

RAO

BULLETIN

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DoD



DoD Disability Severance Update 02 ► Condition Not A Disability

An advocate for wounded warriors is charging Navy Department medical personnel are misusing an administrative separation authority called "Condition Not A Disability" on many sailors and Marines whose medical conditions should be screened through the disability evaluation system.."The use of administrative discharges for conditions that require DES [disability evaluation system] processing simply has to stop," retired Army Lt. Col. Michael A. Parker told the Department of Defense's Recovering Warrior Task Force last month at its latest public hearing. Navy physicians too often fail to submit medical issues for disability evaluation, as regulations require, Parker said. Instead they allow members to be discharged for Condition Not A Disability, a faster and less costly administrative discharge than would occur with referral to a medical board. The consequence for sailors and Marines is discharge without a disability rating and compensation, or without a lifetime disability retirement that they might deserve, Parker contends.



In an interview, Vice Adm. Matthew Nathan, Navy surgeon general and current co-chair of the task force, conceded there has been "inconsistency among some [health care] providers in what they consider to be separating issues versus a disability issue." But he added, "In my experience there hasn't been a pre-conceived design to use this to separate folks." Defense Department Instruction 1332.38 lists conditions for which Condition Not a Disability should be used to separate members. They include urinary incontinence, sleepwalking, severe nightmares, dyslexia or other learning disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, stuttering, incapacitating fear of flying, or airsickness, motion or travel sickness. Navy physicians have used it far more widely, Parker claims. Separation data from the services appear to support his argument.

From fiscal 2010 through 2013, an average of almost 1300 sailors and 1540 Marines per year were separated for Condition Not a Disability. Over the same period, Air Force used this authority an average of 22 times a year. Army data are kept in way that doesn't allow comparison. It tracks total separations for conditions not disabling including personality disorder, which other service branches track separately. [A 2010 congressional investigation found Army had abused use of personality disorder, viewed as a pre-service condition, to separate soldiers with post-traumatic stress, which should result in a service-connected disability and sometimes retirement.] But Parker said he knew of only one soldier, and no airmen, separated under Condition Not a Disability for a medical condition not listed in the CDN regulation, suggesting its misuse is largely a Navy Department problem.

Former Navy Hospital Corpsman Todd Bruder says he fell victim to it. A year ago, while assigned to Camp Pendleton, Calif., for field medical training, Bruder broke his right foot during command physical training, a simple misstep in a flag football game. Bruder said he felt "pops" in his foot. The next morning it was swollen and bruised, and x-rays showed fractures in the joint of his big toe and in the sesamoid bone behind it. The orthopedic clinic at Pendleton advised Bruder to stay off the foot and it would heal. It didn't. Though he stopped using a protective boot after several weeks, walking remained painful. By April he was referred to a Navy podiatrist who also advised that the breaks would take time to heal. By mid-summer, Bruder needed steroid injections to relieve the pain. Yet a podiatrist wrote in Bruder's medical file that his fractures had healed. A bone scan showed the sesamoid, in fact, had not mended.

In August, doctors rejected Bruder's request for a medical evaluation board, deemed him unfit for continued service by Condition Not a Disability and he was discharged, ending his six-year Navy career at age 29. Back home in Austin, Texas, a primary care physician referred Bruder to an orthopedic surgeon who confirmed one break had not healed, asked why the Navy had not operated and now recommended surgery to remove the sesamoid bone. Bruder, married with a child, has put off surgery, at first to be able to find a job and now, having one, to be able to keep it. Meanwhile, Bruder said, he limps, walking only on the outside of his right foot to lessen the pain, and takes pain medication daily. Parker points to other cases too and says he worries that if the Navy Department doesn't take corrective action to halt this practice, abuse of Condition Not a Disability could expand, particularly with the Marine Corps drawing down by more than 20,000 troops over the next several years.

Navy physicians do face a "conundrum," said Surgeon General Nathan, when patients have conditions that prevent return to full duty and yet doctors can't find an effective treatment or even confirm a condition. "I think there have been inconsistencies," Nathan said. "Sometimes we have young providers, especially early on in a conflict, who are new to the system and don't understand all the nuances. We work very hard to look for areas where we may see discrepancies, and to educate providers and have commands understand." Still, Nathan added, when members face discharge for Condition Not a Disability, they should be able to "go to their chain of command and to their service, and say, 'Can somebody look at this and tell me if I could have a second review?'"

Nathan suggested that after more than a decade of war, the medical system and its personnel have a lot of experience and knowledge on disabling conditions and on out-processing individuals found unfit. "Does that mean there's not an errant individual out there who, by innocence, doesn't understand the differences between separation and the IDES [individual disability evaluation system]? It's possible," Nathan said. But the "chance of these things falling through the cracks is much less." He adamantly disagrees with suggestions "that anybody does it intentionally as a way to separate somebody and save the taxpayers money." Any improper use of Condition Not a Disability he has reviewed, Nathan said, shows only that "individuals didn't understand the system". [Source: Military.com | Benefits | Tom Philpott | 30 Nov 2013 ++]

DoD Mobilized Reserve 4 DEC 2013 ► Decrease of 947

The Department of Defense announced the current number of reservists on active duty as of 4 DEC 2013. The net collective result is 947 fewer reservists mobilized than last reported in the 15 NOV 2013 RAO Bulletin. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 32,166; Navy Reserve 3,816; Marine Corps Reserve 1,987; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve 7,320; and the Coast Guard Reserve 378. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 45,667 including both units and individual augmentees. Since 911 there have been 886,687 reservists activated for duty. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel currently activated is available at www.defense.gov/documents/Mobilization%20Weekly%20Report%2004%20Dec%202013.pdf . [Source: DoD News Release No. R-046-13 dtd 4 Dec 2013 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse Update 10 ► Reported 1thru 15 Dec 2013

- **Stealth Bomber Cost Escalation.** The Air Force's new long-range bomber may cost as much as \$81 billion for the 100 planes planned, 47 percent more than the \$55 billion sticker price the service has listed. The Air Force based its estimate of \$550 million per plane on the value of the dollar in 2010, and it represents only the production costs for an aircraft that won't be deployed for at least 10 years. Including research and development, the bomber would cost as much as \$810 million apiece in this year's dollars, according to calculations by three defense analysts. The cost of the new bomber will draw close scrutiny in an era of declining defense budgets, as the Pentagon faces \$500 billion in reductions over nine years under the budget process called sequestration. The Air Force's track record also is being questioned after soaring costs for the aging B-2 stealth bomber the new plane would replace and the F-35 fighter jet, the most expensive U.S. weapons system, that's now being built.

"The Air Force has zero credibility on start-of-program cost estimates unless and until it ponies up real details about the bomber and its acquisition plan," Winslow Wheeler, a former GAO defense analyst now with the Project on Government Oversight in Washington, said in an email. "It is a fool's errand, or worse, to pretend the cost stated now is anything but a bait-and-switch buy-in gambit." The B-2 was planned as 132 planes for about \$571 million each in 1991 dollars before the first Bush administration cut the fleet to 20 planes in the early 1990s. That resulted in a price of about \$2.2 billion per bomber, a fourfold increase, in a program that remained highly classified during its development. The F-35 program has a current price tag of \$391.2 billion for 2,443 aircraft, a 68 percent increase from the projection in 2001, as measured in current dollars, for 409 fewer planes than originally planned. Whatever its ultimate cost, the new bomber would mean billions for the defense contractor chosen to build it. Lockheed Martin Corp. of Bethesda, Md., and Chicago-based Boeing, the No. 1 and No. 2 U.S. defense contractors, said in October that they'll bid for the project as a team. They may end up competing against Northrop Grumman Corp. of Falls Church, Va., the prime contractor for the B-2, which hasn't yet announced an intention to bid.

The Air Force has requested \$379 million in funding for development this year, increasing to more than \$1 billion in fiscal 2015 and \$2.8 billion in fiscal 2018, according to data released by the service. The Air Force hasn't provided its rationale for the increased spending. The Congressional Budget Office said the Air Force plans to request \$32.1 billion through 2023. The \$550 million per plane projection for the new bomber is "the only cost estimate approved for public release at this time," Air Force spokesman Ed Gulick said in a statement. Gulick said the estimate is a "target that helps balance capabilities and cost" and is being used in "rigidly containing the design" of the bomber. The more complete "program acquisition unit cost" will be derived later by adding research and development, as well as estimating "inflation up to the year you purchase aircraft," Gulick said. The Air Force's cost estimate "seems rather ambitious," said Todd Harrison, a defense budget analyst with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a Washington-based policy group. He calculated a price of \$810 million a plane in fiscal 2014 dollars, or \$81 billion for 100, based on \$20 billion in projected research and development costs. "Aircraft programs, and stealth aircraft in particular, have gone far over their initial cost estimates," Harrison said. "If you factor in historical cost growth, the total program cost could easily top \$100 billion."

Russell Rumbaugh, a defense analyst with the Stimson Center, also a policy group in Washington, said his comparable estimate is \$682 million per plane. Kevin Brancato, a defense analyst with Bloomberg Government, projected \$784 million per plane in this year's dollars. "The incentives in the budget system almost force the services to low-ball their cost estimates," said Gordon Adams, a professor at American University in Washington who oversaw the national security budget for the White House under President Bill Clinton. "Otherwise they do not get the program in the budget. It grows later." The Air Force now operates a fleet of 159 long-range bombers, including 63 swing-wing B-1Bs developed in the 1980s by Rockwell International, which is now part of Boeing, and the 20 B-2s from the 1990s. The new bomber is needed because the "B-2 is an older airplane that's getting expensive" to maintain and "it's not as stealthy as we're now capable of making aircraft," Deputy Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said in an interview before he left office 4 DEC.

As the Air Force anticipates its needs 10 or 20 years from now, "expecting those aircraft to perform reliably at such advanced ages may prove to be overly optimistic," said Mark Gunzinger, an airpower analyst with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. The Air Force is still flying 76 B-52 bombers from the H series that entered service in May 1961. They remain capable of launching conventional and nuclear bombs and cruise missiles. The Air Force has identified the new long-range bomber as one of its top three weapons projects, along with the F-35 from Lockheed and the KC-46 aerial refueling tanker made by Boeing. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel has said the bomber will support the U.S. strategy of rebalancing toward Asia. Pentagon officials have said they'll do as much as they can to

shelter such priority weapons systems from the automatic budget cuts. An Air Force summary of the bomber describes a stealth aircraft able to deliver both nuclear and conventional weapons. While the "baseline aircraft" would be piloted, the bomber would be designed to "enable future unmanned capability," according to the service.

Beyond that, the Air Force, which has said the bomber would incorporate "proven technologies," has said little about its classified plans for the new plane. "It would be a mistake to view this aircraft as simply another bomber," said Retired Lieutenant General David Deptula, the Air Force's former chief of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. It may take off on a bombing run, using intelligence and surveillance sensors provided from other platforms and on-board jammers to degrade ground radar, he said in an e-mail. The bomber crew also could use its radar and sensors to direct land- and sea-based strikes, as well as collect intelligence on the return flight, according to Deptula, who helped plan the air campaign in the 1991 Gulf War. "The operational characteristics are going to be cloaked in secrecy for a while, and I think that makes perfect sense," Air Force Chief of Staff General Mark Welsh told reporters in November. Welsh said capabilities would be carefully weighed against the \$550 million-a-plane target. "What we don't want to do is try to reach into some level of technology that's impractical." That's when "prices start to get out of control and your requirements start to drift," Welsh said. "We are not going to go there."

Adams cited the B-2's cost escalation, as well as plans for a medium-range bomber that Defense Secretary Robert Gates canceled as too costly in 2009. Gates supports the new bomber. "How many times are we going to go down this overpriced bomber road?" Adams said. "It's like Lucy with the football. We never get to kick an affordable aircraft through the goalpost." [Source: Bloomberg News | Tony Capaccio | 7 Dec 2013 ++]

- **\$2 Million Per Hour Flight Cost.** In 2008, the Defense Department spent \$486 million to buy twenty G222 (C-27A) twin turboprop aircraft from Alenia North America. The planes were for the Afghanistan Air Force, which flew a grand total of only 234 hours – at a cost of slightly more than \$2 million an hour – before the project was terminated, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said in a report released this week. The reason: Among other things, no one ordered the spare parts – which would have cost \$200 million – to keep the planes flying, SIGAR reported. Meanwhile the 20 aircraft sit unused. [Source: Next.Gov | Bob Brewin | 10 Dec 2013 ++]

DoD Benefit Cuts Update 27 ► Under 62 Retiree Budget Deal Impact

The yearly value of a 20-year military retirement would be cut for the current force steadily until age 62 under a COLA cap provision in the "bipartisan" budget deal struck by Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) and Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) the House and Senate budget committee chairmen. The cumulative effect would be to cut the lifetime value of military retirement by roughly \$83,000 for a typical enlisted member who retires at age 40 after 20 years' service. The typical officer retiring at age 42 after 20 would lose about \$124,000. That's according to retired Air Force Col. Michael F. Hayden, director of government relations for Military Officers Association of America. Hayden also serves as co-chair of The Military Coalition, an umbrella group of more than 30 military and veteran associations, rushing to try to kill the deal.

Targeted in the Ryan-Murray deal is full inflation protection for "working age" military retirees, those younger than 62. Retirees 62 and older would continue to get annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) that match

inflation as measured by the government's Consumer Price Index. Retirees younger than 62, and future retirees including currently serving members, would see yearly COLAs in retirement cut by one-percentage point below inflation until age 62. At that point they would receive a one-time catch up in their annuity to restore lost purchasing power going forward into old age. The Ryan-Murray deal, said Hayden, reneges on assurances by Congress in setting up the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission last year, as well as promises from President Obama and his defense secretaries, that any substantive changes to retirement would be "grandfathered," impacting only future generations of members. Current retirees or serving members were to be protected.

The budget deal, said Hayden, 'basically shoots the grandfather.' "I have to think anyone who signed on to this doesn't understand the full effect it will have on purchasing power of promised retired pay," Hayden said. The message being sent to the current force and younger retirees is, he said, "they just changed the rules on the benefit you signed up for." To do so without the armed services committee holding a single hearing, and without any analysis conducted on the impact on force readiness, said Hayden, is "absolutely insane." "You have a group of lawmakers not affiliated with the military that completely backdoor these changes," Hayden said. Murray serves on the Senate appropriations subcommittee on defense and the veterans affairs committee, which she chaired for a few years until becoming budget committee chairman last year. Hayden said The Military Coalition was rushing to try to stop the budget deal from becoming law. He wasn't optimistic.

"They basically are putting a lump of coal in the stocking and running out for the holidays," Hayden said. Hayden said this would have "a significant impact on members and their families looking to make the military a career." The long-term financial impact is enough to change minds "on whether to stay in the military." Congress and the White House seemed unaware of the hornet nest they had kicked inside the military community. At a press conference late Tuesday, Ryan and Murray congratulated themselves on reaching a deal that takes a first step toward reducing the deficit through bipartisan compromise, eases across-the-board sequestration cuts to federal programs, including defense, and protects their "core beliefs." For him, Ryan said, those are no tax increases and replacing arbitrary cuts of sequestration with "smart, targeted reforms." "We eliminate waste. We stop sending checks to criminals. We cut corporate welfare. We reform some mandatory programs and we start to make real reforms in these autopilot programs that are the drivers of our debt in the first place," Ryan said. One "autopilot" program, in his view, appears to be full COLAs for working-age military retirees.

"For younger military retirees, we trim their cost-of-living adjustment just a bit," explains a fact sheet released by Ryan's committee. "It's a modest reform for working-age military retirees." The first capped COLAs would take effect in January 2016. President Obama called the deal "balanced" and "a good first step" to replace sequestration which has "harmed students, seniors and middle-class families and served as a mindless drag on our economy over the last year." The deal, the president continued in a written statement, includes "targeted fee increases and spending cuts designed in a way that doesn't hurt our economy or break the ironclad promises we've made to our seniors."

Murray said the deal would cut \$6 billion from military retirement over 10 years, and another \$6 billion from federal civilian retirement by forcing new hires with fewer than five years' federal service to contribute an additional 1.3 percent of salary toward their pensions. "We think it's only fair that hard-working taxpayers who paid for the benefits that our federal employees receive are treated fairly as well," said Ryan. "We also believe it's important that military families as well as non-military families are treated equally and fair." The Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), which took effect in 1987, only provides full inflation protection in years when the CPI increase is two percent or less. If inflation is between two to three percent, COLA is set at two percent. If the CPI is more than three percent, COLAs for FERS are set one percent below the CPI. Advocates for military retirees argue that FERS wasn't imposed on career employees. They could stay under a system still paying full COLAs. [Source: Military.com | Tom Philpott | 11 Dec 2013 ++]

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program ► Reserve Post-Deployment

A Department of Defense program that has helped ease the post-deployment process for thousands of Guard and reserve members and their families in recent years will remain vital even after combat operations wind down in Afghanistan, a senior defense official who helped establish it told American Forces Press Service. DoD launched the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program in 2008 to ensure reserve-component members have access to the information and resources they need to effectively reintegrate with their families, communities and their employers, said Ronald G. Young, who oversees the program as executive director of Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve.

Over the past 12 years, about 900,000 Guard and reserve members have been called to duty, many for extended combat deployments. But unlike their active-duty counterparts, who returned to the extensive support of an installation after deployment, many reserve component members returned to communities that didn't always understand the depth of their experience and to families unfamiliar with military demands. "When we brought home our units from mobilizations in Iraq and Afghanistan, they would demobilize at an active-duty installation" often far from their homes, Young explained. "Here we were, trying to tell unit members about all the services and support they were entitled to now that they were returning home, yet nobody from the local vicinity where they lived or where the unit was located was there to support them." The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program helped bridge that gap, ensuring geographical separation from the military didn't leave troops emotionally or socially isolated. Yellow Ribbon coordinators fanned out across the United States to deliver support and services where service members and their families could access them.

Although DOD has oversight of the program, each service tailored its own program to its members' needs. But they share a general format, with at least one event scheduled at the alert phase, during deployment, and at 30, 60 and 90 days after redeployment. In addition, family programs help ensure family members understand the deployment and reintegration processes and know about resources available to help them. "We as a department have recognized the importance of a program to reintegrate our service members back into their local communities with the local support organizations right there," Young said. Now that combat deployments are drawing down and fewer reserve-component units are being mobilized, Young said it's critical that the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program remains strong. "We have learned that the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program is important to readiness, regardless of whether you are mobilizing for a war or mobilizing to go to Europe to backfill for a unit there. You don't have to be leaving to go into a war zone to need the type of support this program provides," Young said. "So I see the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program as an enduring program for the department," he said. "It helps us to reorganize, refit and prepare our units so they are ready when they are needed again in the future."

Based on the key role the reserve components play in national defense, Young said that future is now. "Today, we have 55,000 Guard and reserve members on active duty around the world," he reported. "The Guard and reserve are no longer just a strategic force, to be put on the shelf and await the next engagement somewhere," Young added. "They are part of the operational force, and my belief is that the Guard and reserve will continue to be utilized into the future for operational missions." By some estimates, members of the reserve components could be even more important as the services reduce the size of their active forces, he noted. "When they return home, they are going to need that same support and assistance to reintegrate with their families," Young said. "And therefore, the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program is going to remain important to the readiness of our future force. It helps keep our force ready, it keeps our family ready and it is vitally important for our operational Guard and reserve."

To remain relevant post-conflict, the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program has to be reliable, resourced and with trained coordinators ready to provide support when needed, whether during peacetime or war, Young said. DOD is exploring ways to deliver online training and a centralized, ready source of information for those who need it, he said. As the program incorporates best practices learned from current operations, Young said it must be agile to adapt to future needs and operating environments. "As part of that, we are adjusting the program content to make it scalable" to suit the size and duration of future mobilizations, he said. "And the program has to be committed," Young said. "We must remain dedicated to those who serve and those we support through a process of continuous evaluation and improvement of the program to ensure it provides enduring support to the services." [Source: AFPS | Donna Miles | 2 Dec 2013 ++]

Sequestration Update 42: ► H.R.3639 Calls for Chained-CPI

A Navy veteran in Congress proposes protecting defense spending with an ambitious plan for cutting federal entitlements — including military retired pay. Rep. Jim Bridenstine (R-OK), a former Navy pilot who flew combat missions off the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln over Iraq and Afghanistan, introduced a bill 2 DEC that he calls the **Provide for the Common Defense Act**, which would relieve planned sequestration cuts in the 2014 and 2015 defense budgets by tackling federal benefits. His plan is far from the only proposal pending in Congress, but Bridenstine is a vocal conservative affiliated with the tea party movement, and his status as a veteran willing to cut military benefits provides political cover for other lawmakers who share his view about the importance of protecting defense spending ahead of other programs, according to congressional aides involved in House and Senate budget negotiations.



Rep. Jim Bridenstine **Rep. Doug Lamborn**

Lawmakers are looking for a way to avoid the next round of sequestration. Expected to begin 15 JAN, the cuts on tap for the current fiscal year would force a \$53 billion reduction in defense spending if Congress and President Obama cannot agree on an alternative budget plan. Military retired pay is actually a peripheral target of Bridenstine's plan. One of the provisions of his bill, H.R.3639, would apply a much-discussed but controversial change in how cost-of-living adjustments are calculated for Social Security and other federal benefits linked to the Consumer Price Index. The so-called Chained-CPI plan endorsed by Bridenstine would result in annual COLAs that are 0.3 percent to 0.5 percent less by changing assumptions on the measurement of the cost of goods and services to take into account the possibility that consumers would substitute cheaper goods to avoid rising prices, such as buying a different brand or product.

For retirees, the immediate impact of this change is small. For example, the 1.5 percent COLA that took effect on Dec. 1 and will first appear in January checks would have been about 1.3 percent under the Chained-CPI formula. However, his proposal assumes the change would result in \$216 billion in savings because it would apply to a wide range of federal entitlements. If implemented, the Chained-CPI calculation could also apply to veterans' disability

and survivor benefits. Unlike military retired pay, veterans' benefits are not automatically linked to changes in consumer prices but rather are traditionally increased by the same percentage through an act of Congress. In a statement, Bridenstine said his bill "strengthens defense, reforms entitlements and reduces the national deficit by \$200 billion." Undoing sequestration is the chief reason for the bill, he said.

- "China is attempting to control international waters and airspace as its own while also endeavoring to build the world's largest navy and air force, including state-of-the-art aircraft carriers and nuclear ballistic missile submarines.
- "Russia is investing \$750 billion into military modernization and buildup while threatening nuclear war and invading its former Soviet satellite states which are striving for freedom and independence. These aggressive actions are an attempt to deny free markets and American freedom of navigation."

Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-CO), a cosponsor of the bill, said the effort is designed to protect defense programs from being cut to pay for lower priority programs. "Washington has a spending problem, but incessantly and mindlessly cutting national security will not get us out of our fiscal mess," Lamborn said. "Completely eliminating the Department of Defense would not even pay off this year's deficit, let alone seriously reduce our \$17 trillion national debt. Congress needs to give our military relief rather than use it as a punching bag." The Chained-CPI proposal is strongly opposed by many congressional Democrats but it is an idea partly endorsed by the Obama White House as a potential part of a larger spending and debt reduction plan. In addition to revising the COLA calculation, Bridenstine's proposal would increase Medicare premiums and deductibles, cap growth in agriculture subsidies and require federal civilian employees to contribute slightly more to their government retirement funds. [Source: NavyTimes | Rick Maze | 4 Dec 2013 ++]

Navy Wounded Warrior Program ► NWW Call Center

The Navy Wounded Warrior (NWW) - Safe Harbor call center -- which connects people to the catalog of services provided by the Navy's sole wounded warrior support program -- has received more than 1,100 calls throughout its first year of operation. Representatives field telephone inquiries 24 hours a day, every day of the year. It is the first call center dedicated exclusively to the Navy's wounded warrior program. The NWW call center can be reached at 855-NAVP WWP (628-9997). Sailors and Coast Guardsmen may self-refer to NWW, or be referred by a family member, their command leadership or their medical team. To sign up to receive the Navy Safe Harbor Family newsletter send an email to dario.santana@navy.mil. To learn more, call 855 628-9997, visit the Navy Wounded Warrior website <http://safeharbor.navylive.dodlive.mil> or email navywoundedwarrior@navy.mil. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 6 Dec 2013 ++]

Arlington National Cemetery Update 46 ► Xmas Wreaths

A major donation by Google and smaller donations from a number of individuals will assure that nearly 120,000 gravestones at Arlington National Cemetery will be decorated with holiday wreaths this season. Google, which is mapping the cemetery with cameras mounted on people and cars, donated \$250,000 to Wreaths Across America, a nonprofit organization that has been laying wreaths there since 1992. Others also contributed smaller amounts after a reading a story in last week's Washington Post that reported that the effort was falling short this year. "We're happy to do our part to honor veterans during this holiday season," said Susan Molinari, Google's vice president of public policy and government relations. Wreaths Across America, which puts wreaths on graves in 900 cemeteries nationwide, had about 12 percent more donations this year than last, but many corporate sponsors who previously had supported the Arlington effort decided

this year to split their contributions between Arlington and other military cemeteries around the nation. This week's donations will almost bring the organization to its goal of setting 130,000 wreaths on Arlington's 240,000 headstones 14 DEC . "We are so incredibly grateful and humbled" by the donations, said Amber Caron, a spokeswoman e: for Wreaths Across America. Getting a wreath on every headstone is next year's goal, she said. [Source: The Washington Post | Patricia Sullivan | 11 Dec2013 ++]



Wreaths Across America 2012 at Arlington National Cemetery

NDAA 2014 Update 05 ► Expedited Process Unveiled

House and Senate Congressional military committee leaders on 9 DEC unveiled an expedited process for a new, \$632.8 billion defense bill for 2014. It paves the way for a lower pay raise for military service members in 2014. According to a HASC press release, the measure “supports current law, which is intended to ensure pay for our troops keeps pace with the civilian sector, but provides the President with latitude to make exceptions by executive order.” President Obama told Congress on 30 AUG that he intends to use his authority to set the 2014 military pay increase at 1 percent. Absent this additional action, service members would have received a 1.8 percent increase. The HASC release makes clear the NDAA neither affirms or rejects the President’s decision. In addition, if the bill clears the Senate with no changes and is signed into law, it includes the following provisions:

- NO increase in TRICARE fees/deductibles/copayments.
- A one-time election for those forced out of Prime in OCT to continue enrollment in Tricare Prime.
- \$30M in Impact Aid for local school districts with military children.
- \$10.4B for military construction, housing, and energy conservation.
- Further accommodates religion/moral beliefs by service members and Chaplains
- TAP to include info on disability-related jobs and education protections
- Authorizes salutes for Veterans and those not in uniform for Pledge of Allegiance
- A “Sense of Congress” that state courts should not consider military deployment as the sole factor in determining child custody in state court proceedings.
- DoD and VA to develop and implement policies on treating and helping service members who have sustained severe injuries to their reproductive and urinary tract systems.
- DoD to carry out a pilot program for clinical trials of investigational treatments of brain injury and PTSD at non-military facilities.
- DoD and VA to establish and deploy an integrated electronic health record system by Dec. 31, 2016.
- More than 30 provisions and reforms to the Uniform Code of Military Justice related to combatting sexual assault in the military.
- Create a definition of a gender-neutral occupational standards that would be used by each military service to develop the standards required for all military career designators.
- Prohibit the Defense Department from initiating another base realignment and closure round.

- Keep Guantanamo Bay operational, prohibits the transfer of detainees to the U.S. and the construction of detainee facilities in the U.S., and maintains limitations on detainee transfers to third countries.
- Re-authorize personnel recovery authorities to plan and execute the safe recovery of U.S. personnel isolated during military and contingency operations.
- Facilitate the development of more functional, lighter and more protective body armor, as well as directs DOD to adopt and field a common camouflage utility uniform for specific combat environments for use by all service members.

Bowing to a calendar crunch and pressure from the Pentagon, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin (D-MI), ranking Republican committee member Sen. James Inhofe of Oklahoma and House Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon (R-CA), announced they would “blend” the authorization act that the House passed in June with a draft that was working its way through the Senate until negotiations fell apart just before Thanksgiving. Both Levin and Inhofe emphasized they were unsatisfied with the quick approval process, but said they had no choice, since the House was scheduled to adjourn 13DEC for the rest of the year, leaving no time for conference talks. “This is the only path to a bill,” Levin said. “There is no alternative.” Without congressional approval of a new bill, a long list of special pay categories for servicemembers will expire 31 DEC. In addition, the Pentagon is bracing for another round of forced spending cuts by mid-January, although there were signs 9 DEC that House and Senate writers of the broader federal budget were near an agreement that could avert the cuts and actually restore some funds to the Defense Department.

Monday’s development had been urged by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, in a letter to House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV). Dempsey said congressional inaction on a new bill threatens military readiness and only increases uncertainty in an era of continuing spending cuts. The bill’s many provisions “are critical to the nation’s defense and are urgently needed to ensure we all keep faith with the men and women, military and civilian, selflessly serving in our armed forces,” Dempsey wrote to Reid and Boehner. Levin read the letter on the Senate floor. Levin said the newer, shorter process would involve an initial House vote, followed by a Senate vote next week since it plans to stay in session until the 20th of DEC. He said negotiators blended the bills by simply focusing on ideas that had been approved and discarding the more-contentious issues. “The bill that we’ve come up with is not a Democratic bill or a Republican bill. It is a bipartisan defense bill, one that serves the interests of our men and women in uniform and preserves the important principle of congressional oversight over the Pentagon,” Levin said.

