

# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 1 September 2017

**PDF Edition**



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2. Numbers contained within brackets [ ] indicate the number of articles written on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net).

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## DoD Budget 2018 Update 06 ► Continuing Resolution Impact Warning

With the fiscal year set to expire at the end of September, Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis is warning that a stopgap funding measure would have a serious impact on a Pentagon attempting to modernize its capabilities. Operating under a continuing resolution, or CR, would be “about as unwise as can be,” Mattis told reporters this week at the Pentagon. It is a tradition that all those serving as secretary of defense have grown used to over the past five years: sounding the alarm about what a CR will do to readiness and modernization, publicly begging Congress to fix the problem and then getting on with life when the budget is inevitably passed toward the end of the year.

There are indications that Congress will follow that pattern this year, with the expectation of a CR to keep things working after September before a final budget is arranged around Christmas. But until that situation sorts itself out, Mattis will most likely follow the script laid out by Ash Carter, Chuck Hagel and Leon Panetta — sounding the alarm about the impact of a CR, which freezes funding at levels from the previous year while preventing new start programs from launching. “We cannot start new programs, so where you’re trying to adjust to the changing character of warfare — electronic warfare, space issues, cyber issues, counter-UAS efforts ... we cannot start those new programs,” Mattis said of a CR. “It just creates unpredictability. It makes us rigid. We cannot deal with new and revealing threats. We know our enemies are not standing still.”

Industry is also keeping a wary eye on the budget situation, with two major trade groups telling their members this week to start making contingency plans in case a government shutdown occurs. Mattis acknowledged the impact on industry, noting that a CR forces those companies to hit pause on investing in new projects. “American industry says, ‘Whoa, you know, I can start doing something here.’ And then there’s no budget for it down the road, so I’ve just put a lot of money into my capital investment, and now, it’s going to sit and idle,” he said of industry response.

The secretary said he would work closely with the defense committees to “try and avoid the damage” that would result from a CR, although he was careful to say, “I wouldn’t call it lobbying.” [Source: Defense News | Aaron Mehta | August 16, 2017 ++]

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## DoD Troop Caps ► Elaborate Counting System Lowers Actual Numbers

Caps on troop levels in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria mandated by the Obama administration have led to an elaborate Pentagon accounting system that conceals thousands of troops from the public — one that is quickly unraveling as the Trump administration prepares to send more troops to the region. With new plans to ramp up the war in Afghanistan, the military is finding it exceedingly difficult to maintain a practice that purposely doesn’t count certain troops in the battle zone that military officials insist was not designed to be misleading but many critics now assert is at best an officially sanctioned charade.

The U.S. already has as many as 12,000 troops in Afghanistan, significantly higher than its 8,400-person cap. If President Donald Trump sends nearly 4,000 additional troops, as officials predict, the total will be nearly double the current public number. In Iraq, where the Baghdad government faces political resistance to a large American troop presence, the 5,200 troop figure the Pentagon uses in public serves as a useful fiction. In fact, more than 7,000 U.S. troops are in Iraq, according to recent reports.

And in Syria the official 503 U.S. troops mostly covers special operations units. But hundreds of other troops who support them and their local allies remain classified — including the Marine artillerymen and Army Rangers whose vehicles are frequently photographed by local journalists. “We can deal with operational security, while still maintaining democratic accountability about how we fight wars,” said Jason Dempsey, an Afghanistan veteran who is now a researcher at the Center for a New American Security. “Accurate troop level numbers are something the public absolutely deserves to know.”

The discrepancy, which has come under new scrutiny amid leaks about actual troop levels, has led Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to review the policy and promise to offer more accurate official numbers. But after Trump announced this week that his administration will not talk about troop numbers, Mattis’ initiative is in doubt. Under the so-called Force Management Level policy, the Pentagon doesn’t count troops who are in the war zones for fewer than 120 days in the public numbers. That includes troops like construction engineers who are building a bridge or repairing an airfield, as well as the combat units like Marine artillery batteries that have deployed to Syria — even though those very Marines have been featured in glitzy official videos.

U.S. military leaders insist there was good reason for the policy. “Sometimes journalists would say to me, ‘Aha, the military is trying to hide the numbers of troops deployed,’ but that wasn’t the reason for it,” said Lt. Gen. Sean MacFarland, who was U.S. the commander in Iraq and Syria from 2015-16 and is now deputy commanding general of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. “It just didn’t make sense to increase the Force Management Level when you were just bringing in some engineers for a little while to build a facility and then take them out,” he said.

The policy has also had practical effect on commanders in the field. As U.S.-led forces closed in on strongholds of the Islamic State last year, the American commander of the war effort requested permission to insert a small number of attack helicopters — three or four, according to a source involved in the discussion — into northern Syria. Under other circumstances, a request for such a small movement of forces from a top commander would have been a no-brainer. But it took an extended debate at the highest levels of the Pentagon and the White House’s National Security Council to approve it.

One crucial reason for the delay: The Obama administration had placed a cap on the number of U.S. forces that would operate in Syria. And the pilots and ground crews accompanying the Apache gunships would bust the limits. The delay didn’t get any Americans killed or unduly affect the course of the campaign against the Islamic State, but the episode, described by the top Pentagon Middle east official at the time, Andrew Exum, highlighted the contortions the military has engaged in to comply with troop caps that the Obama administration first instituted in 2011 in Afghanistan. Infantry brigades deploying to both Iraq and Afghanistan have long left as many as half of their personnel stateside or, more recently, in Kuwait. They then occasionally rotate small groups of extra personnel into the combat zones on a short-term basis when they are needed, which keeps them under the cap.

During Senate testimony last year, Gen. John Nicholson, the top commander in Afghanistan, described another problem. When he took command in Kabul in 2016, he said, the one U.S. aviation brigade in the country didn’t have its own mechanics. Forced to leave them behind because of the troop cap, it was instead relying on more expensive contractor mechanics — with about two contractors filling in for every missing soldier. Nicholson brought that problem and others to Mattis’ attention soon after he became secretary of Defense, the general testified. Mattis took heed and in the months since, according to defense officials, has been pressing his subordinates to provide him with more accurate counts of American troops deployed to Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.

Twice in the past two weeks he has suggested that he will release those numbers publicly. “I had to change the accounting process because we couldn’t figure out how many troops we had there,” Mattis told reporters last week, referring to “different pockets” of troops who were counted under different tallies. Informed that only the incomplete numbers were still being released, Mattis seemed surprised and said he would provide the more accurate numbers. But revealing the true numbers as Mattis has promised could create complications — especially in Iraq, where Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi’s government faces an election next year and widespread suspicion about the role of U.S. troops in the country now that Mosul has been freed from the Islamic State.

“Whenever I made a request for more forces, the first thing I would be asked by my chain of command rightly was, ‘Well, what does the prime minister think?’” recalled MacFarland, the former top commander in Baghdad. “We’d talk to other Iraqi leaders as well. And if the prime minister was amenable and we could build some consensus, generally the U.S. government would be amenable to raising the Force Management Level as well.” “Abadi is walking several fine lines and more U.S. troops coming back to Iraq does not poll well among Iraqis,” said Ramzy Mardini, a nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council who follows Iraqi politics. But there may be little reason to worry for now.

In Trump's primetime speech on 21 AUG laying out his long-awaited plan for the war in Afghanistan, he bucked expectations by not discussing how many reinforcements he has authorized — up to 3,900 — and seemed to suggest that the lack of overall transparency on troop levels will continue. “We will not talk about numbers of troops or our plans for further military activities,” Trump said in his address. Trump’s suggestion that his administration may stop releasing troop numbers is consistent with rhetoric he used on the campaign, when he lambasted the Obama administration for talking about the impending advance into the ISIS-held city of Mosul and told opponent Hillary Clinton during a debate that she was “telling the enemy everything you want to do.”

Trump’s remarks on Monday put the brakes on the plan to start disclosing more accurate numbers, at least as far as Pentagon spokesmen are concerned. “The president’s comments speak for themselves,” spokesman Adam Stump said 24 AUG. “We are still awaiting guidance on the numbers.” But earlier in the week — the day after Trump’s speech — Mattis himself told reporters that he still planned on disclosing “the total number” of troops currently in Afghanistan, if not the number of reinforcements being sent. In the meantime, estimates of the real troop numbers keep leaking out — including from members of Trump’s own National Security Council, suggesting that not everyone in the administration is taking the president’s “we will not talk about numbers” remark as seriously as the Pentagon press team.

In a background call with media the morning after Trump’s speech, one of his own White House subordinates acknowledged that the actual number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan exceeds 10,000. Exum, the former Obama Pentagon official, warned that becoming less transparent, as Trump suggested in his speech, would be a step in the wrong direction. “They’re going to have to talk about numbers with the government of Afghanistan, like we talked about numbers with the government of Iraq, and with the NATO partners, and with both the authorizing and appropriating committees on the Hill,” Exum said. “So if they’re going to do that, I don’t understand why you wouldn’t be a little more transparent with the American people.” [Source: POLITICO | Wesley Morgan | August 26, 2017 ++]

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## **Transgender Troops Update 08 ► Trump Signs Service Ban Directive**

President Donald Trump signed a memo Friday that bans any new transgender men or women from joining the military, but also leaves it to Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to determine the fates of transgender service members currently in uniform. Trump's directive also covers the Department of Homeland Security, to include the Coast Guard. The presidential memo, which Trump has transmitted to the Pentagon, contained three major guidelines.



- First, it directed that the Pentagon maintain a ban on any new accessions of transgender personnel into the military.
- Second, it halted the use of any Pentagon or Department of Homeland Security funds for sex reassignment surgery.
- Third, it directed Mattis to determine whether transgender personnel currently in uniform should be allowed to stay.

A senior administration official who briefed reporters 25 AUG on the contents of the memo said Trump directed Mattis to use the criteria of a transgender service member's impact on military effectiveness, lethality, unit cohesion and impact on budgetary resources. But the official could not describe how a service member should be evaluated, for example, for his or her impact on the budget. Pentagon officials did not provide any additional information Friday. "The Department of Defense has received formal guidance from the White House in reference to transgender personnel serving in the military. More information will be forthcoming," Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White said in a statement.

There are some exceptions to the ban on funding for sex reassignment surgery. Payments will continue when there is determined to be an "exception to protect the health of an individual that has already begun the course of treatment," the official said. Mattis has until March 2018 to grant exceptions to the funding ban and also to determine the fate of transgender personnel now serving, the White House said. It was not clear what the ban on accessions would mean for a small number of transgender cadets who have either graduated from or are currently enrolled in the service academies.

The Senate Armed Services Chairman and numerous Democrats said the White House decision to dismiss transgender troops from the ranks could harm military readiness. "The president's order to remove transgender service members from the United States armed forces and deny them health care is nothing less than a purge," said Matt Thorn, executive director of OutServe-SLDN, in a statement. OutServe-SLDN is the largest non-profit, legal services, advocacy and policy organization dedicated to bringing about full LGBT equality to America's military, the group says on its website.

Thorn went on to call the memo "a discriminatory attack on the people who have volunteered their lives for the defense of the country." The group said it plans to file a federal lawsuit to challenge the policy change. The president signed the memo one month after announcing in three tweets his plan to change the military's transgender policy. A trio of advocacy groups sued President Donald Trump 28 AUG over his ban on transgender individuals serving in the military, calling it unconstitutional and un-American. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | August 26, 2017 ++]

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## **MCAS Futenma Okinawa Update 10 ► Appeals Court Revives Lawsuit**

A federal appeals court 21 AUG revived a lawsuit that seeks to block construction of a U.S. military base in Okinawa, Japan over concerns about its impact on the Okinawa dugong, an endangered marine mammal that resembles a manatee. The Center for Biological Diversity has authority to challenge the adequacy of the government's evaluation of the effect on the Okinawa dugong, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said. A three-judge panel of the court also said the environmental group's request for an injunction blocking the project did not raise political questions that were beyond judicial review.

The ruling overturned a 2015 decision by U.S. District Judge Edward Chen in San Francisco that dismissed the suit. The 9th Circuit sent the case back to Chen for further proceedings. The Department of Justice said in a statement it was reviewing the ruling. Peter Galvin, director of programs for the Center for Biological Research, said the decision was a "lifeline" for the Okinawa dugong. "The base plan as it's currently conceived is incompatible



with the continued existence of the Okinawa dugong,” he said. The legal fight — more than a decade old now — concerns plans to relocate Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to a less dense part of Okinawa. Environmentalists say the construction of two aircraft runways on landfill in a bay as part of the construction plan will destroy critical feeding grounds and habitat for the Okinawa dugong.



**In this April 26, 2004, file photo (left), a local fisherman watches a dugong at Yomitanson on the island of Okinawa, Japan. In this April 8, 2006 photo (right), protesters stage a rally with an inflatable doll of dugong opposing the U.S. military base relocation in Okinawa, outside Japan's defense agency in Tokyo.**

The animal is associated with traditional creation myths in Japan and listed as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, with its numbers estimated at one point to be below 50. Japanese officials said in 2012 the project would have no negative effect on the dugong, and U.S. officials reached the same conclusion two years later. But the center said the U.S. review was inadequate. Construction of the base has begun, though the 9th Circuit said in its ruling there is “no reason to think completion of the base is imminent.” [Source: The Associated Press] Sudhin Thanawala | August 21, 2017 ++]

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## **Trump Afghanistan Strategy ► A New Plan**

President Donald Trump announced a new plan for Afghanistan Monday night with calls for additional U.S. forces, greater NATO participation and regional pressure that held echoes of the previous administrations even as the president said his way forward would be a much more aggressive plan that delivers results.

“Nearly 16 years after the Sept. 11 attacks, the American people are weary of war without victory,” Trump told a largely military audience at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Virginia.

Trump said he was initially inclined to withdraw all forces. As he said on the campaign trail, he still feels that the U.S. had spent too much time, energy and money trying to rebuild Afghanistan, like Iraq, to resemble American governance. “My original instinct was to pull out, and historically, I like following my instincts,” Trump said. “But all my life I’ve heard that decisions are much different when you sit behind the desk in the Oval Office.” After repeat consultation with his military advisers, however, including Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. Joseph Dunford, Trump said he relented and determined that a withdrawal from Afghanistan would be a grave mistake. “Our nation must seek an honorable and enduring outcome,” worthy of the 2,300 U.S. lives lost there fighting in the last 16 years, he said. “The consequences of a rapid exit are both predictable and unacceptable.”

Trump said there are key differences between his plan and those of the last 16 years, even as it contained echoes of strategy from the Obama era.

- First, there would be no time-based strategies but a condition-based approach to determine when U.S. forces would withdraw. “We will not talk about numbers of troops or our plans for further military action,” Trump said. “I will not say when we are going to attack. But attack we will.” Keeping in line with that thinking, Trump did not state how many troops will be heading to Afghanistan. News reports throughout Monday indicated the Pentagon is looking at sending around 4,000 troops to America’s longest war.
- Second, the president said the U.S. would not be committing its military resources to reconstruction or rebuilding Afghanistan’s governance. “We are not nation building again. we are killing terrorists,” Trump said. Part of that will continue a trend of taking restrictions off the military fighting on the ground, although as with the troop numbers, Trump provided no details on how he would “lift restrictions and expand authorities” for warfighters. “We will also expand authorities for American armed forces to target the terrorists and criminal networks that sow violence and chaos throughout Afghanistan,” he said.

He also indicated that America’s resolve to the Afghan government will remain strong, as long as Kabul is doing its part. “Our commitment is not unlimited and our support is not a blank check,” Trump said. “The government of Afghanistan must carry their share of the military, political and economic burden.” Ironically, that statement echoes a key takeaway from President Barack Obama’s first major Afghanistan speech in December 2009 — that “the days of providing a blank check are over” for Afghanistan.

The revised strategy, like the previous one, pursues a regional approach by calling for Pakistan to shore up its border with Afghanistan and confront terror groups such as the Islamic State and Haqqani network. In June, Mattis declared that the Afghanistan review would not focus just on that country, but instead be part of a “regional” approach, in a phrasing that seemed to encompass how the U.S. would handle Pakistan. Pakistan, Trump said, often provides “safe haven to agents of chaos, violence and terror,” later adding that “We have been paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars at the same time they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting. But that will have to change, and that will change immediately.”

The Trump administration has already made some changes in how it deals with Afghanistan’s neighbor, having cut military aid in its planned fiscal 2018 budget. It could take further steps, including listing the country as a state sponsor of terrorism or pushing NATO to remove Pakistan’s listing as a partner nation. Obama also called for regional engagement but that ultimately failed because of the arbitrary withdrawal deadlines Obama had set, said Steven Bucci, a visiting national security fellow at the Heritage Foundation.

- “Doing it the other way [announcing a date of withdrawal] was silly,” Bucci said. “It plays well to a domestic audience but doesn’t do well on the battlefield to say how many people are going to show up and how long they are going to be there.”
- Bucci said continuing engagement with Pakistan now “has more opportunity for success because in that part of the world, when you show strength and resolve, other people tend to get in line with you. If you waver, they scatter.”

Trump’s revised strategy also relies on NATO partners to continue to provide forces for Afghanistan operations, even though NATO has not met the troop requirements of the current plan. Of the 15,000 forces Resolute Support currently requires to execute the train-and-equip mission, NATO has filled 13,600 slots, as of the latest figures available in May 2017. The U.S. provides the lion’s share of those forces, 6,900. President Donald Trump is calling for a greater troop presence in Afghanistan. President Donald Trump is calling for a greater troop presence in Afghanistan.

Coming to this decision was, according to multiple reports, a long and arduous process for Trump and his national security team. Increasing the number of troops in Afghanistan was supported for several months by a group headlined by Mattis and national security adviser Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster. Opposing the move was a group of

Trump staffers led by the recently departed Steve Bannon, who had supported a bid by Frontier Services Group chairman Erik Prince to replace U.S. forces with an army of contractors. There are already 23,525 contractors in Afghanistan supporting U.S. forces — about 9,500 of those contractors are American and the rest are foreign nationals, according to a July 2017 quarterly report released by U.S. Central Command. The Defense Department reports there are 8,400 U.S. troops serving in Afghanistan, but that figure does not take into account forces there on a temporary-duty assignment of 120 days or less.

The Congressional Research Service has estimated the total cost of military options in Afghanistan since 2001 is more than \$840 billion.

For months, Mattis has said the White House was very close to selecting one of the options the Pentagon had developed. But as late as last week, the defense secretary said a full range of possibilities — from withdrawal, to the use of contracted forces, to adding about 4,000 additional troops — was on the table. “The process was rigorous and it involved all members of the Cabinet — of the national security staff, I would say, writ large,” Mattis said 20 AUG. “I’m very comfortable that the strategic process was sufficiently rigorous and did not go in with a preset condition in terms of what questions could be asked or what decisions would be made.”

Shawn Brimley, a top National Security Council staffer and special adviser to the undersecretary of defense for policy during the first Obama administration, remains skeptical that a surge of several thousand troops will really make much of a difference in Afghanistan. “Unless President Trump articulates significant changes to the current strategy in Afghanistan and the ways we employ troops, it’s hard to see how adding about a brigade’s worth of additional forces will make a meaningful difference on the ground,” said Brimley, now executive vice president with the Center for a New American Strategy think tank.

“Unfortunately, there is little that is ultimately in America’s power to achieve in Afghanistan. The Taliban have achieved momentum and control many areas of Afghanistan. The Afghanistan government remains corrupt and rife with internecine strife. And Afghanistan’s neighbors have very different national interests than the United States and the international coalition,” Brimley continued. “The best that we can likely achieve is a well-coordinated counterterrorism approach that prevents Afghanistan’s use as a sanctuary for international terrorism,” he added. “That can likely be achieved with the kind of forces deployed today.”

Trump himself has, for years, publicly questioned why the U.S. should remain in Afghanistan. In a series of November 2013 tweets, he proclaimed “We have wasted an enormous amount of blood and treasure in Afghanistan. Their government has zero appreciation. Let’s get out!” and “Do not allow our very stupid leaders to sign a deal that keeps us in Afghanistan through 2024-with all costs by U.S.A. MAKE AMERICA GREAT!” And in March 2013, he tweeted: “We should leave Afghanistan immediately. No more wasted lives. If we have to go back in, we go in hard & quick. Rebuild the US first.”

So what changed Trump’s mind? One particular issue that has come to light is the question of mineral resources in Afghanistan and how those could benefit U.S. jobs. Foreign Policy magazine recently reported that Trump met in July with Michael Silver, the CEO of American Elements, a company specializing in advanced metals. According to FP and the New York Times, Silver’s push on Afghanistan’s natural wealth of iron, copper and rare-earth metals intrigued the president, who would like to find ways to offset the cost of U.S. forces used abroad. Although not elucidated directly in the speech, echoes of that idea could be heard in Trump’s push for Afghanistan to shoulder more of the financial costs for the conflict.

However, getting those resources would likely prove a legal and logistical challenge, said Rebecca Zimmerman, a Policy Researcher at the RAND Corporation who has studied Afghanistan’s industrial growth. Legally, the Afghan government has largely asked for royalties in the past from groups seeking to mine their resources, rather than in-kind benefits such as training of workers, Zimmerman said. So that would naturally eat into any profits the U.S. would gain from mining there, and could disincentivize American companies from putting forth the capital needed

to do that work. Logistically, Zimmerman notes, such resources have historically been very difficult to get out of the ground.

- "Beyond the active conflict happening around the sites and on the road, there is corruption and illegal mining," she noted, adding that illegal mining is a major industry in Afghanistan.
- "So exploiting that mineral wealth will be far harder than it looks," Zimmerman continued. "Plus, as more mines were opened, unless better transparency measures were in place, the rate of corruption and illicit activity would increase, contributing significantly to the conflict and the country's governance failures."

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Aaron Mehta & Tara Copp | August 21, 2017 ++]

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## **Trump Afghanistan Strategy Update 01 ► Lawmakers React to Plan**

Republican lawmakers on 21 AUG praised President Donald Trump's new Afghanistan strategy as a step towards victory in the nearly 16-year-old war, but Democratic critics said they heard few details and little real change in the new plan.

"He was very vague," said Senate Armed Services Committee ranking member Jack Reed (D-RI) in a statement. "The repeated delays and mixed messages President Trump has sent regarding the U.S. commitment to stability and security in Afghanistan have harmed our credibility with our Afghan partners, NATO coalition members, and other countries." Reed also pushed for "more attention and resources on diplomatic efforts," criticizing Trump's plans to cut State Department funding as short-sighted. "It is imperative for the United States to work with our partners to boost diplomacy, maintain international cooperation, and take a comprehensive, regional approach to Afghanistan."

Trump's plan — unveiled Monday night before a crowd of troops at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Virginia — called for sending more U.S. and NATO forces to Afghanistan, more pressure on local and regional leaders to increase their responsibilities in the fight, and a conditions-based approach for withdrawing forces. But the commander-in-chief also stated that "we will not talk about numbers of troops or our plans for further military activities" and called it "counterproductive" to publicly discuss many details. Senate lawmakers will push for more information in coming weeks. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain (R-AZ) announced plans for a September hearing on the issue. Still, he praised Trump's plan as "taking a big step in the right direction" for Afghanistan.

"The unfortunate truth is that this strategy is long overdue, and in the interim, the Taliban has made dangerous inroads," he said. "Nevertheless, I believe the president is now moving us well beyond the prior administration's failed strategy of merely postponing defeat." McCain's counterpart, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry (R-TX) offered similar support. "(Trump) has set out a reasonable way ahead that begins with being honest about the requirements needed to win, and the challenges in the region," he said. "He is clear-eyed about the complexities of the mission and is giving our Commanders the resources they need to be successful." Thornberry also said the new strategy should serve as a wake-up call for lawmakers to "provide timely and adequate funding for this vital mission," a theme echoed by several Republicans still struggling to lift defense spending caps put in place by Congress in 2011.

"President Trump's announcement this evening makes it even more clear that Congress must act as soon as possible to repeal the sequestration of defense in order to appropriately fund our military," said Rep. Mike Turner (R-OH). "Maintaining a budgetary fiction at odds with the realities of the missions our men and women in uniform are asked to perform is irresponsible." In his speech, Trump admitted he has considered a full withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan during his review of the fight there. Members of his party praised him from backing away from that idea, even as the war approaches its 17th year. "Now is not the time to abandon our fight against terrorism

in Afghanistan, its people or our international partners,” said Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA), an Iraq War veteran. “Instead, we must once again lead from a position of strength.”

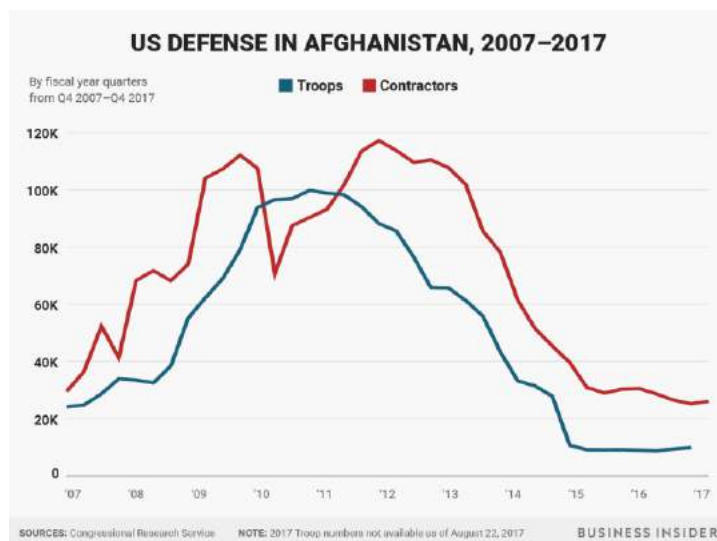
Democrats were more skeptical. Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), and one of the most vocal critics of the wars overseas, said she was “deeply troubled” by Trump’s plan. “After sixteen years at war, one thing is clear: there is no military solution in Afghanistan,” she said. “Any lasting peace in Afghanistan must be secured through diplomacy. Further military engagement will only put our brave servicemen and women in harm’s way while doing little to enhance our national security.”

House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD) said the basic outline offered by Trump Monday isn’t detailed enough to address lingering questions about the mission there. “The president needs to outline specific strategies for attaining the highly elusive goal of eliminating the threats from the Taliban, ISIS, and other terrorist organizations,” he said. “This should include the number of troops he plans to deploy and why they will be sufficient to achieve the objectives and missions they are assigned.” Congress is scheduled to return to legislative work in early September. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | August 22, 2017 ++]

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## Afghanistan Manning Levels ► 2007 thru 2017

President Donald Trump said he plans to increase the number of US troops in Afghanistan in a speech 21 AUG and continue the longest-running war in American history. Currently, there are about 9,800 US troops stationed in Afghanistan and more than 26,000 contractors. The Pentagon defines a defense contractor as “any individual, firm, corporation, partnership, or other legal non-federal entity that enters into a contract directly with the DoD to furnish services, supplies, or construction.” This also includes intelligence analysis, translation and interpretation, as well as private-security contractors — who began taking over roles once held by uniformed soldiers after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The defense industry has also made incredible profits since 2001, including nearly \$100 billion in Afghanistan since 2007. The graphic below compares the number of US troops and defense contractors in Afghanistan over the last decade.



[Source: Business Insider | Skye Gould & Daniel Brown | August 22, 2017 ++]

## **Navy Collisions ► Why They Are Happening Now**

U.S. Navy leaders are scrambling for answers after two guided-missile destroyers collided with other ships in the Pacific within months of each other, causing millions in damage and costing the lives of sailors aboard. In a year that also saw a cruiser run aground in Tokyo Bay and another overrun a South Korean fishing vessel, the evidence appears stark that something is wrong. On 23 AUG Navy officials announced that the three-star commander of the Yokosuka, Japan-based 7th Fleet, Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin, had been relieved from his post weeks before his planned retirement in the wake of the mishaps. But is the problem regionally focused, or does it have implications for the larger Navy?

Ongoing investigations into the two recent collisions and a separate review of Navy training and certification standards, with an emphasis on the surface warfare officer community, aim to answer those questions. But some Navy experts who spoke with Military.com suggested the service may not like what it finds out.

### **Too Small? Too Busy?**

For some, the recent disasters provide a robust argument for the significantly larger fleet size that Navy leadership has endorsed. As of today, the Navy has 276 deployable battle-force ships; it wants up to 355 to meet the operational demand around the globe. Fewer ships means less time at home for rest and training; crews are therefore operating with greater stress and exhaustion levels.

- "The demand signal from our fleet and combatant commanders is not going down for ships," Tom Callender, a senior fellow for defense programs at the Heritage Foundation and former Naval officer who served as the director of capabilities at the office of the under secretary of the Navy for policy.
- "The Navy has pushed to provide and answer those requests as much as possible," he added. "If you look at the number of ships you have deployed, it's been pretty constant at about 100 ships, even as you've taken about a 20 percent decrease in fleet size. Something has to give there."

Rep. Rob Wittman, a Virginia Republican and the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's panel on Seapower and Projection Forces, released a forceful statement blaming the stressors on the fleet for the recent accidents. "While I support the chief of Naval Operations' operational safety stand down of the fleet, I believe that there are even more basic causes for this systematic operational failure of our fleet to include a demanding operational tempo, limited training opportunities and inadequate funding to support basic needs," Wittman said. "I look forward to conducting a detailed review of ongoing Navy operations to ensure the basic safety of our sailors and sufficient forces for our national security."

But that explanation doesn't wash for everyone. Despite the fact that all four ships involved in recent mishaps were operating in regions with some of the highest sea traffic in the world, they ran afoul during routine transits and operations. The commanding officer of U.S. Pacific Fleet, Adm. Scott Swift, said in a message to the fleet that the disasters took place during "the most basic of operations," suggesting complacency and a casual approach to ship operations was the true culprit. "I'm disappointed in a few people who are using this as a reason that we need a bigger Navy; that's tertiary," said another retired Navy officer and popular military blogger who goes by the pen name CDR Salamander. "We have a high op-tempo, but that's no excuse. This is a Vince Lombardi Navy: 'See that ship? Don't let another ship hit it.'" Lombardi was a famous football player and coach.

### **Pacific Challenges**

The fact that all recent mishaps have taken place in the same region, under the same Navy fleet command, does raise questions about the challenges and dangers of operating in the 7th Fleet. The two Navy destroyers that collided with commercial vessels, the USS John S. McCain and the USS Fitzgerald, and a cruiser that ran aground in Tokyo Bay, the USS Antietam, are home-ported in Yokosuka and maintain a constant forward-deployed presence in the Pacific.

In 2015, a Government Accountability Office report showed that these forward-based ships, moved to the region in a broad Navy strategy to increase Pacific presence, spend significantly more time deployed and were regularly short-changed on training. The report showed that U.S.-based cruisers and destroyers spent roughly 40 percent of their time deployed and 60 percent in training and maintenance periods, while their Japan-based counterparts spent 67 percent of their time deployed, 33 percent in maintenance, and did not have a dedicated training period. The report's authors wrote that this led to a "train on the margins" approach in which crews squeezed in training while underway or whenever possible between underway periods. In addition, a GAO survey at the time found up to 17 percent of warfare certifications for crews home-ported in Japan were expired, and some had been for months.

Jerry Hendrix, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security and retired Navy captain who served on the chief of Naval Operations' executive panel, told Military.com the geography of the region also presented its own challenges. The Strait of Malacca where the McCain had just transited through en route to Singapore before colliding with a Liberian-flagged tanker is the most highly-trafficked strait in the world, Hendrix noted. The volume of traffic, he said, added to the complexity of moving through the narrow strait. But a more persistent factor, he said, may be the greater distances and lengthy at-sea periods that come with Pacific operations. "The distances are much greater, so I think there's a higher degree of exhaustion that's associated with operating in the Western Pacific," Hendrix said.

He noted too, that it has been a long time since sailors in the Pacific were commanded by a surface warfare officer, who might be more instinctively attuned to the surface fleet's training and operational needs. Aucoin, who was just relieved, is a naval aviator; Swift, the Pacific Fleet commander, is as well. PacFleet had its last SWO commander, Adm. Gary Roughead, from 2005-2007; the 7th Fleet saw its last SWO commander, Vice Adm. William Crowder, from 2006-2008. "While we like to pretend that all our admirals are the same, each admiral brings their own area of community expertise," Hendrix said. "There's a question as to how long has it been since a senior SWO looked at procedures in the region. My question to CNO-level management of detailing people is, 'When was the last time you thought about that rotation and how important it is?'"

### **Training Shortfalls**

For the Navy, the most uncomfortable revelations may come as the service examines the state of surface warfare officer training and pre-deployment certification training today, and whether crews are missing the mark at sea. To be clear, recent events have highlighted these crews' ability to respond magnificently to a crisis, acting with heroism and efficiency. Partial investigation findings released last week from the destroyer Fitzgerald's collision with a Philippine-flagged container ship southwest of Tokyo in June detail the heroism of crew members who worked tirelessly to save those trapped in flooding berthing spaces and guard against more damage to their hobbled ship. Seven sailors perished in the disaster, but the number could have been greater had the crew not acted as it did. In a press conference in Singapore 22 AUG, Swift also praised the crew of the McCain, which began launching search-and-rescue aircraft for ten missing sailors shortly after sustaining significant damage in the collision.

Regardless, the fact of the collisions is evidence of something gone badly wrong. Multiple experts who spoke with Military.com said in the case of the McCain, as it exited a congested strait and prepared to enter port, it was likely that a sea-and-anchor detail -- additional manning -- had been on station to ensure safe transit and that a senior officer was on the bridge to supervise. Salamander recalled the 2007 incident when the destroyer USS Arleigh Burke ran aground at the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay in daylight because the navigational system had an input error and no one had looked out the window to confirm the ship's position. "There's no bad computer bad radar that's going to substitute for you not looking out the bloody window," he said.

Callender noted that ships have a high annual turnover -- about 100 of a destroyer's roughly 300 sailors will be new to the ship every year -- and it was crucial that developing proficiency in the basics, and maintaining that proficiency, be given priority. And simulators, while advanced, can't replicate the pressures and requirements of real-world navigation. "It's like first getting your driver's license. It's not the same as being a driver who's driven for ten years," he said. "... There's a demand and a need, I don't care how senior you are, to do that refresher training on



a monthly, annual basis, to review the procedures." In addition to the challenge of green crews, Salamander said he believes "perverse career incentives" to get command tours elsewhere can result in fewer and shorter at-sea periods for surface warfare officers.

And while Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson has said the Navy's new review of practices will include external input from other military services and industry, Salamander suggested looking to the navies of other nations, including the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, which also sail around the globe but appear to maintain lower major mishap rates than the U.S. Navy does. Internationally, he said, some ships give a wide berth to U.S. Navy vessels, which are developing a reputation for sloppy sailing that is only validated by recent mishaps. "This would require a culture change, a career change, a training change," Salamander said. "It would require us to take a deep breath and say, 'We may be the world's largest Navy, but we are not the best Navy.'"1

[Source: Military.com | Hope Hodge Seck | August 23, 2017 ++]

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## **DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 AUG 2017**

**Rock Island, IL** – William R. Jones, 67, of Geneseo, Ill., entered pleas of guilty today to theft of government funds and making false statements about his military service to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Sentencing has been scheduled for Dec. 12, 2017. During court hearings and according to court documents, the government established that Jones entered service in the armed forces of the United States in 1971 via the Air National Guard. Thereafter, Jones served in various Reserve or National Guard components. Jones retired from the military in 2002 as a Lieutenant Colonel. At no time did Jones ever serve in the Southeast Asia or Republic of Vietnam (RVN) theater of combat operations or in any other theater of combat operations.

In 2003, after retirement, Jones sought disability benefits, based on claims in statements to the VA that he was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder attendant to combat service in the RVN. Jones falsely claimed that he had been a Special Operations air crewman on an AC-130 Spectre gunship and was shot down and wounded. Jones claimed that he had been awarded a Bronze Star Medal with V for Valor and a Purple Heart for RVN service. The VA denied the claims after checking Jones' military service records and determining that he was never in RVN. Jones, however, continued to press for claims for disability based on combat service, submitting a false DD-214 to the VA and causing the American Legion and public officials to petition or write the VA in support of the defendant based on Jones's false representations. As a result of these false representations, Jones received \$71,472 from the VA for combat-related disability.

On Oct. 31, 2013, Jones caused the American Legion to submit to the VA on his behalf a new claim with supporting documents that included a copy of an article from the Geneseo, Ill., newspaper. The article was based on false information provided by Jones about his purported combat service, including copies of several false certificates for combat awards, a false certificate from MACV SOG (Vietnam Special Operations Group) attesting to Jones's purported SOG service, a false certificate representing that "Staff Sergeant Jones" had received an Enlisted Aircrew badge in November 1971, and a letter dated 2008 from then-U.S. Senator Barack Obama stating that the defendant was a RVN veteran.

In addition, on July 16, 2013, Jones submitted to the office of U.S. Senator Richard J. Durbin a "Privacy Act Release" form that contained false information indicating that Jones had served in combat in Vietnam in 1972; that Jones had been assigned to Special Operations in Vietnam; and, that Jones was shot down in enemy territory but rescued by U.S. Marines three weeks later. In fact, as Jones well knew, he never served in Vietnam; was never assigned to Special Operations in Vietnam, and, was never shot down and rescued by U.S. Marines. As a result of these false statements to Senator Durbin, the Senator conveyed the false statements to the VA in support of the defendant's claim for disability benefits.

The statutory maximum penalty for theft of government funds (one count) is 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. The maximum penalty for making false statements is five years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. Jones also may be ordered to pay restitution to the VA. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Don Allegro. The charges are the result of an investigation by the Office of the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. [Source: DoJ Central District of Illinois |m U.S. Attorney's Office | August 22, 2017 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Update 92 ► Pfc. Dale W. Ross**

A New York military aviation researcher got more than she bargained for on a dream trip to a battle-scarred South Pacific island — the chance to help solve the mystery of an American soldier listed as missing in action from World War II. Donna Esposito, who works at the Empire State Aerosciences Museum in upstate Glenville, visited Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands this spring and was approached by a local man who knew of WWII dog tags and bones found along a nearby jungle trail. The man asked if Esposito could help find relatives of the man named on the tags: Pfc. Dale W. Ross.

After she returned home, Esposito found that Ross had nieces and nephews still living in Ashland, Oregon. A niece and a nephew accompanied Esposito on her late July return to Guadalcanal, where they were given his dog tags and a bag containing the skeletal remains. Although it's not certain yet the remains are the missing soldier's, the nephew who made the Guadalcanal trip is confident they will be a match. "It's Uncle Dale. I have no doubt," said Dale W. Ross, who was named after his relative.

The elder Ross, a North Dakota native whose family moved to southern Oregon, was the third of four brothers who fought in WWII. Assigned to the Army's 25th Infantry Division, he was listed as MIA in January 1943, during the final weeks of the Guadalcanal campaign. He was last seen in an area that saw heavy fighting around a Japanese-held hilltop. When the Japanese evacuated Guadalcanal three weeks later, it was the first major land victory in the Allies' island-hopping campaign in the Pacific.



**In the Aug. 3, 2017, photo (left) the dog tags and a Hawaiian pressed penny charm of Pfc. Dale W. Ross are displayed at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. In the 1942 photo (right) provided by Dale Ross shows his uncle, Pfc. Dale W. Ross in Hawaii in 1942. Assigned to the Army's 25th Infantry Division, he was listed as missing in action in January 1943, during the final weeks of the Guadalcanal campaign.**

Ross' relatives handed the remains — about four dozen bones, including rib bones — to a team from the Pentagon agency that identifies American MIAs found on foreign battlefields. On 7 AUG, the 75th anniversary of the start of the Battle of Guadalcanal, an American honor guard carried a flag-draped coffin containing the bones onto a U.S. Coast Guard aircraft. The Pentagon said the remains were taken to Hawaii for DNA testing. "Until a

complete and thorough analysis of the remains is done by our lab, we are unable to comment on the specific case associated to the turnover,” said Maj. Jessie Romero of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. The other three Ross brothers made it back home, including the oldest, Charles, who served aboard a Navy PT boat in the Solomons and visited Guadalcanal in the vain attempt to learn about his brother Dale’s fate.

Ross’ niece and nephew made their trip last month with Esposito and Justin Taylan, founder of Pacific Wrecks, a New York-based nonprofit involved in the search for American MIAs from WWII. They met the family whose 8-year-old son found the dog tags and remains. They also were taken to the spot on a slope in the jungle where the discovery was made. “I never met this man, but I was a little emotional,” Ross, 71, said of the experience. For Esposito, 45, finding evidence that could solve a lingering mystery in an American family’s military history is the most meaningful thing she’s ever done in her life. “I can’t believe this has all happened,” she said. “It has been an amazing journey.” [Source: The Associated Press | Chris Carola | August 7, 2017 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 16 thru 31 AUG 2017 | Fourteen**

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

For a listing of all missing or unaccounted for personnel to date refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil> and click on ‘Our Missing’. For a listing and details of those accounted for in 2017 refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Year/2017> If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

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

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

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



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

- <https://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>
- <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases>
- <http://www.thepatriotspage.com/Recovered.htm>



[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | August 31, 2017 ++]

**\* VA \***



## VA Psychiatrists ► Shortage Impacting Vet's Mental Health Care

A nationwide shortage of psychiatrists has created a similar shortage in the U.S. Veterans Affairs department, which can amplify the department’s challenge in having sufficient staff to provide mental health care to veterans. A 2015 report showed the VA was critically short on psychiatrists. The report, published by the VA inspector general, said more than two-thirds of VA health care facilities studied — 94 of 140 — needed more psychiatrists on staff to meet demand.

To fill those gaps, VA hospitals often contract with private practice psychiatrists. But the problem is the private sector also is woefully short on psychiatrists. The shortage is being felt across the country. Dr. Atul Grover, executive vice president of the Association of American Medical Colleges, recently told Forbes that expanded access to health care under federal reforms has led to more people seeking mental health care and thus put a strain on the availability of mental health professionals. A 2017 report said psychiatrists have become the second-most highly recruited physicians, trailing only family physicians. The report was published by Merritt Hawkins, a national physician search and consulting firm.

Iowa has not been immune. The state has been dealing with a psychiatrist shortage for years; 89 of the state's 99 counties have a mental health professional shortage, according to the federal Health Resources and Services Administration. "Iowa's shortage of psychiatrists unfortunately exacerbates the VA's shortage of psychiatrists. Our mental health professionals are being stretched too thin," said U.S. Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA), a veteran and member of the Senate's armed services committee. "It's critical that the VA look to strengthen recruiting and retention of health professionals so our veterans have access to quality, timely mental health care." Neither the federal Veterans Affairs media office nor the VA Central Iowa Health Care System returned messages seeking more information.

