

# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 1 June 2014

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## **DoD/VA Seamless Transition Update 23 ► \$11B Overhaul Contract**

Fresh off of the failure of the joint Department of Defense/Department of Veterans' Affairs electronic health record program, the Pentagon is preparing an \$11 billion contract to overhaul its own electronic health records. This would be the biggest federal IT job since last fall's HealthCare.gov rollout. Many outside observers are concerned that this could become another failed effort. The Chief Information Officer at the Office of Management and Budget has warned that a giant problem-solving contract to a single vendor for several years is a common "boondoggish characteristic" of IT procurement that typically ends in failure, Politico.com reported. People familiar with the defense contract stressed the industry's readiness to take it on. HealthCare.gov was a unique project bedeviled by a complex mixture of political strife, balkanized vendors, a short time frame and a customized, first-of-its-kind tech system, they said. Andy Maner, managing partner of IBM U.S. Federal, plans to bid on the contract and to put its Watson supercomputer to use solving health care problems for the DOD project. The Pentagon hopes to issue the contract by early summer 2015, rolling out the health records system region by region in 2016 with a goal to finish by 2023. [Source: TREA News for the Enlisted May 27, 2014 ++]

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## **DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 May 2014**

Two major contractors working on an Army counter-narco-terrorism project used unqualified labor and overbilled the government by nearly \$100 million, according to a leaked version of a Pentagon inspector general report. Prime contractor Northrop Grumman and subcontractor DynCorp overcharged the government anywhere from \$91 million to \$123 million from 2007 to 2013 while working for the Army's Counter Narco-terrorism Technology Program Office.

Army contracting officers "did not review invoices prior to approving payments for labor charges," said the classified [report](#), released inside the Pentagon on 13 MAY but made public 20 MAY by the nonprofit Project on Government Oversight (POGO).

Several examples of suspicious billing prompted a tip to the Defense Department hotline in OCT 2012, including one employee who billed 1,208 labor hours over a 12-day period, producing an overpayment of \$176,900. In all, Northrop Grumman charged 29,401 hours in excess of an employee working 24 hours per day, none of which were flagged by Army contracting officers at Redstone Arsenal, Ala. An example of

rules violations included 300-400 DynCorp employees not qualified for their posts, including one program manager who billed 5,729 hours over a 1.5 -year period, totaling almost \$1.2 million, though that employee lacked the required bachelor's degree. The contract is designed to carry out the Defense Department's "strategy to provide global detection, monitoring and disruption of narco-terrorist activities through effective interagency mission support, technology, and acquisition solutions," the inspector general wrote. DynCorp supplied Northrop Grumman with spare parts and maintenance for U.S. operations in Afghanistan.



The prime contractor used direct billing to submit labor charges incurred primarily by DynCorp. "Direct billing allows Northrop Grumman to send invoices directly to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service through the Wide Area Workflow system for payment," the report stated. "Direct billing limited [the Army Contracting Command's] oversight of the labor charges submitted by Northrop Grumman prior to payment." In a statement released 20 MAY, the Army Contracting Command said is it working with the Army Materiel Command "on a plan for performing the audits to assist in the potential recovery of funds. Additionally, we are in the process of implementing the recommendations" in the IG report. Its parent, the Army Materiel Command, told the IG that it agrees with auditors' recommendations that its contracting command develop advance checks on invoice accuracy and employee qualifications, review past payments, improve accuracy of future reviews and report improper payments to the inspector general's office.

In a blogpost Tuesday, POGO investigator Neil Gordon noted the role of a whistleblower in bringing the case to the IG's attention and thus allowing the government to recoup the improper payments. "The latest troubling assessment of CNTPO makes us wonder how extensive contractor overbilling and other abuses are throughout the program," Gordon wrote. "If oversight staff is indeed spread so thin that contractors are basically being left to their own devices with regard to billing, the Army has two choices: either significantly beef up contract management or insource the work." Northrop Grumman Vice President for Strategic Communications Brandon R. "Randy" Belote III released a statement saying the company "has been cooperating with the DoD's OIG for some time on their investigation into the conduct of one of our subcontractors on the CNTPO contract."

Ashley Burke, senior vice president for communications at DynCorp International, said in an email that her firm "has cooperated with investigators throughout their inquiry into this issue, has complied fully with our obligations under the subcontract, and nothing improper was submitted by DI to our customer (Northrop Grumman)." A DynCorp representative quoted in the report said the company could not provide résumés the IG needed to verify employee qualifications "because some personnel files were archived and extremely difficult to obtain." The Defense IG does not comment on reports labeled "for official use only." [Source: GovExec.com | Charles S. Clark | May 21, 2014 ++]

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## **BRAC Update 39 ► SASC will Reject New Round**

The Senate Armed Services Committee's 2015 defense policy bill will reject a new round of military base closures, according to leaders of the panel's subcommittee on military readiness and management. "The

readiness mark does not authorize another round [of closures],” said Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-NH), the subcommittee’s ranking member. “I know that the chair and I are on the exact same page on this.” The Department of Defense (DOD) proposed a new round of base closures in its 2015 defense budget request. The House Armed Services Committee, which passed its version of the defense policy bill earlier this month, also rejected a new round of base closures. Ayotte said government studies have shown that the 2005 base realignment and closure (BRAC) round cost \$35 million, instead of the estimated \$21 million. “Now is not the time to spend millions of upfront dollars on another BRAC round, especially as DOD has been forced to ground combat aircraft, cancel ship deployments and furlough workers,” she said.

The proposal came as part of the panel’s \$165.9 billion portion of the defense bill, which will be debated and considered by the full Armed Services Committee 22 MAY during a closed session. The subcommittee’s portion also includes \$795 million in funding for the top unfunded military construction requirements of the military service chiefs, and is offset by the same number in reductions, according to the panel’s chairwoman, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.). That would include \$104 million to bring shipyards to bring their mandated 6 percent capital investment program goal and \$430.6 million for depot maintenance shortfalls. It would also include money for two National Guard combat training center rotations, “significant” facility sustainment funding, corrosion prevention, and resourcing for two additional Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Forces. The mark also recommends authorizing \$6.5 billion for military construction, housing programs, energy conservation, and base closure activities, including \$150 million for the Energy Conservation and Investment Program. However, Shaheen added, “nothing in the bill should be construed to authorize base realignment and closure.” [Source: The Hill | Kristina Wong | 20May 20, 2014 ++]

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## Commissary News Update 09 ► More Value for Patrons

The Defense Commissary Agency is facing a lot of challenges as Defense Department budget-cutters seek to decrease the system’s taxpayer funding. But the stores are still there, providing a benefit to troops and families. And, according to intel gathered at a recent commissary conference, DeCA officials are plugging ahead, trying to provide even more value for their patrons’ shopping dollar, and testing out new concepts to make shopping easier. For example:

- **Case lot sales are back.** These popular sales, often with bulk items under tents in commissary parking lots, were halted last year for budget reasons. But they’ll start up again in late summer, around mid-August through September. The timing of these weekend sales varies by store. In the past, stores have offered a variety of items, such as club packs, that helped boost savings beyond the regular average commissary savings of about 30 percent. The stores will have to stay within their budgets to operate the sales, and some of DeCA’s industry partners have agreed to provide more support to reduce the costs. When dates are set, they will be posted on the DeCA website, <http://www.commissaries.com>.
- **National Guard and Reserve on-site sales have restarted.** Commissary officials expect to host at least 52 events at locations around the country, bringing commissary sales to Guard and Reserve personnel who live far from military installations and commissaries. Although these sales are targeted to those troops, they’re open to any authorized commissary shopper. The sales initially were halted last year because of the travel restrictions imposed by DoD, and then later because of budget pressures. Each event is scrutinized for cost and return on investment, according to DeCA spokesman Kevin Robinson. Check out sales scheduled through June at [www.commissaries.com](http://www.commissaries.com), then click “Shopping,” then “Guard/Reserve On-Site Sales” at the left.



- **“Club store” formats are being tested at two stores, with increased sales of bulk items.** At the Imperial Beach, California, commissary, which opened a “hybrid” club pack format in October, sales of club packs have increased by 169 percent. At the commissary at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, the “club store within the store” concept has increased sales of club packs by 80 percent since it opened in March.
- **Online ordering test at three stores continues, with an evaluation of the future of the program after June 30.** In DeCA’s “Click2Go” pilot program, 5,994 customers have ordered online from one of three stores for curbside pickup since the program was launched in 2013: Fort Lee, Virginia; Travis Air Force Base, California; and Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska. The goal is convenience, allowing shoppers to order online, then just pick up their groceries curbside at the store. After June, officials will analyze the results to determine if this eCommerce grocery program should be expanded to other stores.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | Jun 2, 2014 ++]

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## **Arlington National Cemetery Update 49 ► Memorial Day 2014**

President Barack Obama led the nation in commemorating Memorial Day at Arlington National Cemetery, declaring the United States has reached "a pivotal moment" in Afghanistan with the end of war approaching. Obama, who returned just hours earlier from a surprise visit with U.S. troops at Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan, paid tribute to those lost in battle there and elsewhere over history. He called them "patriots who made the ultimate sacrifice" for their country. "Early this morning, I returned from Afghanistan," Obama told the audience of several thousand people. "Yesterday, I visited with some of our men and women serving there -- 7,000 miles from home. For more than 12 years, men and women like those I met with have borne the burden of our nation's security. Now, because of their profound sacrifice, because of the progress they have made, we're at a pivotal moment." "Our troops are coming home. By the end of this year, our war in Afghanistan will finally come to end," the president said to applause. "And yesterday at Bagram, and here today at Arlington, we pay tribute to the nearly 2,200 American patriots who've made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan. We will honor them, always."



**President Obama lays a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns and addressing those who attended the ceremony**

The president made a fleeting reference to the widening scandal involving reports of poor performance by the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is facing allegations of delayed treatments, and even deaths

in Arizona. "As we've been reminded in recent days -- we must do more to keep faith with our veterans and their families, and ensure they get the care and benefits and opportunities that they've earned and that they deserve," said the president. Embattled Veterans Secretary Eric Shinseki, a retired Army general, was present. "These Americans have done their duty," Obama said. "They ask nothing more than that our country does ours -- now and for decades to come," he added, drawing more applause. Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki was among those attending the ceremony.



At Arlington, Obama was joined by first lady Michelle Obama and Vice President Joe Biden and his wife, Jill, at the solemn ceremony across the Potomac River from White House on the hallowed grounds of Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. The remembrance was for the war heroes of yesteryear as well as servicemen and women stationed around the world. It was carried out in idyllic weather under cloudless skies and a brilliant sunshine. Obama appeared at the cemetery's amphitheater to speak after carrying out the traditional presidential wreath-laying, surrounded there by troops in formal dress and hearing the playing of Taps. Preceding Obama to the microphone, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, himself a military veteran, noted this year's remembrance came with the approaching 70th anniversary of America's D-Day landing in Normandy, France. And Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said "America's sons and daughters are still out there today on the frontiers of our common defense." [Source: The Associated Press 26 May 2014 ++]

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## **Womack Army MC ► CO Relieved After Death of 2 Patients**

The decision to remove Womack Army Medical Center's commander came over Memorial Day weekend, after officials at the hospital's higher headquarters learned a patient at the hospital died less than a week after another patient death. Col. Robert Tenhet, commander of Northern Regional Medical Command, said the decision was made to preserve trust in the hospital and ensure patient safety. Speaking from his offices at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, Tenhet said the two deaths, coupled with an ongoing investigation, led to his decision to remove Col. Steven J. Brewster and suspend three of the hospital's deputy commanders. He also said further disciplinary action against former leadership couldn't be ruled out until after several investigations were complete. Womack is one of the Army's largest hospitals. It has the largest emergency department and serves the largest population. Tenhet said the hospital was already under investigation at the time of the deaths following an accreditation process that revealed shortcomings in Womack's infection control procedures. He said the deaths and the earlier accreditation issue are not related. And said the two deaths would be investigated by the hospital, with Northern Regional Medical Command overseeing the investigations.



Tenhet, who is set to be promoted to brigadier general, is a native of Spring Lake and has spent more than 13 years assigned to Fort Bragg units, including Womack. He took the helm of Northern Regional Medical Command on May 5 and was aware of the ongoing investigation of Womack when a patient died following a May 16 visit. Within days, Tenhet ordered the officer in charge of the emergency department at Womack removed from that position. "I started to lose confidence in the commander," Tenhet said, saying there were complacency issues at the hospital. After a second patient died within a week, Tenhet recommended over the holiday weekend that Brewster be removed. The Army's surgeon general, Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho, who also has strong ties to Womack and Fort Bragg, agreed. Brewster was set to change command in June and had planned to retire, Tenhet said. But the change could not wait. "In medicine, it's not like other jobs," he said. "... We are life and death." "These are hard decisions you make, but you have to look at the mission as a whole," he said.



**Col. Steven J. Brewster & Womack Army Medical Center**

Tenhet met with Brewster and the three deputy commanders 27 MAY. The three deputies have been temporarily reassigned to other Fort Bragg units, he said. Tenhet said he then assembled Womack staff to announce the removal of Brewster and to name Col. Ronald Stephens as the new Womack commander. Stephens had been slated to take command of the hospital on 18 JUN. He is now charged with assessing the hospital's resources and its gaps in care and vulnerabilities. "We have to maintain our patients' trust," Tenhet said. 'Right commander' On 28 JUN, Tenhet, whose father receives care at Womack, and acting Fort Bragg commander, Maj. Gen. Clarence K. K. Chinn, said they had confidence in the new leadership and those who remain at Womack. "He's absolutely the right commander to come in," Chinn said of Stephens, a former corps surgeon for the 18th Airborne Corps. Chinn said he and his family have had procedures at Womack over the past month and wouldn't hesitate to visit the hospital again if needed. "We have that trust and confidence not only in Army Medicine, but in the leadership here," Chinn said. "The community should feel confident and feel comfortable. . We've got a good team there."

The key now is ensuring that customer service and care are on par with Army standards, Tenhet said. "Having worked there myself, we've had some quality people there at Fort Bragg," Tenhet said. "They are wonderful facilities. I want to make sure that's not just on the surface." Chinn said Womack was already a premier hospital. He cited the 3,400 clinic visits, eight births, 36 surgeries and more than 1,000 scans, X-rays and similar procedures that occur daily at the hospital. Jonathan Steele, president of Local 1770 of the American Federation of Government Employees, represents about 2,000 Womack civilian employees. He said there have been concerns about Womack workers being stretched too far to cover more patients. He also said complaints of toxic work environments and abrasive leadership have risen in recent years.

Steele said the union has advocated for a civilian position within Womack leadership to address those concerns, and he was disheartened to learn of the leadership change from Womack employees instead of from Army medical leaders. "We've had significant issues," Steele said of the union's relationship with

Womack. "We've definitely had some disagreements." But Steele said he wanted to encourage Womack employees and other union members who may use the hospital to "come to work, be professional and provide excellent customer service." Tenhet said Womack was at 97.5 percent capacity by Army Medicine metrics and was looking to grow the workforce at Womack. The hospital is searching for 27 new doctors, he said, and will continue to build capacity as the hospital's beneficiary population grows.

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Following the news of the Womack shakeup, Fort Bragg's elected officials voiced their concern for the situation. Sen. Kay Hagan, a Democrat, called the reports of improper care "very troubling." "Our service members and their families deserve the absolute best care possible, and they should be able to put their full faith and trust in those responsible for providing that care," she said. Hagan's office has contacted the Army, and she said she would monitor the Womack investigations. Republican Sen. Richard Burr said he had concerns about Womack's 'capacity and to meet the growing needs of their patients.' "The recent deaths must be investigated, and they underscore the urgency of conducting the systemwide review of care in military treatment facilities that (the Pentagon) announced yesterday," Burr said. Rep. Renee Ellmers, a 2nd District Republican, said the removal of Womack's commander was a sign of bigger issues in military health care, both for current troops and veterans. In a release, Ellmers referenced the news at Womack and the ongoing scandal in the Department of Veterans Affairs health system. "While the details continue to unfold, the initial reports of substandard care and the neglect of our country's warriors and veterans should shock and outrage not only the Fort Bragg community, but the nation as a whole," Ellmers said.

Rep. David Price, a 4th District Democrat, said he was disturbed by reports of substandard care at Womack and other military health facilities. "I want (the Department of Defense) to get to the bottom of it. We need to know if the cause is human error, poor administration, lack of training, or other factors so that we can take steps to fix them," Price said. "In particular, we need to know whether these are isolated incidents or evidence of serious systemic problems. Like America's veterans, our service members and their families deserve quality health care, and we must make sure that they receive it." Horoho, the Army surgeon general, initiated an investigation into Womack in March, after the findings of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations led to a two-day standdown that delayed medical procedures at the hospital. The Joint Commission is a national nonprofit that accredits more than 20,000 health care organizations and programs. [Source: Fayetteville Observer | Drew Brooks | May 28, 2014 ++]

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## **DoD Mobilized Reserve 27 MAY 2014 ► Decrease of 497**

The Department of Defense announced the current number of reservists on active duty as of 27 MAY. The net collective result is 468 fewer reservists mobilized than last reported in the 15 MAY 2014 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 25,373; Navy Reserve 3,739; Marine Corps Reserve 1,446; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve 7,508; and the Coast Guard Reserve 423. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 38,489 including both units and individual augmentees. Since 911 there have been 896,815 reservists activated for duty. A breakdown by reserve component of voluntary and involuntary activations is available for readers to see at <http://www.defense.gov/documents/27-May-2014.pdf?source=GovDelivery>. [Source: DoD News Release No. NR-269-14 dtd May 29, 2014 ++]



## VA Vision Care Update 04 ► Eye Injury Registry Stalled

The Veterans Affairs Department has added only one name to an eye injury registry established by Congress in January 2008, senior VA officials told flabbergasted members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee panel on oversight and investigations 29 May. The department also is not in full compliance with standards established in 2000 to ensure that blind veterans can access its websites, officials said. The VA will let a contract for its portion of the Defense and Veterans Eye Injury and Vision Registry this summer, which is expected to be fully operational by October 2015, according to Dr. Maureen McCarthy, deputy chief of the Patient Care Services Office in the Veterans Health Administration. Though the Defense Department has populated the vision database with 23,663 patients, VA has added only one, to test the system, McCarthy testified. In her written testimony, McCarthy explained that the department needs to hire a contractor to manually extract clinical data from VA's electronic medical records and its compensation and pension records into a computable database, the VA Eye Injury Data Store. Information from the data store will then be electronically transferred to the joint eye registry, where it will be used in analyses of veteran eye injuries.



**Travis Fugate, a member of the Kentucky National Guard who was blinded by an IED attack in Iraq, wipes his eyes as he testifies on before Congress on May 29, 2014.**

McCarthy told lawmakers that VA received \$6.9 million in funds for its portion of the joint registry to cover costs from 2010-2014, with \$4.1 million allocated for salaries and \$2.8 million for the data extraction contract. Rep. Dan Benishek (R-MI) said "I can't believe it has taken five years to get this going," and pointed out that it has taken VA longer to develop its portion of the eye registry than the duration of World War II. Terry Kebbel, a blind Vietnam Veteran from Las Cruces, N.M., said VA's lack of compliance with an amendment to the 1973 Rehabilitation Act that established accessibility standards for federal websites, has been frustrating. Kebbel uses a screen reader to translate Web text into audio, but told lawmakers that the structure of VA Web pages, which lack headers, makes that difficult. VA also attaches forms as image files to Web pages, which his reader cannot process, meaning he cannot fill them out, Kebbel said.

N Subcommittee chairman Mike Coffman (r-co) pressed VA witnesses to say when all their websites would meet accessibility standards set in 2000. Lorraine Landfried, VA deputy chief information officer for product development, said it was difficult to ensure 100 percent access by the blind to VA Web sites because the department is in a constant process of updating its websites and software. [Source: NextGov | Bob Brewin | May 29, 2014 ++]

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## **VA Blind Rehabilitation Service ► Programs Offered**

Losing the ability to see through your own eyes is something that cannot be imagined; those outside of this world may never fully understand it. The frustrations of developing visual impairment as an adult can be daunting. VA Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS) provides world-class rehabilitation programs for Veterans and Servicemembers with visual impairment. VA implemented a progressive plan in 2009 to provide vision and blind rehabilitation to Veterans and Servicemembers, who have earliest vision loss to total blindness.



