THIS BULLETIN CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pg</th>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>China Territorial Claims</td>
<td>(PACOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>China Territorial Claims</td>
<td>(01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Military One Source</td>
<td>(01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Commissary Privatization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Commissary Deli Closures</td>
<td>(01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Commissary/Exchange Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>BRAC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>NDAA for 2016</td>
<td>(06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>NDAA for 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>DoD Fraud, Waste, and Abuse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>POW/MIA Recoveries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| * VA * |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pg</th>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>VA Budget 2016</td>
<td>(03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>VA Voluntary Service</td>
<td>(02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>VA Secretary</td>
<td>[39]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>VA OIG</td>
<td>[04]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>VA Performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Agent Orange</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Homeless Vets</td>
<td>[66]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>VA Rural Access</td>
<td>[22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>VA Disability Ratings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>GI Bill</td>
<td>[191]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>VA Innovation Creation Series</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
30 == VECI ------ (VA Program to Promote Economic Success for Veterans)
31 == VA Burial Benefits [35] ---- (Unclaimed Veteran Remains Fact Sheet)
33 == VA Vet Choice Program [16] ---- (VFW | Hurry Up and Wait Report)
34 == VA Vet Choice Program [17] ------- (One Simplified Program Needed)
35 == VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse -------------- (Reported 16 thru 31 May 2015)
35 == VAMC Aurora CO [10] --- (Rotten Reputation among Subcontractors)
37 == VAMC Aurora CO [11] ------- (Congress Funds 3 More Weeks Only)
38 == VAMC Orlando FL [08] -- (MAY Dedication Years Behind Schedule)
38 == VARO Indianapolis ------------------ (Claim Error Rate Drops to 21%)

* VETS *

39 == Feres Doctrine [06] ------ (Lawsuit Dismissed Because of Genesis Test)
40 == Kansas Vet Tuition ---------- (All Vets, Active Duty, and their Families)
40 == Vet Jobs [177] ---------------------- (TV Industry Boot Camp)
41 == Vet Student Loans ---- (Navient Corp | DOJ Secures $60M in Refunds)
42 == Atomic Vets [09] ------------- (Pacific Proving Grounds’ Forgotten Few)
44 == Vietnam Hmong Veterans [01] ------- (Arlington Commemoration)
46 == OBIT | Stanford--Alan ------------------ (10 Jan 2015)
47 == World War I Memorial [04] ---------- (Design Competition Begins)
47 == Vet End of Life Care [02] ------------- (Madigan AMC Palliative Care)
48 == Retiree Appreciation Days ----------------- (As of 29 May 2015)
49 == Vet Hiring Fairs ------------------------- (01 thru 30 Jun 2015)
50 == WWII Vets [87] ---------------------- (Thompson–Brad)
51 == Vet State Benefits & Discounts ----------------- (Maryland 2015)

* VET LEGISLATION *

52 == Cold War Medal [05] -------------- (H.R.2067 | Recognition Overdue)
53 == DIC [08] --- (H.R.2539 | $350 Monthly Increase + Offset Elimination)
53 == House Vet Bill Progress ------------------- (20 May 2015)
54 == VA Admonishment/Reprimand --- (H.R.1038 | Personnel File Entries)
56 == VA Vet Choice Program [18] -------------- (S.1463 | Amend 40-Mile Rule)
57 == CA Vet Legislation [09] ------- (Support AB 1275 | Eliminate Vet Tax)
59 == Vet Bills Submitted to 114th Congress ------------- (150515 to 150531)

* MILITARY *

62 == Military Retirement Pay [02] -------------- (Proposed | Better or Worse)
64 == Arizona Memorial [07] ----- (Collison | Tours Suspended Indefinitely)
65 == Casualty Assistance [02] ------------- (When a Soldier's Life Ends)
67 == USS Samuel B. Roberts ------ ( Decommissioned | Will There Be a 4th)
69 == Boneyard ------ (Largest Airplane Repository & Preservation Facility)
70 == 3DMobileID Binocular ------- (Identifies Individuals at 225 Meters)
71 == X-37B Space Plane ------ (Successfully Launched on 4th Test Flight)
72 == Invisibility Cloak ------------------ (Perhaps in Less Than Two Years)
73 == MOH Awards [03] --------- (WWI | Henry Johnson & William Shemin)
74 == Medal of Honor Citations ----------- (Graham~James A | Vietnam | VN)

* MILITARY HISTORY *

76 == Aviation Art ------------------------ (Magnificent Fight, The)
76 == Saving Sammy B --------------------- (A Frigate's Heroic Legacy)
76 == Military Trivia 107 ----------------- Tokyo Rose | A G.I. Invention
79 == Military History ------------------- (WWII Operation Starvation)
81 == Vietnam at 50 ---------------------- (Operation Rolling Thunder)
83 == D-Day ----------------------------- (Utah Beach Weapons Carrier 6 JUN)
84 == WWII Prewar Events ----------------- (Dust Bowl APR 1935)
84 == WWII PostWar Events --------------- (International Military Tribunal Apr 1947)
85 == Spanish American War Images 73 ---- (Col. Charles A. Wikoff KIA)
85 == Military History Anniversaries ------ (01 thru 30 Jun)
85 == WWI in Photos 126 ------------------ (Over the Top)
86 == Faces of WAR (WWII) - (Coventry Cathedral Mother's Day Services)

* HEALTH CARE *

86 == TRICARE Pharmacy Copay [13] ------- (SASC Proposes Doubling)
88 == TRICARE Tools ---------------------- (Learn About Your Benefit)
88 == TRICARE Use While Traveling [02] ---------- (Webinar 3 JUN)
89 == TRICARE Overseas Program [01] -- (Direct Deposit Reimbursement)
89 == TRICARE Allergy Coverage [01] ---------- (Season Is Here)
90 == TRICARE Prior Authorization [02] ------- (A Medical Best Practice)
91 == Sunburn [03] ------------------------ (More on Treatment Options)
93 == TRICARE Speech Therapy --------------- (Coverage)
94 == TRICARE Auditory Care ----------- (Newborns and Active Duty Only)
95 == Veteran Hearing Loss --------------- (Most Widespread Injury)

* FINANCES *

96 == Reverse Mortgage [01] ------------- (Things the Ads Don’t Tell You)
98 == Saving Money --------------------- (Cell Phone Plans Update 01)
99 == Fake Debt Collectors Scam ---------- (How to Avoid)
100 == Lottery Sharing Scam --------------- (How to Avoid)
101 == Tax Burden for Texas Retired Vets ----- (As of May 2015)
102 == Tax Burden for Hawaii Residents -------------- (As of May 2015)
103 == Thrift Savings Plan 2015 -------- (Share Prices + YTD Gain or Loss)

* GENERAL INTEREST *

104 == Notes of Interest ------------------ (15 thru 31 May 2015)
106 == Library of Congress ----------- (New Service | That All May Read)
106 == Insomnia ------------------------ (4-7-8 Breathing Technique)
108 == Car MPG [02] --------------------- (How to Increase Up to 70%)
109 == Belty -------------------------- (No Need for Stretchy Pants)
110 == RP~China Dispute [09] --------- (Rights Asserted after U.S. Flight)
China Territorial Claims  ► PACOM | Outrageous and Preposterous

Incoming U.S. Pacific Command head Adm. Harry Harris slammed China’s claims in the South China Sea as “outrageous” and “preposterous” in a recent TIME Magazine interview. China has established a pattern of deliberately provocative actions in recent months and has been unclear about its claims to vast swathes of the South China Sea, Harris said, accusing China of destabilizing the region. “I have been critical of China for a pattern of provocative actions that they’ve begun in the recent past. Like unilaterally declaring an air-defense identification zone over the East China Sea, parking a mobile oil platform off the Vietnam coast, and their lack of clarity on their outrageous claim — preposterous claim, really — to 90% of the South China Sea,” Harris told Time.
Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr. (left) sees his background as an Asian American as useful in helping the U.S. forge better relationships with its allies and other powers.

“All these examples, I think, are inconsistent with international laws and norms. They make China’s neighbors nervous, it increases tensions in the region, and I think they are destabilizing for peace in the region.” Harris also accused China of building the islands for military purposes, though China has played down the planned military uses of the islands. “They have manufactured land there at a staggering pace just in the last months. They’ve created about 2,000 acres of these man-made islands,” Harris said. “That’s equivalent to about 1,500 football fields, if I get my math right, and they’re still going. “They’ve also made massive construction projects on artificial islands for what are clearly, in my point of view, military purposes, including large airstrips and ports.” A spokesman for the Chinese defense ministry said 26 MAY that the islands would be used primarily for more benign purposes, such as disaster mitigation, fisheries protection and weather monitoring. U.S. officials say that two large artillery vehicles have been detected on one of the artificial islands. The discovery, made at least several weeks ago by the U.S., underscores ongoing concerns that China will try to use the land reclamation projects for military purposes. You can read Harris’s full interview at http://time.com/3895434/admiral-harry-harris-us-pacific-command-china-japan-asia. [Source: NavyTimes Scoop Deck | David Larter | May 28, 2015 ++]

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**China Territorial Claims Update 01 | SECDEF | Will Lead to Isolation**

US Defense Secretary Ash Carter warned China 27 MAY that attempts to expand its influence in the South China Sea will ultimately lead to isolation for the Pacific power. Speaking in Honolulu at the change of command for US Pacific Command, Carter reaffirmed that the US does not respect Chinese attempts to broaden their sovereign territory through the development of man-made islands in the region. China has claimed those lands as part of its territory, a move other nations in the region believe is a power grab to increase its control of the region. "We want a peaceful resolution of all disputes, and an immediate and lasting halt to land reclamation by any claimant," Carter said in his prepared remarks. "We also oppose any further militarization of disputed features. "And there should be no mistake: The United States will fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows, as we do all around the world."

The latter was perhaps the most forceful comments Carter has made about China’s claims of sovereignty in the region through the first three months of his tenure as secretary. "China is out of step with both international norms that underscore the Asia-Pacific’s security architecture, and the regional consensus in favor of non-coercive approaches to this and other long-standing disputes," Carter said, later adding that the US "will remain the principal security power in the Asia-Pacific for decades to come.” Carter's trip continues.
with visits to the Shangri-La dialogue in Singapore and stops in India and Vietnam. In all three spots, the secretary plans to focus on developing allied capability in the region. "China's actions are bringing countries in the region together in new ways," he said. "And they're increasing demand for American engagement in the Asia-Pacific. We're going to meet it."

A senior defense official told reporters before the speech that the overall trip will focus heavily on developing "that kind of open, inclusive, regional security architecture that we have been building and on which we will continue to build." The Pentagon has certainly viewed partner capacity building as key in the Pacific. Last month, the US and Japan launched an updated framework for its military relationship, while in recent months the Department of State changed its rules for equipment sales to Vietnam to allow the transfer of maritime patrol gear to that nation. [Source: Defense News | Aaron Mehta | May 27, 2015 ++]

Military One Source Update 01 ► Peer Support | Replaces Vets4Warriors

Military OneSource will offer peer support for troops and family members beginning this summer, expanding the military community's options for confidential assistance. The move comes as DoD decided not to renew the contract for the Vets4Warriors program, which provided peer-to-peer support for veterans, service members and families since December 2011. Vets4Warriors has connected callers to people who have walked paths similar to theirs, as part of helping them find resources for support.

Some New Jersey lawmakers have asked Defense Secretary Ash Carter to reconsider the decision on Vets4Warriors, operated by Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care through a call center with about 40 employees in Piscataway, N.J. "We are concerned that by integrating these efforts into the Defense Department's Military OneSource program, the trust in the confidential assistance provided by an organization like Vets4Warriors will be lost," wrote the lawmakers in a May 20 letter to Carter. "Decreasing the number of options available to our service members struggling with mental health concerns seems irresponsible and an unconscionable shirking of our responsibility to service members and their families."
The effort was led by Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr (D-NJ) who signed the letter, as well as New Jersey Sens. Cory Booker (D-NJ), Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-NJ), Rep Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ) and Rwp Tom MacArthur (R-NJ).

Defense officials contend they are not cutting services, but expanding them. "We are widening the network of care, not narrowing it," said Rosemary Freitas Williams, deputy assistant secretary of defense for military community and family policy. Military OneSource, provided through a contract, also is confidential, noted Williams, whose office oversees that program. The Vets4Warriors program, provided by contract through the DoD Suicide Prevention Office, has cost DoD about $5.5 million a year. But cost savings did not drive the decision, said DoD spokeswoman Laura Seal. "What drives our decision making is a steadfast commitment to providing service members and families with the best possible benefits and assistance, which is what expansion of Military OneSource to include peer-to-peer support enables us to do," Seal said.

Vets4Warriors officials referred questions to the Defense Department. Information was not immediately available about whether Vets4Warriors may continue with outside funding. DoD is developing a transition plan to ensure continuity of care for active cases, call forwarding, website queries, email and social media transfers to Military OneSource. Williams said DoD experts have had discussions with Vets4Warriors officials about lessons learned. DoD plans to start offering peer-to-peer support by June 15, Williams said. Such support through Vets4Warriors ends when that contract expires Aug. 15. There is no need to add staff members for the peer support expansion, because a number of the consultants are military spouses, military parents, retirees or veterans, Williams said. Even so, these master's degree-level consultants will get additional training in peer-to-peer support, she said. Peer support has always been an informal part of the
military community. “Military spouses have always been a tight community,” offering each other support, she said, but now the effectiveness of such support has been documented. “The exciting thing is, it’s evidence-based. We know it works,” she said.

The New Jersey lawmakers said the Vets4Warriors program has had more than “130,000 contacts” with service members and their families since its launch in December 2011. As part of the program, the trained peers also follow up with troops, veterans and family members to make sure their needs are met after the initial call. Williams said Military OneSource has about 900,000 contacts each year and also follows up with service members and families. Unlike Vets4Warriors, Military OneSource assistance is available only to retirees, veterans and their families within 180 days after leaving the service. "But no one gets turned away," Williams said. "We do get veterans who are not eligible for Military OneSource to the right place." Consultants do a "warm hand-off" to ensure veterans are connected to the resources that can best help them, she said, noting that the VA has a number of resources, including call centers and peer support, related to mental health. One such VA resources is Vet Centers. "They were peer-to-peer before it was cool," she said.

Callers to Military OneSource can be connected to consultants — all of whom have at least a master's degree in psychology or a social science field and can address a variety of needs in one call. The consultations can be done by telephone, through the Web, face-to-face or by video. People rarely call for one issue or need, Williams said. For example, a military spouse experiencing anxiety might call to find out about a wellness program. While on the phone, the consultant might learn there is a special-needs child in the family, and checks to make sure the spouse is aware of help available through the Exceptional Family Member program. "We want to make sure all their needs are taken care of," Williams said. "Connections help keep people safe," and the peer-to-peer support will provide another way to connect. "This is a decision about providing the best possible benefit to service members, their families and their survivors." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | May 28, 2015 ++]

Commissary Privatization ► Pilot Program

Lawmakers have taken a first step toward privatizing commissaries, approving legislation that would require a pilot program to test the concept of private companies operating at least five commissaries at large installations. The Senate Armed Services Committee approved the plan 14 MAY as part of its version of the 2016 defense authorization bill. According to the committee, the legislation also requires a report on a plan to privatize the Defense Commissary Agency, entirely or in part, and directs the Government Accountability Office to assess potential costs and benefits of having private companies run the stores.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., opposes a requirement in pending legislation that the Defense Commissary Agency try allowing private companies to operate five commissaries.
Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-OK) said he fought hard against the provision in committee and plans to introduce an amendment on the Senate floor to reverse it when the defense bill comes up for consideration by the full chamber. "With all the good in the bill, one of my greatest disappointments was legislation that directs the Department of Defense to privatize military commissaries on a minimum of five major bases and sets into motion the potential for all commissaries to be privatized," Inhofe said in a statement. "It ignores recommendations made by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission in January," he said. That commission recommended consolidating some back-office operational functions of commissaries and exchanges, and allowing commissaries to mark up prices on items to help cover some operational costs. Information was not immediately available about whether the Senate committee has agreed to allow commissaries to mark up prices, as requested by DoD, or has agreed to the Pentagon's request to reduce funding for commissaries.

The privatization pilot program would run for two years, and would require a report to the House and Senate Armed Services committees within 180 days after it ended. A committee aide said the test, if included in the final version of the defense bill, could begin as early as July 2016. "This isn't about hurting commissaries or getting rid of the benefit; it's about finding a more efficient and cost-effective way of delivering the benefit," the aide said. As part of the initiative, lawmakers also have asked DoD to evaluate basic pay and subsistence allowances in relation to privatization of the stores, to ensure that service members would not see a decrease in purchasing power, the aide said. DoD officials would determine whether any changes in pay and allowances might be needed to make up for any decrease in savings as a result of privatization. No similar provision is included in the House version of the annual defense policy bill, which means the commissary privatization provision will have to be discussed later this year when House and Senate lawmakers will meet in a conference committee to reconcile differences in their respective draft bills.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars firmly opposes privatizing military commissaries and the pilot program, said John W. Stroud, the group's national commander. "We want this language stripped from the Senate's version of the defense bill," said Stroud, a retired Air Force first sergeant. "Military commissaries are a key quality-of-life benefit to military service members, their families and to retirees," he said. "You can sometimes find better deals off base, but nowhere near the overall 30 percent savings that commissaries provide." He also said any reduction in customer traffic at the commissary would cause a corresponding reduction in customer traffic at exchange service stores, which would directly affect the exchanges' contributions to a variety of military morale, welfare and recreation programs. [Source: Military Times | Karen Jowers | May 15, 2015 ++]

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**Commissary Deli Closures Update 01 ➤ 44 to Reopen 44 by 30 JUN**

Customers at 44 commissaries in 21 states where deli-bakery services had been suspended will see full services restored by the end of June, according to officials with the Defense Commissary Agency. Military Deli and Bakery Services, Inc., has been awarded the contract, which starts 1 JUN. The company will take over the operations in a phased roll out, with deli-bakery services expected to be in place at all 44 stores by the end of June. In stores where fresh sushi bars previously had been offered, the rollout of those services should be complete by mid-July, officials said. Since the end of February, DeCA has been providing limited deli-bakery services at all the affected commissaries except for Fort Sill, Oklahoma, officials said. The services were provided primarily by hiring many of the former contractor's employees on temporary appointments as government employees. The new contract will allow DeCA to transition the 44 stores back to contractor-operated deli-bakeries, said DeCA director Joseph Jeu, in announcing the contract. DeCA terminated the contracts with the previous contractor, Nayyarsons Corp., of New Hyde Park, New York. The 44 commissaries involved (locations with sushi bars are marked with an asterisk):
- Alabama: Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base Annex, Maxwell Air Force Base*, Redstone Arsenal*, Fort Rucker*
- Arkansas: Little Rock Air Force Base*
- Illinois: Scott Air Force Base*, Naval Station Great Lakes*
- Indiana: Harrison Village
- Kansas: McConnell Air Force Base*, Fort Leavenworth*, Fort Riley*
- Kentucky: Fort Campbell*, Fort Knox*
- Louisiana: Barksdale Air Force Base*, Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans, Fort Polk*
- Michigan: Selfridge Air National Guard Base
- Mississippi: Columbus Air Force Base*, Naval Construction Battalion Center Gulfport*, Keesler Air Force Base*
- Missouri: Fort Leonard Wood*, Whiteman Air Force Base
- Nebraska: Offutt Air Force Base*
- North Dakota: Grand Forks Air Force Base, Minot Air Force Base*
- Ohio: Wright-Patterson Air Force Base*
- Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh Area
- South Dakota: Ellsworth Air Force Base*
- Tennessee: Naval Support Activity Mid-South (Memphis)*
- Texas: Fort Bliss*, Sheppard Air Force Base*
- Wyoming: F.E. Warren Air Force Base

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | May 21, 2015 2014 ++]

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**Commissary/Exchange Survey**  ►  All Users Asked to Participate

Eligible patrons of commissaries and military exchanges are requested to participate in a 20-25 minute survey being conducted to better understand their grocery shopping habits. This work is part of a study commissioned by the National Defense Authorization Act for 2015 and is a critical component of maintaining and expanding the important benefits of the military resale system. Your input will ultimately be an important component to a study that will go to Congress later this year on the best direction to take the military resale system. In addition to your opinion, DoD would appreciate the input of any other members of your family that use Commissaries or military exchanges as your dependent. To access the survey go to [http://www8.intellisurvey.com/run/xuj040115?pan=99&b=24](http://www8.intellisurvey.com/run/xuj040115?pan=99&b=24).

If you choose to participate in this voluntary survey, your answers will be completely anonymous and analyzed in combination with other members' responses, so please give your candid feedback. This survey will be open until June 1, 2015, and you will be able to respond any time day or night until the deadline. We greatly appreciate your time and input. This survey has been assigned report control symbol DD-P&R(OT)2585. If you have technical difficulties with the survey or questions regarding the survey itself please contact Mr. Patrick Fitzmaurice at [mailto:militaryresalesurvey@study.bcg.com](mailto:militaryresalesurvey@study.bcg.com). The Office of the
Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs has hired an independent commercial firm to administer this study. For questions concerning survey authorization and DoD sponsorship, contact Justin Hall, GS-15, Assistant Director, MWR and Resale Policy Directorate at justin.w.hall10.civ@mail.mil.

[Source: Military Resale Study | Justin Hall | May 30, 2015 ++]

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BRAC Update 43 ► First Step in House NDAA Bill

Pentagon officials won't get congressional permission for a new base closure round next year. But they might be inching closer. Both the House and Senate versions of the 2016 defense authorization bill again prohibit a new base closure round, despite defense leaders' repeated pleas for the infrastructure reduction tool. Lawmakers have called the process too costly financially and in terms of public support, especially given the divisive nature of the 2005 base closing round. However, the House did include language in its draft bill calling for a military wide review of "force-structure plans and infrastructure inventory" that outsiders hope could be the precursor to another base closure round, by providing better justification for the need to shutter some military facilities. "To lose the prohibition on planning or investigating a new BRAC … that's the first step," Ryan Crotty, deputy director for defense budget analysis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said during a think-tank event on Capitol Hill last week.

Supporters of a new base closure round have long argued that the military's infrastructure footprint needs to shrink as the fighting force draws down in the wake of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Defense Department officials frequently estimate that they have up to 20 percent excess capacity at stateside bases and argue that a new base closing round could produce billions in annual savings. But lawmakers in recent months have publicly criticized that estimate, noting that it relies on studies done before the 2005 base closure round. They worry that another ambitious closure round could leave the military without critical resources — and, in some cases, their own districts with fewer jobs. "What we've had for the last several years are people pulling estimates out of the air," said House Armed Services Chairman Mac Thornberry, R-Texas. "We need to get a better feel for what the real number, the real situation is with our infrastructure."

The new study calls for a review of possible excess infrastructure (including "the Secretary's objective for the reduction of such excess capacity") and an analysis of "certain excess infrastructure to accommodate contingency, mobilization, or surge requirements." Budget experts at the think-tank event last week were nearly unanimous on the need to trim the number of U.S. military bases, but also acknowledged the political problems that come with such plans. Janine Davidson, senior defense fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, called the House plan a modest but important move by lawmakers. "We absolutely have to move forward on our infrastructure issues," she said. "So it is a great step forward that we get to study this now."

That step ahead still leaves a sizable distance before the military would start closing down bases. A conference committee could still strip the provision calling for the report out of the final defense authorization bill. Even if it survives, the measure still won't become law until later this year. The House plan does not specify a timeline for when the report must be finalized, but does call for defense officials to analyze basing needs for the next two decades starting in fiscal 2017. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | May 18, 2015 ++]
NDAA for 2016 Update 06 ➤ SASC Passes Its Markup

On 14 MAY the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) passed its markup of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2016, which authorizes $612 billion funding for the Department of Defense and the national security programs of the Department of Energy. While the Senate Committee NDAA bill and committee report will not be released until next week a number of provisions have leaked to advocates and the press. It is our understanding that, similar to the House version of the 2016 NDAA, the draft bill would reject both the President’s and the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) radical “reforms” to abolish TRICARE Standard and Prime. The SASC also rejects, as NAUS requested, the Pentagon’s recommendation to burden over age 65 retirees with enrollment fees.

However, unlike the House plan, which provides a full pay raise, the Senate bill would drop the annual across-the-board pay raise, in line with the President’s request, a full percentage point below the measure for private sector wage growth from 2.3 percent to 1.3 percent for members of the uniformed services. The Senate version agrees with the House bill to begin a blended retirement package that includes a Thrift Savings Plan with government-matching member’s contributions up to 5 percent. In line with the unelected MCRMC recommendations and unlike the House plan, SASC would stop the government’s contribution when a service member reaches formal retirement at 20 years of service. Also in line with MCRMC recommendations, SASC would reduce the retirement multiplier to 2.0 from 2.5, resulting in a 20 percent cut to the defined benefits. A member serving 20 years under the current program would receive 50 percent of basic pay, however, under the “blended” plan retirement pay would be 40 percent (20 years’ time 2.0) plus access to TSP at age 65.

This new “modernized” retirement system would apply to members first joining a uniformed service on or after Jan. 1, 2018; current members are grandfathered but may choose to be covered by the new plan. Recognizing the potential for retention problems under its blended plan, the SASC bill would provide continuation pay to service members, serving under the new military retirement system, who reach 12 years of service contingent upon such members agreeing to serve another 4 years of service. A member receiving continuation pay may elect to take the continuation pay in a lump sum or in installments of not more than four payments. To improve financial understanding for TSP decisions, SASC also advances enhanced financial literacy training, as MCRMC recommends, and authorizes $85.0 million for development of the program. It also, authorizes the flexibility for the Secretary of Defense to modify the years of service required for non-disability retirement under the new military retirement system for particular occupational specialties or other groupings in order to facilitate force shaping or to correct manpower shortages within an occupational specialty.

Go to http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/press-releases/senate-armed-services-committee-completes-markup-of-national-defense-authorization-act-for-fiscal-year-2016 to read the bill summary from the Committee. The bill now goes to the full Senate for approval. In the meantime, the House approved its NDAA version 269 to 151. Nothing is final until the two bodies get together and work out differences and the President signs the bill into law. [Source: NAUS Weekly Watchdog | May 15, 2015 ++]

NDAA for 2016 Update 07 ➤ House Approves $612B Bill

House lawmakers on 15 MAY approved a $612 billion defense authorization bill for next year despite objections from Democratic leaders and a White House veto threat over plans to skirt spending caps with
oversized temporary war funds. The measure includes an overhaul of the military's retirement system and rejects a host of pay and benefits trims proposed by the Pentagon. It supports, in principle, a 2.3 percent pay raise for troops, but lacks the legislative language to force that paycheck boost, leaving flexibility for President Obama to go with the lower 1.3 percent raise backed by Pentagon leaders. The bill also includes a host of new policy changes on sexual assault protections and prosecution, reforms to the defense acquisition process, and restrictions on transfer of detainees out of Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The final 269-151 vote came after two days of pleas from Republican leaders to advance the bill. The measure had passed out of the House Armed Services Committee last month on a 60-2 vote and often enjoys bipartisan support even amid the bitter party fights that have become increasingly common on Capitol Hill. But Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), the armed services committee’s ranking Democrat, led efforts to oppose the measure this time over the war funding boost, calling it a gimmick by GOP leaders. The White House has also threatened to veto the measure over the funding breakdown. Administration officials had pushed for the same total level of spending but with congressional action to repeal the spending caps approved in 2011, which would allow increased spending for other agencies as well. Instead, the GOP plan shifted almost $40 billion into the Pentagon’s temporary “overseas contingency operations” war fund and left the overall spending caps in place.

"There are a lot of good things in this bill," Smith said Friday. "But we have one overarching problem, the same that we’ve had since 2011. ... This bill's reliance on the overseas contingency (account) is a problem for the Department of Defense. This doesn't lift the budget caps, and that is harmful." Committee chairman Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX) repeatedly dismissed those concerns and criticized Democrats for using the policy bill as a target for political attacks. "This is one step in the process," Thornberry said. "If there is a better way to deal with these issues in the appropriations bills, there is time to do that." In the end, 143 Democrats voted against the measure, while 41 voted for it.

On 14 MAY, the House also stripped from the bill another controversial provision that would have encouraged military officials to study ways to enlist undocumented immigrants in exchange for a pathway to legal status. The 221-202 vote on that provision — with all House Democrats voting against it — helped shore up GOP support for the measure and temporarily injected the ongoing immigration fight into the defense bill. And just before final passage, Republicans rejected a bid by Democrats to lock in the 2.3 percent pay raise for the troops and also guarantee continued pay for the military in the event of a government shutdown. Republicans said those changes were more about political gamesmanship than strengthening the legislation. The military retirement overhaul would replace the current 20-year, all-or-nothing deal with a "blended" compensation system featuring a 401(k)-style investment plan that promises all future troops will leave the service with some money for retirement. Senate officials have proposed a similar plan, but critics have argued the changes could hurt recruiting and retention.

The differences in those plans — and in the rest of the bills — must be reconciled by a conference committee later this summer, after the Senate's draft of the defense authorization bill is finalized. No voting schedule has been announced in that chamber. The Senate Armed Services Committee's version of the bill, unveiled Thursday, includes the 1.3 percent pay raise, trims to housing allowances and changes to the Tricare health benefit. Pentagon officials have argued those kinds of personnel savings are needed to keep military training and modernization accounts solvent, but outside advocates have blasted service officials for targeting troops' wallets to pay for post-war budget reductions. The authorization bill deliberations are not expected to be resolved until later summer at the earliest. Both chambers also still need to advance their respective defense appropriations plans before the military's fiscal 2016 finances will be settled. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | May 15, 2015 ++]
The U.S. government’s Afghanistan spending watchdog has recommended that three senior Army officers – a lieutenant general, a major general and a colonel – be disciplined for their role in the construction of a $36 million sprawling command center at Camp Leatherneck in Afghanistan that has never been used. The Marines declared an “operational need” in 2010 for a huge headquarters building at the site, to be outfitted with air conditioning, plush seating, and comfortable offices. But the decision to construct a 64,000-square-foot command and control facility has since come to exemplify the U.S. military’s careless waste in Afghanistan. After $36 million was spent on its construction, the tall, windowless building was never, ever used, except perhaps for target practice by the Taliban, according to U.S. officials. The facility was officially turned over to the Afghan army last fall, but it remains empty and sits in a part of Afghanistan where U.S. personnel rarely if ever travel now.

The 64,000 square foot facility is 98 percent complete and sits empty.

The question posed by the initial exposure of this costly debacle in July 2013 is, who was responsible? And will anyone in the military be held accountable? After two internal investigations, and considerable hemming and hawing, the Pentagon’s definitive answer is finally available in a newly released federal report: No one in particular made a bad call, and if the question arose again under similar circumstances today, the same cavernous facility would be still be ordered up. Therefore, no one in the chain of command can or should be held responsible. This reply has outraged several key lawmakers. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, told the Center for Public Integrity in a written statement that the project was a “boondoggle” and that the Pentagon’s claim that its construction was prudent is “patently false.” Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO), a ranking member of the governmental affairs permanent investigations subcommittee, similarly called the facility’s construction “one of the most outrageous, deliberate, and wasteful misuses of taxpayer dollars.” She expressed shock that the Pentagon “completely failed to hold any officials accountable after all the facts came to light.”

Their criticisms were shared by the author of the new federal report, John F. Sopko, the presidentially appointed special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction (SIGAR). In the report, he accused a senior Army general of insisting in August 2010 that the facility be completed merely because Congress had
already agreed to fund it. This decision was made over the objections of three generals who were arguably closer to the U.S. military deployments in Helmand province, where Camp Lea**nerneck was situated, and who were aware that the surge of forces there was unlikely to be long-lasting. One of them sponsored a May 2010 review that declared the command center was “not necessary to execute our mission.” Another general agreed in a memorandum the following month that “this project is no longer required.” And a third said that month that the requirement for a facility “has already been met and thus this project is no longer required.”

These recommendations were rejected by then-Maj. Gen. Peter M. Vangjel, the deputy commander of the Army’s forces attached to Central Command. He said in a note at the time that because Congress had already approved the construction, shifting those funds to another project was “not prudent”—an apparent reflection of the infamous “use it or lose it” ethos that federal bureaucracies use to keep their spending levels intact. Vangjel, who went on to become the Army’s top inspector general before retiring in February, told one of Sopko’s aides that his decision was made with the “knowledge that there would be other opportunities to de-scope, or even cancel the project if the situation dictated.” Even though that never happened and the facility was almost fully finished before its abandonment, Vangjel said that in his opinion, proceeding was “the right decision.” Because Congress had already approved the construction, shifting those funds to another project was “not prudent.”

Robert Work, the deputy secretary of defense, endorsed that decision in a 9 FEB letter to Sopko, saying he was speaking on behalf of then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel. Work wrote that a review showed Vangjel’s decision to proceed over the others’ objections “was prudent” because Camp Lea**nerneck was then “being considered as a potential enduring location for the U.S. military.” Sopko also said the two internal Defense Department probes of the facility’s construction were flawed. One of the investigators—an Army general named James M. Richardson, falsely claimed to have conducted interviews of key decision-makers, Sopko said. Instead, Richardson later said, all questioning was conducted by email. Drafts of the second DOD investigation were sent in advance to the Army general who insisted that the construction proceed, to solicit his comments, Sopko said. Sopko further noted that the top legal adviser to a key Army commander advised colleagues not to cooperate fully with his investigation and called for a “slow roll” approach to answering his inquiries. Sopko called for a determination of “appropriate administrative or disciplinary action” against the adviser, Col. Norman F. Allen.

“SIGAR believes Col. Allen’s actions constituted both misconduct and mismanagement, and violated his professional and ethical responsibilities as an Army lawyer,” Sopko said in his report. Allen, in a written reply to one of Sopko’s aides, denied trying to impede the inquiry or “coach the testimony of witnesses.” Allen, who subsequently moved to the U.S. Special Operations Command legal office in Tampa, said his motive in calling for slow responses to Sopko’s probe was merely to allow enough time for consideration of the legitimacy of its “scope.” What really angered Sopko, however, was the failure of more senior officials at the Pentagon—including those at its own Office of Inspector General—to open their own inquiries into the flawed internal probes. “DOD stated that the DOD IG [had] decided not to investigate, while the DOD IG stated that he declined to investigate because DOD didn’t ask him to,” Sopko summarized. [Source: Center for Public Integrity | R. Jeffrey Smith | May 20, 2015 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 150516 thru 150531

"Keeping the Promise", "Fulfill their Trust" and "No one 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 (73,515) Korean War (7,852), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,627), 1991 Gulf War (5), and Libya (1). 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.dpaa.mil/](http://www.dpaa.mil/) and click on ‘Our Missing’. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

- Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420
- Message: Fill out form on [http://www.dpaa.mil/Contact/ContactUs.aspx](http://www.dpaa.mil/Contact/ContactUs.aspx)

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

**Vietnam**

None

**Korea**

The Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced 21 MAY 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 1st Lt. **Raymond O. Ball**, 31, of Fort Laramie, Wyo., was buried May 19, in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington D.C. In November 1950, Ball was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, when his unit was engaged by a much larger enemy force on the western bank of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. From Dec. 1-2, the Marine Division disengaged from the enemy and began a fighting withdrawal to a more defensible position south, but not before sustaining heavy losses. On Nov. 27, 1950, Ball was killed in action in the vicinity of Hill 1282, while fighting on the western side of the Chosin Reservoir; however, his remains were not recovered after the battle.