In 2014, an average of 20 veterans per day died from suicide, according to a 2016 VA report. Of those 20 deaths, an average of six used the VA for health care services, the report said. Legislators have attempted to address the VA psychiatrist shortage. For example, one bill in the U.S. House would allow the VA to fill positions that have been vacant for more than 35 years by appointing psychiatrists immediately upon completion of their residencies regardless of civil service or classification laws. In Iowa, the state in 2016 issued a \$4 million grant to create psychiatry residency programs at three Des Moines hospitals. "From my experience as the former president of Des Moines University, I know that specialized physicians are more likely to remain in Iowa if they do their residency here," then-Gov. Terry Branstad said when the program was announced. "Iowa is taking steps to ensure that these health care professionals remain an important fabric of our communities, both urban and rural." [Source: The Courier | Erin Murphy | August 14, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Lawsuit | John Porter ► Delayed Treatment**

The Department of Veterans Affairs is paying an Iowa veteran \$550,000 to settle his allegation that he suffered life-shortening heart damage because of a three-year delay in treatment. John Porter, 68, of Greenfield, sued last year in federal court in Des Moines after he says VA staff overlooked a test result showing his heart was failing. Porter told the Des Moines Register on Friday he was glad he lived long enough to see the case settled.

Porter's lawsuit says he went to the emergency room of the Des Moines VA hospital in October 2011 after feeling tightness in his chest, and tests showed he might have heart problems. The lawsuit said a follow-up test three weeks later showed his heart was functioning at less than half of normal levels, indicating heart failure, but no VA doctors told Porter of the findings. Only three years later did doctors at an Arizona VA hospital, where Porter had gone in 2014 after experiencing severe chest pain, find the 2011 test results and inform Porter.

The lawsuit cited a cardiologist at the Des Moines VA who later wrote that the oversight kept Porter from seeing a cardiologist promptly and that because of the three-year delay, "I doubt there will be much progress made" in treating Porter. A VA spokeswoman did not respond 25 AUG to the Register's request for comment. Federal lawyers' formal response to the lawsuit acknowledged that the 2011 test was done on Porter and that the doctor said its results weren't acted on. But they denied that the VA staff was negligent or that Porter's life expectancy was curtailed because of the delay. [Source: The Associated Press | August 28, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Family Benefits ► Six You should Be Aware Of**

If your family has transitioned from the military to civilian life, you may be navigating the whole new benefits world of the Department of Veterans Affairs. While it's likely most of the [VA benefits](#) are specifically for your veteran, some of them might be for you, too. And if your veteran is receiving any amount of [disability pay](#), the benefits likely impact the whole family because they change what cash comes into your family bank account each



month. Whether or not you're new to the VA, it's likely that there are benefits that you just don't know you or your veteran has. Take a look at the following to ensure you're taking advantage of everything you can.

### 1. Free counseling

You knew about the free counseling offered through Military OneSource while your service member was active duty, but did you know the VA has a similar program? Unlike the Military OneSource service, which works with local therapists, the [VA readjustment counseling service](#) is operated out of the VA's veteran centers. For veterans or their family members to use the service, the veteran must qualify under a set of guidelines. But they are broad, and most post-9/11 troops meet the basic requirements. There are plenty of emotional or life-change battles to face as you move from military to civilian life. And as long as your family qualifies, you may be able to sit down with a counselor to tackle working through [PTSD](#), military-to-civilian [transition issues](#) and more.

### 2. Appointment travel reimbursements

. Unless you happen to live right down the street from the VA hospital or clinic or are using VA Choice, your veteran is likely traveling for any medical appointments he has through the VA. That means he or she qualifies for a [travel reimbursement](#) for each and every trip to and from those appointments. Filing for reimbursement is easy -- simply fill out the form at <https://www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/vha-10-3542-fill.pdf> and hand it in at the VA or mail it to the address provided.

### 3. Shopping and MWR on base

If your service member has been ruled 100 percent service-connected disabled, your family still has access to commissary Exchange shopping and MWR activities on base. If your veteran is not 100 percent disabled, he or she can have [access to the Exchanges online](#). Although you won't be able to have your own login, you can shop under your veteran's account.

### 4. Caregiver support

Depending on your veteran's injury and how involved you are in his everyday care, you may qualify for the [Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers](#). That program gives qualifying users a cash stipend for taking care of their veteran. But even if you don't qualify for the payments, the VA offers other caregiver support resources and information that you might find helpful.

### 5. Free health care

If your veteran has been ruled permanently and totally disabled, you could qualify for free healthcare through the [CHAMPVA program](#).

### 6. State benefits

Did you know all states have their own benefits for disabled veterans? New Jersey, for example, offers veterans state employment hiring preference, while Alaska gives major breaks on property taxes. Benefits vary widely by state, so check out the guide at <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/state-veterans-benefits-directory.html>.

[Source: Military.com | <http://www.military.com/benefits/spouse-family> | August 25, 2017 ++]

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## VA Veteran Support Update 04 ► Female Numbers Increasing

The changing face of the American military is causing ripple effects in the veteran population. And one of the biggest changes is the introduction of more female veterans to Department of Veterans Affairs care. Since 2014, the population of female veterans receiving primary care at the Fayetteville VA has grown from about 5,000 to more than 8,000, according to Dr. Jauna Hernandez, chief of the VA's women's clinic. To keep pace, the Fayetteville VA

Medical Center and Southern Regional Area Health Education Center have hosted annual symposiums to refresh and educate health care professionals who serve female veterans.

On 23 AUG, the two groups held the third such symposium at the VA's Fayetteville Health Care Center. The 8 a.m. to noon event included training on how to identify and screen for domestic violence, and assessing and treating depression and sexual dysfunction, among other topics. Hernandez said topics are largely based on what health care providers see most often at the Fayetteville VA. She said the Fayetteville VA is adapting quickly to better care for its fast-growing female veterans.

In 2014, the average age of those veterans was 46. But several years later, she said, the average age of female veterans seeking care at the VA was down to 34. One of the biggest impacts of that age change is that the Fayetteville VA is seeing more positive pregnancy tests than in years' past — from single digits to 16 to 22 positive tests each month. Hernandez said the VA now has a full-time maternity care coordinator in Fayetteville, something officials previously did not see as necessary. Dr. Gregory Antoine, chief of staff at the Fayetteville VA Medical Center, said women are the fastest growing segment of the military, and the VA is adapting to better provide care for them once they leave military service. "It's the evolving face of the VA," he said.

At Wednesday's symposium, doctors presented information designed to refresh or enhance the knowledge of health care professionals, including doctors, nurses and others at the Fayetteville VA. Dr. Vicki Hardy, who teaches allopathic and osteopathic family medicine at the Southern Regional Area Health Education Center, urged providers to be on the lookout for signs of domestic violence. One in five women experience violence at the hand of a current or former partner, Hardy said. She said the abuse, which can include physical, sexual and mental abuse, can lead to chronic medical issues, emotional issues and acute physical injuries. Victims also are at an increased risk to be victims of homicide. Hardy said all women of childbearing age should be screened for domestic violence. She provided examples of screening questions and urged professionals not to skip them. "You have to be comfortable talking to patients about it and you also have to be compassionate," she said. "That is our job - asking questions."

Dr. Deon Faillace, who has been in general surgery practice in Fayetteville since 1987, said she has seen the military and now the VA change to cope with an influx of women. "Women are changing the VA system," she said. Because of that, the VA needs to be more aware of the gender-specific needs of some veterans. In the past, Faillace said, female veterans would be sent to Raleigh for some care. Today, the Fayetteville VA has its own specialized women's clinic. Faillace said health care providers must be aware of specific needs of the female body, from mammograms and pap smears to testing for osteoporosis. "Regular maintenance is required for our human bodies," she said. "If it's not right, get it checked out." [Source: The Fayetteville Observer | Drew Brooks | August 23, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Suicide Prevention Update 43 ► Surveys To Flag Those at Risk**

A new system can flag veterans at risk of suicide based on the surveys they answer about Veterans Affairs Department services they receive. A veteran filling out a feedback form about VA care might describe symptoms of suicidal thoughts or behaviors that put them at risk of homelessness. The system can then direct those patients to VA task forces specializing in preventing and mitigating those issues. It can also identify cases in which a veteran has been struggling for a long time to schedule appointments.

That survey technology, which sends out feedback forms accessible on any device, is sold to the VA by Silicon Valley tech company Medallia. It could be part of a broader effort to process customer feedback about government services in real-time, allowing those who provide government services to respond quicker, according to Brian Michael, Medallia's vice president of federal. Following President Donald Trump's and Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin's pledges earlier this month to invest in telehealth—technology that can treat veterans anywhere in



the country, potentially by using video chat to connect patients to doctors—Michael sees an opportunity to gather even more information about veteran satisfaction.

The VA is Medallia’s first foray into government, though the company already has established customers in the hotel, retail and insurance industries. The company is beginning to incorporate feedback from social media sites—postings about the VA, for instance—into its analysis about customer satisfaction. “We’re trying to change the opinion that feedback is academic,” Michael told Nextgov. Each response from a veteran is an “opportunity for engagement,” and a chance to consider, “How do we make a better decision on this product?” Legislators on Capitol Hill are thinking about ways to help other agencies collect feedback too. Lawmakers in both houses have introduced a version of the Federal Agency Customer Experience Act, which would streamline the months-long survey approval process agencies currently go through. Michael has been meeting with legislative directors about that effort, he said.

Agencies face other challenges in processing citizen feedback. Some require that all surveys are anonymous by design, out of concern that gathering more information from respondents makes them responsible for personally identifiable information. But “if we force anonymity ... we can’t close the loop” on certain customer requests, Michael noted. The VA allows veterans to take the survey either confidentially or anonymously; if they take it confidentially, the system can flag their individual cases to the VA for follow up. And even though the technology lets agencies collect feedback in real time, large organizations aren’t always equipped to act on that feedback quickly, Michael noted.

At the VA, Medallia is able to flag patients at risk of suicide or homelessness simply by routing those cases to VA task forces that already exist. That workflow might not be in place for other veteran issues, so “there’s more work to be done,” he added. “Everyone wants to make sure we’re not saying...’Do you need help?’... and not following up with them.” [Source: NextGov | Mohana Ravindranath | August 22, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Disciplinary Process Update 01 ► Weekly Reports**

The Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection is committed to providing immediate investigative services within all Veterans Affairs offices to ensure the improved quality of service to each Veteran. Your cooperation and input is essential for the OAWP to succeed in accomplishing this goal. If you have any questions or recommendations on how the OAWP can improve service for Veterans and employees, please call:

- Executive Director of the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection – Peter O’Rourke
- OAWP Telephone Number: 202-461-4119
- Email Address: VA Accountability Team

The OAWP is a newly created office within the Department of Veterans Affairs dedicated to improving the needs of Veterans across the United States. OAWP provides investigative internal affairs services necessary to improve health, benefits and cemetery needs for each and every Veteran. Headquartered in Washington DC, the office has satellite resources and programs in additional VA facilities across the United States.

To show that VHA is removing people from their organization who have lost their ability to work at the VA the OAWP provides a Disciplinary report updated weekly which lists actions taken against VA employees. At [https://www.va.gov/accountability/Adverse\\_Actions\\_Report.pdf](https://www.va.gov/accountability/Adverse_Actions_Report.pdf) can be found listed alphabetically by organization each individual's position, action taken, and effective date. Employee names are not provided. The VA is the only federal agency that provides such a report. [Source: <https://www.va.gov/accountability> | August 23, 2017 ++]

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## VA Death Verification System Update 02 ► Did You Know?

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has implemented a new policy change that affects all veterans. The VA is currently in the process of updating its procedure to request further confirmation of a veteran's death before it terminates any and all payments to the veteran. Basically, the process will now involve more exhaustive confirmation of a veteran's death before payments are stopped. For instance, when VA officials believe that a veteran has died, the VA will send a letter to his or her address on file and request confirmation of the death from a surviving family member. If the VA doesn't receive a response from the family — or from a veteran erroneously believed to be dead — only then will the VA terminate payments permanently. [Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | August 23, 2017 ++]

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## VA Whistleblowers Update 52 ► Albany VAMC

A retired nurse manager has reached a settlement with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs over patient abuse and whistle-blower complaints filed against the Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany NY. "It feels wonderful, like a weight off my shoulder," said Valerie Riviello, whose ordeal began four years ago, when she took a patient out of restraints without doctor's orders. A spokesman for the Albany VA did not return a call for comment last week.



In 2013, Riviello told the Times Union that her decision to remove a patient's restraints was in line with VA policies, which called for use of restraints only when patients posed an imminent threat to themselves or others. She had reported what she considered to be an excessive use of restraints on a particular patient to a supervisor and patient safety officer. According to her account, the VA responded with retaliatory actions: She was told to step down as nurse manager, a move that cut her pay by \$6,000. (A lawyer later fought for her to get the title and pay reinstated.) She was put in an office and tasked with developing a new nurse educator program by herself.

Riviello hired a lawyer and in May 2014 filed her complaints with the U.S. Office of Special Counsel. Last year, she retired after two years of dreading work every day. By her account, she was cut off from patient care, and few people would talk to her. When she took vacations, she would return to find information missing from her computer. The settlement was reached early this month. Riviello would not discuss the terms. These days, she teaches nursing students at Mildred Elley about patient care, as well as ethics and patient advocacy. The students have usually read about her story before they have her in class.

In May, they voted her Teacher of the Year. "For me, teaching every day and using it as an example is just the best thing ever," Riviello said. "I feel like I'm making a difference." [Source: TimesUnion | Claire Hughes |, August 20, 2017 ++]

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## VA Medical Marijuana Update 32 ► Advocates Criticize VA Research

Cannabis advocates are criticizing the Department of Veterans Affairs for wasting time and resources on recently published research that produced inconclusive results on the effects of medical marijuana in treating pain and post-traumatic stress disorder. “I find the funds spent on regurgitating these studies to be worthless,” said Sean Kiernan, a veteran and advocate for the Weed for Warriors Project. VA researchers last week published two studies that reviewed previous analyses and evaluations of the effects of marijuana on treating chronic pain and PTSD. The meta-analysis was led by researchers at the VA Portland Health Care System.

Mr. Kiernan, a combat veteran who served in Central America in the 1980s and ‘90s, has advocated for access to medical marijuana for veterans since 2013. Today, he works with Arizona-based physician Dr. Suzanne Sisley, who is enrolling veterans in a clinical trial evaluating cannabis in treating PTSD. He accuses the VA of frustrating Dr. Sisley’s efforts to recruit veterans for her trial. “Couple that with the active blockade the VA has undertaken with [Dr. Sisley’s] study and one is left scratching one’s head on what is really going on. It doesn’t make sense unless the screams for research are intended to be words only,” he said. “They say, ‘We don’t have research,’ and then they’re blocking the rigorous research.”

Dr. Sisley said the published article was “not helpful.” “[The VA researchers are] just retreading all the same material. There’s been so many meta-analyses. The fact that government money was wasted, again ” she said, her voice trailing off. “These aren’t controlled trials, they’re all observational studies fraught with tons of human bias,” Dr. Sisley said of the research. The VA researchers reached the same conclusion, writing that the available studies were insufficient to make recommendations on the medical benefits of marijuana. The researchers were barred from talking with the media to discuss their results.

Media inquiries were directed to a previous statement made by Veteran Affairs Secretary David Shulkin during a White House press conference in May. At that time, he tread lightly on endorsing medical marijuana because of its status as an illegal substance under federal law. “My opinion is, is that some of the states that have put in appropriate controls, there may be some evidence that this is beginning to be helpful,” Mr. Shulkin said. “And we’re interested in looking at that and learning from that. But until the time that federal law changes, we are not able to be able to prescribe medical marijuana for conditions that may be helpful.”

The National Institutes of Health lists at least 18 completed clinical trials with results that analyze the effects of cannabis on pain. For cannabis and PTSD, Dr. Sisley’s is one of about 10 studies underway, but hers is the only study evaluating military veterans and specifically those with chronic and treatment-resistant PTSD. “It’s the most rigorous kind of science you can do — triple blind, everybody’s blinded in the study. Vets don’t know what they’re getting, I don’t know what anybody’s on, the independent raters don’t know what anybody is getting, so that way we eliminate any chance of human bias,” she said. Completion of the phase two trial and positive results will set researchers on the path of phase three — replicating the findings in a larger test pool.

But that’s years down the road and Dr. Sisley first is concerned with what the science will show in this study. “I don’t know what this data will show. As much as I believe, there are certain studies that suggest cannabis could be helpful, we know we’re on the right track with this,” she said. “Until there’s a controlled trial, you can’t make any definitive conclusions.” About 10 percent to 11 percent of veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have PTSD, with similar numbers of Vietnam-era veterans, according to the VA. At least 20 veterans kill themselves every day. Advocates for marijuana say bureaucratic and legal barriers hinder access for a substance that could have immeasurable benefits for this population. [Source: Washington Times | Laura Kelly | August 21, 2017 ++]

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## **Agent Orange Diseases Update 04: Shulkin to Decide by 1 NOV on Additions**

VA Secretary David J. Shulkin will decide “on or before” Nov. 1 whether to add to the list of medical conditions the Department of Veteran Affairs presumes are associated to Agent Orange or other herbicides sprayed during the Vietnam War, a department spokesman said Tuesday in response to our enquiry. Any ailments Shulkin might add to VA’s current list of 14 “presumptive diseases” linked to herbicide exposure would make many more thousands of Vietnam War veterans eligible for VA disability compensation and health care. Ailments under review as possible adds to the presumptive diseases list include bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson-like symptoms without diagnosis of that particular disease. But hypertension (high blood pressure) and stroke also might be embraced, or ignored, as part of the current review.

The process was sparked by the Institute of Medicine’s 10th and final review of medical literature on health effects of herbicide exposure in Vietnam. The 1100-page report concluded in March 2016 that recent scientific research strengthened the association between herbicide exposure and bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson-like symptoms. Specifically, the institute, or IOM, found “limited or suggestive” evidence of an association to herbicide versus its previous finding of “inadequate or insufficient” evidence of an association. The IOM report also reaffirmed from earlier reviews “limited or suggestive evidence” of an association between herbicide sprayed in Vietnam and hypertension and also strokes. That same level of evidence was used in 2010 by then-VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to add ischemic heart disease and Parkinson’s disease to the Agent Orange presumptive list. Shinseki had stronger evidence, an IOM finding of “positive association” to herbicide for chronic lymphocytic leukemia, which he also added to the list that year.

Shulkin, the current secretary, has authority to use IOM findings to add all five diseases to the presumptive list, or he can choose to look at other studies and scientific evidence to support adding fewer ailments or none at all. The IOM, renamed the National Academy of Medicine last summer, delivered its Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 2014, to then-VA Secretary Bob McDonald 15 months ago. He immediately ordered a technical work group formed to review IOM findings and original studies it relied on, as well as any new science relevant to Agent Orange ailments. The workgroup’s findings then were reviewed by a smaller strategic workgroup, followed by an internal task force of senior VA leaders. “The entire VA response packet (with specific recommendations for action) from the IOM Task Force was delivered to the Office of the Secretary for consideration” on 17 FEB, a senior official told us at the time. Shulkin that month was confirmed as VA secretary. The previous 18 months he was VA undersecretary for health and would have been familiar with the Agent Orange packet. So, what has happened since then?

VA officials are lean on those details. A spokesman said VA continues to work “diligently to review the National Academy of Medicine report on potential new presumptions for Agent Orange and prepare the Secretary to make an informed decision. This includes everything from what the science is indicating, necessary regulations and a complete regulatory impact analysis. There is no delay in the decision process. Rather VA is taking appropriate time to ensure we are prepared to provide any benefits and services based on the Secretary’s decision.” Past VA secretaries had rigid timetables for accepting or rejecting IOM findings. They also had to adhere to certain standards and procedures in determining if more diseases should be presumed service connected, and to explain in writing if they declined to add IOM-identified conditions to the presumptive list.

But Congress allowed those provisions of the Agent Orange law to “sunset” Oct. 1, 2015, six months before IOM delivered its last report. Shulkin therefore is under no “statutory deadline nor required to do anything” with the IOM report, except whatever he promised veterans and Congress, said Bart Stichman, co-director of the National Veterans Legal Services Program, a non-profit that advocates for veterans and had lobbied to the Agent Orange provisions.

Many veterans know what’s at stake and have been pressing VA to add more diseases to the presumptive list. Also, thousands of sailors and Marines who served on ships in the territorial waters off Vietnam continue to press

VA and the Congress to make Blue Water Navy veterans eligible for Agent Orange benefits. “I’ve been doing everything I can to bug the hell out of Secretary Shulkin” on the latest IOM study, said Rick Weidman, executive director for policy and government affairs for Vietnam Veterans of America. Shulkin responds, Weidman said, that “he’s trying and it’s a process.” Weidman said he suspects one big hurdle is the White House’s Office of Management and Budget which likely resists saddling VA with sharply higher disability pay obligations for high blood pressure, bladder cancer or stroke contracted by any veteran who stepped foot in Vietnam during the war.

OMB tried to block Shinseki in 2010 from adding three ailments, including heart disease, to the presumptive list. Shinseki went around OMB and appealed directly to then-President Barack Obama who sided with veterans, Weidman said. The Congressional Budget Office calculated that within three years of that decision, ischemic heart disease, Parkinson’s and leukemia accounted for 280,000 additional compensation claims and \$4.5 billion in retroactive disability payments. Beside resistance from OMB, Weidman said Shulkin is counseled by senior staff who run post-deployment health services and study environmental hazards for VA and yet are skeptical of the science associating herbicide dioxins with higher incidence of various ailments. The Agent Orange “experts” they rely on, Weidman charged, haven’t published “one scientific paper in a reputable peer review journal. The whole crew should be fired and I’ve told the Secretary that.”

But is VA studying more than whether to add Agent Orange ailments? Anthony Principi, VA secretary in President George W. Bush’s first term, argues for more sweeping changes. Like Weidman, Principi served in combat in Vietnam but believes the Agent Orange law went too far, forcing VA secretaries to build out lists of presumptive illnesses based only on suggestive links to their wartime service, and ignoring the impact of unhealthy lifestyles, heredity and aging. Interviewed 2 AUG, Principi said it doesn’t seem fair that an elderly Vietnam veteran can begin receiving more disability compensation for heart disease at 75 or 80 than a young Marine receives who loses a leg fighting in Afghanistan.

Principi said he wants “common sense” changes to the Agent Orange law so that, for example, diseases on the presumptive list are deemed service connected only if diagnosed within 30 years of a veteran exiting Vietnam. There’s legal precedent if Shulkin were to propose such a rule, perhaps while adding hypertension to the presumptive list, said lawyer Stichman. In 1994, he recalled, Congress allowed such a “manifestation rule” for Agent Orange-related respiratory cancers. By 2001, however, it rescinded it on complaints by veteran groups that there was no science to support limiting benefits in that way. [Source: The Military Advantage Blog | Tom Philpott | August 3, 2017 ++]

## **PTSD Update 233 ► USFDA Designates MDMA Breakthrough Therapy**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has designated MDMA as a “breakthrough therapy” for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, a significant milestone in the decades-long effort to turn the notorious illegal party drug — better known as ecstasy or “Molly” — into a prescription medication, Washington Post reports. Paxil and Zoloft are currently the only medications approved for the treatment of PTSD. As the Post notes, both drugs have proven largely ineffective in treating the disorder in veterans. “If you’re a combat veteran with multiple tours of duty, the chance of a good response to these drugs is 1 in 3, maybe lower,” John Krystal, chairman of psychiatry at Yale University and a director at the VA’s National Center for Psychiatry, told the Post. “That’s why there’s so much frustration and interest in finding something that works better.”

Remarkably, the FDA’s decision to designate MDMA as a “breakthrough therapy” marks the first time the rare designation has been granted to a psychiatric treatment, as it is reserved only for drugs that work alone or “in combination with one or more other drugs to treat a serious or life threatening disease or condition,” according to the FDA website. The drug must also demonstrate “substantial improvement over existing therapies.” The effort to examine the medical applications of MDMA has been spearheaded by the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, or MAPS, a nonprofit organization founded in 1986 with the stated goal of developing

“medical, legal, and cultural contexts for people to benefit from the careful uses of psychedelics and marijuana.” Its founder, Rick Doblin, is widely regarded as a pioneer among advocates of psychedelic drug use.

The new designation could open the door for MDMA as a prescribed treatment for U.S. military veterans. MAPS sponsored the Phase 2 clinical trials of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy, which began more than a decade ago, and many veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan enrolled in the trials. Almost all of them had seen combat, according to MAPS psychiatrist Dr. Michael Mithoefer, who spoke with Task & Purpose in December. “There’s a lot of sleep disturbance, a lot of anxiety, and a lot of rage,” Mithoefer told Task & Purpose of the veterans who participated in the trials. “For some, the most troubling symptom was this rage that would come out towards their wives or their family members. It was really interfering with their lives and relationships. Most of them were not able to work before they started this study. Some had repeated suicide attempts.”

The Phase 2 trials were conducted as double-blind studies, meaning that neither the patients nor the psychiatrists guiding the therapy sessions knew whether actual MDMA or a placebo was being administered. Patients were given a total of three doses over a period of several months, while therapy continued between sessions. (“There are no take-home doses,” Mithoefer explained.) By the end of one study, two-thirds of patients no longer met the criteria for PTSD. A follow-up study showed that 88% of those patients were still PTSD-free more than three years after their last dose of MDMA. In November 2016, the FDA greenlit large-scale, Phase 3 clinical trials to further investigate MDMA’s potential benefits — the final step before its approval as a prescription drug is possible. Two MAPS-sponsored Phase 3 trials of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy are scheduled to start sometime in 2018, and enrollment will begin in the spring. The trials will focus exclusively on patients with severe PTSD.

The “breakthrough therapy” designation means that the FDA will work closely with MAPS during the Phase 3 clinical trials to expedite the development and review of MDMA-psychotherapy. MAPS has raised or pledged half of the \$25 million required to conduct the Phase 3 trials, and still needs to raise \$12.5 million, according to a MAPS press release. If all goes according to plan, MAPS says MDMA could be available as a prescription drug in the U.S. as soon as 2021.

When it was first introduced to the psychiatric community in the 1970s, MDMA was embraced by thousands of psychiatrists as a drug that could possibly help treat anxiety disorders, including PTSD. However, before formal trials in the U.S. could get underway, the drug began surfacing on college campuses and in dance clubs around the country. MDMA’s popularity as a party drug ultimately led federal officials to ban it, listing it as a Schedule 1 controlled substance in 1985, and progress on the medical front came to a halt. The party-drug stigma persists to this day, in large part thanks to its association with electronic dance music festivals, where fatal MDMA overdoses occasionally make headlines. “It’s a feel-good drug, and we know people are prone to abuse it,” Dr. Charles R. Marmar, the head of psychiatry at New York University’s Langone School of Medicine, told The New York Times last year after the FDA approved the Phase 3 clinical trials. Marmar added that prolonged use can lead to serious brain damage.

But MAPS maintains that MDMA psychotherapy bears little resemblance to recreational MDMA use. The drug’s euphoric effect is not the end goal; rather, the euphoria is intended to act as a sort of truth serum that helps break down internal barriers preventing people with PTSD from identifying and addressing the underlying causes of their suffering. Proponents of the treatment are also quick to point out that doses administered in the clinical setting contain only MDMA, and not the other, potentially harmful substances often found in street versions of the drug. “We’re not just doing a drug study,” Mithoefer said in December. “We’re studying MDMA-assisted psychotherapy.” Adding, “The intention is to heal the PTSD in a very safe, legal setting. That tends to be much more likely to foster therapeutic change than if someone is taking it at a party.” [Source: Task & Purpose | Adam Linehan | August 28, 2017 ++]

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## VA Geriatrics & Extended Care Update 01 ► State Vet Homes Program

On 21 AUG Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin announced that VA plans to propose changes to regulations for its State Veterans Home Construction Grant Program to make it easier for States to receive VA funding to construct Veterans homes in rural areas. State Veterans Homes provide Veterans with nursing home, domiciliary or adult day health care and are owned, operated and managed by State governments.

Currently, the construction grant regulations focus on Veteran demographics as well as nursing home and domiciliary bed need within a State, when determining priority group placement based on projected demand for assistance. Unfortunately, this makes it difficult for some rural areas to compete for VA State Home Construction Grants. In highly rural areas, there could be a 500-mile distance from one State Veterans Home to the next, which gives family members limited options when searching for a conveniently located facility for a Veteran family member. By incorporating a consideration for the need of Veterans in rural areas into the ranking priorities for grant applications in the regulations, rural States may find it easier to compete for the limited VA construction grant funding that is available.

“We want to remove the red tape,” said Secretary Shulkin. “Veterans in rural areas need to be able to get nursing home care when it’s needed as close as possible to their homes, families and friends. Changes in VA regulations can save families from having to travel long distances to visit a loved one in a facility far from home.” VA anticipates that the revision of these regulations will be completed by the end of this calendar year (2017). The updated regulations will be available for public comment. VA is working to ensure that the updated regulations go into effect as soon as possible. visit [https://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/Guide/LongTermCare/State\\_Veterans\\_Homes.asp](https://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/Guide/LongTermCare/State_Veterans_Homes.asp) for more information about State Veterans Homes. [Source: VA News Release | August 21, 2017 ++]

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## VA Compensable Disabilities Update 01 ► Top 10 Overlooked by Vets

1. **Erectile Dysfunction** – Erectile dysfunction, or ED, is the inability of a man to have an erection hard enough to have sexual intercourse. It can also be known as impotence. It is not unusual for this to happen to a man on occasion, but frequent ED can be a sign of a bigger medical problem that needs attention. ED can also lead to complications in a man’s life all on its own.
2. **Agoraphobia** – The essential feature of Agoraphobia is anxiety about being in (or anticipating) situations from which escape might be difficult or in which help may not be available in the event of having a Panic Attack (or panic-like symptoms). Oftentimes, when in this situation, an individual may have the vague thought that something dreadful may happen. Such concerns must persist for at least 6 months and occur virtually every time an individual encounters the place or situation (especially those that remind a veteran of battle situations).

Agoraphobic fears typically involve characteristic clusters of situations that include being outside the home alone; being in a crowd or standing in a line; being on a bridge; and traveling in a bus, train, or automobile. More specifically, the diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5 requires that an individual experiences intense fear in response to (or when anticipating entering) at least 2 of the following 5 situations:

- 1) using public transportation, such as automobiles, buses, trains, ships, or planes
- 2) being in open spaces, such as parking lots, marketplaces, or bridges
- 3) being in enclosed spaces, such as shops, theaters, or cinemas
- 4) standing in line or being in a crowd
- 5) being outside of the home alone



A person who experiences agoraphobia avoids such situations (e.g., travel is restricted; the person changes daily routines) or else they are endured with significant distress. For example, people with agoraphobia often require the presence of a companion, such as a family member, partner, or friend, to confront the situation.

3. **Keloids** – A scar that rises quite abruptly above the rest of the skin. It is irregularly shaped, usually pink to red in color, tends to enlarge progressively, and may be harder than the surrounding skin. Keloids are a response to trauma, such as a cut to the skin. In creating a normal scar, connective tissue in the skin is repaired by the formation of collagen. Keloids arise when extra collagen forms.

4. **Sexually Transmitted Diseases** – Code 6310: Syphilis and Code 6351: HIV – 9301 refer to <http://www.militarydisabilitymadeeasy.com/infectiousdiseasesandimmunedisorders.html>

5. **Pseudofolliculitis Barbae** – a common condition of the beard area occurring in men and other people with curly hair. The problem results when highly curved hairs grow back into the skin causing inflammation and a foreign body reaction. Over time, this can cause scarring which looks like hard bumps of the beard area and neck.

6. **Plantar Fasciitis** – Plantar fasciitis is the pain caused by inflammation of the insertion of the plantar fascia on the medial process of the calcaneal tuberosity. The pain may be substantial, resulting in the alteration of daily activities. Various terms have been used to describe plantar fasciitis, including jogger’s heel, tennis heel, policeman’s heel, and even gonorrheal heel. Although a misnomer, this condition is sometimes referred to as heel spurs by the general public.

7. **Pleurisy** – Pleurisy is inflammation of the parietal pleura that typically results in characteristic pleuritic pain and has a variety of possible causes. The term “pleurisy” is often used to refer to a symptom and a condition. It is more precise to use the term “pleurisy” for the condition and “pleuritic pain” to describe the symptom. Pleuritic pain is a key feature of pleurisy; therefore, this article reviews the physiology and classic characteristics of pleuritic pain, focusing on the presentation and diagnosis of the patient and the management of various causes of pleurisy. Pleuritic chest pain is a common presenting symptom and has many causes, which range from life-threatening to benign, self-limited conditions.

8. **Tropical Phagedena** (Jungle Rot) – Tropical phagedena, Aden ulcer, Malabar ulcer, and jungle rot (from Vietnam) , as well as various native terms. It occurs on exposed parts of the body, primarily the legs, arms, and feet. Frequently on pre-existing abrasions or sores, sometimes beginning from a scratch. As a rule, only one extremity is affected and usually there is a single lesion, although it is not uncommon to find multiple ulcers on two or more body parts.\

9. **Hemorrhoids** – Hemorrhoids are swollen and inflamed veins around the anus or in the lower rectum. The rectum is the last part of the large intestine leading to the anus. The anus is the opening at the end of the digestive tract where bowel contents leave the body.

10. **Sleep Terror Disorder** - Sleep terror disorder is also known as night terrors. Sleep terror is characterized by the following symptoms that a mental health professional looks for when making a diagnosis for this condition:

- Recurrent episodes of abrupt awakening from sleep, usually occurring during the first third of the major sleep episode and beginning with a panicky scream.
- Intense fear and signs of autonomic arousal, such as tachycardia, rapid breathing, and sweating, during each episode.
- Relative unresponsiveness to efforts of others to comfort the person during the episode.
- No detailed dream is recalled and there is amnesia for the episode.
- The episodes cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- The disturbance is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or a general medical condition.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | August 2017 ++]

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## **VA Incarcerated Employees ► New AWOL Policy**

The Veterans Administration has a new human resources policy. A recently terminated Memphis VA employee and whistleblower says it should have his name on it. The VA has issued a Human Resources Management Letter (HRML) which changes the policy for dealing with incarcerated employees: “Employees incarcerated following a conviction, including a criminal or civil contempt proceeding, will be considered absent without leave (AWOL), which is an unauthorized absence from duty. It is not appropriate to approve leave of any kind for the period of absence required to serve a jail or prison sentence.” The new policy appears to be in response to Brittney Lowe, a Memphis VA employee who spent 60 days in prison starting in March, but did not lose her job and was even paid while incarcerated. Lowe was granted leave during her incarceration.

Sean Higgins is a Memphis VA whistleblower who initially helped CDN break Lowe’s story in March. “It should be called the Sean Higgins HRML,” said Higgins. After CDN broke the story, Secretary David Shulkin repeatedly used Lowe’s story in the run up to the passage of the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act in June, a bill which gives the VA more power to fire employees. Ironically, Higgins found out he was terminated on the day that President Trump signed the bill.

While the Memphis VA ostensibly terminated Higgins for creating a hostile working environment, he and other VA whistleblowers believe he was terminated in a retaliatory act. After his termination, CDN reported that the Memphis VA created a bogus restraining order which was placed into Higgins’ file, and that the hospital tried and failed to get a legitimate restraining order against Higgins ex-parte, or without his knowledge.

In a wide ranging interview, Mark Bailey, the chief negotiator for the National Associate of Government Employees, the union which represents Higgins, said these disclosures are only the beginning of the problems in Higgins’s termination and Lowe’s leave. Bailey said employees are only allowed to receive 240 hours of leave per year and since Lowe was gone for two months, she would have received far more hours than that. Bailey says he’s asked VA Secretary David Shulkin to investigate the matter but he’s heard nothing definitive yet from Shulkin’s office. “We will be following up. I will take them to their word to a certain point.” On Higgins’ termination, he was even more blunt: “He shouldn’t have been removed.”

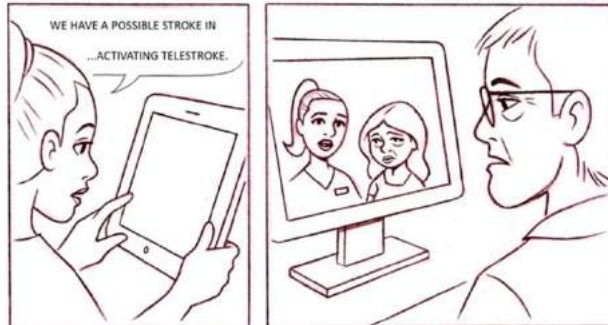
Bailey said that during the hearing, Memphis VA medical director David Dunning left suddenly. According to Bailey, an assistant came into the room while he was making his case on Higgins’ behalf and reminded Dunning he had another meeting and Dunning left before Bailey had finished making his presentation. “He didn’t afford us the that was needed to present our case,” Bailey said. “I found that inappropriate and unprofessional.” Willie Logan, public affairs officer for the Memphis VA, declined to address the allegations directly, he did issue a statement: “To maintain the highest standards of privacy, as required by law, we do not provide information relative to personnel issues. Our main responsibility is to care for veterans who entrust us with their care and to ensure staff is equipped to carry out that function on all levels.” [Source: Communities Digital News (Memphis) | Michael Volpe | August 15, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Stroke Program Update 02 ► Mobile Tablets for Care Teams**

In dealing with acute strokes, it’s said, “time is brain.” With that in mind, VA Connected Care is providing mobile tablets to VA care teams to support VA’s National TeleStroke Program (NTSP) and to help ensure the quickest

possible care is available for Veteran patients. As is the case with non-VA hospitals throughout the nation, some VA medical centers lack the expertise or staffing to provide 24/7/365 acute stroke consultation. NTSP was designed to assist sites in overcoming these challenges by using mobile and telehealth technologies to bring acute stroke expertise to the bedside anywhere in the country.



**The VHA-issued tablets enable VA TeleStroke care teams to activate TeleStroke protocols immediately in the event of a possible stroke.**

NTSP moves away from traditional telecommunication hardware and is basing their platform on tablets. These tablets equip VA Providers with video teleconferencing, specific mobile applications (e.g., VA Video Connect, Image Viewing Solution, Patient Viewer), and enable quicker solutions than earlier technology systems. “We’re taking something that we, at VA, have designed to work in an outpatient capacity and are adapting it for emergency use,” said Dr. Sharyl Martini, Medical Director for VA’s National TeleStroke Program and a neurologist at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston . “We have seen first-hand the dramatic benefits of TeleStroke in acute stroke treatment, and are excited to offer this approach to our Veterans.”

VA facilities that partner with the NTSP will have access to some of the country’s best academic stroke neurologists, enabling emergency room consultations during the critical first 60 minutes of acute stroke onset. NTSP is not only benefitting Veterans in the treatment of acute stroke, but is also leveraging mobile technology to increase access, improve health outcomes and lower costs. “Medicine has been relatively slow to adapt to new technology,” said Dr. Glenn Graham, VA Deputy National Director of Neurology. “What’s appealing about this program is that we are on the leading edge of a trend that we are going to see more of in the future, which is using 21st century tools in clinical medicine.” [Source: Houston VA Medical Center | August 17, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Heart Care Update 01 ► Off Pump By-pass Surgery**

Conventional “on pump” surgery, around since the middle of the last century, uses a pump that takes over the job of the heart and allows doctors to stop the organ, making it easier to operate. Another method, which has enjoyed renewed interest since the mid-1990s, is “off pump” surgery: It avoids the pump—and some potential complications, according to many experts—but can be a trickier procedure.

Now, [VA researchers have reported](#) five-year outcomes from more than 2,200 Veterans who underwent heart bypass surgery at 18 VA medical centers between 2002 and 2007. The patients—almost all men, with an average age of around 63, and most having multiple illnesses and two to three diseased blood vessels—had been randomly assigned to traditional “on pump” surgery or the less conventional “off pump” method.

The main outcome measure—how many patients died during the five-year follow-up, from any cause—favors the on-pump group. They had an 11.9 percent rate of death, versus 15.2 percent in the off-pump group. This represents a 28 percent higher risk for the off-pump patients.

“This is a moderately sized, clinically relevant difference,” notes lead author Dr. A. Laurie Shroyer, lead author on the new report. The study, which published its [one-year outcomes](#) in *the* New England Journal of Medicine in 2009, has been one of the world’s largest and most rigorous trials comparing the two methods of heart bypass surgery. It was sponsored by VA’s Cooperative Studies Program. Refer to [https://www.research.va.gov/currents/0817-Which\\_heart\\_bypass\\_method\\_is\\_better.cfm](https://www.research.va.gov/currents/0817-Which_heart_bypass_method_is_better.cfm) to read more about the study and its findings on the VA Research. [Source: Vantage Point | August 17, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Medical Facilities Update 02 ▶ Senate Approves 7 New VAMC's for Florida**

Florida veterans will have more medical centers at which to receive mental health and outpatient services after the U.S. Senate on 2 AUG unanimously approved legislation authorizing seven new major VA medical facilities in the state. The new Florida VA facilities will be in Daytona Beach, Jacksonville, Ocala, Tampa, Lakeland and two in Gainesville, according to a written statement from U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson (D-FL) who co-sponsored legislation authorizing the new facilities. “We have a duty to care for the brave men and women who have served in our nation’s military,” Nelson said. “Getting these seven new VA clinics opened here in Florida will make it easier for some of our veterans to access the care that they need.”