BRS sponsors programs such as “White Cane Day,” to help people who are sighted better understand the onset of blindness. During these events, BRS representatives educate the sighted through activities such as walking with a white cane while blindfolded, wearing devices that simulate visual impairment, and exploring the technologies that help blind Veterans remain independent. Helping people to understand how the blind successfully function helps them to better appreciate the accomplishments and independence of blind people. The recovery and reintegration stories of Veterans and Servicemembers who have demonstrated their strength and courage are a testament to what is possible for all people. Their experiences and achievements are inspiring to many.



**Mike Jernigan**

Mike Jernigan is one of those that the BRS has benefited. He is a United States Marine Corps corporal who was medically retired in December of 2005. He served in Iraq for six months out of a seven month

deployment and was blinded by a roadside bomb on August 22, 2004 during a patrol near the town of Mahmudiya. Jernigan, who was enrolled in the program said, "I completed a 16-week blind rehabilitation program at VA in Augusta, Georgia. This was the most instrumental step on my path back to independence. There I learned how to clean a house, do my laundry, iron my own clothes and even cook my own meals, which is a great thing because I am a very talented cook. I learned how to do maintenance around the house to include rewiring a lamp and fixing the plumbing underneath the sink. As part of my manual skills instruction I completed a couple of woodworking projects....This program has taught me that even without sight I can lead a very productive life." "Although suffering from my injuries might seem like an unfortunate incident, it has provided me with many great opportunities to better myself. I have taken advantage of the ones that interest me the most and look forward to any more that may cross my path."

"The most destructive part of losing one's sight is the feeling of incompetence... I've broken or cracked more than half of my set of drinking glasses by dropping or knocking them over. I vacuum up electrical cords because I forgot to check for them. I've walked into people by accident. I've stepped on my cats too many times to mention, and I'm afraid that one of them holds a grudge." –What Is It Like to Be Blind. To learn more about the impact of blindness on the individual go to [http://www.slate.com/blogs/quora/2013/12/10/what\\_does\\_it\\_feel\\_like\\_to\\_be\\_blind.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/quora/2013/12/10/what_does_it_feel_like_to_be_blind.html)

[Source: Vantage Point | Gayle Watson | May 27, 2014 ++]

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## **VA Claim Filing Update 02 ► Claim Filing Change Opposed**

The National Veteran Legal Services Program (NVLSP) and the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) expressed opposition to a new rule proposed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, entitled "Standard Claims and Appeal Forms" which would change the process by which disability claims are filed. The VA is proposing to implement new standardized forms for filing an initial claim and for filing a Notice of Disagreement when a veteran disagrees with a VA claim decision. NVLSP and MOPH oppose the rule because it creates a segregation of veterans into different groups, based on their access to a computer with internet access. More specifically, under this proposed regulation, a veteran who submits an incomplete claim electronically would receive the earliest possible effective date, even though the application was incomplete. In contrast, a veteran who submits an incomplete paper claim would only receive the earliest effective date if the complete application is submitted within a year. Therefore, under the proposed rule, a veteran who submits a paper claim for disability compensation, and who inadvertently fails to check a single box on the VA form, may lose thousands of dollars in VA disability benefits.

Also, under the new rules communications that have historically been accepted as claims by the VA would no longer be considered as a request/application/claim for benefits sufficient to preserve an effective date (the date from which benefits are paid) for those benefits. Many veterans would be hurt by this proposed rule. Some veterans would be paid from a later date costing them many thousands of dollars and other veterans may fall through the cracks if the VA sent its letter to the wrong address. If these incomplete/informal claims were put under computer control the VA could follow up.

Under the proposed rule there does not seem to be a way for the VA to track these attempted claims. The burden falls on the veteran. Because the VA would not have to put incomplete claims under computer control, the number of claims pending before the VA would be reduced. Also, because only complete claims would be computer controlled, the VA could report faster processing times. These better numbers



would make it seem that the VA was adjudicating claims at a faster rate and that there were fewer claims waiting to be adjudicated. Thus, the re-definition of what is a claim would help VA show better statistics without any real improvement on its part. NVLSP and MOPH have submitted their comments to the Department of Veterans Affairs in hopes that the department reconsiders this proposed rule change. [Source: NVLSP 2014 Spring Newsletter Spring 2014 ++]

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## **VGLI Update 04 ► Premiums Rise for Older Vets 1 JUL**

Older veterans will be paying higher premiums for Veterans Group Life Insurance as of July 1, said officials with the Veterans Affairs Department. The 2.2 percent increase will apply only to veterans 70 and older; it is the first premium increase for this group in 21 years, officials said. The cost will increase by 5 cents per \$1,000 of monthly coverage. Veterans 70 and older who have \$50,000 of VGLI coverage will pay \$2.50 more a month — increasing from \$112.50 to \$115. For those 75 and older, the monthly cost for \$50,000 of coverage will increase by \$5, going from \$225 to \$230. VGLI coverage is offered in \$10,000 increments up to \$400,000. Monthly premiums are based on age, and increase every five years up to age 75, when the rate is capped and does not increase further with age. Veterans 75 and older who have \$400,000 of coverage will start paying \$1,840 a month in July; up from the current \$1,800 a month.

“Older veterans have been paying premiums at a rate that is below what it costs to provide coverage,” states a fact sheet provided by the VA. “In fairness to veterans of all ages insured under VGLI, and in order to keep the program financially strong and competitive, we have to bring the rates more in line with the cost of claims at those ages. “Without this increase, the current rates are not sufficient to cover the cost of lifetime coverage.” The new rates will be reflected on the first bill veterans receive on or after July 1. If the VGLI premiums are paid by deduction from military retired pay or from VA compensation, the higher premium begins in July. Officials noted that many private insurance plans don’t offer lifetime coverage, so individuals lose their coverage at a certain age. With VGLI, veterans can keep their coverage as long as they think they need life insurance, regardless of age. With less healthy and older individuals, the program pays more claims than a private insurance company might, officials said.

VA recommends that veterans review their life insurance needs to determine if they need less coverage, which would reduce their costs. For example, less insurance may be needed if a home is paid off, or children have left home, or the family has enough savings and investments to cover needs after the veteran’s death. “The senior veteran can’t afford this,” said Bob Latsch, who retired from the Army Reserve in 1995 as an E-5 and carries \$150,000 in VGLI life insurance. He says he may have to reduce the amount of coverage, “although I was counting on that full amount for my wife because we didn’t save anything.” He now pays \$337.50 a month for his \$150,000 in coverage, but that will increase to \$675 because he just turned 75. With the new premium rate increase in July, his rate will be \$690 a month for \$150,000 in coverage. “This means veterans 70 and older will have to shop around for insurance, and it’s not right. It will be hard to find another insurance company that will take us. They have us over a barrel. We shouldn’t be looked at as actuary numbers,” Latsch said.

VA has already announced it is raising the rates of Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance. In July, life insurance rates for active-duty service members will increase to 7 cents per \$1,000 of coverage, up from the previous 6.5 cents. VA had temporarily decreased the premiums in 2008 because the SGLI reserve fund had grown, and officials were intentionally drawing down that fund. The premium increase in July is necessary to ensure the program remains strong, officials said. VA notes that VGLI is unique for veterans



because there is a period — 240 days after separation — in which veterans can apply with no health questions asked. This applies regardless of whether the veteran has a serious illness or disability when leaving the service, which would cause difficulty in trying to purchase life insurance on the private market. Financial experts urge veterans to shop around for life insurance before they leave the service, if they need to replace their SGLI coverage, to carefully compare prices and features of private insurance companies and VGLI. Troops should apply for insurance and make sure they have their needed insurance coverage before the VGLI “no health questions” application window ends 240 days after separation. [Source: NavyTimes | Karen Jowers| 23 May 24, 2014 ++]

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## **VA Sleep Apnea Claims Update 02 ► \$1.25 Billion in 2013**

Veterans' claims for sleep apnea — a common, treatable ailment often associated with obesity and aging — have spiked nearly 150% since 2009, driving compensation for the disorder likely over \$1 billion per year, according to government data and interviews. Nearly nine of 10 veterans receiving compensation are considered 50% disabled by the condition, in which breathing ceases during sleep. For a single veteran without dependents, the monthly payment is \$822.15 for a disability rating of 50%. About half of Americans who suffer from it are overweight, according to the National Institutes of Health. Aging is also a contributing factor. Untreated, sleep apnea can lead to serious health problems, including heart disease.

Veterans Affairs officials attribute the surge in claims — more than 94% of them from veterans of Gulf War I or the Afghanistan and Iraq wars — to greater awareness of the condition. With that awareness comes treatment and appropriate care, they say. "Sleep apnea has become more and more known as a disease," said Bradley Flohr, senior adviser for compensation service at the Veterans Benefits Administration. "It can be quite severe. You can die from it." A change in federal law in 2004, phased in over 10 years and fully implemented in January, also allows veterans who qualify for retirement pay to receive their pensions and disability compensation. Prior to the change in law, the disability compensation had offset pension payments. To receive both payments, a veteran must be considered at least 50% disabled.

Veterans with sleep apnea are considered by the Department of Veterans affairs to be 50% disabled if they need a Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) machine to get a good night's sleep. The machine and mask increase air pressure in the throat to prevent the airway from collapsing. It eliminates virtually all symptoms of sleep apnea for most people although it is not a cure, said Michael Twery, director of the National Center on Sleep Disorders Research at the National Institutes of Health. Many find the mask uncomfortable to wear. The underlying condition remains, and that's why veterans are still compensated at the 50% rate, said Thomas Murphy, director of compensation service for the Veterans Benefits Administration. The intent is to offset the average impact on a veteran's earning power.



**A Custom Sleep Apnea Appliance (CPAP) breathing machine can help relieve the symptoms of sleep apnea.**

By comparison, a soldier or Marine who loses a leg below the knee while serving, and receives prosthesis can be attached, they are considered 40% disabled, which qualifies them for a \$577.54 monthly payment. All amputees also receive an additional \$101 a month, according to the VA. "If a veteran's missing a limb, and I put a new limb on him, and he can now walk around, why am I compensating him?" Murphy said. "That's an extreme exaggeration. You have hearing loss, and I put hearing aids in, I still compensate you for that. The VA's rating schedule makes it impossible to determine precisely how much the department spends annually on sleep apnea compensation, said Steve Westerfeld, a VA spokesman. Veterans often have multiple disabilities, and a rating table determines their compensation. A veteran's dependents also boost compensation. The rating system for all disabilities, including sleep apnea, is under review; new rules could be in place within two years, Murphy said.

If the 127,713 veterans with a 50% disability rating for sleep apnea in 2013 were paid for that condition alone, assuming no dependents, the cost would have been \$1.25 billion. "Soldiers talk. Marines talk," Murphy said. "It's not us going out there and telling them to do this. I don't doubt that that occurs. But it's not us coming out there and saying, 'Hey, you should go do this and find out.' If the condition exists, and it's documented, we'll rate it. If it doesn't exist, and it's not documented, we won't." Veterans are eligible for disability compensation if the condition developed while they were serving. Joe Davis, a spokesman for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, said veterans deserve to be compensated for sleep apnea. "Sleep apnea is a medical evaluation that can't be gamed, and something that must have been documented while in service," Davis said. "The 50% disability evaluation could be because a good night's sleep is critical to everything we do."

Twery, the sleep expert, also noted that some research shows that there could be a link between combat stress and sleep apnea. Whatever its cause, sleep apnea joins a list of issues that is driving up the VA's budget, said Todd Harrison, a military budget expert at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a non-partisan think tank. Its budget is scheduled to jump from \$96 billion in 2009 to \$151 billion in 2014, much of the increase associated with caring for the aging Vietnam-era generation, Harrison said. Sleep apnea, he said, is not the sort of disability most people associate with wounded warriors. "People who think about disabled veterans have in mind a person who was wounded in combat," Harrison said. "Sleep apnea is not a combat injury, especially if it's caused by obesity." [Source: USA Today | Tom Vanden Brook| May 21, 2014 ++]

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## **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 15 thru 31 May 2014**

**Cranford NJ** – Acting Attorney General John J. Hoffman announced that the owner of a Union County home health aide agency has been charged in a 30-count indictment for allegedly billing Medicaid and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs more than \$100,000 for services never rendered. **Laurie Provost**, 54, of Sea Girt, was indicted yesterday (May 14) on 23 counts of second-degree health care claims fraud, and one count each of second- and third-degree theft by deception, third-degree Medicaid fraud, third-degree health care claims fraud, fourth-degree forgery, and two counts of fourth-degree falsifying or tampering with records. "Through her greed, this defendant allegedly defrauded the Medicaid Program, a program that helps New Jersey's most vulnerable population and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), a department aimed at helping those who gave so much for their country," Acting Attorney General Hoffman said. "The Medicaid program is in place for people who truly need assistance paying their medical bills," Acting Insurance Fraud Prosecutor Ronald Chillemi. "It is not there

as a piggy bank for unscrupulous health care professionals. The Office of the Insurance Fraud (OIF) Prosecutor will continue to be vigilant in prosecuting these high priority cases.”



Provost was the owner/operator of Home Care Solutions, located on Commerce Drive in Cranford. Home Care Solutions (HCS) was a home health aid agency that sent home health aides to the homes of Medicaid beneficiaries to provide them with care. The agency also contracted with skilled medical professionals to provide specialized services to patients who required such care. The agency was closed as a result of the Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor’s Medicaid Fraud Control Unit’s investigation. The state grand jury indictment alleges that between July 23, 2011 and Aug. 7, 2013, Provost, through HCS, submitted hundreds of fraudulent claims to Medicaid and/or one of the managed care organizations that provide services to Medicaid beneficiaries and processes provider claims and payments on behalf of the Medicaid program. It is alleged that Provost knowingly submitted requests for payment for services that were not provided, including billing for services purportedly provided to Medicaid beneficiaries by home health aides while the beneficiaries were hospitalized or on vacation. An investigation by the OIF Prosecutor’s Medicaid Fraud Control Unit determined that, through the fraud, Provost allegedly defrauded Medicaid of more than \$100,000. The investigation determined that :

- Between May 12, 2011 and April 9, 2013, Provost allegedly stole over \$44,000 from the DVA by creating the false impression that services were provided to veterans, and therefore HCS was entitled to payment.
- Between March 6, 2010 and July 11, 2013, Provost committed Medicaid fraud by allegedly making false statements on her agency’s Medicaid provider application. When she submitted HCS’s application to become a Medicaid provider, Provost allegedly hid the fact that her nursing license was suspended. An investigation determined that the Medicaid program would have rejected her application if she disclosed the fact that her nursing license was previously suspended.
- As a result of her application fraud, the Medicaid program paid Provost through HCS more than \$2 million.
- Between March 24, 2010 and July 11, 2013, Provost created forged in-service training records, giving the false appearance that HCS met regulation and accreditation standards.
- Between July 21 and Dec. 31, 2009, Provost allegedly submitted documents containing fraudulent statements to the New Jersey Commission on Accreditation regarding HCS’s Director of Nursing. On May 12, 2011, Provost allegedly provided similar fraudulent information to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The indictment is merely an accusation and the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty. Second-degree crimes carry a maximum sentence of 10 years in state prison and a criminal fine of up to \$150,000, while third-degree crimes carry a maximum sentence of five years in state prison and fine of up to \$15,000. Fourth-degree crimes carry a maximum sentence of 18 months in jail and a criminal fine of up to \$10,000. [Source: NJ OIG Press Release | Rachel Goemaat | May 15, 2014 ++]

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**Teasnick NJ** – The president of a New Jersey-based furniture and design services company admitted today to fraudulently holding her business out as a service-disabled veteran-owned small business, which obtained dozens of government contracts set aside for disabled veterans, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced. **Miriam Friedman**, 54, of Teaneck, N.J., pleaded guilty to information charging her with making false claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). She entered her guilty plea before U.S. District Judge Esther Salas in Newark federal court. According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

- Friedman is the president and owner of Office Dimensions Inc. – which sells furniture and design services to industrial and government customers – controlling all its revenues and running the company’s day-to-day operations. Friedman never served in the U.S. military.
- Friedman self-certified in a central registry for government contractors that Office Dimensions was a service-disabled veteran-owned small business. She falsely claimed in the certification that her father-in-law – who was retired, unemployed and had very little involvement with Office Dimensions – was the owner and operator of the business. He had served in the U.S. military, but was not classified as a service-disabled veteran. Friedman then started bidding for VA contracts set aside for service-disabled veterans who own their own businesses.

During her guilty plea proceeding, Friedman admitted that she knew her claims were false, and that they led to dozens of contracts with the VA to provide furniture and interior space planning at VA facilities. In total, the VA paid approximately \$1.2 million to Office Dimensions based on contracts set aside for service-disabled veterans. The charge carries a maximum potential penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, or twice the gain or loss caused by the offense. Sentencing is currently scheduled for Sept. 3, 2014, before U.S. District Judge Jose L. Linares. [Source: US Attorneys’ Office Dist. Of NJ press release May 22, 2014 ++]

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## **VA Whistleblowers ► AFGE Wants Culture of Fear Ended**

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is calling on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to end the culture of fear that has plagued the agency and negatively impacted veterans’ care. As recent headlines suggest, some management officials have been ‘gaming the system’ to artificially inflate performance statistics in their medical centers. What is not so recent is the widespread cover-up culture that pervades the VA. Front-line employees have lived in fear of blowing the whistle due to an established history of retaliation. They do not feel safe to report mismanagement. “These headlines aren’t revealing anything that the VA didn’t already know,” said AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr. “The employees caring for our nation’s heroes work hard each day to carry out the mission of the agency, to provide our vets with world-class care. ... They shouldn’t feel afraid to speak up against managers who are more concerned with securing bonuses than providing their patients with timely access to care for critical medical conditions. It’s time for the VA to rebalance its resources, cut the excess layers of middle management, and shift the savings toward the front lines of patient care where it belongs.

Cox also commented, “The only way to heal what is wrong with the VA is to invest in what is right with the VA: its doctors, nurses, clinicians, and other dedicated health care personnel. ... Our members have paid a heavy price for voicing concerns, submitting letters, raising issues in labor management meetings, and testifying before Congress on wait time issues and veterans’ access to care. When they have sounded the alarm our members faced retaliation and intimidation. No one should have to choose between keeping

their job and speaking out about threats to patient care. It is time for the VA to take swift action to end this culture of fear and cover-ups.” Some examples of this are:

- **Kathi Dahl** is the AFGE Local President at the Pittsburgh VA where a recent outbreak of Legionnaires’ disease caused the death of five veterans and infection of dozens more. The facility had very high readings for well over a year before they were disclosed to Ms. Dahl and the staff. In February 2013 she was summoned by the House VA Oversight Committee as a witness, but was informed by a VA manager that she could “call in sick” instead of testifying. Despite management intimidation she testified on the record to the House Committee on Veterans Affairs regarding the outbreak and subsequent cover-up.
- In 2011, **Dr. Michelle Washington**, a union activist with AFGE VA Local 342, testified before the Senate on issues of inadequate staffing, patient access to specialized care and prolonged wait times for appointments. Her testimony also addressed concerns of mismanagement in terms of appointment data manipulation. Following her testimony, Dr. Washington faced retaliatory actions at her facility where some of her duties as a psychologist were removed and her performance evaluation was negatively impacted.
- **Dr. Maryann Hooker**, also an AFGE activist, became the subject of an unwarranted investigation for testifying on proposed budget cuts and “deskilling” of the workforce in 2011. She was ultimately cleared after intervention of the VA’s Office of Inspector General. Similarly, Veterans Benefits Administration employees testifying on numbers-gaming at the VBA suffered retaliation for speaking up.

AFGE National VA Council President Alma Lee added, “We hope the agency will take a serious look at how facility directors and managers are carrying out the mission of the VA. As the agency carries out its probe, we caution it not to target front line workers carrying out their duties as assigned, but the managers trying to change the rules and cheat veterans out of the care they deserve. VA should not be investigating itself under these circumstances.” Despite management issues, the Veterans Health Administration remains the largest, most cost-efficient health delivery system in the nation. Serving a population of more than 8 million veterans with locations across all 50 states, the system provides inpatient care to 650,000 veterans and outpatient care to another 75 million patients each year. AFGE’s National Veterans Affairs Council represents 210,000 employees within the Department of Veterans Affairs. For the latest AFGE news and information, follow us on Facebook and Twitter. For more info on AFGE refer to <http://www.afge.org>. [Source: AFGE Press Release | Chelsea Bland | May 13, 2014 ++]



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## **VA Whistleblowers Update 01 ► IAVA Online Reporting Project**

After the deaths of at least 40 veterans on a health care waiting list, the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) announced an online whistleblower project meant to expose widespread problems plaguing the Veterans Administration health care system. The online kit instructs veterans on best practices for reporting abuses and potentially leaking documents. The tools are critical now, organizers say, when veterans face a health care system they say is in crisis and an Obama administration that has had a “chilling effect” on whistleblowing. The White House says it values and protects whistleblowers. Asking VA employees to go outside the system and straight to the public with problems is in keeping with the military

traditions veterans are taught to uphold, said IAVA Chief of Staff Derek Bennett, a former Army Captain and Special Assistant to General David Petraeus. “As a veteran myself, I recognize the importance of the chain of command,” he said. “But as a former company commander, I know that my soldiers always had the opportunity to circumvent the chain of command if my work or my staff were part of the problem.”