The process means Congress won’t be asked to decide between two proposals for reforming sexual assault prosecutions in the military; one, by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), would remove decisions from the military’s chain of command and another, by Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO), would stop short of such a move. Defense officials had been objecting to the Gillibrand proposal. But even without the McCaskill or Gillibrand proposals, Levin and Inhofe said the bill still contains 27 reforms to the military’s justice system, such as eliminating commanders’ ability to unilaterally overturn convictions, criminalizing retaliation against an accuser, providing a special counsel to alleged victims of sexual assault and reshaping how victims are treated during a trial’s discovery phase. The bill does contain a controversial proposal to ease restrictions on transferring detainees from the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, but retains a House prohibition on transferring them to the United States. How to deal with such proposals help stall last month’s talks in the Senate, as Republicans had been pressing for an open amendment process. There are still approximately 500 pending amendments to the bill, including sanctions against Iran that are being opposed by the Obama administration while it continues delicate discussions with Iranian leaders.

Levin and Inhofe repeatedly emphasized they were forced into accepting the bill’s newer, quicker process. “We are where we are,” Inhofe said. “We only had until 11 o’clock in the morning of the 13th,” he said. “That’s it.

Mechanically, if we are all going to embrace and love each other and agree to everything, it still couldn't be done. There's no way we could have a defense authorization bill this year." Waiting until January wasn't an option either, Inhofe said, because of the expiration of special pay provisions. Because a snowstorm had prevented many senators from returning to Washington on the 9th, Reid canceled Senate floor votes that had been scheduled for the afternoon and announced the Senate would resume debate on the defense bill the next morning. The House passed their version of the bill 12 DEC putting the ball in the Senate's court to pass it prior to their 20 DEC Xmas recess. To read the full bill go to <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113hr1960pcs/pdf/BILLS-113hr1960pcs.pdf>. Source: AFSAOC & Stars and Stripes | J. Taylor Rushing | 10 & 11 Dec 2013 ++]

VA



VA Hospitals Update 10 ► GAO Findings on Peer Review

Patients at Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals are not being adequately protected from doctors who have histories of providing substandard treatment, according to a new report from the Government Accountability Office. None of the four Veterans Affairs hospitals examined by the GAO complied with all of the requirements for peer review of patient care that results in a bad outcome, which could include patient deaths. Cases that warranted possible disciplinary action also were not always followed up on properly, according to the report. The Veterans Health Administration has procedures in place to ensure quick reviews in cases that have bad outcomes. Those can range from a confidential review by senior doctors to more formal investigations that can lead to discipline.

Among the standards the hospitals failed to meet were timely completion of the reviews and development of clear triggers that would signal the need for more in-depth investigation of the patient's care, according to GAO. "Failure of VAMCs (Veterans Affairs medical centers) to adhere to the protected peer review policy elements may result in missed opportunities to identify providers who pose a risk to patient safety," GAO concluded. "VHA cannot provide reasonable assurance that VAMCs are using the peer review triggers as intended, as a risk assessment tool. This weakens VAMC's ability to ensure they are identifying providers that are unable to deliver safe, quality patient care," GAO said. Investigations by VA's inspector general and media reports have documented at least 21 preventable deaths and a series of sanitary and safety lapses at VA hospitals. Recent reports have linked poor patient care, maintenance issues and unsanitary practices to at least six preventable deaths in Columbia, S.C., five in Pittsburgh, four in Atlanta, and three each in Memphis and Augusta, Ga.

There are three levels of review after an adverse incident at a VA hospital. The most informal is peer review in which experienced medical providers examine the treatment a patient received to determine whether it was appropriate. That process is considered "protected," meaning it is confidential and the results cannot be used in disciplinary proceedings. The other two levels examine the doctor's competence and determine whether the adverse outcome is due to misconduct. They are not protected, and the results can be used to discipline the health care provider. If an investigation in a protected review uncovers evidence that the doctor or dentist's actions put patients

at risk, the case can be forwarded to the higher level of unprotected examination. There are supposed to be clear triggers to make that determination. The initial review must be completed within 45 days under VA policies. If it is determined the case should have been handled differently, it is supposed to be sent to a higher-level panel, which is supposed to make a final determination within 120 days. Other VA policies require cases in which patient care or doctor competence are questioned to be sent to an unprotected review, and that each hospital develop clear triggers that would flag a case for further investigation.

Ehen GAO studied the peer review processes at VA hospitals in Dallas, Nashville, Seattle and Augusta, Maine, it found none met all four requirements. Only one hospital completed all initial reviews within the required 45 days. It also completed final reviews within the 120-day deadline in 97 percent of the cases. Two other veterans' hospitals met the 45-day deadline less than 80 percent of the time. Final reviews at those two hospitals were done within the required 120 days in 89 percent of the cases. The last hospital could not be assessed because its records were incomplete. The hospitals were not identified by name. All four hospitals did have standards to trigger a higher level of review if the quality of care or doctor competence was questioned. Three of them appropriately sent questioned cases for further examination between 96 and 100 percent of the time. But the same hospital that had the sloppy records sent only 79 percent of the cases that should have been given more scrutiny to a higher level of review. VA officials generally agreed with the GAO findings and said the agency plans to implement the recommended changes. [Source: Washington Examiner | Mark Flatten | 4 Dec 2013 ++]

VA Loans Update 10 ► VA Amount Actually Guaranteed

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs guarantees a generous portion of each VA loan. How much the VA guarantee ends up being depends on the loan amount. The VA guarantees a portion of these loans for a lender. This is not money paid to a veteran, or for their benefit. Instead, the VA guarantees a portion of these loans to help lenders offset the risk of loans. By doing so, it encourages lenders to make loans available to veterans on competitive terms. Also, regardless of how much the VA will guarantee, or how high the VA loan limit is in a particular county, a veteran will have to qualify for the loan based upon income, credit, and other requirements. VA-eligible borrowers may be interested to know how much the VA guarantees on mortgages obtained through military home loan benefits. To understand the VA guarantee, one might think of VA loans in terms of small, medium and large. This table shows the maximum guarantee amounts for loans ranging from small to jumbo:

VA Loan Amount	Maximum Guarantee	Special Provisions
Up to \$45,000	50% of loan amount	25% of Streamline Loans
\$45,001 - \$56,250	\$22,500	Same as above
\$56,251 - \$144,000	40% of the loan amount, with a maximum of \$36,000	Same as above
\$144,000 or more	Up to an amount equal to 25% of the county loan limit	Same as above

- **Small VA loans under \$144,000 may have a larger guarantee** - Proportionately speaking, loans under \$144,000 can get a larger guarantee. As much as half of a VA loan under \$45,000 can be guaranteed. The proportion of VA guarantee goes down as the amount of the loan goes up. When you obtain a Certificate

of Eligibility (COE) for the first time, you may notice that your available entitlement is \$36,000. This amount only refers to loans up to \$144,000.

- **Medium VA mortgages between \$144,000 and \$417,000 have up to 25% government backing -** Realistically speaking, most VA loans are for larger than \$144,000. The average VA loan is around \$210,000. The VA guarantees up to 25% of loans over \$144,000. The percentage depends on whether a borrower makes a down payment. Most VA loans are obtained without a down payment; therefore, most VA loans receive 25% backing by the federal government. The conforming loan limit for most U.S. counties is \$417,000. And, the VA is willing to back up to 25% of all VA loans up to this limit. Many borrowers get their COEs and scratch their heads because it says that their entitlement is only \$36,000. Remember this is only for loans up to \$144,000. An experienced VA loan officer can calculate your entitlement for loans above this amount. Most borrowers with full entitlement intact will have an additional \$68,250 of VA backing available.
- **Large VA home loans over \$417,000 and up to conforming loan limits also get 25% VA guarantee -** A larger category of VA loans exists and is named so for its size ---Jumbo. Jumbo VA loans are those over VA conforming loan limits. For most counties, that limit is \$417,000. However, certain high cost counties can have conforming limits higher than \$417,000. This is to adjust for the higher cost of real estate in some areas. It's rare, but some counties have VA loan limits that exceed \$1 million, other counties have limits above \$417,000 but less than \$1 million. VA borrowers in counties where the conforming limit is higher than \$417,000 can expect VA backing of 25% up to the limit. Therefore, it's possible for qualified borrowers to obtain large VA loans with no down payment. However, Jumbo loans over the conforming limit will require a down payment to cover the amount not guaranteed by the VA.

To find out how much the guarantee will be on your VA loan, contact an approved lender. [Source: Military.com | Veteran Mortgages | 12 Aug 2013 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse Update 83 ► Reported 1thru 15 Dec 2013

- **West Valley City UT** — A former staffer for U.S. Rep. Jason Chaffetz of Utah has been charged with lying about being injured in the Iraq war to collect disability benefits. Prosecutors on 5 DEC filed a 15-count indictment accusing **Gilbert Prado** of West Valley City with wire fraud and making false statements. The eight wire fraud counts stem from monthly disability payments Prado received from August 2011 to March 2012 totaling \$18,000, authorities said. Prado, 49, is also accused of falsely representing to Veterans Affairs that he was injured during combat in Iraq in 2006. Prosecutors haven't challenged the fact that Prado served in the military. The indictment said Prado lied during his VA evaluation for benefits when he claimed an improvised explosive device exploded 40 feet from him, throwing him against a truck. Prado said the blast left him with a concussion, broken ribs, vision problems, headaches and memory loss, authorities said. Prosecutors also said Prado falsely claimed he had recurring nightmares about shooting and killing two men, and injured his elbows while breaking down doors during searches.

A message left at a phone number listed for Prado was not immediately returned Friday. Another number was disconnected. No attorney was listed for him in court records. The VA determined in 2009 that Prado had post-traumatic stress disorder, and he received monthly disability benefits. He requested an increase in benefits the next year, citing injuries to his brain and elbows, but the agency denied the request. The VA did grant his request for an increase in benefits in 2011, the indictment said. Prado landed a two-year paid position in Chaffetz's Provo field office through the Wounded Warrior Project. A 2011

congressional office directory shows Prado worked on constituent issues for Chaffetz. The Republican congressman told The Deseret News that his office became concerned about the veracity of Prado's story and referred the case to federal authorities. Chaffetz said he couldn't offer further details because it was a personnel issue. Prado worked for the congressman from 2010 to 2011, Chaffetz's office confirmed in a statement. [Source: Associated Press article 7 Dec 2013 ++]



Gilbert Prado

- **Orange County FL** — While thousands of veterans wait for their backlogged benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, one woman who has never served watched her bank account grow for years. **Linda Marshall** has been arrested and plead guilty in federal court to illegally inheriting her brother's pension after he died. "I think they should throw the book at her, it's not right. There's a lot of guys that need it and it's taking away from them," Veteran Bill Patrick said. Veterans who benefit from the VA were appalled to hear about the scheme. "You're taking away from the real veterans," Dan Cooley said. Federal authorities said Marshall's brother passed away in 2008, but she never reported his death and continued to collect nearly \$40,000 until last year. All of the money was being directly deposited into Marshall's brother's account. Surveillance video at local banks show Marshall withdrawing money from her brother's account, investigators said. Court documents reveal she confessed to the crime and admitted what she was doing was wrong. Veterans said many of them worry this happens a lot more than people are aware of. Marshall is facing up to ten years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. [Source: <http://www.wftv.com/news> 8 Dec 2013 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 118 ► House Hearing on High Error Rates

The House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs scheduled a hearing for Wednesday, 4 DEC with testimony from veterans-advocacy groups and administration officials who oversee the VA's processing of such claims, which have increased by 50 percent since President Obama took office. VA's 30 NOV weekly status report on claims processing said it had a 89.4 percent accuracy rate on decisions in the previous 12 months and 90.2 percent in the last three months. The report does not separate out the more complicated claims. A 68-year-old widow who has spent 23 years seeking veterans' survivor benefits was scheduled 4 DEC to appear on Panel One as a key witness at the House hearing focusing on the Veterans Affairs Department's problems in handling complicated claims. Specifically, about error rates as high as 66 percent found in disability claims reviewed by the VA Inspector General. The reviews involve cases of post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injuries and veterans seeking to be rated as 100 percent disabled.

Bettye B. McNutt of Olive Branch, Miss., will tell the panel that her 8,600-day fight for dependency and indemnity compensation following the Agent Orange-related death of her Vietnam veteran husband is the result of frequent and multiple mistakes by VA. "I have been forced to live in poverty, sometimes without heat and electricity, as a widow raising a son orphaned by the Vietnam War," McNutt says in her prepared statement to the committee. "I am here seeking justice for the other widows and orphans of our Vietnam War veterans, as I am well aware that there are many like me." McNutt will be accompanied by her attorney, Glenn R. Bergmann, who is now handling her claim, and by her son, Brandon. "When faced with denial, most people give up," McNutt says. "I think VA knows this. VA can easily grant my claim right now if they reviewed the evidence of record and correctly applies the law. This is not a difficult claim, but VA has made it complex."

Her husband, Ronnie, was drafted into the Army and served in Vietnam in 1968 and 1969, she said. He was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer in 1987 and died within five months of his diagnosis. "He died because of the Vietnam War and his service to our country. On his death bed, just weeks before he died, he told me about how he swam in waters highly contaminated with Agent Orange. He told stories about using discarded Agent Orange barrels as makeshift barbecues," she says. "There is no doubt in my mind and in my doctor's professional opinion that the dioxin in Agent Orange killed my Ronnie." While she is convinced her husband's death is service-connected, making her eligible for survivor benefits, the VA is not convinced, at least not to the point of paying her. McNutt says her claim, first filed in 1990 in Jackson, Miss., might have been lost for 12 years although she kept receiving assurances it was being considered. "I believe VA lost or simply forgot to process my claim until I reminded the agency about it," she says.

Now, her claim has been denied seven times, although three times her appeals reached the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, which said VA had made errors on her claim. "I feel that VA is waiting for me to die," she says. A chronology of her claim provided to the committee counts six significant errors, including one in 2006 when she began receiving a pension she had never applied for. "I returned the check," she says. Her claim is now pending before the Board of Veterans Appeals, an administrative board within VA. The wife of another veteran who also has problem with claims has filed a written statement with the congressional panel but will not appear at the hearing.

At the hearing the American Legion took issue with accuracy claims, published in a weekly report that contains various performance measures for the processing of benefits, including several measures of accuracy. The Legion told the House committee it examined 260 claims. Of these, 55 percent contained errors, according to Zachary Hearn, the Legion's deputy director of benefits. Shinseki claimed far better figures during a 6 NOV meeting with reporters documented by Military Times, saying that since DEC 2012, the average three-month accuracy rate had been 90 percent, an increase of 5 percentage points since 2011 and 7 points since 2010. According to the latest workload report, dated Nov. 30, the 12-month accuracy rate for entitlement claims was 89.4 percent. VA has a goal of 98 percent accuracy. According to the VA, the Nashville Veterans Affairs Regional Office had a 95.1 percent accuracy rating for the previous three months. Yet an examination of 22 of the office's claims from that period uncovered seven errors, Hearn said. "Our review paints a far dimmer picture of Nashville's accuracy than indicated in the Monday Morning Workload Report," Hearn said. The group provided similar testimony before the House committee and its Senate counterpart in September.

In addition, Ronald Abrams, joint executive director for the National Veterans Legal Services Program, told the subcommittee that VA's error rate for complex disability claims has increased. "You just simply can't go too fast when you have complicated claims - special monthly compensation, traumatic brain injury," said Abrams, according to the committee. "In fact, the regulation dealing with TBI is so complicated that some people call it the 'Da Vinci Code.'" Abrams' experience, according to the committee, includes taking part in more than 40 Regional Office Action Reviews conducted by The American Legion. Such reviews, he said, showed him that VA's error rate "has been consistently at least 30 percent in the various [regional offices]. Sometimes it's higher. It's unrealistic to assume

that the VA will ever get its real [accuracy] rate to 98 percent." [Source: ArmyTimes & Delaware Online | Rick Maze & Bill McMichael | 3 & 5 Dec 2013]

VA Claims Backlog Update 119 ► VA Testimony at Senate Hearing

At a hearing 11 DEC before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs (SCVA), the Department of Veterans Affairs' Under Secretary for Benefits, Allison A. Hickey, outlined progress made by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) in reducing the backlog of Veterans' disability compensation and pension claims by 36 percent since March -- attributing the success to the combined impact of VBA's transformation initiatives and increased employee productivity. "We know there is much more work to be done to reach our goal of eliminating the disability claims backlog in 2015," said Hickey. "But I'm encouraged that the improved tools and processes we've put in place so far are having a real impact so that we may better serve our nation's Veterans, their survivors and their families."

In her testimony, Under Secretary Hickey detailed the elements of VBA's transformation plan, which includes re-training and reorganizing its workforce, streamlining business processes, and building and implementing new technology solutions. With each transformation milestone, said Hickey, VBA is successfully moving away from a paper-bound, manual process to improve benefits delivery to Veterans, their families, and survivors through paperless claims processing. She also noted that if full funding is received, mandatory overtime for VBA claims processors, which helped bring down the backlog this year, will continue for much of 2014. Key accomplishments highlighted in the testimony included:

- Decreasing the pending inventory of claims by 22 percent;
- Decreasing the number of claims in the backlog (those pending over 125 days) by 36 percent;
- Increasing claim-level accuracy from approximately 83 percent in 2011 to 90 percent today;
- Increasing medical issue-level accuracy to approximately 97 percent today;
- Completed processing of 99.9 percent of all claims that were pending over two years;
- Completed processing of 97 percent of all claims that were pending over one year through the end of October;
- Converting over 360 million images of paper claims documents into a digital format for electronic processing; and
- Establishing over 3.2 million Veteran, Servicemember and family member accounts in *eBenefits*, the joint Defense Department/VA web portal for accessing and tracking VA benefits.

Also, VA's web-based, paperless electronic claims processing solution, the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS), was successfully deployed to all 56 of VA's regional benefits offices across the country, six months ahead of schedule. VBMS has also been fielded to the Appeals Management Center, the Records Management Center, the Board of Veterans' Appeals, VA's National Call Center, and all VA Medical Centers. Currently, about 75 percent of the VBA's claims inventory is in digital form for electronic processing in VBMS -- a percentage that is growing daily. In December, VBMS will continue to add new features and capability.

During her testimony, Hickey thanked the committee members for their support, noting that VA will rely on their continued support for resourcing the information technology and automation advancements needed to meet the Department's goal of eliminating the backlog in 2015. In fiscal year 2013 alone, VA provided over \$59 billion in compensation benefits to four million Veterans and survivors, and over \$5 billion in pension benefits to more than 515,000 Veterans and survivors. For Veterans and separating Servicemembers who are planning to file a disability claim, VA urges them to do so by filing Fully Developed Claims (FDCs) electronically through *eBenefits*. Veterans and separating Servicemembers who need help filing their claims can contact their local veteran service organization for assistance. Under current law, Veterans filing initial disability compensation claims as FDCs now through Aug. 5, 2015, may be eligible for up to one year of retroactive benefits. Registered *eBenefits* users with a Premium account can file a claim online, track the status, and access a variety of other benefits, including pension, education, health care, home loan eligibility, and vocational rehabilitation and employment programs. [Source: VA News Release 11 Dec 2013 ++]

VA Prosthetics Update 10 ► Hand With Sense Of Touch

Over the past few years, artificial hands have come a long way in terms of dexterity. They can grasp, shake hands, point, and, usefully, make the "come hither" gesture. Now, researchers at the Cleveland Veterans Affairs Medical Center and Case Western Reserve University have made significant progress in building a prosthetic hand that provides something like a sense of touch. The hand, which you can see put to use in a demonstration in the video at <http://www.nextgov.com/health/2013/12/va-researchers-help-develop-artificial-hand-can-feel/75311/?oref=ng-HPriver>, has 20 sensitive spots that can perceive other objects' physicality. Implants that connect those spots to nerves in the patients arm have continued to work 18 months after installation, which MIT Technology Review reports, notes is a important milestone since "electrical interfaces to nerve tissue can gradually degrade in performance."

Hands are more than tools for manipulating the physical world. They are also tools of perception, reporting sensations such as heat, texture, contact. These two systems, output and input, work together, helping us to know when our grasp is tight or whether we've reached the object on a shelf that's just out of view. The difficulty of building a machine that can perceive tactile information and report it back to the brain has become the roadblock for a truly hand-like prosthetic. The new prosthetic is a step towards creating this feedback loop. And it can do more than sense simple contact. Dustin Tyler, of Case Western, can adjust the device to signal different textures. Igor Spetic, who used the hand in the video, "says sometimes it feels like he's touching a ball bearing, other times like he's brushing against cotton balls, sandpaper, or hair," according to the Technology Review report.



The seven-millimeter-long cuff electrode

At the heart of the technology is a custom version of an interface known as a cuff electrode. Three nerve bundles in the arm—radial, median, and ulnar—are held in the seven-millimeter cuffs, which gently flatten them, putting the normally round bundles in a more rectangular configuration to maximize surface area. Then a total of 20 electrodes on the three cuffs deliver electrical signals to nerve fibers called axons from outside a protective sheath of living cells that surround those nerve fibers. This approach differs from other experimental technologies, which penetrate the sheath in order to directly touch the axons. These sheath-penetrating interfaces are thought to offer higher resolution, at least initially, but with a potentially higher risk of signal degradation or nerve damage over the long term. And so they have not been tested for longer than a few weeks. Thus far, the device has only been tested in the lab, but researchers are hoping that further development and study could bring it to the market within the next decade. [Source: The Atlantic | Rebecca J. Rosen | 11 Dec 2013 ++]

VA Burial Benefit Update 29 ► Hmong Vet Burial Policy

It is yet another piece of unfinished business for this do-nothing Congress. Even worse in this case, time is literally running out for an estimated 6,000 Hmong veterans who want nothing more than to be buried in a national cemetery. That will take an act of Congress, because they didn't serve directly in the U.S. military. While this issue may not have as much sweep as a farm bill or immigration reform, it matters a great deal to individuals affected, in places like the Central Valley. It is a matter of honor that all Americans should care about. As Rep. Jim Costa, a Fresno Democrat, states it: "Serving side-by-side with U.S. troops during Vietnam, Hmong veterans have earned the right to rest in peace beside their brothers in arms. ... Granting them burial benefits recognizes their patriotic service and demonstrates our nation's deep gratitude for their heroic actions."



Khoua Xiong of Sacramento looks for his name on a plaque in honor of Hmong veterans from the Vietnam war at the International World Peace Rose Gardens

He was joined by Rep. Paul Cook, a Republican from Yucca Valley who is a Vietnam vet, in reintroducing H.R.3369, the Hmong Veterans' Service Recognition Act, in late October. The legislation has gained some support since it was first introduced in 2010. As of last week, it had 33 co-sponsors – 25 Democrats, 8 Republicans. Ten California representatives are among them. Unfortunately, the bill is nowhere to be found on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs calendar before the House goes home for the year on 13 DEC. Costa plans to resume his crusade in January, and there is some cause for optimism. Cook is on the subcommittee assigned the measure; five of the other eight members are co-sponsors, including Reps. Gloria Negrete-McLeod and Raul Ruiz of California. Members of Congress representing California should have particular sympathy for this measure, given that there are about 1,200 Hmong veterans still living in the state. There are nine national cemeteries in the state, including Sacramento Valley National Cemetery in Dixon and San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery in Santa Nella. Now, the only foreign soldiers allowed in national cemeteries are Filipino veterans who fought under the U.S. flag during World War II, when the Philippines was a U.S. commonwealth. Under H.R.3369, eligibility would be expanded to Hmong veterans – if they were legal U.S. residents at the time of death and if they were granted U.S. citizenship by a 2000 law, or served with guerrilla forces based in Laos in support of U.S. forces between Feb. 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975.

Just before Veterans Day last month, The Sacramento Bee's Stephen Magagnini told some of their stories (<http://www.sacbee.com/2013/11/09/5895362/hmong-american-veterans-of-the.html>). Charlie Moua, 65, a local leader of Hmong veterans, said he was only 11½ when he was trained to fire a rifle. Khoua Xiong, 80, of Sacramento, said he lost two-thirds of the battalion he commanded. His cousin, Katoua Xiong, 74, said half his company of 100 soldiers was killed. They were among thousands of Hmong guerillas who fought in the CIA's secret campaign against North Vietnamese and communist forces in Laos. They saved lives of American soldiers, rescued

U.S. pilots who were shot down and gathered vital intelligence. Four decades later, Hmong veterans are aging and dying by the day. It's already too late for their leader, Gen. Vang Pao, who died nearly three years ago at a Clovis hospital at age 81. He led thousands of Hmong in Laos; after the communist takeover in 1975, he helped refugees and those who resettled here. The military, however, refused to make an exception and would not let him be interred at Arlington National Cemetery, the most hallowed ground for our military. Instead, he is buried at a memorial park in Glendale. Congress still has a chance to grant Pao's men their dying wish. It is a well-deserved and long-overdue honor. [Source: Sacramento Bee | Editorial Board | 9 Dec 2013 ++]

VA Burial Benefit Update 30 ► New Monetary Burial Award Rules

The VA has proposed to change and simplify the rules for a surviving spouse to receive the basic monetary burial award. Basically it is recognizing that any funeral will cost more than the allotted benefit. Thus to make it easier on the survivor they will not require a written application with attached receipts. They also say that they will be simplifying the descriptions and regulations to make it easier for the survivor to understand. Following are the VA's proposed guidelines for the benefits for a non service related death:

Non-service-Related Death. For deaths on or after October 1, 2011, VA will pay up to \$700.00 toward burial and funeral expenses (if hospitalized by VA at time of death), or \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses (if not hospitalized by VA at time of death), and a \$700.00 plot-interment allowance (if not buried in a national cemetery). For deaths on or after December 1, 2001, but before October 1, 2011, VA will pay up to \$300.00 toward burial and funeral expenses and a \$300.00 plot-interment allowance. The plot-interment allowance is \$150.00 for deaths prior to December 1, 2001. If the death happened while the Veteran was in a VA hospital or under VA contracted nursing home care, some of all of the costs for transporting the Veteran's remains may be reimbursed. An annual increase in burial and plot allowances, for deaths occurring after October 1, 2011, begins in fiscal year 2013 based on the Consumer Price Index for the preceding 12-month period.

Monetary Burial Benefits Regulation Change

VA is proposing to change its monetary burial benefits regulations to pay eligible survivors more quickly and efficiently. If approved, these regulations would authorize VA to pay, without a written application, eligible surviving spouses basic monetary burial benefits at the maximum amount authorized in law through automated systems rather than reimbursing them for actual costs incurred.

- Under current rules, VA pays burial benefits for burial and funeral expenses on a reimbursement basis, which requires survivors to submit receipts for relatively small one-time payments that VA generally pays at the maximum amount permitted by law.
- The proposed amendments to the burial regulations will permit VA to pay, at a flat rate, burial and plot or interment allowances thereby enabling VA to automate payment of burial benefits to eligible surviving spouses.

The changes are intended to help survivors of Veterans bear the cost of funerals by changing regulations to get them the benefits they deserve more quickly. The proposed regulation, if approved, would do the following:

- Restructure, consolidate, and clarify VA's current monetary burial benefits rules to make them easier to understand by Veterans, their survivors, and other stakeholders;
- Clearly establish VA's priority of payments and enable automated payment to eligible surviving spouses;
- Remove the requirement for *eligible* surviving spouses to file a claim for basic burial allowances and simplify the burial claims process for all beneficiaries;

- Establish in regulations a presumption that VA will pay the service-connected (SC) burial allowance for Veterans that were rated totally disabled from service-connected conditions at the date of death; and
- Implement portions of Public Law 112-260, authorizing monetary burial benefits for Veterans without wartime service whose remains are unclaimed.

Statement:

“VA is committed to improving the speed and ease of delivery of monetary burial benefits to Veterans’ survivors during their time of need. The proposed changes will permit VA to automatically pay the basic burial or interment allowances to eligible surviving spouses, without the need for a written application. VA wants to help survivors of Veterans bear the cost of funerals by changing regulations to get them the benefits they deserve more quickly.”

[Source: T REA News for the Enlisted 9 Dec 2013 +]

VA Open Data Policy ► **New Website** www.va.gov/data

In DEC, as a part of the government-wide Open Data Policy, VA launched its open data webpage www.va.gov/data. The page aims to introduce the user to VA’s open data, convey a clear and simple understanding of what open data is, and highlight a few of the most valuable open data sets: VA Facilities Locations, Homeless Resources, and Family Caregiver Services. In addition to offering the VA data sets, the new page directs users to <http://www.data.gov>, where they can explore 171 open data sets. Over the next few months, VA’s open data team will create a fully functional data catalog that can be accessible and useable by the public, and by VA and other federal employees. Like other federal agencies, VA collects and creates data related to the needs of Veterans and the work of the department. Some of it is already available online but can be hard to find, understand and use. In keeping with the Open Data Initiatives that this administration has launched over the past few years, VA has been making more of its data open and available to the public. After all, the work of the federal government is paid for by taxpayers and when possible, data that is public should be accessible and usable by all of us. Already, VA has been working with partners like the Feast to use open data to create products of value for Veterans and their families. In the coming months, VA’s open data team will scale up efforts to create valuable and informative products by convening designers, developers and entrepreneurs to use open data in new ways. VA’s team is looking to the public for feedback and prioritization of future data releases. You tell them how they can improve and what data sets would be valuable to you? [Source: Vantage Point | Emily Tavoulaareas | 5 Dec 2013 ++]

VA Electronic Health Record Update 04 ► **Spontaneous Shutdowns**

The Veterans Affairs Department’s \$491 million paperless claims processing system frustrates examiners with “spontaneous system shutdowns,” Sondra McCauley, VA deputy assistant inspector general for audits and evaluations, told a hearing of the House VA Committee. McCauley said 25 staffers in the in the Houston, Newark and Milwaukee regional offices of the Veteran Benefits Administration told the IG that the Veterans Benefits Management System, or VBMS, also has latency problems that have slowed downloading of medical documents. Nextgov reported on 4 JAN that sluggish response times on VBMS made it difficult for claims examiners to perform simple actions on veteran claims files, such as search, update, save or retrieve. McCauley told the hearing on 4 DEC that VBMS mislabeled electronic evidence in claims files and mixed up evidence in the file of one veteran with that of another veteran. Such malfunctions, she said, force users to rely on older systems to process claims.