U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) who also co-sponsored the legislation, said in a written statement that the new facilities would help improve veterans’ access to medical care. “Our veterans have fought selflessly to defend our country and protect our freedoms, and they deserve easy and convenient access to quality healthcare,” Rubio said. “These outpatient clinics will allow them to receive outpatient care close to home, and I’m glad we were able to get these projects started in our state.” Florida’s veteran population ranks third in the nation, with an estimated 1.55 million vets in 2015, including 715,000 who were enrolled in the VA Healthcare System, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The legislation authorizing the new Florida facilities was included in a broader veterans’ healthcare bill, known as the VA Choice and Quality Employment Act of 2017. The measure, which was approved by the U.S. House the week before and signed into law by the president 12 AUG. The Florida VA medical facilities and the amounts authorized for each are:

- Replacement outpatient clinic in Daytona Beach, not to exceed \$12.2 million
- New outpatient clinic in Gainesville, not to exceed \$7.9 million
- Outpatient mental health clinic in Gainesville, not to exceed \$4.3 million
- Replacement outpatient clinic in Jacksonville, not to exceed \$18.6 million
- Replacement outpatient clinic in Ocala, not to exceed \$5 million
- Replacement mental health clinic in Tampa, not to exceed \$13.4 million
- Replacement outpatient clinic in Lakeland/Tampa, not to exceed \$10.8 million

[Source: Miami Herald | Daniel Chang | August 2, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Compensation & Benefits ▶ Problem Solving Program Q&A 1 and 2**

### **Question #01:**

*I was diagnosed with Thyroid Cancer last year. Since then, I've had surgery and undergone radiation treatment. I now have meds I must take daily for the rest of my life and the possibility of the cancer to resurface. I also struggle with controlling my anger/patience. I'm with US Air Force special operations and have been perfectly healthy for*

*the past 9 years. I had a physical in January of 2015, went to US Army Ranger School a couple months later, had another physical, and the cancer was discovered. Needless to say, I came in the military healthy, and leaving not so healthy. I plan on getting out next year and was just curious if I would be eligible for any type of disability?*

**A1:** Document this and everything else. Get a copy of your complete medical file. Anything you were treated for in service is deemed service connected up to one year after discharge. I suggest you get with a VSO on base and start building a claim. (PD) 3/24/2016

**A2:** Answer one is a good one. You are correct that if you did not have the thyroid cancer when you entered the service and it occurred on active duty then you will be service connected for the residuals of the thyroid cancer if they have removed the thyroid and/or it has gone into remission. I would also get an Independent Medical Opinion in my Service Medical Records of any and all residual diagnosis of the secondary conditions to thyroid cancer. The next thing that I would get a diagnosis on is the anger/patience. If you are a combat veteran it is a good chance that this might be a residual of trips to a combat zone. Or if your life has been in danger. The other thing to do is to get a diagnosis on active duty and file for a disability rating prior to separation. The other thing is that if you have disabilities for thyroid cancer, PTSD/Anxiety/ Depression you may have enough to request a PEB for an Honorable Discharge due to disabilities incurred on or aggravated by active duty. Your career NCO/Officer and/or Family Support Center should have someone to counsel you on your options. (CP) 3/25/2016

**A3:** It sounds like your cancers were discovered while you were serving. Your emotional symptoms sound like PTSD. Both would be conditions eligible for VA disability status. You should see a Service Officer certified by one of the primary veterans organizations (VFW American Legion, etc) to get help filing a claim. Don't do it yourself. Trained help will get you through the claims process in the most efficient manner. Good luck to you and thank you for your service. (KCS) 3/27/2016

**A4:** I have fought with the VA for 15 years because of the cancer I have. I even went to Waco in front of the board and showed them I was sprayed in Vietnam. Their question was "What was I sprayed with?" If I can't tell them what I was sprayed with than it would be denied. You can't win. Get a lawyer. (GLE) 4/4/2016

**A5:** All answers sound accurate and I am adding a few comments for clarity. I had my thyroid removed within 1 year of discharge but VA denied despite a well documented history because of the language used in my claim. For best chances of obtaining a rating, have your records reviewed by a Veteran Service Organization before leaving service, especially for thyroid cancer and endocrinopathy (which is presumed service connected and requires no burden of proof). Also, file a disability claim with VA now to obtain a rating prior to leaving the military. Finally, instead of pursuing a discharge, consider pursuing a medical disability discharge. Your challenge will be the resistance by DoD to acknowledge a pensionable rating or disability discharge. If you are functional, then your service will find disabilities but with no impact on ability to perform duties. Finally, copy every medical document, every physical, lab, X-ray report as well as mobilization orders, overseas TDY/TDA and evaluations. (SH) 4/4/2016

**A6:** Tks for your service. Ans 1,2 and 3 are all correct. You need to get your medical evidence together, contact your VSO or VFW your call and request assistance in filing your claim. Hopefully your seeing a medical advisor for your conditions cancer and PTSD symptoms. Get started sometimes aging records can be difficult to obtain and the longer you wait the greater the risk. Your conditions sound legit and you should follow through on the claim also keep your family informed as to what you are doing, this could take some time. Good luck. (HC) 4/5/2016

**A7:** It does not matter if your injuries are combat related or not. The key word is Service Connected (happened while in the service). (HC) 4/5/2016

**A8:** You may wish to read through 38 Code of Federal Regulations regarding Veteran disability. This is the total and inclusive law which governs such issues. There also likely are other laws which pertain to disability created/discovered while on active duty. I too believe you can make a claim for disability for up to 2 years from separation, but this needs to be confirmed. You may be eligible to file with the Veterans' Administration NOW for

disability and compensation. Some rules govern this, not the least of which is do you still have the issue, is it disabling, is it permanent, and are you precluded from working due to this disability or a combination of disabilities. The VA has a governing rule under 38 CFR, regarding IU (Individual Unemployability) for which you need to file with the VA. This is governed by the rating and combination of ratings under the VA's evaluation (which can also include any private doctors). IU is granted if you have a single issue of 60% and a combination of issues no less than 70%. In that case, the VA will pay you for total disability and your care will not be subject to a financial means test, for anything. Your spouse would become eligible for medical coverage entitled CHAMP VA. Any children you have, and your spouse, would become eligible for financial assistance to college up to age 27 under Chapter 35 regulations. This would be approximately \$1,000 a month for each child up to 36 months (assuming 9 months a year). This can be for undergraduate or graduate education. On a state level, benefits are in addition to federal regs, such as California waives the cost of all fees for your children to attend a state college. There are so many other things for which you would receive notice. I wish you well. You likely will be subject to an independent compensation and pension exam. This is a BS evaluation, so if you have any private records, letters, reports, etc., take a copy to that exam, even though you will be instructed to leave them at home. These doctors do not want to look bad and be in conflict with what specialists have evaluated. Your military medical records referred to by others, would be handy to have, that a private physician with specialization in the field can issue a report. Lastly, the law requires that if there is a discrepancy in evaluation between the VA and the veteran, the benefit MUST find for the veteran. I trust there exists a similar guideline for active duty personnel. Wish you all success... and health. (NB) 4/17/2016

**A9:** I think answer 8 is a very good one. There are so many ins and outs to filing a good claim that I think a good understanding for the overall process is needed and reading Federal Code 38 is a great start. I would also find a experienced VSO to talk with now before you get ready to retire. VSO's are not all the same, some have far more experience than others and you should find one who are been doing it a while. Start working the support needed for you claim now....don't wait. (LG) 5/21/2016

**A10:** A DX of anything, documented in your SMR = VA SC. Just remember, Paper, paper, Paper Trail. The easier you make it for the VA Rating Dept to verify your conditions, the faster your FDC will go. (GD) 6/6/2016

**A11:** You may file for compensation only, and I say only, if you can tie your thyroid cancer to your time in service. If not then no you cannot file for compensation. (TVH) 7/31/2016

**A12:** I highly recommend you go find/see a qualified VA accredited rep sooner than later to get guidance on what to do and when the time comes they can help you file for what is needed. (LG) 8/4/2016

**A13:** It is called 'Service Connected Disability because you were in the military. Not only can you claim Disability through the Military, you can also claim SSD with the Social Security for you and your wife and any children. (JK) 8/12/2016

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**Question #02:**

*I filed for tinnitus in 2005, I was denied because I was told I did not have any evidence. I asked for any test to determine tinnitus, none was given. I filed for tinnitus again in 2016, this time I used a list of mos's that was provided by The Department of Defense that would qualify you for tinnitus. All three of my mos's are on that list. I sent a copy of the list to V.A with my mos's on it which is 62f, 88m and 92a. I have not received any response. Why?*

**A1:** After applying at my local State Veteran's Office I went to my Kaiser Hospital to have my hearing tested. They confirmed that I had Tinnitus and hearing loss. With that data I went back to my local state Veteran's office and they said that to do a clean application to go to a Veteran's Hospital and have my hearing tested. With the VA Hearing test results my local state Veteran's Service office sent a copy of my DD214 along with the test results to the VA Compensation Office. It took about 6 months for a result to come back but I was back paid from the date of

the application. So, I would suggest that you find out where your local state Veteran's Service office is and visit them. Also go to your nearest VA Hospital to have your hearing tested. (MS) 6/19/2016

**A2:** First, there is no test for tinnitus. One cannot measure ringing in the ears. Second, the maximum benefit is only 10%. You can't get any more. Did you send your evidence in as a claim? If not the VA treats as just another correspondence. Since 2005 was the last time you filed for tinnitus, you would have to a new claim. (PW) 6/19/2016

**A3:** PW is correct that there is no test for tinnitus, however, any lay person can report tinnitus and verify its existence for VA purposes. (AP) 6/20/2016

**A4:** You need to do a 21-4138 explaining what you did in your MOS, how you were exposed to acoustic trauma such as mortar fire, rifle fire, and/or artillery fire. You then describe your symptoms. You cannot diagnosis tinnitus because you are not a medical expert (unless you are a medic or corpsman). When you get your service connection you can then get a VSO or Agent to help you file on a possible Clear and Unmistakable Error (CUE). (CKP) 7/29/2016

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### ***Problem Solving Program (PSP)***

Have a question about the VA? Need help with benefit questions? Need answers to your compensation questions? Use the Problem Solving Program (PSP) to get answers. Submit your question at <http://www.veteranprograms.com/compensation.html> and allow an experienced veteran(s) or VSO to answer your question. Use the PSP as often as you like. Your question will be sent to over 125,000+ [registered](#) USVCP veterans, government employees, veteran organizations, and military supporters.

[Source: USVCP | <http://www.veteranprograms.com/id2460.html> | August 26, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 AUG 2017**



**Somerset, NJ** — A cardiologist from Somerset pleaded guilty 16 AUG after billing the government for hundreds of medical tests he never actually conducted, Acting U.S. Attorney William E. Fitzpatrick said. **Apostolos Voudouris**, 44, has agreed to pay more than \$476,000 as part of a civil settlement and another \$238,000 in restitution. Voudouris began providing medical services under contract at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in East Orange in 2006. Between 2011 and 2015, he submitted more than 350 false claims, fraudulently receiving \$238,000 in fees. He faces up to 10 years in prison when he's sentenced in December. [Source: NJ Advance Media | Paul Milo | August 16, 2017 ++]

**Cleveland, TN** — Federal authorities say Southern California Marines were recruited for a scheme that bilked the government's military health insurance provider out of \$67 million. The San Diego Union-Tribune says a complaint was filed 17 AUG in San Diego as part of a civil asset forfeiture case. Authorities are trying to seize the property of a Tennessee couple. Investigators say Marines were recruited at up to \$300 a month for a so-called medical study that involved phone consultations with a doctor's office in Cleveland, Tennessee, owned by **Jimmy and Ashley**



**Collins.** The Marines were prescribed costly compound drugs. A pharmacy in Bountiful, Utah, filled thousands of prescriptions and billed them to the insurer, TRICARE. Lawyers for the couple deny they committed fraud. [Source: The Associated Press | August 20, 2017 ++]

**Phoenix, AZ** — A psychiatrist who was practicing at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center pleaded guilty Wednesday to federal charges after he was indicted by a grand jury for "tampering with a witness, victim or informant." **Stephen Lester Greer**, 57, of Broken Arrow interfered with a federal investigation into his alleged sexual relationship with a patient by attempting to coerce the patient into lying to federal investigators, according to the indictment filed in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma.

Greer, who became a staff psychiatrist at the VA Medical Center in Muskogee in June 2013, allegedly began the relationship with a psychiatric patient in January 2015, the indictment says. The indictment alleges Greer maintained a doctor-patient relationship with the woman while visiting motels in and around Muskogee after the patient's scheduled VA appointments to engage in sex with the patient. Greer also allegedly provided money to the woman, who became pregnant in May 2015, the indictment says.

Acting U.S. Attorney Douglas A. Horn said in the media release that Greer's job was to treat and protect veterans who visited that facility. "Instead, Dr. Greer violated his oath as a doctor by having inappropriate sexual contact with a female veteran that he was treating," Horn states. "When VA hospital administrators discovered the impropriety, Greer attempted to cover-up his actions by coaching the female veteran to lie to federal law enforcement officers. Special agents of the Veterans Affairs – Office of Inspector General conducted a thorough investigation and worked extensively and professionally with the victim to bring Dr. Greer to justice." The indictment quotes several text messages between Greer and the patient, including a conversation in which the two discussed the need to "be careful" in case others noticed, and a conversation in which the two discussed her pregnancy, which later ended in a miscarriage.

The charge that Greer pleaded guilty to stem from attempts Greer made to keep the patient from telling federal investigators after special agents met with Greer in July 2016 and advised Greer that he was the subject of a federal investigation and "should have no contact with" the patient. Greer met with the patient 90 minutes after the conversation with the special agent and "advised (the patient) to lie to federal law enforcement officers about several topics, including their sexual relationship, financial assistance, the paternity of (the patient's) baby and the hotel rooms they shared," the indictment says. Greer also sent the patient text messages. "We will probably need to destroy these phones and get new ones. They must not get hold of our phones."

Greer has had his license suspended before for engaging in a relationship with a patient, according to Oklahoma Medical Board records. He was accused of "engaging in sexual acts" at the same time he was maintaining a doctor-patient relationship and prescribing medications to a patient between May 2003 and February 2004, according to Board documents. In January 2005, the Oklahoma Medical Board suspended Greer's license until he completed treatment from a Board approved psychiatrist with expertise in treating "psychiatrists with boundary issues." In May 2005, Greer's license was reinstated on a probationary basis for one year. His license was fully reinstated in July 2006. Records show Greer "not practicing since July 2, 2017." The statutory range of punishment for tampering with a witness, victim or informant is up to 20 years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine, according to the media release. [Source: Muskogee Phoenix | Wendy Burton | August 24, 2017 ++]

**Geneseo, IL** — Williams R. Jones, 67, pleaded guilty in federal court this week to theft of government funds and making false statements about his military service to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. According to his federal grand jury indictment from May 2016, those counts said that from December 2014 to December 2015 in Henry County and elsewhere, he "did voluntarily, intentionally, and knowingly embezzle, steal, purloin, and convert to his use and the use of another" money from the Department of Veteran Affairs. That totaled \$71,472 in V.A. medical benefits.

Count two said that on or about July 16, 2013, in Rock Island and Henry Counties, Jones submitted, for the purposes of supporting his claims for veterans disability benefits, to the office of U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin a form with false information. That included statements that he served in combat in Vietnam in 1972; had been assigned to Special Operations there; was shot down in enemy territory but rescued by U.S. Marines three weeks later. Those statements were made when Jones “well knew that he never served in Vietnam, the defendant never was assigned to Special Operations in Vietnam, and the defendant was never shot down and rescued by United States Marines,” court documents said.

Jones entered the Air National Guard in 1971 and served in various Reserve or National Guard components before retiring from the military in 2002 as a lieutenant colonel. He never served in the Southeast Asia or Republic of Vietnam theater of combat operations, according to a news release about the proceedings. After retiring, he pressed for disability benefits by claiming post-traumatic stress disorder related to Vietnam combat service, which he claimed resulted in a Bronze Star Medal with V for Valor and a Purple Heart. [Source: The Register-Mail | Robert Connolly | August 24, 2017 ++]

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## **VAMC Buffalo NY Update 02 ► Improperly Cleaned Medical Scopes.**

A New York Veterans Affairs hospital has notified more than 500 patients that they may be at risk for infection due to improperly cleaned medical scopes. The Buffalo Veterans Affairs Medical Center notified 526 patients of the concern after a review of the disinfection process for endoscopes revealed that an employee of the hospital may not have followed the manufacturer’s instructions, reports The Buffalo News. Officials at the hospital said they will offer free screenings to these patients, and reassured those at risk that the chance of infection is “very low.” "Notification does not mean veterans were infected," officials said 16 AUG in a statement to the newspaper.

The employee in question was fired, the officials said, and the hospital declined to elaborate further on the specifics of the case, like what procedures specifically were involved, how many scopes may have been improperly cleaned and when the error was discovered. Medical scopes like these have been at the center of a number of outbreaks, some of which were deadly. Scopemaker Olympus has been under fire for more than year after its duodenoscopes, used in gastrointestinal procedures, were linked to a superbug outbreak that led to the deaths of at least 35 patients at hospitals across the country. Olympus controls about 85% of the U.S. market for duodenoscopes. The company voluntarily recalled the original scopes in January 2016 and also offered new guidelines on cleaning the products to reduce infection risk.



The risks associated with infection scopes may be greater than previously, thought, too, as FierceHealthcare has reported. Though physicians may be warned about the concerns, they may ignore them, and the intricate design of these devices makes it hard to tell when they're truly clean, even if guidelines are followed. Infection control is under the microscope now more than ever amid increasing concern about potentially deadly antibiotic-resistant infections. The World Health Organization has called the threat an urgent public health need. [Source: FierceHealthcare | Paige Minemyer | August 17, 2017 ++]

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## **VAMC McGuire VA Update 03 ► Resource Management Role**

Officials at the McGuire VA Medical Center say the VA is much more than just a hospital and health coverage. “We’re resource management, we’re psycho-socials, we do financial assistance, we assist the veteran all around, as well as the family,” said Tina Brown with the McGuire VA Medical Center. Brown works in transition care and social work at the hospital — and had a big role in planning the facility's 19 AUG outreach event for the community..

For five years now, McGuire has paired with the City of Richmond to host the Veterans and Family Resource and Employment Fair. “Our veterans who have served our country have gone — whether its overseas or here domestically — and they’ve brought back so much talent to the City of Richmond,” said Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney. The fair helps connect military personnel with both employers and community resources. It's an event that not only puts veterans to work but also allows employers to network with a pool of candidates with a very specific skill set. “We have to have folks who have the military background necessary to teach the soldiers and sergeants and even the coast guardsmen,” said Carl Grunow of PD Systems, Inc. The company, with a location near Fort Lee, is a defense contractor — providing training and logistics services to both the Army and Coast Guard. “They have to have the military background or else they won't be qualified,” said Grunow.

While the range of military service varies for those who attended the employment fair on August 12th — one veteran from Chesterfield says the skills she learned in the military can be applied to jobs across the spectrum. “Everything they taught us is usable in another employment,” said veteran JoAnn Royster. This year’s resource and employment fair connected veterans with 23 employers and 63 vendors all in one day. The VA says at last year’s event 42 people were hired on the spot. [Source: The Southern | Barb Eidlin | Aug 1, 2017 ++]

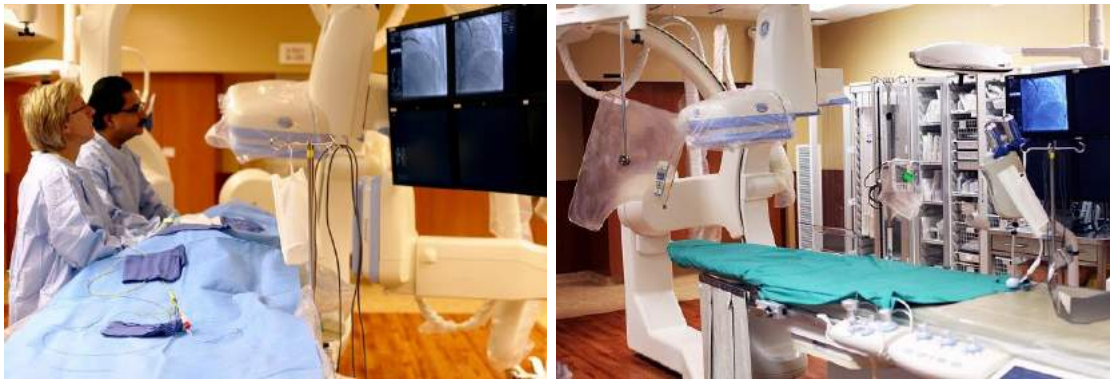
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## **VAMC Wilkes-Barre PA Update 01 ► Cardiac Catheterization Team**

Cardiac catheterization is a procedure that examines how well the heart is working. A thin, hollow tube called a catheter is inserted into a large blood vessel leading to the heart. The results of the procedure tell doctors if patients have diseases of the heart muscle, valves or coronary arteries. Wilkes-Barre’s team of cardiologists, nurses, and technologists is skilled in all aspects of catheterization care. They understand procedures involving the heart can be particularly stressful, and do all they can to address and alleviate Veterans’ concerns. At the medical center, cardiac catheterizations are performed in a state-of-the-art suite. The suite is equipped with the latest technology, including biplane imaging (which allows doctors to follow the path of blood through blood vessels and create a roadmap for reaching and treating the precise location of problems) and three-dimensional mapping.

In cardiac catheterization, the catheter can be inserted into either the radial artery in the wrist or the femoral artery in the groin area. The vast majority of catheterization procedures done at Wilkes-Barre today are radial catheterizations, in which a flexible catheter is inserted into the wrist. Benefits of the radial process, compared to femoral catheterizations, include a reduced risk of bleeding, getting people on their feet more quickly, and increased

comfort. Veterans who undergo radial catheterizations are usually done two hours after the procedure is completed. In Wilkes-Barre, they spend the two hours in the catheterization lab recovery room, relaxing in heated massage recliners.



Richard Weaver, Registered Cardiac Invasive Specialist (left) and Dr. Izzat Shah, M.D. (back) provide Vets advanced cardiac catheterization care at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. Suite (right) which features state-of-the-art biplane imaging and three-dimensional mapping capability.

Every year, the cardiac catheterization team treats more and more Wilkes-Barre-area Veterans, so patients no longer need to travel to VA medical centers in Philadelphia and New York for care. This means that they no longer have to face invasive procedures in unfamiliar settings, without loved ones by their side. The cardiac catheterization team, and the new lab, is another demonstration of how Wilkes-Barre improves the Veteran experience by using the latest medical technology to produce the best possible outcome for Veterans. [Source: Veterans Health | VHA Update | August 22, 2017 ++]

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## VAMC Denver CO Update 07 ► Chronic Understaffing

Leadership and staff at the Denver Veterans Medical Center gathered on 23 AUG to draw attention to what they are calling chronic understaffing in not only their Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital, but others around the state and country. Among those protesting outside of the hospital on Claremont Street and Ninth Avenue was Bernard Humbles, a longtime VA hospital employee and president of the local chapter of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) labor union chapter, the largest union for federal government employees in the country. He says that there are nearly 600 vacant positions in the hospital, from clinical staff such as doctors and nurses to administrative and support positions — leaving employees overworked and veterans with longer wait times to get treatment.





"Our employees are becoming very frustrated," says Humbles. "I've had some that just say 'I'm done,' and leave because of the overwhelming workload. We need to fill these positions. You've even got employees using sick leave, saying, 'I need a day to get some rest.'" Humbles, who himself served in the Army for twenty years before coming to the VA hospital in 1994, says that the burden comes down on veterans: When he can't find enough employees to fill positions, the staff members he does have must fill the gaps themselves. That can affect both the ability of the VA to see patients, leaving longer wait lists, and the quality of the treatment they receive.

The Denver Veterans Medical Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which is charged with providing benefits like pensions, medical and mental-health treatment, and education assistance to those who have served in the armed forces. A veteran at the hospital who wished to remain anonymous says that he has received treatment from VA hospitals in four states over 25 years and had some of his longest wait times at the treatment center in Denver. "Oh, yeah, it's always been underfunded," says the veteran, who is diabetic. The man is moving out of Denver because of the increased price of living, even though he uses marijuana for his anxiety. But another veteran, Ron Conlin, who served in Vietnam, says that he has never had any problems at the hospital. Conlin was at the hospital to get his teeth checked. "I've always been taken care of here, always got what I needed," says Conlin. "Look, the only time that it's difficult to get in is when you get sick and go to the emergency room, and then it's two or three hours, which is probably typical of anywhere."

The rising cost of living in Denver is problematic for staff, says Humbles, because the VA salary pales in comparison to that of private hospitals. "Last year we got 800 new employees, okay — and 600 of 'em left," he says. "Part of the problem is pay here. The cost of living has skyrocketed. And then our competitor out here, Kaiser, is offering our people more money to come work for them. And right now employers are going to go where the money is at, because of the high cost of living." And the problem isn't just at the Denver VA center, he says: Nearly 50,000 jobs at VA hospitals are unfilled, burdening the entire system.

In order to fix the problem, Humbles calls for more funding from the federal government and resources devoted to immediately filling the positions. He's also working with local colleges to fill nursing positions with recent graduates, and is optimistic that the problem can be solved with the two approaches. But he also explains that, without regular citizens being concerned about the treatment that veterans receive, things are hard to change. "The average citizen needs to call their congressman or congressperson or senators and let them know: We need to staff the VA, we need to fund the VA, and we need to make this system work," says Humbles. "And it can work, if you have the right people doing the job."

Senator Cory Gardner, who recently co-sponsored legislation that protects employees calling attention to problems within the VA, did not respond to Westword's request for a comment on the VA staffers' concerns. In May, the Trump administration budget proposed a \$4.4 billion increase in funding for the VA, and set aside \$13 billion for treatment in private hospitals outside of the VA system. The proposed budget request is twice as large as the department's spending in 2001, before the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. [Source: Westword | Grant Stringer | August 23, 2017 ++]

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## **VAMC Marion IL Update 04 ► Productivity Bonus Compromises Accuracy**

In 1971 Kirby Williams went to Vietnam as a U.S. Army draftee and worked as a finance clerk. In 2010 he went to a Veterans Affairs clinic in southern Illinois where a radiologist took a scan of his kidneys. Unfortunately, the radiologist missed a 2- to 3-centimeter mass in one of his kidneys, and by last December that mass had grown to between 7 and 8 centimeters. Now the 66 year old has, at most, two to five years to live.

Sadly, evidence is mounting that Williams may be just one of many veterans whose health and longevity have been compromised by shoddy practices of VA personnel more focused on earning a productivity bonus than taking

care of the men and women who put their lives on the line for the nation. "Kidney cancer is a silent killer; there are really no symptoms," Williams told Fox News, in explaining why the scan results he received at the Marion VA are important. His doctor told him the mass had been growing about six years. While physicians could have removed the affected kidney in 2010, that is no longer an option, according to Dr. L. Anthony Leskosky, a board-certified radiologist who worked at the Marion VA clinic in southern Illinois until he was fired in June because he said he reported these kinds of problems. "It would have been a surgical cure at that time," said Leskosky. "That is the real crime right there."



**VA medical facility in Marion, Ill.,**

Leskosky's documentation and claims about similar problems at the Marion VA have sparked investigations by three federal agencies into the Department of Veterans Affairs clinic to see if its radiologists rushed analyses of potentially hundreds of patient scans to boost their pay -- even though it resulted in veterans with serious or fatal conditions being untreated. The investigations follow a report by Leskosky, who initially advised his supervisors of his concerns but was told to keep quiet about the matter. But Leskosky, who began working at the Marion VA in March 2016 after three decades in private practice, persisted, telling the White House Office of Special Counsel, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG), the VA Office of the Medical Inspector, three U.S. senators and two representatives. The clinic's response was to fire Leskosky, he said. A spokesperson for the Marion VA was not immediately available for comment.

Within weeks, though, of starting at the VA, he noticed patients previously diagnosed as healthy had radiology scans from years prior documenting grave conditions. These conditions, such as cancers, aortic aneurysms, bleeding ulcers and obstructions in their small bowel and colon -- if left untreated -- could cause patients tremendous pain or even premature death. "In radiology, we compare current scans to old studies, so I was pulling up the last two years of the scans. That's when I noticed the radiologists had called their previous exams 'normal,' but I would see a mass on the older scans, and then on my scan, I would see the mass had enlarged, and in some cases become a spreading cancer. Usually that is not survivable," Leskosky said.

As many as four to five times a day, Leskosky said, he found serious errors in prior readings, despite just four other radiologists being on staff. In one particularly egregious case, a radiologist missed a 17-centimeter tumor in a patient's pelvis. "The most disturbing part is the veterans are being misdiagnosed and had their lives shortened or have been subjected to incredibly increased pain and suffering," he said. In private practice, radiologists may miss key findings once or twice in a lifetime, Leskosky said. "There is no way to get over the thought that you are responsible for someone's premature death," he said.

A large part of the problem, Leskosky said, is some of the other radiologists on staff were flipping through 50 to 60 patient scans a day, instead of the industry recommended 25 to 30 and, as a result, missing critical findings. "They were paid based on productivity, so the faster they read, the more money they made, and the fastest way to



read is to call it normal," Leskosky said. The median pay for VA radiologists is about \$270,000 per year. Flipping through 50 to 60 scans a day rather than the industry recommendation of 25 to 30 could increase their annual compensation by \$30,000 to \$50,000, he said. "Instead of correcting the problem or terminating the radiologists who were missing these cancers, missing these really horrible diagnoses and making the veterans suffer to a degree that is unimaginable, and shortening their lifespan to an incredible extent, I was terminated on June 24," Leskosky said.

Under President Trump, the VA and newly appointed Secretary David Shulkin pledged to protect whistleblowers, more aggressively weed out problems and advocate for patients. A spokesperson said the VA is taking Leskosky's allegations seriously. "VA's Office of the Medical Inspector has thoroughly investigated these allegations, and is preparing a final report," Curt Cashour, a spokesman at the national VA offices. "If any allegations are substantiated, VA will take swift corrective action to ensure veterans are receiving the best possible care." Cashour said he could not release more information about Leskosky's case without him signing a release form, which Leskosky did not do.

Natalie Khawam, an attorney with the Whistleblower Law Firm in Tampa, Fla., who represents a number of whistleblowers, including Leskosky, said the VA is "playing games" and it is "a tragedy that Leskosky was fired for trying to protect patients." She said the Probationary Review Board looked over his case and recommended that Leskosky be retained after reviewing evidence and statements in May 2017. However, his supervisors overruled the board's recommendation and terminated him. "Instead of rewarding a caring doctor, the Marion VA tried to silence him by terminating him," Khawam said. "The nation's veterans have lost a great and caring doctor."

Leskosky isn't the first to cite the Marion VA management for incompetence, retaliation and questionable patient safety. A May 31, 2017, memo from the VA National Center for Patient Safety said that in 2008 the OIG found the Marion VA was plagued by quality management and patient care problems and had a spike in the number of post-surgical patient deaths there, which the program manager called "suspicious." While conditions initially improved in 2014, the May 31, 2017, report said there have been significant declines in patient safety and employee morale, as well as a substantial increase in reports of whistleblower retaliation. After reviewing this report, Rep. Jack Bergman (R-MI), chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations for the Committee on Veterans Affairs, and Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL), a member of the subcommittee, have launched their own inquiry into alleged mismanagement and retaliation against whistleblowers at the Marion VA facility.

Citing the VA National Center for Patient Safety report, they said the allegations by several employees are "troubling" and have asked the newly appointed VA secretary for a meeting to discuss the allegations. Meanwhile, Williams says he's not "mad at anyone" about the Marion VA missing his mass in 2010, and likely shortening his life. "That's water under the bridge. Nothing I can do about it now," he said. Whether the various federal investigations into the VA clinic that botched his diagnosis will be as forgiving remains to be seen. [Source: Fox News | Malia Zimmerman | August 26, 2017 ++]

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## **VA-HCS New England ► VA Wants to Bolster Services**

The Department of Veterans Affairs is considering several ways to bolster services in New Hampshire so patients don't have to travel to other New England facilities, a top official said 23 AUG. The VA New England Healthcare System's network director, Michael Mayo-Smith, told a town hall meeting in Rochester that a task force has been formed to examine bringing back a full-service veterans hospital to New Hampshire. The hospital was closed in 1999 because of what Mayo-Smith described as a declining number of patients and the loss of doctors being provided by a Boston private hospital.

The task force, which is expected to release its findings in January, is considering upgrades that could take one of several forms: a free-standing hospital, partnerships with private hospitals or increased services at existing facilities. Before a decision is made, the VA will hear from veterans and their families, employees and the state's Democratic

congressional delegation. "My goal is to deliver as many of the services that the VA provides in other states within the state of New Hampshire," Mayo-Smith told about three dozen people who attended the session. "Exactly how we do that we don't know. But that is in the back of our minds."

The town hall meeting was the latest effort by the VA to regain the trust of veterans after the Boston Globe reported last month on a whistleblower complaint filed by physicians alleging substandard care at state's only medical center for veterans. They described a fly-infested operating room, surgical instruments that weren't always sterilized and patients whose conditions were ignored. Several top executives at the hospital have been removed. Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin, on a visit to the center earlier this month, also highlighted \$30 million in additional funding to the facility including funds for repairs to flood-damaged areas.

In Rochester, several veterans seemed perplexed and confused about the loss of the full-service hospital. "I am wondering what happened. We had a hospital," said Susan Cuddy, a nurse who served in the Navy from 1970 to 2008. "Who let it go? The VA or the feds? ... I used to work at the hospital. They did surgery ... everything but open heart. We had residents and interns. What happened?" Robert Skinner, a Marine whose father was a Korean War veteran, recalled how he would spend much of day traveling to Boston just so his dad could get blood work done. He said such basic services should be provided closer to home. "Bring it back. Bring it back," Skinner said of a VA hospital in the state. "Don't make me have to go travel."

But Republican State Sen. James Gray, a Vietnam War veteran who was at the hearing, said he would rather see increased services around the state, instead of concentrating everything in Manchester. "If we all talk about the ideas that are out there, we may be able to do this within the infrastructure we have and still support the veterans," Gray said, adding that it would be difficult for "a veteran from Colebrook or somewhere way up north" to get to a hospital in Manchester. [Source: Associated Press | Michael Casey | :August 23, 2017 ++]

**\* Vets \***



## Vietnam Veterans Memorial Update 19 ► Vandalized



The Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington was vandalized on 16 AUG, officials said. "A red, waxy material was found on one name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial." The substance has since been removed. The Vietnam

Veterans Memorial Fund also said "This may have been a result of a visitor attempting to make a name rubbing on their own. Name rubbings should only be done with pencil." "Volunteers are happy to help visitors with their name rubbings. You can also request a name rubbing from them at <http://bit.ly/2aBHhpX> " Fox 5 reported that the incident doesn't seem to be connected with recent National Mall vandalism. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Andrea Scott | August 17, 2017 ++]

## Maryland Vet Cemetery Update 04 ► Security Guards Hired

Security guards have been hired to watch over the federal monument and cemetery of Confederate dead near Point Lookout State Park. Those buried in the mass grave have been deceased for more than 150 years. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs said it hired them to guard over the Point Lookout Confederate Cemetery this week. St. Mary's County Commissioner John O'Connor (R) said of the need for security at the cemetery, "I think it's a sad state of affairs that we're in that we've lost all civility to the point where we have to have security over monuments and graveyards, and that we've sunk so low that we're removing Asian sportscasters because his name is Robert Lee," referring to an on-air personnel change made by ESPN, which reassigned a broadcaster from working an upcoming University of Virginia football game in Charlottesville. "That's sad," O'Connor said.



**A security guard stands in front of the Point Lookout Confederate cemetery on 23 AUG. Another guard not pictured sat in a car parked near the entrance A ring of flags from southern states in the Civil War and a statue of a Confederate prisoner-of-war (right) stands at the Confederate Memorial Park outside of the State Park.**

The federal 80-foot obelisk was completed in 1911 for \$20,000 at the present-day site. The 25-foot state obelisk from 1876 was moved over to the federal monument site in 1938. The park is at the corner of Route 5 and Scotland Beach Road, owned by Confederate Memorial Park Inc. with a mailing address in Friendswood, Texas. The 2-acre property was purchased in 2003 for \$30,000. The park includes flags of the states that seceded from the Union in the Civil War, and was dedicated in 2008. Adjacent to that property is a 1-acre site owned by the United States government, with federal and state monuments to those Confederates who died at Point Lookout, which was a prisoner of war camp during the Civil War.

Between 1863 and 1865, more than 50,000 Confederate prisoners passed through Camp Hoffman at Point Lookout. Approximately 4,000 died there, but the federal monument lists the names of 3,382 Confederate soldiers and sailors and 44 civilians. The site, which is home to the unmarked remains of the Confederate dead, is overseen by Baltimore National Cemetery. The site also is home to a state-erected, 25-foot obelisk to the Confederate dead. That state monument was dedicated on July 4, 1876, on the edge of Tanner Creek, where the mass grave had been moved to in 1870 because of erosion from the Chesapeake Bay at the original site at Point Lookout.

The remains of the Confederates were moved three times because of the threat from erosion before they came to their final resting place at the federal monument. The statue of a Confederate prisoner of war at the private Confederate Memorial Park was vandalized in September 2012, and the case was referred to the St. Mary's County

Sheriff's Office. In 1870 at the original burial plot at Point Lookout, "some un-Christian hand" removed the surrounding fence and lit a fire which nearly burned away the markers, the St. Mary's Beacon newspaper reported on 21 JUL of that year. [Source: The Enterprise | Jason Babcock | August 24, 2017 ++]

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## WWII VETS 142 ► Frank J. Ajster | Multiple Bronze Star Recipient

Diane Liss spent Memorial Day 2017 remembering her father, a decorated World War II veteran. But the La Salle Illinois resident still is trying to learn more about the few memories her father shared with her. When her dad, Frank J. Ajster of La Salle died in 2007, she thought he had one Bronze Star. That was recorded at the cemetery. But she later found out he had at least five. In May, she related a story that her dad told her: Of the approximately 2,000 men who were on a ship that steamed out of San Francisco the day before the attack on Pearl Harbor, just three of them remained in the war zone as long as Ajster did. The others were wounded, killed or sent home.

The father's story is difficult to verify, but Ajster indeed was a member of the 24th Infantry "Victory" Division's "fighting 34th Infantry Regiment", 3rd Battalion. He didn't tell his daughter much about the war, except a few stories. She has been finding more paperwork and learning more. "I didn't realize he was in a unit that was in so many battles," she said. Ajster was on a ship that departed from San Francisco on Dec. 6, 1941. "They were a half day out when Pearl Harbor was bombed. They went back to San Francisco and got the ship ready for war," Liss said. She doesn't yet know the name of the ship. Ajster stayed in the Pacific war zone until May 2, 1945, and officially remained in the Army until August 1945



**This May 23, 2017 photo shows a Japanese flag with Japanese calligraphy on the white field and the places the late Sgt. Frank Ajster, served, written in the red center at the home of Ajster's daughter Diane Liss in La Salle, Ill.**

She still has a few newspaper clippings, including one that notes Sgt. Ajster was the officer in charge of a small group that encountered 20 enemy combatants and killed them all to survive that attack. A Daily Post-Tribune article about Frank's brother, Anthony, finding him in the Philippines after landing on Leyte island, recounted some of the hellish experiences of the American soldiers: "With their battalion far below strength after 21 days of hard fighting, they drove deep behind enemy lines, over back breaking, muddy mountain trails to seize and hold a ridge to deny the Japanese commanding positions facing our main forces in a crucial valley. For more than three weeks they clung to the ridge against great odds. They beat off 27 savage attacks . some in darkness of night and torrential rains."

She possesses a good record of the places he went on a Japanese flag that a soldier, Carney Feminella of Chicago, gave to him and signed. After that, in the red circle on the flag, Ajster wrote in ink the names of the places he went and fought and the dates he was there. Those include the battles of Goodenough Island, Hollandia and Biak from the Papua-New Guinea campaign and Leyte, Luzon, Bataan, Corregidor and Mindoro in the Philippines. Japanese calligraphy on the white flag completely surrounds the red field that has Ajster's writing. The flag itself is a bit of a mystery. The Chicago soldier had seen the flag sticking out of the pocket of a fallen Japanese soldier. Villages,



neighborhoods, families and friends signed the flags before Japanese soldiers went off to war, and the soldiers carried them. They were intended to be "good luck flags." Liss has not had the flag translated and does not know the village or city of the fallen soldier.

Ajster had told her that he never went on leave during the war when he had opportunities. A superior asked him why he didn't take a leave. "He said, 'I told my commanding officer once I leave I'm not coming back,'" she said. That proved true. The war was just days from being over in Europe. He was told the war would be over in the Pacific soon, so it was time to take his leave. Before the war, after completing eighth grade, he'd worked as a helper for steel-construction riveter and then for the Civilian Conservation Corps. After the war, he spent a career working on windshields at Libbey-Owens-Ford. [Source: The (LaSalle, Ill.) News-Tribune | Craig Sterrett | June 15, 2017 ++]

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## **Vietnam Vets 25 ► Jim McCloughan | MOH Recipient**

When Former Spc. Jim McCloughan, 71, received his Medal of Honor 2 AUG, four battle buddies were watching. They fought with him side by side as draftees in their early twenties, with C Company, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry, 196th Light Infantry Brigade Americal Division. None thought they would live to talk about it, but more than 48 years later, the soldiers met up again in Washington, D.C., to tell the story of a nightmare Vietnam battle and honor the combat medic who got them through it.

"It's almost sort of revisiting the past that I had, successfully, I should say, put off in the corner," former Cpl. Kent Nielsen told reporters. Nielsen had only had limited interactions with his company's medic before that fateful couple of days. Their first formal meeting, he said, was soon after Nielsen had been shot in the first hours of a May 13, 1969, assault near Tam Ky, as C Company came under small arms and machine fire from the North Vietnamese Army. "We had no idea how many of the enemy were in there," McCloughan said. "They had sent no forward observers. We had no idea what kind of fire power we were up against." It turned out to be 89 American troops versus 2000 North Vietnamese soldiers.



**Former Spc. Jim McCloughan, then 23, will receive the Medal of Honor on July 31 for heroism as combat veteran in Vietnam during a two-day May 1968 battle.**

Nielsen had been moving through crossfire, and so wasn't sure whether he'd been hit by a North Vietnamese soldier or one of his fellow Americans. "I reassured him and I showed him why he got hit by the enemy," McCloughan said. "His exit wound was the size of a quarter. If that had been an American M16, the hole would have been [the size of a grapefruit]." "I cannot tell you the relief on that man's face when he heard that he was hit by the enemy instead of his own men."

The situation became even more dire that day when two helicopters trying to insert troops were shot down, one near the company's position. A squad was sent to guard the crew and prepare for a Chinook to lift the wreckage, but enemy fire was so strong that the pilot and soldiers inside had to be brought back to the company area. Former Sgt. Bill Arnold had smashed his knee tumbling out of a helicopter, and after trying to run and fight on his wounded leg, he began to go into shock. McCloughan found him lying on the ground. "He came down, he threw me over his shoulder and he said, 'Hang on for a bumpy ride,'" Arnold said. McCloughan carried Arnold 100 meters through an open field as both American and North Vietnamese Army bullets whizzed by, according to the official battle narrative.

Later on 13 MAY, according to the narrative, McCloughan dragged two wounded soldiers out of harm's way and into a trench, as a rocket-propelled grenade peppered his back with shrapnel. He did that four more times to extract wounded troops. One of them had such a severe stomach wound that his organs were threatening to spill out, so McCloughan applied pressure bandages. He realized he couldn't just throw him over his shoulder, so "I carried him like a baby through the crossfire," McCloughan said. As he ran into the kill zone, former Sgt. Joe Middendorf provided covering fire. "They were really close," Middendorf said of the Vietnamese troops. Close enough that McCloughan could hear them speaking to each other, the former medic added. "I'm sitting here because they couldn't get a good shot at me, and they couldn't get a good shot at me because of Sgt. Middendorf," he said.