**1st Lt. Raymond O. Ball**
In 1954, United Nations and Communist Forces exchanged the remains of war dead in what came to be called “Operation Glory.” All remains recovered in Operation Glory were turned over to the Army Central Identification Unit for analysis. The remains they were unable to identify were interred as unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, known as the “Punchbowl.” In 2012, analysts from the Department of Defense reevaluated Ball’s records and determined that portions of the remains recovered from Operation Glory should be exhumed for identification. To identify Ball’s remains, scientists from DPAA used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, such as radiograph comparison, which matched Ball’s records.

The Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced 18 MAY that the remains of a U.S. soldier, missing from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Cpl. Richard L. Wing, 19, of Toledo, Ohio, will be buried June 5, in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington D.C. In late November 1950, Wing was assigned to Company H, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, which was deployed north and southeast of the town of Kunu-ri, North Korea, when their defensive line was attacked by Chinese forces, forcing the unit to withdraw south to a more defensible position, near the town of Sunchon. Before they could disengage, the 1st Cavalry Division was forced to fight through a series of Chinese roadblocks, commonly known as the Gauntlet. Wing was reported missing in action after the battle. In 1953, returning American soldiers who had been held as prisoners of war reported that Wing had been captured by Chinese forces in November 1950 near Kunu-ri, and died of dysentery in a prisoner of war camp known as Camp 5 in Pyokdong, North Korea.

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 vicinity where Wing was believed to have died. To identify Wing’s remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, to include two forms of DNA analysis; mitochondrial DNA, which matched his sister and brother and Y-STR DNA, which matched his brother.

The Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced 18 MAY that the remains of a serviceman, missing from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Pfc. Elmer P. Richard, 20, of Exeter, N.H., will be buried June 3, in his hometown. In late November 1950, Richard was a member of Battery D, 15th Anti-aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT), operating along the eastern side of the Chosin Reservoir, in North Korea. On Nov. 29, 1950, elements of the 31st RCT, historically known as Task Force Faith, were overwhelmed by Chinese People’s Volunteer forces which forced the 31st RCT to withdraw south to more defensible positions. On Dec. 2, 1950, Richard was reported missing in action. In late 1953, during a prisoner of war exchange, known as Operation Big Switch, a returned U.S. service
member told U.S. debriefers that Richard was captured by Chinese forces and to have died in mid-December 1950, from battle wounds and dysentery. His remains were not among those returned by communist forces during Operation Glory in 1954.

Pfc. Elmer P. Richard

Between 1990 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 Richard was believed to have died. On Oct. 5, 2000, a joint U.S./Democratic People’s Republic Korea (D.P.R.K.) team excavated a secondary burial site where U.S. servicemen were believed to have been buried after the Korean War. The team recovered commingled human remains. To identify Richard’s remains, scientists from the DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and two forms of DNA analysis including: mitochondrial DNA and Y-chromosome Short Tandem Repeat DNA (Y-STR) analysis, which matched his brothers.

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The Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced 18 MAY that the remains of a U.S. soldier, missing from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Pfc. Paul L. Tingle, 36, of Montpelier, Ohio, will be buried June 8, in his hometown. In late 1950, Tingle was assigned to Company I, 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division (ID), which was deployed north and east of the town of Kujang, North Korea, when their defensive line was attacked by Chinese forces, forcing the unit to withdraw south to a more defensible position. Before they could disengage, the 2nd ID was forced to fight through a series of Chinese roadblocks, commonly known as the Gauntlet. Tingle was reported missing in action during the battle. In 1953, returning American soldiers who had been held as prisoners of war reported that Tingle had been captured by Chinese forces and died in a prisoner of war camp known as Camp 5 in Pyokdong, North Korea.

Pfc. Paul L. Tingle

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 with some of the boxes, indicated that some of the remains were recovered from the vicinity where Tingle was believed to have died. In July 2001, a joint U.S./D.P.R.K. team excavated a secondary burial site in a field near Kujang, where they recovered human remains. Those remains, and some of the remains turned
over between 1991 and 1994, were identified as Tingle. To identify Tingle’s remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, to include mitochondrial and autosomal DNA, which matched his sister and nephew.

The Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced 17 MAY 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. Army Cpl. Lindsey C. Lockett, 24, of Richmond, Va., will be buried April 25, in his hometown. In late 1950, Lockett and elements of Medical Detachment, 503rd Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, were occupying a position in the vicinity of Somin-dong, North Korea, when their unit was overwhelmed by Chinese forces. Lockett was reported missing Dec. 1, 1950. In 1954, United Nations and Communist Forces exchanged the remains of war dead in what came to be called “Operation Glory.” All remains recovered in Operation Glory were turned over to the Army Central Identification Unit in Kokura, Japan for analysis. The unidentified remains were interred as unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, known as the “Punchbowl.”

In 2014, with advances in technology, the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii re-examined the records and concluded that the possibility of identification now existed. In the identification of Lockett’s remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and chest radiography which matched his records.

The Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced 22 MAY that the remains of a U.S. soldier, unaccounted for from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Pfc. Charlie Wilcher Jr., 21, of Sanderville, Ga., will be buried June 1, in Jacksonville, Fla. In late November 1950, Wilcher was assigned to Company A, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division (ID), which was deployed near the town of Kujang, North Korea, when their defensive line was attacked by Chinese forces. This attack forced the unit to withdraw south to a more defensible position. Before they could disengage, the 2nd ID suffered extensive casualties, with numerous men being taken captive. Wilcher was reported missing in action Nov. 30, 1950.

Between 1990 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 with some of the boxes, indicated that some of the remains were recovered from the vicinity where Wilcher was believed to have died. From July 3 to July 5, 2001, a joint U.S./Democratic Republic of North Korea (D.P.R.K.) team excavated a purported burial site near Kujang, recovering human remains. Those remains, and some of the remains turned over between 1990 and 1994, were identified as Wilcher. To identify Wilcher’s remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL)
used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, including mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched samples provided by his sister.

**World War II**

The Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced 18 MAY that two U.S. servicemen, missing from World War II, have been identified and are being returned to his family for burial with full military honors. U.S. Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. **Alvin Beethe**, 23, of Elk Creek, Neb., will be buried June 8, in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington D.C. On Nov. 26, 1944, Beethe, of the 393rd Fighter Squadron, 367th Fighter Group, 9th Air Force, was the pilot of an P-38 Lightning that failed to return from a bombing mission against enemy forces near Duren, Germany. Another U.S. aircraft in the mission reported that Beethe’s aircraft crashed near the town of Morschenich. Beethe was reported killed in action and his remains were not recovered. Following the war, the American Graves Registration Command (AGRC) conducted investigations on the loss of Beethe and successfully located his crash site. However, no remains were recovered at that time.

![2nd Lt. Alvin Beethe](image)

In 2008, the Department of Defense (DoD) was notified that private citizens in Germany had located the wartime crash site. A DoD team traveled to Morschenich and surveyed the purported site. In June 2013, another DoD team excavated the site, and recovered human remains and aircraft wreckage. To identify Beethe’s remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used forensic identification tools to include two forms of DNA analysis, mitochondrial DNA, which matched his cousin and Y-chromosome Short Tandem Repeat DNA, which matched his nephew.

The Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced 21 MAY 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 2nd Lt. **Harry B. McGuire**, 24, of Chester, Ill., will be buried June 3, in Saint Louis. On Jan. 30, 1944, McGuire and elements of the 718th Squadron, 449th Bomber Group, 15th Air Force, were flying out of Grottaglie, Italy on a bombing missing. McGuire was the navigator of a ten-man B-24H Liberator that was shot down by enemy forces while returning from the mission against enemy forces near Udine, Italy. According to the flight path, the plane initially was believed to have crashed in the Gulf of Trieste, south of the island of Grado. The remains of two crew members were recovered after the crash and one serviceman parachuted from the aircraft and was captured by enemy forces. The remaining seven crew members including McGuire, were declared dead and non-recoverable.

On Feb. 22, 2010, Department of Defense (DoD) analysts traveled to the Isle of Morgo and interviewed several local Italian nationals who claimed to have information relating to the crash site. The nationals recalled that the plane crashed on Jan. 30, 1944, as it impacted and buried itself in a pond on the island. On May 7, 2014, while assessing logistical requirements for a future recovery, a Department of Defense (DoD) team found material evidence and human remains near the pond. To identify McGuire’s remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used forensic identification tools to include mitochondrial DNA, which matched his nephew.
VA Budget 2016 Update 03  

Senate appropriators approved plans for nearly a 3 percent increase in the Veterans Affairs Department's budget next year, slightly above what House lawmakers approved earlier this month and slightly below what White House officials had asked for. The move all but guarantees the department will see yet another money boost next year, despite tightening budget and spending caps on most other federal agencies. Since the start of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, VA's budget has risen by almost $100 billion, nearly triple the department's total spending in the late 1990s. But the Senate plan also sets up a potentially contentious summer conference fight over next year's VA budget.

Hill conservatives want to curb some of that growth and have pushed for reductions in VA construction funding until high-profile problems with the program are resolved. VA officials insist the White House's full budget request is critical to keep outreach and reform efforts on track. The Senate Appropriations Committee approved a total VA budget of $163.7 billion for fiscal 2016 operations, about $500 million above the House plan and $850 million below the Obama administration's request. The differences in the plans all come in discretionary spending, which totals $69.2 billion in the Senate version. The House plan would trim hundreds of millions in requested spending from major and minor construction accounts, while the Senate's would trim about $100 million in requests for nonrecurring maintenance at medical facilities.

Both plans call for $255 million less than the White House wants for Veterans Health Administration budget accounts, cuts that VA leaders have decried as potentially taking away medical care from tens of thousands of veterans. But Republican planners say those accounts are fully funded without the extra boost, and have accused VA officials of not doing enough to be responsible fiscal stewards in many areas, particularly construction and administrative spending. Democrats in both chambers objected to those trims and broader Republican plans to keep mandatory spending caps on a host of federal agencies in fiscal 2016, which they argued has limited spending even on the uncapped VA accounts. The Senate committee bill must still pass the full Senate before conference committee work can begin on a final deal. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | May 21, 2015 ++]

VA Voluntary Service Update 02  

“Summer of Service”

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced a new nationwide initiative designed to build upon its existing partnerships to grow the number of individuals and organizations serving Veterans in their communities. The Department is renewing its commitment to Veterans and embarking upon a “Summer of Service” that seeks the help of citizens across the country to honor that commitment. “We have made progress over the past year addressing the challenges we face in delivering care and benefits to millions of Veterans
and their families,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald. “While there is more work to do to honor our sacred commitment to Veterans, we also recognize that VA cannot do it alone. We are asking Americans everywhere to join the Summer of Service and help us give back to those who have given so much to our nation.”

In the coming weeks, VA will be working closely with Congressional partners, Veterans Service Organizations, Mayors and local communities, private sector and non-profit organizations, and VA employees to identify new and innovative ways to support VA’s commitment to care for those who “have borne the battle” and their families. As part of VA’s Summer of Service, the Department has committed to holding an open house in VA facilities the week of 28 JUN to spur increased local engagement and welcome members of the community interested in supporting the needs of Veterans. VA has also established the following goals to achieve by Labor Day:

- Increasing Volunteers: Committed to engaging with 100,000 volunteers to support care and benefits programs and local events.
- Increasing Community Partners: Committed to expanding current agreements to provide services and support reaching more than 15,000 Veterans and family.
- Recruiting Medical Professionals: Hiring clinicians and clinical support staff to further expand access to care and homelessness.
- Congress: Host Congressional Members and Staffs at VA facilities across the country.

The Department has an outstanding volunteer program, which will be highlighted throughout the country this summer. VA will build upon the ongoing work of its more than 350,000 employees and 76,000 volunteers around the nation. While the central focus of the campaign will be increasing volunteerism and partnerships, it will also provide individuals and communities an opportunity to support other important priorities. Despite a hiring effort that brought more than 11,000 net new employees onboard over the past year, VA still needs more health care providers, claims specialists, medical support assistants, and cemetery directors to continue to expand needed services. VA’s partners can help by getting the word out this summer.

In the last year, VA has completed more than 46 million appointments, an increase of more than two million from the previous year. Nearly 3 million Veterans received care in the private sector, an increase of more than 44 percent from the previous year. The number of Veterans and Survivors receiving monthly compensation and pension benefits has increased to nearly 5 million. In an effort to improve the Veteran’s customer service experience, VA has begun the most comprehensive re-organization in its history. The initiative, called MyVA, has been guided by ideas and recommendations from Veterans, employees, and stakeholders. “There is no mission nobler than serving Veterans and their families. At VA, we constantly strive to improve the way we do our job,” said McDonald. “State by state, community by community, person by person, there are a number of ways we can all come together to serve Veterans. From expanded partnerships with the private sector and non-profit organizations, to accelerating hiring, to celebrating the commitment of VA employees and volunteers – we need the help of communities everywhere to succeed.”
Volunteers can help to serve Veterans by visiting [http://www.volunteer.va.gov](http://www.volunteer.va.gov) to find out the needs of your local VA facility. To volunteer your services go to [http://www.volunteer.va.gov/apps/VolunteerNow](http://www.volunteer.va.gov/apps/VolunteerNow) and provide your contact data. Follow #VASummerOfService and join VA in caring for America’s Veterans on

- VAntagePoint: [http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage](http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage)
- Twitter: [https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs](https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs)
- Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs](https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs)
- Instagram: [https://instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/](https://instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/)

[Source: VA News Release | May 26, 2015 ++]

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VA Secretary Update 39  ►  Empowering VA Employees

VA secretary Bob McDonald during Government Executive Media Group’s Excellence in Government conference on 15 MAY said, “Serving veterans is the No. 1 priority for the Veterans Affairs Department, but empowering employees is equally important … When a crisis occurs, what organizations do is, they stop training, they stop investing in employees … We have put together a program now where we are going to overinvest in employees. We have no hope of improving the veteran experience if we don’t improve the employee experience.” At the event, McDonald outlined his department wide management reform effort, launched late last year after the debacle involving data manipulation and excessive patient wait times at the Phoenix, Ariz., VA facility surfaced. The last year has featured a series of scathing inspector general reports detailing problems ranging from mail mismanagement and data manipulation to employee retaliation at VA facilities throughout the country.

With his “MyVA” approach, the former chief executive officer of Proctor and Gamble is bringing the business world’s laser-like focus on the customer to a government agency known for intractable bureaucracy. At the top of the agency hierarchy is the veteran, not the secretary, McDonald said Thursday, emphasizing his effort to change the culture and way of thinking within the department. Empowering and training employees comes after the veteran, and is just as important, he said. “The people who then serve those customers should be exalted, they should be trained,” McDonald said. The Office of Personnel Management “had downgraded many of our positions that interfaced with the customer because we had descriptions of those positions that were 20 and 30 years old. [The employees] were undervalued, whereas those people should be exalted.”

McDonald told the audience of government leaders that VA has created an intranet, encouraging employees to share their ideas of “how we can improve.” He also talked about an initiative dubbed “VA 101,” which is “a training program designed by employees for employees to improve the veterans’ experience.” McDonald, who has visited 147 VA facilities across the country since becoming secretary in July 2014, said what he heard from employees was “they felt like they were members of a system that constrained them and that they couldn’t change. I knew I had to change that.” Leadership had been “cocooned
away from employees,” he added, noting that that was one reason why he gave out his cell phone number at a press conference last September.

The secretary has his work cut out for him, especially since every day seems to bring a fresh negative news story or congressional hearing about the department. Several bills are floating around both chambers of Congress that would make it easier to fire misbehaving employees. (The 2014 Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act made it easier to fire senior executives, but many lawmakers have complained the department isn’t using that authority sufficiently.) After Thursday’s event, McDonald said VA should “not be singled out versus other parts of the government” when it comes to making it easier to fire employees or clawing back bonuses, adding it would make it harder for the department to recruit and retain people. “Since I’ve been secretary, we’ve fired 1,000 people. We have investigations ongoing,” he said. “Accountability is important to us.” Asked whether he would support legislation that applied some of those ideas (making it easier to fire federal workers and rescinding the bonuses of bad apples), he said, “I’d have to see the legislation.” [Source: GovExec.com | Kellie Lunney | May 14, 2015 ++]

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VA OIG Update 04 ► More on Unreleased Reports

More than 120 previously unpublished investigations by the Veterans Affairs Department's inspector general, dating as far back as 2006, reveal problems at VA medical centers nationwide ranging from medical malpractice and patient safety concerns to mismanagement, infighting and corruption. VA Assistant Inspector General John Daigh posted the reports on the VA inspector general's website in April after receiving criticism that his office failed to disclose results of an investigation into the Tomah Wisconsin VA Medical Center charging that a psychiatrist prescribed dangerous amounts of painkillers and other medications to patients, resulting in at least one death. Daigh told lawmakers he did not “hide” the results of the Tomah investigation and explained that he routinely closes investigations for a variety of reasons — either the facility under investigation has taken steps to correct the issue, a lawsuit has been filed over an incident, or, in the case of Tomah, allegations were not substantiated.

But lawmakers say procedures that allow VA facilities to fix themselves after being investigated by the department's inspector general make no sense. Pointing to scandals that have plagued VA in the past year, ranging from off-the-books appointment wait lists to construction overruns totaling more than $1 billion to whistleblower intimidation and more, House and Senate lawmakers continue to question VA's commitment to transparency. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) subpoenaed the department last month for all documents related to the Tomah investigation. The same day, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee issued a subpoena for documents related to personnel at the Philadelphia VA. "It is past time for the VA inspector general to be transparent and accountable and to show its work on its Tomah health care inspection," Johnson said. "I will continue to fight to get answers."

Of the reports released in April, 59 contained substantiated claims and made recommendations for VA facilities to address. Another 50 either did not validate allegations or resulted in litigation, prompting the inspector to close those cases. The reports explore the petty — an anonymous complaint that a nurse put hot sauce on a patient's doughnut in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, which went unsubstantiated — to the tragic, including a veteran in San Diego who was prescribed an antacid at a VA emergency room and sent home but died of a heart attack the next day at a civilian hospital. As with the Tomah report, several cases involve doctors overprescribing psychiatric medications or painkillers — an ongoing problem at VA that administrators say they are working to address.

At the Malcolm Randall VA Medical Center in Valdosta, Georgia, a doctor was accused of overprescribing psychotropic drugs to his female patients to the point that several lost their jobs. The
inspector general did not find any instances of veterans having lost employment, but did find that the doctor prescribed medications without performing required heart tests and failed to use current prescribing practices for mental health conditions. In Tampa, Florida, a physician at the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital was counseled for more than two years by supervisors for prescribing controlled substances at rates "significantly higher than his peers." The inspector general found that efforts to mentor the doctor "did not result in changes to his prescribing practices." But because the hospital was proactive in counseling the physician, the IG recommended only that supervisors also notify the Professional Standards Board and closed the case. "While there was potential for harm to patients, we didn't find any patients that were harmed," the IG office wrote in the report. Other reports ranged from poor practices to misrepresentation of credentials to doctor errors.

- In Lebanon, Pennsylvania, a veteran who went into surgery to have a skin cancer removed from his nose had his face set on fire during a surgical mishap. (The same thing happened five years later to a patient at the Martinsburg, West Virginia, VA facility.)
- In Birmingham, Alabama, and elsewhere, the inspector general investigated numerous cases of undiagnosed cancers, including one case of pharyngeal cancer that spread after the primary care doctor failed to place a referral to a specialist.
- In Bay Pines, Florida, a veteran broke his leg at the hospital and it was not recognized or treated for a week.
- At the VA Central Iowa Health Care System, a doctor conducted unauthorized research on patients — namely subjecting them to an extra radiological exam — without their consent or the approval of an independent board.
- At the Hampton, Virginia, VA, the system for monitoring patients worked only intermittently for three years, allowing elderly patients with dementia to wander away from the facility.

In addition to patient safety and health problems, the reports unveiled an abundance of personnel problems, from a foreign medical student representing himself as a doctor and sexually harassing other employees at the Michael DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston, to a "toxic" work environment on the night shift at the intensive care unit among "cliques of nurses" in Tucson, Arizona. In one case at the James Haley Medical Center in Tampa, the IG was called in to examine allegations that the spouse of a wounded patient on the ward had made outlandish demands, resulting in a poor work environment for staff and general unhappiness among other patients and their families. According to the allegations, the spouse refused to allow anyone to enter her husband's room without permission, demanded one-on-one 24-hour care for her husband and asked that the floor, which had open visiting hours to encourage families and children to visit, be quiet from 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. so her husband could rest after an exhausting day of physical therapy. The IG was called in after families threatened to go to the media with allegations that the patient received preferential treatment. Not surprisingly, a handful of the allegations in that case were substantiated, including one verifying that a "slanderous accusation" was made about the veteran's wife, according to the IG report.

Daigh told lawmakers last month that his office produces 60 "hotline" reports a year and receives about 50,000 tips or calls annually. He added that all closed reports are made available to members of Congress or can be obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request. But for lawmakers, these reassurances are not good enough. Both the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees have stepped up their oversight of the VA and its IG office as a result of continued problems and have promised additional legislative measures to ensure the department complies with transparency and investigation laws. "VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson recently said, 'I don't expect anybody to give that trust back, I expect we're going to have to earn it back,' If VA truly wants to be transparent and open, one of the first things it needs to do is to stop impeding this committee's oversight investigations," said House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL). [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | May 17, 2015 ++]
VA Performance Update 06  ► House Speaker Boehner’s Opinion

Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) took to the House floor on 20 MAY to blast the lack of significant progress at the Department of Veterans' Affairs in processing benefits claims. Boehner's speech fell a week before the one-year anniversary of Eric Shinseki resigning as Secretary of Veterans’ Affairs, as well as the upcoming Memorial Day holiday. Boehner noted that wait times for veterans seeking health care remain about the same despite Congress passing legislation last year providing $16.3 billion to help cut down on the backlog. "This isn't run-of-the-mill incompetence. It's arrogance. And it's arrogance that allows our veterans to be lied to, ignored, and frankly left to die," Boehner said.

The Speaker questioned why employees at VA facilities that tried to conceal wait times were mostly transferred, allowed to retire, or put on paid leave. "If only the Veterans Administration did half as good a job of taking care of the bureaucrats as they do our veterans, we'd be in a lot better shape," Boehner said. The law approved by Congress last year allows veterans to seek private care outside VA medical facilities and provides funding for the VA to hire more doctors. Public outrage over extended wait times at VA hospitals gave momentum to the legislation last year and spurred Shinseki's resignation. An inspector general report found that patients at a VA hospital in Phoenix waited an average of 115 days for an initial doctor's appointment, despite official data that claimed they only waited 24 days. [Source: The Hill | Cristina Marcos | May 20, 2015 ++]

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Agent Orange | C-123 Aircraft Update 13  ► VA Care Remains in Limbo

Nearly five months after a federal advisory board concluded that Air Force reservists were exposed to Agent Orange years after their C-123 aircraft were used to spray the toxic defoliant in Vietnam, the former troops are still waiting for medical benefits from the VA. An Institute of Medicine scientific panel concluded in January that the reserve members were exposed to chemical residue that could elevate their risk for developing illnesses associated with Agent Orange, including certain cancers, Parkinson's disease, amyloidosis and diabetes. On the day the report was released, VA Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning Dr. Linda Schwartz said the department needed to determine who may have been affected and whether legislation was required to give these former service members health care and compensation.
Under VA policy, veterans may be eligible for services if they served on active duty and were discharged or released under conditions other than honorable. "Active duty," according to VA, is defined as having served in the active component or on any period of active duty for training during which a person is disabled or dies from an injury or disease during that duty, or any period of inactive duty training during which a person is disabled or dies from an injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty. According to Sens. Richard Burr, R-N.C., and Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., VA officials have been debating the latter portion of that definition, with the VA Office of General Counsel arguing that a reservist must have incurred an injury during training, and the injury must have manifested itself into a disability during that period of training, in order for that member to qualify for services.

Burr and Blumenthal say that argument contradicts previous statements and interpretations made by the same office. In a letter dated April 27, they urged VA Secretary Bob McDonald to resolve the dispute. "We fundamentally disagree. ... This not only contradicts VA's previous interpretations of the same statutory language but also leads to absurd results. For instance, reservists who contracted Ebola while flying patients during training but showed no symptoms until they are in civilian life would not satisfy VA's new-found interpretation," they wrote in the letter, which was co-signed by five other senators. In an address to the Association of Healthcare Journalists on April 24, McDonald told a packed hall of reporters that an announcement regarding these C-123 veterans would be coming in "two weeks." "We should be making an announcement that they would be provided health care. Part of that [has been] deciding: Does Congress need to pass a law [to change the definition] or can we just do a regulation," McDonald said.

The senators said no new legislation is needed. "As secretary, you have the authority to make the decision that would provide these veterans the care and benefits they have earned. We ask that you do so without delay," they wrote in their letter. For those who served on C-123s, including retired Air Force Maj. Wes Carter, who led the effort to obtain recognition and care for these veterans, the delay has been frustrating but comes as little surprise. He has battled the Air Force for at least five years to get an official acknowledgment that the troops were exposed to dioxin levels high enough to make them ill. "Why the pushback, I have no idea," Carter said. "There were, maybe, 2,100 of us? And how many people are we talking about now, a few hundred? Who knows how many are still alive, how many have Tricare or other insurance or how many at this point just don't want to deal with VA?" [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | May 22, 2015 ++]

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Homeless Vets Update 66 ▶ VA Goal to Stay at Zero

Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald said his department's goal of cutting the number of homeless veterans to zero by next January is less important than making sure that number doesn't rise again in years to come. "The important thing is not just to get to zero, but to stay at zero," he said. "How do we build a system that is so capable, that as a homeless veteran moves from Chicago to Los Angeles in the winter, we have the ability to touch them immediately?" On 28 MAY, McDonald addressed about 600 community organizers at the annual National Coalition for Homeless Veterans conference, charging them to keep up the progress thus far as his department's self-imposed deadline approaches. From 2010 to 2013, the number of homeless veterans nationwide dropped more than one-third to about 50,000 individuals, and VA officials expect that number to dip even further when the 2014 estimates are released later this summer.

Meanwhile, VA funding for homeless assistance and prevention programs has jumped from about $2.4 billion in fiscal 2008 to nearly $7 billion for fiscal 2016, providing resources that advocates say were nearly nonexistent a decade ago. Despite the positive trends, the effort to end veterans homelessness will need dramatic strides in coming months to come close to the lofty goal of zero veterans on the streets at the end of 2015. McDonald told the crowd that "we can get to zero, and we can stay at zero," but avoided specifics
related to the year-end timeline. Instead, his charge to the crowd was to make sure their work is sustainable, so that the "scourge of veterans homelessness" cannot return. "We'll work hard, but once all veterans are off the streets, we know our job still isn't done," he said. "More homeless veterans will happen, and we're going to have to move them into housing."

The VA secretary also linked the homeless work to broader departmental reforms underway in the wake of the nationwide patient wait-time problems, highlighting the need for better customer service practices across all VA programs, including homeless outreach efforts. He also emphasized the need to continue partnerships between his department and the community groups, saying that the lingering problems with veterans housing "are going to be solved at the grass-roots level, not in Washington, D.C." This year's conference marks the 25th anniversary of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. Group leaders said the most dramatic change over the years for the group has been the shift in public awareness of the issue, and the shift from managing the problem of homeless veterans to ending it. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | May 27, 2015 ++]

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**VA Rural Access Update 22 ➤ 5/6M Rural Vets Lack Attention, Resources**

About 5.6 million veterans are living in rural regions of America, but public planners still have too limited a view of their struggles to effectively reach them, advocates warn. Officials from the Housing Assistance Council held their annual summit on rural veterans issues Wednesday to push for more attention, outreach and resources for those individuals, who make up more than 11 percent of the total veterans population. Veterans in rural areas are generally older (median age 62) than the overall veterans population (median age 40) and more likely to own their own homes, but less likely to have easy access to a variety of federal health care and employment offerings, according to group research. That leads to challenges even for folks already focused on rural issues.

Jon Dieter, director of community services at Washington Longview Housing Authority, said recent national efforts to solve veterans' homelessness have led to a bounty of new housing resource partners in his state. But when officials tried to expand those efforts from cities to rural regions, the available partners suddenly disappeared. "Like so many other things, you're just not going to find resources for rural veterans unless we push, pull and advocate for them," he said. "A lot of the problems we normally face with helping veterans become so much harder when we're in rural areas." Lawmakers on hand at the summit praised recent efforts by Veterans Affairs officials to expand their rural offerings, but said that won't be enough to truly help veterans in those areas. Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA) said for many older veterans with limited transportation options, traveling to distant VA health care facilities or waiting for mobile care centers to visit their towns is less practical than getting the department to pay for checkups with private-sector doctors. "So we need a different approach," he said. "Too often rural America gets screwed on these kinds of services."

Dieter said his organization was one of the first to use VA housing vouchers normally reserved for urban areas in their rural homeless solutions. Having that kind of flexible view of available tools, advocates argued, can solve veterans' problems more quickly than expecting veterans to change their addresses to access resources. Eric Oberdorfer, research associate at the council, said his group is working on a new public data project to help better highlight the rural veterans population and their specific challenges. The effort won't be complete until 2016, but once finished will enable any interested party to access veterans demographics data on rural counties and regions, to better plan resource placement and outreach efforts. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | May 20, 2015 ++]

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VA Disability Ratings | 100% ► When You Are Allowed to Work

Veterans are often confused about Department of Veterans Affairs 100 percent disability ratings and whether or not they can work if rated at 100 percent. There are four types of 100 percent disability ratings.

1. **Combined.** When a veteran’s service-connected disabilities combine to 100 percent, he can work full-time.

2. **TDIU or IU.** This stands for Total Disability/Individual Unemployability. It is a specific type of claim made by a veteran, requesting he be paid at the 100 percent rate even though his disabilities do not combine to 100. This request is made because the veteran is unable to maintain “gainful employment” because his service-connected disabilities prevent him from doing so. The basic eligibility to file for IU is that the veteran has one disability rated at 60 percent or one at 40 percent and enough other disabilities that result in a combined rating of 70 percent or more. The one disability at 40 percent criteria can be a combined rating of related disabilities. Meeting the basic criteria is not a guarantee that the veteran will be awarded 100 percent under IU. The medical evidence must show that the veteran is unable to work in both a physical and sedentary setting. A veteran not meeting the percentage criteria may still be awarded IU if the disabilities present a unique barrier to gainful employment. If a veteran is granted 100 percent under IU he is prohibited from working full-time, because in filing the claim for IU the veteran is stating he is unable to work because of his service-connected disabilities. Receiving IU is not a bar to all employment. The veteran can work in part-time “marginal” employment and earn up to a certain amount annually.

3. **Temporary 100 percent rating.** If a veteran is hospitalized 21 days or longer or had surgery for a service-connected disability that requires at least a 30-day convalescence period, the VA will pay at the 100 percent rate for the duration of the hospital stay or the convalescence period. For example, if a veteran has a total knee replacement for a service-connected knee disability, the VA will pay 100 percent compensation for 13 months, the standard recovery period for a replacement of a major joint. The duration of 100% temporary disability for any other type of surgery will depend on what the doctor reports as the recovery period.

4. **Permanent and total.** A 100 percent “permanent and total” rating is when the VA acknowledges that the service-connected conditions have no likelihood of improvement and the veteran will remain at 100 percent permanently with no future examinations. The P&T rating provides additional benefits, such as Chapter 35 education benefits for dependents, among others. Veterans sometimes make the mistake of requesting a P&T rating simply because they want education benefits for their dependents. Veterans need to keep in mind that when P&T is requested, all of their service-connected disabilities will be re-evaluated. If improvement is noted during the subsequent examinations, a reduction from 100 percent can be proposed.

Because many veterans are service-connected for conditions that VA says have a “likelihood of improvement,” most ratings are not considered permanent and are subject to future review. The only time veterans can’t work a full-time, gainfully-employed job is if they were awarded 100 percent disability through a claim for IU. Also, a 100 percent rating under either IU or combined ratings may or may not be rated as permanent and total. A temporary 100 percent rating is just that: temporary due to being hospitalized or recovering from surgery on a service-connected condition. It is always best for a veteran to work with an accredited veterans service officer who can explain the complex workings of the VA benefit system. [Source: Montgomery County TN | VSO Sandy Britt | May 21, 2015 ++]

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GI Bill Update 191 ► Resident Rate Requirements Temporary Waiver

In order to make it easier for Veterans and their families to receive their GI Bill benefits where they choose, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs has used his authority to waive the provisions of Section 702 of the Veterans
Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 (Choice Act). This action will ensure all GI Bill students are able to continue training at their chosen institutions. Under Section 702, VA must disapprove education programs at public institutions for Post-9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty (MGIB-AD) benefits if a school charges certain individuals tuition and fees in excess of the resident rate for terms beginning after July 1, 2015.

VA recognizes that the time allotted for states and territories to comply with Section 702 of the Choice Act is challenging for some states and schools due to the process required to make legislative and/or policy changes. This limited waiver by Secretary McDonald covers programs that are not in compliance for all terms beginning prior to January 1, 2016, in order to allow time for non-compliant states and territories to make the requisite legislative and policy changes. VA is requesting all currently non-compliant states and territories to submit their plans to become compliant to VA, through their State Approving Agency, no later than June 15, 2015. “Our military members and their families make sacrifices that require them to pack up and move with little notice,” said Bob McDonald, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “They shouldn’t be penalized after they leave military service by burdensome residency requirements. This waiver will allow students to continue receiving the GI Bill benefits they’ve earned as states work to comply with this important law.”

VA has provided technical assistance to numerous states and many have reached compliance. A list of states that are in compliance is posted on the GI Bill website. VA will update the list as states become compliant. In general, the resident-rate provisions of the Choice Act cover Veterans, as well as their spouses and children, using Post-9/11 GI Bill or MGIB-AD who live in the state where they are attending school and who enrolled within three years of the Veteran’s qualifying discharge. To remain approved, schools must charge tuition and fees at the resident rate to these covered individuals. For more information on GI Bill resident-rate requirements and to see which states comply, visit the GI Bill website at http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/702.asp. Updates will also be posted on the GI Bill Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/gibillEducation. [Source: VA News Release | May 15, 2015 ++]

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VA Innovation Creation Series ► Personal Technology Development

Can you imagine losing the ability to use everyday objects like your phone, typing on a computer or even enjoying a beloved hobby like photography? These are just a few of the challenges that Veterans and civilians with disabilities such as amputations and tremors face every day – and these are the challenges the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) wants to help solve. Through the launch of VA’s Innovation Creation Series for Prosthetics and Assistive Technologies, VA invites all designers, engineers, and problem solvers alike, to help us find creative ways to solve these challenges. The VA Innovation Creation Series aims to accelerate the development of personalized technologies to improve care and quality of life for Veterans. “VA has long been at the forefront of research and technology, discovering new ways to give our Veterans the best care possible,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “We’re reaching out to technology leaders in the corporate world and to the public in order to find creative new solutions to help transform care and quality of life not only for our Veterans, but for the public at large. The innovations that come out of this challenge will benefit the Veterans we care for and will be open source to help advance American medicine.”

The launch of the VA Innovation Creation Series will took place 15 MAY at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System, in Palo Alto, CA. During the event, participants were shown how technology can improve the lives of people with disabilities from Veterans themselves and leaders in the field. VA is looking for the public’s help to solve Challenges experienced by their Veteran patients. These include:

- Development of novel upper and lower extremity devices at the end of prosthesis for daily use.
• Creation of a medication pillbox that allows the flexibility to hold medications that need to be taken up to 8 times a day with a reminder system for each time medication needs to be taken.
• Creating a device that can dampen tremors when someone is performing fine motor tasks.
• Designing a device to remotely change the speed and grip strength of a prosthetic device for our Veterans with upper extremity injuries.
• Creating a way to reassign motions and buttons on gaming controllers to provide alternative access for veterans who are using them in therapy to improve eye hand coordination, fine motor control and/or range of motion.