VA completed installation of VBMS in all 56 VBA regional offices in June. However, McCauley said, VBA has only one VBMS pilot site with “the capability to process claims from initial application through review, rating, award, to benefits delivery.” VBMS, key to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki’s goal to elimination of the massive claims backlog by 2015, is ill-suited to handle complex claims -- those involving multiple medical conditions -- well, due to the limitations of its design, an official of the Paralyzed Veterans of America told the hearing. VBMS is a rules-based system that lacks the “human interaction to fully understand the circumstances of a specific injury,” Sherman Gillums Jr., associate executive director for Veterans Benefits at the PVA told the hearing. “Unfortunately, rules-based systems treat all veterans the same and can be flawed by imperfect rulemaking and application,” Gillums said. He said the numerous issues faced by veterans with “with catastrophic injuries create a complex set of outcomes that cannot be easily reconciled by logic-based systems that cannot appreciate nuance in disability assessment.”

Calculators in rules-based systems historically have failed to compute the right ratings for people with multiple issues, Gillums said. This type of decision analysis uses decision trees that attempt to enable the rater to simplify and resolve complex questions, Gillums said. “This technique, however, can be problematic when the analysis involves highly qualitative assessments that are reduced to binary choices,” he said. Experienced claims examiners, not algorithms, “best factor in the nuances of special monthly compensation and areas of subjective interpretation that can lead to an incorrect decision,” Gillums said. [Source: Next.Gov | Bob Brewin | 5 Dec 2013 ++]

VA Pension Update 05 ► Illegal Investment Scheme Uncovered

New Mexico state financial analysts have uncovered an investment scheme which preys on veterans’ pension and disabilities payments. Such action is illegal under federal law. Equity Advisors, which has an office in Albuquerque, and the Voyager Financial Group are accused of convincing veterans to sell their pension payments for thousands less than they’re worth. In one case, the amount of money a veteran received in exchange for a pension was roughly 30,000. According to analysts, they would have received 46,000-48,000 otherwise. The analysts said in many cases, veterans are preyed on when they can’t afford to say no, and need the immediate lump sum – even if future payments would add up to greater amounts. The aforementioned company is accused of taking a cut and turning around to sell the pensions to investors. It’s made to look like a legitimate transaction, but under federal law the veterans could demand all of their money back at any time, making the investors possible victims, too. It would deprive the investor of all benefits automatically; something the investor could do nothing about. The state found eight investors in New Mexico who could be out tens of thousands of dollars. The state analysts said this is one of the more sophisticated schemes they’ve ever come across. The state has issued a cease and desist order against the company, imposed a \$40,000 fine and ordered them to return the money to the veterans. [Source: ABC KOAT 7 Albuquerque 11 Dec 2013 +]

VAMC Chicago IL ► \$12 Million Medical Malpractice Settlement

A Chicago-area Vietnam veteran will get a \$12 million medical malpractice settlement from the federal government. Veteran John Johnson went in for oral surgery at the Hines V.A. Hospital in 2007, went into cardiac arrest and suffered brain damage as a result. His lawyers say doctors did not adequately prepare for and monitor his heart condition when he was put under anesthesia. His lawyers say the money will be used to help cover his medical and day-to-day living expenses. [Source: ABC News | WLS-TV/DT | 2 Dec 2013 ++]



VAMC Las Vegas Update 02 ► Long Waits and Bad Attitudes Alleged

Long waits and bad attitudes are the most common complaints of veterans who shared their experiences at Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities in the Las Vegas Valley after reading about Sandi Niccum's ordeal in the 27 NOV Review-Journal. The 78-year-old, blind Navy veteran and longtime VA volunteer experienced long and painful waits for treatment of a colon problem during October visits to the VA Medical Center in North Las Vegas. A chronology of her experiences that a friend witnessed and submitted to the Review-Journal at her request before she died 15 NOV prompted the VA and a congressional oversight committee to launch investigations into her allegations of mistreatment and insensitive conduct by staff at the emergency waiting room and radiology facility.



Sandi Niccum is shown slumped in a hospital waiting room on one of her last days. She was blind and in severe pain.

Feedback from some who called or sent emails show Niccum's case wasn't an isolated incident. Examples include veterans who wrote, "The V.A. has very good personnel. Unfortunately, there are some people that work there that should not be allowed around humans." And, "The VA emergency room is impossible. They are extremely slow. Their turnaround time is far worse than a regular hospital." One veteran, who said she had an experience similar to Niccum's, wrote, "I had to go in for an MRI and I did. No one ever called me back to give my results. I called and left messages for the provider and her nurse several times and still never received a call back. As I continued to leave messages I would cry ... because I was so worried about my results. Finally after a month of trying to contact someone about my results, I asked to switch my primary care doctor to another one. Obviously, that must have been a big deal, because I received a call from a nurse the next day." The female veteran asked that her name not be used.

On 2 DEC, a World War II veteran spoke openly about his experiences at the VA Medical Center, particularly about an encounter he had in March with employees at the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System's Northwest Clinic. "I don't just mean one worker was rude. All of them. I mean they treat the veterans like garbage. Something has got to be done. ... They scream at patients," said Milton Duran, an 87-year-old decorated combat veteran who has lived in Las Vegas for 22 years. A rifleman with the Army's 417th Regiment of the 76th Infantry Division, Duran saw 40 percent of his company get mowed down by Nazi machine gunners near Germany's Saar River in early 1945. Later in life, Duran was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder but only after years of haggling with the VA over claims and his combat record. Finally, in 2004, with help from then-Rep. Shelley Berkley, D-Nev., he was awarded his World War II medals, including a Bronze Star for meritorious service. Meanwhile, the VA also diagnosed his PTSD problem for which he is being treated. Duran said he is rated 100 percent disabled for PTSD.

One day, Duran was checked in by a "grumpy nurse" who suggested he see a psychiatrist for his PTSD. But he was there, instead, to find out about a throat problem. He said she looked at his file in the computer and was vague about an examination he had for polyps. She told him, "That's all I can tell you. I can't tell you no more." On 19 MAR, Duran called the VA's Northwest Clinic hoping to find out about his throat. He was having trouble swallowing and had been waiting 10 days to hear the results of tests. "I was scared it might be cancer," he said. Duran later learned that the polyps in his throat were benign. Doctors told him an operation to remove them would be too risky because of his age. The first time he called the clinic, he was listed as the 14th call waiting and put on hold for 35 minutes. He hung up, then called back two hours later and was put on hold again for 20 minutes. "Still I couldn't get nobody to answer me. So I waited another couple hours and called." This time, Duran was No. 12 in the call-waiting line. "When they got to No. 3, they cut me off.



Army veteran Milton Duran, 87, in his Las Vegas home on Monday, displays bruises

That's when I got mad. I told my boy, 'I'll get to the bottom of this.' ... So I put my uniform on, just the top part, and I got this picket sign. And went to the Northwest Clinic. I went into the lobby," he said, describing the sign that read, 'VA Unfair to Veterans.' "Pretty soon the guards came out and said, 'You can't do that.' I said, 'What do you

mean I can't. This is my place. I'm a veteran. If it weren't for thousands and millions of guys like me you wouldn't be here.' ” Police came, put handcuffs on him and issued him citations for an unauthorized demonstration on VA property and disorderly conduct that disrupts operation of the facility. Each violation has a \$275 fine. Duran still has bruises on his wrists from the handcuffs. “When I was in the back seat (of the patrol car), I said, ‘Hey, do something about these handcuffs.’ They’re hurting the hell out of me.”

After Duran was issued the citation, the VA site manager talked to him outside the clinic. “When he came out he was ... the only man to ask me, ‘Milt, What’s wrong?’ Had they told me that inside, we could have settled that. Nobody asked me that. “That’s all I wanted was somebody to ask me, ‘What’s wrong, Milt?’ I would have told them. But no, instead they called the cops. They put the handcuffs on me. I still have these marks on my wrists.” Later he went to U.S. District Court. A judge, noting Duran’s World War II medals and his age, dismissed his case. Citing privacy regulations “to protect patients and third party rights,” local VA spokesman David Martinez said officials were unable to comment 3 DEC. “As you are aware, we do take all comments serious and look at any concerns relayed to us regarding care we provide,” Martinez wrote in an email. [Source: Las Vegas Review-Journal | Keith Rogers | 3 Dec 2013 ++]

VAMC Waco TX ► Water Tests Positive for Legionella

Officials say water sources at more than three buildings at a Central Texas veterans hospital have tested positive for legionella, a bacteria that can cause Legionnaires' disease. The Waco Veterans Affairs Medical Center had all of its buildings tested after a patient tested positive for Legionnaires' disease in October. Test results on water samples began coming in 6 DEC and showed that at least three buildings, including patient-care facilities and an administrative building, have some level of legionella, spokeswoman Deborah Meyer said. Meyer did not have a figure for how many of the more than 20 buildings on the hospital campus have the bacteria because final test results have not come in yet. She said the hospital will be notifying patients, family members and employees of the situation on 10 DEC. “We’ve been busy trying to get all these things going and looking to see what we need to do and making plans to contact everybody we need to contact,” Meyer said.

Legionnaires’ disease is contracted by inhaling water vapor contaminated with the bacteria, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The bacteria is found in water and structures like hot tubs, cooling towers, large plumbing systems and decorative fountains. The bacteria cannot be spread from person to person, according to the CDC. Symptoms for the disease are similar to pneumonia, including coughing, shortness of breath, high fevers, headaches and body aches. Meyer said most people have a natural immunity to legionella, but it can develop into Legionnaires’ disease in people with compromised immune systems, such as the sick or elderly.

The patient who had Legionnaires’ disease resided in the hospital’s community living center. He has been successfully treated, Meyer said. The hospital in November had water in the community living center injected with higher levels of chlorine to rid the building of the legionella. That process will be repeated with the remaining buildings that have the bacteria, Meyer said. Meyer said no patients will have to be displaced or relocated for the chlorination process. Patients will be provided bottled water during the process and advised not to drink from faucets or fountains. Meyer said filters also have been installed on faucets throughout the hospital campus to filter out the legionella bacteria. Meyer did not know when the final test results on all the buildings will be available. [Source: Waco Tribune-Herald | Regina Dennis | 10 Dec 2013 +]

GI Bill Update 164 ► ACE Report on Vet vs. Traditional Students

A recent report revealed major differences between veteran and service member students and traditional students among undergraduates at four-year universities. Released by the American Council on Education, the report revealed that on a national scale, veteran and service member students tended to be older and spend less time on campus than traditional students. Student veterans and service members were more likely to report a positive relationship with faculty and administration than traditional students. However, they were slightly less likely to report friendly and supportive relationships with other students, a difference of about four percent. Margaret Baechtold, director of Veteran Support Services, said she was not surprised at some of the statistics the report revealed. “The vast majority of them do not live in the residence halls,” she said. “So it isn’t surprising, like other older students who have either other responsibilities or are living off campus, that the amount of time they spend on campus and the way they engage in campus-based activities is different than a traditional 18- to 22-year-old undergraduate student.”

The ACE report, titled Student Veterans/Service Members’ Engagement in College and University Life and Education, was based on data collected from 2009 to 2012 in a study called From Soldier to Student II. It also included data from the 2012 National Survey of Student Engagement, an annual survey of undergraduate students at four-year universities in the U.S. “Within our population of student veterans, a much higher percentage of them are married and have families than of the general student population,” Baechtold said. “That in and of itself is absolutely going to impact the amount of time and interest they have in campus specific activities versus their own personal family commitments and potentially jobs they might hold while they’re in school.”

Anthony Arnold, second year law student at Indiana University (IU) and Navy reservist, said he spends a great deal of time on campus, in contrast to the national results. In addition to his role as president and founder of the IU chapter of Student Veterans of America, Arnold said he has stayed busy with law internships and other student organizations within the law school. Arnold said a law student can be expected to spend a great deal of time on campus studying regardless of military or civilian status. However, he said he still makes time to hang out with friends and engage with other students. “(SVA has) different workshops (to) help veterans, student veterans, meet their professional goals,” he said. “But then the other half of the organization is the social atmosphere. It’s getting to try and get veterans who don’t come out, don’t socialize, don’t integrate with the campus to attempt to do so.” James Sutor, criminal justice undergraduate at IU and Army sergeant, said he also spends a lot of time on campus. Aside from being a cadet for IUPD and helping with SVA events, Sutor said he makes an effort to socialize with friends every day.

According to the ACE report, student veterans’ and service members’ average age was 33 as compared to civilian students’ average age of 22. At 27 and 29 respectively, Sutor and Arnold’s ages are close to the national average found in the report. Arnold said because of different life experiences and priorities his fellow service members tended to spend more time studying than traditional students. “For some veterans, we’ve lived in Japan, lived in Europe, we’ve traveled around the world, missing a Friday night isn’t that big of a deal,” Arnold said. In November, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that one million veterans, service members and family members benefited from the Post-9/11 GI Bill since 2009. The results of “From Soldier to Student II” revealed support services on college campuses have increased as well.

IU has had support services for student veterans/service members since January 2007, Baechtold said. A recent report from the U.S. News and World Report ranked IU one of the top ten best universities in the country for student veterans and service members. Only 46 percent of veteran/service member students in the report findings said they felt supported by administrative personnel. Sutor, on the other hand, said the Veteran Support Services staff made his transition from Ivy Tech to IU easier when he transferred two semesters ago. “It’s almost like, when you go there

as a new student, they just basically hold your hand and, like, guide you through everything,” Sutor said. Arnold also expressed a great deal of satisfaction with the VSS staff. “I can’t speak more highly of the office,” he said. “They are an integral part of making sure that veterans are able to succeed here on campus.” [Source: Indiana University Newsroom 3 Dec 2013 ++]

Vets



Vet Jobs Update 133 ► 10 Myths on Working Retail Jobs

Working retail during the holidays, or during any transitional period, comes with some advantages. The work is usually relatively easy to find, and it can provide a boost to your income while you attend school or look for another job. However, it's important to understand the reality of the industry. The Guardian reported 10 myths about working in retail which are covered below:

- 1. Most retail workers are young people who don't need the money.** In reality, the average age for retail workers is 37 years old. Furthermore, they're usually contributing a large portion of their household's total finances.
- 2. Retail workers are unskilled.** According to the Guardian, 28% of retail workers have earned some college credits and 15% hold a degree. Employers are also reporting that they want employees who have both hard and soft skills, including the ability to use technology to understand and facilitate online shopping.
- 3. Most retail workers are working temporarily so they can be promoted or find a job in another industry.** Although the retail industry experiences a higher turnover rate than many others, many retail workers do stay in their job for the long-run. They typically stay with their employers, but will switch to other companies if the pay is particularly bad or they aren't receiving satisfactory scheduling.
- 4. Retail work is meant to be entry-level.** Despite the qualifications needed for most retail work, it effectively cannot serve as a stepping-stone to every individual. While many people do use it as a financial stop-gap or combine retail experience with other qualifications to hop industries, it is unlikely that every person out of the roughly 15 million currently employed will transition.
- 5. Retail jobs are good because the environment is safe and climate controlled.** Despite a handful of positive aspects to retail work, many component pieces required for job satisfaction are missing. The Department of Labor reported that the median wage for retail work is \$9.53 for sales associates and \$9.13 for cashiers. While this may be viable for many, 15% of retail workers currently live below or near the poverty line.

6. If retail workers every encountered legitimate issues, they could easily approach their employer for a raise or report them to the government for infractions. There are a few legal paths for retail workers to take when it comes to fighting for their rights. However, effectively it is very difficult to take them. The Guardian reports that studies show employers will frequently penalize, punish, and harass workers who legally protest or organize, and that asking the government for assistance is a lengthy and difficult process.

7. Most retail workers prefer part-time work. Although part-time work can be advantageous for employees who have other obligations, most of them aren't able to influence or change their schedule. Reportedly 13% of retail workers working part time would take more hours if they could get them.

8. Most retail workers are lazy. Every industry and place of work has its share of workers who aren't up to standard, but that doesn't mean everyone else is too. Many retail workers report enjoying the work itself and want to do well. Some companies impose very strict policies which make it difficult for workers to actually engage with customers, rather than pushing

9. Raising retail worker salaries would mean increased costs for consumers. While it sounds logical that increased retail worker earnings would translate to large price hikes, studies show otherwise. According to a study from Berkley, if Walmart paid every employee \$12 an hour instead of the minimum wage and 100% of the cost was passed to consumers, prices would only increase by about \$0.46 per shopping trip. Further actions could be taking, such as decreasing the pay of executives.

10. Most retail workers want to work holidays for increased pay. Retail companies are not legally required to offer increased pay for holiday hours. Although many of them bill holiday working hours as voluntary, since many workers simply need more money they're more likely to take what they can get.

[Source: Military.com | Job Hunting | Dec 2013 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 134 ► Navy ESTEP Looking for Veterans

An innovative Office of Naval Research (ONR) program is looking to Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard veterans for the cutting edge in alternative energy-and is highlighted this week in a new video released during the Navy's Warrior Care Month. The Energy Systems Technology Evaluation Program (ESTEP) provides student veterans with internships in Navy organizations using advanced technologies. Examples of such work include evaluation of smart grid and solar energy use at Camp Pendleton; development of cyber-secured energy management systems; and enhancing wind-resistant rooftop photovoltaic panels. To view the a video this ESTEP program visit the YouTube website <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeACsN-2IF4&feature=youtu.be>. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 6 Dec 2013 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 135 ► Beware Dead End Jobs

If you find yourself lost in the transition from service in the military to the civilian world, there are a few things to keep in mind while searching for jobs. One of the most important is job security: working for years in a specific industry does not guarantee that your position will even exist in the coming years. Yahoo! collected job data and came up with list of the top 10 dead-end jobs which we've compiled for you below. Take a look to see if you may need to change up professions.

1. **Social Media Expert** – Social media is a hot-button item in the business world. Companies have been quick to understand and utilize the PR power Twitter, Facebook, and other social websites can provide. This has given rise to the so-called social media expert position: an individual who stays on top of a company's social media presence. However, this is due in part to a lack of general understanding and training. As time goes on, Yahoo! predicts that social media know-how will become increasingly ubiquitous to the point of being a basic requirement for many positions.

2. **Taxi Dispatcher** – While taxis themselves aren't yet in danger of going away, the way they're sent out may be. The rise of smart phones has given birth to a slew of apps designed to connect travelers with taxi cabs, making the time-honored dispatcher position obsolete. There's no clear deadline for this job, but it's very likely that as taxi companies get more high-tech, dispatchers will need to shift careers.

3. **Toll Booth Operator** – If you live in a big city, you know that a lot of public transit systems are using relatively new methods of collecting fare. Most prevalent are digital passes for trains and buses, but this extends to bridges and anything requiring a toll booth. Commuters are usually offered the use of devices that can be scanned as they pass through a gate which bypasses the need for someone to sit in a booth and collect funds. It's very possible that within the next 10 years, these systems will become ubiquitous enough to remove the toll booth operator position entirely.

4. **Retail Cashier** – The retail industry is always looking for new ways to sell products faster and easier. One trend meant to do so is the removal of cashiers. This is happening by implementing mobile and automated registers. In many outlets, employees are using handheld devices to ring up items and swipe cards rather than standing behind a bulky till. In others, the registers are so user friendly that customers can scan their own items and pay for them. It is very possible that your local, friendly ringer may not be performing the same job in about ten years.

5. **Word Processor/Typist** – There was a time when word processing and typing were valued skills, but now they're commonplace in the working world. Most jobs requiring a large volume of typing can be performed by just about anyone in an office, hence these positions are largely disappearing.

6. **Switchboard Operator** – The telecommunications industry is rapidly changing thanks to the internet and cell phones. Switchboard operators used to ensure smooth communication across the country, but that job is being replaced by programs that automatically optimize a given system.

7. **Photo Finisher** – Touching up a photo once it's printed is becoming a vastly outdated art form. Programs such as Photoshop have provided photographers with a wide variety of very powerful tools to enhance pictures, and even create unique standalone art.

8. **Postal Worker** – The sending of physical mail has declined drastically in the past few years. People simply don't need to send letters as often as they used to thanks to numerous digital alternatives. As such, postal services are seeing decreased revenue and need to make cuts to their budget to survive. Unfortunately, this has resulted in the cutting of postal worker positions.

9. **Video Store Clerk** – The internet has provided an unprecedented level of ease of access to all types of media, videos included. Major movie rental companies are closing up shop, and it's still very rare to find storefronts selling or renting tapes or DVDs. While sites like Netflix and Hulu perfect their monetization methods, it's unlikely that clerks at video stores will be able to retain their job in the coming years.

10. **Print Journalist** – The fate of print publications has been debated vehemently for the past few years, but Yahoo! is calling it: print journalists need to move on. People can access more quickly and with greater ease by

browsing the web than getting the paper. While the precise fate of this industry is still more or less in question, the trends cannot be ignored.

[Source: Military.com | Career Advise | Dec 2013 ++]

Vet Job Interviews Update 03 ► 10 Most Common Questions

No two interviews are ever the same. Every hiring manager will ask different questions and conduct interviews in different ways. However, certain questions are almost ubiquitous to the interview process. To help prepare, Alison Doyle has compiled a list of the 10 most common interview questions which we've collected for you below. All servicemembers know the importance of planning for an operation, and job interviews are no different – know the questions, practice your answers, and you'll be more likely to succeed.

1. What is your greatest strength?

This might seem like a no-brainer question to answer, but you need to be careful. Don't use this as an opportunity to soapbox about how wonderful you are: pick a specific ability or skill that relates to the job you're applying for and talk about it. This is one of the easiest times during an interview to sell yourself, so hit the sweet spot of playing up your strength without boasting. Describe what your greatest skill is, and then pick two or three examples that explain why.

2. What is your greatest weakness?

This question can trip up a lot of people, but not for the reason you might think. While it's never a good idea to let your heart bleed out as you describe your greatest failings in life, this also isn't the time to practice Orwellian doublespeak. The trick is to talk about a genuine work-related weakness, then explain about how you handle it. Don't say that your greatest weakness is perfectionism or being too early – those are strengths, and the interviewer won't be impressed. What really stands out is the ability to accurately self-analyze and effect a change. It shows maturity, insight, and translates well in your work.

3. How do you handle stress and pressure?

Stress and pressure are ubiquitous in the working world. No matter how easy-going your work might be, there are always problems, snags, and emergencies that will interrupt your plans. The key to answering this question is acknowledging how you overcome personal feelings and solve problems. Whether your first response is to take 60 seconds to breathe and clear your head or to start writing down solutions on a scrap of paper, you want to emphasize your ability to focus on solutions, motivate yourself through adversity, and sidestep anxiety or panic.

4. Describe a difficult work situation / project and how you overcame it.

Similar to answering "how do you handle stress and pressure," this is an opportunity to talk about your problem solving abilities. This question is best answered with a focus on a single example since that's what the question is asking for. Start by setting up the situation, then talk about how you solved it. Cap off your answer with a short and sweet explanation of your thought process, goals, and problem-solving method.

5. How do you evaluate success?

Your answer to this question will tell employers whether or not you fit the office culture and if you would be a motivated employee. It's a broad, nebulous question, but don't let that scare you. Pick a few measures of success that relate to the job you're applying for; success can mean fostering good communication, completing projects ahead of schedule, or finding innovative solutions to certain problems.

6. Why are you leaving or have left your job?

If you left on unfriendly terms with your previous employer, your gut reaction might be to pick apart every single thing that was wrong with them. Do not, at any time for any reason, do this. Unless you were laid off, focus on your inspired need to find new opportunities. You might want to focus on a different kind of work, or perhaps there

wasn't any room to grow at your old company. Whatever the reason, the best answers to this question will focus on personal and professional growth.

7. Why do you want this job?

The answer to this question will be similar to the one above, except instead of explaining why you want to grow, target your answer to the job and company you're applying for. Talk about opportunities the prospective employer will give you and how you will benefit them as a company. No matter the type of job or pay, communicate your interest with specific examples and short plugs about your abilities.

8. Why should we hire you?

Don't just answer this question by saying, "because I'm awesome," or a wordy, detailed version thereof. This is an opportunity to talk about what makes you the right candidate for the position. This requires knowing what the employer is looking for, and then matching your skills and experience to it.

9. What are your goals for the future?

This question hones in on your ambition: an interviewer who asks this wants to know what you're attempting to achieve. Discuss your plans for the future so that your personal ambition benefits the company.

10. Tell me about yourself.

Arguably, this is the broadest possible question an interviewer can ask, so it's important to be prepared. If you're not good at coming up with answers on the fly, then you may begin to ramble and trail off into personal anecdotes.

Answer this question by talking about your professional self: what you can do, and what you've accomplished. This is an opportunity to create a well-defined snapshot that will give the employer a good impression.

[Source: Military.com | Alison Doyle | Nov 2013 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 16 Dec 2013 thru 14 Feb 2014

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 click on the link next to the date in the below list. If it will not open refer to www.uschamber.com/hiringourheroes/events. **To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering for the hiring fairs which are presently scheduled for the next 8 weeks.** For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. visit the USCC website at <http://www.uschamber.com/hiringourheroes/events>

Veterans Hiring Fair

- December 17, 2013 – [Mountain Home, ID](#)
- January 9, 2014 – [Military Spouse Hiring Fair and Career Forum Scott Air Force Base, IL](#)
- January 10, 2014 – [NBC4DC Health and Fitness Expo - Washington, D.C.](#)
- January 16, 2014 – [Milwaukee, WI](#)
- January 16, 2014 – [Albuquerque, NM](#)
- January 22, 2014 – [Independence, MO](#)
- January 23, 2014 – [Orlando, FL](#)
- January 28, 2014 – [Groton/New London, CT](#)
- January 28, 2014 – [Oklahoma City, OK](#)
- January 30, 2014 – [Montgomery, AL](#)
- February 5, 2014 – [Wichita, KS](#)
- February 11, 2014 – [Columbia, SC](#)
- February 11, 2014 – [Plymouth, MA](#)
- February 12, 2014 – [Savannah, GA](#)
- February 13, 2014 – [San Diego, CA](#)

Note: A key tactic that most job-seekers overlook when attending a job or career fair is to Stop at every table! One mistake we all make on occasion is to generalize. For example, people assume that health-care companies are only hiring health-care workers, or that insurance companies only need agents. So when they encounter these tables or displays, they typically say nothing and keep moving. Also, sell yourself! Be an extrovert and your own agent! Finally, your mission is fact-finding and networking. By spending time at each table, one learns to overcome stereotypes that lead to erroneous assumptions [Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Assn 12 Dec 2013 ++]

Vet North Korea Trips Update 01 ► Detainee Newman's Background

The 85-year-old U.S. veteran being held in North Korea spent his war years there in one of the Army's first special forces unit, helping a clandestine group of Korean partisans who were fighting and spying well behind enemy lines. Now South Koreans who served with Merrill Newman, who is beginning his sixth week in detention, say their unit was perhaps the most hated and feared by the North and his association with them may be the reason he's being held. "Why did he go to North Korea?" asked Park Boo Seo, a former member of unit known in Korea as Kuwol, which is still loathed in Pyongyang and glorified in Seoul for the damage it inflicted on the North during the war. "The North Koreans still gnash their teeth at the Kuwol unit." Some of those guerrillas, interviewed this week by The Associated Press, remember Newman as a handsome, thin American lieutenant who got them rice, clothes and weapons during the later stages of the 1950-53 war, but largely left the fighting to them.



In this Dec. 2, 2013 photo, Park Young, center, a former member of the Kuwol partisan unit and his comrades look at a website reporting on Newman, an elderly American tourist detained in North Korea

Newman was scheduled to visit South Korea to meet former Kuwol fighters following his North Korea trip. Park said about 30 elderly former guerrillas, some carrying bouquets of flowers, waited in vain for several hours for him at Incheon International Airport, west of Seoul, on 27 OCT before news of his detention was released. Newman appeared over the weekend on North Korean state TV apologizing for alleged wartime crimes in what was widely seen as a coerced statement. Park and several other former guerrillas said they recognized Newman from his past visits to Seoul in 2003 and 2010 - when they ate raw fish and drank soju, Korean liquor - and from the TV footage, which was also broadcast in South Korea. Newman's family has not been in touch with him, but he was visited at a Pyongyang hotel by the Swedish ambassador, his family said in a statement, and he appeared to be in good health, receiving his heart medicine and being checked by medical personnel.