The fighting raged on through the night, Nielsen said, as he lied powerless on the ground and contemplated the worst. "I'll never forget: I spent the rest of that evening and night as an observer, witness, and a very concerned patient," he said. "There were times during the night where I was desperately afraid we were getting overrun. I don't know you've done in your life, but the closest to that was sitting there thinking, well if that grizzly bear comes over here, how do I pretend to be dead?" McCloughan spent that night tending to the wounded because it was too dangerous to land a medevac. When one did arrive, McCloughan still stayed with the company. "When that helicopter pulled out, the word around the company was, 'Save one for yourself,'" former Sgt. Mike Martino said. "Because we knew we were not going to get out. We were going to be overrun. We didn't have enough ammunition to deal with it."

In the morning, after wounded troops were successfully flown out, 1st platoon made the move to Nui Yon Hill. The assault lasted all day, as enemy soldiers ambushed the troops, claiming the life of the company's only other medic. "I said this is the worst day of my life," Martino said, remembering Day One of the battle. That night, a helicopter came to drop ammunition down to the soldiers. "But this guy is laying out there in the middle of this opening, while this fire is going on, holding a strobe light," Martino said of McCloughan.

The medic crawled out into a rice paddy with the light, trying to signal to the helicopter. "The door gunner never kicked anything out, he was so panicked by what was going on, he strafed our perimeter with the M60 [machine gun]," said former Sgt. Mike Martino, who found a hole from one of the bullets in his pant leg the next day. The following morning, while fighting back enemies and keeping two critically wounded soldiers alive, McCloughan managed to knock out an RPG position with a hand grenade. When the fighting subsided the morning of 15 MAY, McCloughan had saved 10 lives, according to the narrative.

"I had nothing to drink in those 48 hours, I had nothing to eat," he said. "The only thing I did with my water was to make sure that those bandages on that stomach wound stayed moist so that his organs would not dry out and he would die." Within a matter of months, all five men were back on American soil and processing out of the Army, off to rejoin society with 9-to-5 jobs. McCloughan picked up where he left off, becoming a high school teacher and athletic coach in South Haven, Michigan. But the memories of May 1968 stayed locked up tight, as they did for his battle buddies.

When asked how often he'd recounted what happened: "I wouldn't say never," McCloughan said. "You pick and choose special situations, where you can only talk about it with those who know what you're talking about," he said. In 2012, McCloughan read an obituary for Martino's mother, and decided to reach out to his old sergeant, who had



settled down in New York state. But Martino didn't want anything to do with revisiting the war. "I told him when he came through and visited me, that I would rather give you a kidney than revisit this," Martino said.

Martino's father, a World War II veteran, had told him it was best to keep it to himself. "He said to me one time, he said, 'Michael, people will be polite, but they don't really want to hear. It makes them uncomfortable, so just don't talk about it,' " Martino said. That was until they found out "Doc" would be receiving a Medal of Honor. Now, the men said, they were reliving what they went through to support him. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Meghann Myers | August 1, 2017 ++]

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## **GI Bill Update 238 ► Advanced Degree Growth Under Post 9/11 Bill**

When New York University Professor Liang Zhang started doing research on veterans in higher education, he wasn't surprised to see that the Post-9/11 GI Bill generated a significant bump in college enrollment. But what he wasn't expecting to learn as part of his new "Veterans Going to College" report is that the largest growth has been among veterans earning advanced degrees — particularly older veterans who already have a master's. It's unclear why, exactly, more veterans are pursuing advanced degrees under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, because the U.S. Census Bureau data that Zhang used for his research did not ask about intent. But the professor has a theory: The Post-9/11 GI Bill is more "transparent" than its predecessor, the Montgomery GI Bill. "Now college is all free. On top of that you get housing benefits. I think that part makes (graduate school) more attractive," he said.

Multiple veterans who responded to a Military Times query agree. The Post-9/11 GI Bill, enacted in 2009, represents a significant expansion of education benefits. Without having to pay into the benefits, as with previous iterations, student veterans get up to 36 months of in-state tuition covered at public universities and stipends for textbooks and housing. At private universities, the GI Bill caps at a certain amount — \$22,805.34 for the 2017-18 school year. Students at some schools who have entered into an agreement with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs can also receive help through the Yellow Ribbon Program, a supplement to the GI Bill that reduces or eliminates costs not covered by the GI Bill.

"I know for a clear fact that I probably would not have been able to go to school for graduate work without any help from the Post-9/11 GI Bill," said Laurence Bennett, a 46-year-old Army veteran with an MBA. Bennett, who paid into the Montgomery GI Bill when he joined the military in 1997 and later switched to the Post-9/11 GI Bill, is about to start on a second master's degree in project management at DeVry University's Keller Graduate School of Management. "I feel that if I used the (Montgomery GI Bill) there would have been no way to finish a degree. With rising costs of school tuition and loans, it would have helped but possibly not enough," he said in an email.

Zhang, who teaches at the NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, said Monday his research showed about a 10 percent increase in overall veteran college enrollment. Among veterans with at least one master's degree pursuing a second master's, doctorate or other advanced degree, there has been about a 30 percent growth. This result was somewhat surprising because veterans with master's degrees were eight years older than the average veteran in his sample group, and older people are less likely to attend college, he writes in the report. "From another perspective, however, because education improves one's decision making, better educated veterans may be more likely to make informed decisions and take full advantage of the generous education benefits offered by the (Post-9/11) GI Bill," the report said.

Zhang's study also found that the Post-9/11 GI Bill's effect on college enrollment was much larger immediately after the bill's adoption and has plateaued in recent years. In addition, he found that there has been a consistent and positive impact on enrollment across all age groups studied, ranging from 20 to 60 years old.

Much like Bennett, Army veteran Maureen Elias, 40, said she would have never attempted to go to graduate school without the Post-9/11 GI Bill. "There is no way I would have chosen to go into \$60,000 or more into debt,"

the former counterintelligence agent and mother of three said in an email. Elias earned a bachelor's degree at Campbell University in 2012 and will graduate in December with a master's in mental health counseling from Bowie State University. After separating from the Army in 2006, Elias and her husband, also a veteran, started to seriously consider going to college once they heard about the Post-9/11 GI Bill. 1“Because Campbell University is a private university and had a high tuition cost, we received more money through the tuition payment and monthly stipend with the Post-9/11 GI Bill instead of using the Montgomery GI Bill,” she said. “It also seemed like a much less complicated formula for payment because tuition was paid directly to the school. We were thrilled when we found out we also got a book stipend because we learned very quickly that college books are expensive.”

Zhang acknowledged there could be changes coming to the Post-9/11 GI Bill soon, with the passage through Congress of the “Forever GI Bill,” which will bring even more expansion to the education benefits. And while he can't say what the effect will be at this point, as President Trump has yet to sign it into law, Zhang said there could be similar effects. “Basically, the punch line is that the expansion matters,” he said. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Natalie Gross | August 15, 2017 ++]

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## **GI Bill Update 239 ► Trump Signs Forever Bill**

President Trump has put his signature on a new law that will bring significant changes to education benefits for service members, veterans and their families. The legislation known as the “Forever GI Bill” garnered strong bipartisan support in Congress, passing unanimously in both the House and Senate “Today our commitment to support and care for the men and women who have served our great nation has been reinforced with the signing of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017,” Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), chair of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, said in a statement. “This legislation will enable veterans to use the education benefits they've earned through the GI Bill when and how it suits them best, setting them up for future success in whatever career they pursue. “Our student veterans are some of the very best of this country,” he added, “and I'm proud we can support them with this new law.” Here are 11 things you should know about the new GI Bill benefits.

### **1. There's no longer an expiration date.**

Previously, veterans had to use their Post-9/11 GI Bill within 15 years of their last 90-day period of active-duty service. That requirement is going away. This portion of the law will apply to anyone who left the military after January 1, 2013. It will also apply to spouses who are receiving education benefits through the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship for family members of service members who have been killed in the line of duty since Sept. 10, 2001.

### **2. Purple Heart recipients will get more benefits.**

The new GI Bill allows anyone who has received a Purple Heart on or after Sept. 11, 2001 to receive 100 percent of the benefits offered under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which includes coverage of tuition costs at a public school's in-state rate for 36 months and stipends for textbooks and housing. Previously, Purple Heart recipients were beholden to the same time-in-service qualifications for the GI Bill as other service members. This meant that Purple Heart recipients without a service-connected disability who did not reach 36 months of service were only eligible for a percentage of the benefits and not the full amount.

Aleks Morosky, national legislative director for Military Order of the Purple Heart, said there have been 52,598 Purple Heart recipients who were wounded in action during post-9/11 conflicts, though it's unclear how many would immediately benefit from this provision. An estimated 660 Purple Heart recipients each year over the next 10 years will be able to take advantage of the increased benefits. “We think that anybody who has shed blood for this country has met the service requirement by virtue of that fact,” Morosky said. “Everybody sacrifices, everybody puts themselves in harm's way, but Purple Heart recipients are certainly among the service members who have sacrificed the most.” This provision will go into effect in August 2018.

### **3. More people are eligible for Yellow Ribbon.**

The Yellow Ribbon Program is a voluntary agreement between schools and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to split school costs not covered by the GI Bill, reducing or eliminating the amount students must pay themselves. The Forever GI Bill will expand eligibility for this program to surviving spouses or children of service members in August 2018 and active-duty service members in August 2022. Previously, only veterans eligible for GI Bill benefits at the 100 percent level or their dependents using transferred benefits were eligible for Yellow Ribbon.

### **4. There's some extra money — and time — for STEM degrees.**

Some college degrees in science, technology, engineering and math fields take longer than four years to complete, which is why the new law authorizes an additional school year of GI Bill funds on a first-come, first-serve basis. Scholarships of up to \$30,000 will be available for eligible GI Bill users starting in August 2018. Only veterans or surviving family members of deceased service members are eligible for this scholarship — not dependents using transferred benefits.

### **5. Vets hurt by school shutdowns will get benefits back.**

A provision in the new GI Bill that will restore benefits to victims of school closures has been a long-time coming for the staff at Student Veterans of America. “We’ve been getting calls for several years now, beginning with the collapse of Corinthian (Colleges), from student veterans whose lives were put on hold,” said Will Hubbard, vice president of government affairs for the nonprofit, which has more than 500,000 student members. “Every day we wasted until it passed was another day that they had to wait.” This provision will retroactively apply to GI Bill users whose schools have abruptly closed since January 2015, for credits earned at the shuttered institutions that did not transfer to new schools. This will include the thousands of veteran students who were attending the national for-profit chains Corinthian Colleges and ITT Technical Institute when they closed in 2015 and 2016, respectively. It would also provide a semester’s worth of reimbursement for GI Bill users affected by future school closures, as well as up to four months of a housing stipend.

### **6. The VA will measure eligibility for benefits differently.**

Starting August 2018, this bill changes the way the VA uses time in service to calculate eligibility. Previously, service members with at least 90 days but less than six months of active-duty service would be eligible for up to 40 percent of the full GI Bill benefits. Under new regulations, the same 90-days-to-six-month window is equal to 50 percent of benefits. Service members with at least six months and less than 18 months of service will be eligible for 60 percent of benefits. This change will tend to benefit reservists more due to the nature of their service, according to a spokeswoman for the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs.

### **7. Reservists can count more of their service toward eligibility.**

Starting next August, members of the National Guard and Reserve will be able to count time spent receiving medical care or recovering from injuries received while on active duty toward their GI Bill eligibility. This will apply to all who have been activated since 9/11. The Forever GI Bill also allows individuals who lost their Reserve Educational Assistance Program when the program ended in 2015 to credit their previous service toward their eligibility for the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

### **8. Housing stipends will decrease slightly.**

The government will pay for the expansions represented in the Forever GI Bill through a 1 percent decrease in housing stipends over the next five years. This will bring veterans’ housing stipends on par with what active-duty service members receive at the E-5 with dependents rate. (Veterans on the GI Bill currently receive a slightly higher housing allowance rate than active-duty E-5s with dependents.) This change will take effect on Jan. 1, 2018 and will only apply to service members who enroll in GI Bill benefits after that date. No one currently receiving a housing stipend from the VA will see a reduction in benefits.

“On a month-to-month basis, they would never see less money,” said SVA’s Hubbard, explaining that the 1 percent reduction will come off of the total the VA would have spent over five years. Starting in August 2018,

housing stipends previously calculated based on the ZIP code of a student's school will be based on where a student takes the most classes. Also in August 2018, reservists will continue to receive their monthly housing allowance under the GI Bill on a prorated rate for any month during which they are activated, preventing them from losing a whole month's worth of funds.

### **9. Benefits can get transferred after death.**

A provision of the new GI Bill offers more flexibility with the transfer and distribution of benefits in case of death. If a dependent who received transferred benefits dies before using all of the benefits, this provision gives the service member or veteran the ability to transfer remaining benefits to another dependent. This will go into effect August 2018 and apply to all deaths since 2009. This provision also gives dependents of deceased service members the ability to make changes to their deceased loved one's transferred benefits.

Ashlynn Haycock, senior coordinator of education support services for the nonprofit Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, explains that currently, only a service member has the authority to make changes to the benefits they'd like to transfer. So, if a service member dies after transferring 35 months of benefits to one child and one month of benefits to another, for example, the family would not be able to make future changes to the GI Bill's distribution among that service member's dependents.

### **10. Surviving family members will get more money, but less time.**

Besides access to Yellow Ribbon, spouses and children of service members who died in the line of duty on or after 9/11 will also see their monthly education stipend from the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program increase by \$200. There's a downside, however. Though the same program has previously provided 45 months of education benefits, that will decrease to 36 months in August 2018 to bring it in line with the provisions of the GI Bill.

### **11. School certifying officials must be trained.**

Individuals who certify veteran student enrollment at schools with more than 20 veteran students will be required to undergo training. Previously, training was not mandatory.

<sup>4</sup>  
[Source: NavyTimes | Natalie Gross| August 16, 2017 ++]

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## **Vietnam Documentary ► 10-part, 18-hour Series to Air on PBS 17 SEP**

Filmmaker Ken Burns views the Vietnam War as a virus that infected Americans with an array of chronic illnesses — alienation, a lack of civil discourse, mistrust of government and each other. And he hopes his new documentary can be part of a cure. "What if the film was just an attempt at some sort of vaccination, a little bit more of the disease to get you immune to the disunion that it has sponsored?" Burns said in a recent interview. "It's important for us to begin to have creative but courageous conversations about what took place."

Burns and co-director Lynn Novick had just finished work on their World War II documentary a decade ago when he turned to her and said, "We have to do Vietnam." The result is their 10-part, 18-hour series that will air beginning 17 SEP on PBS. "For me, it was the sense that Vietnam was the most important event for Americans in the second half of the 20th century, yet we had done almost everything we could in the intervening years to avoid understanding it," Burns said. "As horrible as they are, wars are incredibly valuable moments to study, and I thought what Vietnam lacked was a willingness to engage in that."

The film brings together the latest scholarly research on the war and features nearly 80 interviews, including Americans who fought in the war and those who opposed it, Vietnamese civilians and soldiers from both sides. Burns and Novick have been showing excerpts of the film around the country in recent months, most recently at Dartmouth College on 17 JUL. "I think this will be for a general American audience a kind of revelation, a cascade of new facts and new figures, and I don't mean numeral figures, but biographical figures that will stagger their view

of what was, and hopefully get everybody, regardless of political perspective to let go of the baggage of the superficial and the conventional," Burns said.



**In this April 28, 1965 file photo, U.S. Marine infantry stream into a suspected Viet Cong village near Da Nang in Vietnam during the Vietnamese war.**

Having been blamed for the war itself, many Vietnam War soldiers were understandably reluctant to share their stories, the co-directors said. But compared to his earlier series on World War II and the Civil War, Burns said there was one challenge he didn't face. "One of the great tasks for us as filmmakers — amateur historians if you will — was how to cut through all the nostalgia and sentimentality that had attached itself to the Civil War and World War II," he said. "There's no such problem with Vietnam."

After watching the hour-long preview, U.S. Army veteran David Hagerman, of Lyme Center, said he can't wait to watch the entire series. "It was powerful," said Hagerman, who spent his nine months in Vietnam running a treatment center for soldiers addicted to heroin. While strangers now approach him and thank him for his service, he said coming home in 1972 was traumatic. I walked into the Seattle airport, and I was in my Army outfit," he said. "The reception I received was so negative and so powerful that I walked into the nearest men's room, took my uniform off, threw it in the trash, and put on a T-shirt and a pair of pants."

Burns said while he doesn't buy into the notion that history repeats itself, it's clear that human nature doesn't change. And he acknowledges that many of the themes his series explores are uncannily relevant to the present. "If I backed up this conversation and said, 'OK, I've spent the last year working a film about a White House in disarray obsessed with leaks, about a huge document drops into the public of classified information ... about a deeply polarized country, about a political campaign accused of reaching out to a foreign power during an election, about mass demonstrations across the country,' you'd say, 'Gee, Ken, you stopped doing history, you're doing the present moment,'" he said.

At Dartmouth, Novick and Burns were joined by U.S. Army veteran Mike Heaney, of Hartland, Vermont, who is shown in the film describing losing fellow platoon members in a 1966 ambush and spending the night paranoid that a dead Viet Cong soldier lying next to him was just faking it and would rise up to kill him. After the screening, he told the audience about returning to Vietnam in 2008, where he compared war wounds with former enemies turned

fellow "grandpas." He said he's been able to cope thanks to the support of his family, as well as both Americans and the Vietnamese people. "I don't expect to ever get closure on this kind of experience that I had," he said. "And that's OK." [Source: Associated Press | Holly Ramer | July 17, 2017 ++]

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## **AFL Q&A 04 ► Locating Military Records**

**Q.** Does anyone know where I can find my military records?

**-o-o-O-o-o-**

**A1:** Military records are stored in several locations based on your branch of service, and whether you were active or not. National Guard records are stored in each respective state. Active duty records are stored based on your date of discharge, with most of them being in St Louis at the National Personnel Records Center. Page 3 of the SF 180 lists the addresses of the repositories. (AP) 12/2/16

**A2:** It sounds like your trying to get this information without going thru a VSO (Veterans Service Organization). They will help you fill out the proper forms and send them in to get this done. Better to go thru them if planning a claim as well as getting the records. Don't leave out getting all your medical records for the VA as well as all outside sources as well. Keep these records handy. Where you request the records for branch of service would help to know which one for there are different locales where they are stored.

Military Records Requests

- U.S. Navy phone: 314-538-3935, Saint Louis Records, Federal Information Center phone: 1-800-6878-9889
- National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), Navy-USMC Records, 9700 Page Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63132-5100

In letter request give: Name, Service Number, Social Security Number, Years Served Copy of Navy DD-21 takes 8 weeks to get them. (JRM) 12/3/16

**-o-o-O-o-o-**

Armed Forces Locator is an offline computer-based search system. It was developed to help veterans, active duty, servicemembers, Reservists, National Guard members and ROTC members locate old friends, current colleagues, and family members who serve or have served in the armed forces. Their mission is to provide an opportunity for those who served to reconnect again with war buddies. Also, locate many topics that are of interest to veterans, active duty servicemembers, and veterans organizations. [Source: <http://www.armedforceslocator.com> | August 31, 2017 ++]

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## **Retiree Appreciation Days ► Scheduled As of 31 AUG 2017**

Retiree Appreciation Days (RADs) are designed with all veterans in mind. They're a great source of the latest information for retirees and Family members in your area. RADs vary from installation to installation, but, in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups, and various other services. Some RADs include special events such as dinners or golf tournaments. Due to budget constraints, some RADs may be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, scheduled appearances of DFAS representatives may not be possible. If you plan to travel long distances to attend a RAD, before traveling, you



should call the sponsoring RSO to ensure the RAD will held as scheduled and, if applicable, whether or not DFAS reps will be available. The current updated schedule for 2017 is available at:

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

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

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

This schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\veteterans activity related events such as Seminars, Veterans Town Hall Meetings, Stand Downs, Resource\Career Fairs and Other Military Retiree & Veterans Related Events for all military services. To get more info about a particular event, mouse over or click on the event under Event Location. Please report comments, changes, corrections, new RADs and other military retiree\veteterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager at [milton.bell126@gmail.com](mailto:milton.bell126@gmail.com).

(NOTE: Attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214.”@“ indicates event requires registration\RSVP.)For more information call the phone numbers indicated on the schedule of the Retirement Services Officer (RSO) sponsoring the RAD.

To quickly locate events in your geographic area just click on the appropriate State\Territory\Counry listed at the top of the schedule. They will look like this:

**AK AL AR AS AZ CA CO CT DC DE FL GA GU HI IA ID IL IN KS KY LA MA MD ME MI MN MO MS MT NC ND NE NH NJ NM NV NY OH OK OR PA PR RI SC SD TN TX UT VA VI VT WA WI WV WY Belgium Germany Italy Japan Korea Netherlands Thailand**

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | August 31, 2017 ++]

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## **Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 31AUG 2017**

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date in the below list. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown below for the next month. For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. refer to <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events>. Listings of up upcoming Vet Job Fairs nationwide providing location, times, events, and registration info if required can be found at the following websites. You will need to review each site below to locate Job Fairs in your location:

- <https://events.recruitmilitary.com>
- <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs>
- <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs>



[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | August 31, 2017 ++]

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## State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► Minnesota 2017

The state of Minnesota provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Veteran State Benefits –MN**” 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.minnesotaveteran.org>.

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

[Source:<http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/minnesota-state-veterans-benefits.html> Aug 2017  
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### \* Vet Legislation \*



**Note:** To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 115th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate. Bills are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole.

## VA Mustard Agent Care Update 06 ► President Signs Bill

President Donald Trump signed legislation 16 AUG making it easier for a Missouri World War II veteran and others of his generation to receive benefits to treat conditions from secret mustard gas experiments they were subjected to more than 60 years ago. The amendment to a broader veterans bill signed by Trump was pushed through Congress by Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO) and others. It essentially shifts the burden of proof from the veterans to the Department of Veterans Affairs. “Every once in a while, Congress gets it right,” McCaskill said.

The legislation was co-sponsored by Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO). McCaskill said the legislation did not get its final boost for approval until Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), who chairs the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, got behind it. The bill also has the support of David Shulkin, the head of the Department of Veterans Affairs, who said this summer of Missouri veteran **Arla Wayne Harrell**, whose claims of injury from mustard gas have repeatedly been denied: “We believe him.” Previous VA administrators had not gone nearly that far in saying they believed the

veterans' claims, and VA case workers had repeatedly denied claims Harrell, of Macon, Mo., despite mounting evidence proving vets were exposed at Camp Crowder in Missouri during the war.

- “Mr. Harrell has waited a long time,” Shulkin said, adding that “this is a great day for Mr. Harrell and his family, as well.
- “We are deeply appreciative of the 400 or so veterans that we believe have been waiting for too long to be recognized for what they deserve,” he said, adding that the bill “allows the VA to move forward and do the right thing.”



**Arla Harrell, a WWII veteran, with his wife, Betty, at the nursing home where they live in Macon, Mo.**

Harrell's family has said that their father has had over a quarter century of denied claims and that he has been dismayed by the thought that his government did not believe him. Harrell had kept secret his exposure to mustard gas for almost a half century. As an 18-year-old, they said, he had been threatened with military prison if he talked about the experiments. McCaskill said she would now press the VA to put the cases like Harrell's at the head of the VA claims line. The bill includes about \$1 million in funding over 10 years to cover the 300-400 World War II veterans that are still alive and have had mustard gas claims denied. The government has estimated that as many as 60,000 American World War II veterans were exposed to chemical experiments during the war.

Beverly Howe, one of Harrell's daughters, is a nurse trained in chemical and biological weapons. The family is waiting for the VA's response to their latest appeal. If that fails, then the Harrells can refile, and the bill signed by Trump now puts the burden of proof on the VA to disprove Harrell's claims. Howe said she and her sisters were not permitted to wear perfume when they lived at home because of her father's lung problems, which she said doctors were never able to properly treat. “My dad was not like other fathers,” she said. “He was not able to play out in the yard with us, he was not able to cut the grass. He was able to go to work, but when he came home from work all he could do was sit down. My mother would sometimes bring his food to him because he was so tired, so exhausted and, frankly, so short of breath. It was more effort than he could make to go up and sit at the table.”

Howe said her mother had to sell the family home near Macon in order to keep Arla in a nursing home. He is unable to speak but can communicate with nods and expressions, Beverly said. She said her father, and the family, did not have resentment toward those who subjected him to the tests. They are, however, frustrated at dealing with the government in trying to get help from the VA to treat the condition. They filed the first claim in 1991 and have lost repeated appeals since then.

- “Times were different when we were in World War II,” she said. “I have no ill feelings toward the Army of that era, it is not the same era that it is today. We know a lot more about those kinds of things than we did then.
- “Where I hold the moral ground,” Howe continued, “is the fact that when these men were released from these vows of secrecy, our county didn't stand up at that point and say, ‘We got it, we got your back, we are going to make sure that you are taken care of in the way you should have been taken care of 50 years ago.’”

[Source: St. Louis Post-Dispatch | Chuck Raasch | August 16, 2017++]

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## VA Health Care Access Update 55 ► H.R.3557 | Doctors for Veterans Act

Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) wants to reduce the time veterans must wait before receiving medical care. Walden has introduced Congressional legislation, the **Doctors for Veterans Act**, which is designed to make it easier for Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals and clinics to recruit health care providers, including physicians. Walden wants to increase the availability of health care providers to reduce the time veterans have to wait for doctor appointments, said Justin Discigil, Walden’s communications director.

A key piece of the legislation is its Education Debt Reduction Program, which raises the cap for how much VA clinics can spend in helping health care providers pay back their college student loans. The Doctors for Veterans Act would raise the cap from \$24,000 to \$60,000 a year. The legislation would also raise the total allowable student loan repayment benefit from \$120,000 to \$240,000. Walden’s bill, HR 3557, also includes a provision that would make it possible for VA clinics to cover the cost of the additional taxes health care providers will be charged if they receive more money for the repayment of student loans.

“The Doctors for Veterans Act will allow the VA to better recruit medical providers by offering student loan repayment benefits that compete with what is offered in the private sector,” Walden said in a news release. “Especially in rural areas, our veterans are underserved and VA facilities in Oregon face difficult recruiting challenges. This bill will help the VA compete with the private sector for qualified physicians to adequately staff their health centers in underserved areas and bring veterans the care they deserve.” Linda Wondra, public affairs officer for the Walla Walla VA Medical Center, agrees that recruiting and retaining health care providers is a continuing challenge. “We are always in need of health care providers in rural areas,” Wondra said. [Source: The Observer | Dick Mason | August 24, 2017 ++]

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## VA Appeals Update 27 ► Trump Signs Disability Appeals Overhaul Bill

President Trump on 22 AUG signed into law a measure meant to accelerate the appeals process for disability claims at the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), easing for veterans a process criticized as too cumbersome. The bill is aimed at helping veterans challenge rejected bids for benefits and to mitigate a backlog of appeals. Veterans that have become sick or injured while serving are entitled to disability payments from the VA, which determines how much to compensate them through a process that looks at medical records and other documentation. But not all veterans are happy with the amount they’ve been allocated and can appeal the decision.



The appeals process at the VA is lengthy, however, with a five-year average wait for a decision. The White House said this week that there are 470,000 appeals cases currently pending in the VA system. Lawmakers said they want the wait time to be reduced to less than a year. The new law will give veterans more options on how to appeal benefits decisions they think are unfair and do not compensate them enough. "This is a big one," Trump said, pointing to the bill before signing it to a roar of applause Wednesday. VA Secretary David Shulkin stood behind him along with leadership from the nation's largest veterans group.

Trump signed the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act (H.R.2288) after addressing veterans at the American Legion's national convention in Reno, Nev. "One year ago at this gathering ... I promised you I would make it my priority to fix the broken VA and deliver our veterans the care they so richly deserve," Trump told the audience. Trump spoke to American Legion while on the campaign trail last year. Prior to signing the bill, Trump boasted of several recent VA reforms, including a promised White House veterans hotline and new legislation meant more easily oust ineffective VA employees. "If somebody who works at the VA is bad to the people of the VA ... we look at them and we say, 'you're fired' that's it," Trump said. "They don't do a good job, they're out." [Source: The Hill | Ellen Mitchell | August 23, 2017 ++]

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## **Agent Orange Korea Update 08** ► **Fairness for Korean DMZ Veterans Act**

Army machine gunner Garfield Harper Jr. awoke one night to the smell of ammonia. He was inside the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea at the time but had no idea what caused the odor or who was responsible for it. It was the highly toxic defoliant Agent Orange, which was sprayed to kill vegetation so the enemy could not hide there years after the Korean War cease fire. Harper developed a serious skin disorder decades after his three years of military service, but it took him many more years to discover and then prove a disability case connected to his Agent Orange exposure in and near the DMZ in 1967.

Rep. Thomas MacArthur (R-NJ), held a news conference 15 AUG at an American Legion post in Pemberton to highlight his introduction of a congressional bill requiring the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to recognize Agent Orange-connected disabilities for Korean DMZ veterans like Harper who served before April 1968. Veterans Affairs "knew there was earlier exposure and we've tried to get this changed administratively but couldn't, so we introduced legislation to do what the VA could have and should have done," MacArthur said amid a crowd of several dozen Korean War and other veterans at American Legion Post 294, including state VFW and legion officials.

"We think of Agent Orange mostly in Vietnam, but it was used to clean the Korean DMZ," he added, alluding to its use during the Vietnam War from the late 1960s to the early 1970s. "This bill like many bills started with a story — the story of Garfield — and his story is the story of a lot of veterans." Specifically, the Fairness for Korean DMZ Veterans Act [H.R.3605] would do the following:

- Expand the current time frame of April 1, 1968 to Aug. 3, 1971 for eligibility for disability compensation for veterans who served at or near the Korean DMZ and are suffering from herbicide-related conditions.
- Change the eligibility date back to Sept.1, 1967 — seven months earlier than current rules — for veterans to qualify for a health care disability from herbicide exposure.
- Establish the presumption of exposure for the earlier time frame, eliminating a lengthy appeal process and the need for the veteran to provide proof of exposure.
- Affect an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 current veterans who would have served there during those seven months.

Harper and fellow Korean DMZ veteran Eugene Clarke of Reading, Connecticut, spoke at the news conference. They also were meeting face-to-face for the first time after nearly two years of telephone conversations about their



Agent Orange exposure and Army service with the 7th Infantry Division — Harper in the 32nd Regiment and Clarke in the 31st. "This bill means a lot to me and I hope it succeeds to help DMZ veterans who have illnesses right now that they didn't know where they came from," said the 69-year-old Harper, adding the "government should step up to the plate and take care of you."

He said the VA first told him there were no U.S. troops in the DMZ in 1967. "I told them that wasn't true," recalled Harper, a retired Teamster. He appealed to the VA for a service-connected disability for a skin disorder that has attacked much of his body and was granted it in 2013. Clarke, however, is still awaiting a VA decision on his appeal for disability because he suffers from diabetes — one of a list of other Agent Orange side effects. Other health problems associated with exposure include prostate cancer and heart disease, according to the VA. "God bless the congressman," Clarke told the gathering in thanking MacArthur, later calling the bill "the best thing since sliced bread."

Clarke, a retired Wall Street stockbroker, said he spent only one month in 1967 in the DMZ but was in South Korea longer than that. The VA approved its 1968-1971 dates because U.S. troops were using the spray to kill vegetation, but MacArthur said troops were exposed to it earlier because South Korean soldiers had been testing its use in the DMZ. The U.S. led a coalition force under the banner of the United Nations inside the South Korean side of the DMZ for many years after the Korean War ended with a ceasefire in 1953 but without a peace treaty, but today only South Koreans patrol the southern portion.

MacArthur's bill has the support of the state and national commanders of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion. Letters from the national commanders were read at the news conference. "We want to thank the congressman for doing what is right for our veterans," state VFW commander Carey Pritchett said at the event. Charles Schmidt, National American Legion commander, said veterans who served the nation honorably "should never be denied assistance when returning home from injuries sustained while fighting for this country." While the VA does not recognize herbicide exposure in the DMZ prior to 1968, MacArthur said ironically it does recognize a related disability of children whose fathers served in or near the zone and who contracted spina bifida, a birth defect linked to Agent Orange exposure.

The congressman vowed to see the bill through the process until he gets justice for these veterans. "It's just insane we can't get this through the bureaucracy. We sent them there and we need to do the right thing by them." [Source: Courier Post | Carol Comegno | August 16, 2017++]

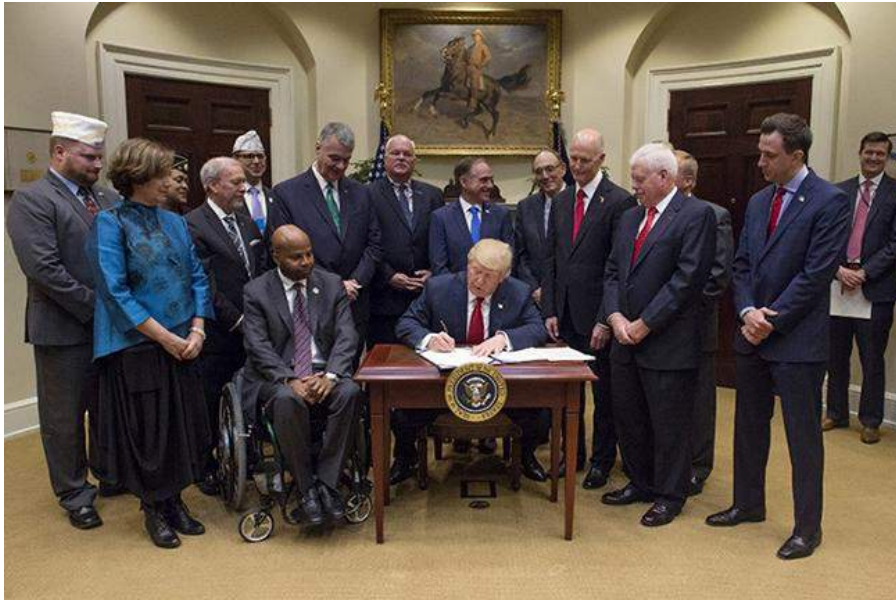
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## Vet Congressional Issues Update 01 ► Banner Year for Vets

While it has been difficult to get major legislation through Congress, that hasn't been the case with some important veterans' bills that have found their way to Pennsylvania Avenue for the president to sign. In fact, it has been a banner year for veterans as Congress quickly moved legislation through the process in an unusually bipartisan and bicameral way while other important legislation, like the defense bill and other federal measures, stalled. Here's a brief recap of the year and what's in play today.

- **Oct. 1, 2016.** The VA starts the fiscal year with its full 2017 budget, including advance appropriations for FY 2018, while other federal agencies were forced to operate under a continuing resolution.
- **Jan. through March 2017.** Lawmakers hit the ground running in the new Congress, introducing more than 200 bills to help veterans in the first quarter of the 115th session—a trend that has continued to inch up every year since 2001.
- **April.** The president extends the Veterans Choice program, commonly known as "Choice," before it was due to expire in August, giving the VA time to expend remaining funds in the program and develop a better replacement program for veterans receiving care through private providers





- **June.** The president signs the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017, which provides the secretary of the VA additional authorities to expedite the removal of employees when warranted.
- **Aug. 7.** Congress sends a bill to the president to establish a national memorial in honor of servicemembers who served in support of the global war on terrorism.
- **Aug. 11.** Congress sends the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 to the president to sign. The current claims appeals system is inefficient and plagued with archaic procedures that prevent the VA from taking quick action on appeals and providing timely decisions and benefits to veterans while ensuring transparency and a veteran-centric process. MOAA and other veteran groups have worked for two years with the secretary, the Board of Veterans Appeals, and Congress to put together this bill to modernize the VA's appeals process and provide more rights and transparency in the system for veterans seeking benefits.
- **Aug. 12.** The president signs an emergency funding bill to provide \$2.1 billion to fund Choice for an additional six months, giving Congress and the administration time to come up with a long-term plan for reforming the community care program—a hugely popular program with veterans and one Secretary Shulkin told Congress in June would run out of money earlier than he expected.
- **Aug. 16.** The president signs the “Forever GI Bill,” making the Post-9/11 GI bill permanent for servicemembers entering the military beginning Jan. 1, 2018, and including other improvements like the “Shauna Hill” transferability provision, which authorizes unused benefits to be transferred to additional dependents if the originally designated dependent dies.

The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) worked with several military and veterans organizations to successfully defeat other congressional actions that would have been detrimental to their members. When the VA proposed eliminating individual unemployability benefits for veterans after they reached Social Security retirement age, MOAA pushed back and the VA decided to not pursue the cuts. When Congress proposed requiring servicemembers to buy into the Post-9/11 GI Bill, MOAA spoke out in opposition and Congress found the needed funds elsewhere. “We have been very encouraged and pleased with the collaborative and supportive efforts on behalf of the VA, Congress, and the administration to get these important bills through the process,” said Cmdr. René Campos, USN (Ret), MOAA's director of government relations for veterans health care.

Lt. Col. Aniela Szymanski, USMCR, MOAA's director of government relations for veterans benefits, added, "Veterans should be proud of the work of their members serving on the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees, especially the leadership, Chairs Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA) and Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), and ranking members Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN), who truly have the best interests of veterans and their families at the heart of what they do."

MOAA members also deserve a special thanks for taking the time to engage with their lawmakers and for keeping up on important legislation through their legislative updates and alerts - you are really the ones responsible for getting this legislation signed. There's still much more to do this year to reform VA health and benefits systems. Please stay engaged so MOAA and the Military Coalition can continue the progress and momentum. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | August 18, 2017 ++]

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## Vet Congressional Issues Update 02 ► Congress Criticized on Bill Handling

President Donald Trump on 24 AUG criticized Congress' handling of a relatively noncontroversial piece of veterans legislation, saying lawmakers should have used the measure to push through an unrelated controversial increase in the country's debt ceiling. In a series of tweets Trump said he had asked Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) to tie the recently finalized Veterans Affairs' Choice Program extension to the debt ceiling increase, which Congress needed to act upon before 30 SEP to avoid a government shutdown. His tweet's read:

- Donald J. Trump ✓ @realDonaldTrump - I requested that Mitch M & Paul R tie the Debt Ceiling legislation into the popular V.A. Bill (which just passed) for easy approval. They...
- Donald J. Trump ✓ @realDonaldTrump - ...didn't do it so now we have a big deal with Dems holding them up (as usual) on Debt Ceiling approval. Could have been so easy-now a mess!

The Choice Program extension legislation added \$2.1 billion to the program — which allows veterans to seek care at private sector medical centers at the government's expense — to keep it operational into early 2018. VA officials had lobbied Congress for the money to prevent disruptions in veterans' health care in the coming months. House lawmakers passed the measure by a 414-0 vote in late July, but only after a week of contentious debate among party leaders and veterans groups. In the end, Republican officials had to add \$1.8 billion in new VA leases and personnel spending to get outside advocates' endorsement of the measure. Senate leaders used unanimous-consent rules to finalize the measure without any opposition.

The issue was a major fight for the veterans community, one that veterans groups and VA administrators had forcefully lobbied Congress to adopt. But on a national stage, it was a largely unheralded issue, amounting to extending a benefit for a small subset of the whole nation. The debt ceiling legislation, on the other hand, has been a major point of contention for both parties in recent years. Fiscal conservatives have repeatedly threatened a government shutdown over the ever-increasing national debt limit and forced concessions on federal spending cuts before voting for the raises. The issue is expected to be a major fight in the upcoming September legislative session.

If the debt ceiling language was attached to the Choice Program extension bill, the measure likely would not have passed as quickly and quietly as it did. Veterans groups and leaders of the veterans committees on Capitol Hill have opposed attempts to add controversial issues to the critical VA reforms, arguing they would further delay the important changes. Trump's comments are the latest sign of increasing friction with Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill. At a campaign rally in Phoenix, Arizona, on 22 AUG, he indirectly attacked Arizona Republican Sens. John McCain and Jeff Flake for their opposition to his public comments. Multiple news reports have cited behind-the-scenes fights between McConnell and Trump over a series of legislative priorities. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | August 24, 2017 ++]

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## VA Women Vet Programs Update 30 ► H.R.2452 | Deborah Sampson Act

Representative Elizabeth Esty introduced the Deborah Sampson Act (H.R.2452/S.681) in the House on 16 MAY. This comprehensive measure addresses gender disparities and would improve and expand programs and services for women veterans provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

If enacted, this bill would establish a pilot program for peer-to-peer counseling and make permanent group counseling retreats for women veterans recently separated from military service. It would increase training for providers delivering gender-specific care, expand days of care for newborns from seven to fourteen, authorize medically-necessary transportation for newborns, address privacy and security issues for women in VA health care facilities and correct infrastructure issues to improve the environment of care for women. The legislation would also create a program to assist women veterans with legal services, authorize additional grants for organizations supporting women veterans with families and require data collection regarding women and minority veterans including a report on the availability of prosthetics for women veterans.

DAV's 2014 report, *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home* identified many of these gaps for women in VA programs and has long advocated for a more comprehensive provision of VA women's health services that appropriately recognizes their service and meets their gender specific health care needs. The report can be downloaded at <https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/women-veterans-study.pdf> The Deborah Sampson Act (H.R. 2452) is in line with DAV Resolution No. 225, which calls for enhanced medical services and benefits for women veterans.

Readers can support this effort by contacting their elected representative and urge co-sponsorship and passage of H.R. 2452. At <https://www.dav.org/can/?vsrc=%2fhome> can be found an editable letter which has been prepared for this purpose or you may write your own message to express your personal views. The site also provides you the means to forward your message to your legislator. [Source: DAV National Commander | August 25, 2017 ++]

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## Other Vet Legislation ► Recently Introduced As of 170631

Recently TREA's Washington Office endorsed the following legislation on behalf of TREA's members.

**HR 3370: *Fry Scholarship Enhancement Act*** - This bill includes under the Yellow Ribbon G.I. Education Enhancement Program (public-private contributions for educational assistance in addition to post-9/11 educational assistance): (1) the child or spouse of an individual who, on or after September 11, 2001, dies in the line of duty while serving on active duty (Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry scholarship recipients); and (2) an individual who, on or after such date, serves at least 90 days but less than 6 months on active duty and who, after completion of such service, either continues on active duty for an aggregate of less than 6 months or is discharged or released before completion of such amount of active duty service. Introduced by Rep.Hakeem Jeffries (D- NY)

**H.R.3492:** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand educational assistance to veterans who pursue certain apprenticeship program, to establish a pilot program for veterans to pursue certification programs in computer numerically controlled machining, and for other purposes. Introduced by Rep. Dan Lipinski (D- IL)

**H.R. 3642: *Military Sexual Assault Victims Empowerment Act (SAVE)*** - This bill would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to improve the access to private health care for veterans who are survivors of military sexual trauma. Introduced by Rep. Andy Barr (R-Ky.)