The ongoing VA hospital scandal, which has seen top officials subpoenaed by Congress amid allegations that VA hospitals have covered up long wait times, has infuriated veterans’ groups, including the IAVA, which deals specifically with veterans of post-9/11 conflicts. After delays at the Phoenix VA hospital went on so long that some veterans allegedly died while waiting for care, complaints about the overloaded VA hospital system have emerged all over the country. Veterans and congressional investigators have complained that it has been tough to get straight answers from inside the VA and its embattled leadership. To combat the problem, the IAVA is joining with the Project On Government Oversight to launch <http://www.VAOversight.org>, a site specifically designed to help VA employees leak to POGO (Project on government Oversight) investigators and the media. POGO, which has long helped whistleblowers and other leakers get their information out, says the collaboration is the first of its kind in the group’s history.

It recommends would-be leakers install the encrypted Tor software, mimicking Edward Snowden (i.e. NSA secrets leaker). Even with the help provided by POGO, Joe Newman, the communications director at POGO, Newman said, “Leaking remains a dangerous business, especially in the Obama era. Certainly the fear of reprisal is real. We don’t have any personal knowledge of reprisals in the VA at the moment... but in general it’s the norm not the exception.” The site offers detailed training in how to circumvent the stringent anti-leak efforts put in place across the government by the Obama administration, which has made cracking down on unauthorized leaks a priority. “What we’ve seen with the Obama administration is the lengths they will go to try to keep things in house,” said Newman. Newman, a former journalist, said the Obama administration has for the most part carried over intense anti-leak programs launched in the George W. Bush administration. Changing technology and a changing emphasis on national security have focused attention on whistleblowers and investigating leaks, he said. Still, Newman added, the Obama administration’s zeal to track down and punish leakers is well-documented. “The thing that makes the Obama administration really stand out is the use of the Espionage Act. They’ve invoked it seven times [against leakers] and that’s more than every other administration combined when it comes to going after people who have leaked to the media,” he said. “That really puts the Obama administration in a different category as far the extent they’ll go to keep things secret.”

Bennett said Obama’s prosecutions have had the desired effect when it comes to leaks. “If you just look at the number of whistleblower prosecutions, this administration is significantly higher than the previous administration,” he said. “I can imagine that post-Snowden, there is even more concern about that. So, yeah, I can imagine there’s a chilling effect.” But the VA is not an intelligence agency, where even speaking to the media on any topic without authorization is strictly, forbidden. And successful whistleblowing has played a major role in the unfolding VA scandal. On 12 MAY, employees at the Durham, North Carolina VA hospital were put on leave after a fellow employee alleged they falsified records to hide wait times. While there are built-in reporting systems for problems, IAVA says internal systems aren’t working fast enough to fix the VA and more employees need to be encouraged to come forward. Bennett said veterans can’t wait for the problems inside the VA to be fixed. “Our members are outraged and flabbergasted about the allegations that are coming out,” he said. “As somebody’s who’s not in the system, I don’t know their exact process [at the VA.] But clearly there is something about the culture or the structure that these employees...do not feel comfortable sharing internally.”



The White House says it appreciates and welcomes whistleblowing. “The Obama administration has demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting whistleblowers,” an administration official said. “The president appointed strong advocates to the Office of Special Counsel and the Merit Systems Protection Board who have been widely praised. The President also signed the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2012, which improves whistleblower protections for Federal employees.” Beyond the high-tech tools, Newman added, sometimes the simplest advice is the best when it comes to avoiding being caught as a leaker. [Source: BuzzFeed | Evan McMorris-Santoro | May 14, 2014 ++]

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## **VA Health Care Delays ► HVAC Chair Requests Commission**

The Obama administration was asked 13 MAY to set up a special, bipartisan commission to investigate accumulating allegations of health care delays at VA hospitals, dozens of the cases linked to findings or allegations of patient deaths. The request came from the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) In a letter to Obama Tuesday, Miller said an independent commission was necessary “to thoroughly investigate veteran access issues, patient harm and preventable deaths as a result of delays in care across the VA health care system.” Miller cited as a precedent the presidential commission set up in 2007 in the wake of the scandal at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where there were allegations that wounded soldiers were getting caught in a bureaucratic labyrinth of sometimes delayed care or processing. The VA has recently come under intense pressure over charges or findings that veterans have waited months to be seen by a doctor. In dozens of cases in recent years, some died before treatment was provided. Earlier this year, the VA said its own internal review found 23 veterans deaths in the last three to four years that were linked to delays in cancer screenings. There have been calls recently from some sectors, including the American Legion, for VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to step down. The agency chief responded last week by saying he would take “swift and appropriate” action should new problems surface.

On 12 MAY, two Department of Veterans Affairs workers at a hospital in Durham, N.C., were sent home on administrative leave week amid allegations linked to delay of health care. It was the third round of administrative leaves in recent weeks connected to charges about healthcare delays. The VA issued a brief statement that a tip from an employee at the Durham VA Medical Center “indicated that some employees at that facility may have engaged in inappropriate scheduling practices at some point between 2009 and 2012.” The VA learned of the allegations Monday and two employees at the hospital were immediately placed on administrative leaving pending a review, the agency said. The two were described as lower-level employees. According to the VA, the allegations surfaced as agency auditors — as part of a nationwide review — were preparing to visit the Durham hospital. Facility director DeAnne Seekins asked staff about any past problems and one employee came forward with the new allegations, the VA says.

Late last month, in response to a request by the VA inspector general, Shinseki placed the hospital administrator at the VA medical center in Phoenix and two other officials there on administrative leave. The inspector general is investigating allegations by a retired doctor who worked at the Phoenix facility that up to 40 veterans died while waiting for treatment. There also are charges that appointment records were falsified and some destroyed. Last week, Shinseki placed a nurse working at a Wyoming VA hospital on administrative leave after receiving from the media a leaked e-mail dating from 2013 that contained explicit directions on how to “game” the system and hide long delays of treating patients. The inspector general was also called in to investigate that case. In his letter to Obama Tuesday, Miller expressed concern that “the allegations we are now seeing warrant action beyond the IG’s.

[Source: USA Today | Gregg Zoroya | 14 May 2014 ++]

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## **VA Health Care Delays Update 01 ► Nabors to Oversee Review**

President Barack Obama is dispatching one of his closest White House advisers to oversee a review of the beleaguered Veterans Affairs Department as the agency grapples with allegations of treatment delays and preventable deaths at a Phoenix veterans hospital. White House deputy chief of staff Rob Nabors will be temporarily assigned to the VA to work on a review focused on policies for patient safety rules and the scheduling of patient appointments, officials said 14 MAY. The move signals Obama's growing concern over problems at the department, particularly recent reports that hospital administrators in Phoenix kept an off-the-books list to conceal long wait times as 40 veterans died waiting to get an appointment. Similar problems have since been reported in other states. The allegations have sparked a firestorm inside the VA and on Capitol Hill.



**White House deputy chief of staff Rob Nabors**

The American Legion and some congressional Republicans have called for the resignation of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki, who was scheduled to testify before a Senate committee 15 MAY. "While we get to the bottom of what happened in Phoenix, it's clear the VA needs to do more to ensure quality care for our veterans," Obama said in a statement. "I'm grateful that Rob, one of my most trusted advisers, has agreed to work with Secretary Shinseki to help the team at this important moment." Obama ordered the patient policy review after the Phoenix allegations became public. But officials said Shinseki requested more help with the review, leading Obama's chief of staff, Denis McDonough, to tap Nabors for the assignment.

The move is similar to the action the White House took last year when it assigned longtime Obama aide Jeffrey Zients to take over management of the troubled HealthCare.gov website from officials at the Health and Human Services Department. HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius later resigned her post. "We are glad the president took this first step to ensure the White House is involved in solving this crisis at the VA," said Tom Tarantino, the chief policy officer of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. "We need bold reform to establish a culture of accountability throughout the VA system and hope that Mr. Nabors' presence will help ensure that this type of failure never happens again." Despite calls for Shinseki to step down, the White House insists that Obama continues to have confidence in the secretary, a retired four-star Army general. Shinseki said he welcomed Nabors' help in ensuring veterans have access to timely, quality health care. "If allegations about manipulation of appointment scheduling are true, they are completely unacceptable — to veterans, to me and to our dedicated VA employees," Shinseki said.

Though Nabors has kept a low public profile, he is one of Obama's closest advisers and has played key roles in the president's fiscal battles with congressional Republicans. Nabors, the son of an Army veteran, was appointed deputy chief of staff following Obama's re-election and previously served as the president's chief congressional liaison and deputy budget director. The review Nabors will oversee is separate from an inspector general's investigation into the Phoenix allegations that is already underway. Three executives at the hospital have been placed on leave while the allegations are being investigated. [Source: The Associated Press | Julie Pace | 14 May 2014 ++]

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## **VA Health Care Delays Update 02 ► Shinseki Mad as Hell**

Under withering criticism, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki told a Senate committee on 16 MAY that he was "mad as hell" about allegations of deadly waiting times and cover up at VA hospitals but he doesn't plan to resign. The retired Army general faced angry legislators and then aggressive journalists with a consistent message, arguing it was too soon to cast blame and vowing decisive action if an inspector general's investigation finds proof that VA workers manipulated waiting lists to cover up long delays for veterans seeking health care. Since November, CNN has uncovered delays in care at VA facilities across the country where numerous VA staffers have stepped forward to allege dangerously long wait times and efforts by agency officials to cover them up. Critics cite reports and complaints of excessive waits for care going back several years, with some calling for Shinseki's resignation or dismissal over the continuing and allegedly worsening problems.

At his first congressional hearing since reports drew national attention to the issue, Shinseki told the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee that he was reviewing all VA operations and also cooperating fully with the independent inspector general's investigation. "Any allegation, any adverse incident like this makes me mad as hell," he said, urging the legislators to wait for the investigation's finding before trying to resolve a complex set of problems. His assurance that "we will act" on any substantiated allegation angered senators from both parties who insisted the problems are real and need immediate action. Some pointed to a policy implemented by Shinseki that set a 14-day limit to provide care for veterans applying for the first time, saying a deadline they labeled as unworkable resulted in VA administrators devising ways to cover up months-long delays. Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC) questioned why Shinseki, who has been Obama's only veterans affairs secretary, failed to act sooner on problems long cited by veterans, the U.S. Government Accountability Office and others. "With the numerous GAO, IG and Office of Medical Inspector reports that have been released, VA senior leadership, including the secretary, should have been aware that VA was facing a national scheduling crisis," Burr said. "VA's leadership has either failed to connect the dots or failed to address this ongoing crisis, which has resulted in patient harm and patient death."

Shinseki labeled possible links between long waits and veteran deaths as allegations, and acting inspector general Richard Griffin said nothing his investigation has found so far proves a causal relationship. "It's one thing to be on a waiting list, and it's another thing to conclude that as a result of being on the waiting list, that's the cause death," he said. His assistant, Dr. John Daigh, said frequent delays occurred, as well as deficient quality standards that caused patient harm in some cases. "But to draw the conclusion between patient harm and death has so far been a tenuous connection," Daigh told the committee. However, the Dayton Daily News research showed that the VA has settled many cases that appear to be related to delays in treatment. A database of paid claims by the VA since 2001 includes 167 in which the words "delay in treatment" is used in the description. The VA paid out a total of \$36.4 million to settle those claims, either voluntarily or as part of a court action.

The hearing touched on deeper policy and political ramifications involving veterans affairs, with Republicans seeking to target Shinseki for failing to take action while some Democrats emphasized the increasing health care demands of veterans that lag behind funding levels. At the same time, Democrats also called for a thorough probe of what was going on and immediate changes to fix the problems. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) urged Shinseki to include law enforcement agencies in the current investigation because of "evidence, not allegations," that records were falsified in scheduling practices described by some as "cooking the books." Later, Griffin told the panel that federal prosecutors are working with his investigation. He said his office intends to complete its report no later than August.

When Committee Chairman Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) asked Shinseki if "cooking the books" was a problem in the VA health system, the secretary said: "I'm not aware, other than in a number of isolated cases" that there was evidence of that. Overall, Shinseki said, the VA system is good and he advised waiting for the inspector general's report before legislating solutions, a position backed by Sanders, an independent who caucuses with the Senate's majority Democrats. Shinseki has put three employees, including two senior executives, on administrative leave at the request of the Inspector General's office, but some members of Congress and the American Legion have called for his resignation or dismissal. Asked at one point if he should resign, Shinseki said caring for fellow American veterans was a mission, not a job, and he intended to continue working until he achieves his goal of improved care "or I am told by my commander in chief that my time has been served." In appointing White House Deputy Chief of Staff Rob Nabors to assist Shinseki in reviewing what happened, Obama said he asked Shinseki to review "practices to ensure better access to care." "While we get to the bottom of what happened in Phoenix, it's clear the VA needs to do more to ensure quality care for our veterans," Obama said. Shinseki said he welcomed the perspective of Nabors. Republicans went after Shinseki at the hearing and from the floor of the full chamber. Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell questioned if the VA problems were part of a "systematic, administration-wide crisis."



#### **VA Undersecretary Dr. Robert Petzel testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington**

On 16 MAY the Veterans Affairs Department's top health official abruptly resigned amid the exploding scandal over delays in veterans' care. VA Undersecretary for Health Dr. Robert Petzel was already scheduled to retire later this summer, but VA Secretary Eric Shinseki asked for his resignation early. In a statement, Shinseki thanked Petzel for his four decades of service at the department but said a change is needed. "As we know from the veteran community, most veterans are satisfied with the quality of their VA health care, but we must do more to improve timely access to that care," Shinseki said. "I am committed to strengthening veterans' trust and confidence in their VA [healthcare](#) system. VA officials would not say if any specific event triggered Petzel's forced resignation. On Thursday, [he and Shinseki testified](#) before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee about the recent care delay scandals. Earlier this month, Dr. Jeffrey Murawsky, director of VA's Great Lakes Health Care System, was nominated by the White House to replace Petzel. [Source: CNN | Tom Cohen & Chris Frates | May 16, 2014 ++]

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## VA Health Care Delays Update 03 ► Obama Mad As Hell

A memo sent to all Veterans Affairs Department health directors in 2010 warning them against using “gaming strategies” to improve scores on patient appointment reports has resurfaced as part of the ongoing probe of scheduling failures at some VA medical centers. William Schoenhard, deputy under secretary for health for operations and management, sent a detailed memo in April 2010 to the regional directors calling for “immediate action” to review scheduling practices to eliminate “inappropriate” strategies. Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., asked VA Secretary Eric Shinseki 15 MAY in a contentious Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee whether he was aware of the eight-page instruction, which details what practices schedulers should avoid. Shinseki said he had not seen the memo, which Military Times previously [reported on](#).

VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Robert Petzel, who resigned 16 MAY, just weeks before his scheduled retirement, told Isakson he knew of the memo and said the VA has worked “hard to root out inappropriate uses of the scheduling system and abuses.” “It’s absolutely inexcusable,” Petzel said. According to Shinseki, 6,000 employees were “involuntarily removed for poor performance or misconduct” in 2012 and 2013, including some senior executives. The dismissals, in the form of firings, retirements or transfers, were not all related to the scheduling problems. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said 19 MAY that President Obama supports Shinseki and agreed to transfer White House Deputy Chief of Staff Rob Nabors last week to VA to oversee an audit of scheduling practices in VA medical facilities. On 18 MAY, White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough described Obama as being “madder than hell” about reports of off-the-books appointment lists and patient deaths related to delays in care. Shinseki used a similar phrase Thursday in his Senate testimony. “Any allegation, any adverse incidents like this, makes me as — makes me mad as hell,” Shinseki said.

But Sen. Patty Murray (-WA), one of the lawmakers who quizzed Schoenhard in 2012 about questionable scheduling practices at VA medical centers, said 15 MAY she is disappointed in the repeated failures and believes “decisive action” is needed now. “The standard practice at VA seems to be to hide the truth in order to look good. That has got to change once and for all,” Murray said. The results of the VA-wide audit, led by Nabors, are expected within three weeks. The VA Inspector General anticipates wrapping up its investigation into the Phoenix allegations in August. Meanwhile, the summer could bring more heat to the department for its scheduling and referral practices: A GAO report on VA’s management of specialty care consults is expected to be released. GAO analyst Debra Draper said preliminary results have uncovered several problems, including delays in care, veterans not receiving needed care and system-wide closure of 1.5 million consults older than 90 days with no explanation as to why they were closed.

President Obama’s transition team was warned in 2008 that repeated audits showed the Veterans Affairs Department was misreporting wait times for medical treatment, including one audit revealing delays nearly 10 times worse than the department was officially acknowledging. The situation was so bad that the inspector general said it stopped trying to police the issue until the VA could prove its information was accurate — raising a red flag for the transition team, according to documents obtained by The Washington Times. The documents, obtained under a Freedom of Information Act request, show the problem extended back to at least the middle of the Bush administration but remained unresolved when Mr. Obama won election in 2008, and the VA was unable to say this week whether it ever took any steps to correct the problems. According to the documents, the VA inspector general told the Obama transition team of three audits dating back to 2005 that revealed significant problems with wait times and scheduling.

One of those audits showed an instance in which the department reported 2,900 veterans waited more than a month for medical appointments. The actual figure was closer to 28,000 veterans, according to the auditors. “Through a series of audits, the OIG has repeatedly demonstrated that [the Veterans Health Administration] reported wait times could not be relied upon and the electronic waiting lists reported wait times could not be relied upon and the electronic waiting lists Biden transition team. Wait times were one factor used to dole out bonuses to VA executives. The inspector general offered a number of recommendations to try to help the department establish accurate wait times, including calling for testing to gauge the times, and taking steps to ensure “informal waiting lists” weren’t being used. The VA rejected both recommendations in May 2008, when the Bush administration was in office. [Source: MilitaryTimes & The Washington Times | Patricia Kime & Jim McElhatton | May 20 & 21, 2014 ++]

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## **VA Health Care Delays Update 04 ► AFGE Blames Understaffing**

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) points to understaffing and inadequate funding of frontline services as main causes of long wait times for veterans seeking care at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities. The agency made promises and set standards that, in many locations, may have been impossible to fulfill, given the inadequate allocation of resources to frontline caregivers. In such an environment, instances of wait list gaming become almost inevitable.

AFGE members report shortages of providers and support personnel to provide timely access to veterans seeking care at most VHA facilities. The shortages in primary care and a number of specialties, including psychiatry, are directly linked to management’s manipulation of wait list data at many VA medical facilities. Scheduling clerks consistently report that they lack the sufficient provider slots to make timely appointments. But VA’s performance standards provide strong financial incentives for managers to hide underlying staffing and resource problems by scrubbing wait lists. “When we look deeper into this issue of extended wait times for veterans to receive an appointment, we have to recognize that understaffing is a major culprit,” said AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr. “All around the country, medical facilities are understaffed, with numerous frontline care positions going unfilled. How can the VA expect to keep up with the growing needs of our nation’s heroes if it doesn’t properly staff its facilities?”

Congress has made earnest efforts to provide the agency with the resources it needs to carry out its mission, but it has not gone far enough. According to the Independent Budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs, developed each year by leading veterans groups, funding levels will remain an estimated \$2 billion short in FY 2015 and approximately \$500 million short for FY 2016. Making matters worse, far too many precious dollars are spent on unnecessary layers of management and administration, rather than direct patient care. The growth of middle management positions within the agency has ballooned to unprecedented levels, from fewer than 300 in 1995 to more than 1,700 by a recent count, costing taxpayers \$203 million annually. “Understaffing has a strong, negative impact on employees’ ability to do their jobs,” said AFGE National VA Council President Alma Lee. “Our medical professionals are dealing with excessive caseloads and insufficient support staff. This is the reason why there are problems scheduling patient appointments. These dedicated public servants try to do more with less because the agency has not allocated the proper resources to needed services, but they cannot manufacture extra hours in a day. When they do try to speak out about staffing shortages and list manipulation, they are often faced with harsh management retaliation. It’s time for the agency to reexamine where its dollars are spent and put them where they are needed most: patient care.”