The VA Innovation Creation Series will accept proposed solutions through the end of June which have been submitted to [http://www.innovation.va.gov/challenge](http://www.innovation.va.gov/challenge). The Series will culminate in a two-day “Make-a-thon” event at Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, VA July 28-29, where the designs submitted by the public online will be built and tested to showcase how they could meet the needs of Veterans. Joining us at these events will be The Ipsos Girls’ Lounge “Pop Up,” which will be focused on celebrating female Veterans, scientists, technologists and engineers. The pop-up can be found at the events in Washington D.C. for the National Maker Faire June 12-13 and at the Make-a-thon finale July 28-29. This launch event serves as a call to all solvers to submit their ideas. More information is available on the VA Innovation Creation Series website at [http://www.innovation.va.gov/challenge](http://www.innovation.va.gov/challenge). Press and participants are encouraged to reserve their space at the events by visiting [www.bit.ly/1zHRxa7](http://www.bit.ly/1zHRxa7).

[Source: VA News Release | May 15, 2015 ++]

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**VECI** ► VA Program to Promote Economic Success For Veterans.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald, with leaders from national and local Veterans service organizations, corporate employers and government agencies, announced the launch of the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative (VECI), an effort focused in a total of 50 U.S. cities to promote economic success for Veterans. The initiative is part of MyVA, which is dedicated to making Veterans the center of all we do. “The best way to get things done for Veterans is to involve partners from both the public and private sectors – national to local,” said McDonald. “If history has shown us anything, it’s that all you have to do is give Veterans an opportunity and they will go beyond anything you could ever envision. Community leaders understand the purpose of MyVA and will find innovative ways to support it.”

The goal of the VECI is to increase education and employment opportunities for America’s Veterans by bringing together local and national employers to coordinate services for Veterans, Servicemembers and military families. With the sacred commitment of making customer service for Veterans the focal point, VA will look to communities around the country to help make the VA the best federal agency. “MyVA will work State by state, community by community, person by person,” said McDonald. “We want to expand our reach and collaboration in communities where Veterans live.” The Veterans Economic Communities Initiative launch event was hosted in Dallas. Secretary McDonald and Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings provided remarks, during the event. Campaign partners also participated in panel discussions on public-private partnerships. Representatives from major corporations such as Hilton and TriWest joined Secretary McDonald in pledging their commitment to furthering Veteran economic opportunities.

The Veterans Economic Communities Initiative includes a VA Economic Liaison in each community who will expand and encourage collaboration among private and public organizations that offer resources related to education, training and employment. Through strategic partnerships, and by offering Veterans innovative forms of learning and employment opportunities, these communities will help Veterans gain competitive career skills and knowledge in locally in-demand fields. Campaign partners include the departments of
Defense and Labor, the Small Business Administration and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in addition to regional and national nonprofits, businesses and educators. The first 25 communities were chosen based on local Veteran unemployment rates, Veteran population and the projected increase in Veteran population. Communities participating in the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative include:

Atlanta, Georgia; El Paso, Texas; Las Vegas, Nevada; New York, New York; San Antonio, Texas; Chicago, Illinois; Honolulu, Hawaii; Los Angeles, California; Norfolk, Virginia; San Diego, California; Cincinnati, Ohio; Houston, Texas; Louisville, Kentucky; Phoenix, Arizona; Seattle, Washington; Colorado Springs, Colorado; Jacksonville, Florida; Miami, Florida; Richmond, Virginia; St. Louis, Missouri; Dallas, Texas; Kansas City, Missouri; Nashville, Tennessee; Riverside, California; Washington, DC

Under the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative, communities will develop scalable, sustainable models over the next two years that include:

- Resources and education for employers on hiring and supporting Veterans.
- Employment summits to connect talented job seekers with local employers who have immediate hiring needs.
- Policy academies where experts generate ideas, form partnerships and make policy recommendations that will help lower the unemployment rate and increase economic opportunities among Veterans and their families.
- Learning or resource hubs to help connect Veterans to economic opportunities including entrepreneurship, credentialing and skills building.

[Source: GovExec.com | Charles S. Clark | April 30, 2015 ++]

VA Burial Benefits Update 35 ► Unclaimed Veteran Remains Fact Sheet

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) works with Veteran service groups, funeral industry partners, public administrators and other concerned citizens to ensure the dignified burial of unclaimed Veterans. “Unclaimed Veterans” are defined as those who die with no next of kin to claim their remains and insufficient funds to cover burial expenses. A VA pension or other compensation is no longer a pre-requisite for these “Unclaimed Veterans” to receive burial benefits. Below is a step-by-step process for determining eligibility and arranging burial for unclaimed Veterans.

Step 1: Determine Eligibility:
- Contact the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 1-800-535-1117 to determine if an identified, unclaimed decedent is a Veteran and eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery. The process may require 48 hours or more; or
- State or tribal Veterans cemeteries also offer burial options for eligible Veterans. Contact the state or tribal Veterans cemetery for eligibility determination and scheduling the burial. A listing is available at http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/cems/listcem.asp.

Step 2: Arrange for the deceased, unclaimed Veteran’s burial in either:
- A National Cemetery - Contact the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 1-800-535-1117 to arrange burial for eligible Veterans in any of VA’s 131 national cemeteries with available space.
- A State or Tribal Veterans Cemetery - Contact the state or tribal Veterans cemetery to schedule the burial. A listing is available at http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/cems/listcem.asp.
- A Private Cemetery - Veterans buried in a private cemetery may be entitled to a headstone or marker. To apply, complete VA Form 40-1330, Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker
Step 3: **Apply for monetary burial benefits associated with the burial of the unclaimed Veteran.**

Eligibility may depend on the Veteran’s place of burial. Monetary Burial Benefits Available for Unclaimed Veterans by Place of Burial

- National Cemetery - Reimbursement for the cost of a Casket or Urn (VA National Cemetery Only), Reimbursement for transportation to a National Cemetery, Burial Allowance
- VA-Funded State or Tribal Veterans’ Cemetery - Burial Allowance
- Private Cemetery - Burial Allowance and Plot Allowance

**Monetary Burial Benefit Descriptions:**

- **Casket or Urn:** An individual or entity that pays for the casket or urn used to inter an unclaimed Veteran, in a VA national cemetery, who died on or after January 10, 2014, may apply for reimbursement of the cost through the National Cemetery Administration. The casket or urn must meet certain standards and must be used for burial or inurnment of the unclaimed Veteran in a national cemetery. Reimbursement is for actual cost, not to exceed an annually established average, published each year in the Federal Register. VA will process claims retroactively to the effective date of the benefit, January 10, 2014. Review [http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/docs/factsheets/retroactive_casketurn_reimbursement.pdf](http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/docs/factsheets/retroactive_casketurn_reimbursement.pdf) for instructions on how to apply.

- **Veteran Remains** – Casket or Urn Reimbursement Program Fact Sheet for instructions on how to apply.

- **Transportation to a National Cemetery:** Any individual or entity that pays for the transportation of an unclaimed Veteran’s remains to a national cemetery for burial may apply for reimbursement of the costs through the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), VA Form 21P-530, Application for Burial Benefits ([http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21P-530-ARE.pdf](http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21P-530-ARE.pdf)). VBA must receive a receipt, preferably on letterhead, showing who paid the costs, the name of the deceased Veteran, the specific transportation expenses incurred, and the dates of the services rendered. Reimbursement will not exceed the cost of transporting the unclaimed Veteran’s remains to the national cemetery closest to the Veteran’s last place of residence in which burial space is available.

- **Burial Allowance:** Any individual or entity that pays for the costs associated with preparing the remains of an unclaimed Veteran for burial or inurnment may be eligible for a burial allowance. Submit burial allowance requests through VBA, using VA Form 21P-530, Application for Burial Benefits. VBA currently reimburses these costs at a flat rate of $300. For more information read VBA’s Burial and Plot-Interment Allowances Fact Sheet at [http://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/burials/burial.pdf](http://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/burials/burial.pdf).

- **Plot Allowances:** Any individual or entity that pays for a plot for the burial of an unclaimed Veteran in a private cemetery may be eligible for a plot allowance. Submit plot allowance requests through VBA, using VA Form 21P-530, Application for Burial Benefits. VBA currently reimburses these costs at a flat rate of $745. For more information read VBA’s Burial and Plot-Interment Allowances Fact Sheet at [http://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/burials/burial.pdf](http://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/burials/burial.pdf)

**Notes:**

- Veterans eligible for burial in a VA national, state or tribal Veterans’ cemetery may receive a headstone or marker, a U.S. Burial Flag and a Presidential Memorial Certificate.
- Applicants should annotate “unclaimed remains” to define relationship to the Veteran when completing VA Form 21P-530, Application for Burial Benefits. Use one VA Form 21P-530, Application for Burial Benefits, to apply for the Transportation Reimbursement, Burial Allowance and Plot Allowance. There will be a separate form for the casket or urn reimbursement when the final rule is published.
If a Veteran dies while at a VA facility under authorized VA admission, and the remains are unclaimed, the facility director will ensure proper burial for the Veteran as defined by VHA Handbook 1601B.04, Decedent Affairs, Section 8, and “Unclaimed Remains.”


If a Veteran dies at a non-VA facility under authorized admission at VA’s expense, and is unclaimed, contact the closest VA healthcare facility to arrange for proper burial of the unclaimed Veteran. Go to http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/division.asp?dnum=1&isFlash=0 for a listing of facilities.

[Source: VA Unclaimed Veteran Remains Fact Sheet | News Release | May 2015 ++]

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VA Vet Choice Program Update 16 ► VFW | Hurry Up and Wait Report

In the wake of the access crisis that rocked the VA health care system last spring, the VFW has compiled a series of reports on the state of VA health care and to evaluate the implementation of important reforms created by the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act. The law included significant reforms designed to offer veterans new options to receive timely, quality health care. The law also included emergency funding to help build capacity within the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system and new authorities allowing the VA secretary to more easily reprimand executive employees.

The VFW first issued a report entitled “Hurry Up and Wait,” to evaluate the state of the VA health care system and identify persistent challenges and potential solutions to ensure VA can deliver quality, timely care to all veterans who have earned it. However the VFW’s work did not end there. After reforms were implemented, the VFW commissioned several surveys to gauge veteran's experiences and evaluate the law’s most significant reform, the Veterans Choice Program. The VFW has analyzed input from more than 9,600 veterans regarding their satisfaction and access to the new program, through which veterans waiting more than 30 days for care or residing more than 40 miles from a VA medical facility are offered an opportunity to receive care from non-VA providers.

The VFW’s initial Veterans Choice Program report included six specific recommendations regarding participation, wait-time standard, geographic eligibility, and non-VA care issues that needed to be addressed. Fortunately, the program has also remained a top priority for VA and Congress, which have addressed several issues that accompanied the program's roll-out. For example, the concerns and advocacy of VFW members led VA to change the way it calculates geographic eligibility from “as the crow flies” distance to driving distance, aligning it with VA beneficiary travel. The VFW continues to play an integral part in identifying issues the Veterans Choice Program faces and recommending reasonable solutions to such issues. On March 11, 2015, the VFW published its third report in its series of reports on the state of the VA health care system and the Veterans Choice Program. The report includes 13 recommendations on how to improve the Veterans Choice Program and VA’s purchased care model to ensure they serve the best interest of America’s veterans.

As of May 1, 2015 the VFW has heard on this issue from more than 9,600 veterans throughout the country. VFW is available to offer direct intervention on behalf of all veterans experiencing problems accessing care via VFW’s national helpline 1-800-839-1899 or email vfw@vfw.org. To read "Hurry Up and Wait” and VFW’s initial, and second report on the Veterans Choice Program, refer to:

VA Vet Choice Program Update 17 ► One Simplified Program Needed

Advocates applauded the progress the Department of Veterans Affairs has made in a much-maligned program to offer private health care to eligible veterans, but said too many are being excluded or are simply unaware of the option. At a hearing of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs on 13 MAY, officials with some of the largest veterans service organizations sounded off on the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act, which is supposed to give veterans living more than 40 miles from a VA facility the option of seeking private care under their VA insurance. The law was passed in response to a VA scandal that began one year ago, with revelations of secret wait lists and patients languishing for months and years before receiving treatment. Implementation of the new rules hit a snag when some patients who lived 40 road miles from a VA facility were denied eligibility because they were closer “as the crow flies,” while others simply weren’t aware they were eligible.

House Committee on Veterans Affairs Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), a harsh critic of VA, said he applauds the department for the choice program and efforts to reform it. “That said, the implementation and administration of the Choice program has been far from perfect, and many veterans are still waiting too long and traveling too far to receive the health care they need,” he said. All of the advocates at the hearing agreed the program is still too complicated, with veterans facing different rules depending on their situation and health conditions, and confusion about who is eligible. “There should be one program for outside VA care and it should be simplified,” Joseph Violante, national legislative director for Disabled Veterans of America, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and the American Legion asked lawmakers to clarify rules on veterans who live within 40 miles of a VA facility that lacks the specialty care they need, so that such veterans can qualify for outside care.

* Veterans of Foreign Wars said more needs to be done to alert veterans of their eligibility.
* Concerned Veterans for America pushed for its own proposal, which would largely privatize VA health care and raise co-pays for newer veterans in exchange for more flexibility to use private care. The VA has rejected the proposal and no other veterans service organization has supported it.
* In submitted testimony, DAV called for the VA to streamline its private care options into a “single integrated extended care network.”

[Source: Stars & Stripes | Heath Druzin | May 13, 2015++]
**VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse**  ►  Reported 16 thru 31 May 2015

**Tampa VAMC** - A man who was supposed to shred documents from a Tampa veterans hospital but instead used them to steal veterans’ personal information is headed to federal prison. **Willie Streater**, 25, of Tampa was sentenced to six years and nine months in federal prison for accessing device fraud and aggravated identity theft, said U.S. Attorney A. Lee Bentley. Streater was also ordered to pay more than $1 million in restitution to the IRS and $25,206, which is equal to his proceeds from his activities. Streater pleaded guilty on 19 MAR. According to court documents, Streater worked at a shredding company that was contracted to shred documents at the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital in Tampa. He stole documents intended for shredding that contained the personal identifying information of U.S. veterans and sold them to people who used the information to file fraudulent tax returns. This case was investigated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General, the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation and the Tampa Police Department.  [Source: Tampa Tribune | May 28, 2015 ++]

**VAMC Aurora CO Update 10**  ►  Rotten Reputation Among Subcontractors

Construction delays and slow payments at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ hospital project in Aurora caused runaway cost overruns as subcontractors stayed away or jacked up their prices, court documents and interviews with company owners show. In one case, project managers were forced to swallow a $25 million sole-source bid from a subcontractor for an item budgeted to cost $10 million. In another, builder Kiewit-Turner twice plied eight steel companies for bids on a small piece of the project when only one would respond, millions of dollars over budget. "It was so incomplete it would be a monumental effort to put a price on it," said Bob Spencer, director of operations for Drake-Williams Steel, which did not bid on that contract. "It was not going to be feasible to do." Drake-Williams held the contract for main structural steel for the medical center, but problems were so widespread that company officials chose not to take additional work. "The project wasn't coming out of the gate the way it should," Spencer said.

The project's rotten reputation among subcontractors — the result of bad blood between the VA and K-T, almost from the start, that eventually spilled into court — was a major reason costs rose so dramatically. In a February 2014 analysis of the project for K-T in a lawsuit against the VA, a consultant blamed the subcontractor problem for much of the $400 million escalation from the budgeted $600 million. "KT's estimate of the construction costs, based largely on actual market prices from a diminishing pool of competitively bid subcontractors, continued to increase through 2013, reaching in excess of $1 billion in July 2013," wrote Allen Aardsma of FTI Consulting in Denver. Since then, estimates put the price at $1.7 billion,
nearly triple its $604 million budget. That makes it the most expensive construction project in the agency's history.

About 85 percent of the medical center and accompanying parking garages are being built by subcontractors, making them crucial to the success of K-T, a joint venture between the Kiewit Corp. and Turner Construction. K-T officials said some subcontractors remain unpaid, although negotiations continue. "Our subcontractors are crucial to completing this important project," spokesman Tom Janssen said. "KT and our subcontractors are waiting for Congress and the VA to come to an agreement on the funding process for the remainder of the project. This is critical." In dozens of cases between 2011 and 2013, companies said they intentionally avoided bidding because of wrangling between the VA and K-T. Some small businesses teetered on insolvency because of late payments, scaring other potential subcontractors into ignoring future work, documents reviewed by The Post show.

Small companies rely on prompt payments to meet payroll and expenses, often unable to cover those costs for very long. Many rely on bank loans and lines of credit to bridge the gap. But some banks balked at letting small business clients rely on its money to work on the VA project. "The bad name of this project is on the street," warned James Chang, a VA resident engineer on the project in December 2012. "No one wants to bid on this project." Other construction jobs around Denver at the time — nearby hospital construction and improvements at Denver International Airport among them — made it easy to avoid the VA work. "Too many other projects out there bidding, so no time for this one," K-T quoted a subcontractor as saying. Another told K-T it simply didn't want to be bothered: "Because of the large amount of time we have into the project with no work procured, we feel our efforts are better spent bidding on other projects."

K-T successfully sued the VA in the U.S. Civilian Board of Contract Appeals over design problems — late blueprints and a variety of miscalculations — the contractor said was the reason why the project cost has exploded. Aardsma, the consultant, blamed late designs in part for the subcontractor problems and, by extension, cost overruns. "The VA's late issuance of a complete, 100% design ... pushed procurement of the subcontracts into a more costly 'bidders market,' " Aardsma wrote. "Subcontractors were not as hungry ... and were more aware of the VA's lack of timely payment for change-order work." Between September 2011 and September 2012, as it haggled over the final cost of the project with K-T, the VA stopped processing change orders tied to the southern clinic building under construction at the time. "This had two impacts," Aardsma wrote. "First, it had the natural and expected effect of giving the project a more risky rating in the eyes of subcontractors because the VA was not timely in recognizing and paying for changes. This was detrimental since the bulk of the project still had to be bid out to the subcontracting community."

The second impact was an inability to determine the costs impacting the clinic building and, by extension, the entire project. In a January 2013 letter, K-T reiterated subcontractor explanations about why they were either avoiding the project or, when they did bid, prices were coming in higher than budgeted. "Appears to be a project with far too many risk (sic)," wrote one; "We have seen that payments ... are at or exceeding 120 days," wrote another; "We have a large $ amount outstanding and can't afford to continue," a third wrote. K-T struggled to keep bids competitive, as with the contract for steel work in which the contractor could find only one bidder. The contract was for "miscellaneous metals," a wide-ranging order that included items from stair rails to elevator pit ladders to restroom knickknacks. In addition to Drake-Williams Steel, Zimmerman Metals also did not bid, sales manager Ted Arellano told The Post. Company officials were worried "many, many months" would expire before it saw a paycheck, Arellano said. The sole bid by RK Specialties Inc. in Henderson was nearly $4.2 million — about $1.7 million higher than what had been budgeted, in part because of design problems, documents show.

In February 2013, lawyers for subcontractor Centerre Government Contracting Group in Denver were flagging U.S. Rep. Ed Perlmutter about subcontractor payment problems, noting that more than 100 change orders totaling about $10 million remained untouched for months. Nearly two dozen smaller companies
Centerre had hired were unpaid; Centerre offered some cash advances to forestall their ruin. "Some of the smaller subcontractors, including minority-owned firms, have experienced financial insolvency," the attorneys wrote Perlmutter, according to a copy of the letter obtained by The Post. The VA finally asked K-T to survey subcontractors about why they were not offering bids. Dozens of e-mails repeated the same thing: Companies would happily work with Kiewit, and had done so previously, but would not work on this VA project. One contractor insisted he be removed from future mailers about this project and any other one tied to the VA. "I have heard too many stories from both subcontractors and attorneys regarding problems and difficulties associated with this project," Wheat Ridge-based Absolute Caulking & Waterproofing president Scott Deering wrote K-T in March 2013. "Though I don't believe everything I hear ... I feel no reason to test the water with this project."

Another business, E Light Electric Services Inc. in Englewood, said the VA connection made it leery of doing any work. "With all that has transpired at the facility, we feel that it is too risky to chase opportunities there," vice president David Wright wrote in an e-mail in February 2014. Great Western Bank had advised a potential subcontractor that it not only would not get financing to work on the VA project, but that it should not even attempt to tap into any of its line of credit for the job. The reason, Great Western senior vice president Michael Bowlby explained in an e-mail, was "due to numerous subcontractors being unpaid as well as the project being underfunded." Congress learned of the problem in April 2014 during testimony about the project's ongoing problems. "This is a cash-flow crisis for businesses on the project," Michael Gifford, president of Associated General Contractors of Colorado, testified before a subcommittee of the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. "Quite frankly, (it's) not a risk that contractors working for a federal agency should have to worry about so they do not have to price anticipated late payments into their initial bids."

[VAMC Aurora CO Update 11 ➤ Congress Funds 3 More Weeks Only

Lawmakers reached a short-term deal 20 MAY to avert a work stoppage on a troubled veterans hospital outside Denver, buying time to negotiate a broader agreement to finish the project, which faces a $1 billion cost overrun. The Veterans Affairs Department was days away from running out of money on the project in the Denver suburb of Aurora. It warned that work would stop — further driving up the cost and delaying completion — unless Congress acted by Sunday to lift a spending cap on the project. House Speaker John Boehner at first refused, demanding that the VA come up with a plan to fund the hospital to completion and make far-reaching internal changes in its culture. He relented Thursday, agreeing to a deal that will fund construction for three more weeks, said Rep. Mike Coffman, a Republican whose district includes the hospital. "I am greatly relieved that we will have more time to negotiate a longer-term deal for the Aurora VA hospital," Coffman said.

Troubled veterans hospital in Aurora, Colo]
The half-finished hospital is expected to cost $1.73 billion to complete, nearly triple the estimates the VA gave last year. The VA has said it needs another $830 million to finish the project as designed and wanted to siphon the money from a fund Congress set up to resolve another scandal, long wait times for veterans to get health care. Republicans and Democrats have balked, saying the VA needs to come up with a different funding plan and fire those responsible for the massive overruns. Negotiations stalled, so the VA pushed for a short-term deal to avert a shutdown. It got a little less than it wanted — Boehner agreed to lift the spending cap by $100 million, to $900 million; the VA had asked for a $200 million increase. The VA has offered to cut the cost by about $55 million by indefinitely delaying construction of a nursing home and a post-traumatic stress disorder clinic on the hospital campus.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald made the following statement regarding the apparent compromise legislation: “I am pleased that Congress has taken action to ensure that construction at the site of the Denver Replacement Medical Center will continue. VA remains committed to doing the right thing for taxpayers and for the nearly 400,000 Colorado Veterans and families that the Aurora hospital will serve. I look forward to working with Congress in the coming weeks to determine a path forward to finishing the campus.” [Source: The Associated Press | Dan Elliott | May 21, 2015 ++]

VAMC Orlando FL Update 08 ► MAY Dedication Years Behind Schedule

The secretary of Veterans Affairs, Robert McDonald, visited the VA hospital at Lake Nona and Lake Baldwin Park 21 MAY, as a part of a national tour focused on overhauling the agency. The medical center was dedicated Tuesday, years behind schedule. The center’s groundbreaking was in 2008 and it had been expected to be completed in 2012. The VA blamed the delays on problems with contractors. “We need to build the infrastructure of VA care and community care today that we need when the veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan age. If we don’t close the gap now, we could be facing another crisis in VA care 20 to 30 years from now,” said McDonald. The complex has 134 inpatient beds, 120 beds in a community living center and a 60-bed rehabilitation facility. The $665 million dollar facility is expected to employ 3,500 workers and serve as many as 115,000 veterans each year. It is scheduled to be fully operational by the end of the year. [Source: WESH Orlando | May 26, 2015 ++]

VARO Indianapolis ► Claim Error Rate Drops to 21%

One day after Hoosiers remembered our fallen heroes, the Director of the Indianapolis VA Regional Benefit Office is speaking out about a recent federal audit into his office. The review, conducted by the Inspector General’s Office, revealed the Indianapolis Regional Office is still making mistakes with disability claims. However the numbers have dropped from about 41% in 2011 to 21% in 2014. “Yes, there is room for improvement. That said, I am extremely pleased that our folks who have worked very hard have made the progress that we have,” said Director Mike Stephens. He added, the audit reflects a sample of disability claims. The overall picture, he said, is much better. “Actually the accuracy rate of our overall workload is 98% which is very good. I’m pleased with that.”

The VA recently moved to an electronic system about two years ago, but Stephens said mistakes would still be a possibility. “At the end of the day it’s still a very human process,” Stephens explained. “We process claims one at a time. One veteran at a time. And that process is subject to human error.” Stephens insisted he and his staff would use the results of the audit to continue to reduce the frequency of errors. “These folks have worked to eliminate 90% of the claims’ backlog here in Indiana over the past three years. We will
continue to stay focused on improving service to veterans using the recent IG findings to help us get better.”
The Inspector General’s Office conducts an audit of the VA Regional Office every three years. [Source: FOX 59 News | Aishah Hasni | May 26, 2015 ++]

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**Feres Doctrine Update 06 ➤ Pacific Because of Genesis Test**

Air Force Capt. Heather Ortiz arrived at Evans Army Community Hospital in Fort Carson, Colorado, on March 16, 2009, to welcome her baby girl to the world via a scheduled cesarean section. Things progressed smoothly until Ortiz was given Zantac, a common heartburn medication, to ward off gastrointestinal issues that could lead to surgical complications. But Ortiz is allergic to Zantac, and her medical records say as much. So she was given Benadryl as a counter. But that medication caused a precipitous drop in her blood pressure — which would not affect Ortiz long-term but carried catastrophic consequences for the baby. The hypotension, combined with an erratic heartbeat and the attending staff's inattention to monitoring the baby's vital signs, deprived the child of oxygen for an extended period, leading to brain damage and severe disabilities, including cerebral palsy, court documents say.

The baby, identified as I.O. in documents, requires around-the-clock medical care and supervision, likely for the rest of her life. Jorge Ortiz, Heather's husband and the baby's father, sued the government on behalf of the child, seeking financial support to help pay for that lifetime of care. The case initially was dismissed by a district court, which cited the Feres doctrine, a law that prevents active-duty service members from suing the government for injuries incurred in the line of duty. Jorge Ortiz appealed. But on 15 MAY, the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals weighed in, ruling in favor of the federal government. Because the baby's injuries were related to an injury caused to an active-duty captain, the government cannot be held accountable, the circuit court judges wrote — with some reluctance — in their decision. "Under [Feres], federal courts lose their subject matter jurisdiction over claims like this because we conclude the injured child's in utero injuries are unmistakably derivative of an injury to her mother," Judge Timothy Tymkovich wrote. "To be sure, the facts here exemplify the overbreadth (and unfairness) of the doctrine, but Feres is not ours to overrule."

If Jorge Ortiz was the active-duty member and his wife a military dependent delivering their baby in a military hospital, the Ortizes very likely would have won the case or received a settlement, said their attorney, Laurie Higginbotham. But the mother's active-duty status and the judges' decision to apply what is known as the "genesis test" for Feres, which asks whether a civilian injury is related to an injury to a service member, led to a ruling that Higginbotham plans to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court as the latest challenge to Feres. According to court documents, the judges decided that although Ortiz suffered no long-term consequences of the drop in blood pressure she experienced, it was an event — an injury — that caused her daughter's permanent disabilities. "At bottom, the source of (Infant Ortiz's) ultimate injury was her servicewoman mother's blood pressure problems," the judges wrote.
Higginbotham called the decision a "tremendous injustice," citing cases in which other appeals courts ruled in favor of the military child injured during childbirth. "We don't think 'genesis' applies. We don't believe the mom was 'injured.' There was a temporary drop in blood pressure and a drop in heart rate. The baby was showing signs of fetal distress and the providers did not respond," Higginbotham said. The family did not respond to a request for an interview. Heather Ortiz is a nurse assigned to the 711th Human Performance Wing at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. A Pentagon review of the military health system released last year showed that from 2010 to 2013, the average rate of injuries to babies during delivery in military hospitals was twice the national average. Nearly 49,000 babies were born in military facilities in the U.S. and overseas in 2013.

Navy Capt. Kathy Beasley, a former Nurse Corps officer who now works in government relations for the Military Officers Association of America, said the complex Ortiz case revives a debate over the extent of the Feres doctrine and its applicability. "This pathetic situation brings attention back to the Feres doctrine itself. I think, based on what I read in the case, that a re-examination of Feres could be in order." Beasley said. The Ortiz's baby girl recently celebrated her sixth birthday. Higginbotham said she lives at home but will never recover from the extensive brain injury she received during childbirth. "I've represented a lot of military families in cases of brain injury and it's a tremendous burden," she said. "Tricare pays for a lot but it doesn't cover everything. This family is basically looking to meet their minimal financial needs, looking for a way to survive." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime, Staff | May 28, 2015 ++]

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**Kansas Vet Tuition**  ►  All Vets, Active Duty, and their Families

Gov. Sam Brownback has signed a bill that would give in-state tuition to all veterans, active duty members of the U.S. military and their families. Brownback signed the bill 29 MAY and said it would help recognize the importance of their service. The measure also would allow employers to show a preference toward qualified veterans when hiring and would protect the jobs of military members that are temporarily called to active duty. Brownback said the reforms could help persuade the Pentagon to not reduce troop levels at Fort Riley in Junction City as a part of an across-the-board downsizing. The Army plans to downsize personnel from a war-time high of 570,000 to 450,000 at the end of 2017. Fort Riley employs about 25,000 military and civilian workers. [Source: The Associated Press | May 29, 2015 ++]

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**Vet Jobs Update 177**  ►  TV Industry Boot Camp

Jon Stewart might not have been a proponent of the Iraq War, but he is all in favor of helping the war's veterans. The TV host has developed a “five-week industry boot camp” that helps veterans find work in television, including his own show. Stewart told the New York Times that even though he’s been developing the program for the past three years, he decided to publicize it now because he is leaving “The Daily Show” in August and wants to encourage other shows to create similar programs to help veterans find employment in the industry. “This is ready to franchise. Please steal our idea,” he said. “It isn’t charity. To be good in this business you have to bring in different voices from different places, and we have this wealth of experience that just wasn’t being tapped.” Though the 52-year-old famously railed against the Iraq War on "The Daily Show," he said that "because I had very strong opinions about what we were doing over there ... I wanted to visit the individuals who were part of the effort to gain a perspective on it."
Jon Stewart

Stewart got the idea for his program in 2013 after he was contacted by the nonprofit mentoring group American Corporate Partners to help a veteran find a job in the industry. Rather than just make a few phone calls for one person, the Emmy winner said he wanted to develop an intensive “crash course” for veterans who wanted to learn about the TV business. Developed by “The Daily Show” staff, the immersive program gives veterans a look at behind-the-scenes careers in fields such as editing and talent booking. Stewart said the program is crucial because “there are well-worn channels into this industry that are closed off to veterans.” “You get into the television industry generally by going to certain colleges known for having good television programs, getting internships and getting to know people who work in the industry,” he added. “A lot of veterans never had that opportunity because they were busy at war. This is a way to give them that chance.”

“The Daily Show” has hired veterans from the program, including Justine Cabulong, a former Marine lieutenant who is now a production coordinator, and Nathan Witmer, an Iraq war veteran employed as an associate field segment producer. “We hear ‘Thank you for your service’ all the time, but here was concrete action, people working to really make a difference,” Witmer said. “And it changed lives. I’m proof of that.”


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Vet Student Loans ► Navient Corp | DOJ Secures $60M in Refunds

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has secured $60 million in refunds for military veterans it contends were illegally charged too much interest on their student loans. The student loan service provider formerly known as Sallie Mae, which has since changed its name to Navient Corp., will begin issuing the refunds next month to 77,795 veterans who were overcharged for their educations. The refunds will range from checks of $10 to more than $100,000. The average veteran will receive about $770 back from Navient, the DOJ noted. This is the first time the federal government has sued a student loan company for charging military veterans too much interest.

Navient agreed last year to settle DOJ charges that it violated the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) by not capping interest rates for certain loans to veterans at 6 percent. The company will begin sending the refunds out next month. Navient disputed the charges from DOJ and says it maintains a commitment to serving veterans. “We demonstrate our appreciation for the service of our service member customers through streamlined access to benefits, information and assistance,” Navient president and CEO Jack Remondi said in a statement. "Our dedicated team of experts provides one-on-one support to assist service members, many of whom are away from home without access to financial documents or computers. We appreciate that the regulators agreed on consistent guidance and an enhanced process, thereby enabling us to offer SCRA benefits to even more service members.” [Source: The Hill | Tim Devaney | May 28, 2015 ++]
Atomic Vets Update 09 ► Pacific Proving Grounds’ Forgotten Few

It was known as the Pacific Proving Grounds, atolls bombed for nuclear testing starting in the 1940s. Decades later, soldiers and civilians in support roles were sent to the Marshall Islands to clean up the nuclear waste. They want to be recognized as “Atomic Veterans” for the health and other benefits the government has paid other service members exposed to nuclear testing years earlier. There are thousands of cleanup veterans there, many already dead from radiation-related diseases. After Bikini Atoll, many of the tests were carried out along the Enewetak Atoll in the Marshall Islands. “These islands held 1.6 explosiveness — the same as Hiroshima — per day for 12 years,” said Ken Kasik, a civilian who ran the military exchange commissary in the Marshall Islands in the late 1970s.

American military servicemen observed those tests from offshore. “They were all made to sit on the deck of the destroyer back-to-back, cross-legged,” one testing veteran who died of cancer had said in a story recounted by Oliver Morgan, a cleanup veteran of the 84th Engineers who came to the islands later. “They could actually see through the guy in front of them because the light was so intense. You could see the X-ray bones of the guy in front of you.” Military service members in the Pacific for the tests are, to the Department of Veterans Affairs, recognized as “Atomic Veterans.” So are other participants in above-ground nuclear tests elsewhere — such as in Nevada on the mainland — and those near Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Atomic Vets and their surviving families get radiation exposure compensation and health benefits.

But that’s not the case for thousands of American service members who, years later, cleaned up America’s nuclear waste in areas still hot with radiation. “There was no fresh water,” Kasik said of the conditions service members endured in the Marshall Islands cleanup. “They had to make the water out of the contaminated ocean water.” Kasik flipped through photos he took of soldiers working in the dirt. “This is radiation,” he said. “This is everybody working in 110-degree heat, no protection. It’s a minefield of radiation.” “Every now and then, they would make us drive our dozers and trucks out into the surf to clean off the soil because the dozer was too contaminated,” said Morgan, who was assigned to the Marshall Islands when he was serving with the Army in the late 1970s. They had no safety equipment. “We were basically in boots, shorts, T-shirt and a hat. The T-shirt was optional,” Morgan said. Photos he had showed many shirtless soldiers shoveling the contaminated soil. “The debris they collected that they put in the vehicles and put on the boats to send to the island to dump into the hole was the same vehicle that took the guys back to work or back to the islands,” Kasik said of the people-movers that doubled as dump trucks. “There was never any decontamination.”
The level of contamination was known. Kasik showed KHON2 reporters two radiation-measurement gadgets he kept from his time in Marshall Islands. “If your badge turns red, get the heck out of there immediately, but there’s nowhere to go,” he said. After his shifts at the exchange store, he would help some military personnel log nightly radiation gadget readings. “At the end of the night, it would all be added up and averaged in,” he said. “So if you have one personnel that had been in a real hot danger zone the whole day and his badge was glowing, but you had 10 personnel that didn’t even leave the island and their badges were red and they were all clean, you would average the 11 people together and then you would throw it away.”

