Fonda said she hoped for an open dialogue with veterans after about 50 former military members and supporters protested the actress’s appearance 16 JAN at the Weinberg Center for the Arts. “Whenever possible I try to sit down with vets and talk with them, because I understand and it makes me sad,” Fonda told a relatively full theater, responding to a submitted question. “It hurts me and it will to my grave that I made a huge, huge mistake that made a lot of people think I was against the soldiers.” In 1972 Fonda visited Hanoi, North Vietnam, where she criticized attacks on the dike system along the Red River. A U.S. investigation later revealed the publicity of these bombings as propaganda. Fonda’s statements and a photograph of her sitting on a North Vietnamese anti-aircraft battery outraged many Americans and veterans, leading many to call her “Hanoi Jane” and a “traitor.”
Bob Hartman, an Army veteran who served in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968, said he blamed Fonda for breaking off negotiations among the countries and held her responsible for thousands of American lives. “She encouraged North Vietnam to pull away from the negotiations table,” he said, holding a sign outside the Court Street parking garage to protest her presence. “She got Americans killed ... and she went to Vietnam to advance her husband’s career.” About 50 veterans, many of whom served in Vietnam, held signs saying “Forgive? Maybe. Forget? Never” and waved flags outside the theater for about two hours, occasionally booing people entering the Weinberg Center, including state Sen. Ron Young.

“But those people out there ... I’m a lightning rod,” Fonda said. “This famous person goes and does something that looks like I’m against the troops, which wasn’t true, but it looked that way, and I’m a convenient target. So I understand.” However, Fonda said she did not regret traveling to North Vietnam, saying her time there was “an incredible experience.” “We feel what she did was so egregious ... (she) really cost lives,” said Mike McGowan, a Marine Corps veteran who served as an infantryman in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969.

Among the protesters was Frederick County Councilman Tony Chmelik, who said he decided to support the veterans in honor of his father, who served in the military. “(We want to) let everybody know we haven’t forgotten,” said Tommy Grunwell, a Marine Corps veteran who served in Vietnam and helped organize the protest. At least one person turned out to demonstrate in favor of Fonda, saying the actress’s work as an activist and founder of nonprofits helping women should also be recognized and represented. “I feel like you can’t vilify Jane Fonda but not vilify our government,” said Gabrielle Hash, who stood among veterans holding a handmade poster in support of Fonda.

During her hourlong talk, Fonda discussed the importance of adolescence in shaping women’s and men’s lives, and how she regained her courage and spunk in the “third act” of her life upon turning 60. “My voice went underground, and it took me a long, long time to get it back,” she said. Through working with adolescents at the nonprofits she founded, Fonda said she discovered that most girls are “whole” before approaching puberty; they know what they want and are not afraid to voice it. But upon entering adolescence, this voice fades as girls are pressured to fit in and mold themselves to society’s ideals of a thin, popular woman. “Her voice doesn’t disappear, but it goes underground,” Fonda said, describing how this plagued her through three marriages. But for boys, many are led to believe they need to act strong and fearless from the time they enter the formal school system at age 6, according to Fonda. “They become emotionally illiterate,” she said, adding that some of these boys later become violent when their masculinity is threatened in any way.

In describing her own struggles with age, marriage and respect, Fonda urged audience members to seek forgiveness and happiness through small changes like daily meditation or walks outside for a longer and more fulfilled life. “If ... we can manage to think positively ... we can actually alter the pathways in our brains,” she said. “I’ve experienced it, so I know it’s true. It takes work, it takes intention. But man, is it worth it.”

[Source: The Frederick News-Post | Paige Jones | Jan. 17, 2015 ++]
WWII Advertising ▶ Boeing

As you read story after story about Boeing Flying Fortresses, one thing is apt to impress you above all else...and that is the deep-rooted affection which Fortress crews have for the sturdy ships which bring them back to their bases, time and again, from fierce battles with the enemy forces.

Consider the case of the Fortress which fought off half a hundred Nazis for twenty minutes and then limped home with her left wing severely damaged, her inboard engine dead, and more than 2000 bullet holes in her tough hide. At the height of the action the skipper told his crew they could jump. "Sorry, sir," they called back over the interphone, "we're too busy shooting down Fickle-Walls."

Or this, by another pilot: "We were traveling between 410 and 450 miles an hour. According to the slide rules, there was no chance of our pulling out of the dive. But we were genies if we didn't try. There were tearing noises; the bombs were crunching through the bottom. Then the Fortress came up level, and the wings were still with us! She's a great ship, and you know what I mean when I say great!"

Back of stories like these, and the plane that inspires them, there must be designing and engineering and manufacturing skills of high degree. The Boeing engineering staff numbers over 3,000, and includes many with experience in over 50 distinct fields, structural, electrical, hydraulic, acoustical, metallurgical and many others.

Boeing products have consistently met or exceeded all claims made for them. To-day, it will likewise be true tomorrow...if it's "Built by Boeing" it's bound to be good.
Photos That Say it All ➤ Deployment

Normandy Then & Now ➤ Juno Beach at Bernieres sur Mer

June 6, 1944: German prisoners-of-war march along Juno Beach landing area to a ship taking them to England, after they were captured by Canadian troops at Bernieres Sur Mer, France. Today tourists sunbathe at the same landing area where Canadian troops came ashore on D-Day.

Have You Heard? ➤ Catholic Horses

A punter (gambler) was at the horse races playing the ponies and all but losing his shirt. He noticed a Priest step out onto the track and blessed the forehead of one of the horses lining up for the 4th race.

Lo and behold, that horse, a very long shot, won the race. Next race, as the horses lined up, the Priest stepped onto the track. Sure enough, he blessed one of the horses. The punter made a beeline for a betting window and placed a small bet on the horse. Again, even though it was another long shot, the horse won the race.

He collected his winnings, and anxiously waited to see which horse the Priest would bless next. He bet big on it, and it won. As the races continued the Priest kept blessing long shots, and each one ended up
The punter was elated. He made a quick dash to the ATM, withdrew all his savings, and awaited for the Priest's blessing that would tell him which horse to bet on.

True to his pattern, the Priest stepped onto the track for the last race and blessed the forehead of an old nag that was the longest shot of the day. This time the priest blessed the eyes, ears, and hooves of the old nag. The punter knew he had a winner and bet every cent he owned on the old nag. He watched dumbfounded as the old nag came in last. In a state of shock, he went to the track area where the Priest was.

Confronting Him, he demanded, 'Father! What happened? All day long you blessed horses and they all won. Then in the last race, the horse you blessed lost by a mile. Now, thanks to you I've lost every cent of my savings!'.

The Priest nodded wisely and with sympathy. 'Son,' he said, 'that's the problem with you Protestants, you can't tell the difference between a simple blessing and last rites!'

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They Grew Up to Be? ► Claire Danes

Claire Danes (My So-Called Life)

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Interesting Ideas ► Hiding Money When Traveling
Moments in US History ► Alcatraz, 1963

The last prisoners leaving Alcatraz, 1963

Words You Don't Hear anymore

- If you pull that stunt again, I am going to wear you out!
- Don't lose that button; I'll sew it back on after a while.
- Wash under your neck before you come to the table, you have beads of dirt and sweat all under there.
- Get out from under the sewing machine; pumping it messes up the thread!
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