AFGE also points to the ever-increasing reliance on federal contractors as a key driver of growing costs at the VA. According to the Project on Government Oversight, the cost of hiring a contractor is 1.83 times more expensive on average than hiring a federal employee in the same position. Despite this vast cost-gap, the VHA system has spent billions on contract services in recent years, including a \$9.3 billion contract with private health providers for its Patient Centered Community Care (PC3) initiative. Rather than leaning on costly contractors as a band-aid, the VA needs to address the chronic understaffing issue head-on and hire the frontline care providers our veterans count on. “Our nation’s vets deserve world-class care, free of extended wait times and unnecessary bureaucracy,” said Cox. “We challenge the VA to keep its promise to our nation’s heroes. Let’s fill these vacant positions, recruit the best and the brightest to provide exceptional care and end the toxic culture that prevents employees from speaking out about patient care problems.” [Source: PRNewswire-USNewswire May 21, 2014 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 22 ► Memorial Day Message**

*After 38 years in The Army, I am now honored and privileged to serve as your Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA remains committed to providing the high quality benefits you have earned and deserve.*

*Allegations of VA employees’ misconduct have surfaced over the last several weeks, beginning with scheduling delays at the Phoenix VA Health Care System. As I testified before Congress on May 15, I take any allegations about patient safety or employee misconduct very seriously. The reports of Veterans’ negative experiences while seeking VA care are of great personal concern to me. I fully agree with President Obama’s statement on May 21, 2014: “If these allegations prove to be true, it is dishonorable, it is disgraceful....”*

*In response to these allegations at the Phoenix VA Medical Center and a number of other facilities, the VA Office of Inspector General is conducting a comprehensive, independent review. In addition to the IG’s independent review, I ordered the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to conduct a nationwide audit of all other major VA healthcare facilities to ensure understanding of, and compliance with, our appointment policy. That audit is being conducted now by more than two hundred senior VHA staff. All teams are independent of the facilities they are visiting. You and your families deserve to have full faith in your VA, and we intend to earn it every day.*

*As President Obama made clear to the American people May 21, 2014, “Every single day, there are people working in the VA who do outstanding work and put everything they’ve got into making sure that our Veterans get the care, benefits, and services that they need.”*

*I echo that praise and commend the hard work and dedication of the vast majority of our VA employees, many of whom are Veterans themselves. Every year, dedicated employees are prepared to provide care for over 8.9 million Veterans enrolled in VA healthcare. Every day, VHA conducts approximately 236,000 outpatient healthcare appointments—about 85 million last year.*

*Since 2009, we have enrolled two million more Veterans in high-quality VA healthcare, reduced Veterans’ homelessness by 24 percent, and provided Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits to more than one million student Veterans and eligible family members. We have opened up new presumptives for Veterans to receive long overdue care for exposure to Agent Orange, for combat-related PTS-D, and for Gulf War*

*illnesses. And, we have decreased the disability claims backlog by over 50 percent in the last 14 months. We will meet our goal of eliminating the claims backlog in 2015.*

*Every VA medical facility is accredited by The Joint Commission, an independent, non-profit organization that ensures the quality of U.S. healthcare through intensive evaluation of more than 20,000 healthcare organizations. In 2012, The Joint Commission, recognized 19 VA hospitals as top performers, and that number increased to 32 in 2013.*

*Since 2004, the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) survey has consistently shown that, on average, Veterans who use VA healthcare award our hospitals and clinics a higher customer satisfaction score than patients give private sector hospitals. When asked if they would use a VA medical center the next time they need inpatient or outpatient care, 96 percent and 95 percent of Veterans, respectively, indicated they would. Veterans across the Nation are receiving quality care from VA. We must encourage other Veterans to seek it.*

*Notwithstanding these accomplishments, VA will do even better. If any allegations under review are substantiated, we will act.*

*As we approach our observance of Memorial Day and its special significance to our Nation, VA is redoubling its efforts, with integrity and compassion, to earn your trust.*

*As President Obama said, Veterans have “done their duty, and they ask nothing more than that this country does ours—that we uphold our sacred trust to all who have served.”*

*And, we will.* [Source: VA Press Release May 23 2014 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 23 ► Burr War of Words w/Vet Organizations**

A highly bitter war of words has broken out between veterans organizations and the ranking member of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs amid the brewing controversy over health care for former servicemen and servicewomen. Late Friday afternoon (23 MAY) before the Memorial Day weekend, Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.) penned an “open letter to America’s Veterans” in which he took several veterans service groups to task for being insufficiently critical of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki. Burr accused the groups (with the exception of the American Legion) of being more invested in maintaining access to the secretary than with fixing a troubled health care system. He questioned why they haven’t called for a leadership change at the VA, and pointedly charged the groups’ leaders with not caring about the health and well-being of their members.

Burr’s letter was in response to the testimony that Shinseki and seven of these veteran service organizations (VSO) had given before his committee the week prior, concerning revelations and allegations of long wait times, bureaucratic malfeasance and insufficient care at the VA. Not surprisingly, leaders at the veterans groups Burr named were not pleased with the letter. In their own letter, Veterans of Foreign Wars responded to Burr by calling his letter a “monumental cheap-shot” and labeling it “one of the most dishonorable and grossly inappropriate acts that we’ve witnessed in more than forty years of involvement with the veteran community.” If the tone wasn’t clear, the group added that Burr’s conduct and allegations were “ugly and mean-spirited in every sense of the words and profoundly wrong, both logically and

morally,” in addition to breaching “the standards of the United States Senate.” The Veterans of Foreign Wars letter was by no means the only forceful reply.

- Paralyzed Veterans of America wrote Burr on Saturday telling him that he “should be ashamed” of himself. His letter, they added, “clearly displays why the vast majority of the American public puts no faith in their elected officials to do what is right for this country.”
- Disabled American Veterans offered their own response that under normal circumstances would seem harsh, but compared to the others came off as diplomatic. “Regrettably,” the group wrote on its website, “Senator Burr shows no interest in pursuing serious policy solutions, preferring instead to launch cheap political attacks on the integrity of leaders of veterans organizations that do not agree with him.”

It is not uncommon for politicians and outside groups to get into heated battles over policy; certainly less so when (like now) there is a brewing scandal over an issue as critical as health care for veterans. But it is rare that the back-and-forth becomes so rancorous so quickly. And it doesn’t necessarily bode well for the prospects of emerging from the current crisis surrounding the VA with a comprehensive, agreed-upon set of reforms. What rankled the groups, a source close to one of them said, was not just that Burr questioned their motives on the eve of Memorial Day. It was also that Burr sent the letter after sparsely attending the hearings he found so offensive, and not raising concerns about the groups’ positions on the issue while he was there. Of the seven groups that testified before Burr’s committee, the three above are the only ones to have responded so far. Burr praised the American Legion in his open letter for calling on Shinseki to resign, so it stands to reason that it won’t be issuing a response. The other three groups that have not weighed in so far are Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Student Veterans of America and Vietnam Veterans of America. The letters can be seen at:

- [http://www.burr.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressOffice.PressReleases&ContentRecord\\_id=aa65233d-d544-d911-5730-974ef9952220](http://www.burr.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressOffice.PressReleases&ContentRecord_id=aa65233d-d544-d911-5730-974ef9952220) (Senator Burr’s letter).
- [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/25/richard-burr-veterans\\_n\\_5389296.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/25/richard-burr-veterans_n_5389296.html) (VFW and PVA letter responses).

[Source: Huff Post | Sam Stein | May 26, 2014 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 24 ► Shinseki Replaced by Slone Gibson**

Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki apologized in public and then resigned in the privacy of the White House on Friday, driven from office by a mushrooming scandal over the agency’s health care system that serves millions of the nation’s former warriors. President Barack Obama said he accepted the resignation “with considerable regret,” and appointed Slone Gibson, the agency’s No. 2 official, as temporary secretary. Obama also said that the Justice Department would determine if any illegality had occurred, and that a top White House aide who has been detailed to the Veterans Affairs Department would remain there for the time being,

As for Shinseki, Obama said, “I regret that he has to resign under these circumstances.” He lavished praise on the Vietnam veteran and former Army chief of staff for his decades of service. He said the Cabinet officer had told him “he does not want to be a distraction” from the need to repair the agency, a task the president said pointedly could well require Congress to approve additional money. A lifetime of service, in uniform and out, wasn’t enough to save Shinseki’s career, though, after agency investigators

reported widespread problems in its sprawling hospital system and reported that 1,700 veterans seeking treatment at the Phoenix facility alone were consigned to limbo because they had never been added to official wait lists. In the 36 hours that followed the findings on Wednesday, Democrats in tough re-election races joined Republicans in clamoring for Shinseki's resignation.



In an appearance before a veterans group before he met with Obama, Shinseki said, "I extend an apology to the people whom I care most deeply about — that's the veterans of this great country — to their families and loved ones, who I have been honored to serve for over five years now. It's the calling of a lifetime." He called the problems outlined in the report "totally unacceptable" and a "breach of trust" that he found indefensible. He announced he would take a series of steps to respond, including ousting senior officials at the troubled Phoenix health care facility. He concurred with the report's conclusion that the problems extended throughout the VA's 1,700 health care facilities nationwide, and he said that "I was too trusting of some" in the VA system.

Obama said Shinseki told him the agency needs new leadership and that he didn't want to be a distraction. "I agree. We don't have time for distractions. We need to fix the problem." Republicans in Congress said a resignation alone wasn't enough to solve problems at an agency that has been struggling to keep up with a huge demand for its services — some 9 million enrolled now compared to 8 million in 2008. The influx comes from returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, aging Vietnam War vets who now have more health problems, a move by Congress to expand the number of those eligible for care and the migration of veterans to the VA during the last recession after they lost their jobs or switched to the VA when their private insurance became more expensive. "What's still needed is an agreement by the president and his allies in Congress to join Republicans in legislation that would help to fix this system that has so failed our veterans," said Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.



## VA Deputy Secretary Sloan D. Gibson will take over

Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), who chairs the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said there "will be no honeymoon" period for the new acting secretary and added that his panel's investigation will continue. Gibson, the president's choice to take over the agency at least temporarily, has held the No. 2 post since February. He was formerly president and chief executive officer of the USO, the nonprofit organization that provides programs and services to U.S. troops and their families. Gibson is the son of an Army Air Corpsman who served in World War II and grandson of a World War I Army infantryman. Obama said an audit submitted by Shinseki shows that the problems are not limited to a few facilities but affect many across the country. "It is totally unacceptable," Obama said. "Our vets deserve the best; they've earned it." The IG reported that as many as 41 other hospitals in the vast VA medical system have similar problems. The VA IG has not completed its investigation over allegations that the secret wait lists at Phoenix led to as many as 40 untimely deaths. [Source: AP | Julie Pace and Pauline Jelinek | May 30, 2014 ++]

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## VA Disputed Claims Update 15 ► Ronald McNutt | 24 Years

Three weeks before 39-year-old Ronald McNutt died of cancer in 1987, he began talking about his military service in Vietnam with his wife, Bettye. The former soldier recalled swimming in rivers contaminated with runoff from Agent Orange and cooking on makeshift grills cobbled from the drums that had held the toxic herbicide. Bettye McNutt had never heard of Agent Orange, and she didn't understand why Ronald was sharing these stories. But months after he passed away, she began digging into the subject, and armed with research — and a diary detailing her husband's war service — she filed a service-related dependency and indemnity compensation claim. That was May 19, 1990. On May 7, 2014, as McNutt was driving near her Olive Branch, Mississippi, home, she got a call from her attorney, who had startling news: After seven denials and appeals, having been told by Veterans Affairs Department officials that her husband's cancer was not caused by Agent Orange and 24 years of struggling to provide for herself and the couple's only son, the VA Board of Veterans Appeals had approved her claim.



**Army infantryman Ronald McNutt, shown during his Vietnam deployment in 1968-69, died at age 39 of cancer caused by Agent Orange.**

When she was read the board's conclusion, that Ronald McNutt's condition was "caused directly, not presumptively, by exposure to Agent Orange," she wept. "When I think of all the things I went through ... I finally feel relief. I've been in survival mode for so long, it's going to take me a while for it to sink in," Bettye McNutt said. McNutt's case is likely not the longest pending veteran's claim, but the widow, who testified last December before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee about VA's disability claims backlog, said she came forward to call attention to long-standing problems with the claims system.

"Dealing with the VA is a game of nerves," McNutt said. "What I'd like to say to others is: Don't accept the denial. Keep on". McNutt said that after her husband's death, her son suffered from severe emotional grief and nightmares and they struggled for years in poverty, sometimes going without power or heat because she couldn't pay the bills. She said she often relied on the kindness of friends to make sure she and her son had food. Now she is set to receive compensation from VA-\$1,000 for each of the 288 months that have passed since she filed her initial claim in 1990.

She said the fight was about justice for her own family as well as other Agent Orange victims. But she candidly acknowledges that she's also looking forward to no longer worrying about whether she will lose her job. "I can drive a car that has less than 250,000 miles and I can go home without worrying about having the utilities cut off," said McNutt, now 69. She waged much of her claims fight on her own, but decided to seek the help of an attorney about four years ago. Attorney Glenn Bergmann said after the ruling it had been "an honor" to help McNutt. "VA finally agreed with the clear medical evidence that toxic exposure to Agent Orange in 1968 and 1969, while serving in the Army in Vietnam caused Ronald McNutt's tragic and early death from colon cancer," Bergmann said. "This case should serve as an example to other veterans and survivors to never give up the fight." In a response to questions on the case, VA spokeswoman Meagan Lutz cited a speech President Abraham Lincoln gave in 1865. "Lincoln delivered his prescription for our nations' recovery, including, 'to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan....' Lincoln's words became the VA's official motto in 1959," Lutz said. In March, the VA's claims backlog hovered around 368,000 cases, down from a peak of 611,000 in late March 2013. [Source: NavyTimes | Patricia Kime | Jun 2, 2014 ++]

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## **Non-VA Facility Care Update 01 ► VA to Allow More**

More veterans are being allowed to obtain health care at private hospitals and clinics in an effort to improve their treatment following allegations of falsified records and delays in treatment. In a statement issued 24 MAY, Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki also said VA facilities are enhancing capacity of their clinics so veterans can get care sooner. In cases where officials cannot expand capacity at VA centers, the Department of Veterans Affairs is "increasing the care we acquire in the community through non-VA care," Shinseki said. The directive announced Saturday should make it easier for veterans to get medical care at non-VA facilities, according to an agency spokeswoman. The VA spent about \$4.8 billion last year on medical care at non-VA hospitals and clinics, spokeswoman Victoria Dillon said. That amounts to about 10 percent of health care costs for the Veterans Health Administration, the agency's health care arm. It was not clear how much the new initiative would cost, Dillon said.

Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, welcomed Shinseki's announcement, but questioned why it took so long. Reports about the veterans at the Phoenix hospital surfaced more than a month ago. "It appears the department is finally starting to take concrete steps to address the problem," Miller said Saturday, calling the directive "a welcome change from the department's previous approach, which was to wait months for the results of yet another investigation into a problem we already know exists." Miller has accused Shinseki and President Barack Obama of focusing on internal reviews while "overlooking VA's very real, very deadly and very well-documented delays-in-care problem." Miller has pledged to introduce legislation that would give any veteran who is unable to obtain a VA appointment within 30 days the option to receive non-VA care at the department's expense. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) has called for the VA to allow more veterans to receive medical care at private hospitals. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said this past week that she was open to the idea of medical



care at private hospitals. She said it was unacceptable to have a backlog of patients waiting for permission to go to a federally qualified clinic. [Source: AP | Matthew Daly | May 24, 2014 ++]

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## **GI Bill Update 173 ► Wyoming In-State Tuition**

A new state law allows the University of Wyoming (UW) to offer in-state tuition to qualified military veteran students.

To qualify for the new benefit, nonresident military veteran students must meet the following criteria:

- 1) Be a veteran of the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps or Coast Guard; U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Corps; and National Guard or any reserve or auxiliary component.
- 2) Apply to attend UW within one year of honorable discharge from military service;
- 3) Provide evidence of taking steps to establish Wyoming residency.

For questions about the new in-state residency qualifications or requirements, contact Marty Martinez, UW Veterans Services Center (VSC) project coordinator, (307) 766-6909 or email [mmarti77@uwyo.edu](mailto:mmarti77@uwyo.edu). [Source: NAUS Weekly Update May 23, 2014 ++]

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## **PTSD Update 167 ► Vets Face Ultimatum: Pills or Pot**

Military veterans are increasingly able to turn legally to marijuana to treat pain and the symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome. But disclosing their marijuana use to the Department of Veterans Affairs sometimes comes with a price. Veterans who tell the VA about participating in a state marijuana program say they have been forced to choose between their prescription narcotic painkillers — such as Vicodin, Oxycontin and Percocet — or marijuana, said Michael Krawitz, president of Veterans for Medical Marijuana Access. Marijuana alone "certainly is not a replacement for somebody's narcotic pain medication," Krawitz said. "Most veterans would see quite a dramatic difference." Although VA doctors cannot recommend marijuana as medicine to their patients, the VA does not explicitly ban patients from participating in state marijuana programs.

Per VA's policy, a veteran who reports marijuana use to their doctor cannot have his or her VA benefits taken away. But patients can have their treatments "modified." At the VA, patients who get narcotic painkillers must sign what's called an opioid pain care agreement. As part of the agreement, the patient consents to a urine, saliva or blood test to "make sure your opioids get into your body," according to a copy of the agreement provided by the VA. These tests also ensure the patient is not abusing or overdosing on the drugs, as well as taking the right amount and not giving the pills to others, according to an e-mail from the VA. These tests can also identify when a patient is using marijuana. The VA declined to make someone available for an interview for this story. In e-mailed responses, VA spokeswoman Gina Jackson said decisions about marijuana and prescriptions are made on an individual basis.

Nationwide, 21 states and Washington, D.C., have legalized medical marijuana. It's unclear how many vets are using medicinal pot. The VA does not track the number of patients who have reported medical marijuana use, according to Jackson. And whatever numbers would be reported to VA do not count the many who simply don't tell their VA doctors, Krawitz said. Vets choose marijuana over narcotics When

given the choice between their prescription painkillers and marijuana, many vets choose marijuana, Krawitz said. One such patient is Ryan Begin, a Marine who lives in Maine, where medical marijuana is legal. "It was pills or pot, but I can't do both," Begin said he was told by VA. Begin suffered an arm injury during a 2004 deployment in Iraq. When he returned home, Begin said he was given a "big bag of pills" and told to go home and feel better. But on the pills, Begin said he was jittery, unpredictable and reactive. "People feared me when I was on the pills," he said. Begin said he went "cold turkey" off the pills and managed to transition to marijuana without too much trouble because he had a strong enough strain of the plant. He now grows his own marijuana plants. He also uses tinctures and edibles. He said the marijuana slows him down enough so he can think and get through the day.

The medical community's stance on medical marijuana is widely varied. The American Medical Association does not endorse state medical marijuana programs, but also is calling on more controlled studies of marijuana. AMA has also urged the federal government to review marijuana's categorization as a Schedule 1 drug, the most dangerous and addictive type of drug, considered to have no medical use. For Dr. Jeff Goldsmith, incoming president of the American Society of Addiction Medicine, marijuana is not a medicine because it has not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration and therefore has not met the standards of other approved drugs. "It's just an illegal drug that people like to use," Goldsmith said. But Dr. Dustin Sulak, whose patients include Begin and other veterans, said marijuana has been life-changing for his patients. In his opinion, marijuana is a safer option: People die from opiate overdoses, but they don't overdose from marijuana, he said. "It's an herb," Sulak said. "It should be next to St. Johns wort and kava in the health food store."

Begin has become a champion for medical marijuana access for veterans. But he says it's tough to find vets who will speak publicly about marijuana. There's still a stigma around marijuana use. "This is something I believe so strongly in that I know it works and I know other people can benefit from it," Begin said. "I'll do just about anything if it means people will have access to the same things I do." [Source: USA Today | Jolie Lee | May 23, 2014 ++]

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## **VAMC Hines IL Update 01 ► Secret Waiting Lists Allegation**

Federal auditors visited the Edward Hines Jr. Veterans Affairs Hospital near Maywood on 14 MAY amid allegations by a social worker that patients at Hines were kept on "secret waiting lists" so executives could collect bonuses linked to meeting standards for speedy treatment. Germaine Clarno, president of the American Federation of Government Employees VA Local 781, first told CBS News in a report that aired 13 MAY that "employees are coming to me from all over the hospital" with stories about secret waiting lists. "I've seen these lists," Clarno said in an interview with the Chicago Tribune. "It just became regular, normal business." In a statement given to the Tribune, Hines Director Joan Ricard said she had "received no evidence or specific facts about data manipulation" at the hospital.