Many of the cleanup veterans and civilians are dead due to a high rate of cancer. Many others are sick, as are many civilians who were there too. “I had 37 cancer spots removed. I had 57 biopsies,” Kasik said. “The other guys that were actually out there and digging in the dirt and breathing all this continually are the ones that are really sick and have gotten internal cancers, brain cancers, tumors.” Sick veterans like Morgan suspect their families are touched too, but they and their families have been denied care. He recounts name after name of soldiers from the cleanup who have already died of cancers of the lung, brain and other organs. Many were in their 30s to late 40s, some made it as long as their early 50s. He calculates a 35-percent cancer rate just among the numbers he knows.

Morgan said, “Their common denominator is that they were all stationed at Lojwa at one time or another in their life, and they weren’t all there at the same time. They’ve all either died of cancer or are in remission at this moment. They basically have to fight tooth and nail to get treatment from VA because they were ‘never there’ or they weren’t ‘exposed to enough radiation’ to give them cancer. We as veterans and as civilians that worked there, we would like to be acknowledged as Atomic Veterans. “Because if we do become sick, we want to be taken care of medically. Cancer is not a cheap way to go, and we don’t want our wives and children to be burdened with the cost of taking care of us. The Atomic Veterans, they get medical, they get their spouses and children get $75,000.” The veterans from the cleanup phase are now in their mid-50s, but battling chronic ailments at a far too younger age compared to their counterparts who didn’t serve in a hot zone.

“I’ve got acute bronchitis,” Morgan said of his own ailments. “I went to the VA here at Tripler (Army Medical Center) and tried to put in a claim as a nuclear veteran. A month or two went by and I went back to check, and the guy basically told me we have no record of you ever being there… I was like, wow, basically you’re making me feel like I’m trying to steal valor?” Morgan was sent to the Marshall Islands in the late 1970s when stationed with the 84th Engineers B Company at Schofield Barracks, but his service record for the time, critical to getting VA-service-related health and disability, just refers to “Hawaii.” That DD-214 service record says nothing of the jaunt to the South Pacific even though he showed photos to KHON2 showing him on the scene, in the cleanup zone, in the late 1970s.

“We’re trying to get our government to basically acknowledge we were even there,” Morgan said. “We have a problem. These were controlled islands. We are not allowed any information about who was there,” Kasik said. “Everybody that went there, the U.S. government knows who they were and when they were there. They were put on those boats, toured the islands, and went up to Lojwa. They were taken off and were told ‘You’re gonna live here and you’re gonna work here.’ Our vets have to somehow prove they were on this island. The only proof they have some of them is pictures that we’ve taken. The U.S. government is saying they were never on that island.”

The U.S. Army Pacific told KHOM2’s Always Investigating they “don’t retain and can’t research individual records,” and that each individual vet, or their surviving family, has to go through the National Archives. “They put all of us on the Lojwa base camp. It’s in the danger field,” Kasik explained. “The northern islands, these are all the hot islands. This is Enewetak (Atoll) way down here. This is Runit where they dumped all the contamination. What they did was pick one island, Lojwa, which is still in the danger zone, and they said will be safe enough as a base camp, and every day we’ll boat our boys from Lojwa up to
the cleanup.” But even if they proved they were there, the veterans still aren’t being included in the Atomic Veterans category, something U.S. Rep. Mark Takai (D-HI) says lawmakers could fight to fix. “Clearly if they were like the VA treats everybody else, including the veterans of today,” Takai said, “they would be rated as service-connected disability and they would be provided with care.”

When Takai was in the state legislature in Hawaii, he led efforts to ask the federal government to count these cleanup personnel as Atomic Veterans. Always Investigating followed up with Takai now that he’s in Congress, and Takai then sent the Department of Veterans Affairs a proposal in writing. “We’re asking them to expand the definition of a veteran in this particular class and we’re hoping for the best,” Takai said. “What would be easiest is for the VA to acknowledge it and to make a change.” If the VA says “sorry can’t do,” Takai told KHON2 he’ll work on a law. He also said helping each veteran prove their presence at the cleanup should be something the military and VA can be more helpful with. “There are records somewhere clearly, and we’ve just got to work toward making that information available,” Takai said. “There might not be one list, there might be some information on how they got there, there might be a manifest, but it’s always better to have it on the service member.”

Short of being recognized as Atomic Veterans for the other benefits, the U.S. Army does have one avenue for assessing at least the health impact for now. The U.S. Army’s Pentagon office told KHON2, “If the U.S. Army were contacted by the veterans administration or a veteran looking for assistance, we would estimate their potential service exposures under our Veterans Radiation Exposure Investigation Program,” said Army spokesman Dave Foster. As for broadening the definition of Atomic Veterans, Takai says what America is doing now, not only for other Atomic Veterans, but for the Marshallese, should set a precedent.

“The Compact of Free Association (COFA) allows for pretty much unfettered access of Marshallese to come to Hawaii or elsewhere,” Takai said. “The federal government is acknowledging that because of the fallout, the Marshallese have health conditions that they need addressing, and we’re also addressing educational and housing as well. That’s an obligation we made to those people decades ago. I think that obligation should extend to service members who went back to those islands and addressed the fallout, addressed the nuclear waste that was still there.” “The federal government is basically paying for their housing, medical, public assistance, schools. It’s costing the federal government hundreds of millions a year to take care of these people,” Morgan said of the Marshallese. “But us? Basically nothing. We’re the forgotten few.” [Source: Hawaii KHON Channel 2 News | Mangieri and Justin Kanno | May 26, 2015 ++]

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Vietnam Hmong Veterans Update 01 ► Arlington Commemoration

The old Green Beret stood as erect as age would allow and remembered his lethal times in Laos. Arrayed before 85-year-old John H. “Scotty” Crerar were Hmong veterans, come together from Fresno, Calif., Anchorage, Alaska, and Minneapolis, all the domestic places where a lost war had cast them. Crerar was their blood brother, one who helped train them and fought alongside them. “We had good students,” Crerar said, “but the part that people forget is that the special forces were learning, too.” A retired Army colonel
with a storied career in special operations, Crerar joined other seasoned Army Special Forces veterans, young congressional staffers and colorfully bedecked Hmong men and women Friday morning in the shadow of an Atlas cedar tree. The Hmong mark May 14-15 as the time when, in 1975, North Vietnamese forces captured the key base used by the CIA and Hmong fighters.

The tree was planted in 1997, next to a small granite marker commemorating Hmong and Lao veterans. The Hmong men, some in suits and a dozen or so in incongruously new camouflage uniforms, and the others were marking a somber anniversary. Forty years ago, North Vietnamese and communist Pathet Lao forces finished off the Royal Lao Army. It was the end of the Kingdom of Laos, and the start of what’s now called the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. The 1975 collapse in Laos scattered the Hmong people, who previously had been recruited by Army Special Forces and CIA operatives during the extended war in Southeast Asia. The Hmong had guarded secret bases and rescued downed U.S. airmen, and they made many sacrifices. By some accounts, upward of 30,000 Hmong died during the secret war, and that does not tally the entire cost.

“Here,” Fresno resident Richard Xiong said through a translator Friday, pointing to his right shoulder, the site of an old war wound. It came, he said, from an AK-47. “Here,” former Clovis, Calif., resident Pasert Lee said in English, pointing to his scalp. “Do you see the scar?” Artillery, Lee explained. Between 1961 and 1975, Xiong said, he served with artillery units fighting the communists. Now he is president of the Fresno-based Lao Veterans of America Institute, one of several nonprofit organizations that advocate on behalf of the Hmong community. Lee said he enlisted to fight the communists on May 21, 1968. He now lives in Anchorage, where he likewise is president of a nonprofit organization aiding the Hmong. Both Lee and Xiong said they came Friday for the same reason. “This is a celebration for all the veterans,” Xiong said.

Nationwide, there are more than a quarter of a million Hmong living in the United States, many congregated in Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Carolina and California’s San Joaquin Valley. Their geographic concentration and the power of their story has given them a little political clout, some of which was on display Friday. Staffers from the offices of Rep. Devin Nunes (R-CA) and Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) among others, participated in the roughly hour-long program at Arlington National Cemetery. Lawmakers themselves, though detained at the Capitol on Friday by unexpected House votes, already had paid their respects by introducing legislation this week on behalf of the Hmong. Bills reintroduced by Costa and others in the House of Representatives and Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and others in the Senate would authorize the burial of Hmong and Lao veterans in U.S. national cemeteries. The lawmakers previously have introduced similar bills; initially, Costa said, to honor the late Hmong military leader Vang Pao, who died in 2011.
On Friday, Vang Pao’s youngest son, Fresno resident Chi Neng Vang, represented the family at the Arlington cemetery commemoration. The 30-year-old, Southern California-born, well-spoken Vang represented, as well, the new generation who know of the parents’ war only through stories. “We are here,” Vang said, “to pay our respects.” [Source: The News Tribune | Michael Doyle | May 15, 2015 ++]

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OBIT | Alan Stanford

Alan Sanford’s, whose Naval crew fired the first American shot of World War II, were interred 20 MAY at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. He died January 10, 2015 at age 91. A native of St. Paul, Minn., he joined Minnesota Naval Militia while in high school. A call to active duty in 1940 led to accelerated graduation from high school and, ultimately, assignment to USS WARD (DD 139) in Pearl Harbor. At 6:37 a.m. on Dec. 7, 1941, Seaman First Class Sanford, an 18-year-old gunner, was aboard the USS Ward, which was guarding the entrance to Pearl Harbor. Just over an hour before the Japanese aerial attack began, crewmen on the destroyer spotted a Japanese mini-submarine trying to sneak into port on the trail of another U.S. ship. “We thought it might have been a toy or who knows,” Mr. Sanford recalled in a National Park Service oral-history interview in 1991. “We never heard of or seen anything like a two-man submarine before.” The sailors described it as cylindrical, about 80 feet long, with an oval-shaped conning tower.

The Ward’s captain, who had been in his bunk, appeared on the bridge wearing a life vest over his pajamas and bathrobe. “All ahead flank, stand by to ram,” he ordered, according to Mr. Sanford. “Commence firing.” Sanford and the other crewmen on the bow gun fired at a range of about 100 yards. He watched the round leave the barrel and barely miss the conning tower. “I thought if it had another coat of paint on the sub, it might have activated the graze fuze,” which detonates when a shell suddenly slows down, Mr. Sanford said in the park service interview. “That’s how close I think we came.” A second gun crew on the Ward fired next, punching a four-inch hole in the starboard side of the conning tower as the destroyer steamed past the sub at a range of about 50 yards. The destroyer followed up with four depth charges. Sea water poured in through the shell hole, the submarine rolled to starboard, and sank in 1,200 feet of water, according to the captain’s report and historians. The captain reported the battle to his superiors via radio, but nothing came of it. USS WARD sank that submarine, which was not believed for many years. He was gratified decades later when the submarine was found and actions of USS WARD were confirmed.

After the war, Sanford earned a degree in mechanical engineering at the University of Miami and went on to an engineering career, including many years at Kennedy Space Center supporting the Gemini, Apollo, Space Shuttle and military spaceflight programs. He was on the support team at the Cape for the safe return of Apollo 13 following a catastrophic in-flight explosion. His engineering career took him to a wide variety of places, including Aruba, Netherlands Antilles and Iran until 1979, when he was among the last Americans to leave following political upheaval. Mr. Sanford was a member of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 764 in McMurray, American Legion Post 175 in Washington, Wireless Association of the South Hills, Titusville
Amateur Radio Club in Florida and Space Coast Florida Chapter of the Pearl Harbor Survivor's Association. A 32nd Degree Mason, he was proud of his Naval service, but more proud of his family.

Surviving are sons Leo Eugene Crimmins and wife Judy of Jackson, Ga., Capt. James Alan Sanford, USN (retired) and wife Patricia of Eighty Four, and Donald Roderick Sanford of Titusville, Fla.; seven grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren. A video is available at http://www.wsj.com/articles/gunner-whose-crew-fired-first-wwii-shot-for-us-is-buried-1432158790. [Source: The Wall Street Journal | May 21, 2015 ++]

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**World War I Memorial Update 04 ➤ Design Competition Begins**

The World War I Centennial Commission is opening a design competition for the new national memorial that will be built a block away from the White House in Pershing Park, which is along Pennsylvania Avenue between 14th and 15th Streets. Officials have set up a two-stage competition and it is open to all. In the first stage, participants will submit narrative and graphic descriptions of a design concept responding to the competition's design goals. Judges will select three to five submissions, and those entries will be further refined and developed in the second stage. The commission will have final decision on the selected design, based on the recommendation of a jury. The submission deadline is July 21, 2015, with the finalists to be announced on Aug. 4, 2015. The commission expects to announce its selected design in January 2016. The design competition formally began 21 MAY and competition rules will be posted on the commission’s website: http://www.worldwar1centennial.org. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | May 15, 2015++]

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**Vet End of Life Care Update 02 ➤ Madigan AMC Palliative Care**

Caring for the nation's veterans at the end of their lives can be a complex task. Service members — especially combat veterans — can struggle with guilt, abandonment and regret. The Army and the Department of Veterans Affairs are working to help them. At one Army hospital south of Seattle, its mission is to make those last days meaningful. Mark Goodwin rode a Harley. He liked to barbecue, and he loved the Seattle Seahawks — the retired Army first sergeant was a season ticket holder. "He's the kind of person that wanted to make sure that everyone else in his life was taken care of," says his wife, Traci Goodwin. "I think that's part of being a soldier, of being a leader. So he was used to looking after people." But when Mark was diagnosed with stage 4 colorectal cancer last year, she says it was Mark who needed someone to look after him.
He ended up at Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, Wash. The Palliative Care Team there helped the couple manage everything from pain care to Mark's veteran benefits. "While we were focused on recovery and healing, they wanted to make sure that all of his documents were in order ... to make sure that I wouldn't be left with a pile of paperwork or unsure of what to do," Traci says. The end of life is an intimate journey. When confronted with it, many are unprepared. To help, Madigan has one of the Army's most comprehensive and well-trained end-of-life teams. It includes physicians, nurses and social workers. Chaplain George Wallace works with the group full time. "Sometimes what emerges are issues of betrayal and guilt. We have these really, really high — almost superhuman — standards. We call it the warrior ethos: 'I'll never quit,' that sort of thing, and that's great," Wallace says. "But it often comes with baggage after the fact, if you feel like you didn't live up, or, 'I left a buddy behind that I couldn't bring home.' "

Col. Kenneth Trzepkowski, chief of palliative care at Madigan Army Medical Center, unfolds one of the handmade quilts donated to the hospital for the palliative care patients and a wall of tributes, prayer cards and notes of appreciation from families whose loved ones have been cared for at Madigan Army Medical Center.

There are other challenges: Some vets are alone at the end of life. They may be estranged from friends and family because of post-traumatic stress or substance abuse issues. It can be a terrifying place, but also ripe for transformation and forgiveness. Wallace says he has witnessed it many times. "You begin to realize that you're running out of time, so that has a way of jarring and opening a space that can be very fruitful," he says. Mark and Traci Goodwin weren't alone. But they still needed help. They spent a year at the medical center — the doctors trying to save him. But the couple knew they were walking on a knife's edge. "When Mark finally realized that perhaps it wasn't going to work out the way we had been praying for, he called them in along with his nursing team and wanted to talk to them, and he actually asked me to leave the room so that he could speak to them in private," Traci says.

She says she was stunned. They'd been married for two decades and told each other everything. Marc Goodwin's request to speak privately with his caregivers revealed the extraordinary relationship he'd built with them. He entrusted them to deliver a message to his wife about his deepest fears during his final hours. "They relayed to me that his concerns were me and how I would deal with it," she says. "I went in after that to give him the peace of saying it's OK. If you are ready, then I can let you go." Mark died the next evening.

When a veteran or a service member dies at Madigan Army Medical Center or the VA, an American flag is placed over the body. As it's wheeled from the room, hospital staff line the hallway. Some salute, others stand at attention, to honor a veteran's service and sacrifice. [Source: NPR KUOW | Patricia Murphy | May 26, 2015 ++]

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Retiree Appreciation Days ➤ As of 29 MAY 2015

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](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html)
- PDF: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf)
- Word: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc)

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | May 29, 2014 ++]

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**Vet Hiring Fairs ➤ 01 thru 30 Jun 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 month. 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](http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events).

**Fort Bliss, TX** - Fort Bliss Hiring Fair  
June 3 - 8:30 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

**Carolina, PR** - San Juan Hiring Fair  
June 5 - 8:30 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

**Japan, AP** - Japanese Theater Transition Summits  
June 7 - 5:00 pm to June 11 - 5:00 pm  Details  Register

**Yokosuka, Japan** - Virtual Job Fair - Yokosuka Transition Summit  
June 8 - 12:00 am to 4:00 am  Details  Register

**Fort Bragg, NC** - Fort Bragg Wounded Veteran & Caregiver Employment Conference  
June 9 - 9:00 am to 2:30 pm  Details  Register

**Okinawa, Japan** - Virtual Job Fair - Okinawa Transition Summit  
June 11 - 12:00 am to 4:00 am  Details  Register

**Fort Dix, NJ** - Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst Hiring Fair  
June 15 - 8:30 am to 3:00 pm  Details  Register

**Columbia, SC** - Columbia Hiring Fair
June 16 - 10:00 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

Buffalo, NY  -  Buffalo Hiring Fair  
June 18 - 8:30 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

Nashville, TN  -  Nashville Hiring Fair  
June 18 - 8:30 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

Fort Gordon, GA  -  Fort Gordon Transition Summit  
June 24 - 4:00 pm to June 25 - 4:00 pm  Details  Register

Arlington, VA  -  Transitioning Senior Military Leadership Networking Reception  
June 25 - 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm  Details  Register

East Rutherford, NJ  -  Greater New York City Hiring Fair  
June 27 - 10:00 am to 1:00 pm  Details  Register

New York, NY  -  New York Hiring Expo with New York Mets  
June 30 - 9:30 am to 3:00 pm  Details  Register

[Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Assn May 29, 2015 ++]

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WWII Vets 87  ►  Brad Thompson

Brad Thompson, a young man from Stephenville, Texas, was spending his last days in the United States Army Air Corps. He was packing up to ship home, when over the Armed Forces Network Radio, came the strains of a new tune that he’d never heard before, “….Gonna take a sentimental journey, gonna set my heart at ease, gonna take a sentimental journey to renew old memories….” “What a way to end it all,” he thought. “We had whipped the enemy and after two-and-a half years overseas, it was time for me to go home. What a time it was, those war years. All Americans were so united and were so riveted and of one mind that no combination of enemies could defeat us,” he continued. “I remember the pride in seeing my friends and neighbors going into the services and the pride and willingness to go myself. “I remember a commander-in-chief that made wise decisions and had unshakable support of the war effort because he knew we were in a must-win situation if America was to survive. The dedication and effort on the home front had never been stronger and has not been equaled since.”

Brad Thompson
Brad and his brother, Templeton, were born in Erath County, were close friends and enlisted in the Army Air Corps on the same day in July, 1943. Both had been working in defense plants, but left those jobs to join the service and from that point until the war was over, their lives took different directions. Temp, as he was called, had two years of ROTC study in his portfolio so he was sent to pilot training school, eventually becoming a Lt. Col. He flew a B-29 in WW II, stayed in the Air Force after that war, trained pilots during the Korean conflict, instructing on B-47’s. During the Cold War, Temp flew a B-32, (4 engine jet), for the Strategic Air Command. He finished his service during Viet Nam with the C-130.

Brother Brad on the other hand loved the idea of flying and always wanted to fly but went into the service as part of the ground crew and spent his time getting planes ready for combat. “Philip Price and I were working the night shift in a defense plant in San Diego when Pearl Harbor was attacked,” Brad said. “We suddenly realized our vulnerability out there on the West Coast. They cut out all the lights and told us not to turn on car lights but if we wanted to go home, to walk. Philip and I walked 42 blocks to our apartment.” Brad left San Diego and went to work in a Fort Worth defense plant and then volunteered for service. He was sent immediately to England because of his experience working in defense plants building aircraft; he was recruited to fit new airplanes for combat. “I went to work on B-17s installing bullet proof glass on both sides of the cockpit as well as the windshield,” Brad said. “A special jettison rail had to be installed on both side windows. We also placed armor plating on the floor for both pilot and co-pilot. We re-located the ammo boxes for more security and installed life rafts over the wing. Many other things went into preparing aircraft for delivery to operational bases.

“After V-E Day, I was part of a replacement pool, awaiting assignment to the Pacific and the anticipated invasion of Japan,” Brad continued. “But then along came President Truman, the Enola Gay, Paul Tibbits and World War II was over. “What a time it was!” he remembered. “The awesome and overwhelming feeling that something almost beyond imagination was about to happen, and then it did! I doubt there will ever be another time like it.”

[Source: Stephanville Empire-Tribune | Joyce Whitis | Nov. 09, 2014 ++]

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State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► Maryland

The state of Maryland provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “Veteran State Benefits – MD” for an overview of the below those benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each refer to http://www.mdva.state.md.us/index.html.

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

Cold War Medal Update 05 ➤ H.R.2067 | Recognition Overdue

As Americans, we have a long and storied tradition of honoring the millions of men and women who have served our country throughout generations of armed conflict. We have built memorials and museums, issued medals, and designated national holidays to commemorate our veterans’ service and ensure that their legacy will live on for generations to come. There also lie heroes that time has forgotten - whose names and actions are not written in the text of history books or etched into the walls of memorials. Millions of brave service members whose commitment to our nation ended the Cold War, after more than forty years. They worked quietly, or behind the scenes but prevented the world from dovetailing into nuclear war.

While the world was focused on wars raging in places like Korea and Vietnam, these men and women worked tirelessly to ensure that the tens of thousands of nuclear missiles the United States and the Soviet Union had aimed at each other’s shores were never launched. They served on remote B-52 bomber bases, maintained missile silos, defended checkpoints and gathered intelligence in order to save our nation, and the world, from the devastating consequences of a nuclear catastrophe. The Cold War ended on December 26, 1991, but our heroes received no parades, celebrations or even so much as a public thank you. Although there were no major battles or combat over the forty-four year span of the Cold War, it is what these men and women prevented from happening that deserves our highest honor and appreciation.

It is long past time that our Cold War veterans receive the proper recognition that they deserve. While Democrats and Republicans rarely agree on much in Washington these days, honoring our veterans is an issue that transcends party lines. That is why Reps. Steve Israel (D-NY) and David Jolly (R-FL) reached across the aisle to introduce legislation that will award a military service medal to members of the Armed Forces who served honorably during the Cold War. The Cold War Service Medal Act of 2015 (H.R. 2067) authorizes the Secretary of Defense to issue medals to members of the U.S. Armed Forces who were honorably discharged after having served on active duty for at least 24 consecutive months during the Cold War, deployed outside the continental United States for at least 30 days during those years, or performed other Cold War service as the Secretary of Defense may prescribe.

The bill’s sponsors are urging their colleagues to bring this legislation to the floor of the House for a vote. They owe it to Cold War veterans and their families to show them the respect and appreciation for their valor and the silent sacrifices they made to protect our country and our freedom. It is never too late to right a wrong, and presenting these men and women with the medal they have earned is the least we can do to honor their courage and their sacrifice. Without them, the war that never was, could have been the war to end all wars. [Source: The Hill | Reps. Steve Israel and David Jolly | May 25, 2015 ++]
DIC Update 08 ► H.R.2539 | $350 Monthly Increase + Offset Elimination

Surviving spouses of veterans who paid the ultimate price would see their Veterans Affairs benefits increase under a bill U.S. Rep. Joe Kennedy III filed last 21 MAY, days before America honors its war dead on Memorial Day. “This has been a hard fight for a long time,” said Gold Star Wives of America member Chris Kinnard, who helped work on the bill. “It will bring tears to our eyes to get it. We’ve worked really hard for it and we appreciate Mr. Kennedy for stepping up to the plate.” Kinnard, whose husband James was killed in Vietnam in 1969, was born in Quincy and previously lived in Rockport before moving to Colorado. Her husband’s family was from Leominster. She said she receives a $1,254 monthly DIC payment, an amount that could increase by $350 under the new bill.

Kennedy’s bill would entitle surviving spouses and children of qualifying veterans to monthly Dependency and Indemnity Compensation worth 55 percent of a fully disabled veteran’s disability payments, increasing the rate from the current 43 percent. Such a move would bring the VA compensation rates for surviving military spouses in line with other military benefits programs as well as benefits granted to spouses of federal civilian employees killed on the job. “It turns out that for some categories of our veterans, they weren’t being treated the same as other service members passing away or even federal employees,” said Kennedy, who represents Massachusetts’ 4th District.

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, or DIC, is a monthly, tax-free payment the Department of Veterans Affairs pays to eligible survivors of qualified veterans and service personnel who are killed while on active duty or die from a service-connected disability.

Survivors of veterans who die from non-service-related conditions but were totally disabled or were prisoners of war may also qualify. “If they actually pass due to that injury, that payment is in many cases reduced,” the Massachusetts Democrat said. “I don’t think anybody intends that to happen. I think that gets to the goal of the bill.” The bill is an updated version of legislation former U.S. Rep. John Tierney (D-MA) filed last year. The Tierney bill never made it out of the House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. After Tierney lost his seat in the 2014 election, Gold Star Wives of America approached Kennedy about the stalled legislation. “It gets back to the very basic obligations of what government is supposed to be about,” Kennedy said. “The basic point it gets to is not just honoring the commitment they make to their country, but it’s about the commitment we make to them.”

Kay Witt, a member of Gold Star Wives of America’s government relations committee, said an increase in DIC payments will help many low-income military widows. “This will give them a shot to pay rent, buy food and pay utilities,” she said. The bill would also prevent benefits provided through other programs from being reduced or offset for surviving spouses who are eligible for DIC payments. In many cases, their military annuities are decreased under current regulations. “The last thing we need to do is add another financial burden on top of them because our systems are not coordinated,” Kennedy said. [Source: Gatehouse News Service | Gerry Tuoti | May 28, 2015 ++]

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House Vet Bill Progress ► 20 MAY 2015

House lawmakers passed a legislative slate of veterans-themed measures 18 MAY, including a new accountability bill (H.R.1038) for Veterans Affairs Department employees and one (H.R.91) that would offer new ID cards for any honorably discharged service member. The moves, just days before the Memorial Day
holiday, received unanimous bipartisan support, illustrating how veterans' issues has become one of the few noncontentious topics in the chamber.

The new accountability bill, sponsored by Rep. Ryan Costello (R-PA) would require VA officials to maintain all written reprimands and punishments that employees receive as long as they work for the department. Under current rules, those records are erased within three years. Lawmakers have argued that this allows problem employees to continue to move around within the department and gain promotions with little consequence for past bad behavior. It also fits in with larger congressional efforts to ease punishment and dismissal rules at the department, which have come under criticism in the last year for only a handful of high-profile firings in the wake of nationwide scandals.

Rep. Vern Buchanan has introduced a bill that would create new ID cards for any honorably discharged service member.

The new ID measure, sponsored by Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL) would create official VA cards for all veterans, instead of only those who currently qualify for certain health care and financial benefits. Buchanan said numerous veterans have complained that forcing them to carry around copies of their DD-214 discharge documents to prove their military service for other public agencies and private business offerings is cumbersome and potentially unsafe, given the personal information on the discharge paperwork. The cards would be available to veterans for a fee, to be determined by VA. Other measures approved by the House include

- H.R.474, the reauthorization of several homeless reintegration programs new financial incentives for service-disabled veterans who own small businesses, and VA contracting preference for firms with high concentrations of veterans among their employees,
- H.R. 1313, the Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business Relief Act
- H.R.1836, the Vulnerable Veterans Housing Reform Act of 2015.

Several of the bills already are under consideration in the Senate but must still find time for a full chamber vote before any can be sent to the White House for President Obama to sign into law. Earlier this year, the House unanimously passed legislation dealing with preventing veteran suicides as one of its first measures of the year. Lawmakers on both sides of the political aisle have publicly pledged to keep veterans issues separate from partisan fights, although the VA appropriations bill for next year passed along party lines amid concerns over larger government spending priorities. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | May 20, 2015 ++]
Ensuring VA Employee Accountability Act, which lawmakers approved unanimously, would make those notices citing poor performance or misconduct a permanent part of an employee’s file. Under the current policy, an “admonishment” remains on an employee’s record for two years, while a “reprimand” stays in the file for three years, after which time it is permanently removed. An admonishment is an informal warning issued to an employee either verbally or in writing; a reprimand is more serious, and is a written statement of formal censure for misconduct.

“Managers should know the complete history of their staff or potential staff members,” said Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-OH)

The legislation does not create any new penalties for employees or affect the process for appealing disciplinary actions. “Part of the systemic problems with the Department of Veterans Affairs stem from the fact that current policy prevents the keeping of complete employee files and does not allow the at-fault employees to be tracked or held accountable,” said Rep. Ryan Costello (R-PA), the bill’s sponsor. “It is critical to maintain a complete record of a poor performer in order to better understand an employee as long as they are with the department.” But the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), which represents VA employees, strongly opposed the bill in an 18 MAY letter to House lawmakers, saying it “would deprive every VA employee, including non-managerial employees, of the chance to clear his or her name after receiving an unjustified reprimand from a manager who is acting out of incompetence, bias, anti-veteran animus or whistleblower retaliation.” (Emphasis in original.)

Costello defended the legislation on the House floor Monday, acknowledging “some concerns that this legislation could negatively impact flexibility in resolving routine personnel disputes, but there is nothing in this bill that imposes new employee penalties or would affect the existing process for a VA employee to appeal a disciplinary action.” Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-OH) said Monday in support of the bill that “no one is saying that employees can’t improve their performance after being reprimanded or admonished, but managers should know the complete history of their staff or potential staff members.” The letter from AFGE, signed by Beth Moten, the union’s legislative and political director, said H.R.1038 would eliminate Clear Record Settlement Agreements. “CRAs give managers the flexibility to resolve routine personnel disputes efficiently and quickly without protracted litigation or destruction of the VA careers of front-line employees,” Moten wrote.

House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) praised the Ensuring VA Employee Accountability Act, “which would put an end to the department’s tired and ineffective practice of issuing temporary written warnings to employees in the face of serious instances of mismanagement and malfeasance,” he said in statement. The House on Monday passed four other vet-related bills, including legislation that would give preference to government contractors who employ veterans full-time, and another that would allow the surviving spouse of a service-disabled vet to retain the vet’s small business status through VA’s Vets First program for up to three years after the veteran’s death. [Source: GovExec.com | Kellie Lunney | May 19, 2015 ++]
VA Burial Benefits Update 36  ►  H.R.2490 | Convicted Capital Crime Vets

The remains of a convicted murderer must be removed from Indiantown Gap National Cemetery so it can remain hallowed ground, U.S. Rep. Lou Barletta said 26 MAY. Barletta (R-11-PA) has introduced legislation in Congress to disinter George Emery Siple from the federal cemetery in Lebanon County. Siple was buried there in 1999, after dying in federal prison 30 years after he was convicted of shooting and killing Bertha Smith, of Harrisburg. Smith’s family has been unsuccessful in petitioning the Department of Veterans Administration to disinter Siple in line with a 1997 federal law that bars veterans convicted of a capital crime from being buried in a national cemetery.

Rep. Lou Barletta

The 1997 law was not actively enforced until 2006, when the VA instituted an honor system which relies on families to voluntarily report their relative’s criminal records, Barletta said. A 2013 federal law gave the VA specific authority to disinter veterans convicted of a capital crime from national cemeteries. However, this law does not cover burials during the period from 1997 to 2013. Barletta said his bill also would require the VA and Arlington National Cemetery to take every “reasonable action,” including searches of public criminal records, to ensure a veteran is eligible to be buried in a national cemetery. “Murderers should not be buried next to true military heroes,” said Barletta during a press conference on the state Capitol grounds. If this legislation is passed and Siple is exhumed, his remains would be returned to his family or if no family can be found to the VA for burial, said Barletta. [Source: AP | Robert Swift | May 26, 2015++]

VA Vet Choice Program Update 18  ►  S.1463 | Amend 40-Mile Rule

Bipartisan legislation would allow vets access to health care outside of the Veterans Affairs Department when the nearest VA facility within 40 miles driving distance does not provide the care the vet needs. The bill amends the so-called “40-mile rule” included in the 2014 Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act, which allows certain vets to receive health care temporarily outside the VA if the department is unable to schedule an appointment for the veteran within 30 days, or the veteran lives more than 40 miles from a VA facility. S. 1463 would ensure that the 40-mile rule “applies only in the circumstance where a veterans facility provides the service the veteran needs,” said Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS), the bill’s sponsor, on the Senate floor 22 MAY. So if a vet lives within 40 miles of a VA facility, but that facility does not provide the care the vet needs, then the veteran is eligible for the Choice program.
Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kansas, Sponsored the Bill

The 2015 Access to Community Care for Veterans Act now heads to the House, but Moran said he hoped that Senate passage of the bill would push the department to “correct this problem on its own volition” as soon as possible. This is the latest tweak to the 40-mile rule included in the 2014 law. On 24 APR, VA published an interim final rule in the Federal Register, effective immediately, which changed the interpretation related to a veteran’s distance from the nearest VA facility. Instead of calculating geographic distance based on a straight line or, “as the crow flies,” the department now determines eligibility based on the actual driving distance between the veteran’s home and the nearest VA medical facility. VA is using geographic information system (GIS) software to calculate driving distance.

The department came under pressure from veterans, lawmakers and veteran advocates over its original interpretation for how to calculate the 40-mile distance, which led to the change. VA defended its original interpretation saying the conference report accompanying the final bill stated: “In calculating the distance from a nearest VA medical facility, it is the conferees’ expectation that VA will use geodesic distance, or the shortest distance between two points.” VA then pointed out in the interim final rule explaining the April change that “the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, so VA concluded that a veteran who is outside of a 40-mile radius of a VA medical facility would be eligible under this provision.”

Moran and other lawmakers have said S.1463 is necessary because there are still too many veterans, especially in rural areas, who are not able to get the health care they need despite the Choice program. Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson (R-GA), on Friday said that “if for some reason the House does not adopt the language, we will take it up immediately in the Senate when we have our next markup meeting in the Veterans’ Affairs Committee and take care of it.” Moran said lawmakers would make sure the language would be included in “every bill related to veterans affairs that is on its way to the White House” if his stand-alone bill isn’t enacted or the VA doesn’t make the change through regulatory action.

The Choice program is a key component of the 2014 Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act, which President Obama signed into law last summer. The department began sending Choice cards to eligible veterans at the end of last year, mailing them out in three phases. But the roll-out created confusion, and many vets who believed they were eligible for the Choice program were turned away. It runs through Aug. 7, 2017, or until the $10 billion fund is exhausted. The administration’s fiscal 2016 budget proposal recommended shifting any potential excess money from the Choice program into other areas, but lawmakers
quickly shot down that idea in February saying it could end the program prematurely. House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., called the proposal a “non-starter.”

The department anticipated that the change related to calculating distance would double the number of vets eligible for non-VA care under the program; presumably, Moran’s legislation would allow access to even more vets. Moran said that the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office’s “preliminary estimate of the mandatory effects of S.1463 gave a net zero effect over the five-year and 10-year projection period. But according to a May 25 Associated Press report, VA said it could cost billions each year to make the change. VA spokesman Randy Noller said that while the department could not comment on pending legislation "we at VA strive to care for our veterans who have served our nation and earned veterans benefits. We continue to look forward to working with our Senate and House committee partners to best implement the Choice Program and serve our veterans." [Source: GivExec.com | Kellie Lunney | May 26, 2015 ++]

CA VET Legislation [09] ► Support AB 1275 | Eliminate Vet Tax

May 5, 2015

Dear Friend:

As you may know, I have introduced Assembly Bill 1275, which would exempt veterans’ military retirement pay from the state income tax. Given your involvement in veterans’ issues, it is my hope that you will consider supporting this key piece of legislation.