His family did not respond to requests for comment on his wartime activities. Jeffrey Newman has previously said that his father, an avid traveler and retired finance executive from California, had always wanted to return to the

country where he fought during the Korean War. Newman served in the U.S. Army's 8240th unit, also known as the White Tigers, whose missions remained classified until the 1990s. Retired Col. Ben Malcom says he served in the unit during a different period than Newman, and didn't know him. But he later wrote a book about their work detailing how the U.S. supplied weapons, ammunition, food and American advisers to an anti-communist guerrilla force in North Korea. He said some were outfitted with North Korean military uniforms complete with weapons and identification cards to work as spies. Others were trained as paratroopers.

Malcom said his openness about the unit's work during the war, including a book, a History Channel documentary and many interviews, would preclude him from even considering visiting North Korea. "I would never go back to North Korea," he said. "They know me." But another veteran from the unit, Mickey Parrish, 83, in Jacksonville, Florida, who also didn't remember Newman, said he didn't think that their service in what was the Army's first special forces unit 60 years ago would be cause for additional concern if visiting North Korea. "There's no animosity as far as I am concerned, and I would hope there would be none on their end," said Parrish. In his televised statement, Newman said he trained guerrillas whose attacks continued even after the war ended, and ordered operations that led to the death of dozens of North Korean soldiers and civilians. He also said in the statement he attempted to meet surviving Kuwol members.

The former guerrillas in Seoul also said Newman served as an adviser, but that most of the North's charges were fabricated or exaggerated. They have a book that includes a photo of Newman, and his signature by the words "proud to have served with you." Newman oversaw guerrilla actions and gave the fighters advice, but he wasn't involved in day-to-day operations, according to the former rank-and-file members and analysts. He also gave them rice, clothes and weapons from the U.S. military when they obtained key intelligence and captured North Korean and Chinese troops. All Kuwol guerrillas came to South Korea shortly after the war's end and haven't infiltrated the North since then, they say, so there are no surviving members in North Korea. "The charges don't make sense," said Park, 80. In the final months of the war, Newman largely stayed on a frontline island, living in a small wooden house, said Park Young, an 81-year-old former guerrilla. "He ate alone and slept alone and lived alone," said Park, one of 200 guerrillas stationed on the Island. Their accounts are backed up by a U.S. Army research study declassified in 1990 that found when the U.S. Eighth Army retreated from the Yalu River separating North Korea and China in late 1950, some 6,000 to 10,000 Koreans initially declared Their willingness to fight for the United States.



Merrill Newman, center, walks beside his wife Lee, left, and his son Jeffrey after arriving at San Francisco International Airport

Former Kuwol fighters claim to have killed 1,500 North Korean soldiers and captured 600 alive. About 1,270 Kuwol members perished during the war, according to surviving unit members. The guerrillas aren't alone in questioning Newman's trip to North Korea. "The South Korean partisans were possibly the most hated group of people in the North, except for out-and-out spies and traitors from their own side," said University of Chicago history professor Bruce Cumings in an email. But analyst Cho Sung-hun with the state-run Institute for Military

History Compilation in Seoul said it's "not weird" for war veterans to try to visit former battle grounds before they die. Cho, who interviewed Newman in 2003 for a book on guerrilla warfare during the Korean War, described him as a "gentle American citizen" and said North Korea should not trigger a new source of tension with his detention. North Korea has detained at least seven Americans since 2009 and five of them have been either released or deported. Korean-American missionary and tour operator Kenneth Bae has been held for more than year.

North Korea's state news agency KCNA reported 7 DEC that investigators determined that, "Newman entered the DPRK with a wrong understanding of it and perpetrated a hostile act against it." " Taking into consideration his admittance of the act committed by him on the basis of his wrong understanding (and the) apology made by him for it, his sincere repentance of it and his advanced age and health condition, the above-said institution **deported** him from the country from a humanitarian viewpoint," the official North Korean report added. [Source: The Associated Press & CNN | Hyung-Jin Kim/Foster Klug & Greg Botelho | 3 & 7 Dec 2013 ++]

Veterans' Treatment Court Update 21 ► Washington DC Conference

The 700,000 veterans consigned to the dustbins of society -- prisons and jails -- won some top level attention at the first national Vet Court Conference in Washington D.C., which brought together 1,000 judges, mental health and substance abuse professionals and the leadership of the Veterans Affairs and Defense Departments. The three day conference, sponsored by the Justice for Vets division of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, focuses on veterans involved in the criminal justice system as a result of substance abuse and mental health problems. There are some grim statistics behind this issue: One in six returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan suffers from a substance abuse disorder; since 2004, the number of veterans treated for mental illness and substance abuse has increased 38 percent, and 81 percent of arrested veterans had a substance abuse problem.



Army vet Donald Betts in 2012 in his cell in Aberdeen, Wash., where state officials are working to better coordinate benefits for imprisoned vets

The first veterans treatment court in the country was established in 2008 by Judge Robert Russell in Buffalo, N.Y. The goal was to divert veterans charged with felony or misdemeanor nonviolent criminal offenses to a specialized criminal court that emphasizes treatment and rehabilitation guided by veteran health care professionals, veteran peer mentors and mental health professionals. Since then, the number of veteran courts has grown to 130. Melissa Fitzgerald, senior director of Justice for Vets, said the specialized courts "have gained national prominence as the most innovative solution for veterans entering the criminal justice system. Veterans treatment courts stand between the veteran and a felony conviction, incarceration, or worse, ensuring that when returning service members

are arrested because of a substance abuse and/or mental health disorder, they receive the structure, treatment and mentoring they need to get their lives back on track.”

VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, in his keynote speech at the conference 2 DEC, said that homelessness also stands out as another key factor for incarceration. He said, “nearly 58,000 [veterans] are estimated to be homeless on any given night. I am told that incarceration is the No. 1 predictor of homelessness. “If we are going to break the cycle between incarceration and homelessness, we will have to raise our level of collaboration and leverage all our assets to address these factors, which seem so pervasive when dealing with troubled Veterans—depression, insomnia, substance use disorder, pain, failed relationships.” Shinseki said this includes VA taking a sharp look at its own use - - some critics say abuse -- of addictive, prescription pain killers, such as Oxycontin. Over the past three years, Shinseki said, VA has discouraged overuse of opiates in favor of other medications and therapies and has taken steps to reduce the use of opiates. Since 2012, the Minneapolis-based VA health care system has cut its use of high-dose opiates by more than 50 percent and all but eliminated Oxycontin prescriptions, decreasing its use by 99 percent., Shinseki said.

VA has hired 172 justice outreach specialists who work directly with the courts “to see that veterans who are before the court or already in jail get the care they need and that courts are supported in their consideration of best possible alternatives to incarceration,” Shinseki said. Those specialists worked with 5,800 veterans in the first year of the program in 2010, a number that jumped to 36,000 this year, he said. Veterans in the justice system aided by VA have averaged seven prior arrests, Shinseki said, and 20 percent have spent a year or more behind bars. Vet courts do make a difference, he said. “Two-thirds of veterans before the treatment courts successfully complete their treatment regimens,” he said. “When they receive VA services, they experience an 88 percent reduction in arrests from the year prior to the year after treatment court admission. They also benefit from a 30 percent increase in stable housing in the year after.” Christopher Deutsch, spokesman for the National Association for Drug Court Professionals, said it is hard to truly quantify how many veterans from the long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are in prison, as the last report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics on incarcerated veterans was released in 2000, a year before the start those wars

A November 2011 study, conducted by researchers at VA’s Connecticut health care system and the Yale Medical School Department of Psychiatry, focused on 30,000 jailed veterans and determined that Afghanistan and Iraq veterans constituted only 3.9 percent of that population. Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in the survey, the report said, were more likely to report combat stress and were 26 percent less likely to have a diagnosis of drug abuse or dependence, but three times more likely to have combat-related post traumatic stress disorder. VA has developed a new system to identify incarcerated veterans called the Veterans Reentry Search Service to enable corrections officials to quickly and easily identify any veteran in their institutions. Shinseki has “written each governor encouraging collaboration through VRSS,” he said. “With greater participation, we will be better able to identify and treat veterans in need of our services, hopefully reducing their appearances before you. We intend to make VRSS available to the courts, as well.” [Source: Next.gov | Bob Brewin | 3 Dec 2013]

WWII Vets ► None Present at Pearl Harbor Ceremonies

Tom Korth, 30, the Iraq war veteran who led the 7 DEC Saturday Pearl Harbor anniversary ceremony at O’Fallon Missouri City Hall, began by looking out over the audience and asking if there were any World War II veterans present. The response was as silent as a Hawaiian dawn. The silence at Pearl Harbor was shattered at 7:55 a.m. Hawaiian time, Dec. 7, 1941, with Japan’s surprise attack against U.S. naval and air forces. More than 2,400 Americans died. For the United States, World War II formally began the next day. The silence among the 50 or so people who attended O’Fallon’s annual remembrance ceremony 72 years later was a somber reminder that even the

Greatest Generation -- the one that survived the "date which will live in infamy" and went on to defeat its attackers and their allies -- can't defeat the mathematics of mortality. All those who survived the attack, and the subsequent war, and the ensuing years, now are pushing 90, at the youngest.



During the Pearl Harbor Day Remembrance Ceremony James Griesenauer, 76, (right) who served in the Army from 1956 to 1957, pauses for reflection with Ted Richardson, (left) who served in Korea from 1951-52, and Roger Hadley, 79, (center), who served in the Air Force from 1958-78.

"Last year we had five of them. The year before that we had four. I know from the VFW that two of them did pass away," this year, Korth said. "Every passing year they're getting older, obviously. They are dying off at a pretty rapid rate now. As they die off, their stories die off." Among those whose stories weren't heard Saturday was Stanley Shylanski, 95, of Ferguson. An Army infantryman stationed in Hawaii during the attack, he was listed on the O'Fallon event agenda to speak. But his family called to say he was sick and that they didn't want to bring him out in the cold weather. In a 2010 video interview with the Post-Dispatch, Shylanski, then 92, recalled hearing the planes as he was getting his breakfast in the mess hall. "I'm proud that I'm part of history," he said. "All of us that were there, we have something that other people would never experience. Historically. Big things. Start of World War II, for us. I mean, that's quite an event. "To endure something like that in history can't be duplicated. No way."

More than 16 million American servicemembers were involved in World War II, with the vast majority of them surviving it. As of May, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimated that about 1.7 million of them are still alive. "We're burying our World War II veterans at an alarming pace," said Sheldon Hartfield, 54, Vietnam War veteran and chairman of the O'Fallon Veterans Commission. "These gentlemen are older, and with the weather, they just couldn't make it." He added: "We're dedicated to honoring them whether they're here or not. As long as there's breath in my body ... we will honor their memory every year." O'Fallon's was one of several ceremonies around the region. At the St. Louis Soldiers Memorial downtown, organizers rang the bell from the World War I cruiser USS St. Louis 54 times -- once for each Missourian who was killed at Pearl Harbor. [Source: St. Louis Post-Dispatch | Kevin McDermott | 7 Dec 2013 ++]

WWII Vets 54 ► Paul Albert

Paul Albert's journal from 1944 is filled with terse entries that sound like nightmares, but these were his daily routine, reminding all who read them of the horrors of war:

- Like this one, from Thursday, March 16 Target — Augsburg, Germany. Deep penetration into Germany that took nine and a half hours with losses again totaling 23 planes by the Eighth. The 95th lost six planes and had much battle damage. ... We saw a ME 110 blast a struggling B-17 with rocket fire and sending it straight down with no chutes escaping, a horrible sight. We thought we had 22 more missions to go, but were informed that the tour was upped to 30 missions."
- And this one, a month later, from Thursday, April 13 — "The Eighth totaled losses of 33 bombers on this one mission. ... Our third trip into the heavy fighter belt of southern Germany. ... We had damage to the No.

2 and 3 engines that caused us to fall back from the formation, always a scary situation because you become prey for the vultures of the Luftwaffe. ... Our squadron lost one plane flown by a new crew."

- Another, the next week, Tuesday, April 18 — "My 21st birthday. Target — Berlin. When the target was revealed at briefing, it provoked a lot of groans. ... Heavy flak and fighter protection made it an undesirable place to visit. ... Heavy cloud coverage caused us to hit a secondary target at Brandenburg. ... Practically all of the group saw fighter action with the total force suffering heavy losses ..."



Paul Albert shows off the Distinguished Flying Cross he received for his service during World War II and is shown looks over art that depicts a B-17 Flying Fortress, the type of plane in which he flew his missions.

In all, Staff Sgt. Paul Albert flew 35 missions over Germany, France, Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Poland from his base in Horham, England. It was quite a journey for a Lebanon kid who had quit high school and didn't know what to do. At the time, Albert saw a poster in the Lebanon Post Office stating: "Be a sergeant in six weeks. Join the US Army Air Force and be an aerial gunner." That was all the direction he needed. "So I signed up for it, and in a few days I was in Harrisburg, being inducted," Albert said, reminiscing from his home in Lebanon's Woodland Estates, which he shares with Betty, his wife of 64 years. Basic training was in Miami Beach, Fla., and gunnery school was in Las Vegas, he recalled. "It was not exactly a hardship," Albert, now 90, said of those beginnings. After six weeks of training in March 1943, Albert graduated, received his "wings" and was indeed promoted to the rank of sergeant.

Shortly thereafter, Albert and his group flew over the North Atlantic to Horham, about 100 miles north of London, where he was assigned to the air base of the 336th squadron of the 95th Bomb Group of the U.S. 8th Air Force. There he was, a gunner on the famous B-17 "Flying Fortress." Albert was originally assigned to be the ball turret gunner — suspended from the underside of the plane — but his 6 foot 1 inch frame made it nearly impossible to get into the small area, so a crew mate switched places with him, and Albert acted as the waist gunner, situated toward the center of the plane. Waist gunners were exposed to cold temperatures, which fell as low as 50 degrees below zero, and wore special suits with an electric heating system wired through them, Albert explained. Even so, frostbite was a continual problem for the flyers. "Our first mission was a 'milk run' across the (English) Channel, and we bombed some sub pens," he said. "It was an easy mission because we saw no German fighters, and that disappointed some of the guys." They weren't disappointed for long.

A few days later, Albert and crew flew a mission into southern Germany, to Augsburg, a nine and a half hour flight. "We lost 23 planes that day; there was a lot of shooting by the Germans," he said. "As I recall, it was an aircraft factory (they were bombing)." The 8th Air Force had 10 percent of all casualties in World War II, Albert said, because its members were on the forefront of the fighting and regularly were sent on dangerous missions. On April 9, 1944, Easter Sunday, Albert's crew was scheduled to go on a mission to Poland, but bad weather forced its

cancellation after the craft was already in the air. "We went up to 32,000 feet to get out of the cloud cover — the highest we had ever been — the pilot found a hole, but we crashed at the end of the runway," he said. As the pilot tried to land on a short runway, the plane was still going about 50 mph when it hit a construction ditch, nosed over and caught fire immediately, he added. The navigator and the bombardier at the front of the plane were injured but survived after being pulled from the wreckage by other crew members, Albert recalled. When it was all over, the plane was a pile of molten metal. "During actual combat — or an incident like that — you weren't frightened," he said. "It was your job. But you thought about it more after the fact."

There were not many heroes during the war, he added, just people doing their jobs. "Doesn't matter which service they were in," he said. "I don't think heroes think about what they're doing — they just do it. It's later when you think about what could have happened." Eventually, the pilot of one of Albert's B-17s "showed the effects" of too much combat flying and had to be removed from duty. In May 1944, Albert and crew bombed a synthetic oil refinery in Czechoslovakia. Smoke and flames rose 15,000 feet in what was an amazing sight, he said. "It was one of those things you saw, and knowing it was hurting the German war effort, you felt good about it," he said. Another day brought a mission of mercy, when the B-17s dropped supplies — food, medicine and ammunition — to French freedom fighters hiding in a wooded area. "We could literally see those French people coming out of the woods to get the supplies," he said.

After bombing an airfield in Romania, the crew landed in Poltava, Ukraine, about 40 miles from Kiev, Albert recalled. "Conditions there were very rough; the town had exchanged hands about four times, and even though it had been a sizable city, only one or two buildings was left standing," he said. June 6, 1944 — D-Day — is a day Albert said he will never forget. His crew was told the night before that the Allied invasion would occur on the coast of German-occupied France. Nothing prepared the men for the sight of hundreds of ships in the English Channel. "It was an awesome sight," Albert said. "When we flew over the Channel, everywhere you looked, you saw ships. We were to bomb the estuary of the River Orne, and we were only 700 yards ahead of the landing craft; luckily, we didn't hit any of our troops. We got our target." The pilots were told not to turn around if they developed trouble because they would be shot down if they attempted to do so, Albert said.

The Lebanon man said the English people treated the American troops well, adding that he has a lot of respect for the Royal Air Force fighters, their compatriots. Albert recalled how affected he was by seeing so many people, and so many children, sleeping in the London subways at night, seeking protection from the bombings by German aircraft. "They lived a very austere life during the war; I've got to give them credit," he said. During his service, Albert received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with oak clusters. After he returned to the States, Albert took advantage of the GI bill and graduated from Lebanon High School, as well as Penn State, East Stroudsburg University and Antioch College in Ohio. After obtaining two master's degrees, he taught for many years on Long Island, N.Y., served as curriculum coordinator for math and science, and coached basketball and football before retiring to Lebanon. "The GI bill was just what we needed (after the war)," he said. "Without it, we would have had a serious shortage of professionals." [Source: Lebanon Daily News, Pa. | Marylouise Smith | 1 Sep 2013 ++]

OBIT | James E. Empey ► 21 Nov 2013

James W. Empey, who fought in two wars and earned the title of fighter ace, died at home Nov. 21. He was 89. His 30-year military career started in 1942 as an 18-year-old aviation cadet in the Army Air Forces. Empey was assigned to the 59th Fighter Group for training as a P-39 pilot and was then assigned to North Africa in 1943. By 1944, he was flying the P-51 over Europe and in a 30-day period shot down five German aircraft, making him an ace at age

20. "He was an accomplished fighter pilot before he could vote," longtime friend Col. Ward Boyce said. Empey returned to the United States in 1945 and became a training instructor. He met his future wife at a Veterans of Foreign Wars hall in New York a few years later, and they married in 1950. The couple would have celebrated their 63rd anniversary on Christmas Eve. After being released to the reserves, Empey was called back to active duty in 1952 and attended the Air Force's experimental test pilot school. He also was assigned to the U.S. airbase in Châteauroux, France for a time, and in 1962, was sent to Oklahoma State University to earn a degree in aeronautical engineering.

The couple was living in California when Empey went to Vietnam. "The reason he volunteered to go to Vietnam and fly again was because he said too many 18-year-olds and 19-year-olds were coming back in body bags," said his long time neighbor and friend Diana Herrera. While there, Empey gained the nickname "the Red Baron" by flying missions wearing his World War II-era leather helmet, white scarf and goggles. After Vietnam, Empey worked at the USAF Systems Command launching communication satellites. He retired from the Air Force in 1972 as a lieutenant colonel. During his service he was awarded the Silver Star, two Distinguished Flying Crosses and 27 Air Medals, and was inducted into the Commemorative Air Force American Combat Airman Hall of Fame in 2009. For many years he and his wife traveled throughout the country and lived in Arizona and Florida, in addition to California. They moved to San Antonio in the late 1990s and bought a house in Universal City. Empey continued his participation in the American Fighter Aces Association. He especially enjoyed the association's annual convention. "He was a very good-natured, fun-loving individual," Boyce said. "One year we were honoring the Women Airforce Service Pilots and he came in a dress and a wig to put himself off as one of the WASPS." [Source: San Antonio Express-News | Mary M. Heidbrink | 30 Nov 2013]

OBIT | Edward James Heffron ► 1 Dec 2013

Paratrooper Edward James "Babe" Heffron died Sunday, 1 DEC at a hospital in Stratford, N.J. He was 90. Babe Heffron never wanted the limelight. But he got it anyway. People would show up at his door in South Philadelphia just to meet a genuine war hero. "He was always gracious," said his son-in-law, Edward Zavrel. "Especially with kids. He would tell them about America." Babe was a member of the legendary World War II "Band of Brothers," the Army paratroopers extolled in the 1992 Stephen Ambrose book *Band of Brothers*, and in an HBO miniseries of the same name, in which Babe was played by Scottish actor Robin Laing. He also was the co-author of the 2007 book *Brothers in Battle, Best of Friends: Two WWII Paratroopers From the Original Band of Brothers Tell Their Story*, written with Army comrade William J. "Wild Bill" Guarnere - also a South Philadelphian - and journalist Robyn Post.



Edward James "Babe"

"He was a very private person," said his son-in-law. "He liked to keep things quiet." He especially did not want to upset his beloved daughter, Patricia Zavrel, and managed to avoid telling her about his war experiences before the book came out. "She would say, 'Dad fought in the war,' " and that's all she knew before the book," said Ed Zavrel, Patricia's husband. If he'd had his way, that's all she would have known about the war. "Babe was always concerned about other people," Ed said. "He didn't want a big funeral because he didn't want to ruin people's Christmas. "He was proud of his service, but he felt that he just did what he had to do. If he talked about the war, he would tell humorous stories, about making jokes and singing." Babe, who stood 5 feet 4½ inches, was a private in Easy Company, 2nd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, from 1942 to 1945.

Easy Company - the "Band of Brothers" - fought in several major battles in the European Theater, beginning with the Normandy invasion. Easy Company also participated in Operation Market Garden in the Netherlands - made famous by the book *A Bridge Too Far*, which was also made into an epic film, and the Battle of the Bulge in Bastogne, Belgium. Both were desperate and critical engagements. At the Bulge, he was a machine gunner and awarded the Bronze Star for valor. His unit helped liberate the Kaufering concentration camp in Landsberg, Germany, a Dachau subcamp where the Nazis murdered 14,500 Jews. The unit also seized Hitler's Eagle Nest, the luxurious lodge at Berchtesgaden in the Austrian Alps presented to Hitler on his 50th birthday by his subordinates. For years after the war, Babe had problems celebrating Christmas and New Year's. Christmas reminded him of the desperate Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, the bloodiest battle of the European Theater; New Year's Day reminded him of the death of his best friend, John T. "Johnny" Julian, killed on that day in 1945 at Bastogne.

After the war, Babe worked for the Publicker Industries whiskey distillery in Philadelphia for 20 years, then on the Delaware River waterfront as a cargo checker for 27 years. "He retired at the age of 70, but he didn't want to," Ed Zavrel said. "If he had his way, he would still be working. He didn't like to sit around. He would walk uptown to buy a newspaper and visit the stores. It didn't matter what the weather was. He'd go out in rain or snow. "On a bad day, Patricia would call him and say, 'Don't go out!' He'd call her later and tell her he had gone out anyway." Babe kept in almost daily touch with Guarnere, his friend and co-author. Guarnere was Babe's platoon sergeant, and he lost his right leg at the Battle of the Bulge. "He'd call Bill to remind him to take his medicine," Ed said. "He was old school," Ed said. "If there was an old school, he was the principal." Although Babe enjoyed looking up old Army comrades and hanging out with them, he never took part in veterans activities. He was never in a parade.

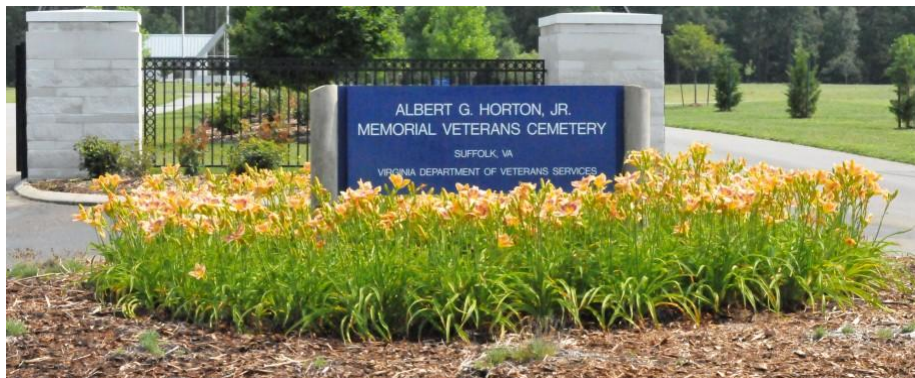
Edward Heffron grew up in hardscrabble times in Philly. He was born in South Philly the third of the five children of Joseph Heffron, a prison guard, and Anne Heffron. He attended Sacred Heart Parochial School and South Philadelphia High School, where he played football. During the Great Depression, he dropped out of high school to help his family. He worked for the New York Shipbuilding Co. in Camden, sandblasting cruisers that would be converted to light-aircraft carriers. Because of the job, he was exempt from the draft, and, with a physical condition that caused his hands to cramp up, he could have avoided military service. But he didn't want to. Three brothers and some friends were going into the Army, and he wanted to go, too. He enlisted on Nov. 7, 1942.

Babe is referred to frequently in the Ambrose book, and appears as himself at the end of Episode 10 in the miniseries produced by Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg, speaking about Easy Company. He also had a cameo in the fourth episode, sitting at a table in Eindhoven in the Netherlands, waving a small flag. Babe said he was pleased with the way Robin Laing portrayed him. City Councilman James Kenney said Babe Heffron affected the lives of many people who crossed his path, including Kenney. "I've known him for a long time and he was a terrific person, certainly a hero," Kenney told NBC10. "He was very wise and he kept all of his senses till the very end. I mean his brain was as sharp and witty as a 30-year-old. He was one of the funniest, wittiest guys I've ever known." Besides his daughter, Babe is survived by his wife, the former Delores Moffitt. [Source: Philadelphia Daily News | John F. Morrison | 3 Dec 2013 ++]

Virginia Vet Cemetery Update 03 ► Outer Burial Containers

After the completion of a federally funded project, Suffolk's Albert G. Horton Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery will provide concrete lawn crypts for veterans free of charge, cemetery director Dan R. Kemano says. With \$3.3 million from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration, the cemetery on Milners Road has installed 4,090 double-depth outer burial container units. Each space is designed to protect from the elements two caskets containing a veteran and spouse. The crypts are installed with their lids 22 inches below ground level, Kemano explained. A casket containing the first set of remains is placed at the bottom of a unit, and a shelf is placed atop that casket before the unit is resealed and the earth and sod replaced. The process is repeated when the surviving veteran or spouse passes, with the second casket placed atop the interior shelf. "Now they are together in their final resting place," Kemano said. Eligible dependent children can also qualify for interment, he added. Previously, the crypts were available for between \$400 and \$1,200. They were \$400 if purchased direct from the cemetery, which with another grant had been providing them at cost, but more expensive if purchased from a funeral home, Kemano said. Virginia Veterans Cemetery at Amelia also received \$1.6 million to provide 1,610 of the crypts.

In a news release, Paul Galanti, commissioner of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, said it places Virginia's veterans cemeteries on equal footing with national facilities. "Pre-installation of outer burial containers will bring the benefits offered by Virginia's state cemeteries in line with those offered by (national facilities) such as Quantico and Culpeper," he said. "Federal cemeteries provide outer burial containers to veterans at no cost, and now Virginia will be able to offer veterans the same benefit." Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Dublin opened with pre-installed crypts in 2011, unlike the Suffolk and Amelia cemeteries when they opened in 2004 and 1997, respectively. The Virginia General Assembly passed legislation to provide lawn crypts at cost while awaiting the federal grant that now means there will be no charge for burials, except for a \$300 administration fee for the spouse and/or dependent.

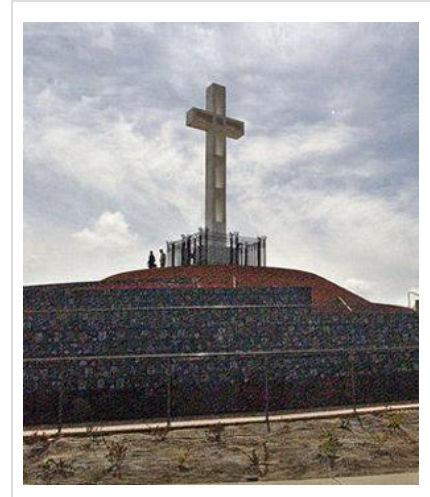


Kemano said the project was declared closed 11 DEC after a final inspection, adding the new containers would start being used later this month. At the Suffolk cemetery, the new containers rest among three peaceful gardens with green lawns and lines of trees. Kemano expects the 4,090 units at the Horton cemetery to be available for eight or nine years and said he'll submit additional grant requests to supply more as required. Kemano says he wants to get the word out that veterans and their spouses and qualifying dependents can be buried in a state cemetery instead of a commercial cemetery. "Veterans, by serving, have earned the right to be interred here," he said. The three new gardens encompass roughly nine of the Suffolk cemetery's 74 acres, Kemano said. Information on the cemetery and

veteran pre-burial applications can be obtained at http://www.dvs.virginia.gov/cemetery_horton.shtml. [Source: Suffolk News-Herald | Matthew Ward | 11 Dec 2013 +]

Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial Update 08 ► Cross Ordered Removed

The Mt. Soledad Memorial Association was formed in 1952 with the following mission: "To enhance and preserve the Mt. Soledad Veterans' Memorial honoring those veterans who have served our country during times of conflict and to educate the general public about service to our country and the sacrifices that veterans make to preserve the freedoms we enjoy as Americans." The 43-foot War Memorial Cross currently standing atop Mt. Soledad near San Diego (the third such emplacement there) dates back to April 18, 1954, when the monument was rededicated to World War I, World War II, and Korean War veterans during an Easter Sunday ceremony.



In 2011, the Ninth Circuit Court ruled that the cross stood in violation of the First Amendment, which is, of course, completely backwards. The amendment recognizes the right to "the free exercise" of religion, and the cross was not an act of Congress "respecting an establishment of religion."