**5000 South 5th Avenue, Hines, IL 60141 Tel: 708-202-8387**

Clarno's account followed news reports that patients at a VA hospital in Phoenix were denied treatment while staff kept them on secret waiting lists for months. At some point, those reports said, veterans were transferred to official waiting lists where their purported wait times aligned with department goals. The director of the Arizona facility, a former Hines executive, has since been placed on leave. Hines, a 471-bed facility in an unincorporated area of western Cook County, served more than 54,000 veterans in a recent year. Hospital spokeswoman Charity Hardison said Wednesday's visit by VA auditors is part of a nationwide review of veterans' access to care that was ordered by Shinseki. Ricard said in her statement that she immediately investigated last week when Clarno raised concerns that a spreadsheet mentioned in an internal email was evidence of a separate waiting list for mental health treatment. Ricard said she found that the spreadsheet in question was "a performance improvement tool" and not a separate wait list.

Clarno declined to provide documents backing her claims to the Tribune, saying that such disclosures could lead to retaliation against hospital workers. Clarno has previously criticized VA administration and the treatment of employees at Hines. Central to the accusations of secret lists is that VA executives receive bonuses based in part on how quickly patients are seen. But J. David Cox Sr., the national president of Clarno's union, said making secret lists leads to poorer treatment for veterans and cloaks broader problems about staffing levels. "If you can't get all your work done," Cox said, "it's important to say, 'These are the obstacles,' not just create fake waiting lists. That's just wrong. Totally wrong." In a statement, U.S. Sen. Mark Kirk said he was troubled by the accusations of secret lists at Hines and called for the Department of Veterans Affairs to investigate the hospital. "I am concerned about credible reports of secret wait lists at Hines VA, similar to the lists used in Phoenix," said Kirk, himself a veteran. "The Inspector General should immediately broaden its investigation to include Hines VA and to deliver a swift and immediate report." [Source: Chicago Tribune | Mitch Smith | May 14, 2014 ++]

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## **VAMC Seattle WA ► Cliff Douglass Wrongful Death Lawsuit**

Week after week, Cliff Douglass saw the cancerous spot on his forehead swell until it hurt to the touch. He had a biopsy from VA Puget Sound confirming it was melanoma and instructions to wait for his caregivers to connect him with a specialist at the University of Washington to remove the cancer. They didn't make the call. The cancer spread. His family now is suing the VA, charging that the inaction of his care providers diminished his chances of beating the melanoma that caused his death in November 2012. His sister, who cared for Douglass in his last days, is pressing the case in part because of reports she has heard from around the country of veterans dying while waiting for care at VA hospitals. "This is not really about the money; it's about other people dying," said Connie Olberg of Sammamish.



**Cliff Douglass and sister Connie Olberg**

False reporting has not been documented at the VA hospitals in Seattle or at American Lake, but they're just as impacted by the pressures of dramatic growth since the beginning of the war in Afghanistan. The VA paid out \$5.9 million in wrongful death settlements between 2001 and 2011, according to data obtained by the Center for Investigative Reporting. Four of the 14 VA Puget Sound cases documented by the center cited delays in treatment. The News Tribune has filed a Freedom of Information Act request for more recent records. The VA last year rejected Olberg's initial claim after her brother's death. Olberg filed the lawsuit in DEC 2013 with Tacoma attorney Jessica Holman Duthie in the U.S. District Court for Western Washington. In court documents, the VA disputed Olberg's claim. Assistant U.S. Attorney Patrick Gugin wrote that the case should be dismissed and that any negligence that contributed to Douglass's death was not the fault of his caregivers at the VA.

Douglass grew up in Issaquah and served in the Army just after the Vietnam War. He came home to the Puget Sound and worked for Boeing as a machinist, but struggled with substance abuse for much of his working life. Those problems came to a head and he lost his job at Boeing in the early 2000s. He got clean and became a mentor to others who struggled to end addictions, Olberg said. She didn't realize the extent of his impact on others until his funeral. "Person after person after person talked about that," she said. "He got beyond the formalities. That was who my brother was. He wasn't a shallow person."

Douglass's medical records show he was diagnosed with melanoma in May 2011. At the time, he was receiving medication to help him recover from a liver transplant. Organ transplant recipients face an elevated risk of cancer, according to the National Institute of Health. His medication also could have made him more vulnerable to cancer, his family was told. He was instructed to wait for the VA to arrange his surgery at the UW, and he grew frustrated as the weeks passed with no appointment. In August 2011, Douglass made the call himself and arranged a surgery for the following month. "I still wouldn't be scheduled if I hadn't called the university," he vented to his VA doctor in an August 2011 visit, according to notes from his appointment.

During his surgery, doctors discovered the cancer had spread down his face and throughout his body. He wasted away over the following year. A video taken two weeks before his death shows him struggling to eat and drink without spilling. Olberg felt her brother was robbed after working so hard to get healthy and sober. "Here's a man who fought so hard to overcome a tough situation in his life and he succeeded and then he gets liver cancer. Then he fought so hard to overcome that, and he succeeded. And he was helping people. He was such a good person," Olberg said. [Source: The News Tribune | Adam Ashton | May 21, 2014 ++]

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## **VAMC Phoenix AZ Update 04 ► 1700+ Vets Left off Wait Lists**

More than 1,700 veterans were left off the official wait list for a primary care appointment at the Veterans Affairs Phoenix medical center, a purposeful omission that allowed hospital administrators to receive performance bonuses, the VA's inspector general has found. In an interim report into allegations of secret wait lists and subsequent patient deaths at the Phoenix VA facility, the department's top investigator found "serious conditions at the Phoenix Health Care System," including 1,400 veterans who did not have appointments but were on the facility's electronic waiting list, as well as the 1,700 who have yet to be entered into the system. "Since multiple lists we found were something other than the official electronic wait list, these additional lists may be the basis for allegations of creating 'secret' wait lists," acting VA Inspector General Robert Griffin wrote. Griffin's report did not include information on his office's

investigation into whether the scheduling issues delayed diagnosis or care, or led to deaths. He said the review needed to include a variety of records, such as VA and non-VA medical records, death certificates and autopsy results and his office has issued subpoenas where needed for the information.

For the initial investigation, the VA IG office reviewed a statistical sample of 226 appointments at Phoenix and found that the veterans waited an average of 115 days for their first primary care appointment, with 84 percent waiting more than 14 days. VA national data showed these veterans waited on average 24 days for their first primary care appointment and only 43 percent waited more than 14 days. “We recommend the VA secretary initiate a nationwide review of veterans on wait lists to ensure that veterans are seen in an appropriate time, given their clinical condition,” Griffin wrote. He added that the IG will hand over the 1,700 names so VA can expedite their appointments. “These veterans were and continue to be at risk of being forgotten or lost in Phoenix’s convoluted scheduling process,” Griffin said. The preliminary findings are the first admission from federal officials that thousands of veterans were left waiting for medical care even as hospital administrators reported no problems finding appointments for their patients. The report is likely to renew calls for swift action against Phoenix officials for covering up care delay problems, as well as accountability for officials higher up in VA. In the report, investigators said they do not believe the problem is in only Arizona. “We are finding that inappropriate scheduling practices are a systemic problem nationwide,” they wrote.

Following release of the interim report, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki issued a statement describing the findings as reprehensible and said the department will aggressively and fully implement the remaining OIG recommendations. “I am directing that the Phoenix VA Health Care System immediately triage each of the 1,700 Veterans identified by the OIG to bring them timely care,” Shinseki said. He added that he does not plan to take further personnel actions against hospital administrators — three of whom were placed on administrative leave in April after news of the allegations broke — at the VA IG’s request. The findings prompted several lawmakers to weigh in at a 28 MAY hearing, including Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) who called for VA Secretary Eric Shinseki’s resignation and urged the Obama Administration to launch a criminal probe. Miller previously had said he would wait for the IG’s findings before calling for senior leadership to step down. “Shinseki is a good man who has served his country honorably, but he has failed to get VA’s health care system in order despite repeated and frequent warnings from Congress, the Government Accountability Office and the IG,” Miller said. “It’s time for him to go.” Miller said Attorney General Eric Holder should undertake a criminal investigation into the issues. His call for Justice Department involvement follows similar requests from Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-IL). [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime & Leo Shane | May 28, 2014 ++]

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## **VA Loans ► Financial Preparation Do’s & Don’ts**

Buying a home is usually the largest purchase any individual will make in his or her lifetime, and it can be a decision overwhelmed by questions and confusions. Conventional lending programs typically make the loan application process a daunting one, and leave many interested borrowers digging through paperwork on their own. Luckily for veterans, the [VA home loan program](#) exists to make home buying more accessible. Through the VA home loan program, preparing to become a homebuyer doesn’t have to be overwhelming. By adhering to the following tips, veterans can become knowledgeable and empowered borrowers allowing them to increase their odds of achieving homeownership affordably:

- **Do Repair Your Credit.** The number one reason applicants are denied home loans is because they have a [low credit score and poor credit history](#). Before seeking pre-approval or applying for a home loan, pull a credit report on yourself. If your credit score isn't above 620, take the time to pay off lines of credit and speak with former creditors to see if they will remove delinquent payments from your report. Although waiting 6 months to a year to rebuild your credit may seem like a long time, the wait is well worth it when you get the approval you want along with great interest rates and loan terms.
- **Do Not Ignore Your Credit Once it's Repaired.** Once your credit score is where you want it, you need to then take the time to protect it. Before applying for a home loan you need to avoid pulling out additional lines of credit, missing payments, or having others do major credit inquiries. All of these actions could quickly lower your credit score, leaving you back at square one.
- **Do Start Saving.** A VA loan may not require a down payment, but that doesn't mean that investing in a home won't come with its costs. Homes require regular general maintenance and annual property tax, and both can become expensive. To make sure that your potential home doesn't become a strain on your monthly budget, it's always best to [start saving prior to purchasing a home](#).
- **Do Not Set Your Sites on a Rundown Property.** Homebuyers are usually interested in buying a property in need of renovations because they believe that they can either get more bang for their buck or because they think they can flip and sell the property. While a rundown property may offer the opportunity to do either, VA loans are rarely suitable for homes in need of dire repair.
- **Do Speak with VA Professionals.** Both VA loan specialists and real estate agents with VA home experience can offer a plethora of knowledge to any person interested in a VA home loan. If you have questions about the VA loan application process, [contact a VA loan specialist](#). If you have questions concerning eligible properties or the VA buying experience, contact a real estate agent with VA home experience.
- **Do Not Avoid Getting Organized.** Spending an afternoon sifting through paperwork is hardly anyone's idea of fun. However, having all of your paperwork ready and organized before applying for a VA home loan can make the process less stressful and run more quickly. So prior to application, make sure you have your Certificate of Eligibility, income taxes, and consistent paystubs readily available.
- **Do Get a Pre-Approval Letter.** Getting a pre-approval letter does more than just let you know that you pre-qualify for a loan; it gives you a budget. This budget lets you know what you can and can't afford which will help you avoid falling in love with homes out of your budget, and the letter will also let sellers know that you are serious making them more inclined to do business with you.

[Source: Veteran News | Donnie LaCurhan | 10 Mar 2014 ++]

**\*Vets\***





## Concerned Veterans for America ► Disturbing New Force

**Note:** The following Tom Philpott editorial on information sourced from CVA, an organization who poses as a vet advocacy group, is enlightening and a breath of fresh air. His comments on the darkening attacks on VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and the DVA are well taken and bring an element of reason to the present outcry over delayed health care. Although I seldom make editorial comments in the Bulletin, I wholeheartedly support his views on this matter and urge all veterans to take a step back and let the system determine the truth of what really has occurred. Should we be concerned - YES. Should we give up on the DVA - NO! **Editor/Publisher RAO Bulletin**

This month marks 20 years of writing Military Update. I've used it three times to editorialize about news events including President Clinton's sex scandal while commander in chief and President George W. Bush's worrisome plan to invade Iraq a month before it happened. This week I do so again to shed light on a disturbing new force that is confusing veterans and darkening attacks on the Department of Veterans Affairs during the current health appointments scandal. I refer to a well-funded group called Concerned Veterans for America (CVA).



**Tom Philpott**

So far one major veterans' organization, The American Legion, has called on VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to resign, following a CNN report that 40 veterans might have died awaiting VA health care in Phoenix where appointment dates perhaps were fudged to make wait times look shorter. I can't claim to have covered VA medical appointments and wait times with enough depth or regularity to know if there's gross mismanagement and deceptive bookkeeping at some or many VA facilities. That will be verified, or not, by independent audits and criminal investigations now underway. Most veterans' groups continue to support Shinseki. They say they know him well enough to believe he'll address any abuses uncovered and will work to protect more veterans from harm. And we'll see. But in my 37 years covering veterans' issues, I have never seen veteran issues used more cynically or politicized more thoroughly than during the past several years. At times the intent seems to be to shake trust in government generally rather than to address veterans' needs.

In the thick of this is Concerned Veterans for America, posing as a vet advocacy group and being rewarded for it. CVA press releases usually are partisan attacks. Its spokesman, Pete Hegseth, an Iraq war vet and Republican who ran for a U.S. Senate in 2012, is quoted often by major news outlets without mention of press reports associating CVA with the Koch brothers, libertarian billionaires who create public interest groups to oppose big government. That's fine. That's protected speech. A CVA spokesman told me last year it won't reveal donor information. What should upset vets is the use of select facts about VA and its programs to reinforce fears rather than give reliable information. Last week a CVA press release hit a new low in purporting to document "lies" Shinseki told in congressional testimony, dropping any veil of respect for a decorated, combat-disabled soldier with a long and stellar career. It is no coincidence only

Republicans, including Rep. Jeff Miller (Fla.) and Sen. Richard Burr (N.C.), participate in CVA events. They should reconsider. Though CVA sponsors an occasional informative forum in Washington D.C., it produces no careful analyses of what ails VA. The goal seems to be to attack, relentlessly, while a Democrat holds the White House.

Traditional vet groups are alarmed by the rising profile CVA has on cable news programs and in newspapers where informed opinions on chronic claim backlogs and care delays should rule. Instead, there's heated rhetoric that stirs dissent and attempts to turn the public against a department the CVA routinely portrays always as too costly and too ineffective. Joseph Violante, national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans, a well-informed and thoughtful advocate for vets over decades, recalls being invited to react to Hegseth's critique of VA on a talk radio program in Wisconsin. He was upset to hear Hegseth contend VA budgets continue to climb despite "four million fewer veterans" than a decade ago. "I said, 'Yea, there are probably four million fewer. But they are not all in VA health care'" Violante said. "If you look at health care numbers on unique patients, it hasn't changed much the past decade [at almost six million being treated]. Enrollment has gone up to about nine million. "But to throw stuff out like that shows they don't understand what the hell they are talking about. They mix the claims process with the healthcare process and the backlog and wait lists like they are one thing. Every time I see [CVA on TV or in print] the hair on the back of my neck just stands up."

Long-time advocates like Violante worry that CVA's arguments, over time, will give politicians cover to cut VA funding severely or even to dismantle much of the VA health care system. "They have these people out there saying, 'We're giving VA too much. We're giving the Defense Department too much.' Their whole purpose is to give support to anyone who wants to cut government, particularly for veterans." The theme that VA is too costly and ineffective is critical to a message of doubt in government programs. If the vast VA bureaucracy can't satisfy your medical needs, isn't it best to get care from the private sector? DAV, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars want the VA preserved for its expertise and resources in caring for vets. They fear bills to supplement the VA care by sending vets into the private sector for care nearer to home is a first step toward watering down VA quality of care.

Shinseki concedes his controversial decisions to make ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's disease and B-cell leukemia service-related conditions for anyone who stepped foot in Vietnam helped to create the tsunami of claims and health care obligations that has overwhelmed VA, even as hundreds of thousands of vets came home from long, recent wars. On his watch VA also simplified the process for filing post-traumatic stress disorder claims from veterans of all wars, made compensable more illnesses for 1990-91 Gulf War veterans exposed to in-theater toxins, and launched an aggressive outreach to explain to vets potential disabilities. That's why the typical claim today has a dozen compensable conditions to be reviewed versus three to four in past wars. Congress must be aggressive in its oversight of VA health care delays and abuses. But politicians also need to take a hard look at why VA claims and health care have been overwhelmed, and avoid the bitter sound bite wars that give a group like CVA an equal voice with truly pro-vet advocates. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Tom Philpott | May 23, 2014 ++]

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## **Vet Sick Leave Bank ► Disabled Federal Employees**

Veterans and the management of the Veterans Affairs Department have been front and center these last few weeks because of the controversy over reports of secret waiting lists for medical appointments, and the recent deaths of vets who were waiting for care. The spotlight on the quality of veterans' care might be

new, but problems with access to that care are not. Of the many ideas and bills circulating in Washington now related to veterans, at least one seems relatively straightforward and potentially bipartisan. The Federal Managers Association is pushing Congress and the Obama administration to come up with a legislative or executive fix to help new federal employees who also are disabled veterans attend their mandatory medical appointments without dipping into their sick leave, or having to take leave without pay to get care.

Full-time federal workers in their first year on the job have a zero sick leave balance when they start, accruing four hours of such leave per pay period. That amounts to a balance of 104 hours at the end of their first year. But disabled vets, who must attend regular medical appointments to take care of their health, but also to continue receiving their veterans' benefits, quickly burn up their sick leave, according to FMA. So the organization wants to work with Congress and the Office of Personnel Management on coming up with a solution: creating a sick-leave bank specifically for disabled vets who are first-year federal employees to be used for medical treatment related to their service-connected disability. "While federal employees can be advanced leave and banks are available, it often does not cover what is needed to meet these medical requirements for chronic disabilities and they are forced to take leave without pay," FMA said in an issue brief on its 2014 legislative recommendations. Many vets also have to travel far to reach the nearest VA facility to receive treatment, which eats up leave time, FMA pointed out. Twenty-one percent of disabled vets applied for disability compensation benefits; of that number, 73 percent received a disability rating from VA, according to VA's 2012 National Survey of Veterans. [Source: GovExc.com | Kellie Lunney | May 28, 2014 ++]

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## **WWII Submariners Update 01** ► **Missouri Man Chronicles Losses**

Serving aboard an American submarine was one of the most dangerous assignments in World War II, with nearly 1 in 5 crew members losing their lives somewhere in the ocean depths. Paul Wittmer of suburban St. Louis has spent years working to ensure that those men — more than 3,600 sailors — are remembered, including a book that has been years in the making. Wittmer, a submarine veteran who turned 90 last week, has conducted research for eight years at the National Archives at St. Louis, which houses millions of military personnel records. He compiled biographical information on every man lost aboard a submarine during the war. The research fills six volumes. The painstaking effort even helped correct history. The Navy previously listed 3,505 submarine officers and sailors lost on 57 subs downed during World War II. Wittmer calculated a larger number — 3,628.



**Paul Wittmer**

The duty was highly risky, Wittmer said, and about 20,000 men volunteered. "When you go on a patrol, you are essentially alone," Wittmer said. "You didn't have any support group, and you went deep into the enemy harbor. You rescued people. You plotted enemy mine fields. That was a very nasty business." Wittmer has been active in submarine veteran organizations, helping to get monuments erected to honor the dead. For years, he wanted to compile their life history in a book, but much of the personnel information wasn't available to the public. Wittmer tried Freedom of Information requests, but to no avail. In 2007, the government made public personnel records for all veterans discharged as of 1945, the end of World War II. "Mr. Wittmer was right there at the door waiting for us," said Whitney Mahar, the archives' research room manager, who says 10 to 20 people show up each day to do research. "He's very persistent, very serious about his research and what he's trying to accomplish." Wittmer poured through thousands of documents, compiling information such as the name of each veteran, his date of birth and birthplace, parents' names, service dates and dates — or approximate dates — of death. In some cases, he was able to find photos of the men, who came from all across America.