Military retirement pay is subject to California’s state income tax, and in some cases is taxed at a rate as high as 13.3%. AB 1275 would help ease the sometimes difficult transition from military service and make California a more desirable destination for retiring veterans to call home. It is noteworthy that 30 other states in our country already offer some form of tax exemption for military pensions. Let’s add California to that list.

I need your help to pass this bill. We will need to show broad-based support, both in our community, and throughout the State. I hope that you, and your organization, will consider assisting me in this effort by sending me a letter of support that I can share with my colleagues, as well as by soliciting support from others. My office is ready and able to provide any additional information you require to draft this letter. Please email support letters to adam.capper@asm.ca.gov and mail a copy to:

Assemblymember Adam Gray
Capitol Office, Room 4117
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0021

Thank you for your support on this and other important veterans’ issues.

Sincerely,

Adam C. Gray
Assemblymember, 21st District
The above letter has been received from Assemblyman Adam Gray asking for support of his bill to eliminate California income tax on military retirement pay. California is home to nearly 1.9 million Veterans, which amounts to the largest population of Veterans in the country. They enlisted in military service without omission, to offer their lives and time with their families in order to defend our country. After years of service, thousands of military retirees seek the right place to retire, but Veterans face difficulties as they return to civilian life. It is made more difficult because of financial struggles. One solution to this is to eliminate the state tax on military retirement pay as proposed by Assemblyman Gray’s AB 1275 legislation. Passage is dependent on convincing the state’s legislators to support the bill. California veterans are encouraged to send a letter to their legislators requesting they support this legislation. A sample letter is included as an attachment to this Bulletin titled, “Support AB 1275”. Feel free to tweak it as applicable to your situation. Contact data for your state legislator is available at http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov. [Source: Assemblyman Adam Gray | May 05, 201 ++]

Glad to hear that you have received this letter from Assemblyman Adam Gray. It's important to support his bill to eliminate California income tax on military retirement pay. As you've mentioned, California is home to nearly 1.9 million Veterans, which makes it the largest population of Veterans in the country. Many of these Veterans have served their country without omission, offering their lives and time with their families to defend our country. After years of service, military retirees often face difficulties when transitioning back to civilian life. One solution to these challenges is to eliminate the state tax on military retirement pay, as proposed by Assemblyman Gray’s AB 1275 legislation.

It's crucial to convince state legislators to support this bill. Encourage your California veterans to send letters to their legislators to request their support for this legislation. A sample letter is available as an attachment to this Bulletin, titled “Support AB 1275.” Feel free to customize it according to your specific situation.

To contact your state legislator, visit http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov. This website will provide you with contact data for your state legislator, which you can use to communicate directly with them. You are encouraged to send a letter to your legislators requesting their support for this legislation.

In addition to the sample letter, Vet Bills Submitted to 114th Congress is also provided in the Bulletin. This section lists Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community that have been introduced in the 114th Congress. The bulletin encourages you to support these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators, as passage of a bill is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indicator of this likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. If your legislator is a sponsor or cosponsor of a bill, you can enter the bill number in the site’s search engine on https://beta.congress.gov to 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

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

- H.R.2361 : Work-Study for Student Veterans Act. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the authority to provide work-study allowance for certain activities by individuals receiving educational assistance by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep. Takano, Mark [D-CA-41] (Introduced 05/15/2015).
- H.R.2464 : Improve VA Secretary Accountability to VA OIG. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the accountability of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep Benishek, Dan [MI-1] (introduced 5/20/2015).
- H.R.2490 : Prohibit Internment in National Cemeteries of Vets Convicted of Capital Crimes. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to ensure that the prohibition against interment or memorialization in the National Cemetery Administration or Arlington National Cemetery of persons committing Federal or State capital crimes is consistently carried out, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to disinter the remains of George E. Siple from Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Barletta, Lou [PA-11] (introduced 5/21/2015).
- H.R.2522 : Homeless Vet Household Goods Pilot Program. A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot program to award grants for the provision of furniture, household items, and other
assistance to homeless veterans to facilitate their transition into permanent housing, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Beatty, Joyce [OH-3] (introduced 5/21/2015).

- **H.R.2539 : Increase DIC Rates.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for an increase in the amount of monthly dependency and indemnity compensation payable to surviving spouses by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep Kennedy, Joseph P., III [MA-4] (introduced 5/21/2015).

- **H.R.2551 : VA Pre-Apprenticeship Program Educational Assistance.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to ensure that veterans may attend pre-apprenticeship programs using certain educational assistance provided by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep McSally, Martha [AZ-2] (introduced 5/21/2015).

- **H.R.2555 : Pilot Program for Veterans Service Organization Grants.** A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot program to award grants to nonprofit veterans service organizations to upgrade the community facilities of such organizations. Sponsor: Rep Ryan, Tim [OH-13] (introduced 5/21/2015).

- **H.R.2573 : Furnish Dependent Headstone/Marker non-VA Cemetery Burial.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish headstones and markers for the graves of dependents of veterans buried in county, private, or other cemeteries. Sponsor: Rep Norcross, Donald [NJ-1] (introduced 5/22/2015).

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- **S.1400 : Vet Owned Businesses Access to Surplus Prosperity.** A bill to amend the Small Business Act to direct the task force of the Office of Veterans Business Development to provide access to and manage the distribution of excess or surplus property to veteran-owned small businesses. Sponsor: Sen Durbin, Richard [IL] (introduced 5/20/2015).

- **S.1450 : VA Physician Employment Hours.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to allow the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to modify the hours of employment of physicians and physician assistants employed on a full-time basis by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Sen Hirono, Mazie K. [HI] (introduced 5/21/2015).

- **S.1451 : VA Survivor Benefits Claim Paperwork.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to adjudicate and pay survivor's benefits without requiring the filing of a formal claim, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Hirono, Mazie K. [HI] (introduced 5/21/2015).

- **S.1452 : VA Emergency Medical Treatment Reimbursement.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand eligibility for reimbursements for emergency medical treatment and to require that the Department of Veterans Affairs be treated as a participating provider for the recovery of the costs of certain medical care, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Hirono, Mazie K. [HI] (introduced 5/21/2015).


- **S.1463 : Access to Community Care for Veterans Act of 2015.** A bill to amend the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 to modify the distance requirement for expanded availability of hospital care and medical services for veterans through the use of agreements with non-Department of Veterans Affairs entities. Sponsor: Sen Moran, Jerry [KS] (introduced 5/22/2015)

Military Retirement Pay Update 02 ► Proposed | Better or Worse

As a major overhaul of the military retirement system continues to gain momentum on Capitol Hill, questions remain about the core of the proposal and whether it will be better or worse than the current pension for career service members who serve 20 years or more. No question, the proposed changes would offer a better deal for the 83 percent of troops who serve fewer than 20 years. Under the current system, they get no retirement benefit. The proposed new model would offer them a personal retirement savings account with annual government contributions of up to 6 percent of basic pay. Yet for the much smaller slice of the force that spends — or plans to spend — 20 years or more on active duty, a comparison of the current all-or-nothing plan and the proposed "blended" system is far more complex. Comparing the two alternatives will be an urgent concern for many troops if the proposal becomes law. Everyone in today's force would soon face a choice: Opt into the new system and start accruing money in their own retirement savings account, or exercise a "grandfather clause" that would allow them to remain under the traditional retirement system and its promise of a more robust pension.

The Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, which first proposed the basic construct of the alternative plan in January, says all troops would be better off under its the new benefit, even those who serve 20 or more years. The commission's proposed changes to the retirement system are included in the 2016 defense authorization bill that is moving through Congress. Under that legislation, today's troops would have about 18 months to make a decision by 2017 on whether to stick with the old benefit or sign up for the new plan. Yet some critics question the commission's analysis that everyone would do better under its proposal — that young troops would get a retirement benefit for the first time, career troops would get a better long-term benefit and the whole package still would save the government billions of dollars each year.

"In the long run, the old system is a better deal for people who serve 20," insisted Rick Jones, director of legislation for the National Association for Uniformed Services. "I think they are presenting a sales pitch that markets their proposal," Jones said of the commission's analysis.

But in response to inquiries from Military Times, the commission has, for the first time, made public its data and analysis to support its assertion that career troops will in fact do better under its proposal. Any effort to compare the real value of future benefits is fraught with uncertainty and subject to debate because that requires penciling in assumptions for unknowable factors like future inflation, military pay raises, stock market returns and individual investment decisions.

- The basics of the plan call for cutting the size of the current pension by 20 percent. To make up for that, the Defense Department would open 401(k)-style retirement accounts, known as Thrift Savings Plan, or TSP, accounts. Money placed in the TSP is not available for withdrawal without a tax penalty before age 60.
• The government would make automatic contributions to all troops’ accounts equal to 1 percent of their basic pay. Troops could then choose to contribute more of their own pay, and the government would offer dollar-for-dollar matching contributions up to an additional 5 percent of basic pay.

• After two years of service, troops would be vested in the plan — they would "own" the money — and could keep it whenever they leave the military, even if they never serve anywhere close to 20 years.

• When a retiree passes away, the defined pension benefit essentially disappears — but any balance remaining in a retiree's TSP can be passed along to a spouse or other heirs.

To compare the current and proposed retirement packages, the commission offered an analysis of a hypothetical enlisted member who clocks 20 years and retires as an E-7.

• Under the current retirement benefit, that member could expect an immediate annual pretax pension of about $23,900, which would be adjusted upward each year to reflect cost-of-living increases, according to the Defense Department’s official military retirement pay calculator.

• Under the proposed retirement benefit, that E-7 could expect to receive an annual pension that is 20 percent smaller, $19,120 a year. That’s a difference of $4,780 compared to the traditional retirement benefit.

• However, under the proposed benefit, that member would also have accumulated money in the TSP over his or her years of service. At the time of military retirement, the tax-free savings account would include a government-provided retirement benefit probably valued at about $45,000, according to the analysis provided by the commission — a figure that assumes the member contributed 3 percent of basic pay and received an additional 3 percent in government matching funds.

• By the time the retired E-7 reached age 60, that TSP investment, if left untouched, would grow to about $211,000, according to the commission. That figures assumes average annual investment returns of about 7.3 percent.

The commission's analysis then extends further. It suggests that the retired E-7 could, starting at age 60, begin making small monthly withdrawals from the TSP in an amount that essentially would equal the 20-percent monthly reduction in his or her military pension, in effect restoring the E-7’s total retirement income to parity with the traditional pension system.

• To do that, the retired E-7 would have to withdraw a total of $276,000 from age 60 to age 85.

• Meanwhile, over that span, according to the commission's assumptions, the E-7's TSP balance would continue to grow at a healthy annual return so that at age 85, the retiree still would have $566,000 in his or her account.

One factor in the new plan that the commission's analysis does not take into account is the diminished pension check retirees would receive before age 60, when they get access to their TSP accounts without tax penalties. For someone who enlists straight out of high school at age 18 and retires 20 years later at age 38, that's a considerable gap of 22 years. In effect, the proposed plan shifts the value of the retirement benefit later in life, offering smaller pension checks during the so-called "working-age" retirement years, when most veterans find post-military employment in the private sector, while ostensibly leaving them with more cash in their golden years. Criticism also has been leveled at some of the assumptions in the commission's analysis, particularly the assumption that TSP accounts will see an average annual return of 7.3 percent. That figure is based on the average annualized investment returns of U.S. public pensions over the past 10 years. But that is a far higher return than some of the more conservative investment options available to TSP participants, which range from 3 percent to 5 percent over the past decade, according to the government-run TSP website.

The figures in the commission's comparison — and the claim that the new plan offers a better deal for careerists — would change significantly if the analysis assumed those lower annual returns. Those kinds of
uncertainties leave some unconvinced of the commission’s claim that the proposed system would be better for careerists. “I have not seen figures that make me comfortable to say that this new system will be the equivalent or better for what a service member who serves 20 or more years gets under the current benefit,” said Deirdre Hellemann, the executive director of the Retired Enlisted Association. “As of now, it looks like the new benefit for people who serve less than 20 is being paid for by cuts in the benefit for those who have served 20 or more.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Andrew Tilghman | May 17, 2015++]

Arizona Memorial Update 07 ▶ Collison | Tours to Resume 4 JUN

The National Park Service and the Navy aim to resume taking visitors to the USS Arizona Memorial in a week, after a dock damaged by a wayward vessel is repaired. An attachment point between the floating dock and its anchors came loose when a vessel rammed it, park service spokeswoman Abby Wines said 28 MAY. Anchors will need to be reset and chains retightened, she said. The incident occurred Wednesday when the hospital ship USNS Mercy and a civilian tugboat contracted by the Navy were maneuvering in Pearl Harbor. The tugboat or the Mercy hit the dock. The Navy is investigating what happened. The sunken USS Arizona wasn’t damaged, Wines said.

Sailors aboard the Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) render honors May 25 as the ship passes the USS Arizona Memorial and the Battleship Missouri Memorial during Pacific Partnership 2015.

Visitors will be able to enter the memorial at the World War II battleship starting 4 JUN if repairs go as expected, she said. The memorial honors the 1,177 sailors and Marines killed on the battleship Arizona when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941. The remains of more than 900 servicemen are still entombed on the ship, which lies underneath the memorial’s white structure. To go there, visitors board boats at a visitors’ center on land for a short ride across the harbor. The memorial is one of Hawaii’s most heavily visited sites, drawing nearly 1.6 million people each year. The Navy, which operates the tour boats, has been taking visitors to a spot near the memorial to view the ship from afar while the dock is being repaired. Visitors are understandably disappointed but many are still grateful for the opportunity to get close to and see the hallowed site, Wines said. “For many people this is their only trip to this island and the USS Arizona may be the iconic thing that they’ve planned to come here to visit. It’s an extremely significant, powerful part of our history,” she said. She stressed the visitors center remains open, along with other historic sites in Pearl Harbor such as the retired battleship Missouri. Navy Region Hawai’i spokesman Bill Doughty said the Navy is repairing the dock as fast as it can. [Source: The Associated Press | Aubrey McAvoy | May 28, 2015 ++]
Casualty Assistance Update 02: When a Soldier's Life Ends

Even before Army Master Sgt. Anthony Link could deliver the dreaded knock on the door, he heard a woman inside shout out in despair. "No," cried Talisa Williams, who pulled up a window curtain and saw the men in their dress uniforms. "My baby. Not my baby." It was shortly after 5 a.m., July 8, 2012. Standing outside the Brooksville home of Talisa and Clarence Williams Jr., Link, who was with an Army chaplain, steeled himself for the difficult assignment. He was there to tell the couple that their son, Clarence Williams III, a young man of deep faith, love of country and a burning desire to be a soldier like his dad, had been killed in Afghanistan.

Link had served as an Army Casualty Notification Officer many times before, informing several families that a loved one had been killed in action. But each experience brings new challenges, Links says. New sorrows. Confident that he knew what he’d say, Link says he thought about his oldest child to make sure he’d know how to say it. "My daughter is about a year younger than this soldier who was killed in Afghanistan," he remembers. "All I could think of was what if that was my daughter? What kind of help would I need?"

Three years later, Link and the Williams family maintain a deep friendship, a dynamic that has played out with a number of families who he shepherded through the grief and bewilderment that comes with learning a loved one has died in service to the country. As the nation honors the fallen on Memorial Day, The Tampa Tribune examines the critical relationship between troops like Link and the families they assist. "I don't know what we would have done without him," says Kim Allison, whose youngest son, Army Spc. Zachary Shannon, died in a Black Hawk helicopter crash in Afghanistan on March 11, 2013. Link showed up at her Dunedin house to deliver the bad news and has been a part of her family's life ever since. They are planning a cruise together in the fall.

Back in 2008, one of Link's Army mentors made a suggestion that would change his life. And, as it turned out, the lives of many others like the parents of Clarence Williams III and Zachary Shannon. Chief Warrant Officer 3 Charles Winston was looking for a few good soldiers to become Casualty Notification Officers and Casualty Assistance Officers. The notification officers are the ones who, along with a chaplain, knock on the door when an active duty soldier is killed due to combat, training, injury or illness. The assistance officers are the ones who walk the families through the initial grief, the piles of paperwork, seeing the flag-draped casket and thousands of details that come up in a bureaucratic maze no one wants to enter. Link, 42, is a human resources official and has been with the Army for more than two decades. He says Winston asked if he wanted to step up and help the loved ones. "He just said, 'you are organized, good with people and just seem to be caring about soldiers,' " says Link. "He did this duty and he said, 'I need to get some good soldiers in here and take care of these families.'"

Army rules say that all enlisted soldiers above the rank of Sgt. 1st Class, Chief Warrant Officer 2 and any officer is eligible to be trained to notify and assist the families of the fallen. "We are looking for a level of maturity," says Linda Johnson, benefits coordinator at Fort Stewart in Georgia, which oversees the assistance and notification officers in the Tampa area. Those selected by their brigade commanders undergo three days of intensive training, which includes everything from knowing how to fill out the required paperwork for compensation and benefits, how to navigate the Department of Veterans Affairs, hearing from survivors.
about their experiences and role playing the door knock, Johnson says. After training, there is a test that must be passed each year. Most of the time, there are separate notification and assistance officers for each case, says Johnson. Aside from helping families of active-duty soldiers who have died, they assist families of those who separated from the Army within four months and families of retired soldiers.

Each branch of the service has a slightly different approach, though the Army, Navy and Marines have the same rank requirements. The Navy and Marines combine the notification and assistance roles into a Casualty Assistance Calls Officer, or CACO. The Air Force uses airmen to make the notifications, and civilians, called Casualty Assistance Representatives, to handle the assistance portion. U.S. Special Operations Command, headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base, has its own cohort, drawn from the services, to help the families of commandos. Across the services, they have been busy. There have been more than 6,800 U.S. troop deaths in support of the wars since 9/11. And more who have succumbed during training or to injury or illness.

Link says though the training was extremely helpful, he still had to reach out to his mentor before knocking on his first door to notify Army Sgt. Federico Borjas' family that he had been killed in Afghanistan on Oct. 16, 2008. "I didn't know what to expect," says Link. "You're in a classroom and you role play and all that. You practice and have discussions, but I just needed that re-enforcement." So Link called Winston. "I know you can do this," Link recalls Winston telling him. "Just think about you having to go out to my family. Think of how that would be." That, says Link, helped him help the Borjas family. About 16 months later, Winston's advice proved eerily prophetic. "Chief Winston passed away and I had to do that for his family," says Link, who has helped scores of families, including those of about two dozen soldiers killed in action.

Shortly after 5 a.m., July 8, 2012, Talisa Williams heard someone at her front door. "I shook my husband and told him I heard the doorbell ring," she says. "My husband said he didn't hear anything." Eventually convincing Clarence Williams Jr., an Army veteran and Florida Highway Patrol Officer, that someone indeed was ringing the bell, the two got out of bed and headed to the front door. Clarence Williams Jr. pulled a window curtain back. "What do you see?" Williams recalls asking. "Go get dressed," she remembers hearing her husband answer. Not wanting to wait, Williams says she too pulled a curtain back. "I saw the military hats," she says. "Two military hats. One was Sgt. Link, the other was the chaplain. I lost it completely then. I already knew something terrible happened to my son even before they rang the doorbell." When the Williams let Link into their home, they had no idea they would be letting him into their life.

Link and the chaplain were invited inside. Once he confirmed that the couple were indeed the parents of Spc. Clarence Williams III, Link delivered the well-rehearsed, standardized words that those with loved ones in uniform never want to hear. "The Secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deep regret that your son is believed to have been killed in action on July 8," Link said. "I tried to stay calm, but I lost it," Williams recalls. "I told him no, it wasn't my son, but I knew it was my son." After giving the parents time to let the news sink in, Link says he began to talk with the couple about the many things that needed to be done. Though it was early, Link had already been up for a while, printing out the stacks of paperwork and forms that Talisa and Clarence Williams Jr. needed to eventually fill out. Putting on a dress uniform he keeps pressed and hanging in his closet for such assignments, he drove to meet the chaplain and was now helping the family cope with the aftermath of the horrid news.

Because their son was killed in action, they had the option of going to Dover Air Force Base to witness his body come back to the United States in what is called a dignified transfer ceremony. "The family has to be ready to go pretty quickly for a dignified transfer," he says. "They might have to leave later that day or the next day." Link calmly answered the family's questions that morning. But it was only the beginning. There were many forms to fill out, says Williams. Forms authorizing the Army to take care of the body, Forms authorizing burial at the Florida National Cemetery. Forms spelling out the type of headstone. "We
had a lot of decisions to make quickly,” says Williams of the days after the knock. Link, she says, was a constant and calming presence.

He made the travel arrangements to Dover and accompanied the family. He was part of the funeral, escorted Talisa Williams into the service. He was available every time the family had a question. "It meant a lot to us as a family, because him being a soldier himself, he pretty much knew what we were going through,” says Williams. "It was hard, but he showed us a lot how much care there was, how much love there was. It made our family know that we were important.” But even after the six months was up, Williams says Link stayed in touch, attending family functions like barbecues as well as memorial events. "He is an awesome person and has become a big part of our family," says Williams.

The feeling is shared by others to whom Link has delivered the worst news. Link informed Thea Kurz when her son, Army Sgt. 1st Class Matthew I. Leggett was killed in Kabul on Aug. 20, 2014. "He is a great human being with understanding, being able to read where I was at and knowing when to be empathetic," says Kurz, a bookkeeper from Ruskin, "I just saw him a week and a half ago." This September, Chip and Kim Allison will take a cruise with Link and his family. On March 11, 2013, their son, Zachary Shannon, was one of five soldiers killed when their helicopter crashed in Afghanistan. Link was his family's Casualty Assistance Officer, walking them through every step of the process. "I almost felt panic at the end of the six months that, 'oh my gosh, he's not going to be our Casualty Assistance Officer,' ” says Kim Allison. "But the friendship we built up continues."

Good casualty notification and assistance officers are very important to grieving family members, says Toni Gross, who is intimately familiar with the drill. Her son, Frank Gross, was 25 when he was killed in Afghanistan July 16, 2011. She now serves as president of American Gold Star Mothers Inc. Tampa Bay, an organization that helps parents whose children have died in service to the country. Gross says that Army Maj. Heidi Skelton-Riley served as both her notification and assistance officer and was there anytime her family needed. "She went above and beyond," says Gross, recalling that, after accompanying her family to Arlington National Cemetery for the burial of her son, Skelton-Riley came down with food poisoning and was vomiting on the plane ride back to Florida. "But nothing could have stopped Major Heidi," says Gross. Not every family is so lucky, she says. "Some Gold Star moms have had really crappy casualty assistance officers," she says. "And that causes additional stress and grief to the family. It gives them a sense of hopelessness and helplessness.

Master Sgt. Anthony Link, who is studying to become a deacon in his church, says that being accepted as a family member is a great honor. "Most of the time, I have children the same age,” he says of the soldiers whose families he has served. "I just grieve for them and think about the birthdays being missed. The Christmases being missed. The anniversaries.” Aside from the families, Link says he thinks frequently about the soldiers. "Oddly enough, I just think about the person that I'm not going to get to meet, but who I get to know a lot about," says Link, adding that he plans to spend Memorial Day at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell. He will attend the annual ceremony honoring the fallen. And pay his personal respects to the soldiers whose families he has assisted. "I will visit quite a few soldiers,” says Link. Meanwhile, with American service members in harm's way around the globe, the pressed uniform hangs in his closet. Ready for the next call to make the dreaded knock on the door. [Source: Tampa Tribune | Howard Altman | May 25, 2015 ++]

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**USS Samuel B Roberts** ► **Decommissioned | Will There Be a 4th**

The naming of a Navy warship is never a simple thing. There are grand traditions to follow, not-so-grand ones to consider, and an occasional willingness to disregard the rules altogether. But at its best, a warship’s name
inspires its crew, lifts heritage off the page and into the heart, and provides a slate upon which to write a new chapter of naval history. Such a name is Samuel B. Roberts, and it will leave the fleet upon the May 22 decommissioning of FFG 58 in Mayport. If the Navy values its heritage, the absence should last only as long as it takes to pick a new ship to bear the name.

It belonged first to Samuel Booker Roberts Jr., a Navy coxswain who in 1942 helped land Marines on Guadalcanal and then stayed behind to run supplies up the coast after the fleet withdrew. When a foray led by legendary Marine Lt. Col. Chesty Puller went bad, Roberts and his fellow coxswains drove their boats through fire to pull the Marines off the beach. Roberts wheeled his craft around, distracting the Japanese gunners long enough to get the others clear — and exposed himself to a fatal bullet. For his valor and sacrifice, he received a posthumous Navy Cross.

Within months, the Navy bestowed upon him an even rarer honor, giving his name to a new warship. A pocket-size destroyer escort, DE 413 would play an outsized role in one of naval history’s most valiant actions. In 1944, the Samuel B. Roberts was sent to Leyte Gulf as part of the largest fleet the world has ever seen. Assigned to guard a flotilla of escort carriers, the thin skinned Roberts wasn’t meant to see action. That changed when a Japanese stratagem lured away Adm. Halsey’s powerful Third Fleet, leaving the Roberts and its flotilla the only thing left between an enemy battleship squadron and defenseless American troopships. With no hope for survival, DE 413 and its fellow small boys plunged into battle against pagoda-topped behemoths. The fury of their attack confused the Japanese commander, who eventually withdrew in the face of what he concluded were cruisers and fleet carriers. The Roberts, pummeled beyond saving by 8-inch shells, slipped beneath the waves — taking with her the last Japanese hope of changing the war’s outcome. “In no engagement of its entire history,” wrote Navy historian Samuel Eliot Morison, “has the United States Navy shown more gallantry, guts and gumption than in those two morning hours between 0730 and 0930 off Samar.”

The U.S. Navy commemorates valiant ships as well as valiant sailors, and so it commissioned a second Samuel B. Roberts in 1946. A full-fledged destroyer this time, DD 823 crafted a fine service record of its own. It helped turn back Soviet ships bearing missiles to Cuba, and later earned two battle stars in the Vietnam War. The “Steaming Sammy B” served for 24 years, and was sunk for target practice in deep water. In 1986, the Navy named a third Samuel B. Roberts, one of the final Perry-class frigates. Sent to escort tanker ships through the hellish seas of the Iran-Iraq War, FFG 58 performed brilliantly in dangerous and tight waters. Then an Iranian mine blew a truck-size hole in the ship’s engine room, leaving it dead in the water off a hostile coast. Well-trained and well-led, the crew fought fire and flood into the night, and saved their ship to fight another day. Like its predecessors, the third Roberts leaves behind a legacy befitting the highest traditions of the naval service — and in particular its unofficial motto, “Don’t give up the ship.”
Three ships have borne the name of an exceptional sailor, and each has only deepened its luster. Instead of letting Samuel B. Roberts slip into history, the Navy should name a fourth warship for the World War II coxswain, and allow the name’s rich heritage to inspire a new generation of sailors. [Source: NavyTimes | Bradley Peniston Commentary | Jun 01, 2015 ++]

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Boneyard ◄ Largest Airplane Repository & Preservation Facility

The airplanes are lined up in rows by the hundreds, serving as a striking reminder of the nation's military past. They carried presidents and astronauts, shot down enemies during war and shuttled American military forces around the globe. Now, they are scattered across a dusty field at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base on the outskirts of Tucson, at a location known affectionately as the "boneyard." It is the world's largest airplane repository and preservation facility, providing long- and short-term aircraft storage, parts reclamation and disposal for all types of planes. The facility contains more than 4,400 aircraft and 13 aerospace vehicles from the Air Force, Navy-Marine Corps, Army, Coast Guard, and several federal agencies including NASA. As sunrise illuminates the facility's 2,600 acres, the relics it holds evoke thoughts of missions past:

- An Army One helicopter that transported President Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1950s.
- An old TWA jet that was once hijacked and bombed.
- An aircraft that spent 16 years preserved entirely under Antarctic snow before returning to flight and ending up in the sweltering Arizona desert.

Notably, the last aircraft to leave Saigon as it fell to North Vietnamese forces sits alongside disassembled Cold War bombers. The B-52s have their tails removed — one of the terms of a post-Cold War treaty with Russia to provide proof the bombers were indeed decommissioned. The 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group was established in 1946 as the 4105th Army Air Force Unit to house planes after World War II. It quickly expanded to aircraft from all military branches due to Tucson's low humidity, minimal rainfall and high altitude, all of which help ward off rust and corrosion. The hard soil makes it possible to move and secure aircraft without the need for pavement. Today, the boneyard is both a testament to U.S. air prowess and, through reclamation and restoration, a means to keep the country and its allies in flight.
Through a special Support Agreement, the Pima Air & Space Museum is the exclusive operator of the tour of the "Aircraft Boneyard". The tour is bus based and you are not allowed out of the bus. Refer to http://pimaair.org/visit/tour for details. [Source: The Associated Press | Matt York | May 22, 2015 ++]

3DMobileID Binocular ➤ Identifies Individuals at 225 Meters

It can be difficult to spot a face in the crowd, especially when the face belongs to someone who wants to kill you. That’s why the Navy is working to develop a wireless 3-D binocular face-recognition system. At the Defense Department’s inaugural Lab Day, held in the Pentagon’s courtyard, Defense One got up close and personal with a working prototype that can ID someone at 225 meters, about two football fields away. The image recognition isn’t necessarily superior to what you could get from a high-resolution camera feed mounted on a surveillance drone. But spotting particular individuals from the air poses a unique challenge because you’re mostly looking at the tops of people’s heads. The binoculars promise much better face matching because they work at, well, face level. “The image is captured, sent to our system, which does a few software enhancements, and it’s run against a local database,” said Michael Richmond, who manages the project at the Space and Naval Systems Warfare Center (Atlantic). “Most facial recognition systems are a few meters at most; nothing is this far at a handheld capability.”

In January 2013, the Navy awarded its first contract for a system to “increase the stand-off identification of uncooperative subjects,” according to a solicitation announcement. The winner was StereoVision, a California company that had already demonstrated a set of face-recognizing spectacles called the Wireless 3D Binocular Face Recognition System. This 3DMobileID could pick out a face and match it to a database at 100 to 200 meters. The prototypes on display at the Lab Day can reach about twice as far. Currently, the system uses point-matching software from Cognitec, but Richmond said it was designed to be interoperable
with any commercial face-recognition software. Like any face-rec device, the binoculars are only as good as the database that the machine pulls images and potential matches from. For the military, that means the biometrically-enabled watch list, or BEWL. Always growing, the BEWL currently holds the facial records of some 200,000 people from around the world. In the past 10 years, many have come from the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq.

“We’re looking to incorporate a 50k watch list from the BEWL onto another system for additional testing,” said Richardson. There’s no reason, at least theoretically, why future versions of the binoculars couldn’t pull from much larger databases. By year’s end, the FBI’s Next Generation Identification database is expected to hold as many as 52 million records. Richmond said that the prototype systems cost $30,000 apiece, a price tag that could decrease if scale increases. Face-recognition binoculars could play an important role in developing better intelligence in real time. That could help identify threats faster or reduce casualties from errant drone strikes. The most critical intelligence, related to friends and foes, will still be developed by men and women in the field. New face-ID tech will help put a bit more distance between them and the enemy.

[Source: Defense One | Patrick Tucker | May 15, 2015 ++]

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**X-37B Space Plane ▶ Successfully Launched on 4th Test Flight**

A mini military space plane had a successful liftoff 20 MAY on another long orbital test flight. But as usual, the Air Force isn’t saying much about the unmanned mission. A video of the launch can be viewed at [http://www.space.com/29446-x37b-space-plane-launch-watch-live.html](http://www.space.com/29446-x37b-space-plane-launch-watch-live.html). This will be the fourth flight of an X-37B space plane, a secretive, experimental program run by the Air Force. The three previous missions also began with rocket launches from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. The mystery test vehicle — essentially a technology test bed — is designed to orbit the Earth and then land like one of NASA’s old shuttles. It is operated robotically, without anyone on board, and is reusable. It is 29 feet long — about one-fourth the size of a NASA shuttle. The Atlas V launch vehicle is also carried 10 tiny "cubesats" to orbit, including one called LightSail, which was developed by the nonprofit Planetary Society. LightSail aims to test key technologies ahead of a more involved solar-sailing mission using another cubesat in Earth orbit next year.

The Air Force owns two X-37B spacecraft, both of which were built by Boeing’s Phantom Works division. Each space plane is about one-fourth the size of a NASA shuttle -- just 29 feet long by 9.5 feet tall (8.8 by 2.9 meters), with a wingspan of 15 feet (4.6 m) and a payload bay the size of a pickup-truck bed. To put those dimensions into perspective, both X-37Bs could fit inside the payload bay of NASA’s now-retired space shuttle orbiter. The X-37B launches vertically and lands horizontally, on a runway, as the space shuttle did. LightSail, is scheduled to deploy its 344-square-foot (32 square meters) sail 28 days from now. Atmospheric drag will pull the cubesat back down to Earth two to ten days after this occurs, Planetary Society representatives say, but the brief mission should show how well LightSail’s attitude-control and sail-deployment systems work.
The longest X-37B flight lasted about 675 days; touchdown was last October. There's no official word on how long this one will stay up. All three previous missions ended in California. NASA has a materials experiment aboard, while the Planetary Society is tagging along with a solar-sail demo. Although largely mum about this X-37B flight, the Air Force has acknowledged a thruster experiment involving electric propulsion. Air Force researchers want to check design modifications to ion thrusters already flying on some advanced military communication satellites. [Source: Space.com | Mike Wall | May 20, 2015 ++]

Invisibility Cloak ► Perhaps in Less Than Two Years

Among the superpowers people want, a Harry Potter-style invisibility cloak generally comes pretty high on the list. Now even the US Army wants one for its soldiers. They are looking for companies to make them such cloaks in the next 18 months. Scientific progress has turned many fictions into fact, but true invisibility may be unattainable, Martin Wegener of the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in Germany told the New Scientist: “Complete invisibility of macroscopic objects for all visible colors is fundamentally impossible.” So the army will have to settle for a more workable definition of invisibility instead—perhaps a cloak that remains invisible under certain types of light, for example, making the cloaked soldier appear to be a ghostly image. Previous attempts at achieving invisibility have involved everything from the use of funky lenses to hidden projectors paired with cameras. But such technologies have very limited applications.

The US Army’s hope is for soldiers to able to dramatically improve their ability to camouflage themselves, in comparison to what they are able to achieve using the conventional camo-printed uniforms or even more high-tech LED light-equipped ones (paywall). One possible avenue for workable invisibility cloaks is metamaterials that are uniquely structured at the microscopic level. The microstructure gives the materials special properties, such as the ability to bend light around them. In this way, the cloak will seem to disappear because the reflected light will appear to come from behind the cloaked body. Such light-bending materials were first developed almost a decade ago, but at the time could perform the magic on tiny objects only and under limited wavelengths of light. Since then the technology has improved to the extent where billion-dollar companies such as BAE systems and startups including Hyperstealth Biotechnology may be placing their bids to win the US Army’s contract.
As you would expect, the army has specifications for what its cloaks should do. They’ll need to work in all terrains, from all angles, and to perform come rain or snow. If a battery is required (which is quite likely as electricity can be used to change the microstructure of metamaterials), the army also specifies that it shouldn’t weigh more than pound and must provide at least eight hours of operation. After the first screening of prototypes, the selected entrants will be given a year to make 10 versions of their invisibility cloak for testing. How realistic are these specifications? It really depends on the definition of invisibility. The US Army will probably have to be reasonably flexible. For instance, if the army is happy with a soldier donning a garment that makes her look like a shadow among other shadows, it might have its “invisibility cloak” quite soon. [Source: Defense One | Akshat Rathi | May 08, 2015 ++]

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MOH Awards Update 03 ► WWI | Henry Johnson & William Shemin

Two fallen World War I veterans will posthumously receive the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry from President Barack Obama during a 2 JUN White House ceremony.