**S.1619:** A bill to amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to extend the interest rate limitation on debt entered into during military service to debt incurred during military service to consolidate or refinance student loans incurred before military service. This bill amends the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to extend the 6% interest rate limitation on debt entered into during a servicemember's military service to any debt entered into to consolidate or refinance one or more student loans incurred before such service. Introduced by Sen. Dick Durbin ( D- IL)

**S.1635: *Keeping Our Commitment to Overseas Veterans Act*** - This bill extends authority through September 30, 2018, for operation of the Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office in Manila, the Republic of the Philippines. Introduced by Sen. Mazie Hirono (D- HI)

Each of the bills, if passed, would improve things for veterans, members of the Guard and Reserve, and/or military families. If you would like to see these passed into law it is important that you contact both of your Senators and your Representative and urge them to support the bills. Without strong support from military voters they will not make it through Congress. [Source: TREA Washington Update | August 28, 2017 ++]

**\* Military \***



## **Military Advancement** ► **Navy Eliminates E-4 Exams for 20 Ratings**

Navy personnel officials announced the elimination of E-4 advancement exams in 20 high-tech ratings that automatically advance all sailors to petty officer once the initial training pipeline is completed. The Navy has also given commanding officers the ability to reinstate sailors deemed to be “back on track” to E-4 after being busted down from all ratings to E-3. The changes, which go into effect 1 DEC, were announced 16 AUG an a NAVADMIN.

“Our profession relies on trust and confidence up and down the chain of command and we expect our COs to make decisions that are ultimately aimed at developing our Sailors’ character and competence — changes like these help us do just that,” said Vice Adm. Robert Burke, the chief of naval personnel, in a press release. “These changes are part of our Sailor 2025 and Rating Modernization initiatives, which are aimed at empowering our COs and streamlining policies where it makes sense.” The efforts are related, Burke wrote in the message, but are not part of any cost-saving efforts. Personnel officials told Navy Times the move is a result of ongoing reforms to the advancement system made by a panel looking to find ways to improve enlisted advancements, particularly in the petty officer ranks.

Once the policy goes into effect, COs can reinstate sailors to E-4 after a minimum wait of six months, as long as the rank reduction came as a result of minor offenses, not a non-judicial punishment. COs will be the sole authority in approving reinstatement, and under no circumstances are COs obligated to reinstate an individual if they deem it unwarranted, the message said. The policy is not to be confused with the concept of a “suspended bust,” when a sailor keeps the current rank and is only knocked down a peg if another offense is committed. Beyond the required six-month wait, the rule allows COs the flexibility to further delay reinstatement until they feel the sailor is ready. The exam elimination will begin with the Spring 2018 petty office advancement cycle. The following are 20 ratings from the advanced electronics, advanced technical and nuclear programs that will be eliminated:

- AWF - Naval Aircrewmen (Mechanical)
- AWO - Naval Aircrewmen (Operator)
- AWR - Naval Aircrewmen (Tactical Helicopter)
- AWS - Naval Aircrewmen (Helicopter)
- AWV - Naval Aircrewmen (Avionics)
- CTI - Cryptologic Technician (Interpretive)
- CTN - Cryptologic Technician (Networks)
- EMN - Electrician’s Mate (Nuclear)
- EOD - Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician
- ET - Electronics Technician
- ETN - Electronics Technician (Nuclear)
- FC - Fire Controlman
- FCA - Fire Controlman (Aegis)
- IS - Intelligence Specialist
- ITS - Information Systems Technician (Submarine)
- MMN - Machinist’s Mate (Nuclear)
- MT - Missile Technician
- ND - Navy Diver
- SB - Special Warfare Boat Operator
- SO - Special Warfare Operator

[Source: NavyTimes | Mark D. Faram | August 16, 2017 ++]

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## **USAF Pilot Shortage ► Retired Pilots Sought**

The Air Force is hoping some retired pilots will return temporarily to active duty to serve in staff positions in a move aimed at keeping its current middle-ranked pilots in the air, the service’s top civilian said 25 AUG. Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson announced the service is looking for up to 25 retired pilots to return to the service on 12-month contracts to fill staff jobs that require the expertise of a military pilot. It is the Air Force’s latest attempt to keep experienced mid-level officers in their cockpits as it faces continued pilot retention issues. “We’d like to keep our pilots who are current in the aircraft in the aircraft and try to fill some of these vital flight slots with people who have the experience needed but who have subsequently retired from the service,” Wilson told reporters at the Pentagon on Friday. “...Come on back to active duty, give us another year of service in a staff job.”

Retired pilots who volunteer to return to work those jobs would not be allowed to fly. Wilson also announced the Air Force would increase flight pay for officers and enlisted airmen for the first time since 1999. The service will boost the maximum aviation career incentive pay for officers to \$1,000 per month beginning Oct. 1. The maximum is now \$840. Career enlisted flyer incentive pay will also increase from a maximum of \$400 per month to \$600. The



Air Force largely blames attractive jobs in commercial aviation for its pilot retention issues, which has left the service short more than 1,200 fighter pilots and 300 tanker and cargo aircraft pilots.

Most regional airlines require significantly less cockpit time for military pilots than their civilian counterparts – about 750 flight hours as opposed to about 1,500. Airlines have hired pilots extensively in recent years to replace Baby Boomers as they reach the mandatory retirement age of 65. Wilson said Friday that commercial airlines have hired more than 4,000 pilots in the last year. But in addition to attractive civilian pilot jobs, Air Force pilots have also blamed limited flight training time, increased administrative duties and long, recurring overseas deployments for leaving the service, Air Force officials have acknowledged.

Wilson said the service is tackling the issue head-on. Last month, the Air Force announced it would pay eligible pilots retention bonuses ranging from \$10,000 to \$35,000 to remain in the service. Earlier in the year, Air Force leaders met with some top airline executives to discuss ways to make it easier for pilots to fly in the reserves and work for commercial airlines. The service also said it has cut some of the administrative duties for pilots in 2017. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Corey Dickstein | August 25, 2017 ++]

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### **USMC Guam Base ► Contact Awarded for New Base**

The U.S. Navy awarded a contract 18 AUG for utility construction and site improvements for a future Marine Corps base on Guam. The announcement came amid heightened tensions between North Korea and the U.S. just days after the North considered a preemptive missile strike on the strategically important U.S. territory of Guam. “This effort is a big step in strengthening Guam, as part of the Marianas strategic hub, ensuring the Marine Corps’ ability to sustain a forward presence within the Indo-Asia-Pacific region,” Lt. Gen. David Berger, commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific, said in a statement. “Historically, the Marine Corps has played an essential role in our nation’s ability to deter adversaries and defend, as well as strengthen the capabilities of our partners and allies within the region. We are as committed as ever in maintaining that role and responsibility.”

The Navy said the \$164.9 million Japanese-funded contract was awarded in support of an international agreement between the U.S. and Japan. The relocation of Marines to the island has been in the works for over a decade. The contract includes construction of utilities, roads and infrastructure as well as removal of unexploded ordnance and munitions. [Source: The Associated Press | Brian Skoloff | August 18, 2017 ++]

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### **HMS Queen Elizabeth ► New Carrier's Early Homeport Appearance**

Britain’s Royal Navy moved one step closer for its new aircraft carrier, the HMS Queen Elizabeth, to becoming operational, as the 65,000-ton warship sailed into its home port of Portsmouth for the first time on 16 AUG. The warship entered the naval base, south of England, sooner than expected after the Royal Navy and the industry alliance that built the carrier changed the original plan and brought HMS Queen Elizabeth into Portsmouth midway through the sea trials now underway rather than when the tests were expected to be completed later this year. Engineering work was originally planned to be undertaken at Rosyth Dockyard, Scotland, where the warship was built and then the sea trials got underway 27 JUN, will now be conducted at the naval base ahead of the warship heading out for a second phase of trials.

About 12 days into the trials, the warship berthed at the deepwater port of Invergordon, Scotland, spending two weeks for a planned replenishment and refueling and the resolution of engineering issues. The ship’s propulsion system was also checked by divers after the HMS Queen Elizabeth hit debris, possibly fishing nets, during the trials



in the North Sea. After resuming trials, the aircraft carrier returned to Invergordon earlier this month ahead of sailing to Portsmouth.



Speaking onboard the warship, Prime Minister Theresa May said, “Britain can be proud of this ship and what it represents. It sends a clear signal that as Britain forges a new, positive, confident role for ourselves on the world stage in the years ahead, we are determined to remain a fully engaged global power, working closely with our friends and allies around the world.” U.K. Defense Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said the warship has made “good progress in sea trials and will now embark on the next phase of preparations that will see the return of Britain’s carrier strike ability.”

The British axed their remaining aircraft carriers in the 2010 strategic defense and security review to save money and have been taking a carrier strike holiday until the new warships are available. Carrier operational skills have been kept alive largely by seconding U.K. personnel to the U.S. military. When HMS Queen Elizabeth met with the USS George H.W. Bush and its carrier strike group during an exercise off the coast of Scotland recently, the Nimitz-class U.S. carrier had more than 60 Royal Navy sailors and Royal Marines onboard. The war games saw the commander of the U.K. Carrier Strike Group, Commodore Andrew Betton, and his team’s direct jets, firepower and personnel across the task group for 10 days to hone skills for the U.K.’s own carrier strike capability.

HMS Queen Elizabeth is the first of two aircraft carriers being built for the Royal Navy in a £6.3 billion (U.S. \$8 billion) program. The second, HMS Prince of Wales, is close to completion and will be formally named next month. The ships will not both be operated at once. The British do not have the manpower, money or aircraft to do that, but they will enable the Royal Navy to operate a single carrier continuously. Both warships have been assembled by the Aircraft Carrier Alliance, with BAE Systems as a lead member. Large modules were built by six British shipyards and floated up to Rosyth for assembly.

The Royal Navy will operate the F-35B Lightning II short takeoff and vertical landing strike jets and Merlin airborne early warning helicopters from the warship. The U.K. has 11 F-35B’s delivered so far. By the end of this year, all 14 jets so far ordered will be delivered. Flight trials from the carrier’s deck are on track to begin next year, with initial operational capability expected in 2020 and full capability three years later. The British government said in its 2015 strategic defense and security review that it would buy at least 48 of the F-35B version of the strike jets and committed to eventually purchase 138 Lightning II, without specifying the types. The F-35B will be operated by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, but there have been hints the RAF could eventually be equipped with the F-35A version used by the U.S. Air Force. [Source: DefenseNews | Andrew Chuter | August 16, 2017 ++]

## Women In Service Update 01 ► Navy Ratings Still 99% Male

It has been more than a year and a half since the military opened all jobs across the services to women. But for jobs in the Navy’s special warfare community, including SEALs, getting women into the ranks of their elite career fields has been slow. To date, there is only one enlisted female in the accession pipeline to potentially become a special warfare combatant-craft crewman, or SWCC, according to Naval Special Warfare Command spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Mark Walton. Whether the woman makes it is unclear — the accession pipeline for the special warfare job involves months of standard Navy training before the candidate even enters the formal schooling and testing.

Yet the SEALs are not the only Navy job where the presence of women continues to be rare. Navy data shows there are 13 ratings where women make up less than 1 percent of sailors, including more physical, combat-oriented jobs like navy diver and explosive ordnance disposal.

**NAVY RATINGS WITH LESS THAN ONE PERCENT OF WOMEN**

	Ratings	Total Sailors	Women	Men	% of women
1	Explosive Ordnance Disposal	1,248	12	1236	.96
2	Fire Control Technician	1,205	10	1195	.83
3	Electronics Technician Radio Frequency - Submarine	1,652	11	1641	.67
4	Machinist's Mate Weapons - Submarine	1,097	7	1090	.64
5	Culinary Specialist - Submarine	956	5	951	.52
6	Navy Diver	1,193	6	1187	.5
7	Electronics Technician Navigation - Submarine	1,792	9	1783	.5
8	Machinist's Mate - Submarine	2,266	10	2256	.44
9	Electronics Technician Nuclear - Submarine	1,565	6	1559	.38
10	Sonar Technician - Submarine	2,253	7	2246	.31
11	Engineering Laboratory Technician - Nuclear - Submarine	873	2	871	.23
12	Electrician's Mate - Nuclear - Submarine	2,026	4	2022	.2
13	Machinist's Mate - Nuclear - Submarine	2,461	4	2457	.16

**THE 10 RATINGS WITH THE MOST FEMALE SAILORS AS OF JULY**

	Ratings	Total Sailors	% of women
1	Legalman	495	63
2	Navy Counselor	706	45
3	Cryptologic Technician Interpretive	2,040	37
4	Yeoman	4,467	37
5	Personnel Specialist	2,571	33
6	Aviation Maintenance Administration	2,596	32
7	Quartermaster	2,059	30
8	Logistics Specialist	7,709	28
9	Interior Communications Electrician	2,137	28
10	Culinary Specialist	6,824	28

It remains unclear precisely why women are not moving toward such jobs in greater numbers after the Pentagon eliminated all formal gender restrictions across the force last year. Part of it could come down to culture. Throughout Navy history, female sailors blazing a new trail have faced pushback entering previously all-male jobs, as was the case with assignments to surface warships or becoming pilots. And while Navy leaders seek to expand the number of women in the ranks, female sailors in some ratings say their gender has hindered their advancement.

Today, about 19 percent of the enlisted fleet — roughly 50,500 sailors — are women, and the sea service wants to increase that presence to 24 percent by 2025. Personnel data shows women comprise the majority in only one rating: Legalman, where they make up 63 percent of the field’s 495 sailors. Women make up 45 percent of the Navy counselor rating, and 37 percent of interpreters and yeoman, according to personnel data. They also comprise about 33 percent of personnel specialists. Navy officials concede that some jobs may remain nearly all-male. “History tells us that, though the opportunity is there to take those tough jobs, most women choose to serve elsewhere,” said a Navy personal official familiar with efforts to recruit and retain more women.

### LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES

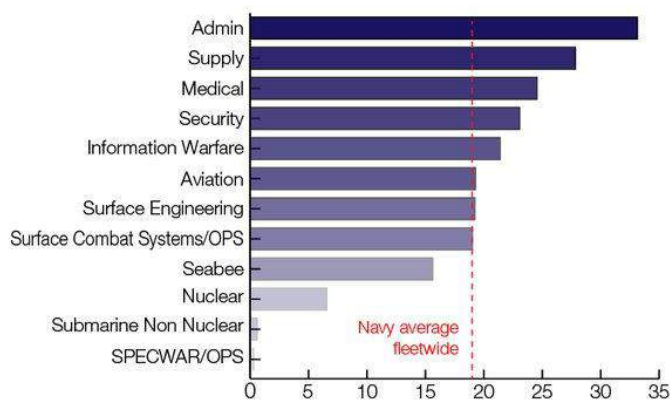
Not all physical, combat-related Navy jobs remain completely devoid of women. Since all gender restrictions were lifted in January 2016, at least 36 women have qualified in a variety of riverine enlisted classifications, according to Navy officials. Yet those ambitious enlisted women sailors say their advancement opportunities are limited.

Mineman 1st Class Rebecca Cross enlisted 17 years ago and has resigned herself to the fact she will likely retire as a first class. “The upward mobility just isn’t there,” Cross told Navy Times. “We haven’t had a female mineman make chief in over four years.”

Cross wants to go to sea, and knows she needs to go to sea to be competitive as she nears the senior enlisted realm. But women in the Navy face a lack of berthing, Cross said, and their careers suffer for it because that makes it harder to land the sea tours they need to move up. “I don’t want to be given anything different than men,” she said. “I just want opportunity that is equal to what the men have... I can compete with them if I am given the same opportunity to qualify in career-enhancing billets.”

The shortage of racks is a reality the Navy concedes on its “Women on Ships” website. “Rack allocation is based on the total number of women currently assigned for pay grades E6 and below or E7 and above,” according to the site. “So, there might be a time in your career that the detailer will tell you that they have no ships or there are no open racks on their requisitions.” Navy data shows women like Cross leave the sea service as the ranks advance. Women make up a quarter of sailors in the E-1 through E-3 ranks, according to Defense Manpower data. But the percentage of women in the ranks drops to 18 percent at the mid-level E-4 to E-6 levels and shrinks to less than 7 percent at master chief. Career fields with few women may offer less opportunity for mentorship, and job demands might require more deployments or time at sea. Such aspects make jobs less family friendly, an issue the Navy believes is a top concern for women.

**WHERE THE WOMEN ARE**  
Navy data shows women — 19 percent of the sailors across the Navy fleet — are clustered in some communities and underrepresented in others.



“We just don’t retain as many women as we’d like after the first or second enlistment,” the Navy personnel official said. “We lose them at a higher rate than men and it’s something we’ve studied and are making progress at fixing, though not as fast as we’d like.”

### **HARD TO BE FIRST**

The woman training this summer with sights set on career as a SWCC was not identified by Naval Special Warfare Command officials due to “operational security realities,” Walton said. On the commissioned side, one female Naval Academy midshipman who entered the accession pipeline to become a SEAL, a journey in which countless men have failed over the years, has opted out. Retired Navy Capt. Lory Manning, now director of the Service Women’s Action Network, said it may be too early to glean any firm takeaways from the lack of women entering the pipelines to special warfare. Culture, physical standards and the enormous reality of being first might explain the lack of women so far, she said.

Pioneering women who led the way into a variety of Navy jobs over the past decades have faced pressures and seen their careers impacted by old biases, Manning said. “I don’t know that a lot of 19-year-olds realize that, but it’s very scary to go first,” she said. “There are real dangers there.” Adding to that is the daunting physical standards, Manning said. “When I was in the Navy, I knew a lot of men who couldn’t get through BUD/S,” she said of the

grueling Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training. How welcoming the special warfare community will be to those female brethren who can physically hang remains to be seen, Manning said. While some Navy watchers have warned that integration of the SEAL ranks will be impossible,

Manning pointed out that SEALs have operated with female linguists and intelligence experts for years. “The culture may turn out to be more welcoming than some people think,” she said. “It has to be watched.” Instructor subjectivity and potential bias, either for or against a female candidate, in such intense training programs will also need to be tracked. Training in areas like small-unit tactics involves instructors making subjective judgments as to the leadership fitness of a candidate, Manning said, and those conducting the training must be aware of gender influencing their assessment. “What’s my idea of a combat leader, if I’m doing the judging,” she said. “It’s got to be looked at not just from, are they meeting the physical standard, but are those evaluating them fairly evaluating them?” [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz & Mark D. Faram | August 16, 2017 ++]

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## **USS Hue City (CG-66) ► Chiefs Mess Meltdown**

The decimation of the Hue City chiefs mess began back in February when scores of sailors trundled off the cruiser in the Lithuanian port town of Klaipeda, ready to blow off some steam. That night would culminate in a drunk chief sonar technician, or STGC, having sex with a junior sailor in a senior chief’s hotel room.

The indiscretion would simmer among the crew for months before eventually torpedoing the careers of the STGC and four other chiefs who were accused of failing to report the fraternization. Now, two of the accused chiefs are pushing back against the charges of failure to report, claiming to have had no knowledge of fraternization and insisting that their expulsion from the ship — and possibly the Navy — stemmed from a caustic mix of command reprisal and racist favoritism.

But back in early February, the visit to Lithuania started like many other port calls: A senior chief got himself a hotel room and took a welcome break from the cruiser’s close quarters. He invited the STGC and three other chiefs over to hang out before the khakis made their way to a nearby Irish pub. Bottom of Form

Surrounded by other sailors, the STGC got drunk and chatted up a female petty officer second class. “The topic of having sex came up,” the STGC later recalled in an official statement. “We talked a little bit more and I stated that I had access to a room and we can go there.” The female sailor said in a statement that it seemed like no big deal. “He assured me that everything was going to be cool,” the E-5 said. It turned out to be anything but.

The Lithuanian sexcapade between the STGC and the younger enlisted sailor ensnared the majority of seven Hue City chiefs disciplined this spring in a sprawling, ship-wide scandal that took out roughly a quarter of the ship’s chiefs mess, according to records obtained by Navy Times. A sixth chief was disciplined for having sex with the same female E-5 sailor on a separate occasion, and the seventh was busted in April on charges of drunk and disorderly and disrespecting an officer, according to Navy officials and records. The details of the Lithuanian port call came to light after two of the chiefs punished for failing to report fraternization — a senior chief and chief boatswain’s mate, or BMC — provided Navy Times with captain’s mast transcripts, statements and other documents. They offer for the first time a look into the Hue City’s chiefs mess meltdown, and how the command responded.

At least five of the punished chiefs, including the senior chief and the BMC, face administrative separation from the Navy in connection to the misconduct, according to separation notices dated in May and June. The senior chief and BMC have opted to go in front of an administrative separation board. Naval Surface Force Atlantic officials would not confirm the details that led to the punishments, nor would they identify the chiefs. The Navy generally declines to disclose the names of sailors who face non-judicial punishment, such as captain’s mast hearings.

The senior chief and the BMC requested anonymity due to the ongoing nature of their proceedings. The senior chief came to the Hue City in September, and said he witnessed a sloppy culture built on favoritism and racism. The Lithuanian hookup, he said, spoke to the ship climate the STGC came from. The E-5 who slept with the STGC in Lithuania said in an official statement that she did not realize she had done anything wrong because “no one else got in trouble for dating and being with a khaki.” “It’s not enforced on board,” she said of the Navy-wide rules prohibiting fraternization. “People would get capped for sleeping with higher ups; people received better evaluations based on the relationships on board. Been on board going on five years and I was under the impression that it was fine as long as it didn’t disturbed (sic) the work environment.”

### **ONE NIGHT IN KLAIPEDA**

The rendezvous was low-key by design. The STGC, who Navy records show enlisted about 19 years ago, was discreet when he asked his friend — the senior chief — for his room key. “I told him that I left something in his room and that I needed to go get it,” the STGC said. The senior handed over the key and the STGC took the junior sailor to the hotel room to have sex before returning to the bar, according to the chief’s statement. The woman wrote in her statement that she was upset with herself for going with him. “I allowed the alcohol and his words to entice me,” she said. After the STGC returned to the pub, he went with the senior chief, the BMC and two other chiefs back to the hotel. At this point, the accounts of the command and the accused chiefs differ. Hue City skipper Capt. Daniel Gillen would accuse the senior chief, the BMC and the two other chiefs of having heard — and failed to report — the STGC discuss the tryst as they hung out in the senior chief’s hotel room. The senior chief and the BMC remained adamant they heard no such thing.

### **“I AIN’T PUTTING MY ANCHORS ON THE LINE FOR ANYBODY”**

Soon, the Hue City sailors, some surely a bit bleary eyed and lighter in the wallet after Klaipeda, got underway again. People began to talk, according to the E-5’s statement. One sailor mentioned seeing her and the STGC walk back into the Lithuanian pub directly behind each other that night. The STGC “would call and see if anybody had said anything to me and telling me to keep my mouth shut,” the junior sailor said. Scuttlebutt was creeping into the chiefs mess as well, according to the BMC and the senior chief. During a late-February chiefs mess meeting, the BMC said a senior chief gas turbine system technician, or GSCS, and the chief master-at-arms, or MAC, alluded to sex between chiefs and junior sailors. The GSCS suddenly became blunt. “If you’re (expletive) junior sailors you better stop, because I ain’t putting my anchors on the line for anybody,” the GSCS said, according to the BMC’s later appeal of the captain’s mast verdict.

The MAC stood behind the GSCS, yelling, “you guys are fraternizing and y’all need to start chieffing!” The BMC and senior chief said they were shocked. “Everybody gets the big eyes,” the BMC recalled. “What the hell’s going on?” The senior chief pressed the GSCS to not “sit on that,” and tell the mess who was fraternizing so they could correct the situation. The GSCS leveled a knife hand at the STGC who had sex with the E-5 sailor in the hotel room, then turned to the senior chief and asked why he didn’t stop it, according to the BMC’s appeal. “Who are you talking about so we can handle it!” the senior yelled, according to the BMC’s appeal. “Stop talking in riddles and just say it!” The GSCS said it was “a clean slate, starting today,” according to the BMC, and told the mess he was tired of junior sailors telling him the chiefs are dirty. “Like I said, if you done something, you ain’t got (expletive) to worry about moving forward,” the BMC recalled the GSCS saying. “I don’t want to hear nothing about it.” The GSCS and MAC could not be reached for comment.

Another issue that arose in the chiefs mess that day concerned an Inspector General’s investigation into the Hue City’s command. At one point, the GSCS walked over to the ship’s top enlisted sailor, Command Master Chief Teri Zehnacker, and accused the senior chief of submitting recent Inspector General complaints about the Hue City’s command. The GSCS was also the ship’s command managed equal opportunity manager, or CMEQ, the senior chief and BMC said in an interview. “Instead of saying, ‘Hey CMEQ, that’s protected communications, you can’t do that,’ (Zehnacker) teared up a little bit and said, ‘words matter,’” the senior chief alleged. The senior chief said in an interview that he was “brutally honest” about the negative assessment of Zehnacker he gave to IG officials, and

claimed he brought his concerns to Gillen about the CMEO publicizing IG-related statements in the chiefs mess, but the ship's commanding officer brushed them off.

After that, the senior chief said, he started to be treated differently. The Navy declined to make Gillen nor Zehnacker available for comment. Gillen denied those allegations in a later rebuttal to the senior chief's punishment appeal, writing that Zehnacker "was never shown the IG complaints and the Preliminary Investigations that I ordered afterwards. "The CMC, XO and I fully respect the IG process and its confidentiality," Gillen wrote. "The NJP was imposed based on the fact that (the senior chief) had knowledge of the fraternization offense and didn't report it."

#### **"I WAS NOT IN THE RIGHT STATE OF MIND"**

Weeks later on 19 APR, the Hue City was steaming along when an anonymous tip appeared in the CO's suggestion box urging him to investigate sexual contact between chiefs and the E-5, according to Navy records. That same day, the STGC admitted to sleeping with the junior sailor in Lithuania, and said he told his liberty buddies about the incident that night. But the senior chief and BMC contended they were not the STGC's liberty buddies, and that they heard nothing about the Lithuania hookup. Nevertheless, the command alleged that the senior chief, the BMC and two other chiefs were all in the senior chief's hotel room that night after leaving the pub, and that the STGC told them all about the sex.

Records show the BMC and senior chief's department heads came to their defense on a chain of command comments and recommendations form. "He has always provided essential guidance to subordinates whether good or bad to include reporting unacceptable behavior of others," the department head wrote on the BMC's form. The senior chief's department head recommended against any discipline.

"He would never shield anyone from a UCMJ violation as he is a professional who expects that same mentality from all he leads," the department head wrote. An executive officer inquiry, or XO, was held on April 23 to determine whether charges should proceed. The STGC told the XO that he did not tell the senior chief that he was going to go have sex with the E-5 when he asked to borrow the hotel key that night, according to the hearing's transcript. The BMC said he had gotten his own room that night, and would later write in his appeal that he didn't even see several of the accused.

Captain's mast hearings were held the next day. A chief electrician's mate, or EMC, who was in the senior chief's hotel room and was charged for failing to report, said he heard the STGC discuss the encounter. He also placed the three other chiefs in the room. "I'm sorry that I did not tell anyone about the incident after it happened," the EMC said in the transcript. The EMC could not be reached for comment.

A damage controlman, or DCC, who was also in the room, told the CO he heard the STGC say the junior sailor had been in the hotel room. "Everyone looked up and looked surprised," he said at the XO. Despite the aforementioned revelation, the DCC said he didn't hear anything sexual discussed. "Why didn't you ask why she was in the room?" Gillen asked at the mast. "You're a chief. You are supposed to have a questioning attitude." "I don't know, sir," the DCC answered. "I was not in the right state of mind." The DCC also could not be reached for comment.

During his hearing, the BMC called several chiefs as witnesses. He called them to testify that, the night before, the EMC had emotionally apologized to the other chiefs for failing to report the fraternization earlier.

During that act of contrition, the EMC mentioned that the GSCS and MAC — the two who sounded off about fraternization after the ship left Lithuania — knew about the STGC's indiscretion beforehand, the BMC alleged. Two chiefs backed up the BMC and testified they heard the EMC say as much the night before. Four chiefs testified they heard no such thing from the EMC the previous night, according to the hearing's transcript. Gillen later wrote in his rebuttal to the BMC's punishment appeal that he would direct an investigation into whether the GSCS and MAC had known about the incident. SURFLANT spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Myers Vasquez said last month he was not aware of any other investigations regarding the Lithuania incident.

The BMC maintained his innocence during his hearing and later said in his appeal that the EMC was drunk and in and out of consciousness at that point in the night. The BMC also claimed in his appeal that the STGC said at his



XOI that he never told the BMC about the sex that night, and that the command master chief and weapons department chain of command were present for that testimony, yet none of them brought that up during his proceeding. “If something was mentioned, I did not hear it,” he said at his mast. “I don’t know how to prove to you that I did not know about the incident.” He wrote in his appeal that he believed his punishment stemmed from him not sweeping several sexual harassment and assault allegations under the rug.

The senior chief said he asked to call the STGC during his hearing to testify that he never told the senior about the encounter that night. The transcript states the senior chief did not call any witnesses — a claim he disputes. A disclaimer at the top of the transcript notes that it is not a verbatim account and is limited to “the important details.” The transcript does show the senior mentioning that the STGC’s testimony would exonerate him. “If I could have (the STGC) here, he would have say (sic) that he did not say anything to me that night,” the senior said in his final statement. Gillen confirmed that notion in his rebuttal to the senior chief’s later appeal. “I did not take his final statement as a request to have (the STGC) testify for him,” Gillen wrote. “They didn’t prove I knew anything,” the senior said in an interview. “The guy who committed the fraternization said I didn’t do anything.”

The STGC said in his initial statement that he had told his liberty buddies about the tryst. Both the senior chief and the BMC requested copies of the liberty logs in order to show they were not the STGC’s liberty buddies. But Gillen wrote in his appeal rebuttals that the liberty logs could not be found and were irrelevant. He said the EMC who confessed “adamantly stated” that all the accused chiefs were there, and that the EMC “was very open and upset about the incident.” The EMC was the maintenance and material management, or 3M, coordinator on the ship, Gillen wrote, “and has a retirement date of Aug. 31, 2017.” “I have observed the (EMC’s) passion in regards to the 3M Program management and holding Chiefs accountable for proper maintenance,” Gillen wrote.

The EMC received a verbal admonishment at his captain’s mast. In doling out punishments to the rest, Gillen did not differentiate between the fraternizer and those who failed to report it. The STGC, the senior chief, the BMC and the DCC each received a punitive letter of reprimand and were later served with a notice of administrative separation. The senior chief and BMC questioned why they received the same punishment as those committing the act, but Vasquez, the SURFLANT spokesman, defended Gillen’s move. “Ours is an environment where there can be no distinction between types of misconduct,” he said in an email. “Whether actively engaging in misconduct or failing to report or correct it —both are degradations to our Navy team.”

### **AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE**

The senior chief and BMC, who are black, said their punishments reflect prejudice in the ship’s command. The senior chief said the “southern pride Navy,” or “Mayport mafia,” a nickname based on the Hue City’s Mayport, Fla. home, punishes black sailors more harshly. They alleged that another chief — a white male — was busted in April for drunk and disorderly and found frolicking in the surf with a junior sailor by the command master chief during a port call in Seychelles. The white sailor was merely given a letter of reprimand before being allowed to put in for retirement, they said. Navy officials declined to discuss that case’s specifics.

While allegations swirl and accounts of what happened on the Hue City differ, one thing that remains clear is the senior and the BMC have much to lose if separated from the service. The senior chief will hit 20 years in November, while the BMC is nearly at the 17-year mark. The men each have several Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medals and other decorations that speak to a successful career, according to records.

The tempestuous nature of the situation — and what was at stake — hit the BMC a few days after his captain’s mast as he stood in the Hue City hangar bay waiting to be flown into an uncertain future.

As he was readying to board a helicopter, a legalman ran up and handed him a piece of paper. It was a good conduct award, dated just days before the Lithuanian port call that changed everything. “I heard that helo,” the BMC said. “I can’t believe I’m about to be forced to leave this ship...I’m with dudes who slept with junior sailors and

went skinny dipping with junior sailors, and I've just done my job.” [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | 14 August 1, 2017 ++]

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## **PPV Lease Renters Insurance ► Navy Removes Requirement**

Privatized housing companies won't have to include renters insurance in lease agreements for sailors, the Navy announced 14 AUG, joining the other services in removing the requirement. This change will be implemented within six months, the service announced; the delay gives sailors time to find insurance policies that meet their needs, officials said. Sailors in existing Public Private Venture leases will remain covered by the insurance provided by their PPV company until their lease expires. Renters insurance averages about \$15 to \$30 a month. While it's no longer a required part of the lease, it does protect tenants in the event of fire, theft or other loss in which the landlord is not responsible for replacing tenant property.

“This change will provide equality among all sailors — those renting on the economy and within PPV housing,” Navy Installations Command Housing Director Greg Wright said in the announcement. The Navy is the last of the service branches to adopt this policy. The Army and Air Force adopted it in early 2015, shortly after the Defense Department announced a policy change that eliminated the renters insurance component from the calculation that determines Basic Allowance for Housing rates. That move followed reductions in BAH rates, which were approved by Congress. The Marine Corps removed its renters insurance policy requirement in June 2016. [Source: NavyTimes | Karen Jowers | August 15, 2017 ++]

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## **USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) Update 04 ► Disciplinary Action Planned**

The Navy plans to discipline up to a dozen Fitzgerald sailors, including the commanding officer, in connection to the destroyer's fatal June collision with a commercial ship that led to the drowning of seven sailors in their berthing. In addition to Cmdr. Bryce Benson, the CO who was injured when the ACX Crystal struck the ship on 17 JUN, the executive officer, Cmdr. Sean M. Babbitt, and Command Master Chief Brice A. Baldwin will also undergo non-judicial punishment this week, Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Bill Moran said 17 AUG. The command triad will be detached from the Fitzgerald once the disciplinary proceedings are finished, Moran said.

Moran discussed the disciplinary measures Thursday after the release of a 41-page investigation into the crew's harrowing response to the catastrophe. The report does not offer any details about the events leading up to the collision, which have not been made public, Benson was trapped in his quarters after the Crystal struck the Fitz's starboard side, and he was found hanging from the side of the ship, according to a Navy report released 17 AUG. He was relieved of command earlier this summer. Navy officials said at the time that the relief was so that Benson could recover from his injuries.

Seventh Fleet head Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin has completed NJP proceedings for one Fitz sailor this week and is expected to conduct similar proceedings for the others on 18 AUG in Japan, Moran said. Moran declined to say whether the triad will face administrative separation from the Navy. Other sailors slated to be disciplined include “people that were on watch that night,” he said. Moran said “the bridge lost situational awareness” before the Crystal struck the destroyer at about 1:30 a.m. local time off the coast of Japan. The rate of closure and lack of maneuver space meant there was “not enough time nor room” to avoid a collision, he said. Moran declined to say whether any alarm sounded before the collision. A timeline of events in the line of duty report released 17 AUG makes no mention of any pre-collision alarm, but states that the Fitzgerald sounded “a collision alarm for two seconds” two minutes after impact.

The Navy generally does not disclose the identifies of those who undergo non-judicial punishment. Other Navy investigations regarding who was at fault in the collision remain ongoing, and Moran declined to discuss the details. He said that disciplining Fitzgerald sailors does not indicate the destroyer’s crew was solely at fault. “We don’t know yet whether the Fitzgerald is fully responsible for the mishap,” he said. “But we know mistakes were made.” More disciplinary actions could come about as investigations continue, Moran said. The portions of a line of duty investigation released Thursday are generally used to determine what happened for the sake of survivor’s benefits.

The Navy has completed its safety investigation into the fatal collision. The sea service’s third investigation into the incident involves which parties were at fault, as well as any potential monetary settlements, Moran said. “It is not over,” he said. “We’ve got a ways to go.” Moran said Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson would fully explain what happened after the investigations are completed. He estimated that such a public explanation would come “weeks from now.” Benson took command of the Fitzgerald less than a month before the fatal incident. Babbitt came aboard in March, while Baldwin had been on the Fitzgerald since 2014, according to Navy records. The seven sailors killed onboard the guided-missile destroyer Fitzgerald have been honored with posthumous advancements, the chief of naval personnel announced. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | August 17, 2017 ++]

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## **USS John S. McCain (DDG-56) ► Named for McCain's Dad, Grandfather**

The U.S. warship involved in a collision off Singapore has a name many Americans recognize — but not for its father-and-son namesakes. Most know Sen. John S. McCain III, the Vietnam War hero who ran for president in 2000 and 2008. But it was his father and grandfather — both naval commanders who served during World War II — who inspired the naming of the 154-meter (505-foot) guided-missile destroyer. Sen. McCain himself had reached the rank of captain in a decorated military career marked by extensive injuries from torture and more than five years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam. He turned to politics after his release in 1973. Both his father and grandfather retired at the highest level of admiral — the first father-son duo to achieve four-star rank.



In this July 14, 1961, file photo, then-Lt. John S. McCain III, left, and his parents, Rear Adm. John S. McCain Jr. and Roberta Wright McCain take part in the ceremony to commission McCain Field, the U.S. Navy training base in Meridian, Miss., named in honor of Adm. John S. McCain, pictured in a photo above, respectively, grandfather and father to the two McCains. (AP)

McCain Sr., who went by his middle name of Sidney, was the first of the family to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. His decades-long career included World War II command posts in the Pacific. He was on the deck of the ship aboard which Japan signed the instruments of surrender in August 1945 as a crowd of sailors looked on. His son, McCain Jr., known as “Jack,” fought in the war with the Navy’s submarine fleet. He commanded U.S. forces in the Pacific during the Vietnam War before he retired in 1972.

The warship named after the admirals was commissioned in 1994 and is stationed with the Navy’s 7th Fleet in the Pacific. Its crest includes an Oriental dragon, a reference to good fortune, bravery and a readiness “to strike quickly with deadly accuracy, recalling the McCain family’s participation in support of the Pacific theater in World War II,” according to the U.S. Navy website. Sailors sometimes refer to the ship as “Big Bad John.” But a 1994 tribute by the Arizona senator’s younger brother, Joe, notes that the McCain military commitment goes beyond the urgency of war: “The two McCains — John Sidney, Sr., and John Sidney, Jr. — served both in the clamor of battle and the long days of keeping the peace. They sacrificed just as the crews of this ship will sacrifice, in peace and war. For that is the lot, and the privilege of the sailor. To serve.” [Source: The Associated Press | Katy Daigle | August 21, 2017 ++]

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## **USS John S. McCain (DDG-56) Update 01 ► Strait of Malacca Collision**

On 21 AUG the guided-missile destroyer USS John S. McCain was involved in a collision with the Liberian-flagged tanker Alnic MC while underway east of Singapore and the Strait of Malacca, according to officials with U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs. There were ten sailors missing and five injured, officials initially said. The collision was reported at 6:24 a.m. Japan Standard Time, while the ship was transiting to a routine port visit in Singapore. Initial reports indicated she sustained damage to her port side aft.

The extent of damage and personnel injuries is being determined. The 600 ft 30,040 GT Alnic MC resumed her journey to the Raffles Reserved Anchorage in Singapore. Early reports suggested that she had sustained damage to a valve, and was carrying nearly 12,000 metric tons of oil from Taiwan to Singapore. Search and rescue efforts were initiated in coordination with local authorities. In addition to tug boats out of Singapore, the Republic of Singapore Navy ship RSS Gallant (97), RSN helicopters and Police Coast Guard vessel Basking Shark (55) were in the area to render assistance, according to the U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs. An Emergency Family Assistance Center was established for family members. The phone numbers are (315) 243-1728 for on base and 011-81-46-816-1728 for international calls.



After the collision, the McCain headed to port under its own power. The other ship, the Alnic MC, is a 600-foot oil and chemical tanker with a gross tonnage of 30,000. The tanker is about three times the size of the McCain, the Navy Times reported. Declaring that “this trend needs more forceful action,” Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson on 21 AUG called for a global fleet-wide operational pause in order to understand the causes of the service’s spate of fatal at-sea collisions this year. “I want our fleet commanders to get together with their leaders and their commands to ensure we’re taking all appropriate and immediate actions to ensure safe and effective operations

around the world,” Richardson said in a video released Monday morning. The review will assess “the contributing factors, the root causes of these incidents,” he said.

Also on 21 AUG U.S. Navy and Marine Divers found human remains inside sealed sections of the damaged hull of the USS John S McCain, which is moored at Singapore's Changi Naval Base. In addition they are working to identify a body found by the Malaysian navy about eight nautical miles northwest of the collision site. Photos posted on the Twitter account of a Malaysian navy frigate on Wednesday showed crew carrying what appeared to be a body to a U.S. Navy helicopter. To date no additional information has been released on that body other than it was not one of McCain's crew.

On 22 AUG the Navy said it had removed Seventh Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Joseph Aucoin after a series of collisions involving its warships in Asia. Aucoin was due to step down next month, with Sawyer, a submariner by trade, already slated to succeed him. The Seventh Fleet, headquartered in Japan, operates as many as 70 ships, including the U.S. Navy's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier, and has around 140 aircraft and 20,000 sailors. It operates over an area of 124 million square km (48 million square miles) from bases in Japan, South Korea and Singapore. An official Chinese newspaper said on 21 AUG the U.S. navy's latest collision shows it is becoming an increasing risk to shipping in Asia despite its claims of helping to protect freedom of navigation.

On 24 AUG the Navy announced the end of search-and-rescue efforts that totaled 80 hours and a 2,100 square-mile area east of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. Between 24 and 27 AUG, Navy and Marine divers recovered all 10 sailors that were missing in the two berthing areas that were flooded. The bodies of the below are due to return to the U.S. in a dignified transfer ceremony at Dover Air Force Base sometime this week, USNI News understands.

- ET3 Dustin Louis Doyon, of Connecticut.
- ET3 Kenneth A. Smith, 22 of New Jersey
- ET1 Charles Nathan Findley, 31, from Missouri
- IC1 Abraham Lopez, 39, from Texas
- ET2 Kevin Sayer Bushell, 26, from Maryland
- ET2 Jacob Daniel Drake, 21, from Ohio
- IT2 Timothy Thomas Eckels Jr., 23, from Maryland
- IT2 Corey George Ingram, 28, from New York
- ET3 John Henry Hoagland III, 20, from Texas
- IC3 Logan Stephen Palmer, 23, from Illinois

While in Singapore, sailors and Marines aboard America provided initial support for the McCain crew to include berthing for 155 Sailors, daily supplies, counseling, medical/dental services and communications network support. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | August 21, 2017 ++]

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## **Drones | Aerial Update 02 ► Cheap One Gets Past Best British Navy Defenses**

In an unusual but disturbing security breach, an amateur drone enthusiast skirted past armed patrol boats to land a small unmanned aircraft aboard the deck of the Royal Navy's newly-commissioned aircraft carrier, the HMS Queen Elizabeth, according to the [The Telegraph](#). The ship was docked at a presumably secure port in Invergordon, Scotland. The fact that the drone triggered no security alarms — and that security officers there waved at the drone — prompted concern among military and security experts. Alan West, a former First Sea Lord, the United Kingdom's equivalent of the U.S. Navy's chief of naval operations, told the Daily Mail that it was worrisome that a drone could reach the aircraft carrier since terrorist groups like the Islamic State have been using drones to drop

bombs in Iraq and Syria. The unidentified drone operator told the Telegraph, “I was amazed that I was able to land on the aircraft carrier for two reasons, the first being that there was no one about to prevent it from landing although there were security police around in small boats who were waving at the drone.” It is at least the fourth collision by a U.S. Navy warship with another vessel in the past year and two days, after the destroyer Fitzgerald on June 17, the cruiser Lake Champlain on May 9, and the ballistic missile submarine Louisiana on Aug. 19, 2016.