Wittmer, who grew up in New York City, joined the Navy in 1942. Curiosity led him to enlist on a submarine. "They had the best diesel engines, and I wanted to know about diesel engines," he said. "I actually learned quite a bit — how to operate them and take them apart and put them back together again." After the war, Wittmer worked as an engineer in New Jersey and Connecticut. He moved the family to St. Louis in 1978 to work at Ferguson Machine Co. Five years earlier, a fire at the archives destroyed records of thousands of servicemen, including about 80 percent of Army personnel discharged between 1912 to 1960 and countless Air Force personnel discharged from 1947 to 1964. Fortunately for Wittmer and families of submarine veterans, the Navy records were intact. The latest edition of Wittmer's self-published, six-volume set of the hardbound books, "United States Submarine Men Lost During World War II," was published earlier this year. It is co-authored with Charles Hinman, curator of the USS Bowfin Submarine Museum in Hawaii. The set is available for \$300. Wittmer said the information in the books will not be posted on the Internet. Wittmer has sold 11 sets and donated one to the records center. He would like to get one in every state library and archive. It wasn't easy, he said, but it needed to be done. "It was labor-intensive," Wittmer said. "It was the equivalent of a 40-hour week job at my personal expense. But it was a labor of love, really." [Source: The Associated Press | Jim Salter | May 24, 2014 ++]

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## **National WWII Memorial ► 10th Anniversary**

As veterans, VIPs and tourists gathered 24 MAY to mark the 10th anniversary of the dedication of the National World War II Memorial, many of them might not have been aware of the long struggle that went into creating what has become one of the most-visited sites in the nation's capital. "There was a group called Save the Mall who didn't want us to build the memorial on this spot," former Sen. Bob Dole recalled during the ceremony. "Our defense was that we'd already saved the mall. We saved everything else in America, because of young men who were willing to lay down their lives". Others, who spoke on the origins of the memorial were:

- The memorial's designer, Austrian-born Friedrich St. Florian said, "When we designed it and built it, there was a lot of opposition. It was quite a struggle to actually get it built. But in my heart, I never doubted that eventually the memorial itself would prevail and redeem itself. It now has taken its rightful place among the great memorials."
- Ohio Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur, who introduced the bill to create the memorial to the more than 400,000 Americans who perished in World War II, said that it's "hard to imagine the difficult

journey from introduction of that simple bill in 1987 to the dedication of the memorial on May 25, 2004. Seventeen years later." But the focus of the event was on the veterans of the "Greatest Generation."



**A veteran salutes during the playing of taps at a May 24, 2014 ceremony**

Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, the keynote speaker, is a Vietnam veteran whose father, Charles Dean Hagel, served in World War II. "Anyone who grew up in a household with a World War II veteran knows the values, the standards, the expectations that were imbued in each of us," he said. "As we age, and hopefully become wiser, we recognize more and more every day the depth and the width of what our World War II veterans did. Not just during the conflict, but when they came home." Hagel added that like all memorials, this one "was built to honor the sacrifices of those who have gone before us, but also to instruct future generations that war is not an abstraction. War is real, with real consequences. This memorial was built to remind us that the peace, prosperity and freedom we all enjoy today was delivered by those who fought in the deserts of North Africa, on the beaches of Normandy, on the high seas and in the air, and everywhere in the Pacific. And it has been preserved by the men and women who stepped forward to wear the uniform of this nation in the decades that followed. "This nation may never again be shaped and led by an entire generation that fought and bled so completely for their country," Hagel said. "But the legacy of our fathers, our grandfathers and great grandfathers will forever endure. This legacy remains alive today in the millions of men and women who have stepped forward to serve our nation over the past 13 years of war. They, too, are a great generation, and their humility, patriotism and selflessness continues to inspire us all."

Congresswoman Kaptur remembered the veteran who cornered the young congresswoman at an Ohio fish fry and demanded to know why there was no monument honoring World War II veterans in Washington. "It was the vision and the dream of a remarkable and humble man in northwest Ohio" named Roger Durbin, a mail carrier and Battle of the Bulge veteran who "wanted to encompass the full story of liberty's path in the 20th century." Designer St. Florian, who considers the memorial "the crowning achievement of my career," echoed Hagel's comments about the impact on the descendants of the veterans. "Memorials, really, as much as they are important for the veterans, they are built for future generations," he said. "They must remember the struggle of World War II, and they have to make the same commitment to defend freedom and democracy." But for now, the greatest impact is still on the Greatest Generation. "Elizabeth and I enjoy coming down on Saturdays and greeting veterans from all across the country," Dole said. "These are people 89, 90, 91, 105. They make me feel good when they're 105. "It's interesting to watch these older men and some women when they come into the memorial. It's a very emotional experience, and there are a lot of tears shed by these rugged older guys. They're so thankful that the memorial is here, and that they have a chance to visit it through the Honor Flight program." [Source: Stars and Stripes | Joe Gromelski | May 24, 2014 ++]

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## Rolling Thunder ▶ 27th Anniversary Demonstration

This year marked the Rolling Thunder organization's 27th anniversary demonstration in support of POW/MIA and veterans' issues. It began Friday, May 23rd began with a visit to the Washington National Cathedral with the church hosting a special "Blessing of the Bikes" to honor those who have served and to provide a place of healing for veterans. The Candlelight vigil took place at the Vietnam Wall where Gold Star Mothers were escorted by the Flame of Freedom to honor and remember those who gave their lives in service to their country and those still missing or held prisoner. Saturday, members visited the VA Medical Center and sang songs. Also on Saturday, a wreath was presented at the Navy Memorial and Harley-Davidson of Washington held a free barbeque. Speaker Myke Shelby, an Air Force Veteran and owner of San Diego Harley-Davidson received the first Michael Cobb Memorial Award that evening for his work with Veterans.



Sunday an estimated 800,000 motorcyclists took part in the annual "Ride for Freedom" from the Pentagon parking lots to the National Mall with supporters lining the streets giving this demonstration an estimated total of over one million. Gerry Walter a former WWII POW and his wife, first time participants, rode in a restored Ford Model "A" car. The stage area by the Reflecting Pool was filled with supporters to the top step of the Lincoln Memorial. The keynote speaker was Dorothy Woods, wife of former Navy Seal Tyrone Woods who was killed in the Benghazi attack. Others who spoke were Veteran's advocate Nikki Mendicino and numerous other supporters of the Rolling Thunder organization and the POW/MIA issue. Rolling Thunder, Inc., is a 501(c)(4) non-profit Veterans organization incorporated in 1995, by National Director Sgt. Artie Muller, to seek accountability for all POW/MIA's from past wars and to promote the needs of Veterans. National membership is comprised of Veterans from all wars and peacetime with 40-45% of members being non-veterans. There are currently over 95 chartered Rolling Thunder chapters throughout the United States. Although many members ride motorcycles, a person does not have to own or ride a motorcycle to be a member. For more information on Rolling Thundr, contact Nancy Regg, 908-310-3268, [nregg2@comcast.net](mailto:nregg2@comcast.net), or visit the web at <http://rollingthunder1.org/>. [Source: PRNewswire-USNewswire May 28, 2014 ++]

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## Congressional Gold Medal Update 03 ▶ 65th Regiment Borinqueneers

While fighting in Korea, Staff Sgt. Dolores Nieves and other members of the 65th Infantry Regiment were known as Los Diablos de la Montaña, or Devils of the Mountain, for their ability to fling their enemies' grenades back at them before they detonated. "We were the kings of the grenades," said Nieves, 80, who



lives in Hartford. "We were very fast." The men were also fearsomely skilled with a bayonet, he said. According to the Department of Defense, the soldiers launched the last recorded, battalion-sized bayonet assault, overrunning the Chinese south of Seoul on Feb. 2, 1951. The unit was eventually called "Los Borinqueneers," a nickname that reflected its mostly Puerto Rican members. The name was derived from Borinquen, a word given to Puerto Rico by its original inhabitants, the Taino Indians. Nieves remembered a ceremony shortly after the war at which Gen. Douglas MacArthur called the unit by its adopted name.



**Battle-weary soldiers of the 65th infantry, north of the Han River in Korea in June 1951.**

Nieves was born in 1933 in Carolina, Puerto Rico. Life in the town was monotonous he said, and his parents didn't earn a lot of money. So he decided to join the U.S. Army in 1951 at age 17. "I didn't think about war at that time. I thought I would be in the military. I was happy because I believed I would eat filet mignon," he said. "I thought I would earn a lot of money." He earned \$120 a month, a significant amount at the time. He gave his father half and kept the rest. Not long after basic training, he was deployed to Korea, where he was assigned to the 65th Infantry Regiment. He spent more than a year with the unit. He recalls fighting Koreans and Chinese soldiers who sometimes camouflaged themselves as gravestones in cemeteries. "They put crosses on themselves and they moved," he said. "When you looked, one would be right next to you." Nieves and other members of the unit strung tin cans around their bunkers to alert them should enemy soldiers try to infiltrate.

After the war, Nieves returned to Carolina shaken by what he had seen during the war. He said he lived near a quarry, but received warnings before dynamite was used, allowing him to leave his house. Otherwise, he said, the explosions brought back memories of the battlefield. In 1962, he joined the Puerto Rico National Guard. He also worked for an insurance company and as a taxi driver on the island. He later moved to New York and then to Connecticut, where he joined the National Guard. He served with B Company, First Battalion, 169th Infantry Regiment, and was stationed in Germany during the Gulf War. He has also been to Somalia and Japan. Nieves also served with the 712th Maintenance Company until he retired in 1994. He has been active with the Hispanic-American Veterans of Connecticut and served as the organization's vice president last year. He's recently been involved in an national effort to get the Congressional Gold Medal awarded to the Borinqueneers.

Nieves, along with other Borinqueneers, went to Washington D.C. in April 25, 2013, to help introduce Senate Bill 1174, the Borinqueneers Congressional Gold Medal Bill. "The medal is an honor that we deserve because the 65th made history," he said. Retired Sgt. First Class Carmelo Figueroa, president of the Hispanic veterans group, said the bill, which is backed by U.S. Sens. Richard Blumenthal and Chris Murphy, was approved 19 May by the House of Representatives and went to the Senate for a vote. Congress completed final passage 22 May. "This was the last active duty unit that led the last hand-to-hand combat bayonet fight in the history of the Army," Figueroa said. "That alone stands out." Los

Borinqueneers was also the last segregated unit to be deactivated. Murphy said the Borinqueneers' contributions should be honored with the Congressional Gold Medal, allowing the unit's legacy to be preserved for years. "Mr. Nieves — a true Connecticut hero — and the Borinqueneers fought hard for the country they love, despite facing discrimination because of their ethnicity," Murphy said. "I know future generations will look back on the Borinqueneers' story as a model of courage and sacrifice, as we all do today." General MacArthur wrote of the unit's achievement in Korea: "They are writing a brilliant record of achievement in battle, and I am proud indeed to have them in this command. I wish that we might have many more like them." [Source: Stars & Stripes | Hilda Muñoz | May 23, 2014 ++]

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## **OEF/OIF Vets ▶ White~Kyle**

For more than six years, former Sgt. Kyle White knew he had been nominated for the Medal of Honor. On 13 MAY received the nation's highest award for valor, and, along with it, a sense of relief. "Finally, our story can be told," he said. "These guys were the best of us. To me, it's important that their names are known. This is only one story, and this was more than six years ago. Since then, hundreds more sacrifices and hundreds other stories are out there." Five soldiers and one Marine were killed on Nov. 8, 2007, during a deadly enemy ambush in Afghanistan's Nuristan province. White, then a specialist with 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, was honored for repeatedly running the gauntlet of enemy fire to get to the wounded and fallen. When the shooting stopped and night fell, White, who was barely 20 years old, cared for his wounded brother, called in steady radio reports, directed security and guided in close-air support until the medevac birds were able to come and evacuate the wounded and the dead.



President Obama presented the Medal of Honor to White in a White House ceremony. "I do not consider myself a hero," White said. "To me, the real heroes are the ones I fought with that day." White was the seventh living service member to receive the Medal of Honor for actions in Afghanistan or Iraq. Seven service members were posthumously awarded the medal for their actions in those wars. White also was the second soldier from 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment to receive the nation's highest valor award for actions in Afghanistan. Former Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta was the first living service member to be honored for his actions in Afghanistan or Iraq. Giunta and White deployed together in the same battalion in May 2007 for a 15-month deployment to some of the toughest parts of eastern Afghanistan.

On Nov. 8, 2007, the soldiers, along with Marine Sgt. Phillip Bocks and the Afghan soldiers he was advising, set out for Combat Outpost Bella after a meeting with the villagers in Aranas. The patrol made its way up a steep hill toward a trail that would lead them back to COP Bella, when, about 30 minutes into their journey and right after part of the patrol rounded a spur, "the ambush started," White said. White, who was the radio telephone operator for the platoon, was walking with Capt. Matthew Ferrara, the platoon

leader, forward observer Spc. Kain Schilling, and Bocks. That headquarters element was quickly separated from the rest of the platoon, which was in front, and the Afghan soldiers who were bringing up the rear. The first shot came in like a single pop. Then two pops, and then the whole valley lit up," White recalled. "RPGs were coming from it seemed like everywhere." White began shooting back. "I dumped my first magazine, and when I went to reload it, I put the new magazine in, and nothing," he said.

White was knocked unconscious by an incoming RPG. He woke up facedown on the trail. "I picked my head up two inches from the ground, and an enemy round hit the rock right in front of my face," he said. White continued to fire at the enemy, and he soon saw Schilling had been hit in the shoulder. "There were so many rounds coming in around us, it was incredible," White said. As the bullets zipped by his head and rang in his ears, White ran about 20 feet down the trail toward Schilling. He tied a tourniquet to the specialist's arm and made sure he hadn't been hit anywhere else. White then returned to the fight, running through "a few" magazines before Schilling yelled to him that Bocks had been hit. White dashed out to Bocks, and "you could see sparks all around Kyle," Schilling said. "He glowed from the ricochets." Bocks was about 10 meters away, "but it might as well have been a mile," White said. White grabbed Bocks by the carry handle on the top of his body armor and dragged him as far as he could.

Bocks had been shot at least twice, and White, using his body to shield Bocks from the enemy fire, tried to stop the bleeding as best he could. "I worked on him until he was no longer with us," White said. White then ran back to Schilling, who was yelling for him. "Right as I turned around I saw a round go right through his left knee," White said. White rushed back to Schilling's side. He was out of tourniquets, so he ripped off his belt and tied it down on Schilling's leg. White then realized his and Schilling's radios were dead, and he began looking around to try to locate the other soldiers. "That's when I saw Capt. Ferrara," White said. He was facedown and not moving. White low-crawled to him, under fire, but Ferrara was dead. White moved back to Schilling's location, and by this time, an interpreter and an Afghan soldier were there as well. Both Afghans were wounded, so White tended to them. Once he made sure they were OK, White decided he needed to find a working radio and checked to see if Bocks' radio was still working. "I pulled the hand mic out of his armor, and as I was bringing it up to my head, a round went through the hand mic and blew it out of my hands," he said. "Luckily I was the RTO and I knew how to operate the radio pretty well."

White then began relaying situation reports and updates to the operations center at COP Bella. "At this point, it gets pretty foggy," White said. "I've heard myself on the radio directing fire support and stuff like that, but I don't remember." As he worked the radio, White pieced together that the other element of the patrol had jumped off the side of the trail and tumbled down a cliff to a riverbed below. They were pinned down, and White decided he would try to link up with them. "I tried to do that when night fell," he said. "I picked [Spc. Schilling] up, put him on my shoulder, and I tried to move him, but it was too painful for him. I had to lay him there, and this is where we stayed." The men stayed there for hours, waiting for the medevac birds to reach them. "It seemed like nighttime was the longest," White said. All of the Americans on that patrol were killed or wounded, White said. Fourteen soldiers were awarded the Purple Heart, one the Distinguished Service Cross, one the Silver Star, four the Bronze Star with V device, and two the Army Commendation Medal with V device for their actions that day.

White spent a few days in the hospital at Bagram Air Base before he was allowed to return to the U.S. for the funeral of his best friend, Cpl. Sean A. Langevin, 23. Langevin was one of the five soldiers killed that day. White then returned to Afghanistan to finish out the deployment. White left the Army in July 2011. He graduated in December with a bachelor's degree in business administration and now lives and works in Charlotte, N.C. Regarding his MOH award White said it doesn't belong to him. "It wasn't just me on that trail," he said. "It's everyone who was there. It's their award. One of the responsibilities I feel is

being a voice for those we lost, making sure their names are known and their stories are told.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Michelle Tan | 12 May 2014 ++]

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## **SBA Vet Issues Update 34 ▶ 7 MAY Congressional Hearing**

Veteran business owners and advocates expressed some frustration with federal programs intended to help budding entrepreneurs, but they largely pushed lawmakers to provide more funding and support for such programs, not less, during a recent congressional hearing. Programs such as Operation Boots to Business, a U.S. Small Business Administration initiative developed with Syracuse University, have come under fire from lawmakers on both sides of the political aisle who said the efforts were not approved by Congress, lack needed oversight and may be unnecessary in light of offerings from the private sector. Witnesses at the 7 MAY hearing of the House Small Business Committee, which was called to highlight similar private-sector initiatives, expressed a different view. “The more dependable entrepreneurial programs for ... the veterans community have been the federally funded programs, such as the Veterans Business Outreach Centers, or VBOCs, and the versatile Boots to Business curriculum,” said Davy Leghorn, an assistant director with the American Legion. “Any discussion that seeks to reduce funding, or inhibit the operations, of [SBA’s Office of Veterans Business Development] will be met with opposition from the American Legion.”



**Committee Chairman Rep. Sam Graves and Davy Leghorn, assistant director of the Legion's Economic Division, who testified before the joint congressional subcommittee hearing on challenges to veteran-owned small business and service-disabled veteran-owned small business**

Leghorn said that because SBA’s veterans operations are “too small and underfunded” to bring Boots to Business to all vets who need it, the Legion has tried to help fill the void, reworking the program in consultation with SBA and Syracuse, and offering its own version. But the Legion can do only so much to make up for the lack of federal support. A recent workshop for female vets held in Houston attracted women from around the country but had to be capped at 120 people, with everyone else being put on a wait list, he said. Other witnesses touted the various private-sector initiatives that helped them launch businesses and pushed for the federal government to do more.

- Wade Franklin, a Navy vet who relied on the International Franchise Association’s VetFran initiative for help starting a UPS store franchise, said he had trouble coming up with the money and didn’t get much help from the federal government. He suggested that the feds develop something for entrepreneurs akin to the Post-9/11 GI Bill’s generous support for student veterans.
- Air Force vet Dawn Smith expressed similar frustration, saying that her application for an SBA Patriot Express Loan was denied, and the military’s transition assistance program, or TAP, didn’t help her much. The Business and Professional Women’s Foundation was much more helpful, providing a mentor who worked with her one-on-one throughout the process. Smith suggested that this foundation’s offerings be incorporated into TAP. Leghorn agreed, saying the federal government should consider providing funding to that foundation and similar programs.

During a 30 APR hearing, both Republicans and Democrats on the House Small Business Committee criticized SBA for developing Boots to Business and other new programs, saying such action was “alarming,” made no sense and “seems to be flying in the face of what Congress wants.” At the end of the 7 MAY hearing, Rep. Sam Graves, (R-MO), who chairs the committee, expressed continued concern about such federal programs duplicating private-sector offerings. “It’s encouraging to hear about all the private-sector initiatives that are truly helping our nation’s heroes, and I do believe it’s important to consider our federal programs in the context of what’s happening in the private sector, so that instead of duplicating the programs, we can focus on filling those gaps,” Graves said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | George Altman | May 14, 2014 ++]

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## **Homegrown by Heroes** ▶ **Nationwide Labeling Program**

A new nationwide labeling program will allow farmers, ranchers and fishermen who served in the military to use a special logo to promote their agricultural products. The “Homegrown by Heroes” labeling was first created by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture in 2013. The label allows consumers and businesses purchasing agricultural products to see the logo in multiple areas, enabling them to select products that support U.S. farmer veterans. The initiative is now being expanded nationwide. “Farming and military service are more closely linked than one might think,” said Michael O’Gorman, executive director of the Farmer Veteran Coalition. “Thousands of our service men and women leave the rural communities and farms they call home in order to serve our country in the military. Upon completion of their service, they often return home to resume work on the family farm.”