Army Pvt. Henry Johnson

Sergeant Henry Johnson was a member of the all-black 369th Army Infantry. Johnson became a hero when he singlehandedly fought off a group of German soldiers with only a knife and a gun to rescue a wounded comrade. "He got wounded 21 times and what he did was stop the Germans from getting through the French line," son Herman Johnson said. France awarded Johnson its highest military Medal of Honor, but his deeds were ignored back home. Henry Johnson died 01 JUL 1929 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

On 11 April 2003 Sergeant Henry Johnson was posthumously awarded the Army's Distinguished Service Cross for bravery. The medal was presented to his son. He was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart in 1996. He is also depicted in the pantheon mural at the Liberty Memorial.

Army Pvt. Henry Johnson will receive the medal for his actions while serving as a member of Company C, 369th Infantry Regiment, 93rd Division, American Expeditionary Forces. Johnson distinguished himself during combat operations in the vicinity of the Tourbe and Aisne Rivers, northwest of Saint Menehoul, France, on May 15, 1918. Johnson entered the Army on June 5, 1917. He was assigned to Company C, 15th New York (Colored) Infantry Regiment, an all-black National Guard unit that would later become the 369th Infantry Regiment. The regiment was ordered into battle in 1918, and Johnson and his unit were brigaded with a French Army colonial unit in front-line combat.

While on night sentry duty May 15, 1918, Johnson and a fellow soldier were attacked by a German raiding party comprising at least 12 soldiers. While under intense enemy fire and despite receiving significant
wounds, Johnson mounted a brave retaliation resulting in several enemy casualties. When his comrade was badly wounded, Johnson prevented him from being taken prisoner by German forces. He exposed himself to grave danger by advancing from his position to engage an enemy soldier in hand-to-hand combat. Displaying great courage, Johnson held back the enemy force until they retreated.

New York National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. Louis Wilson will join the President at the White House to accept the Medal of Honor on Johnson’s behalf.

Army Sgt. William Shemin

During Shemin’s service, he participated in the Aisne-Marne Offensive, where he took shrapnel and was wounded by a machine gun bullet that pierced his helmet and was lodged behind his left ear. Following his injuries, Shemin was hospitalized for three months and later received light duty as part of the Army occupation in Germany and Belgium until he completed his tour. For the injuries he sustained during combat, Shemin received the Purple Heart. He was also awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for battlefield valor, Dec. 29, 1919. Shemin was honorably discharged in August 1919, and went on to get a degree from the New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse University. After graduation, he started a greenhouse and landscaping business in Bronx, New York, where he raised three children. Shemin died in 1973 at age 77.

Army Sgt. William Shemin will receive the medal for his actions while serving as a rifleman for Company G, 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry Regiment, 4th Division, American Expeditionary Forces. He distinguished himself during combat operations in the vicinity of the Vesle River, Bazoches, France, on Aug. 7-9, 1918. Shemin left the cover of his platoon’s trench and crossed open space, repeatedly exposing himself to heavy machine gun and rifle fire to rescue wounded comrades. Due to casualties suffered by his superiors, Shemin took command of the platoon and displayed great initiative under fire until he was wounded Aug. 9.

Ms. Elsie Shemin-Roth of Webster Grove, Missouri, will join the president at the White House to accept the Medal of Honor on her father’s behalf.

Place and date: Republic of Vietnam, 2 June 1967  
Entered service at: Prince Georges, MD 1955  

Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. During Operation Union 11, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, consisting of Companies A and D, with Capt. Graham's company attached launched an attack against an enemy occupied position with 2 companies assaulting and 1 in reserve. Company F, a leading company, was proceeding across a clear paddy area 1,000 meters wide, attacking toward the assigned objective, when it came under fire from mortars and small arms which immediately inflicted a large number of casualties. Hardest hit by the enemy fire was the 2d platoon of Company F, which was pinned down in the open paddy area by intense fire from 2 concealed machine guns. Forming an assault unit from members of his small company headquarters, Capt. Graham boldly led a fierce assault through the second platoon's position, forcing the enemy to abandon the first machine gun position, thereby relieving some of the pressure on his second platoon, and enabling evacuation of the wounded to a more secure area. Resolute to silence the second machine gun, which continued its devastating fire, Capt. Graham's small force stood steadfast in its hard won enclave. Subsequently, during the afternoon's fierce fighting, he suffered 2 minor wounds while personally accounting for an estimated 15 enemy killed. With the enemy position remaining invincible upon each attempt to withdraw to friendly lines, and although knowing that he had no chance of survival, he chose to remain with 1 man who could not be moved due to the seriousness of his wounds. The last radio transmission from Capt. Graham reported that he was being assaulted by a force of 25 enemy soldiers; he died while protecting himself and the wounded man he chose not to abandon. Capt. Graham's actions throughout the day were a series of heroic achievements. His outstanding courage, superb leadership and indomitable fighting spirit undoubtedly saved the second platoon from annihilation and reflected great credit upon himself, the Marine Corps, and the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

LYNDON B. JOHNSON  
President of the United States

James Albert Graham attended high school in Brandywine, Maryland. In June 1963, he received a B.A. degree in Mathematics upon graduation from Teachers College in Frostburg, Maryland. He is seen in a photo and written about in the book "Not Going Home Alone" by James J. Kirschke. Prior to enlisting in the regular Marine Corps, he was a member of the U.S. Army (1955–57), the District of Columbia National Guard (1959–61), the U.S. Army Reserve (1961), and the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve (1961–63). He was discharged from the Marine Corps Reserve to accept a regular appointment in the Marine Corps, September 30, 1963. He then attended the Officers Candidate School, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Virginia, and was commissioned a second lieutenant on November 1, 1963. After completing Officer Candidate School in December, 2dLt Graham commenced naval air basic training at the Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida. He then attended The Basic School, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, graduating in November 1964. In January
1965, he was transferred to the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and served consecutively as a platoon commander of Company I, Executive Officer of Headquarters and Service Company, and Commanding Officer of Company M. During this period, Lt Graham participated in the American occupation of the Dominican Republic (1965–66) to protect the lives of Americans during the uprising there from April until June 1965. While stationed at Camp Lejeune.

In November 1966, he joined the 2nd Replacement Company, Staging Battalion, Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton, California, for transfer to the Republic of Vietnam. Upon arrival in South Vietnam the following month, Capt Graham joined the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division. He first served as Commanding Officer of Company H, until January 1967, then became Commanding Officer of Company F. While in command of Company F on June 2, 1967, during Operation Union II at Quang Tin, Capt Graham chose to remain with one of his men who could not be moved due to the seriousness of his wounds, and was mortally wounded. Captain Graham is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

A complete list of his medals and decorations includes: the Medal of Honor, the Purple Heart, the Presidential Unit Citation, the Navy Unit Commendation, the Organized Marine Corps Reserve Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Vietnamese Service Medal with one bronze star, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.


* Military History *

Aviation Art 89  ►  The Magnificent Fight
The Magnificent Fight
by John D. Shaw

The Desperate siege of Wake Island took place December 8 through 23, 1941. With only several hundred Marines, Naval personnel and civilian American contractors to defend against this concentrated onslaught with marginal weaponry, the spirit of heroism within this group has never been surpassed. Shown here are F4F Wildcats of VMF-211 preparing for battle. In the cockpit of one of the only four flyable aircraft available, Capt. Hank Elrod confers with fellow pilots John Kinney and Frank Tharin, before embarking on a mission December 11, in which he inflicted damage sufficient to sink the enemy destroyer Kisaragi. On this same date the gallant defenders of Wake repulsed a Japanese amphibious landing, the only time such an attempt was thwarted during World War II. Inevitably, the defenders of Wake Island, isolated, out of ammo and on the brink of starvation, became prisoners-of-war of the Japanese, but only after one of history’s most truly magnificent stands. [Source: http://www.brooksart.com/Magfight.html May 2015 ++]

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Saving Sammy B ► A Frigate's Heroic Legacy

Aboard the frigate Samuel B. Roberts Senior Chief Gunner's Mate Tom Reinert was standing watch by his 76mm gun topside in the sweltering Persian Gulf heat when the deck below him buckled. He was driven to his knees. "I looked aft, and everything behind the mast was just a wall of flame, towering up into the sky," Reinert recalled. His first thought was that the ship was going down. There was no way a ship the size of the frigate Samuel B. Roberts could endure such a huge blast and survive. But after that, as flaming pieces of insulation and debris rained down, his thoughts immediately shifted to one thing: damage control. Reinert, like the rest of crew, jumped into action.

The Sammy B was in desperate straits, and the nearest U.S. ship was nearly 100 miles away. A cheap, Russian-designed Iranian mine had shattered the keel and knocked out the power. Within 90 seconds, the frigate had taken on nearly half its total displacement in water — two main spaces completely flooded. It was April 14, 1988: the day USS Samuel B. Roberts, on her maiden cruise, should have sunk in the Persian Gulf but was saved by a herculean effort. For the next four hours, the Sammy B's beleaguered crew waged a fight for survival that stands as a testament to the simple truth that a well-trained, well-led crew can overcome seemingly impossible odds. The lessons have been passed down to successive generations of Roberts' crew members through the ship's traditions and, even as the ship prepares to retire from active service May 22, it's a legacy that will live on. To learn how thus ship survived refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “Saving Sammy B”. [Source: Navy Times | David Larter | May 2015 ++]

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Military Trivia 107 ► Tokyo Rose | A G.I. invention

Iva Toguri was born in Los Angeles on July 4, 1916. Iva was a Girl Scout as a child, and was raised as a Methodist. She attended grammar schools in Mexico and San Diego before returning with her family to Los Angeles. There she finished grammar school, attended high school, and graduated from the UCLA, with a degree in zoology. She then went to work in her parents' shop. On July 5, 1941, she sailed for Japan to visit an ailing relative and to possibly study medicine. The U.S. State Department issued her a Certificate of Identification; she did not have a passport. In September, Toguri applied to the U.S. Vice Consul in Japan for a passport, stating she wished to return to her home in the U.S. Her request was forwarded to the State
Department, but the answer had not returned by the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941) and she was stranded in Japan.

Iva Toguri, aka "Tokyo Rose" in her youth and her 1946 mugshot

Toguri was pressured by the Japanese government to renounce her American citizenship, which she refused to do. She was initially declared an enemy alien and refused a war ration card. To support herself, she found a job as a typist at a Japanese news agency, later taking a similar job with Radio Tokyo. In November 1943, Allied POWs forced to broadcast propaganda selected her to host portions of the one-hour radio show *The Zero Hour*. After she refused to broadcast anti-American propaganda, she was assured by her producers that they would not write scripts having her say anything against the U.S. True to their word, no such propaganda was found in her broadcasts.

Toguri hosted a total of 340 broadcasts of *The Zero Hour*. Toguri performed in comedy sketches and introduced recorded music, but never participated in any actual newscasts, with on-air speaking time of generally about 20 minutes. Though earning only 150 yen – about $7 – per month, she used some of her earnings to feed POWs, smuggling food in as she did before. Toguri aimed most of her comments toward her fellow Americans ("my fellow orphans"), using American slang and playing American music. She routinely referred to American and allied troops in the Pacific theater as "boneheads." In one of the few surviving recordings of her show, she refers to herself as "your 'Number One' enemy."

At no time did Toguri call herself "Tokyo Rose" during the war, and in fact there was no evidence that any other broadcaster had done so. The name was a catch-all used by Allied forces for all of the women who were heard on Japanese propaganda radio.

At war's end, reporters visiting Japan went on the hunt for Tokyo Rose. Unfortunately, as the reporters soon discovered, several women broadcast over Radio Tokyo and none used the name Tokyo Rose. Unwilling to puncture a balloon that now had grown to a gigantic size, the reporters promised $2,000 to Iva Toguri to say that she was Tokyo Rose. Toguri, who'd been stranded in Japan by the war and provided for herself by getting a job as a DJ, signed a statement claiming to be Tokyo Rose, though she had no idea that this figure had been implicated in treason. The army conducted an investigation and cleared her, as the *New York Times* reported in August 1945."There is no Tokyo Rose," the U.S. Office of War Information revealed," the name is strictly a G.I. invention.... Government monitors listening in twenty-four hours a day have never heard the word 'Tokyo Rose' over a Japanese-controlled Far Eastern radio." Three years later Assistant Attorney General Theron L. Caudle confirmed that Toguri was innocent." Her activity," he wrote," consisted of nothing more than the announcing of music selections."

No matter. The media, led by journalist/broadcaster Walter Winchell, went on a witch hunt. In 1948 the government of President Harry Truman, then in the political race of his life, pressed charges against Toguri, indicting her on eight counts for treason and trying her in federal court in San Francisco. It was a frame-up
from the start. The key witnesses who testified against her during the trial, claiming she had broadcast propaganda over the radio, subsequently admitted they had lied." We had no choice," said one of the witnesses, a Japanese businessman. "U.S. Occupation police came and told me I had no choice but to testify against Iva, or else." He and others flown in from Japan for the trial "were told what to say and what not to say for two hours every morning for a month before the trial started." The judge in the trial was convinced that Toguri was guilty and privately confessed that he was shocked that his son – a veteran who had been stationed in the Pacific – felt no animosity to her. "I can't understand it," the judge confessed. In his instructions to the jury he excluded virtually all of the arguments her lawyers had raised in her defense. The jury foreman afterward said, "If it had been possible under the judge's instructions to acquit her, the jury would have.

On September 29, 1948 she was found guilty of only one of the eight counts, fined $10,000 and sentenced to 10 years in prison. She was sent to the Federal Reformatory for Women in Alderson, WV. After spending six years and two months in prison, Iva Toguri was paroled and released on January 28, 1956. She moved to Chicago, where she spent the remainder of her life. Nearly 20 years after her release from prison, an investigation by Chicago Tribune reporter Ron Yates discovered that Kenkichi Oki and George Mitsushio, two prosecution witnesses who had given the most damaging testimony at her trial, had perjured themselves. They stated that FBI and U.S. occupation police had coached them for over two months about what they were to say on the stand, and had been threatened with treason trials themselves if they didn't cooperate.[Both of these men had renounced their American citizenship to work for Radio Tokyo.] This was followed up by a Morley Safer report on the television news program 60 Minutes.

As a result of the 60 Minutes piece, President Gerald Ford issued a full and unconditional Presidential pardon to D'Aquino on his last day in office, January 19, 1977. [Toguri had married Felipe D'Aquino in 1945 a Portuguese citizen of Portuguese-Japanese heritage. She did not, however, choose to take his Portuguese citizenship.] On January 15, 2006, the World War II Veterans Committee (sponsors of the Memorial Day Parade in Washington DC and the National World War II), citing "her indomitable spirit, love of country, and the example of courage she has given her fellow Americans", awarded her its annual Edward J. Herlihy Citizenship Award. According to one biographer, Toguri found it the most memorable day of her life. On September 26, 2006, at the age of 90, she died in a Chicago hospital of natural causes. To view a 43 minute video biography on what she experienced refer to http://www.biography.com/people/tokyo-rose-37481.

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Military History ► WWII Operation Starvation

Operation Starvation was an American naval mining operation conducted in World War II by the Army Air Forces, in which vital water routes and ports of Japan were mined by air in order to disrupt enemy shipping.
The mission was initiated at the insistence of Admiral Chester Nimitz who wanted his naval operations augmented by an extensive mining of Japan itself conducted by the air force. While General Henry H. Arnold felt this was strictly a naval priority, he assigned General Curtis LeMay to carry it out. LeMay assigned one group of about 160 aircraft of the 313th Bombardment Wing to the task, with orders to plant 2,000 mines in April 1945. The mining runs were made by individual B-29 Superfortresses at night at moderately low altitudes. Radar provided mine release information. The 313th Bombardment Wing received preliminary training in aerial mining theory while their B-29 aircraft received bomb-bay modification to carry mines. Individual aircrew were then given four to eight training flights involving five radar approaches on each flight and dummy mine drops on the last flight.

Beginning on March 27, 1945, 1,000 parachute-retarded influence mines with magnetic and acoustic exploders were initially dropped, followed up with many more, including models with water pressure displacement exploders. This mining proved the most efficient means of destroying Japanese shipping during World War II. In terms of damage per unit of cost, it surpassed strategic bombing and the United States submarine campaign. Eventually most of the major ports and straits of Japan were repeatedly mined, severely disrupting Japanese logistics and troop movements for the remainder of the war with 35 of 47 essential convoy routes having to be abandoned. For instance, shipping through Kobe declined by 85%, from 320,000 tons in March to only 44,000 tons in July. Operation Starvation sank more ship tonnage in the last six months of the war than the efforts of all other sources combined. The Twentieth Air Force flew 1,529 sorties and laid 12,135 mines in twenty-six fields on forty-six separate missions. Mining demanded only 5.7% of the XXI Bomber Command's total sorties, and only fifteen B-29s were lost in the effort. In return, mines sank or damaged 670 ships totaling more than 1,250,000 tons.

After the war, the commander of Japan's minesweeping operations noted that he thought this mining campaign could have directly led to the defeat of Japan on its own had it begun earlier. Similar conclusions were reached by American analysts who reported in July 1946 in the United States Strategic Bombing Survey that it would have been more efficient to combine the United States' effective anti-shipping submarine effort with land- and carrier-based air power to strike harder against merchant shipping and begin a more extensive aerial mining campaign earlier in the war. This would have starved Japan, forcing an earlier end to the war.

Japan entered the war with some 6,000,000 tons of merchant shipping of over 500 tons gross weight. During the war an additional 4,100,000 tons were constructed, captured or requisitioned. According to the Secretary of War 1 JUL, 1946 United States Strategic Bombing Survey Summary Report 8,900,000 tons of this shipping were sunk or so seriously damaged as to be out of action at the end of the war. Of this 54.7% of this total was attributable to submarines, 16.3 percent to carrier based planes, 10.2 percent to Army land-based planes and 4.3 percent to Navy and Marine land-based planes, 9.3 percent to mines (largely dropped by B-29s), less than 1% to surface gunfire, and the balance of 4% to marine accidents.
Due to their ability to penetrate deeply into enemy-controlled waters, submarines accounted for approximately 60 percent of sinkings up until the final months of the war. During 1941, carrier task forces made deep sweeps which accounted for large numbers of ships. After April, 1945, when Japanese shipping was restricted to the Korean and Manchurian runs and to shallow inland waters, mines dropped by B-29s in Japanese harbors and inland waterways accounted for 50% of all ships sunk or damaged. In isolating areas of combat from ship-borne reinforcements land-based aircraft also sank large numbers of barges and vessels smaller than 500 tons gross weight, not included in the tabulation prepared by the Survey. [Source: http://www.anesi.com/ussbs01.htm?pagei & https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Starvation Apr 2015 ++]

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Vietnam at 50  ➤  Operation Rolling Thunder

In 1964, Keith Connolly was a young Air Force pilot and was among the first Americans to fly sorties in the F-100 Super Sabre fighter bomber targeting the North Vietnamese communist insurgency. “The atmosphere was that we were going over there to provide the firepower necessary to bring the North Vietnamese to their knees,” said Connolly, who now lives in Arizona after retiring from 35 years in the Air Force. The average American back then paid scant attention to the long-simmering civil war on the Indochina peninsula, where the U.S. had sent military advisors but was not yet involved in direct ground combat. “It was the only war in town, and it was going to be over with tomorrow,” Connelly recalled. “Boy, were we wrong.”

On March 2, 1965, the U.S. commenced such bombing raids in earnest with Operation Rolling Thunder, a massive, joint Navy-Air Force campaign of more than 300,000 attack sorties over 3½ years. Connolly and hundreds of other Air Force and Navy pilots would be drawn into that bombing campaign focused on North Vietnam, an operation now largely regarded as a failure that escalated U.S. involvement in the civil war, pulled American ground troops into combat and led to scores of downed U.S. flyers spending years in North Vietnam POW camps. “What it led to was an escalation of military force on the American side and a corresponding effort to keep up on the Vietnamese side, which lasted for another 10 years,” said Marilyn B. Young, a history professor at New York University who co-edited the book “Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam, Or, How Not to Learn from the Past.” “I think Rolling Thunder was a profound failure.” “It was just a mess, from start to finish,” said James H. Willbanks, a veteran of the war and author of numerous books on the subject, including “Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost its War.” Scholars point to numerous reasons Rolling Thunder was ineffective: heavy-handed restrictions on targets, shifting and vague operational goals, underestimation of the enemy, lack of intensity and confused evaluation. “And in the process, we lost over 500 aircraft to no particular end,” Willbanks said.

No magic formula. Rolling Thunder sprang from a cantankerous debate and mutual mistrust between President Lyndon Johnson’s civilian security advisers, particularly Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, and top military officials over how to deal militarily with the spread of communist insurgency in Southeast Asia. Johnson’s advisers argued for waging of a limited war, a concept that was largely anathema to military heads who had cut their teeth on the full-scale World War II. Such a limited bombing campaign would employ gradual pressure on North Vietnam “until they finally reached the point where the North Vietnamese leadership would say, ‘We give. We say uncle,’ ” said Edward Marolda, a naval historian and author of ‘By Sea, Air and Land: An Illustrated History of the U.S. Navy and the War in Southeast Asia.’ “If you’re not achieving success when you start bombing, then you would increase the bombing and military pressure,” Marolda said. But there was always a self-imposed “ceiling” on that pressure because Johnson and McNamara feared that bombing too intensely — or too close to the border of China — could trigger direct Chinese or Soviet Union intervention on behalf of North Vietnam, he said.
F-105s attack a bridge in southern North Vietnam in 1966 (left). Commander Richard M. Bellinger of aircraft carrier Oriskany’s Fighter Squadron 162 relates how he destroyed a North Vietnamese MiG-21 on Oct. 9, 1966 (right).

“They did not want to generate World War III,” he said, but the U.S. never found that “magic formula” of pressure. “As it turned out, gradual escalation gave the enemy time to improve anti-aircraft defenses and to take other measures to reduce the impact of the bombing,” said Mark Moyar, author of “Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965.” When North Vietnam did not cave in, Rolling Thunder morphed into “Plan B,” with a goal of stemming the flow of supplies and personnel to the insurgency in the South, primarily through the Ho Chi Minh Trail, Marolda said.

Pilots in danger. As Rolling Thunder rumbled on, missions became ever more risky for the men flying them. Connolly recalled that the anti-aircraft gunners in North Vietnam in 1964 were not that good. “They were like us,” he said. “In fact, in our squadron, we did not have a person who had been involved in combat before. This was all new to us.” When Connolly went back for his second tour of duty, he found that Rolling Thunder had ushered in a new era. “When I returned in ’65 and things got more intense and we started losing more air crews, it became very apparent that we had underestimated our foe,” he said. “In the early days, when you’d go across a target, they’d shoot at you. They weren’t horribly accurate. Later on, they wouldn’t shoot at you until they got the ideal shot. They became much more disciplined. “Conversely, we got better at our job, which was basically getting into the target, delivering munitions and escaping.” Some didn’t escape. Among them was Sen. John McCain, then a Navy aviator who was shot down near Hanoi in October 1967 and spent the next six years as a POW.

The pilots Connolly flew with in those days were a small, tightly knit group. “There were not a lot of fighter pilots, particularly who were flying the F-100 or the F-105,” he said. “We all knew each other because we rotated around that system. So if you didn’t know the guy personally — and many of them you did — you knew someone who did. So each loss was amplified by the fact that, hey, we lost a really good guy here or there or he went in and we never heard from him. “It’s always tough when you’ve lost three of four people on a given sortie and the next day you have to go up there again.”

Ground war. Rolling Thunder ushered in American ground combat because such a vast operation had to rely on more jets based in South Vietnam, aside from aircraft sortieing from Thailand and carriers at sea. “So you’re going to have to put airplanes on the ground in Vietnam, and that’s in fact why in March of ’65 we put the Marines ashore in Da Nang, to secure the air base,” Willbanks said. “And of course, once you get the Marines ashore, you can’t secure an air base by sitting in the wire. You’ve got to patrol, and pretty soon what starts as a defensive means looks very much like offensive operations. And fairly quickly we’re in a real, no-kidding shooting war on the ground.” Johnson tacitly admitted that Rolling Thunder had failed by announcing in March 1968 he would not run for re-election and that the U.S. was going to enter peace negotiations with North Vietnam, Marolda said.
In the decades since Rolling Thunder officially ended in the fall of 1968, the operation has routinely been held up as classic example of the pitfalls of political micromanagement of war. “There’s some truth to that,” said Christian G. Appy, professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and author of “American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity.” “But what should not be forgotten is that while there were some constraints on bombing in the North, our bombing of the South was utterly unconstrained,” Appy said, adding that 4 million tons of bombs were dropped on the South, compared with 1 million tons in the North. Appy argues that despite the destruction of Rolling Thunder, it had no impact because there was no military solution to be had in Vietnam. “So long as the government in South Vietnam didn’t have the sufficient support of its own people, the American objective of creating a permanent, non-communist country called South Vietnam was just not going to happen.”

The legacy. Moyar said Rolling Thunder is an example of America’s recurring tendency to overestimate air power. “The precision of air power has improved greatly since Vietnam, but we continue to see the nation’s enemies adapting in ways that limit the damage that can be inflicted from the air.” Col. Gregory Daddis, an academy professor of history at West Point, said he advises his students to look to history for perspective rather than specific lessons because context changes over time. “In the case with Rolling Thunder, I think there’s something to be learned here about an honest dialogue between civilian policymakers and senior military leaders about what military force can achieve,” Daddis said. A germane question Rolling Thunder raises is what beliefs and assumptions did civilian and military leaders hold that made them believe the U.S. could bend or break the will of Hanoi’s leaders through the military, in particular air power, he said. “That’s important because it suggests that military power might not always be able to help you achieve your political objectives,” he said. [Source: Stars and Stripes | Wyatt Olson | Mar. 01, 2015 ++]

D-Day ► Utah Beach Weapons Carrier 6 JUN

An Army weapons carrier moves through the surf toward Utah Beach, after being launched from its landing craft on June 6. Note .50 caliber machine gun on the vehicle, pointed skyward for anti-aircraft defense.
WWII Prewar Events ► Dust Bowl APR 1935

About to be engulfed in a April 15, 1935 gigantic dust cloud is a peaceful little ranch in Boise City, Oklahoma where the topsoil is being dried and blown away during the years of the Dust Bowl in central North America. Severe drought, poor farming techniques and devastating storms rendered millions of acres of farmland useless.

WWII PostWar Events ► International Military Tribunal Apr 1947

A general view of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East meeting in Tokyo in April, 1947. On May 3, 1946, the Allies began the trial of 28 Japanese civilian and military leaders for war crimes. Seven were hanged and others were sentenced to prison terms.
Spanish American War Images 73 ► Colonel Charles A. Wikoff KIA

United States Army officer Colonel Charles A. Wikoff was the most senior U.S. military officer killed in the Spanish–American War.

Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 30 Jun

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 30 Jun”.

WWI in Photos 126 ► Over The Top

A British officer leads the way "over the top" amid the bursting of German shells.
Faces of WAR (WWII) ► Coventry Cathedral Mother's Day Services

Overview of lines of US wounded soldiers attending Mother's Day services in blitzed Coventry Cathedral, which has no roof at all; men are patients in nearby convalescent hospitals. May 13, 1945

* Health Care *

TRICARE Pharmacy Copay Update 13 ► SASC Proposes Doubling

The co-pays that Tricare beneficiaries fork out for prescription drugs would nearly double over 10 years under legislation proposed by the Senate Armed Services Committee. The panel's draft 2016 defense authorization bill, released 22 MAY, calls for increasing co-payments on all brand-name prescriptions starting in 2016, raising co-pays for generics beginning in 2019 and then continuing to incrementally boost
all co-pays through 2025. b Medications would continue to be offered at no cost through military pharmacies, as well as to survivors of those who die or died on active duty, and medically retired personnel and their family members.

Legislators said they need to raise the fees to ensure that the Pentagon's budget meets military readiness and national security needs in future years. "In deliberations with the House last year, there was an agreement to reconsider any proposed co-pay changes if inadequate defense budget levels continue … in the committee's view, the defense budget situation is no better this year," committee members wrote in an explanatory report accompanying their bill. Tricare beneficiaries saw pharmacy co-payments rise by $3 for most prescriptions just a few months ago, in February. The new Senate plan, if approved as part of the final defense bill, would require the Pentagon to keep co-payments steady next year for generic prescriptions obtained through network pharmacies or by mail — $8 for a 30-day prescription at a retail store and $0 for a 90-day prescription by home delivery. But prescriptions for brand names would increase, to $28 from $20 for a 30-day script at a retail store and to $28 from $16 for a 90-day prescription by mail. Fees also would increase for drugs not listed in Tricare's formulary, to $54 from $46 for a 90-day prescription. By 2025, co-payments would be:

- $14 for either a 30-day generic prescription at a network pharmacy or a 90-day generic prescription by mail.
- $46 for a 30-day prescription of a brand-name drug at a retail pharmacy or a 90-day prescription.
- $92 for a 90-day prescription of medication not listed in Tricare's formulary.

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*Assumes 1 brand name prescription per month in a retail pharmacy and 3 generic mail order maintenance prescriptions filled through the year in 90-day increments.

The House version of the defense bill does not include a similar fee hike. Instead, it proposes that the Defense Department establish a pilot program of preferred retail pharmacy networks to see whether such a program, currently available in Medicare, would reduce government costs. Other health-related items included in the Senate's draft bill:

- A stipulation that DoD publish the average wait times for patient appointments at military hospitals and clinics as well as public data on patient safety, quality of care and health outcomes at military hospitals and clinics.
- A requirement that members of the Selected Reserve be allowed to enroll in Tricare for up to 18 months after discharge under other-than-adverse conditions.
- A provision that DoD develop a system by which mental health specialists could apply for and be designated as able to understand and treat, behavioral health conditions related to military service and a requirement that the department maintain a list of these providers.
- A provision that Tricare allow beneficiaries up to four urgent care visits a year without prior authorization.
• A requirement that DoD ensure Tricare beneficiaries can transfer between regions without experiencing any delays in health care related to the moves.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime, Staff | May 28, 2015 ++]

TRICARE Tools  ➤ Learn About Your Benefit

Your health care benefit gives you and your family security in knowing you can receive health care when you need it. TRICARE provides several tools to make sure you understand your health plan, whether you have one of the basic TRICARE plans or transitional health care coverage. One great option for TRICARE information is TRICARE TV videos on YouTube. These short, monthly videos discuss a specific aspect of the TRICARE benefit. Once on TRICARE’s YouTube page https://www.youtube.com/TRICARE you can access all the videos on the playlist. You can also subscribe to receive notifications when a new video is posted.

In addition to news articles, there is there the weekly audio podcasts http://www.tricare.mil/podcasts that recaps the week’s news and highlights relevant military health observances. Monthly webinars provide an opportunity for you to speak directly to TRICARE experts. Subject matter experts present and take questions at the end of their presentations. Webinars, like TRICARE TV episodes, typically address one aspect of the benefit per session. At http://www.militaryonesource.mil/social/webinars you can sign up for upcoming webinars on the Military OneSource website and also watch prior webinars on their archives page. At http://www.militaryonesource.mil/social/webinar-archives.

All of these resources are on TRICARE’s Media Center at http://www.tricare.mil/mediacenter. You can also interact and get daily news and information on TRICARE’s social media pages, Facebook, Twitter and Google+. For more in depth information, fact sheets give highly detailed information about specific parts of the benefit and are available for download on the TRICARE SMART site http://www.tricare.mil/SMART. Learning about your benefit ensures you understand it and the best ways to get care. If you’re not sure where to start, you can always begin on the TRICARE website http://www.tricare.mil. NOTE: Links to all of the above TRICARE assets and other useful resources are available on the LINKS FOR MILARETIVETS website at http://www.hostmtb.org. [Source: TRICARE News Release | May 29, 2014 ++]

TRICARE Use While Traveling Update 02  ➤ Webinar 3 JUN

TRICARE and Military OneSource are co-hosting a webinar to educate TRICARE beneficiaries about accessing their health benefit as they travel this PCS Season. The webinar will take place on Wednesday, June 3, 2015 at 12:00PM EST. Go to https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5824631328180190209 to sign up. Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis and is limited due to system capacity. Participants must avoid sharing personal health information when asking a question.

Beneficiaries are covered while traveling on business, vacation or when moving. The rules for getting care vary depend on your plan and travel destination. The featured speaker for this event is Ms. Shane Pham. Ms. Pham is a member of the Defense Health Agency Policy and Operations Directorate. She has worked in multiple Military Health System positions to include a quality service manager, a referral management nurse, a medical coder, a TRICARE Europe representative and an Air Force medic. NOTE: You may submit your questions to Ms Pham before the webinar by sending an email to MOSWebinars@militaryonesource.com. To get more information about TRICARE while traveling, visit www.tricare.mil/FindDoctor/Traveling. (Archived copies of this an earlier webinars are available at www.militaryonesource.mil/social/webinar-archives)

TRICARE Overseas Program Update 01 ➤ Direct Deposit Reimbursement

TRICARE Overseas Program beneficiaries who see host nation providers and file claims for reimbursement can now receive TRICARE payments through direct deposit in U.S. dollars into a U.S.-based bank account. To use this option, you must register at http://tricare-overseas.com. To register, click on the "Beneficiaries" tab then click on the "Register" link in the "Secure Logon" box. Once registered, update your family profile to ensure your family members are reflected accurately. Eligible beneficiaries may choose to sign up for direct deposit by selecting "Direct Deposit Sign-Up" link. If you are not eligible to sign up for direct deposit, you will not see the link to sign up for it. Beneficiaries or dependent children who have incorrect information in their patient record, such as a wrong date of birth, name or sponsor number, will not be able to sign up for direct deposit until the errors are corrected.

Once you select to sign up for direct deposit, a pop-up will prompt you to agree to receive paperless explanation of benefits statements. This allows you to electronically see the direct deposit numbers and dates when a reimbursement is made. You must agree to receive paperless EOB statements to proceed. Next, update your personal information and provide your banking information. Even if the original claim was filed in an international currency, the reimbursement amount will be paid in U.S. dollars based on the foreign exchange rate for the last date of service as submitted on the claim. You will receive a confirmation e-mail whenever you are sent a TOP claims payment via direct deposit. For more information or assistance with signing up for direct deposit, contact your TOP Regional Call Center and select option 2 for TOP claims assistance.

[Source: TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin #347 | May 29, 2015 ++]

TRICARE Allergy Coverage Update 01 ➤ Season Is Here

In the spring, many people are happy to spend time outside after being inside for the winter. Temperatures are warmer, the days are longer and flowers are in full bloom. Unfortunately, spring is also the time of year when allergies flare and can cause discomfort to many. According to the U. S. National Library of Medicine, allergic reactions are sensitivities to substances called allergens that come into contact with the skin, nose, eyes, respiratory tract, and gastrointestinal tract. They can be breathed into the lungs, swallowed, or injected. Allergies occur when your immune system reacts to substances that do not bother most other people. Common allergens are: Animal dander, Bee stings or stings from other insects, insect bites, plants, and pollens.

Reactions vary when a person is exposed to something to which they are allergic. First-time exposure may only produce a mild reaction. Mild allergic reactions include itching, rashes, watery or red eyes and nasal congestion. Repeated exposures may lead to more serious reactions. Once a person has had an exposure or an allergic reaction (is sensitized), even a limited exposure to a small amount of an allergen can trigger a severe reaction. More serious reactions can include swelling of the face, eyes or tongue, difficulty breathing and more. Some reactions can occur several hours after exposure, particularly if the allergen causes a reaction after it has been eaten. In very rare cases, reactions develop after 24 hours. One of the most severe allergic reactions, anaphylaxis, is a sudden and severe allergic reaction that occurs within minutes of exposure. Anaphylaxis requires immediate medical attention. Without treatment, anaphylaxis can lead to death within 15 minutes.