**Britain's new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth**

[Source: NavyTimes | Mackenzie Wolf | August 17, 2017 ++]

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## **Drones | Aerial Update 03 ► Being Prepped for Missile Defense**

Teams of modified MQ-9 Reaper drones are being prepped to keep airborne eyes on North Korea, ready to track missile launches and feed crucial data to Navy interceptor warships far offshore, the drones’ maker says.

A June 2016 missile defense drill called Pacific Dragon, which brought together the militaries of Japan, the U.S., and South Korea, showed that a pair of modified MQ-9 Reaper drones could effectively track a ballistic missile. The successful tracking was due in part to special Multi-Spectral Targeting System C sensors from Raytheon aboard the drones. Their electro-optical infrared sensors can detect the heat of a missile as it enters its boost phase. A pair of these modified drones can triangulate on the plume to obtain 3D targeting data, helping interceptor ships draw a better bead on the flying missiles.

Now General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, which makes the Reaper, is working to improve its ability to contribute to missile defense. “Let’s just say that within the next few years, there’s lots of improvements in the tracking capability. The accuracy in the early part of the boost phase that this provides is game-changing,” company president David Alexander told reporters last week at the company’s headquarters here. “If I say any more, I might get into trouble.” The U.S. Missile Defense Agency is looking to do more testing in coming years, according to a separate source familiar with the matter. MDA wants to reduce to one the number of Reapers needed to track enemy launches, likely by adding a tracking laser to keep tabs on the soaring missile, the source said.

Further into the future, Alexander said that the company’s large, jet-powered Predator C “Avenger” drone could add a layer of surveillance and targeting data to North Korea — or anywhere else the military might want one. Originally designed for the U.S. Navy’s aborted Unmanned Carrier-Launched Airborne Surveillance and Strike, or UCLASS program, the Avenger and its 3,000-pound-capacity weapons bay could loft the massive, much longer-



ranged 1 MS-177A sensor package (the MS stands for multi-spectral) from United Technologies. “That would be a sensor so big you couldn’t really put it on an MQ-9,” Alexander said.

Competitor Northrop Grumman is using the MS-177 in its \$222.7 million Global Hawk drone for the Air Force. Alexander said a Predator C, equipped for an MS-177 and priced at between \$12 million to \$15 million, might be able to do a similar job. And in the future, a similar long-range sensor with “very large aperture, so if you wanted to fly this airplane along the border of someone else’s country and look deep in,” said Alexander [Source: Defense One | Patrick Tucker | August 22, 2017 ++]

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## **Military Hydrogen Production ► Researchers Find New Method**

Researchers are hoping the discovery of a new energy source will shed troops of heavy batteries and allow them to complete their missions without having to resupply. Engineers and scientists at the Army Research Laboratory found a way for water to react with an aluminum alloy powder that produces hydrogen without any other catalysts in under three minutes. While the reaction and production of hydrogen isn’t new, the aluminum nanomaterial the researchers designed causes water to split apart — into two hydrogen molecules and one oxygen molecule — when it comes in contact with the aluminum material. “We have discovered an aluminum alloy powder, which when added to water, produces hydrogen very rapidly,” Dr. Anit Giri, a physicist at the Aberdeen Proving Ground lab in Maryland, told Army Times.

Normally, when aluminum is exposed to air, it forms an oxide layer that impedes the reaction that creates hydrogen, Giri said. The trick is to break that layer to keep the reaction going by adding an alkaline material such as sodium hydroxide. “Our material does not need any of those added catalysts,” Giri said. “Whenever we want to produce hydrogen, we can just add water to this powder.” The hydrogen can be used in a fuel cell to potentially power equipment and vehicles and recharge devices, said Scott Grendahl, a materials engineer and team leader. “If we could generate power on each individual soldier ... we would be far better off as a fighting force,” he said.



**In a demonstration, Army researcher Anthony J. Roberts powers a radio-controlled toy tank with hydrogen harvested from a unique chemical reaction. Scientists and engineers have found a way to split hydrogen and oxygen quickly and without a catalyst, resulting in high amounts of energy.**

If troops in the field don’t have to worry about carrying batteries around or waiting for a resupply, they can extend their away times, said Dr. Kris Darling, a nanomaterials scientist. There’s also the potential for the reaction to occur even without pure water, he said. For example, a soldier could use a sport drink or rainwater — and possibly even urine or sweat — to add to the powder and create hydrogen. The same can be done to make the aluminum alloy powder. Instead of needing pure aluminum, troops could scavenge a damaged vehicle for the

material. “Essentially, you wouldn’t have to bring anything in except for the equipment to make the powder,” Darling said.

The team is still researching its applications, but they recently powered a small radio-controlled tank. Mixing the powder with a small amount of water caused a bubbling reaction, which produced enough hydrogen to power the tank around the lab. Hydrogen is part of the big push for alternative energy, Grendahl said, and this new reaction would make it easier to transport and use. The military currently uses Jet Propellant 8, or JP-8, which can fuel aircraft, tanks and other devices. It’s expensive and must be taken into the field in bladders. The aluminum alloy powder, however, can safely be airdropped in sealed pouches. The discovery could also make troops safer. Fuel convoys have been a major target in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Grendahl said, but “if we’re carting around aluminum, it’s not explosive. It’s not a target like JP-8 would be.”

The fears that have normally surrounded hydrogen — think Hindenburg — don’t apply to the team’s discovery because the hydrogen wouldn’t hang around long enough to cause an explosion, Grendahl said. “We would just be transporting the powder around along with the fuel cell,” he said. “There would be no need to have compressed or liquefied hydrogen all over the place, and if it’s used as soon as it’s created, then there’s never enough of it to become explosive.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Charlsy Panzino | August 20, 2017 ++]

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### **USNS Lewis B. Puller (T-ESB 3) ► Commissioned | 1st in Its Class**

Chesty Puller is back at the center of the action. The U.S. Navy recently commissioned a first-in-its-class Expeditionary Sea Base to be named after the most storied Marine in the Corps’ history. The Puller will provide a floating staging base for U.S. operations in the Central Command Region, an asset that is uniquely suited to facilitate special operations missions. The ship became the first U.S. vessel to be commissioned outside of the United States on 17 AUG during a ceremony in Bahrain. The ship was previously designated as a USNS, or United States Naval Service civilian-crewed ship. Now a warship, it will replace the amphibious assault dock Ponce.

The Ponce, originally designed as an amphibious assault ship, has provided similar afloat staging base capabilities during the past several years. But the Puller is the first ship built specifically for this mission. The Puller has the third-largest flight deck in the Navy — after aircraft carriers and amphibious assault ships — from which four CH-53 helicopters or MV-22s can operate at a time. It can also launch small boats or unmanned surface vehicles from its mission deck, and has a unique modular design so it can be reconfigured with various 20-foot containers to “support any mission you like,” said Capt. Adan Cruz, the commander of the ship.



The ship has an unusual look: In addition to the empty space available for containers, there are no sides between the mission deck and flight deck. And though it will replace a ship that has been operating in the region for about five years, it has different capabilities. The Puller is designed to support amphibious operations, special operations and mine countermeasure operations, and will fall under the command of Brig. Gen. Francis Donovan, commander of Naval Amphibious Force Task Force 51/5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, known as 51/5. “It’s a force enabler,” Donovan said. “It complements and enhances our capability.”

Donovan’s unit is an integrated Navy-Marine Corps staff based in Bahrain with responsibility for crisis response in the Central Command area, including command and control of the region’s Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force and any Amphibious Readiness Group-Marine Expeditionary Unit operating in the region. The Puller “gives us more options,” he said, because of the large flight deck, the ability to perform maintenance, and the ability to house about 150 Marines and sailors. “On a day-to-day basis, our forces, between our shore-based MAGTF, which is the SPMAGTF, and our sea-based MAGTF, which is the ARG-MEU, they’re distributed across the CENTCOM region. So as we look every day at potential crisis points, it’s like a game of chess,” Donovan said. Now, he said, the unit can send the Puller to additional locations with the necessary assets— whether that’s to be first to the scene of a crisis or arrive later with additional troops and capabilities. “It gives us more flexibility, more freedom, more adaptability, and really at the end of the day, the most important: more ability to project power ashore,” Donovan said.

The ship is technically home ported in Norfolk, Virginia, but will be forward deployed to CENTCOM indefinitely, to support operations in the region. “Often we talk about ... military forces being able to enhance peace and stability in the region. Here we have to be very honest: We have four active conflicts going on in this region,” said Vice Adm. Kevin Donegan, commander of the Navy’s 5th Fleet. Because of the changing nature of warfare and the constant state of flux in the area, the Navy built “tremendous growth potential” into the ship, allowing it to “really expand on what she does, in support of amphibious missions, in support of naval missions, in support of reconnaissance missions, and in support of special operations forces,” Donegan said.

The Ponce was limited by the way it was constructed, so that when the Navy “put the first directed energy laser system ever deployed on a ship” aboard the Ponce, “we had to take something off to do that,” Donegan said. “It’s not going to be the case here.” During the brief indoor commissioning ceremony aboard the ship, Lt. Gen. William Beydler, commander of Marine Corps Forces Central Command, noted that the ship’s namesake served 26 of his 37 years in the Marine Corps away from home — mainly in the Pacific. “I would argue that if he lived in our era, he would have spent the majority of time in this region, in the Middle East, in the CENTCOM AOR, because that’s where the fight has been, that’s where the fight is, and that’s where the fight will be in the near time,” he said. Puller’s strength was “being deployed overseas in the points of friction for the nation when it called,” Donovan said. “And that’s what we intend to do also. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Jennifer Hlad | August 21, 2017 ++]

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## **B-52's Update 03 ► 18 Things About the Stratofortress**

It's big. It's ugly. And it's one of the most adaptable aircraft flown in the past 60 years.

- 1) The B-52's first flight was April 15, 1952 - over 63 years ago.
- 2) The B-52 was designed to carry nuclear weapons during the Cold War, but it has only carried conventional ordnance in combat.
- 3) There were huge leaps in aviation happening when the B-52 was being designed, and it went through 6 major redesigns during the 5 year design period.
- 4) A B-52A was used to carry the North American X-15. The X-15 achieved the record for fastest manned powered aircraft, with a speed of Mach 6.72.

- 5) There have been 744 B-52s built, but currently there are only 85 in active service, with 9 in reserve.
- 6) The B-52 can carry up to 70,000 pounds of ordnance, or the equivalent of 30 fully-loaded Cessna 172s.
- 7) Production ended in 1962, which means the youngest B-52 is 53 years old.
- 8) The jet has a unique ejection system; the lower deck crew eject downward.
- 9) The B-52 is expected to serve until the 2040s. That's over 90 years of service.
- 10) In 1964, a B-52 configured as a test bed to investigate structural failures flew through severe turbulence, shearing off its vertical stabilizer. The aircraft was able to continue flying, and landed safely.
- 11) The navigator and radar navigator sit in the lower deck of the aircraft. These are the two seats that eject downward.
- 12) To comply with the SALT II Treaty requirements, cruise missile-capable aircraft had to be identifiable by spy satellites. To comply, the B-52 "G" models were modified with a curved wing root fairing.
- 13) Early models had cabin temperature problems; the upper-deck would get hot, because it was heated by the sun, while the navigation crew would sit on the cold fuselage floor.
- 14) In 1961, a B-52G broke up in midair over Goldsboro, NC. Two nuclear bombs on board were dropped in the process, but didn't detonate. After the bombs were recovered, the Air Force found that five of the six stages of the arming sequence had been completed.
- 15) In 1972, B-52 tail-gunner Albert Moore shot down a MiG-21 over Vietnam. It was the last recorded bomber-gunner to shoot down an enemy aircraft.
- 16) After the Soviet Union fell in 1991, 365 B-52s were destroyed under the START treaty. The aircraft were stripped of usable parts, chopped into 5 pieces with a 13,000 pound steel blade, and sold for scrap at 12 cents per pound.



- 17) During Operation Desert Storm, B-52s delivered 40% of the weapons dropped from the air.
- 18) Currently, B-52s cost \$70,000 per flight hour to operate. And while they might be ugly, they're still a pretty amazing and adaptable aircraft.

**NOTE:** For photos related to each of the above refer to <http://www.boldmethod.com/blog/lists/2015/05/18-things-you-never-knew-about-the-b-52-stratofortress>.

[Source: Leo Miller | August 23, 2017 ++]



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## **Military Tattoo Criteria Update 10 ► Barrier to Re-Enlistment**

Time may be the biggest factor causing combat veterans to leave the Marine Corps, but there's another reason that should not be underestimated, some vets say: the Corps' tattoo policy. Brian Davenport was barred from re-enlistment in 2015 because two of his tattoos were so close together that they were considered to be one tattoo that was too big under the Marine Corps' tattoo policy at the time, he said. He and other Marines have a similar story: When the Marine Corps stopped deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan in large numbers, tattoos became a career killer for them, even if they had -combat experience. "As soon as we got back from Afghanistan and we found out we weren't going to be going back, everything just did a complete 180," Davenport told Marine Corps Times. "It was more stressing the little things: your uniform, appearances."

Davenport deployed to Afghanistan in 2012 as a machine gunner, but he felt the Marine Corps did not value his combat experience after he returned, he said. "You had leaders saying, 'We don't care that you're a combat veteran,'" he said. "I had a second lieutenant, he was brand new and he's like: 'No one cares about Afghanistan. That's over. We're moving on. There's a new Marine Corps.'" Davenport's return from Afghanistan coincided with the Marine Corps' drawdown from 202,000 to 182,000 -active-duty Marines that was driven by cuts to defense spending. On the day that Davenport found out that he could not re-enlist because of his tattoos, he went straight to an Army -recruiter, who was able to get him into the Army two days after he left the Corps, he said.

During the drawdown from 202,000 Marines a few years ago, the Corps ratcheted up its enforcement of tattoo policies. Starting in 2014, Marines were required to submit photographs of their tattoos for re-enlistment. Marine Corps Commandant Gen. -Robert Neller has explained the reason for the Corps' tattoo policy: "We are not in a rock and roll band. We are -Marines. We have a brand. People expect a -certain thing from us," he told Marine Corps Times in February 2016. Marine veterans often look to get jobs as police officers, but local, state and federal law enforcement agencies are very strict on whether applicants can have visible tattoos, Neller added.

In June 2016, the Marine Corps announced an updated tattoo policy, which allows visible tattoos to extend further on Marines' upper arms and thighs. Although some Marines would have -preferred a more lax policy, Neller certainly listened to their opinions on the matter, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Ronald Green said at the time. "He's allowed more skin area for -tattoos in an effort to balance the Marines' desires with the grooming standards of the Marine Corps," Green told Marine Corps Times. "He wanted the policy to allow Marines freedom and flexibility to express themselves, while also being clearly written and understandable for both Marines and their leadership." Neller has said that he has no plans to relax the Corps' tattoo policy further.

In the year prior to the Marine Corps' new tattoo policy being announced, only a fraction of Marines were denied re-enlistment because of their tattoos, said Maj. Garron Garn, a spokesman for Manpower & Reserve Affairs. "From June 2015 to June 2016, there were more than 14,000 re-enlistment packages submitted; of these, there were 33 that were denied due to non-compliance with previous policies and the current tattoo order," Garn told Marine Corps Times. Those Marines were also told they could remove their tattoos if they paid for the procedure, Garn added. Marines are now told what the consequences are of getting a tattoo that violates policy, such as not being allowed to re-enlist.

Still, former Gunnery Sgt. Matthew Martin said he believes the tattoo policy has unfairly ended good Marines' careers. "I've seen guys that all they wanted to do was have a career in the Marine Corps, who were cast over or re-enlistment were made very difficult because of the tattoo policy," said Martin, who left the Corps in 2013 after 15 years. Martin joined the Marine Corps in 1998 and went on to serve in Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, he said. Having experienced both war and peace, he believes the Marine Corps was more of a meritocracy during the height of the Iraq war. "Peacetime Marine Corps sucks," he said.

In 2015 Sgt. Daniel Knapp, an infantry Marine who had received two meritorious promotions, was denied re-enlistment for a tattoo on his forearm even though he had a policy waiver endorsed by his command. “When I was in Afghanistan, my tattoos never stopped me from shooting anyone, and they never made me more of a target,” Knapp told Marine Corps Times at the time. “They never stopped me from keeping Marines safe. On patrol nothing ever happened because of my tattoos.”

Officials say just as Marines are expected to meet the highest physical standards, the Corps also sets high standards for Marines’ professional military appearance. “There is a reason why Marine Corps recruiting has remained so successful throughout the years,” Green said in June 2016. “When you ask Marines why they chose the Corps, most will tell you because they wanted to be different. They wanted to be part of something better than self — they wanted to be a part of a team.” Still, the Marines are stricter than the Army, which does not limit how big or how many tattoos soldiers can get. The Navy allows sailors to get inked on their necks and behind their ears.

The tattoo policy hasn’t stopped one Marine veteran from trying to get back into the Corps for the past five years. But every recruiter he has talked to has said no because of the two sleeve tattoos he has that run the length of both arms. The veteran, who asked not to be identified, left the Corps in 2009 as a sergeant after deploying to Iraq in 2007 and 2008 as a logistics Marine. Although he has had a good life as a civilian, he misses being able to serve, he said. “The only thing that I can’t find in civilian life is being a Marine, deploying, doing that thing,” he said. “There’s nothing else to it. You can’t do that anywhere else.” [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Jeff Schogol | August 28, 2017 ++]

**\* Military History \***



## **USS Indianapolis (CA-35) Update 01 ► Wreckage Found in Philippine Sea**

Wreckage from the USS Indianapolis, which sank 72 years ago after being torpedoed during World War II, was found 5500 meters down in the Philippine Sea by the expedition crew of billionaire Paul Allen. The Indianapolis was hit by the Japanese on July 30, 1945 and sank in only 12 minutes, leading to the greatest single loss of life at sea in the Navy's history. Of 1,196 crew aboard the ship, only 317 survived. The men who didn't go down with the ship faced dehydration, saltwater poisoning and shark-infested waters. "To be able to honor the brave men of the USS Indianapolis and their families through the discovery of a ship that played such a significant role during World War II is truly humbling," Allen said in a statement.

Prior to being attacked, the Indianapolis had delivered components of one of the two nuclear weapons that were later dropped on Japan. "For more than two decades I've been working with survivors. To a man, they have longed for the day when their ship would be found, solving their final mystery," Captain William Toti, retired, spokesperson for the survivors of the USS Indianapolis told PaulAllen.com. Previous Allen-led expeditions have resulted in the discovery of the Japanese battleship Musashi and the Italian WWII destroyer Artigliere. The 16-person team on Allen's ship will continue to survey the full site and will conduct a live tour of the wreckage in the coming weeks. [Source: Fox News | August 19, 2017 ++]





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## GWOT Memorial Wall Update 02 ► Trump Signs Construction Bill

More than 15 years into the Global War on Terrorism, the U.S. president signed a bill approving the construction of a national memorial honoring those who have fought and died in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 – and those doing so today. The bill was signed at Camp David, Md., on 18 AUG, where he held weekend meetings with national security leadership to discuss the latest strategy in Afghanistan. He was flanked by his National Security team, and White House Chief of Staff Marine Gen. John Kelly, who commanded troops in Iraq and lost a son in Afghanistan.



With the fighting still going on, the legislation to create the memorial required an exception from the 1986 Commemorative Works Act requiring Congress to wait 10 years after the official end of a military conflict before considering a memorial in the nation’s capital. A similar bill proposed last year did not go through. The law authorizes the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation to oversee the fundraising, design and construction of the memorial. “Today’s historic signing is dedicated to our 3 million brothers and sisters who have deployed in the Global War on Terror, especially to the ones we have lost, and those who face great obstacles since their return home,” Andrew Brennan, founder and executive director of the foundation, said in a statement. “We’re looking forward to building a sacred place of healing and remembrance for our veterans and their families and want to thank our partners and advocated who worked tirelessly on Capitol Hill to pass this bipartisan legislation.”

Since Sept. 11, 2001, more than 2.5 million Americans are estimated to have deployed in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Department of Defense says nearly 7,000 have been killed and 52,000 have been wounded. About 20 percent of veterans returning from those conflicts struggle with post-traumatic stress, according to the release. The foundation hopes to raise \$40 to \$50 million for the privately funded memorial. It plans to seek federal approval to build it on the National Mall and to hold a national competition for its design.

The project is expected to be completed in 2024 – 10 years after Brennan, a former Army Captain who flew Black Hawks in the Afghanistan war, conceived of the project. It will go through a detailed 24-step bureaucratic process, including fund-raising, site selection and design through construction. The memorial will include six themes: endurance, sacrifice, all-volunteer, global, multicultural and unfinished. [Source: Dianna Cahn | Stars & Stripes | August 21, 2017 ++]

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## **National Guard Mobilization Update 01 ► World War I**

Over 100 years ago, on August 5, 1917, the entire National Guard was drafted into U.S. Army service for World War I. This represented the culmination of several steps declared by President Woodrow Wilson that would mobilize the National Guard into the "Great War", sending troops into Europe for the first time.

This act stands among a series of laws and military decisions in the early 20th century that resulted in the transformation of the National Guard from a traditionally local military organization into professional military force. A little over a year earlier, the National Defense Act of 1916 introduced the modern integration of National Guard Soldiers as an element of the United States Army. It required that Guard members in federal service would serve in the U.S. Army uniform and train to federal standards, in addition to other measures designed to improve readiness and efficiency.

However, the 1916 Act did not authorize the transportation of federalized National Guard troops to a foreign country. The Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Army ruled that the Guard could only be used domestically, owing to the Militia Clause of the U.S. Constitution that only allowed the National Guard in federal status to "execute the laws of the union, suppress insurrection and repel invasions." This phrase alone deemed necessary the draft action. The mobilization order of June 18, 1916, that ordered the Guard to the Mexican border represented the second milestone among the changes in national defense strategy. It demonstrated the power of the National Guard as the country's principal reserve force for the U.S. Army to be mobilized in a declared national emergency. This gradual evolution of legal precedents allowed the Army ample opportunity to make corrective action and improve the deployment process.

Heightened national security concerns earlier in 1917 allowed the National Guard's mobilization to move forward after the draft order of 5 AUG. The draft's impact was immediate. On June 30, 1917, the Regular Army consisted of 250,357 officers and enlisted men. By August 5, 1917, through means of incremental federalization of state National Guards and the draft order, 379,323 officers and enlisted men of the National Guard were drafted into the federal service. With one pen's stroke, the Operations Department within the Office of the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army more than doubled the size of the Army. The National Guard's presence proved essential to raise the significantly larger fighting force, and it added the element of experience through its training completed in the four southwest border states during 1916 - 1917.

Legal considerations remained paramount in this time of war. Statutes and laws regulated the operations of the militia from its very beginning in colonial New England. Thus, the draft order only continued the tradition of commitment to rightful principles administered under these conditions. On July 18, 1917, War Department General Order 95 established the first 16 National Guard divisions. A few weeks later after the draft order, the 42nd "Rainbow" Division mustered. From August 5th throughout the remainder of 1917, these units traveled to their respective training across the country to prepare for the voyage to Europe and the fight against the Central Powers.

The settlement of legal and administrative matters allowed the federal government to assemble and accelerate the development of a National Army, and federal priorities turned to the training and the assembly of a highly effective fighting force. The German Empire proved every bit a formidable opponent, but the presence of the National Guard and the cumulative services proved decisive for the Allies. After the war's combat phase ended on Nov. 11, 1918,

the German High Command's appraisal of American combat divisions assessed that eight divisions' effectiveness earned ratings of "superior to excellent." Among those eight, six were National Guard divisions. The Guard's highly effective success proved critical in the victory of Allied forces in their grueling months in the "War to End All Wars." [Source: TREA Washington Update | August 21, 2017 ++]

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## **H.L. Hunley** ► **Crew Mystery Deaths Solved After 153 Years**

The mystery of how the crew of one of the world's first submarines died has finally been solved - they accidentally killed themselves. The Confederate H.L. Hunley, a privateer submersible torpedo boat, sank on February 17, 1864 after torpedoing the USS Housatonic outside Charleston Harbour, South Carolina, during American Civil War. She was one of the first submarines ever to be used in conflict, and the first to sink a battleship.

It was assumed the blast had ruptured the sub, drowning its occupants, but when the Hunley was raised in 2000, salvage experts were amazed to find the eight-man crew poised as if they had been caught completely unawares by the tragedy. All were still sitting in their posts and there was no evidence that they had attempted to flee the foundering vessel. Now researchers at Duke University believe they have the answer. Three years of experiments on a mini-test sub have shown that the torpedo blast would have created a shockwave great enough to instantly rupture the blood vessels in the lungs and brains of the submariners. "This is the characteristic trauma of blast victims, they call it 'blast lung,'" Dr Rachel Lance. "You have an instant fatality that leaves no marks on the skeletal remains. Unfortunately, the soft tissues that would show us what happened have decomposed in the past hundred years."

The Hunley's torpedo was not a self-propelled bomb, but a copper keg of 135 pounds of gunpowder held ahead and slightly below the Hunley's bow on a 16-foot pole called a spar. The sub rammed this spar into the enemy ship's hull and the bomb exploded. The furthest any of the crew was from the blast was about 42 feet. The shockwave of the blast travelled about 1500 meters per second in water, and 340 m/sec in air, the researchers calculate.



**A painting (left) of the HL Hunley. The bodies of the crew were found sitting in their positions around the central crankshaft (right) which made the submarine move**

While a normal blast shockwave travelling in air should last less than 10 milliseconds, Lance calculated that the Hunley crew's lungs were subjected to 60 milliseconds or more of trauma. "That creates kind of a worst case scenario for the lungs," added Dr Lance. "Shear forces would tear apart the delicate structures where the blood supply meets the air supply, filling the lungs with blood and killing the crew instantly. "It's likely they also suffered traumatic brain injuries from being so close to such a large blast. "All the physical evidence points to the crew taking absolutely no action in response to a flood or loss of air. If anyone had survived, they may have tried to release the keel ballast weights, set the bilge pumps to pump water, or tried to get out the hatches, but none of these actions were taken."

The fate of the crew of the 40-foot Hunley remained a mystery until 1995, when the submarine was discovered about 300 meters away from the Housatonic's resting place. Raised in 2000, the submarine is currently undergoing

study and conservation in Charleston by a team of Clemson University scientists. Initially, the discovery of the submarine only seemed to deepen the mystery. The crewmen's skeletons were found still at their stations along a hand-crank that drove the cigar-shaped craft. They suffered no broken bones, the bilge pumps had not been used and the air hatches were closed. Except for a hole in one conning tower and a small window that may have been broken, the sub was remarkably intact. Speculation about their deaths has included suffocation and drowning.

The new study involved repeatedly setting blasts near a scale model, shooting authentic weapons at historically accurate iron plate and calculating human respiration and the transmission of blast energy. [Source: The Telegraph | Sarah Knapton, | August 23, 2017 ++]

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## **Abandoned Military Bases [06] ► Shivering Sands Maunsell Army Fort, England**



The Shivering Sands Army Fort (U7) was built close to the Thames inlet by the Maunsell army for anti-aircraft defense. Once comprised of interconnected structures near Herne Bay, the towers can still be seen from Shoeburyness East Beach on clear days.

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## **WWII Operation Bernard ► Nazi Counterfeiting Plan**

Operation Bernhard was an exercise by Nazi Germany to forge British bank notes. The initial plan was to drop the notes over Britain to bring about a collapse of the British economy during the Second World War. The first phase was run from early 1940 by the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) under the title Unternehmen Andreas (Operation Andreas). The unit successfully duplicated the rag paper used by the British, produced near-identical engraving blocks and broke the algorithm used to create the alpha-numeric serial code on each note. The unit closed in early 1942 after its head, Alfred Naujocks, fell out of favor with his superior officer, Reinhard Heydrich.

The operation was revived later in the year; the aim was changed to forging money to finance German intelligence operations. Instead of a specialist unit within the SD, prisoners from Nazi concentration camps were selected and sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp to work under SS Major Bernhard Krüger. The unit produced British notes until mid-1945; estimates vary of the number and value of notes printed, from £132.6 million up to £300 million. By the time the unit ceased production, they had perfected the artwork for US dollars, although



the paper and serial numbers were still being analyzed. The counterfeit money was laundered in exchange for money and other assets. Counterfeit notes from the operation were used to pay the Turkish agent Elyesa Bazna—code named Cicero—for his work in obtaining British secrets from the British ambassador in Ankara, and £100,000 from Operation Bernhard was used to obtain information that helped to free the Italian leader Benito Mussolini in the Gran Sasso raid in September 1943.



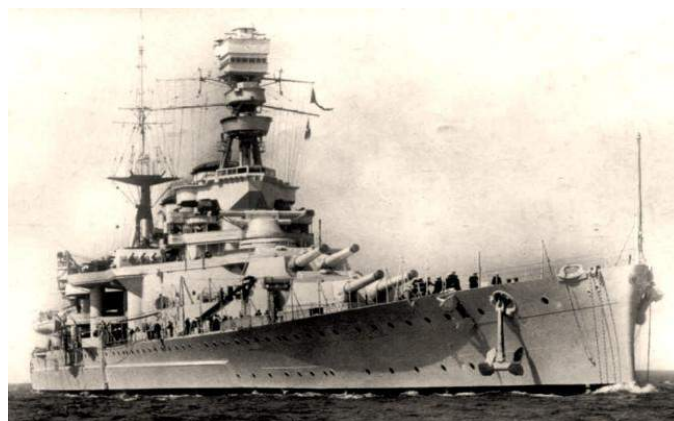
A £5 note (White fiver) forged by the Jewish Sachsenhausen concentration camp prisoners

In early 1945 the unit was moved to Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp in Austria, then to the Redl-Zipf series of tunnels and finally to Ebensee concentration camp. Because of an overly precise interpretation of a German order, the prisoners were not executed on their arrival; they were liberated shortly afterwards by the American Army. Much of the output of the unit was dumped into the Toplitz and Grundlsee lakes at the end of the war, but enough went into general circulation that the Bank of England stopped releasing new notes and issued a new design after the war. The operation has been dramatized in a comedy-drama miniseries *Private Schulz* by the BBC and in a 2007 film, *The Counterfeiters* (*Die Fälscher*). [Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Bernhard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Bernhard) | August 2017 ++]

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## Insanely Daring Air Raids ► No. 5 | Sinking of the Prince of Wales and the Repulse

Air raids were one of the military strategies that were used to attack enemies using fighter planes which would drop bombs and blow buildings apart. This task was perhaps the most dangerous and terrifying mission during the times of war. However, many brave aviators risked their lives and conducted daring raids against insane odds. Following covers one of the most daring raids to ever been conducted in history, the story behind the raids and the crews who flew the military planes.



While not many people might recall the harrowing incident of 10 December 1941, when the Prince of Wales and Repulse were sunk near Kuantan on the east coast of Malaya by Japanese torpedoes and bombs, the dreadful attack following Japanese invasion fleet north of Malaya, the British were determined to stop the invasion. The British Force Z which consisted of one battleship, one battlecruiser and four destroyers sailed towards Malaya to contain the situation. To have complete radio silence, the force's commanders decided to sail without any air support. This was a terrible mistake. Their mission did not go as planned and on their way back to Singapore, they were they were attacked in open waters by the Japanese.

Even though the British were confident in the ships' anti-aircraft defenses, the Japanese, on spotting Force Z quickly made an attack plan. With little knowledge on conducting a bombing attack on ships in the open water, the Japanese decided to launch 85 aircraft to attack the force. Their first attack using the G3M medium bombers was not successful. However, their second wave of G3Ms was carrying torpedoes yielded the fruits, and they managed to sink the ship, killing 840 British sailors. Only 18 Japanese aviators died during the attack.

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## **Military History Anniversaries** ► 01 thru 15 SEP

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 SEP**". [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | August 2017 ++]

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## **Medal of Honor Citations** ► Fournier~William Grant | WWII



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

**William G. Fournier**

**Rank and organization:** Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company M, 35th Inf., 25th Inf.Div. Reserve

**Place and date:** Mount Austen, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, 10 January 1943

**Entered service:** September 1940 in Winterport, Maine

**Born:** June 21, 1913, Norwich, Connecticut

### *Citation*

For gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty. As leader of a machinegun section charged with the protection of other battalion units, his group was attacked by a superior number of Japanese, his gunner killed, his assistant gunner wounded, and an adjoining gun crew put out of action. Ordered to withdraw from this hazardous position, Sgt. Fournier refused to retire but rushed forward to the idle gun and, with the aid of another soldier who



joined him, held up the machinegun by the tripod to increase its field action. They opened fire and inflicted heavy casualties upon the enemy. While so engaged both these gallant soldiers were killed, but their sturdy defensive was a decisive factor in the following success of the attacking battalion .



Fournier, aged 29 at his death, was buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. [Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/moh> | August 2017 ++]

### \* Health Care \*



## Prescription Filling Options Update 02 ► New Express Script Policy

Beginning Sept. 1, 2017, Express Scripts will need annual consent from patients who want to receive automatic refills of their maintenance medications enrolled in TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery. This means that just before one of your prescriptions runs out of refills, Express Scripts will reach out to you to know if you would like your doctor to be contacted to renew the prescription and if you'd like to continue in the Automatic Refill program. If not, Express Scripts will not refill your prescription. "This new process gives beneficiaries more control over their medications and keeps the convenience of automatic refills," said Amy Aldighere, Express Scripts Sr. Director – DoD Program Management. "It also makes it easier to opt out of the Auto Refill program and helps to prevent beneficiaries from receiving medications that they no longer need or shouldn't receive."

### What to Expect

When the last refill of a medication enrolled in the Automatic Refill program ships, Express Scripts will reach out to you by telephone and/or email (depending on the preference you indicated) and ask the following:

- Would you like Express Scripts to reach out to your doctor for a new prescription?
- Do you want to keep your medication enrolled in the Auto Refill program?

### How to Respond

Express Scripts will not re-enroll your medication unless they hear from you. You have several ways to respond:

- Online at [www.Express-Scripts.com/TRICARE](http://www.Express-Scripts.com/TRICARE)
- Via the automated phone call from Express Scripts
- By calling an Express Scripts Patient Care Advocate (PCA) at 1-877-363-1303

If Express Scripts does not receive your consent within 10 days of reaching out to you, they will remove your medication from the Auto Refill program. However, re-enrolling is simple. You can re-enroll your medication at any time online, or through a PCA. For more information or if you have questions, go to the Express Scripts website. <https://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE/index.shtml>. You can also call Express Scripts at 1-877-363-1303 to speak with a PCA. [Source: TRICARE Communications | August 16, 2017 ++]

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## **Military Health Care ► Mental Health Provider Concerns**

A new survey of military mental health care providers raises concerns about gaps and barriers in delivering effective treatment to service members. One key concern: The amount of time mental health providers are able to spend with their patients. Less than half of 520 providers who responded to the Rand survey reported being able to see their patients diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or major depressive disorder weekly; the remainder saw their patients biweekly or less often. The providers cited patients' difficulty in balancing their appointments and treatment schedules with their military duties, and not having enough time in their schedules to see patients as often as they would like.

The results raised questions about whether the providers are able to see these patients "with the frequency and duration that may be associated with improved outcomes," the researchers noted. While most military mental health care providers reported that they are delivering treatment that aligns with clinical practice guidelines for PTSD and major depressive disorder, there are some gaps and barriers to high-quality treatment, according to the researchers.

This Rand work was commissioned by the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury to assess the capacity of the Military Health System to deliver evidence-based care for PTSD and major depressive disorders, and to recommend areas of improvement. Over the last few years, the MHS has increased the size of its psychological health workforce by 34 percent and established training programs in evidence-based treatments.

DoD "commissioned these independent assessments to address one of our highest priorities: providing the best possible behavioral health care for service members and their families," said Dr. Dave Smith, acting assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, in a statement. "We have taken a number of steps to address the issues raised in this research, including expanding both the number of mental-health providers and training to encourage use of the most effective, evidence-based therapies. We will continue our proactive efforts to assess our performance and use that information to improve access to and the quality of our mental and behavioral health services."

Less than half of the 1,337 eligible mental health providers who are on active duty or are government civilian employees working in military treatment facilities responded to the survey. Those eligible had seen at least one patient within the previous 30 days. The survey didn't include contract psychological health providers or purchased-care providers under Tricare. The report also called for more research into whether the prescribing practices are appropriate for patients who receive multiple medications. Providers surveyed reported that 84 percent of their PTSD patients were prescribed more than one medication, and nearly one-fourth were currently prescribed four or more medications.

While most providers routinely screen their patients for PTSD (71 percent) and major depressive disorder (79 percent), just 58 percent used a validated assessment to monitor the patients' symptoms over time. Researchers recommended expanding the monitoring of treatment outcomes, and to use that information to improve quality of care. The researchers also recommended ways to maximize the effectiveness of psychotherapy training, and to reduce barriers to getting that training. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Karen Jowers | August 16, 2017 ++]

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## **TRICARE Changes Update 01 ► Upcoming Ones Which May Affect You**

The Military Health System (MHS) is modernizing TRICARE to better serve you and respond to changes in law and policy. Most provisions will go into effect on January 1, 2018, with full implementation occurring on January 1, 2019. You will find changes that may affect you at <https://tricare.mil/About/Changes> and below. TRICARE is still finalizing some policies and will update their page when additional details become available. Check back frequently. You can also sign up for Email Updates by going to [https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USMHSTMA/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=USMHSTMA\\_347](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USMHSTMA/subscriber/new?topic_id=USMHSTMA_347).

### **Health Plans**

- TRICARE Standard and TRICARE Extra will become the new TRICARE Select plan.
- TRICARE Prime and other TRICARE plans will undergo additional changes.
- TRICARE For Life (Medicare wrap-around coverage) won't change.

### **Costs**

- You may need to pay an enrollment fee, depending on your plan and when you became eligible for TRICARE.
- Some costs will change annually starting on Jan. 1, 2018.

### **Enrollment**

- You will be automatically enrolled on Jan. 1, 2018 if you already have a plan or are eligible for TRICARE on Dec. 31, 2017.
- After Jan. 1, 2018, you must enroll in a TRICARE plan to get or change coverage.

### **Stateside Regions and Contractors**

- The North and South regions will become the new East region Under the new regional contracts, the East Region is a merger of the North and South Regions and includes: Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa (Rock Island area), Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri (St. Louis area), New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas (excluding El Paso area), Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin..
- The West region Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa (excludes Rock Island arsenal area), Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri (except St. Louis area), Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas (southwestern corner including El Paso), Utah, Washington and Wyoming. will remain the same.
- Your regional contractors may change.

### **Accessing Care**

- Certain urgent care and primary care providers will offer extended hours.
- Technological improvements will improve access.

### **What's Covered**

- You can expect expanded coverage.

### **What You Need to Do Now**

- Update your information in DEERS
- Check your current information. This includes your address, email address, and phone number in DEERS.
- Update new information. Did you have a significant life event? This includes if you activated Called or ordered to active duty service for more than 30 days in a row., retired, separated, had or adopted a baby, got married or divorced, etc.
- Update your payment information if you use electronic payments Beginning Oct. 1, 2017 (You will be contacted by your regional contractor.)

### **When Is This Happening?**

- The new network provider directories will be available beginning Nov. 1, 2017. Check if your current provider is in network.
- You'll be notified by your regional contractor Beginning Nov. 1, 2017 if you're being assigned a new Primary Care Manager.
- New East and West regional contractor's call center will be open beginning Nov. 20, 2017
- The processing of new enrollments will be delayed during December as we files are transferred to new regional contractors December 201
- Explanation of Benefits (EOB) are going paperless Jan 1, 2018. They will be available electronically only unless you specifically request to receive them by mail.

[Source: TRICARE Communications | August 18, 2017 ++]

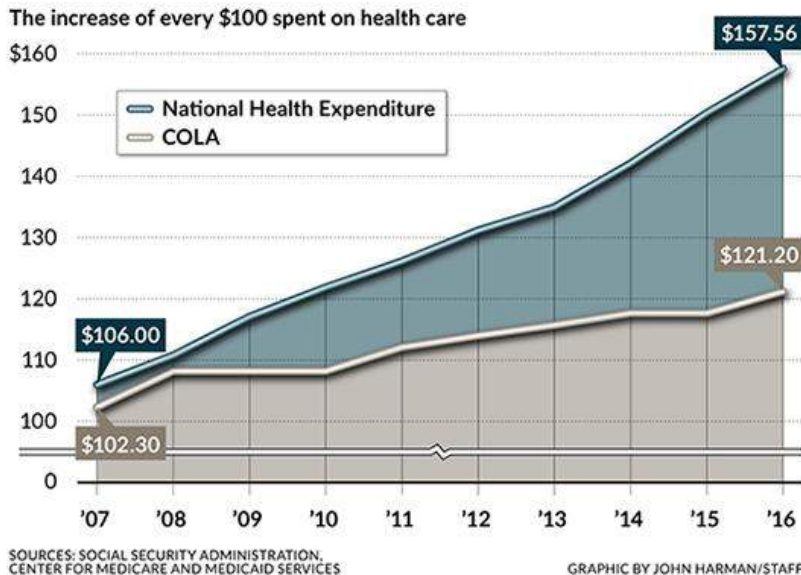
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## TRICARE Fee Indices ► COLA vs. NHE | Big Difference

### COLA vs NHE

In an ongoing effort to get beneficiaries to pay more, a frequent tactic of budgeteers is to tie a different index, other than the current COLA, to the TRICARE fee and cost share structure. The index used to achieve this is the National Health Expenditure index (NHE). Contained in the NHE is every component of U.S. healthcare. NHE projections are presented by type of good or service delivered (hospital care, physician and clinical services, retail prescription drugs, etc.) and by source of funding for those services (private health insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, out-of-pocket spending).

The chart below demonstrates the compounded effect over the past decade of the NHE versus the COLA, using an example of every \$100 spent on health care.



As always, before you sign anything, read the small print. This saying applies all too well to DoD budget submissions of the past few years - and now to the Senate Armed Services Committee's (SASC) 2018 defense authorization bill. TRICARE fee increases in the SASC bill are the same, if not worse, than those proposed in

DoD's 2018 budget submission. If they are included in the final FY18 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), they will directly affect what you and your family will pay for health care.