The Farmers Veterans Coalition, a group working to help veterans feed America, said that while 16 percent of America’s population is rural, 40 percent of the men and women who serve in the U.S. military come from those same rural communities. To qualify for the “Homegrown By Heroes” label, the individual must have served honorably or still be serving in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, and be at least 50 percent owner and/or operator of the farm business. The Farmer Veteran Coalition said it has contracted with a marketing firm to design the artwork and other materials to be used for websites, stickers, packaging and displays. These materials will be provided and shipped at a minimal cost to participating veterans, the

group said. Interested veterans can apply to the program by going to: <http://www.hgbh.org/> The expansion of the program by the Farmer Veteran Coalition comes through funding from Farm Credit, a provider of credit and other services to rural America. [Source: Gannett Washington Bureau | Christopher Doering | May 16, 2014 ++]

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## **Utah Veteran Cemetery Update 01 ► SW Utah Location Sought**

This summer, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will begin looking for a location in southwest Utah to build a cemetery for rural veterans. The VA wants three to six acres, said Glenn Madderom, chief of cemetery development service for the National Cemetery Administration, which is part of the VA. The preferred location is in, or adjacent to, an existing cemetery, but Madderom said the VA will build a cemetery from scratch if it must. "We would be looking in that corridor between St. George and Cedar City, but focusing more on Cedar City," Madderom said. The cemetery would actually be called a veterans' "burial ground." It is part of a VA initiative to provide a final resting place for veterans in rural regions. The VA just signed an agreement with Yellowstone County, Mont., to install a burial grounds in a cemetery there. And the VA also is looking for a suitable spot for a burial grounds in or near Twin Falls, Idaho.

A burial grounds for rural Utah is in line behind Montana and Idaho. Madderom said there's no timetable to install the Utah burial grounds. Any opening would be several years away, he said. Utah is one of 11 states with no national veterans' cemetery. The state, however, maintains a veterans' cemetery in Bluffdale. Arnold Warner, supervisor at the state veterans' cemetery said, "4,971 veterans and spouses were interred there as of 21 MAY. Five to 12 people a week are buried or have their remains scattered there. Many veterans are buried there because of cost. Services, a headstone and burial at the veterans' cemetery are free for the veteran and costs \$700 for a spouse. A private funeral can cost thousands of dollars". Warner says a burial grounds in Cedar City would benefit families who don't want to travel long distances to bury their loved one. He said the Bluffdale cemetery receives one or two veterans a month from as far away as St. George. Veterans from "St. George; Las Vegas, Nevada, they would probably go to the Cedar City one, instead of coming here," Warner said. [Source: The Salt Lake Tribune | Nate Carlisle | May 25, 2014 ++]

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## **Montana Vet Cemetery Update 05 ► Yellowstone National Now Open**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) received a donation of property in Yellowstone County for the new Yellowstone National Cemetery, Montana, which was dedicated in a Memorial Day Ceremony on May 26, 2014. "We are pleased to expand burial service to Veterans and their families in Montana," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "Yellowstone National Cemetery will help us reach Veterans in the rural parts of Montana who have not previously had reasonable access to a national or State Veterans Cemetery." VA's National Cemetery Administration began burial operations the same day it was dedicated. Effective 26 MAY veterans and family members who wish to schedule an interment or inurnment at the cemetery should call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800 535-1117. VA will manage committal services for burials that were previously scheduled by the City of Laurel, Mont.



The property, formerly known as “Yellowstone County Veterans Cemetery,” is 10.64 acres and located at 55 Buffalo Trail Road, City of Laurel, Mont. The property was donated by Yellowstone County on 23 MAY. This new national cemetery is part of VA’s Rural Initiative and will serve an estimated Veteran population of 17,567 within a 75-mile radius of their homes. There are three VA-funded state Veterans cemeteries in Montana located in Helena, Miles City, and Missoula. There is one non-VA funded state cemetery in Columbia Falls, Mont. VA’s Rural Initiative is aimed at providing burial access for Veterans not currently served by a burial option at either a VA-funded State cemetery or national cemetery. Other burial grounds are planned to serve Veterans in North Dakota, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Utah, Maine, Idaho and Nevada. Veterans with a qualifying discharge, their spouses and eligible dependent children may be buried in a VA national cemetery. Also eligible are military personnel who die on active duty, their spouses and eligible dependents. Burial benefits are available for all eligible Veterans, regardless of whether they are buried in a national cemetery or a private cemetery, include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a government headstone or marker.

In the midst of the largest expansion since the Civil War, VA operates 131 national cemeteries, and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites in 40 states and Puerto Rico. Yellowstone National Cemetery is the first of 8 new national Veterans burial grounds authorized by Congress. More than 4 million Americans, including Veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in VA’s national cemeteries. Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the Internet at [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov) or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 800-827-1000. To make burial arrangements at any VA national cemetery at the time of need, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117. [Source: VA News Release May 27, 2014 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Update 30 ► No Man Left Behind | San D. Francisco**

A Kennewick Washington woman who finally learned the circumstances of her brother's death in the Vietnam War last year is now running into obstacles bringing him home. Terri Francisco-Farrell, 62, has known for decades that Air Force 1st Lt. **San D. Francisco**, the copilot of an F-4 Phantom fighter-bomber, was shot down Nov. 25, 1968. Late last summer, investigators went to the site in Quanf Binh province where the plane went down but were unable to locate Francisco's gravesite. A return trip was scheduled to start May 20, but Francisco-Farrell has reason to believe no one actually went. She fears a return mission could be delayed because the two Defense Department agencies responsible for recovering and identifying remains are merging. Some missions have also been canceled or delayed because of federal budget cuts. Time is of the essence if Francisco-Farrell is ever to get the satisfaction of seeing her brother brought home, she said. The witnesses to the crash are aging.

She's traveling to Arlington, Va., for Air Force family briefings from June 11-14 to try to get answers. The Columbia Basin Veterans Coalition is providing \$1,000 to help offset the cost of the trip. "I'm hoping that my presence there will let them know that we're pushing for accountability," she said. A commander of North Vietnamese ground forces during the war told investigators that the F-4's pilot, who was later promoted to major, broke his legs landing hard and was captured. The enemy troops came under attack from U.S. warplanes and jumped into a trench, leaving Francisco to be struck by a bomb and killed. The Vietnamese buried Francisco nearby, but exhumed his body to photograph for propaganda purposes three days later. They reburied him in the same grave.

Francisco-Farrell recently mailed letters to Washington Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, as well as Arizona Sen. John McCain, with her concerns about the search missions, but has yet to hear back, she said. "We've waited and pushed and pushed and pushed," she said. "I'm hoping that nothing has interfered." She would like for the senators to send letters on her family's behalf to those in charge of the searches. "I want to let them know that we are so close that we can't stop," she said. "I want to let them know this is the closest we've gotten in 46 years." Even if Francisco's remains are found, it could take a year or more to identify and bury him, his sister said. DNA is available to compare for identification purposes. She would like to see her brother's remains shared between the Tri-Cities and Arlington National Cemetery — where an unoccupied marker already sits — but the final decision will be with his widow. Skip Novakovich, president of the veterans coalition, said the board wanted to help Francisco-Farrell with her trip because of the creed of "No man left behind." "We felt this was a tremendous opportunity to help someone with something that should have been done a long time ago," he said. "We just felt a real compassion for this lady." [Source: Tri-City Herald | Geoff Folsom | May 26, 2014 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Recoveries ► 140515 thru 140531**

"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 (7,921) Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,642), 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](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 - None**

## Korea

- The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced 21 MAY that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Pfc. **James R. Holmes** of Warren, Ohio, will be buried May 29 in Arlington National Cemetery. In November 1950, Holmes was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, which was pushing north through North Korea to the Yalu River. In late November, the unit was attacked by enemy forces and withdrew south to the town of Anju. On Dec. 1, 1950, Holmes was declared missing in action. As part of a 1953 prisoner exchange known as Operation Big Switch, returning U.S. service members reported that Holmes had been captured by the Chinese during that battle and died in 1951, in prisoner of war camp known as Camp 5, near Pyoktong, North Korea. Between 1991 and 1994, North Korea gave the U.S. 208 boxes of human remains believed to contain 350 - 400 U.S. servicemen who fought during the war. North Korean documents turned over with some of the boxes indicated that some of the remains were recovered from Pyoktong County, near the area where Holmes was believed to have died. To identify Holmes' remains, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, including mitochondrial DNA, which matched his sister and brother.



- The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced 17 MAY that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Marine Cpl. **Harold W. Reed**, 23, of Rochester, N.Y., will be buried May 24 in Toledo, Ohio. In November 1950, Reed was assigned to Weapons Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, when his unit disengaged from the enemy and began a fighting withdrawal to a more defensible position south near the village of Hagaru-ri. On Nov. 29, 1950, Reed was killed in action from a missile wound while fighting on the western side of the Chosin Reservoir. In 1954, United Nations and Communist Forces exchanged the remains of war dead in what came to be called "Operation Glory." All remains recovered in Operation Glory were turned over to the Army Central Identification Unit for analysis. The remains they were unable to identify were interred as unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, known as the "Punchbowl." In 2013, analysts from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) reevaluated Reed's records and determined that portions of the remains recovered from Operation Glory should be exhumed for identification. To identify Reed's remains, scientists from JPAC

used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, such as radiograph comparison, which matched Reed's records.



- The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced 17 MAY that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Cpl. **Richard Isbell**, 20, of Fishtrap, Ky., will be buried June 7, in Staffordsville, Ky. In April 1951, Isbell was assigned to Company H, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Division (ID). While deployed near Popsudong, South Korea, the 7th ID was attacked by overwhelming Chinese forces, which caused Isbell's unit to begin a fighting withdrawal to a more defensible position. During this battle on April 25, 1951, Isbell was reported missing in action. However, after the war, Isbell was reported by returning POWs as having been captured by Chinese forces and died in captivity from dysentery on June 30, 1951, in a prisoner of war camp known as Camp 5, in Pyoktong, North Korea. In 1954, Chinese and North Korean Communist forces exchanged the remains of war dead with the United Nations forces during Operation Glory. In 1956, a military review board declared Isbell's remains as unidentifiable. He was transferred to be buried as unknown in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, known as the "Punchbowl." In 2013, due to advances in forensic technology, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) determined that the possibility of identifying the remains was likely at that time. The unknown remains were disinterred for analysis and possible identification. In the identification of Isbell's remains, scientists from JPAC used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, such as dental comparisons and radiograph comparisons. Today, 7,883 Americans remain unaccounted for from the Korean War. Using modern technology, identifications continue to be made from remains that were previously turned over by North Korean officials or recovered from North Korea by American teams.
- Army Cpl. **Lucio R. Aguilar**, Company M, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, was lost on Nov. 28, 1950, in North Korea and declared dead, missing in action, or captured.. He was accounted for on May 6 and will be buried with full military honors in Corpus Christi, Texas.
- The Defense POW/MIA Office announced the identification of remains belonging to Army Cpl. **Richard Isbell**, 20, of Fishtrap, Ky. He will be buried with full military honors on June 7 in Staffordsville, Ky. In April 1951, Isbell was assigned to Company H, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Division, when attacked by overwhelming Chinese forces near Popsudong, South Korea. Isbell would be declared missing in action on April 25. After the war, returning American POWs reported that Isbell had been captured but died in captivity of dysentery on June 30 in a North Korean POW Camp.

## World War II

- **Pfc. Lawrence S. Gordon**, U.S. Army, Reconnaissance Company, 32nd Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Division, was lost on Aug. 13, 1944, near Ranès, France. Gordon grew up in Saskatchewan and later on went to work in Wyoming. Shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, deciding that the Canadian Scottish Regiment wasn't as good. He sent his last letter home aged 28, just before he died, while he was fighting at Saint Lo, north of Normandy. On Aug. 13, 1944, Gordon was in command of an armored vehicle during an operation to stop the Germans from escaping through the Falaise Gap. It is believed that Gordon and James Andrew Bowman, a gunner who was standing next to him in the turret, were shot at by a German Motorcyclist. The driver of the vehicle died two weeks later. The only survivor was Pvt. Kurtz, who wrote a report on that day, aged 85. Kurtz died in January 2011. Pfc Gordon was accounted for on May 27, 2014. He will be buried with full military honors summer 2014 in Canada.



[Source: [http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news\\_releases/](http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news_releases/) May 2014 ++]

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## OBIT | Coleman~James ▶ 13 May 2014

James "Skeets" Coleman, who was the test pilot on one of the oddest military airplanes ever produced, died 13 MAY of natural causes at an assisted-living facility in Oceanside. He was 95, a life span especially notable given the precariousness of the plane he tested in the 1950s, the Convair XFY-1. It was a vertical-takeoff-and-landing vehicle featured on the cover of the 1990 book "The World's Worst Aircraft." "It was a project that looked really good on paper," said Bill Yenne, author of "World's Worst Aircraft" and several other aviation books. The Navy wanted the plane, which took off straight up like a helicopter before transitioning to horizontal for regular flight, to save space on aircraft carriers. After years in development, one XFY-1 was built, but much of its engineering was untested.



Test pilot J.F. "Skeets" Coleman looks over the XFY-1 Pogo in 1954

"No one wanted to fly it; there were no volunteers," Coleman said in an interview for the "Reaching the Skies" BBC documentary series. "It was a developmental power plant, it was a developmental airplane, a developmental concept. It's pretty hard to tie all of those together without having a lot of risk." Coleman was the only pilot to ever take the XFY-1 on a full-on flight and was awarded the Harmon Trophy in 1955 for his contribution to aviation. "Coleman was one of the last people ever to venture aloft in a machine that nobody knew how to fly, that no simulator had proved would fly, and that no computer could promise would be controllable," according to an article in the Air & Space magazine of the Smithsonian Museum where the XFY-1, nicknamed the Pogo, now resides.



**"Skeets" Coleman was awarded the Harmon Trophy in 1955 for his contribution to aviation.**

James Francis Coleman was born June 2, 1918, in Chicago, the third of six children. He joined the Marines in 1941, serving as a fighter pilot on dive bombing missions in the Pacific during World War II. After the war he earned an aeronautical engineering degree at UCLA. From 1948 to 1950 he oversaw the operation of the now-defunct Del Mar Airport. He later worked for several aviation companies, including North American Aviation and Fairchild, in sales and marketing. In 1951, the Navy awarded Convair aircraft manufacturing a contract to design, build and test a vertical-takeoff-and-landing (VTOL) fighter. The XFY-1 was a so-called tail sitter because it sat straight up like a rocket, resting on four wheels attached to the edges of its wings and fins. It had a height of about 35 feet — the pilot had to use a long ladder to climb to the cockpit.

Coleman was in the Marine Reserves in 1954 when the Pogo was ready for testing, first inside a blimp hanger at Moffett Field south of San Francisco where he could practice takeoffs and hovering. A cable was attached to the nose of the Pogo in case a wrench operator had to be called upon to steady the plane. "My call was 'catch me, catch me,'" Coleman wrote in a report on the tests, "and I had to call him a lot." Modifications were made to ease turbulence, and outdoor tests followed. The first successful full-on flight was Nov. 2, 1954, at Brown Field in San Diego and a few days later another was done for military and other officials to witness. The liftoffs and transitions went smoothly. The hard part was landing the Pogo. To get the plane down, Coleman had to twist around and look over his shoulder, eyeballing the descent without instruments. It was like a driver maneuvering into a parallel parking space, except this vehicle was airborne and weighed more than 11,000 pounds, not counting fuel. "It was a nightmare," Yenne said, "and imagine doing that on rough seas, and at night."

Coleman never had a mishap in test flying the Pogo, but after just a handful of full-on flights, tests were halted — the plane was considered too unwieldy to be practical. It's currently in storage at the Smithsonian. There are no immediate plans to put it on display, a museum official said. In addition to his daughter Nancy Coleman, who lives in Port Washington, N.Y., he is survived by daughter Jackie Remick of Del Mar; son Marty Coleman of Tulsa, Okla.; sister Betty McCabe of New Haven, Conn.; seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. [Source: Los Angeles Times | David Colker | May 17, 2014 ++]



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## **Vet Job Opportunities @ Accenture ► Military Recruiting Programs**

As a global management consulting, outsourcing and technology services company with approximately 266,000 people working around the world, Accenture is constantly seeking the world's best talent. Part of this effort is to identify and hire military veterans. Military skills such as leadership, discipline, teamwork and organizational skills are relevant and transferable to Accenture's work – as are the highly specialized technology and functional skills that many learn during their service. Military professionals are known for their strong work ethic, commitment to excellence, attention to detail, and ability to succeed in a challenging environment, exemplifying many of the same core values Accenture strives for. The lessons learned as military men and women are very transferable to the work they do. Leadership, discipline, organization, teamwork, and doing what it takes to get the job done are some of the areas in which military experience directly applies to their work.

Accenture's military recruiting team understands how to effectively assess a military resume and recognize the skills and abilities of veterans and is dedicated to identifying and assessing candidates from the armed forces. Additionally, they help veterans create resumes and offer information on corporate job searches and the interview process. An example of this is their new online Military Career Coach tool that provides tips and coaching for veterans seeking employment. This includes videos and instructional content to help veterans learn about career planning, resume writing, networking, interviewing and social media and is part of their overall commitment to being a military-friendly employer. Accenture is committed to supporting veterans' transition from military to civilian work by providing skills translation, resume and interview coaching and training opportunities to improve access to careers at Accenture or other companies. More than 100 Accenture executives are serving as mentors to former & transitioning servicemembers. For more information on Accenture, jobs available and applying for a position go to <http://jobsearch.military.com/careers/result.html?q=accenture>. [Source: Military.com article Mar 2014 ++]

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## **Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 18 May 2014**

Retiree Appreciation Days (RADs) are designed with you in mind. They're a great source of the latest information for retirees and Family members in your area. RADs vary from installation to installation, but, in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups, and various other services. Some RADs include special events such as dinners or golf tournaments. Due to budget constraints, some RADs may be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, scheduled appearances of DFAS representatives may not be possible. If you plan to travel long distances to attend a RAD, before traveling, you should call the sponsoring RSO to ensure the RAD will held as scheduled and, if applicable, whether or not DFAS reps will be available. The current schedule is provided in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, **“Retiree Activity\ Appreciation Days (RAD) Schedule”**. For more information call the phone numbers of the Retirement Services Officer (RSO) sponsoring the RAD as indicated in the attachment. An up-to-date RAD list is always available online at <http://www.hostmtb.org/RADLIST-2014.html>. [Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | 18 May 2014 ++]

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## Vet Hiring Fairs ► 1 Jun thru 31 Jul 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 you should click on the link next to the date in the below list. If it will not open refer to [www.uschamber.com/hiringourheroes/events](http://www.uschamber.com/hiringourheroes/events). **To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering for the hiring fairs which are shown below 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>.

| <u>Date</u>                 | <u>Location</u>                     |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Wednesday, June 4, 2014:  | <a href="#">Roseburg, OR</a>        |
| • Thursday, June 5, 2014:   | <a href="#">Jacksonville, FL</a>    |
| • Tuesday, June 10, 2014:   | <a href="#">Dover, DE</a>           |
| • Tuesday, June 10, 2014:   | <a href="#">Savannah, GA</a>        |
| • Wednesday, June 18, 2014: | <a href="#">Jonesboro, AR</a>       |
| • Wednesday, June 18, 2014: | <a href="#">Somerville, NJ</a>      |
| • Thursday, June 19, 2014:  | <a href="#">Cincinnati, OH</a>      |
| • Thursday, June 19, 2014:  | <a href="#">Buffalo, NY</a>         |
| • Wednesday, June 25, 2014: | <a href="#">Charleston, SC</a>      |
| • Thursday, June 26, 2014:  | <a href="#">Lexington, KY</a>       |
| • Thursday, June 26, 2014:  | <a href="#">Cleveland, OH</a>       |
| • Monday, June 30, 2014:    | <a href="#">Omaha, NE</a>           |
| • Tuesday, July 1, 2014:    | <a href="#">Austin, TX</a>          |
| • Tuesday, July 8, 2014:    | <a href="#">Huntsville, AL</a>      |
| • Wednesday, July 9, 2014:  | <a href="#">Springfield, OR</a>     |
| • Thursday, July 10, 2014:  | <a href="#">Harrisburg, PA</a>      |
| • Friday, July 11, 2014:    | <a href="#">Springfield, IL</a>     |
| • Tuesday, July 15, 2014:   | <a href="#">Atlanta, GA</a>         |
| • Thursday, July 17, 2014:  | <a href="#">Tucson, AZ</a>          |
| • Thursday, July 17, 2014:  | <a href="#">Springfield, VA</a>     |
| • Saturday, July 19, 2014:  | <a href="#">East Rutherford, NJ</a> |
| • Tuesday, July 22, 2014:   | <a href="#">Southfield, MI</a>      |
| • Wednesday, July 23, 2014: | <a href="#">Asheville, NC</a>       |
| • Wednesday, July 23, 2014: | <a href="#">Costa Mesa, CA</a>      |
| • Thursday, July 24, 2014:  | <a href="#">Quad Cities, IA</a>     |
| • Monday, July 28, 2014:    | <a href="#">Lakehurst, NJ</a>       |
| • Wednesday, July 30, 2014: | <a href="#">Chicago, IL</a>         |
| • Wednesday, July 30, 2014: | <a href="#">Butler, PA</a>          |
| • Thursday, July 31, 2014:  | <a href="#">Sumter, SC</a>          |

**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 28 May 2014 ++]

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## **WWII VETS 64 ▶ Baggett~Owen J**

The Tenth Air Force in India was, throughout most of its life, the smallest of the AAF's combat air forces but with a large geographical area of responsibility and an important mission. It was responsible for helping to defend the supply line from India to China and for interdicting the Japanese supply net running from Rangoon, Burma, to the north of that country. Its heavy bomber force--consisting of a few B-24s--was the 7th Bomb Group, based at Pandaveswar, northwest of Calcutta, whence it flew very long missions to targets mostly in Burma. On March 31, 1943, the 7th BG's 9th Bomb Squadron was dispatched to destroy a railroad bridge at Pyinmana, about halfway between Rangoon and Mandalay and near two active enemy fighter bases. The formation was led by Col. Conrad F. Necrason, 7th BG commander. The B-24 on his right wing was piloted by 1st Lt. Lloyd Jensen whose copilot was 2d Lt. Owen J. Baggett. On that mission, Baggett was to earn a distinction believed to be unique in Air Force history.