But the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case, sending it back instead to the San Diego trial court. After years of legal wrangling, U.S. District Judge Larry Burns ruled 12 DEC that the cross must be removed within 90 days because it is an "unconstitutional" religious display on government land. He did, however, issue a stay of the ruling for the inevitable appeal. It remains to be seen whether the cross will stay or go, but Hiram Sasser, director of litigation for the Liberty Institute, promised to "fight for this memorial and the selfless sacrifice and service of all the millions of veterans it represents; it is the least we can do for those who gave so much to us all." [Source: The Patriot Post 12 Dec 2013 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► Pennsylvania 2013

The state of Pennsylvania provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these plus discounts listed on the Military and Veterans Discount Center (MCVDC) website, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Vet State Benefits & Discounts – PA**" for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below refer to http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/dmva_home/5902 & <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/pennsylvania.html>.

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/pennsylvania-state-veterans-benefits.html> Dec 2013 ++]

Vet Legislation



GI Bill Update 163 ► **7 Pieces of Legislation to Upgrade Benefit**

At least seven legislative proposals are pending in Congress to improve the new GI Bill for large swaths of beneficiaries, including active-duty and reserve troops, wounded warriors and families. The four-year-old Post-9/11 GI Bill has served 1 million students at a cost of almost \$35 billion — but some lawmakers clearly think it could be doing more to serve troops, veterans and their families. A key focus of some of the new proposals is improving and expanding the ability of troops to transfer GI Bill benefits to family members, a unique feature of the new GI Bill that has made spouses and children eligible to use benefits earned by a service member. Other initiatives would boost benefits for surviving spouses and reservists and add extra benefits for vets with post-traumatic stress. Whether any of the ideas move forward depends in large part on money, as the proposals are swimming against the tide of restricted benefits in a time of tight budgets.

When lawmakers overhauled the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2011 to fix some flaws, they paid for the upgrades by making offsetting cuts in other facets of the program that have left many student veterans unhappy. For example, tuition reimbursement was reduced for students attending public colleges and universities as nonresidents, and the monthly living stipend that originally was paid during breaks between school terms ended. But two years later, Congress is still trying to find a way to help nonresident students, looking for a no-cost fix that would require states to reduce tuition rather than have the government pay more. Still, a number of lawmakers clearly believe the Post-9/11 GI Bill remains a work in progress. Here are the seven proposals — so far without cost estimates — that are in play:

1. Give more time to transfer - Among the many current restrictions on transferring benefits to a spouse or children is one that requires the initial decision to be made while a service member is still in uniform. Once made, a transfer decision can be revoked later, but the initial decision must be made before separation or retirement. The Post-9/11 Education Assistance Enhancement Act, H.R.3514, sponsored by Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Wash., would relax this rule and give service members up to five years after separation or retirement to make their initial transfer decision.

2. Raise age limit for children - Another McDermott bill, H.R.3515, would raise the age limit for dependent children to use benefits. Now, children must use transferred GI Bill benefits by age 26. McDermott's bill, the Increased Age Limit for Post-9/11 Education Assistance Dependents Act, would raise the cutoff to age 29.

McDermott said this would help those seeking advanced degrees. “These small changes in policy can be a big leg up for a family that needs flexibility on taking advantage of the veterans’ educational benefits they’ve rightfully earned,” McDermott said.

3. Expanded Fry Scholarships - Fry Scholarships, a Post-9/11 GI Bill offshoot, provides full GI Bill benefits to surviving children of troops who died in the line of duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001. Surviving spouses would be added under the Spouses for Heroes Education Act, introduced in the House by Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nev., and in the Senate by Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore. Titus’ bill is H.R.3441 and Merkley’s is S.1039. When a service members dies, “the least we can do is to ensure their family has the education they need to succeed,” said Merkley, a member of the Senate Military Family Caucus. “We already provide that benefit to the children of our fallen heroes. We should extend that benefit to a husband or wife who often must go back to school to provide a foundation for their family.” Under both bills, benefits could be used for up to 15 years following the service member’s death, but eligibility would end if the surviving spouse remarries.

4. Help for PTSD vets - To help veterans with mental health conditions who may have difficulty in classes, Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., has an amendment to the Senate version of the 2014 defense authorization bill that would give more time to use benefits but reduce monthly payments. Under Paul’s Amendment 2225 to the pending bill, veterans who have service-connected post-traumatic stress or suffered a traumatic brain injury could extend their 36 months of GI Bill benefits by an extra 18 months. But tuition and living stipends would be reduced to 67 percent of full payments.

5. More benefits for wounded - A similar Senate amendment to the defense bill was filed by Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore. Amendment 2110 would extend the 15-year post-service time limit to use Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for those who received medical care from the Defense Department. For every month of medical care received, wounded warriors would get an extra month of benefits.

6. More credit for reservists - For National Guard and Reserve members, Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., wants to change how training time is counted to give reserve-component members more credit toward Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. His Amendment 2266 to the Senate defense bill would apply to Guard and Reserve members who served in contingencies such as operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and New Dawn. For these service members, time spent in entry-level and skill training could be counted as active service for the purposes of determining their level of GI Bill benefits. This extra three to 15 months of service could result in a significant boost in tuition, living stipends and book allowances, which are based on length of service. Someone with 90 days to six months of service receives only 40 percent of the GI Bill payment that goes to someone with 36 months of service. Udall is pushing this change, he said, because he believes reservists who have served on the front lines deserve the same GI Bill benefits as active-duty members.

7. Make foster children eligible - Foster children would be added as potential beneficiaries of transferred benefits under H.R.3600, a measure cosponsored by Reps. Bill Foster, D-Ill., and Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash. The GI Bill Education Benefits Fairness Act is aimed at correcting a problem discovered after about 100 foster children began receiving benefits but were cut off in mid-semester after a review of the law, with families required to repay the money. If passed, this bill would retroactively cover those families in addition to applying to future benefits transfers. “Children of the men and women who serve honorably shouldn’t be denied the benefits they were promised because of a bureaucratic oversight,” Foster said. McMorris Rodgers, co-chair of the Congressional Military Family Caucus, said the goal is to treat all children the same. “We know that when a parent joins the military, it’s not just a job but a family commitment to our country,” she said. [Source: ArmyTimes + Rick Maze | 2 Dec 2013 ++]

VA Burial Benefit Update 31 ► Michael L. Anderson Disinterment



The House passed legislation 11 DEC that instructs the Veterans Affairs Department to unearth the remains of an Army veteran buried with military honors last year even after police said he killed an Indianapolis woman and injured three others before taking his own life. Current law prohibits military burials in national cemeteries for those who commit capital crimes, but it doesn't make provisions for removing a veteran who is buried in violation of that law. That's what happened in the case of Michael LeShawn Anderson. He was buried in Michigan's Fort Custer National Cemetery in June 2012. Six days earlier, police said he fatally shot Alicia Dawn Koehl. The VA said it found out about the circumstances surrounding Anderson's death only after he had been buried and it needed authorization from Congress to remedy the mistake. Members of Indiana's congressional delegation obliged. The bill covers national cemeteries as well as Arlington National Cemetery, which is administered by the Army. The Senate passed the same bill (S.1471) three weeks ago. It now goes to President Barack Obama for his signature. Koehl was a constituent of Rep. Susan Brooks (R-IN). She sponsored the House version of the legislation. "I'm outraged not only that the Koehl family had had to endure yet another injustice ... but also that our brave service men and women, who in some cases have given the ultimate sacrifice to their nation, are buried next to a murderous criminal," Brooks said in urging lawmakers to vote for the bill. [Source: Associated Press | Kevin Freking | 11 Dec 2013 ++]

NDA 2014 Update 06 ► Breaking Down the House Vote

With Speaker John A. Boehner in the chair, the House overwhelmingly passed the budget deal Thursday night 12 DEC in a bipartisan 332-94 vote. Refer to <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2013/roll640.xml> to see how your legislator voted. This should help you decide what to do when he/she comes up for reelection. There were plenty of interesting defections. In the end, 169 Republicans and 163 Democrats voted for the budget deal, which means that 62 Republicans and 32 Democrats — including the NO 2. House Democrat, Minority Whip Steny H. Hoyer — broke party ranks and voted “no.” There are many ways to break down this decisive vote but, for 218's purposes, we'll examine the defections through the prism of membership in party leadership, key committees and the conservative and liberal factions of the House.

- **All of the Republicans who voted against the budget deal are members of the conservative Republican Study Committee (RSC),** including Chairman Steve Scalise, R-La., except for five GOP members who don't affiliate themselves with the committee but still gave the deal a thumbs-down. They are Mike Coffman of Colorado, John J. Duncan Jr. of Tennessee, Joe Heck of Nevada, Walter B. Jones of North Carolina and Dana Rohrabacher of California. Overall, 73 percent of Republicans and 84 percent of Democrats voted for the deal. While you might have thought the RSC members would be far more inclined to vote against the budget deal, two-thirds of the members supported it. That's not an incredibly significant departure from the overall GOP ranks. However, RSC membership has become an increasingly meaningless distinction, as 172 Republicans out of 232 now consider themselves part of the RSC.
- **There were no defections among the senior members of House Republican leadership.** Even Boehner cast a “yes” vote. It's rare for the speaker to put his position on the official record, and even Conference

Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington who gave birth to her third child within the past few weeks, made it back to the Capitol to vote. Majority Leader Eric Cantor of Virginia, Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy of California, Conference Vice-Chairwoman Lynn Jenkins of Kansas and Republican Policy Committee Chairman James Lankford of Oklahoma all voted for the deal.

- **Hoyer was the only senior member of House Democratic leadership to vote “no.”** The Maryland Democrat had been playing his cards close to his chest in the lead-up to the vote, refusing to say which way he was leaning and even declining to launch a formal whip operation one way or the other. During his caustic floor speech on Thursday evening, he never explicitly said how he would vote. At the end of the day, he voted against the deal, which, in his estimation, was not nearly ambitious enough. It also forced federal workers to pay more into their retirement, and Hoyer’s district is home to many of them. The lack of an unemployment insurance extension also might have played a big (read: crucial) part. Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., had urged her members on Thursday to “embrace the suck” and help haul the deal over the finish line. They did.
- **Jack Kingston, R-Ga., and Andy Harris, R-Md., were the only GOP appropriators to vote “no,”** despite the fact that the budget agreement provides higher topline numbers with which to write and pass the 12 annual spending bills through regular order. Kingston, who is also the chairman of the Labor-Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee, could have cast his vote as part of his ongoing bid for Senate in 2014, where he has to compete with hardline conservative opponents like fellow Georgia Republicans Paul Broun and Phil Gingrey, who also voted “no” on Thursday night. Harris is also a conservative member who may have thought the deal didn’t save enough; conversely, he may have been put off by the language requiring federal workers to pay more toward their retirement, as many of them live in his home state.
- **There were three defections among Democratic Appropriators: Peter J. Visclosky of Indiana, Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut and Barbara Lee of California.** Especially for liberals DeLauro and Lee, even the pull of higher spending levels to write appropriations bills was not enough to override the distaste for provisions involving the federal workforce and the exclusion of language that would extend expiring unemployment insurance. DeLauro also happens to be Kingston’s ranking member on Labor-HHS.
- **Ways and Means Committee ranking member Sander M. Levin, D-Mich., voted “no.”** He said 11 DEC that if an extension of unemployment insurance was not brought to the floor, it could cost the budget deal Democratic votes. Ultimately, it cost the deal his own vote.
- **“No” votes on the budget deal came from the leaders of liberal caucuses of the House.** They include Congressional Black Caucus Chairwoman Marcia L. Fudge, D-Ohio, and Congressional Progressive Caucus Co-Chairmen Raúl M. Grijalva, D-Ariz., and Keith Ellison, D-Minn.

[Source: <http://blogs.rollcall.com/218/breaking-down-the-budget-vote> 13 Dec 2013 ++]

Veteran Legislation 113th Congress ► As of 13 Dec 2013

For a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 113th Congress refer to this Bulletin’s “**House & Senate Veteran Legislation**” attachment. Support of these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indication of that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At <http://thomas.loc.gov> you can review a copy of each bill’s content, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor or cosponsor of it. To determine what bills, amendments your representative has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on refer to <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d111/sponlst.html>.

Grassroots lobbying is the most effective way to let your Congressional representatives know your wants and dislikes. Members of Congress are the most receptive and open to suggestions from their constituents. The key to

increasing cosponsorship support on veteran related bills and subsequent passage into law is letting legislators know of veteran's feelings on issues. You can reach their Washington office via the Capital Operator direct at (866) 272-6622, (800) 828-0498, or (866) 340-9281 to express your views. Otherwise, you can locate your legislator's phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making at <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d111/sponlst.html>. Refer to http://www.thecapitol.net/FAQ/cong_schedule.html for dates that you can access them on their home turf.

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

- H.R.3647 : **Vet Guide Dog Improvement.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the provision of guide dogs to veterans blinded by a service-connected injury. Sponsor: Rep Amodei, Mark E. [NV-2] (introduced 12/4/2013)
- H.R.3648 : **Hire A Hero Act of 2013.** A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow the work opportunity credit to small businesses which hire individuals who are members of the Ready Reserve or National Guard, and for other purposes.) Sponsor: Rep Braley, Bruce L. [IA-1] (introduced 12/4/2013)
- H.R.3649 : **Jobs for Heroes Act.** A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow the work opportunity credit for hiring individuals who are veterans or members of the Ready Reserve or National Guard, to make permanent the work opportunity credit, and to expand and make permanent the employer wage credit for employees who are active duty members of the uniformed services. Sponsor: Rep Bustos, Cheri [IL-17] (introduced 12/4/2013)
- H.R.3653 : **Jobs for Veterans Act of 2013.** A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow an increased work opportunity credit with respect to recent veterans, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep King, Peter T. [NY-2] (introduced 12/4/2013)
- H.R.3672 : **S.O.S. Veterans Caregivers Act.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify that caregivers for veterans with serious illnesses are eligible for assistance and support services provided by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Ruiz, Raul [CA-36] (introduced 12/5/2013)

[Source: <http://www.loc.gov> & <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills> 13 Dec 2013 ++]

Veteran Hearing/Mark-up Schedule ► As of 14 Dec 2013

Following is the current schedule of recent and future Congressional hearings and markups pertaining to the veteran community. Congressional hearings are the principal formal method by which committees collect and analyze information in the early stages of legislative policymaking. Hearings usually include oral testimony from witnesses, and questioning of the witnesses by members of Congress. When a U.S. congressional committee meets to put a legislative bill into final form it is referred to as a mark-up. Veterans are encouraged to contact members of these committees prior to the event listed and provide input on what they want their legislator to do at the event.

Membership of each committee and their contact info can be found at <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/committees.tt?commid=svete>. Missed House Veteran Affairs committee (HVAC) hearings can viewed at <http://veterans.house.gov/in-case-you-missed-it>. Text of completed Senate Veteran Affairs Committee (SVAC) hearings are available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/committee.action?chamber=senate&committee=va&collection=CHRG&plus=CHRG>:

- Currently no hearings scheduled

[Source: Veterans Corner w/Michael Isam 14 Dec 2013 ++]

Military



Medal of Honor Citations ► **MacGillivray, Charles Andrew WWII**



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

MacGillivray, Charles Andrew

Rank and organization: Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company I, 71st Infantry, 44th Infantry Division

Place and date: Near Woelfling, France, 1 January 1945

Entered service at: Boston, Mass.

Born: January 7, 1917, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada.

Citation:

He led a squad when his unit moved forward in darkness to meet the threat of a breakthrough by elements of the 17th German Panzer Grenadier Division. Assigned to protect the left flank, he discovered hostile troops digging in. As he reported this information, several German machineguns opened fire, stopping the American advance. Knowing the position of the enemy, Sgt. MacGillivray volunteered to knock out 1 of the guns while another company closed in from the right to assault the remaining strong points. He circled from the left through woods and snow, carefully worked his way to the emplacement and shot the 2 camouflaged gunners at a range of 3 feet as other enemy forces withdrew. Early in the afternoon of the same day, Sgt. MacGillivray was dispatched on reconnaissance

and found that Company I was being opposed by about 6 machineguns reinforcing a company of fanatically fighting Germans. His unit began an attack but was pinned down by furious automatic and small arms fire. With a clear idea of where the enemy guns were placed, he voluntarily embarked on a lone combat patrol. Skillfully taking advantage of all available cover, he stalked the enemy, reached a hostile machinegun and blasted its crew with a grenade. He picked up a submachine gun from the battlefield and pressed on to within 10 yards of another machinegun, where the enemy crew discovered him and feverishly tried to swing their weapon into line to cut him down. He charged ahead, jumped into the midst of the Germans and killed them with several bursts. Without hesitation, he moved on to still another machinegun, creeping, crawling, and rushing from tree to tree, until close enough to toss a grenade into the emplacement and close with its defenders. He dispatched this crew also, but was himself seriously wounded. Through his indomitable fighting spirit, great initiative, and utter disregard for personal safety in the face of powerful enemy resistance, Sgt. MacGillivary destroyed four hostile machineguns and immeasurably helped his company to continue on its mission with minimum casualties.



President Harry S. Truman presents Charles MacGillivary with the Medal of Honor on August 25, 1945.

Born to Cardigan Scot Roland MacGillivary and Minnie Quinn, he attended Queens Square School in Charlottetown and joined the Merchant Marines at age 16. Shortly thereafter, he emigrated to the United States, to live with his older brother in Boston, Massachusetts. While living with his brother, he learned about the Army and considered joining it. After hearing about the attack on Pearl Harbor, he decided the right thing to do was to volunteer for the U.S. Army. In January 1942, he joined the Army as a private soldier and was assigned to the European Theatre of Operations. He told the United States Senate Subcommittee on Immigration 50 years later, that when he was in boot camp: "an officer asked me and two other immigrants ... whether we wanted to become U.S. citizens. [They took us] to a federal courthouse and [swore us] in before a judge. I thought that if I was going to fight for this country, I should be a U.S. citizen."

MacGillivary's first wartime action came during the Battle of Normandy, landing on Omaha Beach in 1944. From Omaha Beach MacGillivary would be involved in numerous battles throughout France, before reaching Wœfling during the Battle of the Bulge. When his unit was surrounded on January 1, 1945 by the 17th German Panzer Grenadier Division a Waffen-SS Panzer unit in Wœfling, France, MacGillivary, then 27, picked up a machine gun and knocked out four German machine gun nests, killing 36 German soldiers. He lost his left arm in this action. Interestingly the unit he fought to win his decoration, was given the title *Götz von Berlichingen* after a 15th-century German knight who lost his right hand. MacGillivary told a Boston Globe reporter in 1995: "I looked down and my left arm wasn't there. When you get hit by a machine gun, it's like somebody put a hot poker in you. I stuck the stump of my arm into the snow, but the warm blood melted the snow. I figured I was dying. When they

rescued me, my arm had a cake of bloody ice frozen around it, sealing the wound. If it had been summer, I'd [have been] dead."

For other actions during World War II MacGillivray also received the Purple Heart with three oak leaf clusters, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Bronze Star, the Soldier's Medal, and the French Croix de Guerre. He was also eligible for the American Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal and the World War II Victory Medal. He is honored with a bronze plaque on the lectern at the George Robert White Fund Memorial at the Veterans Memorial Park in the Back Bay Fens in Boston, Massachusetts. After the war he returned home to Boston where for a short time he worked as a special agent for Boston's Treasury Department. He joined the United States Customs Service in 1950 starting as a warehouse officer, but soon became an agent for the United States Customs Office of Investigations, conducting special investigations. His daughter Charlene Corea remembered him as being particularly busy in the winter inspecting Christmas trees that entered the United States from Canada. He retired from the Customs Service in 1975.

Sergeant Charles A. MacGillivray was enrolled as a member of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts the third oldest chartered military organization in the world on April 6, 1992. He was the seventh member of the company to receive the Medal of Honor. MacGillivray was a resident of Braintree, Massachusetts from 1957 until his death at age 83 on Saturday June 24, 2000 in the VA Hospital in Brockton, Massachusetts. Rev. Philip Salois, who had himself received a Silver Star in the Vietnam War performed the funeral. Then Governor of Massachusetts Paul Cellucci was in attendance at MacGillivray's funeral. He is buried beside his wife, Esther, in Section 48 (grave 568) of Arlington National Cemetery. [Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/html/moh/wwII-m-s.html#MABRY> & http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Andrew_MacGillivray Dec2013 ++]

POW/MIA Update 66 ► Identified 1 thru 15 Dec 2013

"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 (73,000+), Korean War (7,898+), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,644), 1991 Gulf War (0), and OEF/OIF (6). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home. For a listing of all personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/accounted_for. For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call or call (703) 699-1169. The remains of the following MIA/POW's have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:



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

Vietnam

The DPMO announced that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from Vietnam War, has been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. U.S. Air Force Col. **Francis J. McGouldrick Jr.** of New Haven, Conn., will be buried Dec. 13, at Arlington National Cemetery. On Dec. 13, 1968, McGouldrick was on a night strike mission when his B-57E Canberra aircraft collided with another aircraft over Savannakhet Province, Laos. McGouldrick was never seen again and was listed as missing in action. After the war in July 1978, a military review board amended his official status from missing in action to presumed killed in action. Between 1993 and 2004, joint U.S./Lao People's Democratic Republic (L.P.D.R.) teams attempted to locate the crash site with no success. On April 8, 2007, a joint team located a possible crash site near the village of Keng Keuk, Laos. From October 2011 to May 2012, joint U.S./L.P.D.R. teams excavated the site three times and recovered human remains and aircraft wreckage consistent with a B-57E aircraft. In the identification of McGouldrick, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, such as mitochondrial DNA – which matched McGouldrick's great nephew and niece.



Col. Francis J. McGouldrick Jr.

Korea

The DPMO announced 12 DEC that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Pfc. Jerry P. Craig, 17, of Panhandle, Texas, will be buried Dec. 19, in Leesville, La. In November 1950, Craig was a member of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team (RCT). From Nov. 27 to Dec. 2, while deployed along the eastern bank of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea, the 31st RCT was attacked by Chinese forces, causing them to begin a fighting withdrawal south to a more defensible position. Following the fighting, Craig was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950. In 1954, Chinese and North Korean Communist forces exchanged the remains of war dead with the United Nations forces during Operation Glory. The following year a military review board declared many of the remains as unidentifiable and they were transferred to be buried as unknowns in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, known as the "Punchbowl." Due to advances in technology, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) in 2012 determined that the possibility of identifying the remains was likely at that time. The unknown remains were disinterred for analysis and identification. To identify Craig's remains, scientists from JPAC used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, such as dental comparisons and radiograph comparisons, which matched Craig's records.

World War II

None

[Source: http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news_releases/ Dec 2013 ++]

Stolen Valor Update 90 ► **Tarnishes Service Members' Sacrifices**

Soldiers in every war have risked their lives to defend America. In many cases, their valor has been above and beyond the call of duty. For their service, they receive Purple Heart Medals for wounds, and for valor they might earn Bronze Star Medals, Silver Star Medals or others. It may seem hard to fathom, but there are many who claim to have earned medals to which they are not entitled. Others say they've served in combat but never have. Donald Mason knows this first-hand because he's called these individuals out and exposed their fraud to the public. Mason served from 2009-2010 as the national commander of the Legion of Valor. The organization was chartered by an Act of Congress in 1955. Today he serves as the commander of the legion's San Antonio chapter. All 627 members have received the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross or the Air Force Cross.

The mission of the Legion of Valor includes extending relief to needy members, their widows and children, promoting patriotism and pride in serving, and cherishing the memories of valiant deeds by those who served. Members also protect the valor of service members by exposing people who steal the valor of others. About five years ago, Mason recalls getting a call from the Texas Department of Transportation, which had also contacted Dick Agnew, commander of the Dallas/Fort Worth Legion of Valor chapter. Department personnel suspected that some motorists were fraudulently claiming to be entitled to put Legion of Valor license plates on their vehicles. Mason and Agnew found that of 67 Legion of Valor plates issued in Texas, 10 were fraudulent. The men then tracked down those 10. Surprisingly, all had actually served in the military, Mason said. Furthermore, most had been officers. However, none of them rated any of the four medals that would make one eligible for membership in the Legion of Valor or to have the license plate.

One of the perpetrators was from Mason's hometown of San Antonio. He was a retired Army lieutenant colonel. Not only did he have a fraudulent plate, he also wore his dress uniform to church and among the medals he wore but did not earn was a Distinguished Service Cross. Another was a combat infantry badge for service in Korea. When questioned about his combat badge, he replied that it was earned in 1956. The Korean War ended in 1953. This cut close to home for Mason, who had served with the Marines in Korea as a corpsman. In October 1952, he earned the Navy Cross during fighting near Panmunjom. Mason has dealt with other cases. He's currently looking into the case of a fraudulent Purple Heart Medal. It's fairly easy to steal valor, he said. Medals and ribbons can be purchased on the Internet, and blank DD-214 discharge forms can be found online. Awards can then be typed in as well as other service-related data. It doesn't help matters that many service records were lost in a fire at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, in 1973, he added, meaning people can claim their records were destroyed.

The Supreme Court also made it more difficult to prosecute cases of fraud, he said, when in 2012 in *U.S. v. Alvarez*, it found the Stolen Valor Act of 2005 to violate the First Amendment's free speech clause. The act had made it a federal misdemeanor to falsely represent oneself as having received any U.S. military decoration. Subsequently, Congress passed the Stolen Valor Act of 2012, which makes it a crime if the stolen valor results in profit. There are still steps people can take to find out and report stolen valor. The Defense Department, for example, has a list of service members who've earned some of the highest awards for valor at <http://valor.defense.gov>. Mason said he and other Legion of Valor chapter members would be glad to help if someone needs assistance in reporting stolen valor cases. The first step Mason takes is to talk to the person. If that doesn't work then he would

bring it to the attention of the public through the media. Mason said newspapers have reported cases of stolen valor. Also, the fraudulent claims should be brought to the attention of the U.S. Attorney's Office, if the case involves stolen valor for profit. [Source: Army News Service | David Vergun | 2 Dec 2013 +]

Gold Star Lapel Button ► Issuance Guidelines

The Lapel Buttons were established by an Act of Congress in August 1947 as a visible sign for family members of service members who sacrificed their lives while serving the country. The Lapel Button is a keepsake identifying the next of kin of those who gave their all while defending the American way of life. One Lapel Button is furnished without cost to the widow or widower, to each of the parents, each child, stepchild, child through adoption, brother, half brother, sister, and half sister of a member of the Armed Forces who lost his or her life while in the active military service. The term "widow or widower" includes those who have since remarried, and the term "parents" includes mother, father, stepmother, stepfather, mother through adoption, father through adoption, and foster parents who stood in loco parentis. There are two different Lapel Buttons:

- Gold Star Lapel Button (signifies died in a combat theater) features a gold star, one-quarter inch in diameter, on a purple circular background (signifies the families' grief or mourning) that is three-quarters inch in diameter within a wreath of gold laurel leaves (signifies valor). The Gold Star Lapel Button is furnished to eligible family members of a service member who was killed serving in combat, during an international terrorist attack, or as part of a peacekeeping force.
- Lapel Button for Next of Kin of Deceased Personnel consists of a gold star within a circle surrounded by sprigs of oak. The Next-of-Kin Lapel Button is issued to family members of personnel who died while on active duty or while assigned to a Reserve or National Guard unit in a drill status.



Public Law 534 - 89th Congress, directed the design and distribution of the lapel button issued to next of kin of members of the Armed Forces of the United States who lost their lives:

- During World War I, April 6, 1917 to March 3, 1921;
- During World War II, September 8, 1939 to July 25, 1947;
- During any subsequent period of armed hostilities in which the United States was engaged before July 1, 1958 (United Nations action in Korea, June 27, 1950 to July 27, 1954);
- After June 30, 1958
 - while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States;
 - while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force;
 - while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict in which the United States is not a belligerent party against an opposing armed force.*

The law further provides that not more than one Gold Star Lapel Button may be furnished to any one individual except that, when a Gold Star Lapel Button furnished under this section has been lost, destroyed, or rendered unfit for use without fault or neglect on the part of the person to whom it was furnished, the button may be replaced upon application and payment of an amount sufficient to cover the cost of manufacture and distribution. Go to

<http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/eforms/dd0003.pdf#search=%22Gold%20Star%20Lapel%20Pin%20Application%22> to download the application.

*Operations subsequent to June 30, 1958 which are recognized by the Department of Defense in establishing eligibility for the Gold Star Lapel Button include:

- Lebanon, July 1, 1958 to November 1, 1958
- Republic of Vietnam, July 1, 1958 to March 28, 1973
- Quemoy and Matsu Islands, August 23, 1958 to June 1, 1963
- Taiwan Straits, August 23, 1958 to January 1, 1959
- U.S. operations in direct support of the United Nations in the Congo, July 14, 1960 to September 1, 1962
- U.S. operations of assistance to the Republic of Laos, April 19, 1961 to October 7, 1962
- Berlin, August 14, 1961 to June 1, 1963
- Cuba, October 24, 1962 to June 1, 1963
- Congo, November 23, 1964 to November 27, 1964
- Dominican Republic, April 28, 1965 to September 21, 1966
- Korea, October 1, 1966 to June 30, 1974
- Cambodia, March 29, 1973 to August 15, 1973
- Thailand, March 29, 1973 to August 15, 1973
- Cambodia, April 11, 1975 to April 13, 1975
- Vietnam, April 29, 1975 to April 30, 1975
- Mayaguez Operation, May 15, 1975
- Lebanon, June 1983 to
- Grenadan Operation, October 23, 1983 to November 21, 1983
- Operation Eldorado Canyon, April 2, 1986 to April 17, 1986
- Panama, December 20, 1989 to January 31, 1990
- Desert Shield/Desert Storm, August 2, 1990 to November 30, 1995
- Haiti, September 16, 1994 to March 31, 1995
- Somalia, December 5, 1992 to March 31, 1995
- Operations in the Persian Gulf, November 30, 1995 to (to be determined)
- Operations in and around the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, December 20, 1996 to June 20, 1998
- Any subsequent operations as may be announced by the Secretary of Defense.