Doctors use skin and blood tests to diagnose allergies. Treatments can include medicines, allergy shots, and avoiding the substances that cause the reactions. TRICARE covers proven services and supplies needed

TRICARE Prior Authorization Update 02  ►  A Medical Best Practice

A prior authorization (or preauthorization) is an approval for a prescribed procedure, health care service or medication before you receive the care. If you’re enrolled in a TRICARE Prime plan, your primary care manager (PCM) will work with your regional contractor for the prior authorization. For all other plans, you need to contact your regional contractor for prior authorization. TRICARE uses prior authorization as a tool to ensure safety and efficiency in both the medical and pharmacy benefit.

Prior authorization is a standard process used routinely by not only TRICARE but also other commercial and government health plans, like Medicare. Getting prior authorization ensures that some types of non-routine care are both appropriate for the patient and cost effective. In some cases, there may be an equally effective treatment or therapy available at a lower cost. This type of checks and balance for TRICARE helps lower the cost of care for everyone, and keeps the benefit sustainable for future generations of the military community. Each TRICARE region contractor has their own process on how prior authorizations are managed. You can see a list of services that require prior authorization on the TRICARE website at [http://tricare.mil/FindDoctor/Appointments/Authorization](http://tricare.mil/FindDoctor/Appointments/Authorization). The site also has links to the regional contractor websites to see region-specific requirements.

Prior authorization applies to more than 80 drugs under the pharmacy benefit; one example is when you have a prescription for a brand name drug that has a lower cost, generic equivalent. If your doctor writes a prescription for a brand name drug the pharmacy will fill it with a preferred generic alternative, unless you have a medical reason requiring the brand name, like being allergic to a non-active ingredient in the generic version. A prior authorization for a new prescription may also help prevent potentially dangerous drug interactions. TRICARE also recently implemented prior authorization for some compound drugs that contain ingredients not proven safe and effective. Compound drugs are a combination of two or more drug ingredients made specifically by your pharmacist to meet your individual needs. The prior authorization allows your doctor to submit additional evidence that the ingredients in your compound drug are safe and effective, and to show that commercially available drugs aren’t appropriate for you. This ensures that even though compound drugs can be an expensive form of therapy, they are available to patients who really need them. Your doctor can contact Express Scripts to request a prior authorization for compound drugs.

You work with your doctor to get the prior authorization, which is typically good for one year. You can check the status of your request for prior authorization on your regional contractor’s website. Regional contractor websites can be found on the View My Referrals/Authorizations page on the TRICARE website ([http://www.tricare.mil/FindDoctor/Appointments/CheckStatus.aspx](http://www.tricare.mil/FindDoctor/Appointments/CheckStatus.aspx)). They are:

- **North Region**: Health Net Federal Services
- **South Region**: Humana Military Healthcare Services
- **West Region**: UnitedHealthcare Military & Veterans
- **Overseas**: Contact your Regional Call Center

[Source: TRICARE Communications | May 20, 2015 ++]

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Ahhh, summer! Finally, we can ditch the winter woolies and enjoy the sensation of warm sun on skin. Sunshine helps our bodies make vitamin D, which is essential to health. But a little sun exposure goes a long way. According to the National Institutes of Health: “Ten to 15 minutes of sunshine three times weekly is enough to produce the body’s requirement of vitamin D. The sun needs to shine on the skin of your face, arms, back or legs (without sunscreen). Because exposure to sunlight is a risk for skin cancer, you should use sunscreen after a few minutes in the sun.” The best sunburn remedy is protection. Skin damage adds up over the years, so taking care of your skin is a lifelong project.

First-aid for sunburn - Sunburn happens when you forget to take sun precautions until you feel the heat of a burn. Or you forget to reapply sunblock every two hours. If you do get burned, quick action helps reduce the damage to your skin, New York City dermatologist Whitney Bowe tells Men’s Journal: “Although prevention is best, if you quickly treat a sunburn, you might have a shot at minimizing the damage done to the cells,” Bowe says. “You want to help the skin repair itself as quickly as possible.”

The itch begins - When the worst pain of a severe sunburn has passed, your problems may not be over. Itching can follow a bad burn. Several of our remedies are meant to help with itching. Dermatologist Jeffrey Benabio, physician director of health care transformation at Kaiser Permanente in San Diego, explains in the DermBlog why sunburn itches: Sunburn is caused by ultraviolet (UV) radiation damage to your skin. Too much UV damages your skin cells’ DNA, and your immune system responds by killing off the bad cells. Because UV radiation doesn’t penetrate (unlike X-rays for example), it damages only the surface layer of your skin. This outermost layer happens to be loaded with special nerve fibers called C-fibers, which are responsible for itch.

Get out of the sun - Once you’ve been sunburned, don’t let it get worse. Move into the shade or go indoors. If you are stuck — out on the water, for example — cover up. Good to know: Sunblock takes at least 20 minutes to start working. If you have blisters over more than 20 percent of your body, go to the hospital, Robert Friedman, a dermatologist at New York University’s Langone Medical Center, tells Men’s Journal. Otherwise, treat pain and burning with these 26 remedies found in the kitchen, garden or medicine cabinet:

1. Pain relievers. Men’s Journal talked with Friedman, a dermatologist at New York University’s Langone Medical Center: Friedman suggests popping an ibuprofen (Advil), which acts as an anti-inflammatory to reduce swelling and ease pain. If you also have a headache or mild chills, go with acetaminophen (Tylenol), he says.

2. Cool bath. Take a gentle bath in cool water to cool your skin and stop the burn. Avoid soap because it dries the skin and can make itching worse. You might want to avoid taking a shower because the spray may hurt tender skin. “As soon as you get out of the bathtub or shower, gently pat yourself dry, but leave a little water on your skin,” advises The American Academy of Dermatology.

3. Cool compresses. If you can’t immerse yourself in cool water, do the next best thing: Soak clean towels in cool water and apply them to your burning skin. As the compresses warm, change them for cool ones. Do this on and off for a day or two until the pain and heat subside.

4. Hydration. A sunburn dries your skin. Drink fluids to head off dehydration and heat stroke. In addition to water, try coconut water and drinks with added electrolytes. The Skin Cancer Foundation advises: Watch for signs of dehydration: Dry mouth, thirst, reduced urination, headache, dizziness and sleepiness. Children are especially vulnerable, so check with a doctor if they appear ill.

5. Infection prevention. Avoid scratching your skin or popping blisters, as opening skin wounds increases the chance of infection. Prevention Magazine suggests applying an over-the-counter antibacterial ointment if you have an infection or are concerned that an infection could get started.
6. **Avoid these “cures”**. Stay away from first-aid sprays that contain lidocane or benzocaine. They’re meant to numb the skin or relieve pain but can cause an allergic reaction or irritate your burned skin, making the pain worse. Applying ice to sunburned skin would seem to make sense, but don’t do it. “Putting ice directly on a sunburn can make it worse, according to the Mayo Clinic. Also, avoid using petroleum products (like petroleum jelly) on your skin because they trap the skin’s heat. Instead, follow the AAD’s recommendation and dab over-the-counter low-dose hydrocortisone cream on skin that is particularly raw.

7. **Aloe vera**. A review of four experimental studies found that aloe vera could reduce the healing time of burns by about nine days, compared with conventional medication,” according to environmental news site EcoWatch. Stock your medicine cabinet with a lotion rich in aloe vera. Or grow the plant in your garden or as a houseplant: Just break off a leaf and apply the healing juice directly to a burn when needed.

8. **Fat-free milk**. Milk compresses are an odd-sounding remedy, but it is widely recommended. Don’t use just any milk. It must be fat-free milk, according to Prevention Magazine, which shares this recipe: Mix 1 cup fat-free milk with 4 cups water, then add a few ice cubes. Apply compresses for 15 to 20 minutes; repeat every 2 to 4 hours.

9. **Vinegar**. Pouring a cup of cider vinegar into your cool bath water will promote healing by balancing the pH of your sunburned skin, according to MedicineNet.

10. **Black tea**. Tea bags — black tea, especially — are a favorite home remedy for sunburn. There doesn’t appear to be much scientific basis for it, but it can’t hurt. In the same vein, beauty magazines occasionally recommend calming puffy eyelids by resting with a poultice of damp tea bags on your lids. Used tea bags are perfect for this. Apply the damp tea bags to the worst areas of sunburn.

11. **Potato juice**. The juice of a raw potato can be used to treat sunburn. Rub slices of potato onto burned skin or grate raw potato, gather it in clean cheesecloth or a soft clean rag and apply the poultice directly to your skin. WebMD says: A chemical in the potato peel might also prevent bacteria from attaching to cells. Potatoes are a source of vitamin C, iron, riboflavin and carbohydrates.

12. **Chamomile**. Chamomile is famous for its soothing properties. There’s no scientific evidence that it helps calm burned skin, but it is popular as a folk remedy. Soak a cloth in cool chamomile tea and apply it to your skin.

13. **Cornstarch**. There are a couple of ways to use cornstarch to help with sunburn. You can make a paste — add a few drops of water to some cornstarch, mix and apply it to the sunburned skin. Also, sprinkle sheets with cornstarch so interaction with the sheets feels smoother and less painful to burned skin.

14. **Baking soda**. Baking soda neutralizes acids and is often used to soothe babies’ diaper rash. Pour a half cup to a cup of baking soda in your cool bath. Or, make a paste by mixing baking soda with a few drops of water. Apply it to itchy skin. Prevention Magazine says: Instead of toweling off, let the (baking soda bath solution) dry on your skin. It is completely nontoxic, and it will soothe the pain.

15. **Oatmeal**. Oatmeal — used in a bath or in compresses — is a time-honored remedy for itching. LiveStrong explains how to make a paste by grinding oatmeal flakes in a blender or food processor and mixing with milk and honey. The paste is applied to burned skin. Or follow Prevention Magazine’s method: Put dry oatmeal into cheesecloth or gauze and run cool water through it, saving the liquid. Remove the oatmeal and use the liquid to soak the cloth compresses. Apply them every two to four hours. Colloidal oatmeal is a refined oatmeal extract made by boiling ground oats. Aveeno is one company that uses colloidal oatmeal in bath products to soothe irritated skin.

16. **Yarrow**. Common yarrow, a plant found in many gardens and along roadsides, has healing properties, according to Fox News: If you have a sunburn, make a big pot of yarrow tea and add it to a warm or cool
bath. The infusion will provide relief. Look for dried yarrow sold in bulk at health food stores and spice shops.

17. **Vitamin E.** Apply vitamin E oil directly on skin or swallow capsules to get its healing and anti-inflammatory properties. Also, consider using moisturizer containing vitamin C and vitamin E. The vitamins “might help limit skin damage (though studies have not proved that),” according to dermatologist Shawn Allen of Boulder, Colorado. He’s a spokesman for The Skin Cancer Foundation.

18. **Moisturizer.** Sunburn dries skin making it irritated, so use lots of moisturizer. Avoid scented products as fragrance may further irritate damaged skin. Chilling moisturizer in the refrigerator can make it feel more soothing.

19. **Cucumbers.** The cooling juices of the cucumber are commonly used to soothe inflamed skin. Spas, for example, apply cut slices to patrons’ eyelids for a soothing treatment. For sunburn, cut lengthwise slices to give you more surface area to apply directly to sunburned areas. Chilling the cuke just slightly might make it feel even better on burned skin.

20. **Plantain.** Plantain is a starchy fruit belonging to the banana family. It’s eaten baked or fried in the Caribbean and West Africa, where it is grown. “The late Alabama folk herbalist Tommie Bass used plantain for sunburn, stings, poison ivy and poison oak,” writes botanist James A. Duke in “The Green Pharmacy: New Discoveries in Herbal Remedies for Common Diseases.” It was published in 1997 and available at Google Books. Presumably you apply the fruit — or a poultice of mashed fruit — to sunburned skin. Duke doesn’t say how to use it.

21. **Eggplant.** Yes, eggplant! It has a folk reputation as a sunburn treatment, Duke writes. He suggests mashing it (cooking would make that easier) and applying it to the skin.

22. **Witch hazel.** Witch hazel is another astringent that has been “shown to have long-lasting anti-inflammatory relief,” Prevention Magazine says. You can use it often for temporary, topical help with itching and pain.

23. **Calendula.** The calendula flower is a member of the marigold family that is applied to skin “to reduce pain and swelling (inflammation) and to treat poorly healing wounds and leg ulcers,” WebMD says. It is “loaded with anti-cancer lycopene,” according to Mother Earth News. Calendula creams and gels are found in health food stores and drug stores. Writes Fox News: The gels are more cooling, providing quick relief. Calendula relieves inflammation and helps to accelerate skin healing. Natural, safe, effective and inexpensive, calendula is another home medicine chest essential. WebMD cautions, “[D]on’t confuse calendula with ornamental marigolds of the Tagets genus, which are commonly grown in vegetable gardens.” And it can cause miscarriage so avoid it by all means if you are pregnant or even if you are breastfeeding, WebMD says.

24. **Lavender.** Lavender essential oil, found in health food stores and some drug stores, is commonly used for sunburn, Fox News writes, adding: Rich in anti-inflammatory compounds, lavender essential oil reduces redness and swelling. The side effect? It makes you smell really good.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | May 22, 2015 ++]

TRICARE Speech Therapy ► Coverage

Speech and language disorders can occur at any age. Whether dealing with children or adults, it’s important to understand that most are treatable. Early speech and language intervention can help children be more
successful with reading, writing, schoolwork, and interpersonal relationships. According to the American Speech Language Hearing Association, children’s speech and language development usually follows a typical pattern. Development of communication skills begins in infancy, before children say their first word. Newborn children up to three months old can express pleasure sounds and cry for different needs. As babies get older they babble and make more speech-like sounds.

Parents and caregivers can keep track of developmental milestones to understand a child’s speech capabilities by following the child’s progress in their ability to follow directions, name common objects and actions, know colors, numbers and letters, follow routines like putting his coat away or repeat nursery rhymes. By the time children are four or five years old, they typically can hold a conversation and tell short stories. After discussing concerns with your primary care provider, there might be a referral to an audiologist or Speech-language pathologists to perform a further evaluation of the possible causes of your child’s speech and language difficulties.

Children typically receive their first hearing screening before one month to provide a good baseline for speech and language development. Adults may experience speech and language difficulties for a variety of reasons. An adult may have a speech or language disorder that has continued from childhood, like a stutter, or develop a disorder due to trauma or disease. Brain injury or loss of function can cause motor speech disorders in various ways. Some of the disorders are from problems related to the movement or coordination of the muscles used for speech, disruption of the messages from the brain to the mouth or and problems moving the lips or tongue to say sounds correctly. TRICARE covers speech therapy to treat speech, language and voice dysfunctions resulting from birth defects, disease, injury, hearing loss and pervasive developmental disorders. TRICARE doesn’t cover services for:

- Disorders resulting from occupational or educational deficits.
- Myofunctional or tongue thrust therapy.
- Videofluoroscopy evaluation.
- Maintenance therapy that does not require a skilled level after a therapy program has been designed.
- Special education services from a public educational agency to beneficiaries age 3-21.

[Source: TRICARE Communications | May 21, 2015 ++]

TRICARE Auditory Care  ► Newborns and Active Duty Only

Hearing loss is a major public health issue and the third most common physical condition after arthritis and heart disease. Gradual hearing loss can affect people of all ages -- varying from mild to profound. The first few years of life are especially critical for development. Children learn speech and language from listening to other people talk. If a hearing loss exists without treatment, a child does not get the full benefit of language learning experiences. Most infants receive hearing screenings before leaving the hospital. Detecting and treating any potential concerns as early as possible is the best way to ensure healthy growth and development for your child.

About 20 percent of adults in the United States report some degree of hearing loss. At age 65, one out of three people has a hearing loss. Adults may not have had hearing problems as children, but can develop a hearing disorder from trauma or disease. If you experience persistent buzzing or ringing in your ears, find that sounds are muffled, or have trouble distinguishing speech and other sounds, you should see an audiologist. TRICARE covers newborn hearing screenings as part of well-child care. If you find that you may need hearing aid, TRICARE coverage is limited to active duty family members with specific hearing factors. If you are not active duty and need assistance, you may be able to receive help from other government
Veteran Hearing Loss ➤ Most Widespread Injury

Being a military veteran is commonly associated with injuries and disabilities such as post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, or maybe even lost limbs and burns. However, what many people (and veterans) don’t realize is that the most widespread injury for returning veterans is actually hearing loss. In fact, hearing loss and tinnitus (the sensation of hearing a ringing sound) are currently the top two most compensated disabilities in the Veterans Benefits Association. As of 2014 more than 400,000 veterans of campaigns in Afghanistan and/or Iraq report experiencing hearing loss, tinnitus, or both. The incidence of hearing loss among veterans is rising 13-18% per year. Army veterans report the highest rate of hearing loss in the military community with 50% reporting some hearing loss by age 50. They are followed by members of the the Air Force at 42% and Navy at 37%. In 2010, the VA spent an estimated $1.39 billion in disability payments for major auditory disabilities, and at the current rate of increase, the VA anticipates that hearing related payouts will reach more than $2 billion by 2016.

Hearing loss is caused by permanent damage to any of the 17,000 hair cells that we are born with inside the human ear. Since damaged hair cells cannot grow back, exposure to sounds 140 decibels and higher (or even a prolonged exposure to engine noise) can cause immediate and permanent hearing damage and veterans are regularly exposed to sounds with much higher decibel levels. To give you an idea of the potential hearing damage military members face, the quietest military gear and equipment are an Abrams Tank (93-117 dB), a Kiowa helicopter (101dB), a M-16 rifle (145 dB), and an M26 grenade (164 dB). On the louder end of the spectrum are an M9 handgun (157 dB) and an m3 recoilless rifle (190 dB). For comparison’s sake, a rock concert is usually 130 dB, an airplane taking off is 140 dB, and fireworks are 162 dB.

The military’s history with hearing damage began in the early 1940s, when the U.S. Army conducted a survey that ultimately concluded that gun crews, gunnery instructors, and others regularly exposed to gunfire should be provided with protective earplugs as part of their standard kit; however, their use was not required, and wearing protective ear coverings and ear plugs was often seen as a sign of weakness. In the 1960s, the army implemented specialists whose primary role was to study hearing damage in the military. In a research study, they found that 50-60% of situational awareness is based on a person’s hearing: with good hearing, it took a soldier approximately 40 seconds to identify a target, but with bad hearing, it took approximately 90 seconds to identify a target. Since 2010, the Department of Veterans Affairs has required a hearing examination for veterans based on their Military Occupational Specialty.

To prevent hearing loss, veterans should schedule an appointment with an ear, nose, and throat physician or audiologist to determine if they have hearing loss caused by their military service. Veterans should also take preventative measures during their civilian activities, such as using ear plugs while mowing the lawn. For more information about getting compensation for hearing loss sustained during time in the military, veterans can visit the DVA website http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book/benefits_chap01.asp. There are also many programs and foundations for veterans suffering from hearing loss that may be of assistance.

[Source: Veteran Resources | Donnie La Curan | May 21, 2015 ++]
Reverse Mortgage Update 01 ➤ Things the Ads Don’t Tell You

Reverse mortgages are aptly named because they’re loans that send you payments every month rather than the other way around. They allow you to convert your home equity into cash, without having to sell your home or make payments. So a reverse mortgage could be perfect for retirees with lots of home equity but little income. As with any mortgage, you apply through a lender. You’ll find a list of lenders by state at [http://www.reversemortgage.org/FindaLender.aspx](http://www.reversemortgage.org/FindaLender.aspx). Once your reverse mortgage is in place, you can choose to get payments in a lump sum, or monthly for a certain period of time, or for as long as you live in your home. But to understand reverse mortgages, forget the “reverse” and focus on the “mortgage.” Because at the end of the day, that’s all they are — a mortgage.

How they work

The commercials insist a reverse mortgage is the perfect place to find extra retirement income. Here’s what they don’t tell you. In years past, pretty much any homeowner 62 or older who could fog a mirror and had home equity could qualify. Since the Great Recession, however, there are more hoops to jump through.

- You have to prove you have the resources to pay the taxes, insurance and other expenses required to maintain your home. If you can’t, part of the loan proceeds may be carved out as a set-aside to take care of these expenses.
- You need to own your home outright, or have a low enough mortgage balance so it can be paid off with the proceeds from the reverse mortgage.
- If you have bad credit, you’ll need to explain it. Then the lender will determine whether your explanation qualifies as an extenuating circumstance.

You won’t give up the title to your home. You’ll still own it. The amount of the loan and payments will vary based on your equity, along with the size and length of the payments and your age. Use the reverse mortgage calculator at [www.reversemortgage.org/About/ReverseMortgageCalculator.aspx](http://www.reversemortgage.org/About/ReverseMortgageCalculator.aspx) to see how much you could be eligible for. Once you get a reverse mortgage, you can repay it anytime, but it must be repaid when you die or when the home ceases to be your permanent residence. If you or your heirs can’t repay the loan, your home goes to the lender. While there are different types of reverse mortgages, the most common are home-equity conversion mortgages, or HECMs, backed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. As with any money you borrow, reverse mortgages are tax-free. You can get the money in several ways:

- Fixed monthly payments over a specific number of months.
- Fixed monthly payments for life, or as long as you live in the home.
- A line of credit you draw on as often as you want in whatever amounts you’d like.
- A combination of monthly payments and line of credit.
**What’s the catch?**

**Catch No. 1:** Reverse mortgages come with big fees, and the rates aren’t anything to write home about either. In fact, reverse mortgages typically have higher fees than regular mortgages. Here is what the FTC’s reverse mortgage page at [http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0192-reverse-mortgages](http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0192-reverse-mortgages) says:

- Lenders generally charge an origination fee, a mortgage insurance premium (for federally-insured HECMs), and other closing costs for a reverse mortgage. Lenders also may charge servicing fees during the term of the mortgage. The lender sometimes sets these fees and costs, although origination fees for HECM reverse mortgages currently are dictated by law. Your upfront costs can be lowered if you borrow a smaller amount through a reverse mortgage product called a "HECM Saver."

- The amount you owe on a reverse mortgage grows over time. Interest is charged on the outstanding balance and added to the amount you owe each month. That means your total debt increases as the loan funds are advanced to you and interest on the loan accrues.

- Although some reverse mortgages have fixed rates, most have variable rates that are tied to a financial index: they are likely to change with market conditions.

- Reverse mortgages can use up all or some of the equity in your home, and leave fewer assets for you and your heirs. Most reverse mortgages have a “nonrecourse” clause, which prevents you or your estate from owing more than the value of your home when the loan becomes due and the home is sold. However, if you or your heirs want to retain ownership of the home, you usually must repay the loan in full – even if the loan balance is greater than the value of the home.

- Because you retain title to your home, you are responsible for property taxes, insurance, utilities, fuel, maintenance, and other expenses. If you don’t pay property taxes, carry homeowner’s insurance, or maintain the condition of your home, your loan may become due and payable.

- Interest on reverse mortgages is not deductible on income tax returns until the loan is paid off in part or whole.

Standard HECMs include a mortgage origination fee, based not on how much you borrow, but on the value of your home. If you home is worth less than $125,000, the lender can charge up to $2,500. If it’s worth more than that, the fee is 2 percent of the first $200,000 of your home’s value, plus 1 percent of the amount over $200,000, with a cap of $6,000. So if your home is worth $400,000 or more, you’ll pay a $6,000 origination fee, no matter how much you borrow. Let’s look at an example to illustrate both rates and fees. Using the Reverse Mortgage Calculator mentioned above, we’ll say we were born in 1943, own a home in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, with no mortgage and a $400,000 value. We want to borrow $100,000. Results:

- Interest rate: 6.31 percent. This is a combination of the 5.06 percent loan interest rate and the 1.25 percent mortgage insurance. Today’s rate for a conventional 30-year mortgage loan? Four percent.

- Max available to borrow: $236,400. That’s about 60 percent loan-to-value.

- Loan origination fee: $6,000. Ouch.

- Mortgage insurance: $2,000. Ouch.

- Other closing costs: $2,555.70. Ouch.

So that means we’re paying more than $10,000 ($6,000 + $2,000 + $2,555) in fees to borrow $100,000: more than 10 percent. Plus, we’re being charged more than 6 percent on the loan. Not exactly a sweetheart deal. As with any mortgage, you should shop and compare reverse mortgages and ask about fees. While some may be set by law, others could vary by lender.

**Catch No. 2:** Although you may be receiving checks in the mail, don’t lose sight of the fact that you’re accruing interest, and that unpaid interest is increasing the size of the loan. The longer the loan remains outstanding, the more interest it will accrue. Should you choose lifetime payments and stay in your home for
decades, it’s likely you’ll have little, if any, equity to leave to your heirs, unless, of course, the home increases in value faster than the accumulated interest.

**Catch No. 3:** Because you still own the house, you remain responsible for property taxes, insurance and maintenance. You’ll have to prove you have the financial resources to pay them.

**The bottom line**

The benefits of tapping your home’s equity without selling your home or making payments are obvious. Whether a reverse mortgage makes sense for you, however, will depend on your situation as well as other available options you may have. MoneyTalksNews hit on this topic last year with Looking at a Reverse Mortgage? Explore These 14 Alternatives First at [http://www.moneytalksnews.com/looking-at-a-reverse-mortgage-explore-these-14-alternatives-first](http://www.moneytalksnews.com/looking-at-a-reverse-mortgage-explore-these-14-alternatives-first). If it seems this article is critical of reverse mortgages, it’s because the fees are high and many people do not realize they were paying them. But a reverse mortgage can be the difference between living and merely surviving. If it’s something that will enhance your life, do it. Just understand what you’re doing and shop carefully. Before you’re allowed to take out a reverse mortgage, you’ll be required to receive counseling from an FHA-approved reverse mortgage counselor. So if you’re thinking of a reverse mortgage, call one in advance with questions. A contact roster is available at [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/housing/sfh/hecm/hecmlist](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/housing/sfh/hecm/hecmlist). The vast majority are happy to help free of charge. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacey Johnson | May 19, 2015 ++]

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**Saving Money ➤ Cell Phone Plans Update 01**

Ever been somewhere with the kids and wanted to pretend they weren’t yours? That’s apparently how the big four cellphone providers feel about their offspring. They don’t mind them being both seen and heard, but they’d prefer you not know they’re associated with them. They’re called subbrands or discount carriers, and AT&T, Verizon, Sprint and T-Mobile all have them. So it’s time to shed some light on these family members, because they hold the key to substantial savings on your cellphone bill. Here’s a list of discount brands offering service with the big four carriers:

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<th>Major Brand</th>
<th>Discount Brand</th>
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<tr>
<td>AT&amp;T</td>
<td>Cricket <a href="https://www.cricketwireless.com">https://www.cricketwireless.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sprint</td>
<td>Boost Mobile <a href="http://www.boostmobile.com">http://www.boostmobile.com</a></td>
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<td>GoSmartMobile <a href="https://www.gosmartmobile.com">https://www.gosmartmobile.com</a></td>
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Why a subbrand? The subbrands use the same towers and systems as the major brands, but at a lower price and with no contract. Although you should check first, the parent network phone should be compatible with the subbrand service. If not, buy a good used phone or a new one that’s unlocked and compatible. As we explained in 4 Steps to Cut Your Cellphone Bill in Half ([http://www.moneytalksnews.com/4-steps-cut-your-cell-phone-bill-half](http://www.moneytalksnews.com/4-steps-cut-your-cell-phone-bill-half)), phone prices are dropping, so there’s no longer any reason to be locked in a contract for an extended period of time simply to get a subsidized phone. Discounters typically offer phones for less than $100. SaveOnPhone.com ([http://www.saveonphone.com/secret-cell-phone-plans](http://www.saveonphone.com/secret-cell-phone-plans)) says these “secret cellphone plans” can save consumers 60 percent to 75 percent off their monthly bills.

**Example:**

As this was written, a Verizon’s site says that a single-line plan that includes unlimited talk, text and 2 GB of data is $75 a month on a two-year contract ([http://www.verizonwireless.com/wcms/consumer/shop/shop-data-plans/single-line-data-plans.html?null](http://www.verizonwireless.com/wcms/consumer/shop/shop-data-plans/single-line-data-plans.html?null)). But go to Total Wireless, which uses Verizon’s network, and
you’ll find a contract-free plan that includes 2.5 GB of data for just $35 a month. Same system, same service, half the price.

There can be subtle differences: For example, according to consumer advocate Bob Sullivan, Total Wireless customers get 3G service while Verizon customers get much faster 4G. In addition, the $75 Verizon plan includes a phone (https://bobsullivan.net/gotchas/secret-cell-phone-plans-could-save-you-50-so-why-are-carriers-embarrassed-by-them/#). But if you’re with Verizon now, wouldn’t you want to switch to the discount carrier when your contract is up and your phone is paid off? Total Wireless also offers a two-line family plan with unlimited voice and texting and 5 GB of shared data for $60 monthly, as well as a four-line family plan with unlimited voice and texting and 12 GB of shared data for $110 monthly. Click on http://moneytalksnews.whistleout.com/CellPhones to compare dozens of cell plans in seconds with our free comparison tool.

As another example, we hear from a cellphone dealer who carries T-Mobile and GoSmartMobile and outlines the differences on a site called HowardForums, a discussion board dedicated to mobile phones with more than 1 million members:

www.howardforums.com/forums.php?s=36ee40f3011b422c4dd565c0c2cb50c4 - GoSmart … will work with any T-Mobile or unlocked phone. If you are not concerned with data, they have unlimited talk and text for $25 a month. Unlimited talk, text and data with 1 GB of 3G for $35. … Unlimited talk, text and data with 6 GB of 3G for $40. On the data plans, once you use up your 3G, it slows to 2G. There is no 4G on GoSmart. If you want 4G you have to stick with T-Mobile.

He recommends finding an independent local phone store with a reputation for good customer service. “Most of them will sell GoSmart and they will be able to help you with anything you need,” he says. So, if you have a contract with one of the Big 4, you might want to compare prices with a discounter and see if changing makes sense. Better yet, check out the latest addition to MoneyTalksNews Solutions Center: A comparison tool for cell phone plans at http://moneytalksnews.whistleout.com/CellPhones. You describe your needs, it searches dozens of plans to show you the best deals. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Hiram Reisner | April 29, 2015 ++]

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**Fake Debt Collectors Scam ➤ How to Avoid**

Fake debt collectors are calling people with claims that their loved ones owe payments on a loan. According to reports received by BBB, scammers use threats of jail time to trick victims into paying up.

**How the Scam Works:**

- You are at work or home and the phone rings. When you answer, the caller tells you that he/she works on behalf of a loan company. He claims to be collecting overdue payments taken out by your family member or significant other.
- You tell the caller that you won't pay the debt. But he starts to threaten that your loved one will be arrested and/or face other consequences, such as a suspended driver's license or job loss. As much as you want to protect your loved one, don't pay up!
- Despite the threats, these "debt collectors" don't have any power over you or anyone else. In most cases, the alleged overdue loan doesn't even exist. Even if your loved one does owe money, paying the scammers won't help reduce the debt. Below is advice on how to deal with these intimidating calls.
What to Do if You Receive a Harassing Call from a Debt Collector: The best protection against debt collection scams is simply knowing your rights. Here’s a quick overview.

- Ask the debt collector to provide official "validation notice" of the debt. Debt collectors are required by law to provide the information in writing. The notice must include the amount of the debt, the name of the creditor and a statement of your rights under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act. If the self-proclaimed collector won't provide the information, hang up.
- If you think that a caller may be a fake, ask for his name, company, street address, and telephone number. Then, confirm that the collection agency is real.
- Do not provide or confirm any bank account, credit card or other personal information over the phone until you have verified the call.
- Check your credit report for by going to annualcreditreport.com or calling (877) 322-8228. This will help you determine if you have outstanding debts or if there has been suspicious activity under your name.
- Tell your loved one to place a fraud alert on his/her credit report. If scammers have information like your name, relationship and phone number, they probably have a lot more.
- File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission if the caller uses threats. The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act prohibits debt collections from being abusive, unfair or deceptive.

For More Information Check out the FTC’s website https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0258-fake-debt-collectors to learn more about fake debt collectors. To find out more about other scams, check out BBB Scam Stopper www.bbb.org/council/bbb-scam-stopper. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | April 24, 2015 ++]

Lottery Sharing Scam ➤ How to Avoid

Scammers have given a classic lottery scam a cunning new twist by drawing on the real life story of a Mega Millions winner. Watch out for emails claiming that a recent lottery winner is giving you part of his fortune. It's really just a con.

How the Scam Works:
- You get an email that appears to come from a man named Harold Diamond. Mr. Diamond is a retired principal who won the largest Mega Millions jackpot in New York lottery history this winter.
- The email says Mr. Diamond is giving away part of his new fortune to five randomly selected people. You are so lucky! You've been chosen to receive a million dollars. To collect the fortune, email Diamond's lawyer and mention a verification code number. The code will prove that you are official, and the lawyer will have further instructions.
- Don't do it! This scam may draw on current events, but it's a classic con. If you contact the "lawyer," he will ask for money under the guise of paying taxes or other fees. No matter how much you send, it won't be enough!

Tips to Protect Yourself from a Sweepstakes Scam: Lottery and sweepstakes scams are common. Here are tips to avoid them:
- Don't pay up to claim your prize: You should never have to pay money or buy products in order to receive a prize. Be especially wary of wiring money or using a prepaid debit card.
• You can't win a contest you didn't enter: You need to buy a ticket or complete an application to participate in a contest or lottery. Be very careful if you've been selected as a winner for a contest you never entered.
• Verify -- but not by using a source scammers give you. Check if an offer is real, but don't call the phone number in the email or website you suspect may be a scam. If it is a con, chances are the person on the other line will be involved, too.
• The only legal lotteries in the United States are the official state-run lotteries. Foreign lotteries are illegal.

Property tax is imposed by local taxing units. Go to http://comptroller.texas.gov/taxinfo/proptax for details. For homeowners 65 and older, $10,000 (in addition to the regular $15,000 homestead exemption) of the property's assessed value is exempt from school taxes and $3,000 is exempt from other local taxes. Once an over-65 homeowner qualifies for an over-65 homestead exemption for school taxes, that owner gets a tax ceiling for that home on school taxes. If the homeowner improves the home (other than normal repairs or maintenance), the tax ceiling is adjusted for the new additions.

Go to http://comptroller.texas.gov/taxinfo/proptax for details on the homestead exemption for seniors, veterans and the disabled.

School district taxes are frozen for seniors (65 and older) and disabled persons at the level imposed on the residence the first year that the taxpayer qualified for the residence exemption. Counties, cities, towns, and junior college districts are permitted to establish a tax freeze on homesteads of those age 65 and older or disabled.

**Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

There is no inheritance and the estate tax is limited and related to federal estate tax collection.

Go to the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts site http://comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/ for further information.

[Source: http://www.retirementliving.com May 2015 ++]

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**Tax Burden for Hawaii Residents** ➤ As of May 2015

**Personal Income Tax**

- Hawaii collects income taxes from its residents using 12 brackets, ranging from 1.4 percent to 11 percent. Rather than collecting a sales tax on purchases by consumers, Hawaii imposes a general excise tax on businesses.
- Personal income tax - Hawaii collects income taxes from its residents at the following rate for single taxpayers:
  - 1.4 percent on the first $2,400 of taxable income.
  - 3.2 percent on taxable income between $2,401 and $4,800.
  - 5.5 percent on taxable income between $4,801 and $9,600.
  - 6.4 percent on taxable income between $9,601 and $14,400.
  - 6.8 percent on taxable income between $14,401 and $19,200.
  - 7.2 percent on taxable income of $19,201 and $24,000.
  - 7.6 percent on taxable income of $24,001 and $36,000.
  - 7.9 percent on taxable income of $36,001 and $48,000.
  - 8.25 percent on taxable income of $48,001 and $150,000.
  - 9 percent on taxable income of $150,001 and $175,000.
  - 10 percent on taxable income of $175,001 and $200,000.
  - 11 percent on taxable income of $200,001 and above.