In June, MOAA wrote *TRICARE Fees to get a Big Raise*, outlining the DoD budget proposal. In July, *Senate Proposal Cuts Your TRICARE Benefit to Pay for Readiness* covered the SASC proposals. However, MOAA would be remiss not to address the impact buried in the small print. What's in the small print, you ask? Some not-so-small changes. According to DoD's own language, "Increases in premiums, co-pays, deductibles and catastrophic caps would increase annually based on the increases in health care costs as measured by the growth in the National Health Expenditures (NHE) per capita."

Currently, TRICARE fees and applicable cost shares are tied to the annual rise in the COLA. Swapping this index out for an arbitrarily selected index, the NHE, will result in beneficiaries paying substantially more for health care over time - as shown in this chart: The compounding effects from this index, if applied, will gradually erode every category of TRICARE beneficiaries' earned health care benefits. MOAA strongly believes beneficiaries' TRICARE fees and cost shares should not rise faster than the annual COLA. The rate of inflation resulting from the NHE index is unacceptable. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | August 23, 2017 ++]

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## **TMOP Update 22 ► New Express Scripts 1 SEP 2017 Refill Policy**

Receiving prescription drugs through Tricare's mail-order system will soon require an extra step for users, thanks to an upcoming change in the system's refill order policy. Currently, medications received monthly by mail, often used for treatment of chronic medical conditions, can be set for automatic refills. Express Scripts, Tricare's mail-order pharmacy contractor, contacts the user's doctor when the prescription runs out or expires. The doctor can choose to OK the refill or file a new prescription, allowing the patient to receive medication without interruption.

The latest change, however, will require patients to certify that they want the refill before Tricare contacts the doctor. The switch, which will start 1 SEP, affects all Tricare beneficiaries who receive medication by mail through Express Scripts. The move is expected to save Tricare money, since it will likely cut down on patients who automatically receive mailed medication that they no longer use. To opt-in to a refill, each user will need to grant "consent" through the Express Scripts website, via an automated phone call from the system, or through an Express Scripts patient care advocate, officials said in the release.

When the last refill of a patient's prescription ships, Express Scripts will contact them by mail, phone or email, depending on the user's contact preferences, officials said. If the patient does not respond within 10 days, the medication will be removed from the auto refill program. To be added back into the program, the user can re-enroll online or by phone at 1-877-363-1303. Patient contact preferences can be updated online or by phone. For more information, go to: <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/08/16/tricare-users-approve-mail-order-drug-prescription-renewals.html>. [Source: TREA Washington Update | August 21, 2017 ++]

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## **Severe Eczema ► Possible Cause Has Been Found**

For more than 17 million people in the United States living with severe eczema – a condition that results in dry, itchy rashes and disqualifies many from military service – the mystery behind its cause may be all too familiar. Thanks to researchers at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences and National Institutes of Health, certain patients may understand more about their condition. "Studying these ... disorders, especially when we can define the disease based on a single mutation, is incredibly informative because you can learn a lot," said Andrew



Snow, assistant professor in the department of pharmacology and molecular therapeutics at USU, and senior co-author of a study recently published in the journal Nature Genetics.



In this study, mutations in a gene known as CARD11 were identified as one underlying cause for severe eczema. The discovery led the researchers to ask whether excess glutamine can help correct some of the allergy-related defects in patients' immune cells. The testing was done with T cells, known as the conductors of the body's immune response against infections, from one patient in a lab, and the results were promising. Additional work with the NIH to study whether symptoms for patients with similar mutations improve with glutamine supplements – a readily available product in stores – is likely, said Snow.

Severe eczema can run in families, which suggests a genetic cause, said Snow. One by one, Snow and NIH allergist Dr. Joshua Milner received referrals for patients who had mutations in the same gene – totaling eight patients from four different families. “However, such treatments are not a cure for the cause of the disease, particularly if it's a genetic cause,” said Snow.

During the study, researchers discovered these CARD11 mutations can prevent T cells from being able to do their jobs normally. The mutations prevent the cells from taking in enough glutamine, which is needed for T cells to maintain their proper function. This may help explain why some patients with severe eczema have a history of pneumonia, warts, and other types of lung and skin infections, said Snow. While a mutation in the CARD11 gene is only one possible cause for severe eczema, its discovery can influence new therapies. Current treatments, including over-the-counter and prescription pills or creams, focus on bringing down the inflammation and relieving the itching.

Jeffrey Stinson, a former USU graduate student in Snow's laboratory, who is currently at the National Institute of Standards and Technology and co-author on the study, said the possibility of having something so easily accessible as a targeted form of treatment would be an incredible achievement for those living with severe eczema and other allergic symptoms. “This genetic condition is considered rare, but it's important to acknowledge the impact that findings from small, basic research studies like this can have in the medical field,” said Stinson, stressing that the research would not be possible without the time and participation of the families who volunteer. “Thanks to their dedication, we have new and exciting possibilities for advancement before us.” [Source: Health.mil | Military Health System Communications Office | August 21, 2017 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 411** ► Prescription Refills | Health Care | School Shots

**Automatic Prescription Refills Consent** -- Beginning September 1st, 2017, Express Scripts will need annual consent from patients who want to receive automatic refills of their maintenance medications enrolled in TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery. This means that just before one of your prescriptions runs out of refills, Express Scripts



will reach out to you to know if you'd like your doctor to be contacted to renew the prescription and if you'd like to continue in the Automatic Refill program. If not, Express Scripts will not refill your prescription. Express Scripts will not re-enroll your medication unless they hear from you. You can respond online at [Express-Scripts.com/TRICARE](http://Express-Scripts.com/TRICARE), via the automated phone call from Express Scripts or by calling Express Scripts Patient Care Advocate. If Express Scripts doesn't receive your consent within 10 days of reaching out to you, they'll remove your medication from the Auto Refill program. However, re-enrolling is simple. You can re-enroll your medication at any time online, or through a patient care advocate. For more information or if you have questions, go to the Express Scripts website at [www.Express-Scripts.com/TRICARE](http://www.Express-Scripts.com/TRICARE) .

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**Preventive Health Care** -- Preventive health care is an effective way to protect your health. It helps find problems early so you can make changes or get treatment, if needed. As a reminder, these preventive care services are available under your TRICARE benefit:

- One yearly health promotion and disease prevention exam
- Yearly well-woman exams for women under age 65, which may be done separately from a vaccine or cancer screening at no cost
- BRCA1 or BRCA2 genetic counseling and testing for women at high risk for breast cancer
- Cologuard and computed tomographic colonography for colorectal cancer screenings
- Other cancer screenings that occur during any covered office visit, including testicular, skin, mouth and pharyngeal, and thyroid cancer screenings

School physicals are also covered for children of all ages when required by the school. Sports physicals are not covered under TRICARE. Learn more about covered preventative health services online at [www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices](http://www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices).

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**Vaccinations for School** -- Getting necessary vaccinations now is as much a rite of going back to school as picking up pencils and paper for the first day. They've saved more lives throughout the world than any other medical invention, including antibiotics or surgery. The safest and best way to acquire immunity is through vaccination. For parents sending their children back to school, Military Health System providers follow the same schedule for immunizations as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Most of the vaccines recommended for children should be completed before a child starts school. Vaccines to prevent meningitis, human papillomavirus, which can cause cervical and genital cancers, and additional immunizations for tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough, are recommended for children ages 11 to 12. All children older than six months should get an annual flu shot. For more information on vaccines, visit [www.health.mil/vaccines](http://www.health.mil/vaccines).

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | August 18, 2017 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 412** ► **Preventive Services | Disasters | Back to School**

**Preventive Services** -- Taking your health for granted is easy to do when you're feeling great. But seeing your doctor only when you feel terrible misses the point of preventive health care. It's better to identify and manage potential health issues before you experience recognizable symptoms. TRICARE covers many preventive health services at no cost, giving you every reason to visit your doctor regularly. Did you know that heart disease is the

leading cause of death for both men and women in the U.S.? Because risk factors for heart disease include high blood pressure and high cholesterol, you may not be aware that you have these conditions. But conditions like this can be discovered with cholesterol and blood pressure screenings during a doctor's visit. Taking command of your health means being proactive.

Cancer screenings, immunizations and Health Promotion and Disease Prevention exams can help identify potential health issues. Catching a condition, disease or illness in the earliest stages gives you the best chance of managing or treating it. Talk to your doctor about your family history and risk factors to decide which preventative screenings are appropriate for you. Preventive health applies to children as well as adults. TRICARE covers well-child care exams for children from birth to age 6. During these visits, the doctor will make sure that your child is on track with developmental milestones, weight, immunizations and overall health.

Another way you can be proactive with your health is by making smart choices every day. Good nutrition, plenty of exercise and not smoking helps lower your risk for many chronic diseases, including heart disease, stroke, some cancers and diabetes. Regular physical activity also improves mental health and strengthens bones and muscles. Learn how TRICARE is with you every step of the way. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/preventiveservices](http://www.TRICARE.mil/preventiveservices) for more information.

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**Natural Disasters** -- In the event of a natural disaster, TRICARE makes it easy to get the care you need when you need it. In emergencies, the Defense Department can approve a waiver of primary care manager referrals. Waiving the referral requirement allows affected beneficiaries to get care from TRICARE-authorized providers without a PCM referral, avoiding point-of-service charges. The "Emergency Refill Too Soon" waiver authorizes early prescription refills for affected beneficiaries. When a prescription waiver is authorized for an impacted area, information about early refills is posted on TRICARE.mil. Beneficiaries who have signed up for TRICARE updates via email or SMS text-messaging receive the update directly. Also check TRICARE's social media pages for updates.

Severe weather can happen at any time, during any season. Disaster preparation is important and being prepared is just as essential as knowing how to get help. Everyone should have an emergency "Go To" kit, and copies of important documents like your Uniformed Services ID card or other health insurance card, driver's license, Social Security card and list of prescriptions and shot records. Have the numbers to family doctors and the regional contractor close at hand for help getting care. Make a disaster plan and practice it. TRICARE has a downloadable contact wallet card with all the contacts you need for help with your health plan. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/resources/DisasterInfo](http://www.TRICARE.mil/resources/DisasterInfo) for details on how to stay safe and get the care you need.

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**Back to School** -- Heading back to school can be an exciting time for families. TRICARE can help your child be ready for the school year with annual school physicals. TRICARE covers annual physicals and necessary immunizations for school enrollment for children age 5 to 11. Well-child care coverage is available for eligible children from birth until age 6. This includes vision and hearing screenings. Children of active duty service members can get annual eye exams. Children of retired service members with TRICARE Prime can get comprehensive eye exams every two years. Learn more about TRICARE's school physical coverage at [www.TRICARE.mil/backtoschool](http://www.TRICARE.mil/backtoschool). As the school year kicks off, there are other things parents can do to help children be more prepared for early school bells and long days in the classroom. To make mornings run smoother, prepare the night before by laying out clothes, packing book bags and setting a suitable school-year bedtime. If technology use contributes to staying up later, consider setting a media curfew.

Also, parents should encourage kids to choose nutritious foods and to play an active role in packing their lunches. If your children buy lunch, look at the menu together in advance and discuss smart meal choices.

TRICARE also offers coverage for children until age 21 — or until age 23 when enrolled in college or until they graduate. After that, children may qualify to purchase TRICARE Young Adult. Students must be registered with a “student status” in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System database. Health plan options depend on the age of the child, the location of the school and the sponsor’s military status. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/TYA](http://www.TRICARE.mil/TYA) to help you decide which plan is best for your child.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | August 25, 2017 ++]

## \* Finances \*



### **Insurance Premiums** ► 7 Reasons Why They Are Rising ~24%

Whether President Trump can actually fix it remains to be seen, but he was right about one thing: insurance premiums are on the rise. It’s estimated that in 2017 premiums will go up by approximately 24%. Insurance companies like Aetna and UnitedHealthcare are pulling out of some markets after reporting significant losses and other companies are significantly reducing the plans they offer. But why exactly is this happening? What are the root causes? While the issue is certainly complex, we do know some of the reasons costs keep rising. Here are 7 primary reasons why Obamacare isn’t quite what everyone hoped.

Two semi-good pieces of news are it’s not all gloom and doom. First, it’s important to note that the rise in premiums primarily affects those who are purchasing their own insurance, like those who are self-employed. If you live in cubicle land or work for the man, you probably won’t feel the brunt of the increase in premiums. Also, if you get your insurance through Medicaid, Veterans Affairs, or Medicare you probably won’t see much increase in your premiums. However, those who shop in the insurance marketplace will find themselves staring at steeply increasing premiums. For now you may be able to work from a beach while sipping a mojito, but soon you may need to start drinking Bud Light. Let’s hope that doesn’t happen. You may not be working for the man, but you’ll giving more money to the man.

If you get a government subsidy to offset the cost of your insurance premiums and are willing to shop around for a new plan, you may not be hurt by the increase in premiums. There are various plans available in the insurance marketplace, some more expensive than others. If you’re willing to switch to a new plan, you can probably find one that doesn’t gouge you so deep. But this is one of the ongoing problems with Obamacare. It usually covers a narrow selection of doctors and hospitals, and if you switch plans you may need to find a new doctor. If you’ve got challenging or complex health issues, this can be a big deal, especially if a particular doctor has been treating you for years. Unfortunately, this means that those who are in the worst health may get hit the hardest by the rate increases. If you don’t want to switch plans, you always have the option of becoming independently wealthy. Of

course, this can be a bit more difficult than switching plans unless you happen to have a rich relative. Following are reasons why premiums are going up.

**Reason #1 – They Didn’t Predict Very Well** -- It turns out that the health insurance companies underestimated how much it would cost them to insure those who weren’t already covered. A 2015 report found that insurance companies lost \$2.7 billion in the individual market, in part because they had to cover more claims than expected. Insurance companies aren’t really in the business of losing money, and now they’re scrambling to make up for what they lost. On top of this, those patients who are the sickest generate about 49% of the health care expenditures. This unequal distribution of costs complicates the estimates and means some companies are losing money. Now that insurance companies actually understand the pools of patients, they’re adjusting premiums to account for the actual costs, which are way higher than they estimated.

**Reason #2 – Insurance Companies Are Bailing Out** -- Leading the way in the “Things That Aren’t Surprising” category is that many insurance companies are discontinuing plans that lose money. Additionally, some companies such as United Healthcare and Aetna are completely exiting some markets, leaving very little competition. In some states, there is a single insurance provider, allowing them to raise their rates without consequence. In 2017, it’s expected that the number of healthcare providers will drop by 3.9 percent in each state. As we all learning in introductory economics, less competition equals higher prices.

**Reason #3 – Health Care Costs A Lot** -- Remember last year when the price of EpiPens started skyrocketing and people were like, “We’ll die without them!” and the producer was like, “Well, it stinks to be you!”? People got rightfully upset because that was a pretty low move to pull. Unfortunately, rising medical costs aren’t just happening to EpiPens. Generally speaking, medical costs have been rising at about 5% each year, but some think they’re going to go up even more. Unfortunately, Obamacare is at least partially to blame for this. Newer treatments tend to be very expensive, and now even the sickest people have access to health coverage. This, in turn, means that they have access to the pricey treatments they never had access to before. As their expenses are covered, overall costs for all people are increased.

*As Sean Williams wrote:*

The reason insurers are coping with substantially higher costs for Obamacare enrollees is actually pretty easy to understand. Prior to Obamacare’s implementation, insurers had the ability to handpick who they’d insure. This meant people with pre-existing conditions, who were potentially costly for insurers to treat, could be legally denied coverage. However, under Obamacare insurers aren’t allowed to deny coverage based on pre-existing conditions.

Now could be the time to begin experimenting with those homeopathic cures we’ve been hearing about all these years, like rubbing cucumbers on our feet or bathing in olive oil. Purchasing hundreds of gallons of olive oil is probably cheaper than premiums will be.

**Reason #4 – Some Government Subsidies For Insurers Are Ending** -- Since 2014, the government has provided some subsidies to marketplace insurers who cover higher cost patients. These subsidies significantly reduced the cost to insurance companies and made them more inclined to work through the problems. But this program is ending in 2017 and it’s expected that premiums will go up 4 percent to 7 percent as a result.

**Reason #5 – It’s Not Easy To Fix A Giant Market** -- Unfortunately, fixing a giant market like health insurance isn’t simple. This should surprise absolutely no one. First, the government is involved. Fixing anything government is always a nightmare, taking years of meetings, proposals, and backroom deals. Second, the healthcare industry is involved, which is only slightly less unwieldy than the government. Getting both of these entities to actually make progress is like trying to convince an elderly person that rock ‘n roll doesn’t sound like pots and pans banging together. Lots of solutions have been proposed, but a single, straightforward solution has not been adopted.

**Reason #6 – The Market Is Smaller Than Expected** -- Chalk this one up to yet another miscalculation by the government. It turns out that significantly less people are enrolled in the insurance marketplace than expected. Like,

50% less. Young adults in particular aren't signing up, probably due to the fact that the penalty for not signing up has only been around \$150. A smaller market means that insurance companies can absorb the cost of particularly ill patients as easily. In larger cities, enough people may enroll to spread out the risks but in smaller areas insurance companies are hit hard. This, of course, causes insurance companies to pull out, increasing the problem even more.

**Reason #7 – The Rules Aren't Helping Things** -- One of Obama's big selling points for his healthcare plan was that insurance companies wouldn't be able to deny coverage to those with preexisting conditions. This sounds great in the public square but doesn't always work well in reality. Currently, the government forces insurance companies to cover people but doesn't offer them assistance when their costs exceed their revenues. If an insurance company doesn't think it will make money, it will pull out faster than Donald Trump says something ill-advised.

**Conclusion**

It's easy to be critical of Obamacare, but we should also recognize the great things it has achieved. Many people who would never have received medical coverage have been able to get the treatments they desperately wanted. Will the problems be fixed? Hopefully. Or, as seems inevitable, Donald Trump and the Republican party will dismantle Obamacare and create something new and possibly better. [Source: The Military Guide | August 18, 2017 ++]

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**VA Loan Funding Fee ► Understanding What It Is**

One of the great benefits of military service is the VA home loan. The loan often allows veterans to buy a home with no money down. There is, however, a cost that must be paid for a VA loan: the VA funding fee. It can be paid in cash at closing or can be rolled into the loan. The funding fee helps sustain the VA home loan program, which is supported by taxpayer dollars. Private lenders make the loans, and the Department of Veterans Affairs guarantees them. The VA funding fee is owed when you buy a home with a VA home loan, when you refinance a VA home loan or when you refinance a non-VA loan into the VA program. The amount of the fee depends on several factors, such as:

- The type of VA loan sought (such as purchase loan or refinance).
- The nature of the borrower's military service.
- Whether the borrower is making a down payment.
- Whether the borrower has had a prior VA loan.
- If the borrower is disabled.

The VA funding fee ranges from 0.5 percent for a VA streamline refinance loan to slightly over 3 percent for VA purchase loans and cash-out refis.

**VA loan funding fees for purchase loans**

Type of service	Down payment	VA funding fee for first-time borrowers	VA funding fee for subsequent VA home loans
Regular military personnel	None	2.15%	3.3%
	5-9%	1.5%	1.5%
	10% or more	1.25%	1.25%
Reserves and National Guard	None	2.4%	3.3%
	5-9%	1.75%	1.75%
	10% or more	1.5%	1.5%

Veterans receiving compensation for a service-related disability do not have to pay the fee. A veteran must have received an honorable discharge in order to qualify for VA benefits, including a VA home loan. [Source: Bankrate | Cheryl Knight | August 23, 2017 ++]

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## **Payday Loans Update 03 ► Tempted. First Take a Closer Look**

It happens to a lot of people: Your finances are OK—you're making all your bill payments and meeting other obligations—and then something unexpected (and expensive!) happens. You may find yourself thinking, "I just need enough cash to tide me over until payday." This scenario leads some people to take out a payday loan. Unfortunately, rather than helping them, this course of action often leaves their finances in worse shape than before.

Typically, with a payday loan, you write a check to the lender for the amount you want to borrow plus a fee for borrowing the money. The lender agrees to hold the check until the loan is due—usually your next payday. With your authorization, the transactions may be made electronically, with the lender making a deposit into your account and debiting the loan amount on payday.

### **Costs can mount quickly**

At first, the fee charged to borrow money may not seem too expensive. For example, it might be \$15 to borrow \$100. That wouldn't be too bad if you paid back the loan on payday and didn't borrow again, but that's not what usually happens. More than 80 percent of payday loans are rolled over or renewed by another advance within 14 days.\*

If you extend or roll over the loan for another 14 days (assuming you get paid every other week), you may pay another \$15 fee. After just three times rolling it over, you may end up paying \$60 in fees to borrow \$100. As the fees start adding on again and again, it becomes harder to repay each time you roll over the loan and the cycle of continued borrowing often is much longer—half of all payday loans are in a sequence at least 10 loans long.\* In this example, with a \$15 fee for \$100 borrowed for two weeks, if you rolled it over nine times, you'd pay \$150 in fees to borrow \$100 for less than five months. Now that's an expensive loan!

### **Find an alternative!**

You can avoid the high cost of payday loans. Consider these possibilities:

- Look into taking out a small small personal loan or apply for a Checking Line of Credit.
- Get free Personal Finance Counseling to create a repayment plan for debts and a budget to keep your finances on track.
- Consider taking a cash advance on a credit card, but be aware of the interest rate and terms before you do.
- Contact creditors as soon as possible if you won't be able to make a payment and ask for more time. Many are willing to work with consumers whom they believe are acting in good faith.
- Build an emergency fund. Even small deposits made regularly to a savings account can provide a buffer against emergencies that can throw your budget out of whack.

### **Special Protections for Servicemembers**

Payday loans (and certain other financing) offered to servicemembers and their dependents must include certain protections under the Military Lending Act. For example, for payday loans, the military annual percentage rate cannot exceed 36 percent. Most fees and charges, with few exceptions, are included in the rate. Credit agreements that violate the protections are void. Information on the Department of Defense rule, alternatives to payday loans, financial planning and other guidance is available at [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com).

[Source: "BBB Military & Veterans Initiative | August 2017 ++]



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## Medicare Back Brace Scam ► A New Twist on a Classic Con

Scammers often target seniors by pretending to be representatives of insurance companies or healthcare companies. Recently, the Better Business Bureau is seeing a new twist on this classic con: calls from "Medicare" claiming to have your new back brace.

### How the Scam Works

- You pick up the phone, and it's someone pretending to be a Medicare representative. From there, the con has two typical patterns. The scammer will either offer you a back brace through Medicare or claim that a caregiver previously called about receiving a back brace from Medicare.
- If you show interest in the brace, the scammer will start asking for personal information, such as your Social Security number or a Medicare number to access the benefits. Don't fall for these phony claims, even if the calls are persistent! The callers offer no company name and may even hang up on you if you ask for further company information.

### Protect Yourself from Healthcare Scams

- Medicare should already have your basic information. If Medicare or another governmental organization contacts you, they should already have your name, address and other basic info. A call claiming you have been identified for an offer (but doesn't have your name or other information) is probably blasted out to thousands of phone numbers.
- Never share your Medicare number with an unsolicited caller. Treat your Medicare number like your credit card info or other personal details. Do not share it with unsolicited callers.
- Check BBB Tips at [www.bbb.org/healthcarescam](http://www.bbb.org/healthcarescam) for more information about healthcare scams,

For more information about Medicare fraud, check out the resources provided by Medicare at <https://www.medicare.gov/forms-help-and-resources/report-fraud-and-abuse/fraud-and-abuse.html>. To learn more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips ([bbb.org/scamtips](http://bbb.org/scamtips)). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker ([bbb.org/scamtracker](http://bbb.org/scamtracker)). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | August 18, 2017 ++]

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## Apartment Rental Scam ► Too Good to be True

Looking for an apartment? Watch out for this con using the Airbnb name. Phony landlords post photos of too-good-to-be-true rentals and claim the property will be managed by Airbnb. In reality, both the property and the relationship with Airbnb are fake.

### How the Scam Works

- You look at Craigslist, Apartments.com, or another major rental listing website for an apartment, and you spot a good deal. The apartment is a great price for the location. It comes fully furnished, allows pets, and includes utilities. The "landlord" claims that he is working overseas or on an off-shore oil rig and is looking for someone to rent his property. Because he will be out of reach, Airbnb will manage the apartment.
- You email the "landlord," and his reply says that he will contact Airbnb to start the "rental process." But first, he needs your contact information, "a copy if your ID or Passport if possible," and a "fully refundable" \$500 security deposit. In some reports of this scam, targets were asked to pay by iTunes gift

cards. Only once he receives the security deposit will an Airbnb agent be assigned to show you the property.

- You send the money and information, and the "landlord" tells you to watch for a confirmation email from Airbnb. Unfortunately, that message never comes. When you follow up with the phony landlord, he quickly stops replying to your emails. Unfortunately, you are out \$500 and you shared your personally identifiable information with a con artist who could use it for identity theft.

#### **How to Spot a Rental Scam:**

- Always pay through the Airbnb website: If a property is listed through Airbnb, you will never need to pay the landlord directly or through email. And you will never receive a PDF from Airbnb requesting payment.
- Watch out for deals that sound too good: Scammers lure in targets by promising low rents, great amenities, and other perks. If the price seems much better than offered elsewhere, it may be a scam.
- Don't fall for the overseas landlord story: Scammers often claim to be out of the country and instruct targets to send money overseas.
- Check out BBB Tips : Many scams use similar techniques, see [www.bbb.org/rentalscam](http://www.bbb.org/rentalscam) for more advice.

For More Information read more about scams using Airbnb's name and platform on <https://www.airbnb.com>. To learn more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips ([bbb.org/scamtips](http://bbb.org/scamtips)). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker ([bbb.org/scamtracker](http://bbb.org/scamtracker)). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | August 25, 2017 ++]

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## **College Student/Parent Scams ► 9 Common Ones**

Imagine you're a scam artist looking for a vulnerable group to prey on. Older people are often good marks, but they're dispersed throughout the population, so finding a group to victimize can prove problematic. The very young are too often protected by parents and may not have enough money to make them worthwhile targets. But college students? Perfect. College students are old enough to have money, young enough to be vulnerable and likely to be unsupervised and away from home for the first time. Added bonus: They're not hard to find because they congregate by the thousands on campuses nationwide. Now that you've gotten inside the head of those who might be preying on you or someone you love, take a few minutes to study some common college scams.

### **1. Tuition scam**

Someone calls claiming to be with your school's administration or admissions. They warn that your tuition is late and as a result, you'll be dropped from your classes today. You're ordered to pay immediately, over the phone, with a credit or prepaid card.

**Solution:** If you get a call involving money from anyone regarding anything, get off the phone and call the office that was mentioned yourself. Simply explain to whoever is calling that you'll be calling them back, then check the status of whatever seems to be the problem.

This scam is a variation of the old unpaid bill scam, in which someone gets a call warning of dire consequences if they don't immediately send money. In another common iteration, it's a fake IRS agent warning of jail time.

### **2. Bad behavior**

College students are legendary when it comes to finding ways to get into trouble or compromising positions. But now everyone has a Smartphone, and therefore a camera. So, everything can, and will, be photographed and/or captured on video. And, yes, there are people who will pretend to like you but are actually setting you up for blackmail. One only has to recall the [Ashley Madison hack](#) of 2015 to imagine what can happen when extremely personal information falls into the wrong hands.

**Solution:** If you're going to do anything at college you wouldn't do in front of your parents or a prospective employer, think twice. If you're around people you don't know, and/or you have been drinking, think 10 or 20 times.

### 3. Fake credit cards ... and real ones

The Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility, and Disclosure (CARD) Act of 2009 banned banks from heavy credit card marketing on campus, but that doesn't mean banks and card companies don't still actively pursue college students. Credit cards and other accounts that are heavily solicited are the ones most likely to be loaded with bad terms, big fees and high interest rates. Even worse, some credit card solicitations might be disguising an identity thief. Tread carefully.

**Solution:** If you need a credit card, don't respond to one that solicits you. Instead, do your own hunt for the best card. The best deals in many areas of life, including credit cards, are often the least advertised, so look around online (we have a credit card search [here](#)) and at local banks and credit unions. Compare fees, terms and conditions, then make an informed decision.

### 4. Passwords

Everyone knows not to use the same simple or easy-to-guess passwords on multiple sites, or at least everyone should know. So why do we continue to risk our digital lives by using them anyway? Don't store passwords or other sensitive information on your phone, or laptop, or anything else that can be easily stolen.

**Solution:** Use any number of free programs to create, track and change your passwords. You just remember one password, your password manager does the rest. See ["5 Password Managers to Keep All Your Secrets Safe."](#)

### 5. Advance fees

If someone wants to charge you a fat fee in exchange for a loan, job, scholarship, debt counseling, completing a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) or almost anything else, it's likely either a scam or someone charging too much for doing something you can do yourself.

**Solution:** Whatever the situation, the higher the fee, the more suspicious you should be. When it comes to scholarship and financial aid scams, the [Federal Trade Commission offers these red flags](#) to watch for:

- "The scholarship is guaranteed or your money back."
- "You can't get this information anywhere else."
- "I just need your credit card or bank account number to hold this scholarship."
- "We'll do all the work. You just pay a processing fee."
- "The scholarship will cost some money."
- "You've been selected" by a "national foundation" to receive a scholarship — or "you're a finalist" in a contest you never entered.

### 6. Online books

Crooks know textbooks are a huge college expense. So they set up a site, offer great deals, collect your money, then deliver nothing.

**Solution:** Don't ever buy books, or anything else, online without first checking out reviews and otherwise validating the site and/or seller. Are they listed with the Better Business Bureau (BBB)? Do they have a physical address and phone number? Do you know anyone who's used them before? Check out ["11 Ways to Save Big on College Textbooks"](#) for more ideas.

### 7. Nonexistent apartments

Don't ever agree to rent an apartment without seeing it, both inside and out, and meeting the landlord. This scam is simple: Someone offers a great apartment, collects rent and/or a deposit over the phone for a place they don't own, then disappears.

**Solution:** Read more about this type of scam in ["5 Online Rental Scams and How to Avoid Them."](#) Then don't ever give anyone money until you're standing in your new apartment, key in hand.

## 8. Check cashing

In this scam, a “friend” asks you to cash a check for them. Maybe they even let you keep a little bit of the money for your trouble. You take their check and give them cash. Shortly after you deposit the check, it bounces. They’re long gone, and you’re out the money, as well as a returned check fee.

**Solution:** If you don’t know someone very well, consider cashing a check for them a gift of money from you, because it’s likely that’s what it will turn out to be.

## 9. Risks on Wi-Fi

Few groups are more likely than college students to spend time online via Wi-Fi at places like coffee shops, restaurants and parks. Unfortunately, public Wi-Fi subjects you to all manner of potential foul play.

**Solution:** Slow down hackers and ID thieves by using password protection and encryption software. Still, don’t ever log on to banking or other sensitive sites when on public Wi-Fi. And it’s not just your laptop that’s at risk. Do you have the same protections on your Smartphone?

Bottom line: Remember the Three Golden Rules of Scam Avoidance

While many scams, both on-campus and off, have donned high-tech clothing in recent years, most can be avoided by remembering three old-fashioned rules:

- If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- Don’t part with personal information unless you’re sure where it’s going.
- The more someone needs money upfront, the greater the likelihood you’re about to be robbed.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Ari Cetron | August 23, 2017 ++]

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## Generic Buying ► 20 Products You Should Always Buy Generic

Advertising has a powerful effect. Even toddlers’ desires are formed by exposure to TV commercials. For many of us, advertising is a source of information we use, consciously or unconsciously, in making decisions about what to buy. Blind brand loyalty can be costly, though. More often than you might imagine, the only meaningful difference between a national brand product and its generic version is the price. A study published in the Quarterly Journal of Economics in 2015 — titled “Do Pharmacists Buy Bayer? Informed Shoppers and the Brand Premium” — found that pharmacists who bought over-the-counter headache medications chose national brands instead of store brands only 9 percent of the time. By comparison, the average consumer chose brand names 26 percent of the time. The researchers arrived at similar results when looking at how professional chefs shop for groceries.

Sometimes brand-name products offer something unique. Often, though, they don’t. Here’s how to draw your own conclusions:

- **Read labels.** Hold the brand-name product next to its generic counterpart and compare the lists of ingredients on the labels. In the case of over-the-counter medicines, look for “active” ingredients.
- **Run your own comparison.** Experiment by purchasing a brand-name product and using it alongside a generic — diapers or paper towels, for example. Generics differ, so give several off-brand or store-branded products a try to draw your own conclusions about when it’s worthwhile to spend extra on a national brand.

Here are 20 generics MoneyTalksNews considers worthwhile:

1. **Water** -- Choose store brands and save money — that’s if you must buy bottled water. For serious savings, forget bottled water entirely and drink tap water — the quintessential generic. If you’re still unsure, get a good filter and run your tap water through it. Even generic bottled water is a lot more expensive and not necessarily any safer than tap water. An estimated one-quarter or more of bottled water comes from a tap, according to the National Resources Defense Council. The nonprofit adds: “It’s important to note that the federal government does not require bottled

*water to be safer than tap. In fact, just the opposite is true in many cases. Tap water in most big cities must be disinfected, filtered to remove pathogens, and tested for cryptosporidium and giardia viruses. Bottled water does not have to be.*”

2. **Medications** -- Buying generics is generally a great way to save on medications. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, or FDA, requires that generic and brand-name medications — whether over-the-counter or prescription — conform to safety standards. The FDA says generic prescription medicines “are copies of brand-name drugs and are the same as those brand-name drugs in dosage form, safety, strength, route of administration, quality, performance characteristics and intended use.”

3. **Baby formula** -- Baby formula also is regulated by the FDA, which holds generics to the same quality and safety standards as brand-name products. Here’s the back story: In 1978 a major formula manufacturer caused a public health problem when it changed the recipe in two of its baby formulas, omitting salt (sodium chloride). Chloride is essential to growth and development in infants. The FDA says in a recap of the issue:

*“By mid-1979, a substantial number of infants had been diagnosed with hypochloremic metabolic alkalosis, a syndrome associated with chloride deficiency. Development of this syndrome in these infants was found to be associated with prolonged exclusive use of chloride-deficient soy formulas.”* In response, Congress passed the Infant Formula Act of 1980, giving the FDA power to regulate and oversee the quality of infant formula.

4. **Milk** -- The more local your dairy, the fresher your milk will be. Read labels on milk cartons and bottles to see where the milk originates. Often, a store-brand product comes from the same dairy as a costlier brand-name product. Generics may not be the best choice for all dairy products, though. For example, The Kitchn advises that you skip generic yogurt. The blog says generic yogurt “usually features extra additives and sugars, and distinct quality and texture differences distinguish brands.”

5. **Sunscreen** -- Like medications and infant formula, sunscreens are regulated by the FDA. Look for an SPF rating of 30 or more and protection from both UVA and UVB rays, known as broad-spectrum protection. To be sure a product offers the latter, look for sunscreens with the phrase “broad spectrum SPF” followed by an SPF number on the front of the product. Under federal law, manufacturers can use that phrase only on products that pass a broad-spectrum testing procedure. So when a store brand or off-brand sunscreen meets these tests and costs less, you’ve got a good deal.

6. **Seasonings and spices** -- Freshness is what counts when buying herbs and spices. Brand names do not necessarily guarantee freshness. Try your store’s generics, and see what you think.

7. **Meat** -- Depending on the product and the source, store-brand meats can be just as good as heavily advertised brands. As always, read labels to confirm ingredients and the source of the product. If you must buy brand-name meat — or to save more on store brands — consider buying meat at a wholesale club.

8. **Frozen fruit and vegetables** -- Especially in cooking, baking and smoothies, it’s unlikely you’ll notice a difference between store-brand and nationally advertised frozen fruits and vegetables.

9. **Canned vegetables and beans** -- You can routinely save on groceries by buying your grocery chain’s canned beans, vegetables and fruit. If you are wondering about the generic version of a particular item — canned tomatoes, for example, can vary widely in flavor — try a can of each and compare.

10. **Plastic wrap and aluminum foil** -- Some of these kitchen aids are as good as their brand-name cousins, others are not. (Plastic wrap has to cling, of course.) But experiment with generics because good generic foil and plastic wrap will save you a bundle.

11. **Baking and cooking supplies** -- The researchers who wrote the “Do Pharmacists Buy Bayer?” study also looked at the shopping patterns of chefs and other food professionals. The pros, they found, use store brands more often than the average grocery shopper. The top 10 products that professionals most frequently preferred in generic

brands include: Baking mixes, Baking soda, Powdered sugar, Brown sugar, Baking supplies. If these generics are good enough for professional chefs, consider that they're probably good enough for you, too.

12. **Snack foods** -- Who doesn't love frozen pizza, chips and other snacks? In many cases you can save money and go with store brands. Professional chefs in the "Do Pharmacists Buy Bayer?" study favored multiple types of generic snacks over branded products. In addition to frozen pizza and snacks, they include: Spreads and dips, Dried fruit, Pickles and olives, Nuts, and Cookies.

13. **Cleaning products** -- Many people use generic or brand-name cleaning products interchangeably, depending on the availability of coupons and sales. Unless you've got a favorite cleaner that you believe outperforms all others, you'll get the job done and save money with generics. You can save even more with the DIY approach. Case in point: "9 Expensive Cleaning Supplies You Can Easily Make for Pennies."

at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/9-expensive-cleaning-supplies-you-can-easily-make-for-pennies>.

14. **Personal-care products** -- Some store brands of personal-care products have the same active ingredients as name brands and work equally well. Every expensive name-brand product you can drop from your routine, substituting a less-expensive generic version, adds to your bottom line. Try generic or low-cost versions especially of soaps, hand and face creams and moisturizers, facial cleansers, bubble bath and hair products. Additionally, "Is Cheap Toothpaste a Bargain or a Bad Idea for Your Teeth?" explains how to spot cheap but high-quality toothpaste at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/does-bargain-toothpaste-work-well>.

15. **Gasoline** -- When the Orange County Register examined whether cheaper gas really hurts a car's engine, as advertising sometimes claims, the newspaper found that highly advertised additives don't matter. "Buy the cheapest gas you can get that's convenient and close," said Steve Mazor, chief automotive engineer with the Automobile Club of Southern California Automotive Research Center, speaking to the Register. Mazor has been testing gas for more than 30 years. As long as you're getting the right octane level for your vehicle, "you might as well use the gas that's the cheapest," William Green, a chemical engineering professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, told the newspaper.

16. **Fresh produce** -- Prices for fresh produce vary enormously. Local, no-brand fruits and vegetables usually are your best bet. They don't have to travel as far to reach your table, so they stand to be fresher and more flavorful. Look for them at farmers markets, independent grocers and farm stands. Generic produce found at Trader Joe's and in big-box stores like Costco are often an excellent deal, too. Does organic matter? With some produce, some experts say organic is worth the added cost. But it is possible to buy organic on a budget — and even to save money at Whole Foods.

17. **Cereal** -- Try out generic versions of your favorite cereal — be it flakes, loops, nuggets or O's. The chances are good you'll find that store brands and off-brands have the same look and taste — for as much as \$1 less a box. What's not to like?

18. **Diapers** -- Many generic diapers do the job as well as brand-name ones, but at huge savings. Of course, not all generic diapers are created equal. Test the off-brands for yourself, buying a small package before investing in bulk purchases.

19. **Soda pop** -- Is brand-name soda really better-tasting? The answer, it turns out, is quite complicated. We are not suggesting that all generic cola is as good as its brand-name equivalents. But consider this: Repeatedly in taste tests, subjects tell researchers they prefer a brand-name drink when it's really a generic but they think it is a brand-name product. Of one study, Huffington Post wrote: *"Interestingly, when the scientists scanned the subjects' brains using MRI technology, drinking what they thought was name brand soda created activity in the reward center of their brains. But drinking what they thought was generic soda triggered activity in ... the part of the brain used to make value judgments. Scientists believe that when we use 'brand name' products, we already assume that they're of good quality, so the part of our brain used to assess whether something is worthy of appreciation shuts off, so we take more pleasure in the experience."*



20. **Packaged salad and fruit mixes** -- Buying a national brand's cut fruit or prepared salad does not guarantee freshness. Many grocery stores offer their own salads and cut fruit, often prepared on-site. If the price is better, give the store brand a try.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | August 18, 2017 ++]

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## Tax Burden for Tennessee Retired Vets ► As of AUG 2017

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

### Sales Taxes

**State Sales Tax:** 7% on tangible property (prescription drugs exempt); 6% on food and food ingredients. Counties and cities may add another 1.5% to 2.75% to the total of either rate (refer to <http://www.tn.gov/revenue/section/taxes>).

**Gasoline Tax:** 39.8 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 42.8 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** 62 cents/pack of 20; 77.5 cents/pack of 25.

[Note: Tax rates do not include local option tax of 1 cent.]

### Personal Income Taxes

Salaries, wages, Social Security, IRAs and pension income are not taxed. A 6% tax is levied on stock dividends and interest from bonds and other obligations. The first \$1,250 in taxable income received by a single filer is exempt (\$2,500 for joint filers). Refer to [www.state.tn.us/revenue/taxguides/indincguide.pdf](http://www.state.tn.us/revenue/taxguides/indincguide.pdf) for details.

**Retirement Income Taxes:** Beginning with tax year 2012, the annual Hall Income Tax standard income exemptions for taxpayers 65 years of age or older increases from \$16,200 to \$26,200 for single filers and from \$27,000 to \$37,000 for joint filers.

**Retired Military Pay:** see above

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

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

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

### Property Taxes

Property taxes are assessed and collected by the local governments. County assessors of property appraise real estate for assessment purposes. In addition, they assess tangible personal property used or held for use in a business.

The county commission and city governing bodies determine local property tax rates. The property taxes are collected by county trustees and city collecting officials.

Tennessee does not have a homestead exemption. However, there is a property tax relief program for the elderly, disabled and veterans. Refer to <http://www.tn.gov/revenue/section/taxes>.

The assessed valuation of a property is based on 25% of its fair market value. Depending on the location of the residence, homeowners will be assessed property taxes from the city only, the city and county, or the city, county,

and a special school/fire district rate. A local government may authorize (at their option) a person who is 65 years of age or older to defer payment of tax up to \$60,000 of the appraised fair market value of the homeowner's residence if the combined income is not more than \$12,000. Local option could increase it to \$25,000. For more information, call 615-741-4883 or [click here](#) for an overview of the property tax freeze program.

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

There is an inheritance tax in which all real and personal property in which the decedent owned or has an interest is taxed. It ranges from 5.5% to 9.5% of the value of the property transferred at death. Spouses are exempt. The estate tax is limited and related to federal estate tax collection. For more information refer to <http://www.state.tn.us/revenue/taxguides/inheritoutline.pdf> or call 615-532-6438.

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For further information, visit the Tennessee Department of Revenue site <http://www.tn.gov/revenue> or call 615-741-2837.

[Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#TENNESSEE> August 2017 ++]

### **\* General Interest \***



### **Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 AUG 2017**

- **Gulf War Claims.** A Veterans Affairs office in New Mexico during the 2015 fiscal year denied more than 90 percent of benefit claims related to Gulf War illnesses, marking the ninth-lowest approval rating among VA sites nationwide, according to a federal report.
- **Marriage.** Legendary actor Jimmy Stewart tells a funny joke about a man getting remarried in this classic clip from The Funniest Joke I Ever Heard. Every married man knows that this isn't a question you want to answer yes to if your wife asks so any smart man will say no they won't get remarried. Go to <https://biggeekdad.com/2017/08/jimmy-stewart-joke>.
- **Marriage.** Comedian Alan King delivers his funny monologue about how men die younger than women and offers up the phrase from obituaries "Survived By Wife" as proof. Alan died in 2004 at the age of 76 and he was survived by his wife of 57 years, Jeanette. It appears he was correct after all as he was "Survived By Wife". Go to <https://biggeekdad.com/2013/01/till-death-do-us-apart>.
- **Marriage.** This lovely old couple has been married for a long time and they haven't lost their sense of humor as they continue to play practical jokes on each other in their old age. Go to <https://biggeekdad.com/2013/01/till-death-do-us-apart>. This short film was Directed by Rupert Reid and was a 2012 Tropfest Australia Finalist.
- **Vietnam C-Rations.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMahwBWjJw4> to view a 1967 Vietnam c-rations box being opened for the first time in 43 years. Many vets survived on these rations flown to them by Huey helicopters in the jungle. Those who were lucky did also receive a hot meal flown to them about once or twice a week.

- **Security Clearances.** The State Department’s inspector general recently released an evaluation of the department’s security clearance process. The verdict? Officials can only loosely estimate the time it takes to process clearances, and they don’t track the costs.
- **Lone Marine.** Check out <http://content.jwplatform.com/previews/kCxWJII7-OwINfjNX> to view the Fox News story on retired Marine Staff Sgt Tim Chambers who for 15-years has faced off with 'Rolling Thunder' during their annual parade in Washington D.C.
- **Ice Cream.** Place a piece of plastic wrap directly on top of the ice cream before replacing the lid. By minimizing permeable surfaces, you’re making less places for the ice cream to be exposed to air. This won’t make your ice cream invincible, but it’s enough to keep it fresh for a little bit longer. Also, keep ice cream in the back of the freezer, where it is exposed less to air in general, and temperature fluctuations in particular.
- **San Diego Navy Housing.** The Navy is facing a looming housing crunch in the San Diego region, where high home prices and rents are already a problem. Rear Adm. Yancy Lindsey told the San Diego Military Advisory Council this week that the Navy will add 20 more warships and 15,000 sailors and their families to the region by 2025 as the military focuses on the Pacific Rim. San Diego and nearby Coronado are currently home ports for 52 Navy ships.
- **MGM Vegas Military/Vet Discount.** A new discount program announced by MGM Resorts International makes military members, veterans and their families eligible for room, food and entertainment deals as well as other savings at a variety of MGM properties, including some of the most iconic acts in Las Vegas. Refer to <https://www.mgmresorts.com/en/offers/military.html> for additional details.
- **Confederate Named Army Posts.** Army Times put the question of whether or not to rename posts named after Confederate officers to their readers. 79 percent of Army Times readers supported keeping the Confederate post names.
- **Smoking.** Every day you breathe in and out nearly 20,000 times. That’s a lot of work for your lungs. Over time your likelihood of having a serious lung problem increases, especially if you smoke.
- **Medicare Cards.** Changes are coming to your Medicare card. By April 2019, your card will be replaced with one that no longer shows your Social Security number. Instead, your card will have a new Medicare Beneficiary Identifier (MBI) that will be used for billing...
- **VA Disability Rates:** Refer to <http://militarybenefits.info/va-disability-rates> for the 2017 Disability rate tables.

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## **False Rape Claim Lawsuit ► Former West Point Cadet Awarded \$8.4M**

A former West Point cadet Susan Shannon took to her blog in 2013 to recount the story of being raped by a fellow cadet in 1986 while at the military academy. Her accusation came amid a storm of press coverage about the prominence of sexual assault in the military, and it led to a criminal investigation and the end of the fellow cadet’s Army career. The problem, a Virginia court found on 1 AUG, is that it wasn’t true, and in naming the colonel whom she claimed raped her, she defamed him to the tune of \$8.4 million, the Associated Press reported 11 AUG.

A Fairfax County jury sided with retired Col. David ”Wil” Riggins, who filed a lawsuit in Virginia district court back in 2014, when it became apparent that he would lose his nomination for promotion to one-star general after Shannon’s post came to the attention of Army leadership. The post also led the Army to launch a criminal investigation. “The allegations of rape were investigated by U.S. Army [Criminal Investigation Command], and it was determined that there was no testimonial or physical evidence to corroborate Defendant Susan Shannon’s statements concern Colonel David W. Riggins,” according to the lawsuit.



**Retired Col David Riggins, pictured here as deputy director of the U.S. Army Acquisition Support Center, on Aug. 1, 2017, won a defamation lawsuit against a woman who claimed he raped her while they were both cadets at West Point.**

Shannon alleged in a post on her Wordpress blog, “Short Little Rebel,” that Riggins raped her after she’d blacked out from drinking beer at Eisenhower Hall on campus. “I felt the need to tell the story about a rape of a soldier I personally know: that soldier is me,” she wrote on July 15, 2013. “The man who raped me, Will riggings [sic], class of 1987, is now a Colonel in the Army. The rape is the reason I left West Point. So, while his military career is soaring, I left mine far behind.” In his filing, Riggins poked holes in her story, arguing that cadets are never served beer on campus and, at the time, were not allowed to drink at all. He also said he did not have a car and couldn’t have had one on campus to drive her home that night, as she alleged.

“When pressed on the details as to what happened, Susan Shannon does not state that she actually recalls the alleged rape by David W. Riggins,” according to the complaint. “Rather, she only asserts that she woke up the next morning and concluded that she had sexual intercourse with someone the night before.” In reality, according to the lawsuit, Riggins said the two had dated briefly, and that she had left West Point to pursue medical school. The jury agreed that Shannon had defamed Riggins with her blog post, damaging his career and livelihood with her posts about the rape.

The court ordered her to pay him \$3.4 million in compensation, with another \$5 million on top in punitive damages. Under Virginia law, the AP reported, her actual damages will probably top out at \$2.3 million. Her attorneys are planning an appeal. [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | August 15, 2017 ++]

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## **Afghanistan Failures ► Six Costly Ones So Far**

President Trump on 21 AUG announced an increase of troops in Afghanistan, taking the reins of a conflict where 8,500 personnel are mostly focused on buttressing their Afghan counterparts in the face of Taliban and Islamic State gains. “I share the American people’s frustration,” he said. “I also share their frustration over a foreign policy that has spent too much time, energy, money — and, most importantly, lives — trying to rebuild countries in our own image instead of pursuing our security interests above all other considerations.”

The Defense Department, the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development and other agencies have spent \$714 billion of war and reconstruction funding since the invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001 to bolster education programs, improve infrastructure and increase the competency of Afghan security forces. Insurgents have deliberately targeted U.S.-led projects, including schools and roads, with hopes of dividing the population. That has come at a considerable expense to American taxpayers. Yet America’s longest war has become a symbol for wartime graft and corruption in one of the world’s least governable countries rocked by conflict for

decades. John Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, or SIGAR, has led the effort in recent years to uncover wasteful spending and boondoggled projects. Here are some of most notable examples of waste that he and others have found:

**1). \$6 million: Cashmere goats**

The aim was to jump-start Afghanistan's cashmere industry and grow its profile on the international market. A Pentagon task force funded the purchase and transport of nine rare Italian goats to breed with those native to Afghanistan, hoping that this would improve the animals' undercoats and the quality of the cashmere they yield. As part of the project, a farm was built along with a lab facility where staff would certify the cashmere's quality. All of this was funded by U.S. taxpayers. Speaking at Duke University in March, Sopko lamented the program's failure. "Many of the goats got sick and died, and the project director quit in frustration," Sopko said. "And I'm not sure flying Italian goats into Afghanistan was exactly what the founders had in mind when they created a standing army for the United States."

**2). \$36 million: Unused command center**

Soon after President Barack Obama ordered a surge of American combat troops into Afghanistan, plans were laid in the southern province of Helmand to erect a 64,000-square-foot command center for the Marines who oversaw military operations in the region. The general in charge there at the time told his superiors the building wasn't necessary, that existing facilities were adequate. He was overruled by another general who, according to the inspector general's findings, felt it would be improper to tank a project for which Congress had already agreed to pay. Obama's surge had ended before construction on the complex began, and the Marines were pulling out of Afghanistan entirely by the time it was built. "To their credit," Sopko said during his talk at Duke, "several Marine generals tried to convince the Defense Department not to build what I consider the best built building I've ever seen in Afghanistan, but their entreaties were ignored. It now stands abandoned and empty, a testament to poor planning and accountability."

**3). \$28 million: Afghan army uniforms**

Last month, it was disclosed the Pentagon supported a decade-long effort, led by Afghanistan's defense minister, to buy a new combat uniform for the Afghan army. In its scathing report highlighting a lack of American oversight, the inspector general's audit noted that the Afghan minister chose the uniform based on his preference for the appearance, not its tactical utility. The U.S. military could have provided the Afghans with significantly less-expensive gear that it already owns, Sopko's team concluded, and could save taxpayers as much as \$72 million over the next 10 years by switching. The report drew a strong response from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who issued a memo to the Pentagon comptroller and acquisition chief admonishing the "cavalier" spending. "Buying uniforms ... that may have wasted tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars over a ten-year period must not be seen as inconsequential," he wrote. "To the contrary, these actions connect directly to our mission and budget situation."

**4). \$1 billion: Schools with no teachers or students**

A BuzzFeed report from 2015 found that \$1 billion earmarked to build schools, staff classrooms and flood key provinces with textbooks bled into the accounts of warlords and corrupt officials, leaving entire schools empty and dilapidated. The findings came as the U.S. government for years touted education reform in the country as a successful campaign to topple Taliban ideology and empower young girls to seek education for the first time in their lives, a vital part of the plan to carve out economic opportunities for women.

Investigative reporter Azmat Khan reported 1,100 schools listed as active in 2011 by education ministry officials were not operating at all by 2015, though salaries continued to flow to teachers with no students. She also found girls were overcounted on student rolls by 40 percent and a count of schools built or refurbished by the United States dropped from 680 cited in 2010 to 563 by 2015, despite assurances from USAID that education reform was on the right track. "While regrettable," USAID told BuzzFeed, "it is hardly surprising to find the occasional shuttered schools in war zones." SIGAR doubted in April 2016 that USAID and the Pentagon had a coherent strategy to improve their education programs. It also found 40 percent of primary-age children do not attend school.

### 5). \$8.5 billion: Poppy eradication

The U.S. government has spent \$8.5 billion since 2002 to eradicate Afghanistan's poppy trade, according to SIGAR. The plants bound for worldwide drug markets not only fuel corruption but fund insurgent operations. U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan John Nicholson said in 2016 that poppy harvests fund 60 percent of the Taliban's war chest for salaries, weapons and ammunition. But despite the intense focus on stripping a cash crop from the Taliban, the numbers have recently become worse. In 2013, cultivation reached an all-time high. In 2015, the country saw a 10 percent jump in harvested land as eradication efforts plunged. While some provinces like the center of production Helmand saw harvest reductions, northwest Badghis province saw an 184 percent increase, SIGAR said.

### 6). \$486 million: Scrapped cargo planes

In 2008, a Pentagon decision to buy and retrofit 20 Italian medium-lift cargo planes for the Afghan air force at a cost of \$486 million was meant to surge the fledgling service's ability to move troops and supplies around the country — a central focus of the U.S. military's strategy to transition logistical missions to their Afghan counterparts. The program was immediately paralyzed by poor management, a lack of spare parts and a misread on the Afghan military's ability to maintain and fly the aircraft, SIGAR said, which raised the possibility corruption rattled the program.

The program was canceled in 2013. In his Duke University speech, Sopko said the planes were "death traps," staffed only by test pilots after other Afghan pilots refused to fly them. It cost an additional \$100,000 to turn 16 planes into scrap metal, with four sent to an air base in Germany, Sopko said. An Afghan company paid 6 cents a pound for the planes, netting only \$32,000 back for U.S. taxpayers. In 2017, the Afghan Air Force relies on small, vulnerable Cessnas to resupply ground troops. It has become too dangerous to replenish food and ammunition by trucks.

[Source: The Washington Post | Thomas Gibbons-Neff | August 10, 2017 ++]

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## Philippines War on Militants ► Battle of Marawi City Almost Over

Philippine government forces in war-torn Marawi city are preparing for a final assault against the Maute terrorists with the hope of ending the battle soon. "Our troops are preparing for final assault," Philippine Star quoted Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana as saying on 27 AUG. When asked about a target date for the final assault, he said the decision lies with the ground commanders and the troops in the battleground. The military has been battling the Maute terrorists to retake Marawi city for almost 100 days. The fighting has claimed the lives of 130 soldiers and policemen, while at least 603 terrorists have been killed, the Philippine Star reported. Civilian casualties remain at 45.

Authorities took over the city's police headquarters from the extremists 25 AUG while the Grand Mosque was recaptured the following day, said the report. The extremists had used the Grand Mosque, located downtown, as a strategic post, and other mosques in the city as machine gun and sniper nests. Some 1,000 militants seized large parts of Marawi on May 23 in an audacious bid to turn it into a "province" of the ultra-radical Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The army, backed by bombers, helicopter gunships and US surveillance planes, have since boxed the gunmen inside half-a-square kilometre area, and whittled their number to just 50 to 60.

The attack forced Marawi's entire population of over 200,000 to evacuate, and the ensuing battle levelled more than half the city, including its once-thriving commercial centre. Marawi itself is still closed to civilians. [Source: The Straits Times | August 27, 2017 ++]

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## **DPRK Missile Program ► Another Successful Missile Test**

North Korea fired three short-range missiles on 26 AUG -- all successful -- despite earlier reports suggesting failure, according to the U.S. military. Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the projectiles fired from the North's eastern coast flew about 155 miles. It said South Korea and U.S. militaries were analyzing the launch and didn't immediately provide more details. According to earlier reports, U.S. Pacific Command spokesman and Cmdr. David Benham suggested two North Korean missiles "failed in flight" while the third one had "blown up almost immediately." The U.S. Pacific Command has since revised its evaluation of the missile launch, now reporting no missile failures -- in line with the South Korean military assessment.

Benham said the missiles did not pose a threat to North America or military facilities on the U.S. territory of Guam. Earlier this month, North Korea created a tense standoff with the United States by threatening to lob some of its missiles toward Guam. South Korea's presidential office held a National Security Council meeting to discuss the missiles, which are the first known launches since July, when the North successfully flight tested a pair of intercontinental ballistic missiles that analysts say could reach deep into the U.S. mainland when perfected. The White House said President Donald Trump -- who has warned he would unleash "fire and fury" if the North continued its threats -- was briefed on the latest North Korean activity and "we are monitoring the situation."

The launch came five days after U.S. and South Korean forces began annual military exercises that the North claims are a rehearsal for war. Tensions on the peninsula generally ratchet up during the late summer maneuvers and a series of larger exercises held each spring. Before the latest missile launches were confirmed, North Korean state media said that dictator Kim Jong Un inspected a special operation forces training of the country's army that simulated attacks on South Korean islands along the countries' western sea border in what appeared to be in response to the ongoing U.S.-South Korea war games. Kim reportedly told his troops that they "should think of mercilessly wiping out the enemy with arms only and occupying Seoul at one go and the southern half of Korea."

The Korean Central News Agency said that the "target striking contest" involved war planes, multiple-rocket launchers and self-propelled guns that attacked targets meant to represent South Korea's Baengnyeong and Yeonpyeong islands, before special operation combatants "landed by surprise" on rubber boats. The border islands have occasionally seen military skirmishes between the rivals, including a North Korean artillery barrage on Yeonpyeong in 2010 that left two South Korean marines and two civilians dead.

In response to North Korea's expanding nuclear weapons program, South Korea has been moving to strengthen its own capabilities, planning talks with the United States on raising the warhead limits on its missiles and taking steps to place additional launchers to a U.S. anti-missile defense system in the country's southeast. South Korea has also been testing new missiles of its own, including the Hyunmoo-2 with a range of about 500 miles. Although the missile has not been operationally deployed yet, it is considered a key component to the so-called "kill chain" preemptive strike capability the South is pursuing to cope with the North's growing nuclear and missile threat.

On the U.S.-based North Korea monitoring website 38 North, senior fellow for missile defense at the International Institute for Strategic Studies Michael Elleman remarked amid growing concerns over Pyongyang's fast-paced weapons development that North Korea is unlikely to field a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) within a decade given its relative inexperience (<http://www.38north.org/2017/08/melleman082517>). 38 North is a project of The US-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

On 28 AUG North Korea fired a ballistic missile from its capital Pyongyang that flew 1,677 miles and reached a maximum height of 341 miles as it flew over the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. The launch, which appears to be the first to cross over Japan since 2009, will rattle a region worried that each new missile test puts the North a step closer toward its goal of an arsenal of nuclear missiles that can reliably target the United States. Officials said

an aggressive test-flight over the territory of a close U.S. ally sends a clear message of defiance as Washington and Seoul conduct war games nearby. [Source: Miil.com | August 26, 2017 ++]

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## IoT Toys ► Security Warning

IoT toys have the potential to violate children’s privacy and safety, given the amount of pertinent information the toys can collect and store, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) warned recently in an advisory. The sensors, microphones, data storage capabilities, cameras and other features of Internet of Things (IoT) toys are able to vacuum up extensive details about a child’s name, school, activities and even their physical location. And if those toys are hacked, criminals could use the stolen information to harm a child, the FBI warned.



### What Makes IoT Toys Vulnerable?

- Data collected from interactions or conversations between children and toys are typically sent and stored by the manufacturer or developer via a server or a cloud service. In some cases, data are also collected by third-party companies that manage the voice recognition software used in the toys.
- Voice recordings, toy Web application passwords, home addresses, Wi-Fi information, and sensitive personal data could be exposed if the security of the data is not sufficiently protected with the proper use of digital certificates and encryption when it is being transmitted or stored.
- Smart toys connect to the Internet either directly, through WiFi to an Internet-connected wireless access point; or indirectly, via Bluetooth to an Android or iOS device that is connected to the Internet.
- Key factors affecting the user’s security include: the cyber security features, the toy’s partner applications and the WiFi network through which the toy connects.
- Superior communications connections — where data is encrypted between the toy, WiFi access points, and Internet servers that store data or interact with the toy — are crucial to mitigate the risk of hackers exploiting the toy or eavesdropping on conversations or audio messages.
- The FBI notes that Bluetooth-connected toys that do not have authentication requirements (such as PINs or passwords) pose risks for unauthorized access, enabling criminals to communicate with children.

### What You Can Do To Protect Your Child

- Choose IoT toys very carefully by doing lots of research. Look for any known reported security issues regarding a toy.
- Find out if a toy can receive firmware and/or software updates and security patches — and ensure the toy is running on the latest version.
- Closely monitor your child’s activities with each toy through the toy’s parent application, if such a capability exists.

- Ensure the toy is turned off when it is not in use.
- Create a strong and unique login password when establishing a user account. For example, use lower and upper case letters, numbers and special characters.
- Provide only what is minimally required for creating a user account.

[Source: Military authority | August 19, 2017 ++]

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## **Marine Corps War Memorial Update 03 ► Rehabilitation Started**

The Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, just started its multimillion dollar rehabilitation. Aaron LaRocca, the chief of staff in the office of the superintendent for the George Washington Memorial Parkway, told Marine Corps Times that the project is slated to last until February 2018. During this time, much of the memorial will be surrounded by scaffolding and the loop around the memorial along with the parking area will be closed off. Businessman and philanthropist David M. Rubenstein donated \$5.37 million in 2015 to "commemorate the bravery of U.S. Marines who gave their lives to defend freedom and to honor the continued patriotism and sacrifice of America's military families," according to a National Park Service news release.

The last big rehab of the memorial took place from 2004-2005, but according to LaRocca, the scope of the current rehabilitation project is much larger. "The generous donation by Mr. David Rubenstein is allowing us to not only clean the statue, but wax, regild, redo the roadway and improve the visitor experience," LaRocca said. The memorial serves as the finish line for the Marine Corps Marathon every year. LaRocca said that the finish line for the marathon will not be impacted by the renovation, but they will be working with the permit holders for the marathon to arrange a backdrop for the finisher photos.

The Marine Corps War Memorial, often referred to as the Iwo Jima Memorial, was dedicated in a ceremony on Nov. 10, 1954 — the 179th birthday of the Marine Corps — by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The iconic memorial depicts the Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph taken by The Associated Press' Joe Rosenthal that captures Marines raising the American flag on Mount Suribachi during World War II. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Mackenzie Wolf | August 17, 2017 ++]

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## **North Korea Defectors Update 01 ► Un Followed Out of Fear**

A defector from North Korea says Kim Jong Un is significantly weaker than portrayed -- despite images broadcast to the world last week of large crowds cheering the tyrant's fiery rhetoric. The man, who asked Sky News to hide his identity because his daughter is still inside North Korea and would be in danger if he is recognized, said he wants people to know the truth about life under the Kim regime. "These civilians, if the government tells them to come, they are gathered by the system, they're forced to come, they don't have the freedom not to," he told Sky News. "I feel sorry for these people, they will all be cannon fodder."

Images of the rally released in early AUG by North Korea's state media outlet show North Korean workers dressed alike in white button-down shirts and matching red ties, raising banners lauding the North Korean military. Participants were shown raising their right fists in the air in a public gesture of solidarity with Kim. "On the surface they look thankful, but none of it is genuine," the defector told Sky News in South Korea.



People participate in a Pyongyang city mass rally held at Kim Il Sung Square on August 9, 2017, to fully support the statement of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) government in this photo released on August 10, 2017 by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) in Pyongyang.

Even in the hermit country, he said access to information about the outside world was increasing inside North Korea. "Everyone is aware that there is no other place in the world as poor as North Korea, and that no other country suffers as much as our people do," he said. "We don't follow the system because we like it, we are only following because we are scared of it," he added. The suffering in the impoverished kingdom includes those serving in the military, the defector said. "Even the military people, corporals or captains, I've been to their houses, they are in a poor state," the man told Sky News, adding, "Most people don't have loyalty, honestly."

With living conditions worsening, the defector said many people are criticizing Kim's leadership in private, but afraid to express those views in public. "If you criticize Kim Jong Un you will go to a prison camp and not come back," he said. "(In the camps) you are forced to labor and you live a life no better than a dog or a pig," he added. "It is better to die." A non-governmental organization that researches atrocities in North Korea said public executions in the rouge nation are intended to instill fear of the government, and are meant to be witnessed by as many people as possible. Hubert Youngwhan Lee, the Transitional Justice Working Group's executive director, told Sky News the regime tends to use certain areas for the gruesome display. "The most commonly used locations are river banks, under bridges, markets, or even on school grounds, or public stadiums," he said. [Source: Fox News | Travis Fedschun | August 14, 2017 ++]

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## MREs Update 01 ► Civilian Market

Civilians beware: Amazon.com Inc. could be declaring war on your gastrointestinal tract. The infamous Meal Refusing to Exit — er ... Meal, Ready to Eat — may soon make its way to the civilian populace courtesy of the corporate Goliath, according to a recent report by Reuters. The online retail titan plans to tap into technology that has been clogging the bowels of service members since the MRE's inception in 1981, when it replaced the antiquated canned wet rations used from the Civil War all the way through Vietnam. Recent military efforts endeavored to improve the taste of MREs used by service members, and with the backing of Amazon, it's expected that production rate and quality of the non-refrigerated goods will soar. Boxed culinary delicacies like beef stew and vegetable frittata may be available to buy as early as 2018. Exciting, right? Maybe not. If the military is any indication, introducing this technology to the world's population means potential for a catastrophic mass-constipation fallout. Get help. Invest in *senna glycoside* (a medication used to treat constipation and empty the large intestine before surgery) now. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Jon Simkins | August 14, 2017 ++]

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## WD-40 Update 01 ► More Uses

WD-40 is marketed as a “multi-use product.” It’s known for the capabilities for which it’s usually enlisted — such as lubricating squeaky hinges, loosening rusted parts and driving out moisture. (In fact, “WD” stands for “water displacement.”) But WD-40’s uses extend well beyond those roles. WD-40 Co. offers thousands of uses for its namesake product on its website, including 2,000-plus uses contributed by the product’s devotees. Pros and amateurs alike have been discovering more uses since the original WD-40 product was developed in 1953 after 39 failed attempts. (Thus, the “40” in its name.) Below are some of the least known but most helpful uses. If your instinct is to save a buck by buying a generic equivalent, following through on that instinct might be more challenging than usual in WD-40’s case. The product has few competitors, equity research analyst Joseph Altobello, currently of Raymond James Financial, told the San Diego Union-Tribune in 2013. Liquid Wrench, a brand-name product, and a few store brands could be the closest things to knock-offs.



The newspaper noted the following about the San Diego headquarters of WD-40: The company keeps a room filled with knock-off brands that have tried and failed to mimic the product. Some of the cans look uncannily like regular WD-40. [Chief Executive Garry] Ridge calls that room the mortuary. If you try a new use for WD-40 or a knock-off, test it in a small inconspicuous area first. WD-40’s list of fan-submitted uses notes that the company has not tested those suggestions, and that “customers should exercise common sense whenever using WD-40” and read the label.

### Indoors

- Remove stickers, decals, price tags and tape. It also works on adhesive residue they might leave behind.
- Remove scuff marks. This includes shoe scuff marks on floors and the interior of car doors as well as chair-back scuff marks on running boards on walls.
- Remove dried toothpaste stains.
- Dissolve glues. Examples from WD-40’s website include removing glue from carpet, leather and other surfaces; removing hair-extension glue from hair; and removing glue stains from jeans.
- Remove coffee stains. Examples from the website include cups, tables, counters and floor tiles. Just be sure to wipe up all fluid from floors so no one slips.
- Remove chewing gum. The website mentions gum on hair, shoes, carpet, concrete and lunch trays.
- Remove permanent marker from dry-erase boards.
- Remove crayon, colored pencil, modeling clay and Silly Putty. Crayola specifically recommends WD-40, among other products, for various surfaces.
- Separate stuck Lego building bricks.
- Clean grass stains, paint and dog poop off shoes.
- Dislodge salt-impregnated ice from boot soles.

### Outdoors

- Deter wasps from nesting. For evicting the buggers from a nest or preventing them from building one, users of Reddit’s “LifeProTips” message board agree on WD-40’s effectiveness. Just don’t spray a nest while wasps are around. As one commenter who made this mistake puts it: “They do not like it, and will attack.”
- Prevent grass from collecting on lawnmower blades.



- Deter squirrels from raiding backyard bird feeders. WD-40 Co. CEO Ridge recently told the Los Angeles Times that his favorite story about an unusual use for WD-40 was about a woman who sprayed it on her bird feeder pole because squirrels were filching bird food: “Can you imagine those little squirrels trying to climb up that lubricated pole?”
- Prevent snow from sticking to shovels and snowplow blades.
- Open frozen mailbox doors.

### Vehicles

- Remove dead bugs from various parts. WD-40’s website mentions radiators, grills, bumpers and paint.
- Remove bird droppings from hoods and roofs.
- Prevent car parts from freezing in winter. The website mentions locks and windshield-wiper spray nozzles.
- Remove barnacles from the bottom of boats.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | August 31, 2015 ++]

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## **Earthquakes Update 01 ► ShakeAlert System Incremental Progress**

Depending on the distance of an earthquake’s epicenter and magnitude, vulnerable West Coast cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle could have a few seconds or upwards of a minute before the most damaging seismic waves hit their localities. ShakeAlert, the system that’s been under development on the West Coast through a U.S. Geological Survey partnership with academic institutions, including the California Institute of Technology, the University of California at Berkeley, University of Oregon and the University of Washington, has been making steady, incremental progress as seismic networks become more robust and improvements are made to the systems that detect quakes and relay alerts.



**Damage from the 1994 Northridge earthquake in Santa Monica, California**

If those alerts can be deployed widely through cellphone networks when a quake is detected, people can take quick action to seek a more secure location to ride it out. It’s built upon the idea that a sensor network can detect an earthquake and relay an alert faster than destructive earthquake waves can reach certain locations. Those sensor networks could trigger valves on water tanks to close, shut down gas pipelines, halt or slow trains and prompt surgeons in hospitals to halt operations underway and secure patients and staff. Such a system can’t stop an



earthquake from happening, but it can save lives, reduce injuries and minimize seismic impacts on systems that will be important in any response or recovery operation.

While earthquake early-warning systems have not necessarily emerged from a new technological breakthrough—Japan, Mexico, Romania and Turkey all have developed their own systems—the U.S. has lagged behind and is currently playing catch up. The prototype alert system has performed well, but it's only been available to testing partners. And it's yet to have been tested by a major quake. An ongoing obstacle: Federal funding to build and deploy the ShakeAlert system has been limited. In fact, President Trump's budget proposals had called for the elimination of federal funding for ShakeAlert. But a bipartisan effort of Capitol Hill led by West Coast lawmakers, has been working to secure continued federal appropriations for the system.

In some good near-term news for ShakeAlert's advocates and disaster preparedness on the West Coast, the USGS recently announced additional funding for ShakeAlert—\$4.9 million to be distributed among the network's academic partners and an additional \$1 million to improve regional sensor networks. So for now, earthquake early-warning systems will progress on the West Coast. What else is planned for the next phase of ShakeAlert's development? According to the U.S. Geological Survey:

These agreements include work to incorporate real-time GPS observations into ShakeAlert. The USGS and its university and nonprofit partners will also further the development and streamlining of scientific algorithms to rapidly detect potentially damaging earthquakes, more thoroughly test the warning system and improve its performance. In addition, they will upgrade the networks and install new seismic stations to improve the speed and reliability of the warnings. The ShakeAlert partners will also continue user training and education efforts, in collaboration with state and local partners, and add additional ShakeAlert pilot users. There are currently about 60 organizations that are test users, from sectors such as utilities, transportation, emergency management, state and city governments, and industry. Several of these are engaged in pilot projects to demonstrate the practical use of ShakeAlert in a variety of applications.

"Our team is hard at work upgrading seismic instrumentation, data telemetry, and data processing facilities to ensure the highest-quality warning system possible," Paul Bodin, research professor of seismology at University of Washington and network manager of Pacific Northwest Seismic Network, said in a statement.

Time is ticking. It's only a matter of time until the next seismic disaster. Hopefully with ShakeAlert, more progress can be made on implementation before the next major quake strikes California or Pacific Northwest. [Source: Route Fifty | Michael Grass | August 17, 2017 ++]

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## Salads ► VA Dietician Advice

Salads are a refreshing meal option during the hottest days of summer. However, not all salads are healthy or satisfying. The most common mistakes we hear as dieticians from Veterans are too many high-calorie or high-fat additions and not enough healthy carbohydrates or lean proteins to make the salad filling enough for a meal. Here are some tips for turning a salad into a balanced and substantial meal.

- Add some protein: Without a protein source, your salad is not likely to fill you up. Some no-cook options include drained and rinsed canned beans or canned fish, such as sardines, salmon, or tuna. Other options include boiled eggs, fully-cooked rotisserie or grilled chicken, or leftover burgers from the grill. If choosing deli meats, try leaner options including reduced sodium turkey, ham, or trimmed roast beef.

- Vary your veggies: Many salads from fast food restaurants contain lower-fiber vegetables such as iceberg or romaine lettuce, onions, and tomatoes. Fiber is filling. Try adding higher-fiber vegetables, such as bell peppers, broccoli, spinach, sugar snap peas, or cabbage.
- Don't forget a healthy carbohydrate: My favorite carbohydrates to add to salads are beans (yes-they have protein AND carbohydrates), fresh fruits (think apples, pears, berries), quinoa, brown rice, corn, or leftover sweet potatoes. These will add texture and flavor to your salad. They are also healthier and a more filling option than croutons or crackers.
- Choose a healthy fat, but not too much: Oil and vinegar based dressings are more heart healthy than creamy dressings, like ranch and Caesar. Check the refrigerator aisle or the produce section of your grocery store for yogurt based (lower-fat) versions of these creamy favorites. Other heart healthy options include a small handful of nuts or seeds, or a few slices of avocado. A small sprinkle of cheese works too!

One Veteran in the MOVE program at our VA lost over 60 pounds while still dining at fast-food restaurants most weekdays. He replaces the fried chicken with grilled, skips the salad dressing, and brings his own toppings, such as garlic powder, canned beans or canned vegetables and a fruit cup to complete the meal.

Looking for recipes? Check out the VA's Yummy Benefits cookbook which has salad and dressing recipes ([https://www.nutrition.va.gov/docs/UpdatedPatientEd/Yummy\\_Benefits\\_Cookbook2.pdf](https://www.nutrition.va.gov/docs/UpdatedPatientEd/Yummy_Benefits_Cookbook2.pdf)). If you are taking Coumadin/Warfarin, consult with your PACT registered dietitian before changing your green vegetable intake. To learn more about this or any nutrition-related topic, contact your local VA and ask to speak with a registered dietitian. [Source: Vantage Point | August 24, 2017 ++]

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## Darwin Awards ► Self Destruction in the Most Extraordinarily Stupid Way

The Darwin Awards are finally out. The annual honor given to the persons who did the gene pool the biggest service by killing themselves in the most extraordinarily stupid way Last year's winner was the fellow who was killed by a Coke machine which toppled over on top of him as he was attempting to tip a free soda out. This year's winner was a real rocket scientist... HONEST! Read on...And remember that each and every one of these is TRUE. And the nominees were:

**Semifinalist #1** -- A young Canadian man, searching for a way of getting drunk cheaply, because he had no money with which to buy alcohol, mixed gasoline with milk... Not surprisingly, this concoction made him ill, and he vomited into the fireplace in his house. The resulting explosion and fire burned his house down, killing both him and his sister.

**Semifinalist #2** -- Three Brazilian men were flying in a light aircraft at low altitude when another plane approached. It appears that they decided to moon the occupants of the other plane, but lost control of their own aircraft and crashed. They were all found dead in the wreckage with their pants around their ankles.

**Semifinalist #3** -- A 22-year-old Reston, VA, man was found dead after he tried to use octopus straps to bungee jump off a 70-foot railroad trestle. Fairfax County police said Eric Barcia, a fast food worker, taped a bunch of these straps together, wrapped an end around one foot, anchored the other end to the trestle at Lake Accotink Park, jumped and hit the pavement. Warren Carmichael, a police spokesman, said investigators think Barcia was alone because his car was found nearby. 'The length of the cord that he had assembled was greater than the distance between the trestle and the ground,' Carmichael said. Police say the apparent cause of death was 'Major trauma.'

**Semifinalist #4** -- A man in Alabama died from rattlesnake bites. It seems that he and a friend were playing a game of catch, using the rattlesnake as a ball. The friend - no doubt a future Darwin Awards candidate - was hospitalized.

**Semifinalist #5** -- Employees in a medium-sized warehouse in west Texas noticed the smell of a gas leak. Sensibly, management evacuated the building extinguishing all potential sources of ignition; lights, power, etc. After the building had been evacuated, two technicians from the gas company were dispatched. Upon entering the building, they found they had difficulty navigating in the dark. To their frustration, none of the lights worked. Witnesses later described the sight of one of the technicians reaching into his pocket and retrieving an object that resembled a cigarette lighter! Upon operation of the lighter-like object, the gas in the warehouse exploded, sending pieces of it up to three miles away. Nothing was found of the technicians, but the lighter was virtually untouched by the explosion. The technician suspected of causing the blast had never been thought of as "bright" by his peers.

**The alleged winner of this year's Darwin Award (awarded, as always, posthumously):** The Arizona Highway Patrol came upon a pile of smoldering metal embedded in the side of a cliff rising above the road at the apex of a curve. The wreckage resembled the site of an airplane crash, but it was a car. The type of car was unidentifiable at the scene. Police investigators finally pieced together the mystery. An amateur rocket scientist.... Had somehow gotten hold of a JATO bottle (Jet Assisted Take Off, actually a solid fuel rocket)

That is used to give heavy military transport planes an extra 'push' for taking off from short airfields. He had driven his Chevy Impala out into the desert and found a long, straight stretch of road. He attached the JATO unit to the car, jumped in, got up some speed and fired off the JATO!

The facts as best as could be determined are that the operator of the 1967 Impala hit the JATO ignition at a distance of approximately 3.0 miles from the crash site. This was established by the scorched and melted asphalt at that location. The JATO, if operating properly, would have reached maximum thrust within 5 seconds, causing the Chevy to reach speeds well in excess of 350 mph and continuing at full power for an additional 20-25 seconds. The driver, and soon to be pilot, would have experienced G-forces usually reserved for dog fighting F -14 jocks under full afterburners, causing him to become irrelevant for the remainder of the event.

However, the automobile remained on the straight highway for about 2.5 miles (15-20 seconds) before the driver applied and completely melted the brakes, blowing the tires and leaving thick rubber marks on the road surface, then becoming airborne for an additional 1.4 miles and impacting the cliff face at a height of 125 feet leaving a blackened crater 3 feet deep in the rock. Most of the driver's remains were not recoverable. However, small fragments of bone, teeth and hair were extracted from the crater, and fingernail and bone shards were removed from a piece of debris believed to be a portion of the steering wheel.

Epilogue: It has been calculated that this moron attained a ground speed of approximately 420-mph, though much of his voyage was not actually on the ground. You couldn't make this stuff up, could you? But someone did. The Jet Assisted Take Off is an Urban Legend.

[Source: <http://darwinawards.com/darwin/darwin2017.html> ++]

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## **Passport Application ► State Department Letter From an Irate Citizen**

Dear Mrs. Ms. or Sir:

I'm in the process of renewing my passport and still cannot believe this. How is it that Radio Shack has my address and telephone number and knows that I bought a cable TV from them in 1987 (23 years ago), and yet, the Federal Government is still asking me where I was born and on what date. For Christ sake's, do you guys do this by hand? Ever heard of computers?

My birth date you have in my social security file. It's on EVERY income tax form I've filed for the past 30 years. It's on my Medicare health insurance card and my driver's license, it's on the last eight damn passports I've had, it's on every stupid customs declaration form I've had to fill out before being allowed off the plane for the last

30 years. And it's on all those census forms that we have to do at election times. Would somebody please take note, once and for all, that my mother's name is Maryanne, my father's name is Robert and I'm reasonably confident that neither name is likely to change between now and when I die.

Between you an' me, I've had enough of this bureaucratic bullshit! You send the application to my house, then you ask me for my #\*&#%\*& address. What is going on? You must have a gang of bureaucratic Neanderthal morons working there! Look at my damn picture. Do I look like Bin Laden? And "No," I don't want to dig up Yasser Arafat, for shit sake's. I just want to go and park my ass on a sandy beach. And would someone please tell me, why would you give a damn whether I plan on visiting a farm in the next 15 days? If I ever got the urge to do something weird to a chicken or a goat, believe you me, I'd sure as hell not want to tell anyone!

Well, I have to go now because I have to go to the other end of the city and get another #\*#@&#^@\*@& copy of my birth certificate to the tune of \$100. Would it be so difficult to have all the services in the same area so I could get a new passport the same day? Nooooo, that would require planning and organization. And it would be too logical for the @&^\*^%@% government. You'd rather have us running all over the place like chickens with our heads cut off. Then, we have to find some asshole to confirm that it's really me in the damn picture - you know, the one where we're not allowed to smile...Hey, you know why we can't smile? We're totally pissed off!

**Signed - An Irate Citizen.**

P.S. Remember what I wrote about getting someone to confirm that the picture is me? Well, my family has been in the United States of America since 1776. I have served in the military for something over 35 years and have had security clearances up the ying yang. However, I have to get someone important to verify who I am - you know, someone like my doctor....WHO WAS BORN AND RAISED IN INDIA!  
And you assholes want to run our health care system?

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## **Garage Door Billboards ► Making Yours Stand Out (08)**





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## Have You Heard? ► The Chief goes fishing | Spanish Oysters

The rain had stopped and there was a big puddle in front of the bar just outside the American Legion Post.

A rumpold old Navy Chief was standing near the edge with a fishing line in the puddle.

A curious young Marine fighter pilot came over to him and asked what he was doing.

"Fishing," the old Chief simply said.

"Poor old chief," the Marine officer thought to himself and invited the old Navy Chief into the bar for a drink.

As he felt he should start a conversation while they were sipping their spirits, the young jet pilot winked at another pilot and asked the Chief, "How many have you caught today?"

"You're number 14," the old Chief answered, taking another sip from his double shot of 12-year-old Scotch, "2 Air Force, 3 Navy and 9 Marines.

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A big Texan stopped at a local restaurant following a day roaming around in Spain.

While sipping his wine, he noticed a sizzling, scrumptious looking platter being served at the next table. Not only did it look good, the smell was wonderful.

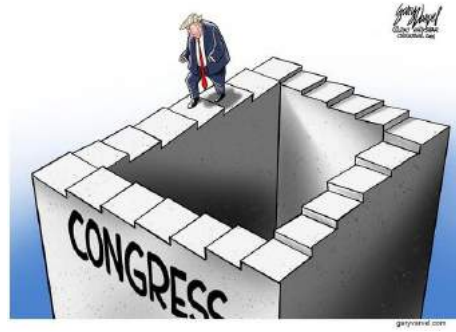
He asked the waiter, 'What is that you just served?' The waiter replied, 'Si senior, you have excellent taste! Those are called Cojones de Toro, bull's testicles from the bull fight this morning. A delicacy!'

The cowboy said, 'What the heck, bring me an order.' \_ \_ The waiter replied, 'I am so sorry senior. There is only one serving per day because there is only one bull fight each morning. If you come early and place your order, we will be sure to save you this delicacy.'

The next morning, the cowboy returned, placed his order, and that evening was served the one and only special delicacy of the day. After a few bites, inspecting his platter, he called to the waiter and said, 'These are delicious, but they are much, much smaller than the ones I saw you serve yesterday.'

The waiter shrugged his shoulders and replied, 'SI, SENOR. \_ \_SOMETIMES THE BULL WINS.' \_





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***RAO Bulletin Editor/Publisher:***

Lt. James (EMO) Tichacek, USN (Ret) Tel: (858) 842-1111 Email: [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net)  
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***RAO Baguio Director:***

SMSGt Leonard (Len) D. Harvey, USAF (Ret) PSC 517 Box 4036, FPO AP 96517-1000, Tel: 63-74-442-3468;  
Email: lenharvey@live.com.ph

***RAO Baguio Office:*** Mountain Lodge, 27 Leonard Wood Road, Baguio City, 2600 Philippines  
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