[Source: http://www.militarywives.com/catalog/gold_star.html Dec 2013 ++]

Airport Military Expedited Screening ► Program Extended to Reservist

A program allowing service members to go through an expedited airport screening process is expanding to include reservists and more airports on 20 DEC. The Pre Check program allows service members to keep on their shoes, light outerwear and belts during the security-screening process. Also, service members can keep laptops and approved liquid bags in their carry-on luggage. All service members are eligible to participate in the program. To participate, service members enter their Department of Defense ID number on the back of their common access card into the Known Traveler Number section when making reservations. Participants are not required to be on official travel or in uniform. For a list of participating airports and airlines, visit the Transportation Security Administration website at this TSA website <http://www.tsa.gov/tsa-precheck>. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 6 Dec 2013 ++]

USAF Academy Informant Program ► Recruited Cadet's Story

Facing pressure to combat drug use and sexual assault at the Air Force Academy, the Air Force has created a secret system of cadet informants to hunt for misconduct among students. Cadets who attend the publicly-funded academy near Colorado Springs must pledge never to lie. But the program pushes some to do just that: Informants are told to deceive classmates, professors and commanders while snapping photos, wearing recording devices and filing secret reports. For one former academy student, becoming a covert government operative meant not only betraying the values he vowed to uphold, it meant being thrown out of the academy as punishment for doing the things the Air Force secretly told him to do. Eric Thomas, 24, was a confidential informant for the Office of Special Investigations, or OSI — a law enforcement branch of the Air Force. OSI ordered Thomas to infiltrate academy cliques, wearing recorders, setting up drug buys, tailing suspected rapists and feeding information back to OSI. In pursuit of cases, he was regularly directed by agents to break academy rules. For his efforts OSI turned their backs on him and allowed him to be kicked out of the Academy for offenses that occurred as a result of his OSI work. To read more on Cadet Thomas' role in working with OIS go to the attachment to this bulletin titled, "**USAF Academy Informant Program**". [Source: Colorado Springs 'TheGazette' | Dave Philipps | 2 Dec 2013 ++]

Reserve Contingent Tuition Aid Update 01 ► Access Tightened

The Army National Guard will lose part of a recruiting incentive when the Army tightens its tuition assistance (TA) program beginning 1 JAN. The new rules require all Army personnel—active, Guard and Reserve—to complete a full year of service after they finish their initial entry training to qualify for the program. This means the Guard may not be quite as attractive to potential recruits who are planning to attend or are already enrolled in college full time. About 4,000 active-component soldiers, 3,000 Army Guard troops and 1,200 members of the Army Reserve have used TA money before serving one year, according to Army officials. Soldiers will also be limited to 16 semester hours during each fiscal year, a change that, according to the Army, will affect about 20,000 active-component soldiers, and more than 18,000 Guard and Reserve members. Soldiers are currently allowed to take up to 18 credit hours. In addition, soldiers using the program to receive their bachelor's degree will also be required to complete 10 years of service before they use it for a higher degree. The amount paid per semester hour—set at \$250—will not change, Army officials said. Army officials said a motivating factor behind some of the changes to the TA program is the "fiscally constrained environment." [Source: NGAUS Washington Report 10 Dec 2013 ++]

Military Lingo/Jargon/Slang ► 023

USA Academy: *Green Girl* – Comforter

USA Acronyms: *RHIP* - Rank Hath Its Privileges

USA Equipment: *Full Battle-Rattle* – The complete set of combat gear

USA Field Slang: *Fort Useless* – Fort Eustis. Also stands for Even Uncle Sam Thinks It Sucks.

USA Misc: *Fobbit* – A soldier who rarely leaves the perimeter of his Forward Operating Base.

USA Rank: *Chicken in a Frypan* – A Specialist (E-4) rank insignia, which has an eagle inside a shield.

USA Soldiers: *Crunchie B* – Mechanized infantry, because when they get run over by their APCs, they make a crunch sound.

USA Unit Nicknames: *Ivy Division* – 4th Infantry Division whose patch has four ivy leaves. Also described as "four 2LT's pointing north".

USAF: *Judy* – A combat pilot's radio call signaling that the quarry is in sight and the pilot is taking control of the intercept.

USMC: *Blanket Party* – Group assault: victim's head is covered by a blanket so the perpetrators can't be identified.

USN: *The Lucky Bag* – The so-called Lucky Bag was really a huge locker in which articles lost aboard ship were deposited. Once a month these articles were produced and handed back to their respective owners. But there was a catch to it...each lucky recipient of a lost article was then given three strokes from the cat-o'-nine tails to teach him not to lose anything again.

Vets: *Freedom Bird* – The 727 World Airways Jet you take home after 365 wakeups.

Military History



Aviation Art 53 ► **First American Ace**



First American Ace

by Roy Grinnell

In May, 1916, Raoul Gervais Lufbery was assigned to N-124, the Escadrille Americaine (the American Pilot's Volunteer Group). He became famous not only for becoming the first American Ace, but also for inventing the so-called Lufbery Circle, his well remembered phrase was "Be careful, always remember it may be a trap." Of Lufbery's 16 victories, it is believed that his fifth was the most notable, during the famous Oberndorf Raid over Germany, in 1916. Four pilots from N-124, flying Nieuport 17's, were to escort the bomber mission to Oberndorf to destroy the Mauser Works factory there. On the return from the mission, Lufbery scored his fifth victory against a Roland CII.

[Source: <http://www.brooksart.com/Firstamericanace.html> Dec 2013 ++]

The Greatest Generations Foundation ► What they Do

The Greatest Generations Foundation (TGGF) is a non-profit International organization dedicated to promoting recognition and respect for war veterans of past and current conflicts while enhancing historical education for today's youth and tomorrow's leaders. They work to ensure that the honor and sacrifice of these veterans is never forgotten, nor that the value of their deeds be allowed to disappear into the annals of history. Since its inception, the organization has directly touched thousands of veterans' lives through a multitude of battlefield programs, organized programs to national and international destinations, and other activities.

Founded in 2004, this is the only non-profit organization devoted to helping veterans return to their battlefields and enabling closure of their war experiences while at the same time educating youth about key war events and their relevance. TGGF determined that veterans would benefit greatly from the opportunity to return to a foreign battlefield and to find some measure of closure. They identified the need to provide financial assistance to veterans to make these journeys, as well as program organization and guiding. In accomplishing their mission to honoring the sacrifices of veterans and ensuring that their legacies are recorded and retold in perpetuity to future generations, they have developed and coordinate the following programs

BATTLEFIELD PROGRAM: Offers the opportunity for World War II veterans to return to their battlefields at no cost to them. These voyages back to the battlefields are often emotional, but provide veterans a measure of closure from their war experiences, the chance to share in the gratitude for their service, and a venue to educate others.

CONNECTING GENERATIONS: Collaborates with universities and military academies to bring college students/cadets along on many of the battlefield journeys abroad. These programs are a powerful learning experience for the students/cadets who learn about the historic events of World War II. History is deepened significantly by hearing the veterans' personal accounts of bravery and sacrifice during these events, and the veterans know their legacy and stories will be preserved and passed along by the students/cadets. These journeys provide a powerful bridge between two generations who, prior to these voyages, often have had little contact with or curiosity about each other.

OPERATION COMMON GROUND: Brings former veterans and wounded warriors who have overcome the hardships of acclimating to civilian life after being wounded in combat to aid stations where soldiers are being treated for recent wounds sustained in Operation Enduring Freedom. By connecting these generations of veterans, those former veterans gain closure in a way otherwise inaccessible while those from recent operations are encouraged to have met the men who fought for a common goal over the last 70 years defending the freedom that they defend today.

AMERICAN HERO DAY: Brings historical events into the classroom, using TGGF’s most trusted strategy: allowing veterans to share their own stories. Veterans visit classrooms to speak about their own experiences of war, answer questions, and bring to life the history children read about in books.

WORLD WAR II TRAVELING MUSEUM: A mobile World War II exhibit that visits schools to share its world-class collection of artifacts and archives. It takes history beyond the pages of textbooks and into the hands of curious students.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS: Students who participate in local history preservation projects or extracurricular activities tied to military history may apply for an International educational scholarship in honor of all World War II veterans. The scholarships enable the recipients to travel with World War II veterans on one of TGGF’s all-expense paid “Connecting Generations” journeys abroad.

STORIES OF REMEMBRANCES: Once veterans have had the chance to share their stories and personal accounts from the war, TGGF works to document and record each piece of their history. They collect first-person accounts of veterans’ experiences from World War I (1914-1920), World War II (1939-1946), the Korean War (1950-1955), the Vietnam War (1961-1975), the Persian Gulf War (1990-1995), and the Middle Eastern conflicts (2001-present).

HOLOCAUST AWARENESS INITIATIVE: Works closely with several Jewish Associations, the Jewish Veterans Association, and with people of varying faiths and cultures to explore the meaning of the Shoah (the Hebrew word used to refer to the Holocaust) and its lessons for future generations.

VETERANS OF VALOR: DIGITAL STORY BOARD DEVELOPMENT: The college students who travel abroad with the veterans are moved and changed by the experience. This program is the vehicle for those students, upon their return, to record the experience. The students, who are each paired with one veteran, are required to journal their experiences during the program. Upon their return, they use their journals to write, produce and narrate a four-minute, recorded vignette about their veteran. These audio clips are submitted to local radio stations to be played in the home community of the veteran. Several of the recorded clips have been played on NPR affiliates around the country.

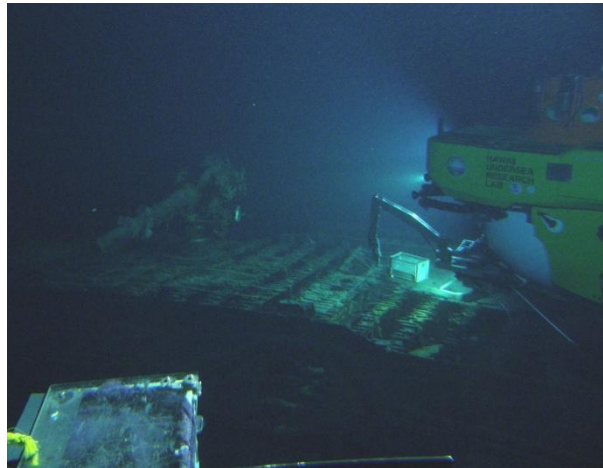
VINTAGE RESTORATION: TGGF works to preserve the history of warfare by collecting, and when appropriate restoring, memorabilia, equipment, and even vehicles relevant to the “Greatest Generations.” These items are then used in conjunction with other TGGF programs such as American Hero Day.

For additional information on the organization, to seek their assistance, or to offer support go to their online message board AT <http://www.tggf.org/ContactUs/>. You can also ask questions at info@tggf.org , call 1(303) 800.6199 or write The Greatest Generations Foundation, Remember Those Who Served, 3773 Cherry Creek North Drive, Suite 575, Denver, Colorado USA 80207. [Source: <http://www.tggf.org> Dec 2013 ++]

WWII Japanese Sub I-400 ► Found 3 mi off Barbers Point, HI

Scientists plumbing the Pacific Ocean off the Hawaii coast have discovered a WWII era Japanese submarine considered a technological marvel at the time of her construction. The 400-foot "Sen-Toku" class vessel — among the largest pre-nuclear submarines ever built - was found in August off the southwest coast of Oahu. She had been missing since 1946. "Sen-Toku" class vessels were able to travel one and a half times around the world without refueling and could hold up to three folding-wing bombers. The accidental discovery of the I-400, an aircraft-toting mega sub, on the rock- and debris- ocean floor, some 2,300 feet beneath the surface, has solved the mystery

surrounding a ship long thought to be further afield. "We came upon this as we were looking for other targets ... It is like watching a shark at rest," said Jim Delgado, a researcher aboard the Pisces V deep-diving submersible which traveled to the wreckage.



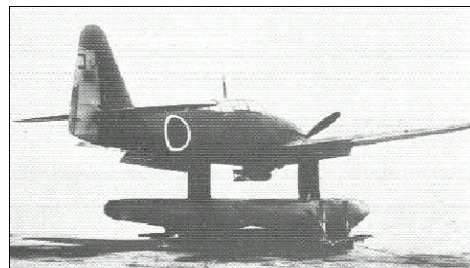
Hawaii Undersea Research Laboratory (HURL) photo shows a light from a research submarine illuminating the deck of a submerged World War II-era Japanese mega-submarine, the I-400, discovered off the ... more

While Japan built many submarines that were larger than those of other Navies, the Sen Toku boats were far larger than anything ever seen before. Some 60% larger than the largest contemporary American submarine, USS Argonaut, they had more than twice her range. The most unusual feature was that they each carried three floatplane bombers (and parts for a fourth), a feat never achieved by any other class of submarine. These aircraft folded to fit into the 115-foot cylindrical hangar, which was slightly offset to starboard and opened forward to access the catapult. The huge double hull was formed of parallel cylindrical hulls so that it had a peculiar lazy-eight cross section, and may have inspired the Soviet Typhoon-class built some 40 years later. Although aircraft must be considered their primary armament, they also carried a formidable torpedo battery and the usual 14cm deck gun. Anti-aircraft armament included ten 25mm cannons in three triple mounts and one single. Each of these boats had radar and a snorkel.

The aircraft were the Aichi M6A1 Seiran, also carried by the Type AM submarines. Each of these monoplanes could carry one aerial torpedo or a bomb weighing up to 800kg. Powered by the 1,400hp Atsuta 32 engine (similar to Germany's DB601) they had a top speed of 295mph and were credited with a range of 642 nautical miles. The Sen Toku submarines carried four aerial torpedoes, three 800kg bombs, and twelve 250kg bombs to arm these aircraft. These aircraft had their assembly points coated with fluorescent paint to ease assembly in the dark, so four trained men could prepare an aircraft for launch in seven minutes. All three aircraft could be prepared, armed, and launched in 45 minutes.



(1)



(2)

- (1) I-400 beside submarine tender USS Proteus after the war. Note the large hangar and forward catapult**
- (2) The Aichi M6A1 Seiran had the performance of carrier-based bombers, yet it was operated from a submarine**

Unfortunately for Japan, the war situation deteriorated so rapidly that these boats were never allowed to show what they could do. On 26 July 1945, I-400 and I-401 set out on a combat mission to launch their aircraft in Kamikaze attacks on the American fleet anchorage at Ulithi. In coordination with a Kaiten class submarine attack, they were scheduled to launch early on 17 August, but by then hostilities had ceased. Both boats therefore returned to Japan and were surrendered to the Allies. After the war, I-400 and I-401 were taken to the United States, examined, and finally scuttled in the Pacific in 1946. I-401 was found off Oahu in 2005. The discovery of I-400 was announced on 2 DEC 2013 after NOAA had reviewed its findings with the U.S. State Department and Japanese government officials, researchers said. The torpedoed I-401 was torpedoed was found partially collapsed and had sunk at a steep angle.

After their scuttling U.S. forces claimed to have no information on their precise location, in an apparent bid to prevent their technology falling into the hands of the Soviet Union, which had demanded the ships be returned to Japan. I-402 was converted to carry precious fuel to Japan from the East Indies, but never performed such a mission. In 1946 she he was scuttled off Goto Island in the Sea of Japan 1946. Construction of two further boats of this design, I-404 and I-405, was stopped before completion, although I-404 was 90% complete. A further 13 boats were canceled before construction started One in the submarine class remains missing. [Source: Reuters | Suzanne Roig & <http://combinedfleet.com/ships/i-400> 3 Dec 2013 ++]

Military History ► **Roosevelt Pearl Harbor Address to the Nation**

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Senate, and of the House of Representatives:



Yesterday, December 7th, 1941 -- a date which will live in infamy -- the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan. The United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in the American island of Oahu, the Japanese ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to our Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. And while this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or of armed attack. It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time, the Japanese government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. In addition, American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday, the Japanese government also launched an attack against Malaya.
Last night, Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong.
Last night, Japanese forces attacked Guam.
Last night, Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands.
Last night, the Japanese attacked Wake Island.
And this morning, the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday and today speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation.

As Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense. But always will our whole nation remember the character of the onslaught against us. No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory. I believe that I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost, but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us. Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger. With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph -- so help us God.

I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7th, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese empire.



[Source: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrpearlharbor.htm> Dec 2013 ++]

Military History ► **Philippines 8 DEC 1945**

The Dec. 7, 1941, surprise attack on Pearl Harbor is burned into the American consciousness. But for two North Texans, Dec. 8 is the day they will never forget. Just hours after the dawn attack on Pearl Harbor but across the international dateline making it Dec. 8, Japanese planes also bombed American bases and Manila in the Philippines. "It was a complete surprise. We were unprepared. It was the second of a number of Pearl Harbors in that first year of the war," said Leon Long, a 93-year-old who grew up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin and then joined his high school friend George Loritz in the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1939. The two pals, who worked in aircraft maintenance, were stationed at Clark Field with the 19th Bombardment Group composed of 35 B-17 bombers and 23 P-40 interceptors. Just days before, 16 B-17s were flown 500 miles south to the island of Mindanao as a precaution against attack, Long said.

After hearing radio news reports of the Pearl Harbor attack early that morning, Long and Loritz were returning to work after lunch when they saw two flights of more than 50 twin-engine planes approaching the airfield. "George said, 'Hey, look, it's nice to see the Navy is out protecting us.' About that time, the earth began to erupt at the end of the runway," Long said. "George ran to the hanger where he worked and I dived into a slit trench. Two other guys jumped in on top of me," he said. After enduring nearly an hour of bombing and strafing runs that destroyed 16 of the B-17s and 20 of the P-40s and most of the base, Long crawled out from beneath the two other men who had been killed by concussion blasts to find that Loritz was among the 100 Air Corps troops killed that day. That day was just the beginning of a remarkable year-long odyssey of war for Long as he escaped the Philippines and joined other survivors of his bomber group in striking back against the Japanese.

Forty miles away, near Manila, then 9-year-old Elsie Miller was dressed and ready for a big day, her first Communion in the Catholic church, when her father, Edward Normandy, an American transportation company executive, rushed home after the Japanese attacked Manila. Normandy had served in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War and then stayed in the Pacific and married Isabel Halili, a Filipino. She died shortly after Elsie, their 10th child, was born. Normandy appeased his daughter by making a quick trip to the church and then packed her and seven other siblings off to safety in the countryside. Elsie's two oldest brothers stayed with their father and they joined Filipino and American troops in the determined but doomed fight for the Philippines against overwhelming Japanese forces. The eight other children stayed with relatives who owned fish farms and eventually they scattered in pairs before returning to Manila during the Japanese occupation, Miller said. "It was a struggle. There was never enough food. It was terrifying. The Japanese were raping women and killing babies," said Miller, now 82.

The U.S.-Filipino resistance in the Philippines lasted until April 9, 1942, when U.S. Gen. Edward P. King surrendered to the Japanese. About 12,000 Americans and 63,000 Filipinos who had been pushed back onto the Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island became prisoners of war and were subjected to the infamous Bataan Death March. The Japanese forced the already weakened prisoners to march 65 miles to a prison camp. Guards shot any man who fell or faltered during the five-day march. Along the way, the Japanese singled out prisoners, sometimes in groups, and shot them to death as examples to the others. Between 7,000 and 10,000 men were killed but Elsie's 61-year-old father and two brothers survived. The two brothers eventually escaped from the Japanese. The oldest brother, Edward Normandy Jr., a doctor who worked at a hospital in Manila, organized a clandestine intelligence unit. He was seized by the Japanese shortly before American forces liberated Manila and was tortured and killed, Miller said. Miller's father remained a captive for four years. "The Americans liberated the few skeletons left in Bataan and my father was one of them. At his age, I don't know how he survived," Miller said.

After the war Normandy returned to work for the transportation company and later bought a plantation in the Philippines. He died at 77 in 1961 in Maryland and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery, Miller said. Miller

moved to the U.S to attend college. In 1961, she was among the first members of the Peace Corps to serve overseas. She went on to work for the Peace Corps for nearly 20 years and retired to Granbury in 1996. By the time Japan surrendered in the Philippines, two-thirds of the Americans captured at Bataan had died in Japanese custody. A lucky break allowed Leon Long to escape the island. About 10 days after Clark Field was bombed, Long was transferred to an artillery battalion on Bataan. One night, after spending a day digging gun pits in the rain, he crawled under a chicken coop to sleep. "During the night, somebody kicked me in the butt and told me to get my rear end in a jeep. 'You're going back to Clark Field,'" Long said.

The few B-17s that were intact after the Japanese attack had been sent to safety in Australia. But a crew from a bomber with a large hole in a fuel tank were desperate to escape and someone remembered Long's metalworking skills. Long's tools, which had been buried to keep them from the Japanese, were dug up and he cut the top off a 50-gallon drum and screwed the metal patch over the gaping hole with a seal improvised from a tire tube. "It worked. The B-17 crew taxied down about 100 yards and then stopped. A guy came running back and said that since I fixed the tank, the pilot wanted me to come onboard," he said. "That's how I got out of the Philippines. I would have never made it through the Bataan Death March." But there would be no shortage of challenges before he made it back home. Stationed first in Australia and then at a base in Java and then pushed back to Australia, his unit was first attached to Dutch, then Australian and finally British air forces. There were no replacements available for bomber crews and Long was soon pressed into duty as a side gunner on a B-17. After bombing missions, he went back to work repairing the planes. "The first time I ever fired a .50-caliber machine gun was in combat. You learn rapidly in that situation," Long said.

His well-traveled unit finally rejoined the Army Air Corps and late in 1942 his group returned to the U.S. "Our ship landed in San Francisco and me a friend slipped away and spent four or five days in the St. Francis Hotel. We were the first troops back, you couldn't buy a drink or meal," he said. Long spent the last three years of the war training bomber crews at Pyote Air Force Station in West Texas. He spent another 20 years in the Air Force, working as a B-36 flight engineer and instructor. After retiring as a master sergeant, he spent 27 years in research and engineering for General Dynamics in Fort Worth. He learned to fly in 1948 and after retiring from General Dynamics he was a pilot for a Fort Worth law firm for 10 years. He also worked as a flight instructor for 43 years and didn't quit flying until April. Long's wife of 64 years, Myra Lynn, died a month and a half ago, and he still lives in the tidy brick home on the west side of Fort Worth they shared for 60 years.

The veteran laughs that he might momentarily forget where his keys are but he has remarkable recall of his more than nine decades of life. 'You just did it' That momentous day on Dec. 8, 1941, remains a life milestone, but Long shrugs off his extraordinary war service. "We were doing what we had to do. You didn't think about it, you just did it." Tom Clark, a 68-year-old former jet fighter pilot during the Vietnam War who worked with Long at General Dynamics, said Long's story from the Philippines amazes him. "I worked with him for years before I heard anything about the war. His escape from the Philippines, that's one of those deals in life I call a 'God wink.' It's so incredible you have to think something is behind it." [Source: Fort Worth Star-Telegram| Steve Campbell | 7 Dec 2013 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 16 Dec thru 15 Jan

Significant events in U.S. Military History are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 15 Jan**".

WWII Prewar Events ► Nazi Youth Book Burning 1938



Members of the Nazi Youth participate in burning books, Buecherverbrennung, in Salzburg, Austria, on April 30, 1938. The public burning of books that were condemned as un-German, or Jewish-Marxist was a common activity in Nazi Germany.

VA Post-WWII Lobotomy ► Used on 1464+ Mentally Ill Vets

The U.S. government lobotomized roughly 2,000 mentally ill veterans — and likely hundreds more — during and after World War II, according to a cache of forgotten memos, letters and government reports unearthed by The Wall Street Journal. “They got the notion they were going to come to give me a lobotomy,” Roman Tritz, a 90 year old World War II bomber pilot, told the newspaper in a report published 11 DEC. “To hell with them.” Tritz said the orderlies at the veterans hospital pinned him to the floor, and he initially fought them off. A few weeks later, just before his 30th birthday, he was lobotomized. “They just wanted to ruin my head, it seemed to me,” Tritz said. “Somebody wanted to.” Besieged by psychologically damaged troops returning from the battlefields of North Africa, Europe and the Pacific, the Veterans Administration performed the brain-altering operation on former servicemen it diagnosed as depressives, psychotics and schizophrenics, and occasionally on people identified as homosexuals, according to the report.

The VA’s use of lobotomy, in which doctors severed connections between parts of the brain then thought to control emotions, was known in medical circles in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and is occasionally cited in medical texts. But the VA’s practice, never widely publicized, long ago slipped from public view. Even the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs says it possesses no records detailing the creation and breadth of its lobotomy program. The Wall Street Journal’s reporting series began with Wednesday’s Forgotten Soldiers and included a documentary, archived photos, maps and medical records. The Journal quoted the VA’s response to its inquiry: “In the late 1940s and into the 1950s, VA and other physicians throughout the United States and the world debated the utility of lobotomies. The procedure became available to severely ill patients who had not improved with other treatments. Within a few years, the procedure disappeared within VA, and across the United States, as safer and more effective treatments were developed.”



Roman Tritz as a young man



Walter Freeman & James Watts performing a prefrontal lobotomy in 1942.

The newspaper reported that musty files warehoused in the National Archives show VA doctors resorting to brain surgery as they struggled with a vexing question that absorbs America to this day: How best to treat the psychological crises that afflict soldiers returning from combat. Between April 1, 1947, and Sept. 30, 1950, VA doctors lobotomized 1,464 veterans at 50 hospitals authorized to perform the surgery, according to agency documents rediscovered by the Journal. Scores of records from 22 of those hospitals list another 466 lobotomies performed outside that time period, bringing the total documented operations to 1,930. Gaps in the records suggest that hundreds of additional operations likely took place at other VA facilities. The vast majority of the patients were men, although some female veterans underwent VA lobotomies as well. Lobotomies faded from use after the first major antipsychotic drug, Thorazine, hit the market in the mid-1950s, revolutionizing mental health care.

The forgotten lobotomy files, military records and interviews with veterans’ relatives reveal the details of lives gone terribly wrong, according to the Journal. The veterans included:

- Joe Brzoza, who was lobotomized four years after surviving artillery barrages on the beaches at Anzio, Italy, and spent his remaining days chain-smoking in VA psychiatric wards.
- Eugene Kainulainen, whose breakdown during the North African campaign the military attributed partly to a childhood tendency toward “temper tantrums and [being] fussy about food.”
- Melbert Peters, a bomber crewman given two lobotomies — one most likely performed with a pick-like instrument inserted through his eye sockets.
- Roman Tritz, the son of a Wisconsin dairy farmer who flew a B-17 Flying Fortress on 34 combat missions over Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe.

To stimulate patients’ nerves, hospital staff also commonly sprayed veterans with powerful jets of alternating hot and cold water, the archives show. Tritz received 66 treatments of high-pressure water sprays called the Scotch Douche and Needle Shower, his medical records say. “You couldn’t help but have the feeling that the medical community was impotent at that point,” Elliot Valenstein, 89, a World War II veteran and psychiatrist who worked at the Topeka, Kan., VA hospital in the early 1950s, told the Journal. He recalled wards full of soldiers haunted by nightmares and flashbacks. The doctors, he says, “were prone to try anything.” [Source: ArmyTimes article 11 DEC 2013 ++]

Spanish American War Images 62 ► Warship Vizcaya

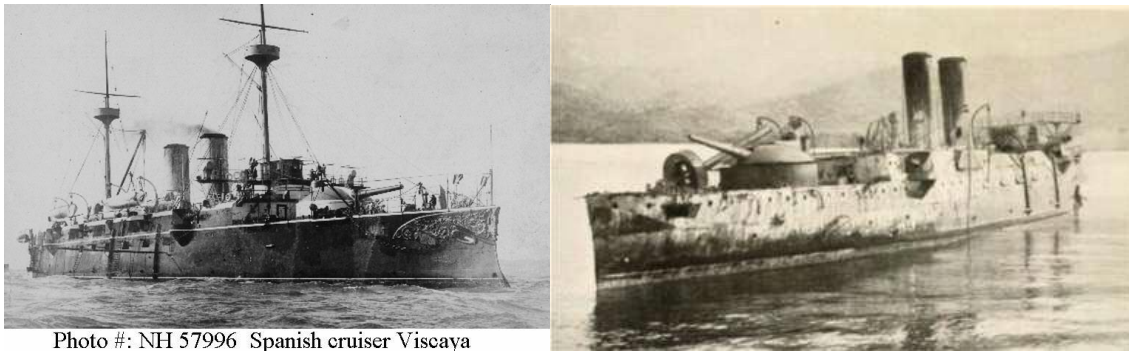


Photo #: NH 57996 Spanish cruiser Vizcaya

Spanish warship Vizcaya before and after the Battle of Santiago de Cuba

Military Trivia 85 ► Bastogne's Airborne Beer

It took 65 years for **Vincent Speranza** to find out that his actions in Belgium during World War II had been immortalized — for his ingenuity with the beverage that the country is famous for producing. The Auburn, Ill., native had buried the war — and the pain he endured — deep inside until his wife died four years ago and he began thinking about the past. Visiting his storied 501st Infantry Regiment earlier this month in Alaska to observe readiness training, he shared his rich combat experiences. Speranza joined the Army in 1943 right after graduating from high school. He was assigned to Company H, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, as a replacement in November 1944 while the unit licked its wounds from the devastating failure of Operation Market-Garden. Within weeks, Speranza would be in a foxhole in Bastogne, Belgium — cold, running short on supplies and ammo and surrounded by German troops. “The first eight days we got pounded” by German artillery, he recalled. “But this was the 101st. They could not get past (us). They never set one foot in Bastogne.”