- For married persons filing joint returns, the rates remain the same, but the income brackets are doubled.
- File Form N-11, Individual Income Tax Return, by April 20. Other forms can be found on the Hawaii Department of Taxation website.
Sales taxes

- Hawaii does not have a sales tax. Instead, the state collects a 4 percent general excise tax, which is assessed on all business activities, including retail sales, commissions, rental income and services.
- Other activities, such as wholesale sales, are taxed at one-half of 1 percent. More details on Hawaii's general excise and use tax can be found in the Department of Taxation's collection of excise tax forms and publications.
- Oahu added a 0.5 percent surcharge to the general excise tax, effective Jan. 1, 2007, bringing that island's excise tax rate to 4.5 percent. This added charge goes to fund Oahu's mass transit system.

Personal and real property taxes

- Personal property, such as cars or boats, is not subject to property tax.
- Real property, land and improvements are taxed with assessments at 100 percent fair market value. Tax rates are per $1,000 net assessed value.
- Property taxes are administered by the counties: Honolulu, Hawaii, Maui and Kauai.
- Exemptions are allowed for owner-occupied homes, with multiple exemptions based on age. Specific exemption amounts may vary by county. Check the website links above for jurisdiction details.

Inheritance and estate taxes

- Hawaii does not collect any inheritance tax or gift tax.
- Hawaii imposes an estate tax on property left by decedents after Jan. 25, 2012. The rates range from 10 percent on estates of up to $1 million to 15.7 percent on estates of more than $5 million. The full estate tax rate schedule is found at the end of Form M-6, Hawaii Estate Tax Return.

Other Hawaii tax facts

- Hawaii taxpayers can file electronically, as well as check the status of their refunds via the Department of Taxation's e-filing services.
- Make sure you've got a minister pronouncing you husband and wife. If the state determines your ceremony is a nonreligious "tourist wedding," you'll have to pay the state's 4 percent excise tax.


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

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Notes of Interest ➤ 16 thru 31 May 2015

- **RP OPC.** Standby for a shift in how VA OPC Manila will handle Philippine medical care in the future. Unofficially, initial indications are FMP will replace existing policy and disabled vets will be paying up front for their care and submitting paperwork for reimbursements just like all other overseas vets. More to come on when, where, and how when it is officially promulgated.

- **China Mirage.** Check out [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgRJmtF6Qo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgRJmtF6Qo) for James Bradley’s talk at the Marine Memorial Club on how American myths about China have impacted American military history and current relations.
• **Women in Service.** The Navy is proceeding with its plan to increase the number of women in the service to 25 percent with a similar goal of attaining that ratio in each ship and squadron, the vice chief of naval operations said.

• **Bees.** The bee death rate spiked to 42 percent last year—the second-highest death rate ever recorded, according to The New York Times. Even more troubling is the study found that bees are dying even faster during the summer months than in the cold winter months—exactly the opposite of what is expected naturally.

• **Walmart.** In the month of March, more than half of American shoppers visited a Wal-Mart, putting it at the top of the national popularity rankings. This is despite a recent report on customer satisfaction that put Wal-Mart dead last among major retailers.

• **Child Obesity.** If all 12.7 million obese children in the country remain obese as adults, the “societal costs over their lifetimes may exceed $1.1 trillion.” That’s about $92,235 per person more than a person of normal weight, researchers said.

• **Spilt Coffee.** The 38-year-old Victorville CA woman accused of fraudulently claiming hot McDonald's coffee spilled and burned her hand at a drive-thru in JAN 2013 was sentenced 18 MAY to 5-years’ probation, 200 hours community service, and pay $1,955 to National Fire Insurance Co. for the false claim.

• **Colorado River.** The 1,450-mile river spans seven states in the American West, provides water to 36 million people, irrigates 15 percent of U.S. crops, generates $26 billion in recreation and tourism revenue and helps support around 234,000 jobs. Water demand now outpaces supply.

• **Police.** The White House has announced that federal programs to pass certain surplus military equipment to local law enforcement agencies will come to an end. Included are armored vehicles, weaponized aircraft and vehicles, bayonets, grenade launchers, and large-caliber firearms.”

• **GI Bill.** The California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) has ordered 15 ITT Technical Institute locations in that state to stop enrolling new or returning students who fund their educations with GI Bill benefits.

• **ATMs.** FICO data reveals that debit card theft at ATMs on bank property soared 174 percent from Jan. 1 to April 9, compared with the same time period in 2014. Successful debit card information theft at nonbank ATMs jumped by 317 percent.

• **Novinophobia.** The fear of running out of wine.

• **Marijuana.** Federal employees still have to abide by federal law when it comes to weed, despite relaxed restrictions in several states and localities.

• **COLA Watch.** The April Consumer Price Index of 231.520 increased slightly from last month, but remains 1.2 percent below the FY 2014 COLA baseline. The Consumer Price Index for May 2015 is scheduled to be released on June 18, 2015.

• **Base Closing.** DoD announced plans to return the site of U.S. Army-Europe in Stuttgart, Germany, to the host country. The transfer will take place later this year. The site has served as home to the U.S Forces Liaison Office for Baden-Wuerttemberg, and the administrative offices for the Army's Stuttgart garrison.

• **Medical Marijuana.** The Senate Appropriations Committee on 21 MAY advanced a $77.6 billion funding bill for military construction and veterans benefits that includes an amendment allowing Veterans Affairs doctors to recommend the use of medical marijuana. The amendment won approval in an 18-12 vote.


• **Museums.** From 26 May thru 7 SEP a free admission program is available to any bearer of a Geneva Convention common access card, a DD Form 1173 ID card (dependent ID), or a DD Form
1173-1 ID card, which includes active duty U.S. military, National Guard, reserve, U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and up to five family members.

- **VA Cyber Threats.** The Department of Veterans Affairs blocked more than 1 billion cyber threats in April, as it did in March, according to the department's monthly information security report.
- **YouTube.** Check out Steven Spielberg’s [https://www.youtube.com/embed/7tyT4glkvBs](https://www.youtube.com/embed/7tyT4glkvBs) on how one Gold Star father dealt with his son’s death in Afghanistan.
- **Cuba.** The Obama administration on 29 MAY formally removed Cuba from a U.S. terrorism blacklist as part of the process of normalizing relations between the Cold War foes.
- **Vet IVF.** Under a 23-year-old law, VA is prohibited from covering IVF. Congress adopted the ban as the result of conservative opposition to assisted reproduction and concern that some fertilized embryos might be discarded.
- **USS Constitution.** The 218 year old ship has been moved to dry dock at the Charlestown Navy Yard historical park in Boston for a major restoration project expected to take three years at a cost of $15 million.

[Source: Various | May 30, 2014 ++]

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**Library of Congress ► New Service | That All May Read**

The Library of Congress has launched a new campaign that allows greater library access to those with vision and physical impairments. “That All May Read” is a free library program of braille and audio materials circulated to enrolled patrons. People may be eligible for the program if they are blind, have a visual disability that prevents them from reading regular print, or have a physical disability that keeps them from being able to hold a book. For more information, visit: [http://www.loc.gov/ThatAllMayRead](http://www.loc.gov/ThatAllMayRead).  [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | May 29, 2015 ++]

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**Insomnia ► 4-7-8 Breathing Technique**

Nothing is worse than lying awake at night, willing your brain to shut down so you can rest. Warm milk, lavender oil, and counting sheep — we've all tried them. But the new solution could be simply learning to breathe. What is it? The 4-7-8 breathing technique was pioneered Dr. Andrew Weill from Arizona, who describes the yoga-inspired method as "utterly simple, takes almost no time, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere." Dr. Weill claims that 4-7-8 breathing can help people fall asleep in just 60 seconds by acting as a "natural tranquilizer for the nervous system" that reduces stress and tension in the body. How do you do it?
The Breathing Trick That Puts You to Sleep in Seconds

1. Before you begin, place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth just above your teeth and keep it there throughout the exercise.

2. Exhale completely through your mouth quite forcefully so you make a "whoosh" sound.

3. Close your mouth and inhale quietly and softly through your nose for a mental count of four.

4. Hold your breath and count to seven.

5. Next, exhale completely through your mouth, making another whoosh sound for eight seconds in one large breath.

6. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three times for a total of four breaths.

Note: Remember that you always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time. Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.

How does it help?

- It takes on more oxygen relaxes the parasympathetic nervous system and promotes a state of calmness.
- It helps rebalance the nervous system which can become over stimulated during times of stress.
- It helps you connect with your body and your breathing and distract you from everyday thoughts that can prevent you from sleeping.

This exercise is a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system. Unlike tranquilizing drugs, which are often effective when you first take them but then lose their power over time, this exercise is subtle when you first try it but gains in power with repetition and practice. Do it at least twice a day. You cannot do it too frequently. Do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice. Later, if you wish, you can extend it to eight breaths. If you feel a little lightheaded when you first breathe this way, do not be concerned; it will pass. Once you develop this technique by practicing it every day, it will be a very useful tool that you will always have with you. Use it whenever anything upsetting happens - before you react. Use it whenever you are aware of internal tension. Use it to help you fall asleep. You can watch a video of Dr. Weil demonstrating the 4-7-8 Breath at http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/VDR00160/Dr-Weils-Breathing-Exercises-4-7-8-Breath.html. [Source: http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/health/wellness/a32426/sleep-breathing-technique/?src=spr_FBPAGE&spr_id=1443_179348199 May 2015 ++]
Although gas is much cheaper than in past summers, they’re still not giving it away. So it pays to improve your mileage the best you can, especially if you can do it for little or no money. Discovery Channel’s “MythBusters,” Kari Byron, Tory Belleci and Grant Imahara once tested whether a few techniques collectively known as “hypermiling” can double your fuel economy. They took two cars, a new sedan and an older coupe, and drove normally as far as they could on exactly 3 gallons of gas. They then repeated the process using hypermiling techniques. The results? The new car was able to drive 40 percent farther while hypermiling (30 miles per gallon, up from 21.3 mpg), while the older car went 70 percent farther (45.3 mpg, up from 26 mpg). The myth is busted, because they couldn’t double their fuel economy, but a 70 percent improvement is impressive. And it could save a lot of money at the pump.

Only driving techniques and modifications legal in California were employed, so everything they did to get that massive improvement in miles per gallon is probably legal for you, too. But since laws vary from state to state, you’ll want to make sure anything you pull from this list is permitted where you live. Here’s what to do:

**Never drive above 45 mph.** Yes, this includes highways. And yes, you’ll make a lot of enemies. But if you can pull off driving no faster than 45 mph, you’ll use a lot less fuel.

**Remove passenger side mirror.** The thinking here is that by reducing wind resistance, you’ll improve mileage. Removing things sticking out from the side of your car should do that.

**Avoid braking and rapid acceleration.** This is the foundation of hypermiling. Not only do you need to gradually bring your car up to speed, but also drive to minimize braking. This means driving slower overall, looking as far ahead as possible, and braking less around turns.

**Turn off engine at red lights.** If the engine is off, you’re not using gas. If you can ignore a little horn honking and spiteful hand gestures you’ll get from the cars behind you while you start back up when the light turns green, you’ll spend less on gas.

**Windows up/AC off.** If you can stand the heat, you can save some money. By keeping your windows up and the AC off, you reduce the strain on your engine and maintain the aerodynamics of your car.

**Try to stay relaxed.** Angry drivers burn more fuel. It’s a myth that “MythBusters” has already tested, but the lesson learned has become part of hypermiling. If you feel yourself getting stressed behind the wheel (and if you’re driving without AC no faster than 45 mph on the freeway and turning your engine off at every red light, you probably will) try taking a few deep breaths to calm down and remember that your goal is zen-like fuel savings.

**Legally draft when possible.** This is another technique that’s been tested by “MythBusters” (albeit to an extreme). If you can find an opportunity to legally draft the vehicle in front of you, take it. Drafting is simply driving at a close but still reasonable distance behind the vehicle in front of you. But while driving extremely close to something like a big rig will save you a ton of gas, it’s incredibly dangerous. Always remember: Your life is more important than your money.

**Overinflate tires by 10 percent.** Though it may reduce the lifespan of your tires, slightly overinflating them may help you get a few more miles out of each tank of gas.

**Cover car in streamlining skin.** While it may seem a bit goofy, “MythBusters” covered the cars in some kind of streamlining skin. It’s unclear exactly what they used in this episode, but they’ve already shown that adding dimples to your car can increase its mileage, so a skin might not be so far-fetched.
Try to navigate intersections to always go through green lights. If you have to stop, you’ll have to start back up again. And accelerating up to speed takes fuel. Minimize the number of red lights you encounter and you’ll use less.

Reduce weight. The spare tire in your trunk is convenient when needed, but adds a bunch of weight to the car. If you’re comfortable driving without it, remove it. And while you’re at it, remove anything else that’s adding unnecessary weight, like that set of golf clubs still in your trunk.

Is all this practical? You’re probably not going to remove your side mirror and spare tire, cover your car with a streamlining skin, or sit in a steaming car all summer. But because you won’t use all of these techniques doesn’t mean you shouldn’t use any. As reported in http://www.moneytalksnews.com/5-ways-improve-mileage, simply driving proactively can increase mileage by 37 percent, while turning off your car at lights can save 19 percent. That’s a huge improvement, and one that doesn’t require spending money on silly gas saving devices. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Brandon Ballenger | May 18, 2011 ++]

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Belty ► No Need for Stretchy Pants

Sometimes after eating a big meal, you might wish you were wearing something that effortlessly stretched to accommodate a swelling belly. But there’s no need for stretchy pants with Belty, a smart belt that automatically loosens or tightens itself depending on the tension of your waistline. According to Ozy (www.ozy.com), Belty has an embedded accelerometer that detects the tension from eating a big lunch or routine activities like sitting or standing, and adjusts itself accordingly. It also has a smartphone app, inactivity monitoring, waistline trend analysis, a built-in pedometer and Bluetooth capabilities, Ozy said. … “it’s not a belt for lazy people,” insists Carine Coulm, CEO and co-founder of Belty’s Paris-based manufacturer, Emiota. The idea, she says, is that as you notice the belt tighten and loosen, you’ll become more aware of your eating habits and be encouraged to improve them.

You can even set your Belty to give you a nudge if you’ve been sitting for too long, prompting you to stretch or move around, according to the Emiota website. But could the smart belt help you lose weight? Experts seem to think it’s possible, though not likely. Weight-loss researcher Christopher Ochner told Ozy that the waistline-monitoring feature of Belty could help wearers, although there’s a good chance people would just ignore it. Ochner noted that the use of devices like Fitbits and pedometers are usually short-lived. “After a week or two, it winds up in a drawer,” Ochner said. Coulm said the Belty, which is made of metal and looks heavy and clunky, is aimed at men right now, though Emiota plans to create a female version of the belt. There’s no word yet on a price. The Belty also isn’t available yet for purchase. But it was a huge hit at January’s Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, where it won an award for innovation, Ozy said. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | May 19, 2015++]

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China said 21 MAY it is entitled to keep watch over airspace and seas surrounding artificial islands it created in the disputed waters of the South China Sea, following an exchange in which its navy warned off a U.S. surveillance plane. The United States said its aerial patrolling was in accordance with international law. The comments came as the Chinese air force announced its latest offshore training exercises in the western Pacific as part of efforts to boost its combat preparedness. An air force spokesman said that followed an initial offshore drill held last month and future such exercises would likely be planned. A news crew from CNN reported it witnessed an incident 20 MAY in which a Chinese navy dispatcher demanded eight times that a U.S. Navy P8-A Poseidon surveillance aircraft leave the area as it flew over Fiery Cross Reef, where China has conducted extensive reclamation work. It said the U.S. crew responded that they were flying through international airspace, to which the Chinese dispatcher answered: "This is the Chinese navy ... You go!"

This areal photo taken through a glass window of a military plane shows China's alleged ongoing reclamation of Mischief Reef in the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. China said Thursday it was entitled to keep watch over airspace and seas surrounding artificial islands it created in the disputed waters.

CNN said it was given exclusive permission to board the surveillance flight because the U.S. wants to raise awareness of China's island building project. It also said it was the first time the Pentagon had declassified audio of the Chinese making such challenges. The Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank posted more video Thursday of the aerial patrol above the Spratly island chain which it said had been released by the U.S. Navy. Speaking at a regular daily briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei reiterated Beijing's insistence on its indisputable sovereignty over the islands it has created by piling sand on top of atolls and reefs. While saying he had no information about the reported exchange, Hong said China was "entitled to the surveillance over related airspace and sea areas so as to maintain national security and avoid any maritime accidents. "We hope relevant countries respect China's sovereignty over the South China Sea, abandon actions that may intensify controversies and play a constructive role for regional peace and stability," Hong told reporters at a daily news briefing.

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf told reporters: "I saw the video. I don't think I'd call it a confrontation. There were certainly verbal warnings given by the Chinese. It's unclear on what basis they issued these warnings. … U.S. military planes operate in accordance with international law in disputed areas of the South China Sea. So the U.S. military has and will continue to operate consistent with the rights, freedoms and lawful use of the sea in the South China Sea," she said. China's construction has intensified frictions among competing parties in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety along with its scattered island groups. The area that is home to some of the world's busiest
commercial shipping routes is also claimed in part or in whole by the Philippines, Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam.

The U.S. and most of the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations want a halt to the projects, which they suspect are aimed at building islands and other land features over which China can claim sovereignty and base military assets. The U.S. says it takes no position on the sovereignty claims but insists they must be negotiated. Washington also says ensuring maritime safety and access is a U.S. national security priority. China is also at odds with Japan over ownership of a group of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea that are controlled by Tokyo but also claimed by Beijing, leading to increased activity by Chinese planes and ships in the area, which lies between Taiwan and Okinawa. Both sides have accused the other of operating dangerously, prompting fears of an incident such as the 2001 collision between a Chinese fighter jet and a U.S. surveillance plane in which the Chinese pilot was killed and the American crew detained on China's Hainan island.

People's Liberation Army Air Force spokesman Shen Jinke said Thursday's exercises were held in international airspace but gave no specifics. In its report on the drills, state broadcaster CCTV showed a video of Xian H-6 twin-engine bombers, a Chinese version of Russia's Tupelov Tu-16, in flight and landing at an air base, although it wasn't clear when the video was shot. Along with the long-standing island dispute, China raised tensions in November 2013 when it declared an air defense identification zone over a large swathe of the East China Sea that would require foreign aircraft to announce their flight plans and follow Chinese instructions. The zone was immediately denounced by Japan, the U.S. and others, and the U.S. Air Force mounted an immediate challenge by flying a pair of B-52 bombers through it unannounced.

A bipartisan group of senators introduced legislation on 21 MAY to condemn China for construction on islands claimed by several nations, and urged a solution to the territorial standoff. The senators called the development troubling, because the islands in the South China Sea are claimed by several other nations, including Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. The structures China is building on the islands could support airstrips for Chinese fighter jets and surveillance aircraft, which could increase the chances of a military conflict. China's actions could undermine regional stability, they warned. Before and after photos are available at http://amti.csis.org/before-and-after-the-south-china-sea-transformed. [Source: The Associated Press | Christopher Bodeen | May 21, 2015 ++]

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RP~China Dispute Update 10  ►  China Allege U.S. Interference

China's military on 26 MAY compared its controversial island-building in the South China Sea to ordinary construction such as road-building going on elsewhere in the country, trying to deflect criticism over an issue seen as inflaming tensions in the region. At the same venue, however, the Defense Ministry issued a report reaffirming China's more assertive approach to national defense that has put its neighbors on guard. The document on China's military strategy said the navy would be adding "open seas protection" to traditional remit of "offshore waters defense," while boosting its ability to counterattack and conduct joint operations at sea. The air force, meanwhile, will "endeavor to shift its focus from territorial air defense to both defense and offense," said the 25-page report, which was issued in English and Chinese at a rare news conference presided over by uniformed officers.

The report's issuance and comments from ministry spokesman Yang Yujun at the briefing followed a formal Chinese protest over an incident last week in which a Chinese navy dispatcher warned off a U.S. Navy P8-A Poseidon surveillance aircraft as it flew over Fiery Cross Reef, where China has conducted extensive reclamation work. The incident, documented by a CNN news crew on board the U.S. plane, prompted a testy
editorial 25 MAY in the official Communist Party newspaper Global Times that warned that Washington should not test Beijing’s restraint or China would have “no choice but to engage.” China has bristled at what it sees as U.S. interference in the region and says it is within its sovereign rights in developing islands made from sand piled on top of reefs and atolls. The U.S. and many of China’s neighbors see the island-building as an upending of the status quo by China to bolster its claims to the region and possibly pave the way for military installations far from its shores.

In one disputed area, the Spratly Islands, U.S. officials say China has created about 800 hectares (2,000 acres) of dry land since 2014 that could be used as airstrips. The U.S. argues that man-made constructions cannot be used to claim sovereignty and is closely watching for signs that China will seek to back up its claims by basing missile systems and fighter aircraft on the newly formed islands. However, Yang sought to minimize the military significance of the island developments and said the issue has been exaggerated by those seeking an excuse to take unspecified actions in response — a clear reference to the U.S. "Every day all around China, there are all kinds of construction projects being started (such as) building homes, paving roads, building bridges, opening new farm land, etc.,” Yang said. "Looking from the angle of sovereignty, China's development of construction on its islands is no different at all from all the other types of construction going on around the country that I just mentioned," he said.

Such construction is designed to satisfy both military and civilian purposes such as disaster mitigation, fisheries protection and weather monitoring, Yang said. Without directly mentioning the U.S., he said the issue had been brought to the fore by an increase in surveillance activities and an effort to "deliberately play up the issue in order to smear China's military and raise tensions in the region. "I don't rule out that certain countries are looking for excuses to take certain actions," Yang said. He declined to say what additional measures China might take to enforce its claims and said overall relations between the U.S. and Chinese militaries are positive.

China lays claim to virtually the entire South China Sea, while Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines say they own all or parts of it. In Taiwan on Tuesday, the island’s president, Ma Ying-jeou, issued a call for setting aside sovereignty disputes and jointly exploring for resources in the area. Taiwan occupies a number of islands, but doesn't seek to enforce its overlapping claim with China. The desire to assert its territorial claims is at least partly behind an upgrading of the military to allow China to project power into the western Pacific, Indian Ocean and elsewhere. That includes the addition of an aircraft carrier, new submarines and surface ships, as well as a more ambitious training regimen such as air force drills in international airspace off the east coast. [Source: The Associated Press | Christopher Bodeen | May 26, 2015 ++]

Shoe Lacing ► What That Extra Shoelace Hole Is Used For

Have you ever wondered why there is an extra shoelace hole at the top of your shoe? Many running and hiking shoes have the extra hole and most people don’t ever use it. Instead, they skip threading the lace through the last top hole and tie them as usual. After watching this video you will now know why they are there and how to use them to your advantage. The extra holes can be used to prevent blisters on your heels and stop your feet from cramming forward into the front of the shoe. When you tie laces using the “heel lock” or “lace lock” technique it creates more friction between the laces at the top of the shoe which are closest to your ankle. This serves to make and keep the heel/ankle area tight and snug in place without having to re-tighten your whole shoe. Even if you do not have the extra shoelace hole you can still use the method on the top hole instead.
Here is how to tie the “lace lock.” Begin by inserting the lace in backwards through the top hole so that you create a small loop on each side of the shoe. Cross your laces and insert them each into the loop on the opposite side then cinch them down. Be sure to go down and not up because cinching upwards will leave the loop hanging out and that is not good. By pulling down towards the shoe you end up creating a nice tight lock that will keep your shoe in place and snug. Finish by tying your shoe as you normally would and you’re good to go! For a video on how to do this go to http://writical.com/this-is-what-that-extra-shoelace-hole-is-used-for-i-wish-i-knew-this-earlier-in-life/.

For videos on how to do star lacing, star burst lacing, and no lacing go to:

- https://search.yahoo.com/search;_ylt=AkiUYZOKawjl6wKUO3UzabyZx4?p=How+to+star+lacing+shoes&toggle=1&cop=mss&ei=UTF-8&fr=yfp-t-339&fp=1
- https://search.yahoo.com/search;_ylt=A0SO80gommpVGRgAU5VYsJnjo;_ylc=X1MDMjc2NjY3OQRlcgMyBGZYA3lmcC10LTMyWVNTWHk4VExxbEhTQWtab3g1a0EEbl9yc2x0AzAEbl9zdWdnAzOEb3JpZ2luA3NlYXJjaC55YWhvby5jbi20EcG9zAzAEcHFzdHIDBHBxc3RybAMEcXN0cmwDMTcEcXVlcnkDaG93IHRvIG5vIG5vIGxhY2UEdF9zdG1wAzE0MzMwNDk3ODL;p=how+to+no+lacing+shoes&fr2=sb-top-search&fr=yfp-t-339-s&fp=1

[Source: http://writical.com | May 11, 2015 ++]

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Photos That Say it All ► Got Your Six
WWII Advertising ► Willys Jeep

"JEEP" INVADES MIDWEST FARM

Demonstrates Post-War Possibilities

"Yes, we had a real, genuine 'Jeep' at our farm for a few days. It was the biggest event that ever occurred in our section, in my opinion."

"We hooked the 'Jeep' to the kerosene and when we gave her the gas she walked right away with it.

"Close as I could figure it, we saved the best part of a day on the cutting of our grain—and that means a lot with conditions what they are.

"One important thing about the 'Jeep' is that it doesn't get tired. We didn't have to stop at the far turns for breathers. We just kept going.

"The 'Jeep' gives you a nice, steady, smooth pull and never right along, hour after hour."

"We hauled feed over to a neighbor's. We hooked it up to a manure spreader, then we drove out to the pastures to round up the cows—and the 'Jeep' made nothing of it.

"On the highway she went like a 'fluttering Jack Rabbit.' Talk about fast! I certainly will try to have a 'Jeep' if they are available after the war. Willys has done a great job."

* * *

"Jeeps" of war are still rolling off the production lines as Willys plants. But the war's end comes nearer and nearer. We look forward to the post-war days when we can learn from the Willys Speed Car, which the whole world calls the "Jeep." and the Willys-Overland "Jeep" Engine, in 10-billion miles of war service, can be built into exclusive Willys power units for work and transportation under post-war conditions.

Willys-Overland Motors, Inc., Toledo, O.
A French armored column passes through the small French town of St Mere Eglise during the Allied invasion of Normandy, getting a warm welcome from the inhabitants. The same street on May 7, 2014.

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Have You Heard? ► Rules of Combat

We’ve seen a lot of discussion the last few years about the law of war, but not a lot about the rules of war. Well, here you go:

1. Friendly fire – isn’t.
2. Recoilless rifles – aren’t.
4. You are not Superman; Marines and fighter pilots take note.
5. A sucking chest wound is Nature’s way of telling you to slow down.
6. If it’s stupid but it works, it isn’t stupid.
7. Try to look unimportant; the enemy may be low on ammo.
8. If at first you don’t succeed, call in an air strike.
9. If you are forward of your position, your artillery will fall short.
10. Never share a foxhole with anyone braver than yourself.
11. Never go to bed with anyone crazier than yourself.
12. Never forget that your weapon was made by the lowest bidder.
13. If your attack is going really well, it’s an ambush.
14. The enemy diversion you’re ignoring is their main attack.
15. The enemy invariably attacks on two occasions: a. When they’re ready. b. When you’re not.
16. No OPLAN ever survives initial contact.
17. There is no such thing as a perfect plan.
18. Five-second fuses always burn three seconds.
19. There is no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole.
20. A retreating enemy is probably just falling back and regrouping.
21. The important things are always simple.
22. The simple are always hard.
23. The easy way is always mined.
24. Teamwork is essential; it gives the enemy other people to shoot at.
25. Never draw fire; it irritates everyone around you.
26. If you are short of everything but the enemy, you are in the combat zone.
27. When you have secured the area, make sure the enemy knows it too.
28. Incoming fire has the right of way.
29. No combat ready unit has ever passed inspection.
30. No inspection ready unit has ever passed combat.
31. If the enemy is within range, so are you.
32. The only thing more accurate than incoming enemy fire is incoming friendly fire.
33. Things which must be shipped together as a set, aren’t.
34. Things that must work together, can’t be carried to the field that way.
35. Radios will fail as soon as you need fire support.
36. Radar tends to fail at night and in bad weather, and especially during both.
37. Anything you do can get you killed, including nothing.
38. Make it too tough for the enemy to get in, and you won’t be able to get out.
39. Tracers work both ways.
40. If you take more than your fair share of objectives, you will have more than your fair share of objectives to take.
41. When both sides are convinced they’re about to lose, they’re both right.
42. Professional soldiers are predictable, but the world is full of dangerous amateurs.
43. Military Intelligence is an oxymoron.
44. Fortify your front; you’ll get your rear shot up.
45. Weather ain’t neutral.
46. If you can’t remember, the Claymore is pointed towards you.
47. Air defense motto: shoot ’em down; sort ’em out on the ground.
48. The Cavalry doesn’t always come to the rescue.
49. Napalm is an area support weapon.
50. Mines are equal opportunity weapons.
51. B-52s are the ultimate close support weapon.
52. Sniper’s motto: reach out and touch someone.
53. Killing for peace is like screwing for virginity.
54. The one item you need is always in short supply.
55. Interchangeable parts aren’t.
56. It’s not the one with your name on it; it’s the one addressed “to whom it may concern” you’ve got to think about.
57. When in doubt, empty your magazine.
58. The side with the simplest uniforms wins.
59. Combat will occur on the ground between two adjoining maps.
60. If the Platoon Sergeant can see you, so can the enemy.
61. Never stand when you can sit, never sit when you can lie down, never stay awake when you can sleep.
62. A bad ride is better than a good walk.
63. The most dangerous thing in the world is a Second Lieutenant with a map and a compass.
64. Exceptions prove the rule and destroy the battle plan.
65. Everything always works in your HQ, everything always fails in the Colonel’s HQ.
66. The enemy never watches until you make a mistake.
67. One enemy soldier is never enough, but two is entirely too many.
68. A clean (and dry) uniform is a magnet for mud and rain.
69. The worse the weather, the more you are required to be out in it.
70. Whenever you have plenty of ammo, you never miss. Whenever you are low on ammo, you can’t hit the broad side of a barn.
71. The more a weapon costs, the farther you will have to send it away to be repaired.
72. The complexity of a weapon is inversely proportional to the IQ of the weapon’s operator.
73. Field experience is something you don’t get until just after you need it.
74. No matter which way you have to march, it’s always uphill.
75. If enough data is collected, a board of inquiry can prove anything.
76. For every action, there is an equal and opposite criticism.
77. Air strikes always overshoot the target, artillery always falls short.
78. When reviewing the radio frequencies that you just wrote down, the most important ones are always illegible.
79. Those who hesitate under fire usually do not end up KIA or WIA.
80. The tough part about being a leader is that the troops don’t know what they want, but they know for certain what they don’t want.
81. To steal information from a person is called plagiarism. To steal information from the enemy is called gathering intelligence.
82. The weapon that usually jams when you need it the most is the M240B.
83. The perfect officer for the job will transfer in the day after that billet is filled by someone else.
84. When you have sufficient supplies & ammo, the enemy takes 2 weeks to attack. When you are low on supplies & ammo the enemy decides to attack that night.
85. The newest and least experienced soldier will usually be awarded the Medal of Honor.
86. A Purple Heart just proves that were you smart enough to think of a plan, stupid enough to try it, and lucky enough to survive.
87. Beer Math – 2 beers times 37 men equals 49 cases.
88. Body count Math – 3 guerrillas plus 1 probable plus 2 pigs equals 37 enemies killed in action.
89. The bursting radius of a hand grenade is always one foot greater than your jumping range.
90. All-weather close air support doesn’t work in bad weather.
91. The crucial round is a dud.
92. There is no such place as a convenient foxhole.
93. Don’t ever be the first, don’t ever be the last and don’t ever volunteer to do anything.
94. If your positions are firmly set and you are prepared to take the enemy assault on, he will bypass you.
95. If your ambush is properly set, the enemy won’t walk into it.
96. If your flank march is going well, the enemy expects you to outflank him.
97. Density of fire increases proportionally to the curiousness of the target.
98. Odd objects attract fire – never lurk behind one.
99. Odd objects attract fire. You are odd.
100. The more stupid the leader is, the more important missions he is ordered to carry out.
101. The self-importance of a superior is inversely proportional to his position in the hierarchy (as is his deviousness and mischievousness).
102. There is always a way, and it usually doesn’t work.
103. Success occurs when no one is looking, failure occurs when the General is watching.
104. The enemy never monitors your radio frequency until you broadcast on an unsecured channel.
105. Whenever you drop your equipment in a fire-fight, your ammo and grenades always fall the farthest away, and your canteen always lands at your feet.
106. As soon as you are served hot chow in the field, it rains.
107. Never tell the Platoon Sergeant you have nothing to do.
108. The seriousness of a wound (in a fire-fight) is inversely proportional to the distance to any form of cover.
109. Walking point = sniper bait.
110. Your bivouac for the night is the spot where you got tired of marching that day.
111. If only one solution can be found for a field problem, then it is usually a stupid solution.
112. What gets you promoted from one rank gets you killed in the next rank.
113. If orders can be misunderstood they will be.
114. Your mortar barrage will put exactly one round on the intended target. That round will be a dud.
115. The weight of your equipment is proportional to the time you have been carrying it.
116. If you need an officer in a hurry take a nap.
117. The quartermaster has only two sizes, too large and too small.
118. When a front line soldier overhears two General Staff officers conferring, he has fallen back too far.
119. If at first you don’t succeed, then bomb disposal probably isn’t for you.
120. Any ship can be a minesweeper . . . once.
121. Whenever you lose contact with the enemy, look behind you.
122. If you find yourself in front of your platoon they know something you don’t.
123. The more stupid the leader is, the more important missions he is ordered to carry out.
124. When the pin is pulled, Mr. Grenade is not your friend.
125. When accused, admit nothing, deny everything, and file counter-accusations.
126. Murphy was a grunt.

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Interesting Inventions ► Eco Friendly Toilet

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They Grew Up to Be? ▶ Danica McKellar

Danica McKellar (The wonder Years)

Moments in US History ▶ Testing Football Helmets in 1912

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IN THIS PICTURE IS ONE OF THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST OF THE AIR FORCE. U.S. AIR FORCE AND ON THE RIGHT IS A PILOT.
Why The Services Can't Work Together

One reason the Services have trouble operating jointly is that they don’t speak the same language.

For example, if you told Navy personnel to “secure a building,” they would turn off the lights and lock the doors. Army personnel would occupy the building so no one could enter. Marines would assault the building, capture it, and defend it with suppressive fire and close combat. The Air Force, on the other hand, would take out a three-year lease with an option to buy.
Notes:

1. The Bulletin will be provided as a website accessed document until further notice. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin’s former size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user’s capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we have notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 19,801 subscribers who responded to that notice. All others are in the process of being deleted from the active mailing list.

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

6. Past Bulletin articles are available by title on request to raoemo@sbcglobal.net. Refer to the RAO Bulletin Index alphabetically listing of article and attachment titles previously published in the Bulletin. The Index is available at http://www.nhc-ul.com/BullSentMasterIndex-150101.pdf. Bear in mind that the articles listed on this index were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or become outdated.

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