Vincent Speranza inspects an M249 machine gun weapon system during an installation visit Oct. 6, 2013

On the second day of the siege, a friend named Joe Willis was wounded with shrapnel in both legs and brought to a makeshift combat hospital in a blown-out church. When Speranza tracked him down, the fellow paratrooper asked him to get him something to drink. Speranza explained they were surrounded and no supplies were coming in. The soldier asked him to check a devastated tavern nearby. Speranza found a working beer tap there. He filled his helmet — the same one he had used as a foxhole toilet — and made two trips to the wounded in the church. He was caught by an angry major and told he would be shot if he did not stop, for fear he would kill the wounded. Visiting Bastogne in 2009, Speranza found his foxhole still there, but Dutch and Belgian military officials told him that the

legend of the soldier filling his helmet with beer for the wounded is still told — and had been immortalized on the label of Bastogne’s Airborne beer. The beer is typically consumed from a ceramic helmet.

So Lt. Col. Tobin Magsig, current commander of 1st Battalion — the only airborne battalion left in the 501st — had a few surprises up his sleeve for Speranza’s recent visit to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Troops showed him a Nazi banner hanging in the Battalion Headquarters that Speranza had signed more than 60 years ago but had never thought about since. They marveled with delight while a rush of names and memories flooded back to him. Magsig also ordered ceramic helmets and Airborne beer for the regimental ball. “Mr. Speranza’s visit has been rich and rewarding for every paratrooper in the battalion,” Magsig said. “You can see it on their faces and the way they carry themselves. After talking with him, they stand straighter and stick their chests out. Their faces beam with pride at the opportunity to serve in the 501st — in the shadow of men such as Vincent Speranza.” The 88-year-old also got a tour of the weapons depot on base, which he called “interesting and informative.” The old machine-gunner beamed as he got to hold current weapons, including the M249 machine gun. He also witnessed four airborne jumps from the inside an Alaska National Guard UH-60 helicopter. “I wanted to change places with them and do the jump, but they wouldn’t let me,” Speranza said. “They’ve opened up another chapter [in my life]... I feel like I’m home again.”

Much has changed since Speranza wore a uniform. The 501st has since separated from the 101st Airborne Division. Airborne jumps are now done out of helicopters and not just cumbersome transport planes. The enemy is harder to identify, melting into crowds of civilians and launching insider attacks. Still, Speranza believes the spirit of the men who stood up to seven German divisions while surrounded in Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge endures in the soldiers of 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry Regiment. “They sure haven’t let us down as far as the reputation of the 501st goes,” Speranza said. “They don’t wear the screaming eagle patch anymore but they certainly keep the eagle screaming.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Matthew M. Burke | 23 Nov 2013 ++]

Faces of WAR (WWII) ► General Dwight D. Eisenhower 1945



General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, sitting in jeep in which he made recent tour of the fighting front during World War II. (ETO) 1945

Health Care



TRICARE Website Update 01 ► **New Customer Service Features**

TRICARE beneficiaries now have an easy way to access customer service features. The TRICARE.mil home page has a new “I want to...” section offering beneficiaries a gateway to links that help them manage their health care from prescriptions to enrollments and much more.

The “I want to...” section of <http://www.tricare.mil> launched 1 DEC. The redesigned home page focuses on tools for beneficiaries to manage their health care benefits. “I want to...” has quick links to secure login portals for more than a dozen customer service features including:

- Managing prescriptions
- Enrolling or purchasing a plan
- Finding a doctor
- Updating personal information
- Filing or checking on a claim
- Paying a bill
- Booking appointments at a military hospital or clinic
- Changing a primary care physician
- Viewing military health records

Many beneficiaries may not even know these resources are available online. The new look [TRICARE.mil](http://www.tricare.mil) home page is a hub for beneficiaries to manage their health care benefits from the comfort of home or on the go with mobile sites. Mobile, online and toll-free customer service options are time savers and prevent unnecessary trips to a military hospital or clinic. Other common requests, such as comparing plans or seeing what’s covered, are also featured in the “I want to...” section as well as links to download forms, or subscribe to TRICARE email alerts. [Source: TRICARE News Release 3 Dec 2013 ++]

TRICARE Prime Update 26 ► **NDAAs Compromise Deal Impact**

More than 171,000 military retirees and family members booted from Tricare Prime on 1 OCT when the Defense Department cut coverage areas for its managed health program could get their old health plans back under the

compromise 2014 defense bill under consideration in the House and Senate. The bill contains a “one-time election to continue enrollment in Tricare Prime” for affected beneficiaries — a proposal floated in May by Reps. Mac Thornberry (R-TX) and John Kline (R-MN) after constituents in their districts learned they would lose the option to stay in Prime. The \$632.8 billion compromise bill, which still requires approval in the Senate, would allow beneficiaries a one-time chance to stay in Prime as long as they continue living in the same ZIP code where they opted into Prime. The President said that if passed in its present form he will not veto it.

The Pentagon reduced the availability of the Tricare Prime managed-care program to locations within 40 miles of an active or former military base on 1 OCT, forcing 171,000 retirees and family members to switch to Tricare Standard, a traditional fee-for-service health care program with higher out-of-pocket costs than Prime. The Pentagon said shrinking Prime will save the government \$45 million to \$65 million a year, based on estimates that DoD pays an average of \$600 more per year to provide Prime to a beneficiary than Standard. But affected beneficiaries felt abandoned by the system, given that the Pentagon began planning in 2007 to reduce its Prime service areas but did not publicize the change. Media reports in October 2012 alerted both affected beneficiaries and lawmakers to the pending reduction. In a summary of the compromise bill released Monday, Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA) chairman of the House Armed Service Committee, said committee members believe health care for retired service members is “a benefit earned through prior service to our nation. “Promises made should be promises kept, and the Pentagon should not break faith with our nation’s heroes,” Kline said earlier this year after proposing the legislation.

The compromise defense bill, which authorizes \$32.9 billion for the defense health program, includes no significant increases in health care fees for military retirees and their families. Lawmakers rejected White House efforts to raise fees markedly for retirees on Tricare Prime and create new fees for working-age retirees on Tricare Standard as well as for Medicare-eligible retirees and their families on Tricare for Life. According to a House Armed Services Committee release, lawmakers believe that recent reforms, such as allowing Tricare Prime fees and pharmacy costs to be raised yearly in proportion to the annual cost of living increase, place Tricare on a “sustainable path” and new fees are unnecessary. “The [Defense Department’s] record of incorrectly calculating Tricare costs and their repeated requests to transfer billions in unused funds out of the program to cover other underfunded defense priorities raises questions about repeated claims by the Defense Department that the defense health program is unsustainable,” the release states. [Source: ArmyTimes | Patricia Kime | 10 Dec 2013 ++]

TRICARE User Fees Update 99 ► CBO Deficit Reduction Plan Proposals

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) proposed a series of changes in the delivery of health care to service members, military retirees, and veterans, in an effort to trim the burgeoning federal deficit. In a 13 NOV white paper, CBO suggested requiring beneficiaries to pay the following:

- TRICARE Prime beneficiaries with single coverage pay \$550 and families pay \$1,100 annual fees and higher copayments for treatment.
- Single retirees or surviving spouses who use TRICARE Standard or Extra would have to meet a \$350 annual deductible.
- Families who use TRICARE Standard or Extra would have to meet a \$700 annual deductible.
- TRICARE Standard or Extra beneficiaries would pay annual fees, set at \$50 for single coverage and \$100 for families.

The new fees would be indexed to reflect nationwide growth in health-care spending in future years. The changes could reduce discretionary outlays by \$20 billion between 2015 and 2023, according to CBO. Alternatively, CBO also suggested that working-age military families should be made ineligible for TRICARE Prime coverage. Under

this plan, discretionary outlays would be reduced by \$71 billion from 2015 to 2023. CBO also suggested in the report that the Department of Veterans Affairs no longer provide health-care services to low-priority veterans, who have higher incomes and no disabilities or conditions that warrant VA compensation. Ending health-care coverage for these so-called Category 7 and 8 veterans would reduce discretionary outlays by \$48 billion from 2015 through 2023. [Source: Armed Forces News 13 Dec 2013 ++]

Military Transition Healthcare Update 01 ► Options

If you've not fulfilled the 20 year requirement for a military retirement, your healthcare ends on your last day of regular active duty service or in the case of an activated National Guard or reserve member and serving a period of more than 30 consecutive days of active duty in support of a contingency operation, on the last day of your transition period known as Transitional Assistance Management Program (TAMP) which is 180-days following your separation date. The TAMP benefit also applies to active duty service members serving in support of a contingency operation separating due to:

- Stop-loss,
- Sole survivorship discharge, or
- Agreement to become a member of the Selected Reserve of a Reserve Component the day immediately following release from regular active duty service.

Military retiree's under age 65 can choose between a managed care option (HMO), known as Tricare Prime, or a fee for service option called Tricare Standard. The main difference between the two is cost verses choice. Tricare Prime is least costly; whereas, Tricare Standard offers the greatest choice in selecting providers. Furthermore, the Tricare Prime option is limited to those who reside within the catchment area of a Military Treatment Facility (MTF). Tricare also comes with a pharmacy benefit delivered through three points of service listed below in the order of least to greatest out-of-pocket cost to you.

- Military Treatment Facility,
- Tricare Home Delivery Pharmacy, or
- Tricare Retail Pharmacy.

Next, the Tricare Retiree Dental Plan (TRDP) provides a dental option for retiree's as well as gray-area National Guard or reserve members and their dependents. Timely enrollment, within 120-days of eligibility, ensures the full range of benefits is available immediately. Otherwise, there's a 12-month wait-period for crowns, bridges, orthodontics and dentures. Lastly, once retired, your Tricare catastrophic cap rises to \$3,000.00/family per fiscal year. The catastrophic cap is your maximum out-of-pocket expense for Tricare covered benefits. Here, the key is Tricare covered benefits. If in doubt - ask! If you need further guidance or would like to schedule a one-on-one consultation to discuss your particular situation in more detail, call a MOAA Benefits Counselor at 1(800) 234.6622. [Source Katherine Tracy, MOAA's Deputy Director for Healthcare Programs | 1 Dec 2013 +]

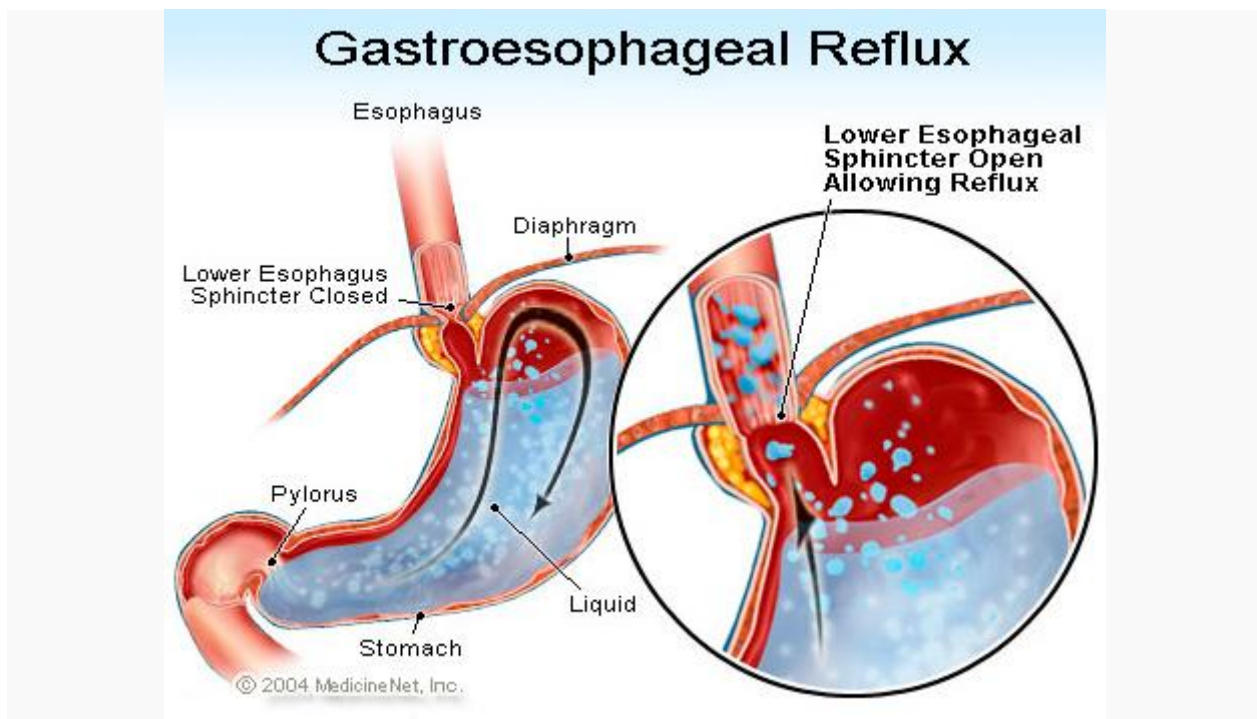
GERD ► Once it Begins, it Usually is Life-Long

Gastroesophageal reflux disease, commonly referred to as GERD or acid reflux, is a condition in which the liquid content of the stomach regurgitates (backs up or refluxes) into the esophagus. The liquid can inflame and damage the lining (cause esophagitis) of the esophagus although visible signs of inflammation occur in a minority of patients. The regurgitated liquid usually contains acid and pepsin that are produced by the stomach. Pepsin is an

enzyme that begins the digestion of proteins in the stomach. The refluxed liquid also may contain bile that has backed-up into the stomach from the duodenum. The duodenum is the first part of the small intestine that attaches to the stomach. Acid is believed to be the most injurious component of the refluxed liquid. Pepsin and bile also may injure the esophagus, but their role in the production of esophageal inflammation and damage is not as clear as the role of acid.

GERD is a chronic condition. Once it begins, it usually is life-long. If there is injury to the lining of the esophagus (esophagitis), this also is a chronic condition. Moreover, after the esophagus has healed with treatment and treatment is stopped, the injury will return in most patients within a few months. Reflux disease also is more common in patients with hiatal hernia, in which a portion of the stomach protrudes up into the esophagus. Once treatment for GERD is begun, therefore, it usually will need to be continued indefinitely although it is argued that in some patients with intermittent symptoms and no esophagitis, treatment can be intermittent and done only during symptomatic periods. In fact, the reflux of the stomach's liquid contents into the esophagus occurs in most normal individuals. One study found that reflux occurs as frequently in normal individuals as in patients with GERD. In patients with GERD, however, the refluxed liquid contains acid more often, and the acid remains in the esophagus longer. It has also been found that liquid refluxes to a higher level in the esophagus in patients with GERD than normal individuals.

As is often the case, the body has ways (mechanisms) to protect itself from the harmful effects of reflux and acid. For example, most reflux occurs during the day when individuals are upright. In the upright position, the refluxed liquid is more likely to flow back down into the stomach due to the effect of gravity. In addition, while individuals are awake, they repeatedly swallow, whether or not there is reflux. Each swallow carries any refluxed liquid back into the stomach. Finally, the salivary glands in the mouth produce saliva, which contains bicarbonate. With each swallow, bicarbonate-containing saliva travels down the esophagus. The bicarbonate neutralizes the small amount of acid that remains in the esophagus after gravity and swallowing have removed most of the acidic liquid.



Picture of GERD (Gastroesophageal Reflux disease, heartburn)

Gravity, swallowing, and saliva are important protective mechanisms for the esophagus, but they are effective only when individuals are in the upright position. At night during sleep, gravity has no effect, swallowing stops, and the secretion of saliva is reduced. Therefore, reflux that occurs at night is more likely to result in acid remaining in the esophagus longer and causing greater damage to the esophagus. Certain conditions make a person susceptible to GERD. For example, GERD can be a serious problem during pregnancy. The elevated hormone levels of pregnancy probably cause reflux by lowering the pressure in the lower esophageal sphincter (see above). At the same time, the growing fetus increases the pressure in the abdomen. Both of these effects would be expected to increase reflux. Also, patients with diseases that weaken the esophageal muscles (see above), such as scleroderma or mixed connective tissue diseases, are more prone to develop GERD.

[Source: http://www.medicinenet.com/gastroesophageal_reflux_disease_gerd/page2.htm Dec 2013.

Embarrassing Health Conditions ► Breath, Constipation, & Flatulence

Some bodily changes can be seen as badges of honor: knees that turned arthritic from scoring winning touchdowns in high school. Once model-like figures lost — but worth it — from birthing amazing offspring. Gray hairs proudly "earned" from a lifetime of hard work and sacrifice. But unflattering smells, sounds, leaks and other unwelcome episodes common after age 50 share one identical symptom: such embarrassment that two of three patients would rather suffer in silence than discuss the condition with their doctor, say researchers. Even before the Internet allowed for anonymous access to answers, surveys indicated that embarrassing ailments were the top reason why Americans didn't get a medical exam when they knew they should. The problem is, remaining mum about problems can affect your overall health. "Most embarrassing symptoms can be treated — often easily," says Donnica Moore, M.D., of the Sapphire Women's Health Group in New Jersey and author of *Women's Health for Life*. "But sometimes they indicate a bigger problem."

Bad Breath

Likely causes: Dry mouth, which can be caused by many medications, including those used to treat depression, high blood pressure, urinary incontinence, allergies and Parkinson's disease; eating sulfur-containing foods such as onions and garlic; gum disease and cavities; smoking or drinking coffee. But the top cause is poor dental hygiene — and interestingly, daily flossing to remove odor-causing trapped food ranks highest as the health habit "patients are most likely to skip or overestimate doing," notes Moore.

Do it Yourself (DIY) treatments: Combat dry mouth by drinking more water, eating saliva-inducing apples and celery, and chewing gum. Avoid toothpastes that contain the compound sodium lauryl sulfate. Along with brushing and flossing, eating probiotic-containing yogurt or supplements may control oral bacteria.

What a doctor may do: Search for a cause, because bad breath can indicate respiratory infection, sinusitis, bronchitis, diabetes, and gastrointestinal or kidney problems.

Noteworthy: Some studies have found brushing your tongue (not just your teeth) reduced "bad breath measurements" up to 70 percent, reports the American Dental Association.

Constipation

Likely causes: Inadequate fluids or exercise, stress, medications for depression and high blood pressure — or just being female. "A woman's wider and flatter pelvic muscles weaken with age, causing the sigmoid colon to drop, which makes the large intestines work harder to move things through," says gastroenterologist David T. Rubin, M.D., of the University of Chicago Medicine.

DIY treatments: Milk of magnesia or “gentle” laxatives such as MiraLAX or GlycoLax as needed (but avoid “stimulant” laxatives). Exercise at least 30 minutes a day. Coffee can also help.

What a doctor may do: If the problem is ongoing with little improvement, test for low thyroid, colon cancer, diverticulosis or other GI problems; review current medications that may cause problems — or prescribe one to relieve them.

Noteworthy: A high-fiber diet has long been recommended to help prevent constipation, “but recent studies indicate fiber doesn’t treat constipation,” says Rubin — and some research even finds that unknown-caused constipation may improve by reducing dietary fiber intake.

Flatulence

Likely causes: Swallowing air when you smoke, eat or talk; snoring and sleep disorders; eating dairy, legumes — such as lentils and beans — or foods and drinks high in sugar and soy; use of antibiotics and other medications.

DIY treatments: Eat more slowly. Take activated charcoal or other over-the-counter products containing simethicone; Beano, an over-the-counter product containing enzymes; or lactase supplements before a meal. Avoid excessive consumption of problem foods and sugary products.

What a doctor may do: Test for lactose intolerance, bacterial overgrowth or irritable bowel syndrome.

Noteworthy: Most people pass gas up to 21 times a day. Foul odors usually result from sulfur, so to protect those around you, limit sulfur-containing foods such as meat, eggs and cauliflower.

[Source: AARP | Sid Kirchheimer | 22 Aug 2013 ++]

PTSD Update 156 ► Federal Contractors Report Similar PTSD Rates

Federal contractors who worked in war zones reported post-traumatic stress disorder and depression at rates similar to military personnel in a recent survey [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR420.html] by the RAND Corporation. Twenty-five percent of private contractors in the study met the criteria for PTSD, while 18 percent screened positive for depression. About half reported alcohol abuse. By comparison, the rates among service members who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are as high as 20 percent for PTSD, 37 percent for depression, and 39 percent for alcohol abuse, according to a 2013 analysis from the Institute of Medicine. The RAND survey covers a segment of the population rarely examined by experts. Only two studies have looked at the issue of health and well-being for contractors who worked in war zones, the study said.



A U.S. Marine watches as a construction crew works on a new base at Camp Letherneck in Afghanistan.

The report also highlights a need for post-service assistance for the contractor workforce, which lacks the type of support network provided to veterans. “The military has programs before, during and after deployment to help service members address deployment-related mental health problems,” said RAND health-policy researcher Carrie

Farmer, who co-authored the study. "The majority of contractors we surveyed reported that they did not have access to similar resources." Despite those findings, the report also noted that 84 percent of the private-sector workers responding to the survey were former military personnel, meaning they may qualify for certain benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. RAND, a nonprofit research group, said it conducted an anonymous online survey of 660 people who served in conflict zones for private-sector employers between early 2011 and early 2013. Defense Department contractors outnumbered U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan during the height of the conflicts in those two countries, the report said. Nearly 156,000 private-sector employees worked in Iraq alongside 152,000 service members in 2008, while about 94,000 contractors were deployed in Afghanistan with roughly 92,000 troops in 2010, according to the study. [Source: Washington Post | Josh Hicks | 10 Dec 2013 +]

Finances



CRDP/CRCS Open Season 2014 ► JAN 1 thru 31

Retired service members who are eligible for both Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP) and Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC), can participate in the CRDP/CRSC open season to select which payment they prefer to receive. Federal law states that retirees can receive CRDP or CRSC, but not both. This year's annual open season is Jan. 1, 2014, to Jan. 31, 2014. Beginning in late December 2013, all eligible retirees will be mailed a CRDP/CRSC Open Season Election Form. Retirees need to return the form only if making a change from CRDP to CRSC or vice versa. If a retiree prefers to keep things the way they are, no action is needed and the current payment will continue uninterrupted. The primary distinction between the two pays is that CRDP is treated as a taxable military retired pay and subject to division with a former spouse whereas CRCS is treated as a non-taxable VA disability pay and not subject to division with a former spouse. Thus the net amount to veterans would be a factor of their marital status and their combined taxable income.

The election form includes a comparison of the CRDP and CRSC entitlement amounts as well as information about the tax ramifications. If a retiree wants to change from CRDP to CRSC or vice versa, the form needs to be completed, mailed and postmarked no later than Jan. 31, 2014. If the form or envelope is dated after January 31, 2014, it will not be processed and the current payments will continue. Beneficiaries should return their form if they want a change before February 1, 2014. The estimated processing time is 30 days, allowing the change in pay to occur no later than the first business day of March. For March payments, there will be a retroactive adjustment for the payment that would have been paid on the first business day in February. A beneficiary's selection will remain in effect unless changed in a subsequent annual open season. To learn more about the differences of the two programs go to <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/disability/comparison.html>. If you need help, contact DFAS at 800-321-1080. Customer service representatives are available M-F from 0800 to 1630 EST. [Source: FRA Newsbytes 6 Dec 2013 ++]

VA COLA for 2014 Checks Update 04 ► Monthly Payment Amounts

Veterans, their families and survivors receiving disability compensation and pension benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs will receive a 1.5 percent cost-of-living increase in their monthly payments beginning Jan. 1, 2014. “We’re pleased there will be another cost-of-living increase for Veterans, their families and their survivors,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “The increase expresses in a tangible way our Nation’s gratitude for the sacrifices made by our service-disabled and wartime Veterans.” For the first time, payments will not be rounded down to the nearest dollar. Until this year, that was required by law. Veterans and survivors will see additional cents included in their monthly compensation benefit payment. For Veterans without dependents, the new compensation rates will range from \$130.94 monthly for a disability rated at 10 percent to \$2,858.24 monthly for 100 percent. The full rates are available on the Internet at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/rates-index.asp>

The COLA increase also applies to disability and death pension recipients, survivors receiving dependency and indemnity compensation, disabled Veterans receiving automobile and clothing allowances, and other benefits. Under federal law, cost-of-living adjustments for VA’s compensation and pension must match those for Social Security benefits. The last adjustment was in January 2013 when the Social Security benefits rate increased 1.7 percent. In fiscal year 2013, VA provided over \$59 billion in compensation benefits to nearly 4 million Veterans and survivors, and over \$5 billion in pension benefits to more than 515,000 Veterans and survivors. For Veterans and separating Servicemembers who plan to file an electronic disability claim, VA urges them to use the joint DoD/VA online portal, eBenefits. Registered eBenefits users with a premium account can file a claim online, track the status, and access a variety of other benefits, including pension, education, health care, home loan eligibility, and vocational rehabilitation and employment programs. For more information about VA benefits, visit www.benefits.va.gov, or call 1-800-827-1000. [Source: VA News Release 4 Dec 2013 +]

Thrift Savings Plan 2013 Update 05 ► NOV Growth Still Good

Nearly every fund in the Thrift Savings Plan made gains in November, marking the third consecutive month of positive trends. Fixed income bonds were the only TSP offerings to dip last month, falling 0.35 percent.

- The F Fund is also the only investment in the red over the last 12 months, dropping 1.26 percent.
- The C Fund, invested in common stocks, continued its strong performance, jumping 3.05 percent and again growing more than any other TSP fund. The C Fund has risen 30.34 percent in the last 12 months.
- The S Fund, which is invested in small and midsize companies and tracks the Dow Jones Wilshire 4500 Index, was up 2.49 percent in November. The fund has been TSP’s strongest offering in the last year, gaining more than 38 percent.
- The I Fund, which consists of international stocks, continued to fall from its 7 percent increase in September, but still managed a 0.75 percent gain.
- The G Fund, invested in government securities, stayed steady with a 0.18 percent increase. The I Fund is up 25.16 percent over the past 12 months, while the G Fund rose just 1.81 percent over the same period. The Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, which manages the TSP, has decided to move forward with a plan to shift away from placing new employees in the G Fund by default, and instead automatically enroll future hires into the more lucrative lifecycle funds. The switch will ultimately require congressional action, however.

The L Funds -- designed to move investors to less risky portfolios as the near retirement -- yielded across-the-board positive returns, though once again gained less relative to the previous month. The L Income Fund for TSP participants who have already started withdrawing money ended November up 0.58 percent. L 2020 increased 1.24 percent for the month, L 2030 gained 1.54 percent, L 2040 was 1.74 percent in the black and L 2050 saw a 1.93 percent boost. The lifecycle funds all have remained in the black for the last 12 months. L Income was up 6.86 percent; L 2020, 15.96 percent; L 2030, 20.06 percent; L 2040, 23.13 percent; and L 2050, 26.14 percent. [Source: GovExec.com | Eric Katz | 2 Dec 2013 +]

Saving Money ► Selling Your Life Insurance Policy

If you have a life insurance policy you no longer want or can't afford, stopping payments or simply cashing it in aren't your only options – or your best ones. Many people have sold their policies in a life settlement sale and come out the other side with cash in hand — but it isn't easy. You can convert your life insurance policy into cash now, but the process is complicated. First, you'll need to have your life insurance policy appraised to determine the selling value. Then, you'll need to find a buyer. Once you have a buyer in place, you'll receive a cash settlement and the buyer will pay any premiums and collect the benefit when you die. Finding a buyer on your own can be complicated, if not impossible, which is why many people choose to either sell their policy to a settlement company or to a third party through a life settlement broker. If you sell to a settlement company, you'll receive a percentage of your policy's value in cash. If you use a broker, you may also pay a commission to the broker. However, a broker may be able to find a better deal than you would on your own. There are a few things you should consider before selling your policy. For example:

- **Your life insurance policy may not have much value on the market.** Life settlement broker Alex Jones says that only about 25 percent of the policies he sees are worth anything.
- **You won't get the full face value.** A 2010 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-10-775>) found that sellers received about 13 percent to 21 percent of the value of their policy.
- **Brokers charge a commission.** The GOA report says that in 2009 commissions were about 9 percent.
- **Buyers don't want every policy.** Bankrate reports that buyers are looking for people over the age of 65 with chronic or terminal illnesses (<http://www.bankrate.com/finance/insurance/5-tips-for-selling-your-life-insurance.aspx>). If you're young and healthy, your policy won't be as attractive to a buyer.
- **You may have tax complications.** Your settlement could be subject to income tax.
- **Your eligibility may change.** The [Federal Trade Commission](http://www.ftc.gov/opa/1995/12/via.shtm) warns that a life settlement could change your eligibility for government assistance programs (<http://www.ftc.gov/opa/1995/12/via.shtm>).
- **It isn't your only option.** If you're selling because you need cash, you may have other options, such as taking a loan against your life insurance policy, accelerating your payout date, or selling the policy to a family member. However, keep in mind that these options also have pitfalls and should be discussed with a financial adviser.

How to sell

Selling isn't all bad, especially if you no longer want the policy or you can't afford the premiums. If you do decide to sell, take these steps to make sure you get the most money.

- **Understand the rules.** Your life insurance policy has rules about selling and your state laws regulate the process. Make sure you understand these before you try to sell. If you don't fully understand, an independent financial adviser can help sort things out.

- **Don't take the first offer.** There are no set values for life insurance policies, and the offers you receive from buyers can vary widely. Review several to make sure you're getting the best deal.
- **Talk to an expert.** Consult an accountant to see what tax liability and eligibility changes you will face after the sale.
- **Check your debts.** If you have large debts, your creditors may have a claim to any cash you receive from your life insurance settlement. If you have debts, discuss them with a financial adviser before you sell.

The bottom line: If you don't want your life insurance policy, it's worth a call to find out what you could get, but be cautious about going through with it. Make sure you're getting the best possible deal before you sign off.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Angela Colly | 5 Aug 2013 ++]

Do Not Call Registry Scam ► How it Works

Scammers are again making phone calls posing as representatives of the National Do Not Call Registry. The callers claim to provide an opportunity to register your phone number, but it's a trick.

How the Scam Works: Someone calls you claiming to represent the FTC's [National Do Not Call Registry](#) or [Canada's National Do Not Call List](#). The "representative" says he is offering you the chance to register your phone number in order to limit telemarketing calls. Several versions of this exist. In one, scammers ask for personal information, such as your name, address and Social Security number. In another, scammers try to charge a fee to join the registry. Either way, just hang up the phone. The call is a scam. The registry is a free service, and sharing personal information with the caller will put you at risk for identity theft.

How to Protect Yourself from Do Not Call Registry Scams:

- **You never need to pay.** National Do Not Call Registry is a free service of the federal government.
- **Don't share your personal information** if someone calls you claiming to represent the National Do Not Call Registry.
- **Private businesses cannot register phone numbers.** Consumers may register directly, or through some state governments, but never through private companies. If someone claims otherwise, it's a scam.
- Remember that your participation in the [National Do Not Call Registry does not expire](#).
- **To add your number to the Do Not Call Registry**, go to Donotcall.gov <https://www.donotcall.gov> or call 888-382-1222 from the phone you wish to register. If you want to verify your number, use the feature on the registry's website <https://www.donotcall.gov/confirm/conf.aspx>
- Canadians have their own National Do Not Call List. Register for that at <https://www.lnnte-dncl.gc.ca/index-eng>

For frequently asked questions about the Do Not Call Registry, check the FTC website at <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0108-national-do-not-call-registry>. To find out more about scams, check out the BBB Scam Stopper at <http://www.bbb.org/scam-stopper>. [Source: BBB Scam Alert 20 Sep 2013 ++]

Fake Shipping Notification Scam ► How it Works

Scammers are taking advantage of the holiday shopping season with fake email shipping notifications that pose as FedEx, UPS or the United States Postal Service. Don't let these scams fool you into opening a virus on your computer.

How the Scam Works:

- You receive an email message that appears to be a shipping notification for a package. You've been doing your holiday shopping online, so you figure it must be something you've ordered. Curious, you open the email and attachment.
- When you click on the file, you find that it isn't a tracking notification after all. It's really a virus that will download to your computer.

Typically, these viruses phish for personal and banking information on your machine. But the FBI recently warned about the resurgence of a type of virus called "ransomware." Once downloaded, this virus will lock your computer and urge you to pay a ransom to the scammer responsible. Like all scams, this one has many variations. Scammers have posed as FedEx, UPS, USPS and even big online retailers, like Amazon. They also change up the email content. A common version of this scam is a fake delivery failure notification. Scammers claim the attached virus is the receipt you need to collect your package from the local office.

Spot common email scams by following these tips:

1. Don't believe what you see. Scammers make emails appear to come from a reputable source. Just because it looks like an "@ups.com" address does not mean it's safe.
2. Be wary of unexpected emails that contain links or attachments. As always, do not click on links or open the files in unfamiliar emails.
3. Beware of pop-ups. Some pop-ups are designed to look like they've originated from your computer. If you see a pop-up that looks like an anti-virus software but warns of a problem that needs to be fixed with an extreme level of urgency, it may be a scam.
4. Watch for poor grammar and spelling. Scam emails often are riddled with typos.
5. Immediate action is necessary. Scam emails try to get you to act before you think by creating a sense of urgency. Don't fall for it.

For more information about scams, see BBB's Scam Stopper at <http://www.bbb.org/council/bbb-scam-stopper>. Check out FedEx and UPS websites for more information about fake shipping emails and examples of typical scams. [Source: BBB Scam Alert 29 Nov 2013 +]

Tax Burden for Delaware Retirees ► As of Dec 2013

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

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: None Delaware does not impose a state or local sales tax, but does impose a Gross Receipts Tax

on the seller of goods (tangible or otherwise) or provider of services in the state. Business and occupational gross receipts tax rates range from 0.1037% to 2.0736%, depending on the business activity.

Gasoline Tax: 41.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: Tax 46.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$1.60 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 2.2%; High – 6.75%

Income Brackets: Six. Lowest – \$5,000; Highest – \$60,000

Tax Credits: Single – \$110; Married – \$220; Dependents – \$110; Over 60 – take an additional \$110

Standard Deduction: \$3,250 if single and not itemizing; \$6,500 if married filing jointly and not itemizing.

Medical/Dental Deduction: None

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security and Railroad Retirement benefits are exempt. Taxpayers 60 and older can exclude \$12,500 of investment and qualified pension income. They may qualify for an additional tax credit of \$110. Out-of-state government pensions qualify for the pension and retirement exemption. Under age 60, \$2,000 is exempt. If you are 65 or older on December 31, you are eligible for an additional standard deduction of \$2,500 (if you do not itemize). Go to http://revenue.delaware.gov/information/faqs_pit.shtml#RI for more information on tax rates and exemptions,

Retired Military Pay: Up to \$2,000 of military retirement pay excluded for individuals under age 60; \$12,500 if 60 or older.

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

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

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

Property Taxes

All real property in the state is subject to tax unless specifically exempt. Personal property, tangible and intangible property is exempt. Real estate is subject to county, school district, vocational school district and municipal property taxes. The state offers various property tax relief programs for residents age 65 and older and for residents with disabilities. Homeowners 65 and older can get a credit equal to half of the school property taxes, up to \$500. For information on the senior school property tax credit, click here. refer to http://dedo.delaware.gov/dedo_pdf/NewsEvents_pdf/publications/2010-2011_Property_Tax_Report.pdf For property tax rates,

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

Delaware brought back its state estate tax effective for deaths occurring between July 1, 2009 and July 1, 2013. For deaths in 2012, estates with a total value of more than \$5.12 million may be subject to the Delaware estate tax

For further information, visit the Delaware Division of Revenue site <http://revenue.delaware.gov> or call 302-577-8200. [Source: www.retirementliving.com Dec 2013 ++]



Notes of Interest ► 1 thru 15 Dec 2013

- **Jobs.** A recent study by Accenture shows that US executives believe there is a skill shortage in America and that they won't have the necessary skills in place in their businesses in the next 1 to 2 years. 72% of executives identified training as one of the top ways for employees to develop new skills and 51% of respondents plan to increase their training and development programs over the next 2 years.
- **Wounded Vet Xmas Cards.** The address to send Christmas Cards for Wounded Veterans is: A Recovering American Soldier, Walter Reed National, Military Medical Center, % Red Cross, 8901 Wisconsin Ave., Bethesda, MD 20889
- **Congress.** The 113th Congress is making it into the Guinness Book of World Records -- mostly because it can't do anything else. With only 55 pieces of legislation passed this year, the Hill has been at its most unproductive.
- **War on Christmas.** Congresswoman Candice Miller (R-10-MI) ushered in a rule change on Capitol Hill that lets lawmakers, for the first time in 40 years, address constituents with a Merry Christmas greeting by mail.
- **Home Security.** Put your car keys beside your bed at night. If you hear a noise outside your home or someone trying to get in your house, just press the panic button for your car. The alarm will be set off, and the horn will continue to sound until either you turn it off or the car battery dies.
- **Xmas Nativity Displays.** It is a violation of the Air Force code to have a sole religious display on base property unless it is associated with an on-base military chapel. (Shaw AFB)
- **Iran.** Rep. Duncan Lee Hunter (R-CA) says U.S. should attack Iran with tactical nukes now since a military conflict with Iran regarding their nuclear program may be inevitable.

[Source: Various 1-15 Dec 2013 ++]

A Different Christmas Poem ► Lest We Forget.

The embers glowed softly, and in their dim light,
I gazed round the room and I cherished the sight.
My wife was asleep, her head on my chest,
My daughter beside me, angelic in rest.

Outside the snow fell, a blanket of white,
Transforming the yard to a winter delight.
The sparkling lights in the tree I believe,
Completed the magic that was Christmas Eve.

My eyelids were heavy, my breathing was deep,

Secure and surrounded by love I would sleep.
In perfect contentment, or so it would seem,
So I slumbered, perhaps I started to dream.

The sound wasn't loud, and it wasn't too near,
But I opened my eyes when it tickled my ear.
Perhaps just a cough, I didn't quite know,
Then the sure sound of footsteps outside in the snow.

My soul gave a tremble, I struggled to hear,
And I crept to the door just to see who was near.
Standing out in the cold and the dark of the night,
A lone figure stood; his face weary and tight.

A soldier, I puzzled, some twenty years old,
Perhaps a Marine, huddled here in the cold.
Alone in the dark, he looked up and smiled,
Standing watch over me and my wife and my child.

“What are you doing?” I asked without fear,
“Come in this moment, it's freezing out there!
Put down your pack, brush the snow from your sleeve,
You should be at home on a cold Christmas Eve!”

For barely a moment I saw his eyes shift,
Away from the cold and the snow blown in drifts.
To the window that danced with a warm fire's light
Then he sighed and he said “It's really all right,
I'm out here by choice. I'm here every night.
It's my duty to stand at the front of the line,
That separates you from the darkest of times.
No one had to ask or beg or implore me,
I'm proud to stand here like my father's before me.
My Gramps died at ' Pearl on a day in December,”

Then he sighed, “That's a Christmas 'Gram always remembers.
My dad stood his watch in the jungles of ' Nam ',
And now it is my turn and so, here I am.
I've not seen my own son in more than a while,
But my wife sends me pictures. He's sure got her smile.”

Then he bent and he carefully pulled from his bag,
The red, white, and blue... an American flag.
“I can live through the cold and the being alone,
Away from my family, my house and my home.
I can stand at my post through the rain and the sleet,
I can sleep in a foxhole with little to eat.
I can carry the weight of killing another,
Or lay down my life with my sister and brother

Who stand at the front against any and all
To ensure for all time that this flag will not fall.
So go back inside,” he said. ”Harbor no fright,
Your family is waiting and I’ll be all right.”

“But isn't there something I can do, at the least,
Give you money,” I asked, “or prepare you a feast?
It seems all too little for all that you've done,
For being away from your wife and your son. ”

Then his eye welled a tear that held no regret,
“Just tell us you love us, and never forget.
To fight for our rights back at home while we're gone,
To stand your own watch, no matter how long.
For when we come home, either standing or dead,
To know you remember we fought and we bled.
Is payment enough, and with that we will trust,
That we mattered to you, as you mattered to us.”

[Source: International War Veterans Poetry Archive (IWVPA) | Michael Marks | Dec 2000]

Car Insurance Update 04 ► **Common Winter Driving Hazards Coverage**

With blizzards and ice storms wreaking havoc across the country, slippery conditions led to problems for drivers from Texas to Maine. Before the next storm hits, learn how your [car insurance](#) coverage applies to common winter driving hazards.

1. I had to abandon my car!

Before leaving your stuck car, call for emergency roadside service, says Mary Bonelli, senior vice president of public information for the Ohio Insurance Institute. The charges would be covered if you have roadside assistance through your car insurance, or membership in a roadside-assistance program, such as AAA. In addition, some carmakers, such as Lexus and Acura, provide emergency roadside assistance as part of a warranty package for new-car buyers. Of course, if conditions are treacherous, you could be in for a long wait. About 500 motorists abandoned vehicles on Chicago’s famous Lake Shore Drive in a blizzard a few years ago that dumped almost 2 feet of snow on the city. And if bad goes to worse and your car is vandalized after you leave it behind, comprehensive car insurance would apply, Bonelli says. Comprehensive insurance is an optional coverage that pays for losses due to theft, vandalism, natural disasters and other factors unrelated to traffic accidents. You’ll have to pay your comprehensive coverage deductible, however.

2. I hit a curb.

Collision coverage, which is optional, pays for damage to your car resulting from a collision with another car or object — or as a result of flipping over. However, it might be worth getting an estimate or two for repairs before filing a claim, Bonelli says. “If the loss is close to your deductible, you wouldn’t likely file it.”

3. I slid down an icy hill and hit parked cars along the way.

Do whatever you can to contact the owners of the parked vehicles. “Leave notes on their cars with your insurance information and then get their license plate numbers,” Barry says. Your collision coverage would pay for damage to your vehicle, and your auto insurance liability coverage would pay for damage to the other cars. If the situation were reversed and someone hit your parked car but did not leave information, your uninsured motorist coverage would pay for the damage, Bonelli says.

4. I got towed.

Auto insurance coverage will not apply if your vehicle was parked illegally when it was towed, Bonelli says. Whether the local jurisdiction makes you pay towing fees depends on the situation. After the Chicago blizzard, the city did not give citations or charge motorists to claim vehicles that were towed from Lake Shore Drive. Call your roadside-assistance provider if you need a tow in order to avoid having the city tow your car away.

5. I couldn’t get into my car because the lock was iced shut.

Again, call your roadside-assistance provider, whether that service is through your car insurance company, car dealer or motorist club. “There’s a chance this would be covered through these services or even OnStar,” Bonelli says.

6. I got in an accident, but police are responding to injury-only crashes.

Exchange information with the other parties involved and then file an accident report with local law enforcement after the weather has cleared, the Ohio Insurance Institute recommends. Some local agencies require you to complete forms in person, while others offer online filing services. Your insurance company will ask whether you filed an accident report when you call to report the claim.

7. My car was stolen when I left it running in the driveway to warm up.

You’re better off braving the cold than letting the engine warm up in the morning while you finish your coffee inside. Besides tempting thieves, you also could get a ticket in some jurisdictions, such as Ohio, where it’s against the law to leave a car running unattended. Still, comprehensive insurance would cover the loss — even if you made stealing the car easy. Remember, though, if you decided to pass on comprehensive and collision coverage to save money, loss from theft would not be covered, nor would damage from vandalism, natural disaster or damage to your car that’s your own fault. Review your policy or contact your insurer or agent if you’re not sure how auto insurance coverage applies to winter driving quandaries. “That way you know what you’re up against and can take proactive measures,” Bonelli says.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews 10 Dec 2013 +]

Meat Labeling COOL Rules ► Effective 1 DEC 2013

New meat labeling rules that took effect six months ago will become more visible to consumers starting 1 DEC. The rules, referred to as COOL for country of origin labeling, will require certain meat cuts such as steaks and roasts to come with labels specifying where the animal was born, raised and slaughtered, CNN says. Businesses were given six months to use up old labels to avoid confusion and waste, CNN says, and that grace period ended I. Here’s how it works, according to CNN:

- If everything happened in one country, the label will specify that the animal was born, raised and slaughtered there.
- If there’s a mix of countries involved, that will be spelled out. For example, a calf might be born in Mexico, but raised and slaughtered in the U.S.

- “In addition to ‘muscle cuts of beef’ (including veal), the COOL law applies to similar cuts of lamb, pork, goat and chicken, wild fish and certain nuts and other food products.” Ground meats should also be labeled to the extent possible.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Brandon Ballenger | 3 Dec 2013 +]



Guam Brown Tree Snake Invasion ► Toxic Mice Test

Representatives from several federal agencies watched 1 DEC as a crew dropped dead mice filled with mild toxins onto two test sites on Andersen Air Force Base, for the fourth official aerial bait drop event. Dan Vice, a Wildlife Services biologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture who has worked on the project for more than a decade, said the mice filled with 80 mg of acetaminophen are used to kill the invasive brown tree snake population that was accidentally introduced to the island around 60 years ago. A pilot project involving 280 mice dropped in a similar manner was conducted in 2010, and the success of that project allowed for the official aerial bait drops that began in September 2013. The drops, including research, cost a total of \$1.5 million, with funding coming from the Department of the Interior and the Department of Defense. The total budget nationally for the project is \$8 million.



Dan Vice holds one of the brown tree snake traps that can be seen along fences around Guam

An estimated one to two million snakes live around the island, Vice said, making the aerial bait drops the most effective and efficient way of controlling the population while not affecting other animals on Guam like deer and pigs. “The risk to non-targets is slight,” Vice said. “It would take 500 baits to kill a pig (or dog and) 15 baits to kill a cat.” Crews yesterday afternoon combed the two 136-acre areas — equaling the size of about 210 football fields

combined — to locate tiny radios also implanted in some of the mice. These radios help the USDA track the snakes' activity — whether or not they've eaten the mice or if the mice decompose on their own. They also track the abundance of small animal and rodent populations, as these would increase if the brown tree snake populations were to decrease. "If it proves to be successful then we may potentially start ramping up the efforts and doing this on a larger basis across more of Guam," Vice said. Vice said this technique is for non-human habituated areas only and would never be done in villages.

Although no one has ever died from the venomous bite of a brown tree snake, according to Vice, most bites to adults result in nothing more than a bee sting-like sore. According to USDA documents, the brown tree snake has caused extensive economic damage to the island's economy, specifically the Guam Power Authority's electrical grid, costing about \$1 million to \$4 million a year in lost productivity due to power outages. That's why facilities like major substations, the A. B. Won Pat Guam International Airport and other areas are surrounded by special fences that keep out brown tree snakes. Vice said about 4,000 snake traps attached to these fences catch about 8,000 brown tree snakes a year. The threat of these snakes becoming established on another island is a reality, said Vice, noting that a stable population of brown tree snakes could be disastrous to the island of Hawaii, costing anywhere from \$400 million to \$2 billion a year to mitigate.

Snake-sniffing dogs also are used at major ports on Guam to detect any critters that could have made it on ships or planes and repopulate on other islands. Vice said the goal of the project is to find the right technologies and tools to eradicate the brown tree snake and eventually reintroduce native species of animals that became prey to the snake population. And although they can show up on fences outside of houses or wrapped around side-view car mirrors, Vice said a person could live many years on Guam and never encounter this type of snake. [Source: Pacific Daily News (Hagatna, Guam) | Michelle Conerly | 2 Dec 2013 ++]

Photos That Say it All ► Comforting Mementoes



Congressional Pay & Perks ► Are they Overpaid?

In November, Congress hit a new low. Gallup found our lawmakers' collective approval rating dropped to a mere 9 percent. Perhaps as a result, the Facebook chain status update machine appears to have kicked into overdrive, with posters demanding, among other things, that Congress live like the rest of us. They claim Congress has exempted itself from Social Security and Obamacare while arranging for members to receive full-income pensions upon leaving office. Problem is, most of these claims are wrong. If you're confused by what you're reading online, here's a quick look at congressional compensation plus a fact check of a couple of common complaints making the rounds.

Congressional pay. Members of Congress last saw their salaries increased in 2009 when annual compensation for senators, representatives, delegates and the resident commissioner from Puerto Rico was set at \$174,000. However, those in leadership positions earn more. The speaker of the House is the most highly compensated member of Congress with an annual income of \$223,500. The Senate president pro tempore as well as the majority and minority leaders in both the House and Senate all earn \$193,400. And that's it. No bonuses for being a committee chair or filling other functions. Plus honoraria – such as accepting a fee to attend an event – are prohibited. Members of Congress are expected to focus most of their time on their legislative duties, but they are allowed to earn an outside income equal to 15 percent of the annual base pay for Level II executives in the federal government. Those executives currently have a base pay rate of \$179,700, meaning senators and representatives can earn no more than \$26,955 in outside pay each year. In addition, that money can't come from certain sources, such as allowing their name to be used to endorse brands or products.

Congressional benefits

- *Tax benefits.* According to the Congressional Research Service, an agency that prepares reports for Congress, senators and representatives can deduct on their income tax form up to \$3,000 per year of their living expenses while out of their districts.
- *Health and life insurance.* Members of Congress are entitled to purchase health insurance through the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program and life insurance through the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance Program. The employee portion of the policy premiums depends on the particular plan selected. U.S. Rep. Justin Amash, R-Mich., notes on his website that he pays \$433.63 each month for his Blue Cross Blue Shield family health insurance plan. In addition, he pays \$115.09 monthly for family dental and \$57.50 a month for \$176,000 worth of life insurance coverage.
- *Members' representational allowance.* Each representative receives an office allotment known as an MRA. This money can be used, for example, to pay for staff salaries, postage expenses, office supplies and travel expenses. The MRA cannot be used for any campaign-related expenses, and the actual allowance amount is calculated using factors such as the distance between a district and Washington, D.C. In 2012, MRAs ranged from \$1.27 million to \$1.56 million. The average allowance was \$1.35 million.
- *Senators' official personal and office expense account:* For senators, their version of the MRA is called the SOPOEA. Like the MRA, this account can be used to pay for staff salaries and office-related expenses such as mailings, travel reimbursements and supplies. Senators also use these accounts to maintain their district offices. As with representative allowances, the SOPOEA cannot be used to pay for campaign-related expenses. The Congressional Research Service notes the accounts ranged from \$2.96 million to \$4.69 million in 2012, with an average of \$3.2 million.

Social Security Exemption. Thirty years ago they were exempt, but today's representatives and senators pay into Social Security and withdraw from it under the same rules as the rest of us. Whoever started the Internet rumor that Congress is exempt must be old enough to remember the early 1980s, when representatives and senators were part

of a pension program called the Civil Service Retirement System. That system did not require participants to pay into Social Security nor did they receive Social Security benefits. In 1984, a law went into effect that required all members of Congress to participate in Social Security. Then, in 1987, the CSRS was replaced by the Federal Employees Retirement System. As of 2012, newly elected members of Congress contribute 3.1 percent of their pay to FERS. Previously elected members make contributions equal to 1.3 percent of their income. According to the Congressional Research Service, as of October 2012, there were 527 retired members of Congress receiving pensions based, at least in part, on their elected service. Of these, 312 had retired under CSRS while 215 retired under FERS. Both systems use a formula based upon an individual's three highest earning years. The average annual payout for CSRS retirees in 2012 was \$71,472, and these individuals averaged 21.1 years of federal civilian service. FERS retirees had average annual benefits of \$40,560 and averaged 15.7 years of service. In addition to FERS, today's congressmen and women are enrolled in the Thrift Savings Plan, which operates like a 401(k). The government automatically contributes 1 percent of their income into the plan. It will also match up to 5 percent of a member's contributions. The first 3 percent is a 100 percent match, while the remaining 2 percent gets matched 50 cents on the dollar.

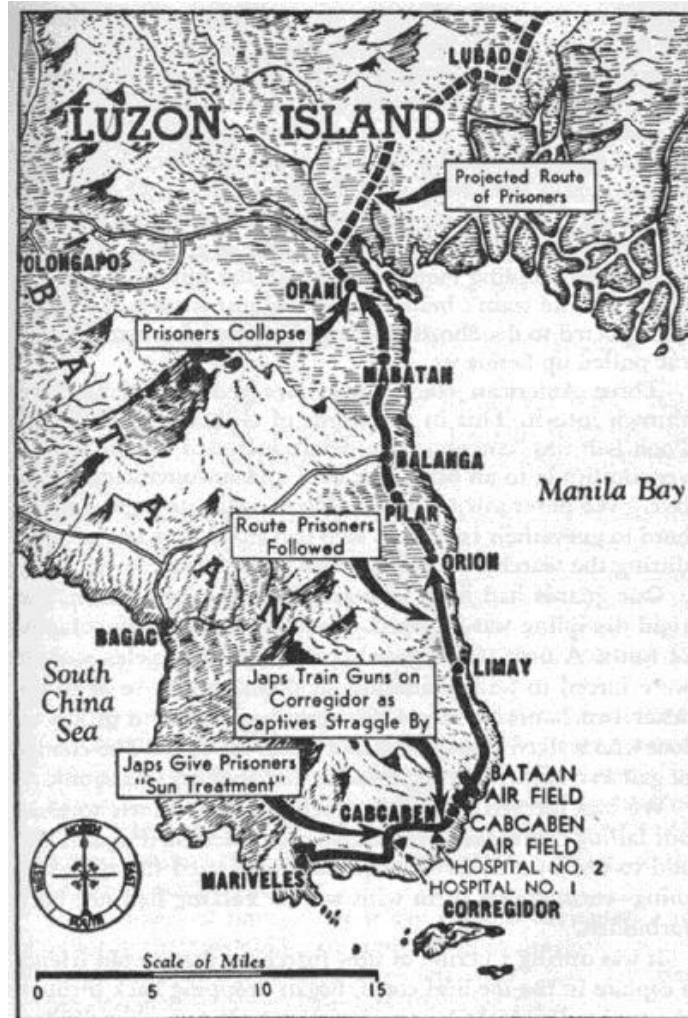
Obamacare. The rumor that Congress does not have to enroll in Obamacare betrays a basic misunderstanding of Obamacare. There is no such thing as Obamacare insurance or Obamacare plans. Instead, Obamacare – known officially as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act – is a collection of new regulations regarding how health insurance is to be issued. In addition, its central provision requires virtually all Americans to have health insurance coverage in 2014. While several groups, such as certain religious sects and the incarcerated, are exempt from the individual health insurance mandate, members of Congress are not one of them. Besides, Congress doesn't need an exemption since they already get health insurance through their job.

Full-time pay for part-time work. The Library of Congress reports there have been 147 days of session so far this year. For comparison, the average Joe *working* five days a week has clocked in 240 days assuming he hasn't taken any vacation time. However, session days are only part of the story. Committee meetings, district events and other obligations related to their office may take up more time than the session itself. The actual amount of time a member of Congress spends working depends on the individual. Some members probably show up for sessions, head home and call it good. Others may be putting in 80-hour weeks all year long between their time on Capitol Hill and events in their district.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Maryalene LaPonsie | 5 Dc 2013 ++]

Military Tours ► WWII Tour of the Philippines

A 26 JAN - 4 FEB Philippine historical tour is being offered by the National Association of Uniformed Services' partner Military Historical Tours. Travelers will visit Manila, Bataan and the 'Death March', Corregidor 'The Rock', and the Malinta Tunnel, Cabanatuan POW Camp, Hellship Memorial at Subic Bay, Olongapo, former Clark Air Force Base, U.S. Cemeteries in Angeles City, and Manila, Santa Tomas University, Bilibid Prison, and others such as a 'tasting' session at the San Miguel Brewery in Manila. This is the 12th year running that Military Historical Tours (MHT) has organized and conducted this World War II tour of the Philippines. The country, primarily English speaking, has long standing historic ties to the United States in general, and our military, in particular. For a brochure on the trip go to <https://www.miltours.com/images/brochures/pi0114.pdf>. Anyone interested can sign up now at www.miltours.com or call at 703-590-1295 for more detailed information. Cost is \$2695 per person plus about \$1200 roundtrip air fare from west coast. Pre and/or post tours to Hong Kong, China or Vietnam are optional. NAUS members receive a 10% discount.



[Source: NAUS Weekly Update 6 Dec 2013 ++]

Have You Heard? ► Mexican Invasion

A U.S. Navy destroyer stops four Mexicans in a row boat rowing towards California. The Captain gets on the loud speaker and shouts, "Ahoy, small craft. Where are you headed?"

One of the Mexicans puts down his oar, stands up and shouts, "We are invading the United States of America, to reclaim the territory taken by the U.S.A. during the 1800s."

The entire crew of the destroyer doubled over in laughter. When the captain is finally able to catch his breath, he gets back on the loud speaker, and asks, "Just the four of you?"

The same Mexican stands up again and shouts, "No we are the last four, the rest are already there."

Interesting Ideas ▶ **Toaster Grilled Cheese**



Turn toaster sideways, get grilled cheese.

“It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare.”
— **Mark Twain**, U.S. humorist (1835 – 1910)



Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 1871





Jewish Olympic Swimmer

Some people just need
a sympathetic pat...

On the head...

With a hammer.



AUTO REPAIR PRICE LIST	
Ping-Ping-Ping	35.00
Plunk-Ping-Plunk	50.00
Klunk-Ping-Klunk	125.00
Thud-Klunk-Thud	200.00
Clank-Thud-Klank	325.00



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2. Readers who have not yet validated their email address who desire to continue to receive the Bulletin can send a message to raoemo@sbcglobal.net with the word "KEEP" in the subject line to restore their subscription. Anyone

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3. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines can request to be added to the RAO’s Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space ‘A’, U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.

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Lt. James “EMO” Tichacek, USN (Ret)

Editor/Publisher RAO Bulletin

RAO Baguio, PSC 517 Box RCB, FPO AP 96517

Tel: (951) 238-1246 in U.S. or Cell: 0915-361-3503 in the Philippines.

Email: raoemo@sbcglobal.net

Web Access: <http://www.veteransresources.org>, <http://frabr245.org> or <http://vets4vets.zymichost.com/rao.html>

Office: Red Lion, 92 Glen Luna, cnr Leonard Rd & Brent Rd. Baguio City 2400 RP TUE & THUR 09-1100

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