Before reaching the target, the B-24s were attacked by fighters. Colonel Necrason was severely wounded, and Jensen's aircraft was fatally damaged. Oxygen bottles were shattered, intensifying a fire in the rear of Jensen's bomber. Nineteen-year-old Sgt. Samuel Crostic slid out of his top turret, grabbed two fire extinguishers, and fought the fire in the rear of the aircraft while standing on a catwalk over the open bomb bay. The plane still was under attack by enemy fighters, taking many hits along its fuselage. To help defend the aircraft, copilot Baggett took over the top turret until Sergeant Crostic had emptied his fire extinguishers, giving the crew time to prepare for bailout. Smoke and fumes filled the B-24. Jensen ordered the crew to bail out. With the intercom inoperative, Baggett hand-signaled the gunners to hit the silk and, nearly overcome by fumes, put on his own chute. He next remembers floating down with a good chute. He saw four more open canopies before the bomber exploded.



**2d Lt. Owen J. Baggett**

The Japanese pilots immediately began strafing the surviving crewmen, apparently killing some of them and grazing Lieutenant Baggett's arm. The pilot who had hit Baggett circled to finish him off or perhaps only to get a better look at his victim. Baggett pretended to be dead, hoping the Zero pilot would not fire again. In any event, the pilot opened his canopy and approached within feet of Baggett's chute, nose up and on the verge of a stall. Baggett, enraged by the strafing of his helpless crewmates, raised the .45 automatic concealed against his leg and fired four shots at the open cockpit. The Zero stalled and spun in. After Baggett hit the ground, enemy pilots continued to strafe him, but he escaped by hiding behind a tree.

Lieutenant Jensen and one of the gunners landed near him. All three were captured by the Burmese and turned over to the Japanese. Sergeant Crostic also survived the bailout. Baggett and Jensen were flown out of Burma in an enemy bomber and imprisoned near Singapore.

In the more than two years he was held prisoner, Owen Baggett's weight dropped from 180 pounds to ninety. He had ample time to think about his midair duel. He did not at first believe it possible that he could have shot down the enemy while swinging in his chute, but gradually pieces of the puzzle came together. Shortly after he was imprisoned, Baggett, Jensen, and another officer were taken before a Japanese major general who was in charge of all POWs in the area and who subsequently was executed as a war criminal. Baggett appeared to be treated like a celebrity. He was offered the opportunity of and given instructions on how to do the "honorable thing"--commit hara-kiri--a proposal he declined. A few months later, Col. Harry Melton, commander of the 311th Fighter Group who had been shot down, passed through the POW camp and told Baggett that a Japanese colonel said the pilot Owen Baggett had fired at had been thrown clear of his plane when it crashed and burned. He was found dead of a single bullet in his head. Colonel Melton intended to make an official report of the incident but lost his life when the ship on which he was being taken to Japan was sunk.

Two other pieces of evidence support Baggett's account: First, no friendly fighters were in the area that could have downed the Zero pilot. Second, the incident took place at an altitude of 4,000 to 5,000 feet. The pilot could have recovered from an unintentional stall and spin., believes he shot down the Japanese pilot, but because that judgment is based on largely indirect and circumstantial evidence, he remains reluctant to talk much about it. Baggett attained the rank of colonel before leaving service. He retired to San Antonio, Texas and lived to age 85. He died 27 Jul 2006. His daughter Farrar said her father never talked much about the incident, Farrar said. "I didn't even know about it until accounts started being published about it," she said. But Owen Baggett, a person of great forgiveness who rose to the rank of colonel in the Air Force, apparently extended his forgiveness even to his captors. Close to the opening of the Vietnam War, he worked as a defense contractor. He traveled to Japan then for his job, and got his shoes shined one day. He looked up and recognized the shoe shine man was one of the guards in the prisoner of war camp where he once languished - one who used to beat him. When the man finished, Farrar said, her father reportedly smiled, tipped the man, and walked away. "That was the kind of person he was," she said. "That one story tells you everything you need to know." [Source: Air force Magazine | John L. Frisbee | Jul 1996 ++]

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## **Student Veterans of America Update 05 ► Education/Transition Survey**

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families, in collaboration with Student Veterans of America, is surveying all service members, veterans, and their families to better understand their current and post-service education and transition experiences. The survey takes approximately 20 minutes and all responses are confidential. The research team, with support from a Global Google Impact Award, will report at [www.vets.syr.edu](http://www.vets.syr.edu) their findings and accompanying research reports in the coming months at To take the 'Service Member to Student Veterans Perceptions of Transition, Higher Education and Success Survey', go to [https://syracuseuniversity.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_9vjIQORyqGhqazj&RID=MLRP\\_cGWE6bVPA6Z\\_WOUt&=1](https://syracuseuniversity.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9vjIQORyqGhqazj&RID=MLRP_cGWE6bVPA6Z_WOUt&=1). [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly, May 30, 2014 ++]

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## America's Most Beloved Vets ► American Revolution 2



**John Paul Jones**



**Nathan Hale**



**Nathanael Greene**

- Asked by the British to surrender, America's first naval hero John Paul Jones is reported to have replied, "I have not yet begun to fight!"
- The Continental Army soldier Nathan Hale volunteered to gather information on British troop movements, and was captured and hanged as a spy.
- The Continental Army General Nathanael Greene began the war as a private in his state militia and became one of George Washington's most trusted officers.

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## State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► Wyoming 2014

The state of Wyoming 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 – WY**" 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://will.state.wy.us/slpub/reports/2008/Military%2008%20AR.pdf> &  
<http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/wyoming.html>

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/wyoming-state-veterans-benefits.html>  
May 2014 ++]

## \*Vet Legislation\*



### **VA Gulf War Advisory Committee Update 05 ▶ H.R.4261 Passes House**

A House bill that passed 28 MAY will restore autonomy to a Gulf War illness board that had been stripped away by the Department of Veterans Affairs earlier this year. The Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses had been established as an independent board after Congress called VA's work on Gulf War illnesses "irreparably flawed" in 1997. But over the past year, VA has [replaced all but one of the board members](#), including the board chairman, and removed the board's charge to review the effectiveness of the VA. The department has also pushed research that looks toward stress as a cause, rather than environmental factors, of Gulf War illness. VA also recently required the board to obtain VA's written approval before releasing any reports about their oversight of VA. Soon after, they removed the board chairman's research report from a letter he wrote to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki.

The Gulf War Health Research Reform Act (H.R.4261), co-sponsored by Rep. Mike Coffman (R-CO) and Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ) requires that the majority of the committees' members be appointed by the board chairman, and returns oversight responsibilities for Gulf War research. The bill passed the House by a voice vote. "The committee shall exert independent control of the budget allocations, staffing levels and expenditures, personnel decisions and processes, procurements, and other administrative and management functions of the committee," the bill states. It also adds a requirement that animal research be considered by VA in the same way human studies are. This has come up in the past when researchers were able to show that rats exposed to the same toxins service members were exhibited the same symptoms, but VA [did not include that research](#) in its reports.

About a quarter of the 700,000 veterans who served in the 1991 Gulf War developed symptoms that include chronic headaches, widespread pain, memory and concentration problems, persistent fatigue, gastrointestinal problems, skin abnormalities and mood disturbances. Researchers have linked [changes in veterans' brains](#) to symptoms, as well as [connecting different groups](#) of veterans to symptoms based on where they served: anti-nerve-agent pills and Scud missiles for forward-deployed troops and pesticides for support personnel in the rear. The bill must be taken up and passed by the Senate for it to take effect. [Source: USA Today | Kelly Kennedy | May 29, 2014 ++]

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### **VA Hospice Care Update 04 ▶ Bill to Make All Vets Eligible**

Rep. Chris Collins (R-NY) has introduced on 22 MAY legislation to give all veterans access to hospice care through the Department of Veterans Affairs. VA hospice care is not guaranteed to all veterans under current law. For instance, veterans must have received previous care in the VA system and meet certain



income brackets in order to qualify for hospice care. Moreover, directives for VA hospice care can vary among individual facilities. Collins said his bill H.R.4725 would help provide veterans with equal access to hospice care. "It was a shock to learn that some of our veterans who have given so much to this country were not allowed to receive VA hospice care at the end of their lives," Collins said. "Our veterans deserve so much better." The House is expected to vote this week on five bills regarding services for veterans, including a measure that would overhaul the performance review system for VA senior executives. Last week, the House voted 390-33 to grant the VA secretary authority to fire or demote senior executives amid allegations that several VA hospitals tried to conceal wait times for medical appointments. [Source: The Hill | Cristina Marcos | May 27, 2014 ++]

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## **DIC Update 07 ▶ H.R.4171 Would Provide Rate Increase**

Rep. John Tierney (D-MA) on 22 MAY introduced H.R.4171, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for an increase in the amount of monthly dependency and indemnity compensation payable to surviving spouses by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The first section would raise DIC to 55 percent of what a 100% disabled veteran receives. At present a veteran with no dependents rated 100% receives \$2,858.24 monthly. The second section prohibits the increased amount (the difference between what they receive now and the increase) from causing a reduction in SBP benefits. Surviving spouses as of 1 DEC 2012 are entitled to receive a Basic Monthly Rate of \$1215 with the following additional allowances:

- Add **\$258** if at the time of the veteran's death, the veteran was in receipt of or entitled to receive compensation for a service-connected disability rated totally disabling (including a rating based on individual unemployability) for a continuous period of at least 8 years immediately preceding death AND the surviving spouse was married to the veteran for those same 8 years. (38 U.S.C. 1311(a)(2)).
- Add \$301 per child for each dependent child under age 18 (38 U.S.C. 1311(b)).
- Add **\$301** if the surviving spouse is entitled to A&A,. (38 U.S.C. 1311(c)).
- Add **\$141** If the surviving spouse is entitled to Housebound (38 U.S.C. 1311(d)).

This is a step forward in care for those who have lost loved ones due to service connected injury or illness. The bill is referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs for further consideration.

[Source: NAUS Weekly Update May 23, 2014 &

[http://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/resources\\_comp03.asp#BM01](http://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/resources_comp03.asp#BM01) May 14 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Update 29 ▶ SASC Amendment to NDAA Approved**

The Senate Armed Services Committee approved an amendment 23 MAY to consolidate the nation's POW/MIA accounting operations under a single agency with a single federal official in charge. The amendment — introduced by Missouri Democrat Sen. Claire McCaskill — was included in the annual National Defense Authorization Act during the committee's markup, according to a statement from McCaskill's office. McCaskill said the move would strengthen recovery efforts after the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office and Joint Prisoners of War, Missing in Action Accounting Command have come under fire for systemic problems. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel ordered an overhaul of the agencies in February. No concrete plans have been released yet. Families and advocacy groups have

criticized the efforts as not going far enough to fix the two agencies. McCaskill said that the amendment addresses the key deficit identified by the Government Accountability Office — that no one agency or official was in charge to coordinate and be held accountable for POW/MIA recovery. “With a single agency responsible, and a single federal official in charge, we can stop the finger-pointing and know exactly who to hold accountable for fixing this troubled program and honor our POW/MIA personnel and their families with a transparent and responsible recovery effort,” McCaskill said in the statement. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Matthew M. Burke | May 23, 2014++]

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## **VA Bonuses Update 15 ▶ Senate Panel Votes Temporary Ban**

A Senate panel on 22 MAY approved a Veterans Affairs Department spending bill that targets senior executives in response to the recent scandals that have engulfed the agency. The Senate Appropriations Committee’s Military Construction and VA fiscal 2015 funding measure would place a temporary ban on bonuses for some agency doctors and executives. The committee also accepted an amendment to include the House-backed bill that would ease the firing of senior executives at the agency. The appropriations bill, which provides \$165.4 billion in funding for VA and military construction for fiscal 2015, was approved unanimously and now heads to the full Senate. “At a time when the VA is being rocked by turmoil over allegations of secret wait lists at hospitals, on top of ongoing challenges to eliminate the claims processing backlog, Congress must move quickly to provide the leadership, resources, oversight and accountability needed to assure that veterans are receiving the timely and quality health care and benefits they deserve,” said Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D., chairman of the VA appropriations subcommittee.

The bonus provision would prohibit performance awards for Veterans Health Administration medical directors, assistant medical directors and Seniors Executive Service employees until the agency’s inspector general has completed its investigation into extended wait times and cover ups at VA facilities and “reforms have been implemented.” The bill would provide the inspector general \$5 million more than President Obama’s request and the 2014 level, in part to ensure it has the resources to conduct the investigation. The House in April [approved](#) its VA spending bill, which included a provision to prohibit bonuses for all VA senior executives in fiscal 2015. On 21 MAY, the House easily [passed](#) the VA Management Accountability Act, which would give Secretary Eric Shinseki enhanced authority to terminate or demote senior executives at the agency.

Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) introduced the same bill -- which federal employee advocates have derided as an unconstitutional political gambit that will ultimately drive qualified professionals away from the VA -- as an amendment to the spending bill. “VA personnel should be accountable for their actions; otherwise the current system of mediocrity and failure will remain,” Moran said. “This amendment will help make certain that those who violate VA policy and affect the quality of medical care veterans receive are held responsible.” Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) spoke out against the bill, saying it may end up doing more harm than good. “We want to make sure we have quality people in the hospitals and I’m sure this gets to that,” Tester said. The amendment, however, was adopted unanimously by voice vote. Carol Bonosaro, president of Senior Executives Association, had sent a letter on Wednesday urging the committee not to approve the bonus prohibition, and said in a statement, “It makes no sense to punish all for the alleged misdeeds of the very few.” [Source: GovExec.com | Eric Katz | May 23, 2014 ++]

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## **NDAA 2015 Update 01 ► House Overwhelmingly Passed Its Version**

The House overwhelmingly passed its version of the 2015 defense annual authorization bill 22 MAY rejecting Pentagon plans for benefits reductions, base closures and a host of program cuts all designed to rein in military spending. The bill would authorize total defense spending of about \$600 billion next year — \$521.3 billion in the national security base budget and \$79.4 billion more for overseas operations — but has been criticized by both lawmakers and Pentagon planners as too small. That’s due to spending caps imposed by Congress earlier this year, and looming sequestration limits for future defense budgets. In recent months, military leaders repeatedly petitioned House members to approve their preferred equipment and personnel cuts to pass without interference, saying even small changes would rack up billions in costs in years to come. But those pleas largely went unheeded. The House plan goes along with proposals to trim military active-duty end strength by about 52,000 soldiers, airmen and Marines next year. But it rejects plans to curb housing allowance rates, cut the commissary benefit, overhaul Tricare and limit troops’ pay raises.

Under the House bill, troops would be in line to receive a 1.8 percent pay raise next year, keeping military wages in line with projected private-sector paycheck growth — although House lawmakers failed to include a specific guarantee for that figure in the legislation, giving the White House an open path to implement its preferred 1 percent pay raise instead. House members also rearranged millions of dollars in the Pentagon’s original blueprint to keep the Air Force’s A-10 fleet, maintain 11 Navy aircraft carriers and block Army plans to transfer Apache helicopters from the National Guard to the active force. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA) defended the moves as prudent defense posturing, not parochial decisions. But he also acknowledged that the defense spending caps on the horizon will make decisions even more difficult next year — after he retires from Congress. “We had to make too many cuts, too many hard tradeoffs, and too many reductions to bring this bill in with \$30 billion less than we gave DoD last year,” McKeon said. “This year we were able to hold off disaster. Unless something changes, the choices next year will be brutal.”

Despite voting for the measure, Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), the armed services committee’s ranking Democrat, bemoaned what he called the short-sighted fiscal decisions in the measure. “This bill does not make any of the hard choices necessary to confront our fiscal challenges,” Smith said in a statement. “Congress simply undid all of the department’s cost-saving measures and slashed readiness accounts without offering alternatives.” Republicans blocked Smith’s attempts to spur floor debate on another round of base closings, a move that he and defense officials argue could save billions in years to come. But lawmakers in both the House and Senate have repeatedly rejected the idea, calling it unwise and politically unpopular. House leaders also blocked debate on measures regarding citizenship for immigrants who enlist and overhauling how sexual assault cases are prosecuted in the military. They also refused to allow debate on an amendment looking at military force authorization in Afghanistan past 2014, prompting sponsor Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) to protest the legislative stalling tactics of his colleagues.

Senators will debate their own authorization bill proposal in that chamber in coming weeks. Many of the Pentagon cost-savings provisions rejected by the House likewise have found little support in the Senate, providing a disappointing forecast for defense budget planners. The White House has already threatened a veto of whatever final bill emerges, both due to the spending priority changes and provisions that would require detention facilities at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba, to remain open. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane | My 22, 2014 ++]

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## **NDAAs 2015 Update 02 ► SASC Approves S.2289**

On 22 MAY the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) approved its committee version of the NDAA (S 2289). Like the House counterpart, the bill would block administration plans to raise TRICARE fees or cancel support for commissaries. In addition the Senate Committee bill rejects the Pentagon plans to retire the A-10 attack jet fleet, allow only a partial shift of Apache attack helicopters from the Army National Guard to the active force and authorize a carrier refueling that the administration wants to postpone into fiscal 2016. The measure also would authorize spending to train and equip Syrian rebels. Unlike the House passed version, the Senate Committee agrees with the President that our service members should receive a reduced pay increase below the established COLA rate. The Senate Committee and the President would provide only a 1 percent pay raise for members of the uniformed services. The next move for the Senate is to schedule the bill for consideration by the entire Senate. It has not been placed on the legislative calendar yet. One Washington wag sarcastically said, "With two Armed Services Committee chairmen retiring, the official title of this year's NDAA is up in the air. The Senate version is being named after Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI) and the House bill is named after Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA). Clearly, this will be the most important issue to clear up when the bill goes to conference." [Source: NAUS Weekly Update May 23, 2014 ++]

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## **NDAAs 2015 Update 03 ► Nuclear Weapons Spending Cut To Help Vets**

The version of the fiscal 2015 defense authorization bill that the House approved 22 MAY would cut some controversial nuclear weapons spending in a bid to help veterans. The legislation -- which authorizes but does not appropriate funds for military-related items -- includes two related amendments offered by Representative Dan Kildee (D-MI). Together they would cut \$7.5 million out of the \$643 million that the Obama administration requested for controversial efforts to extend the life of B-61 gravity bombs, many of which are stationed in Europe. The two provisions also would take \$7.5 million out of projects to refurbish the Navy's W-76 nuclear warhead -- more than half of the funding boost that the Republican leadership of the House Armed Services Committee had sought to authorize for the program. The bill would allow up to \$266.3 million in spending on W-76 refurbishment, still \$7.1 million more than the Obama administration requested. The money -- along with \$15 million that would be cut from the Navy's shipbuilding budget -- would fund two initiatives:

- One would create "a training program to increase and improve financial literacy and training for incoming and out-going military personnel," according to the legislation. According to a statement Kildee provided to Global Security Newswire, this would help address a problem of "unscrupulous lenders" targeting service members.
- The other would require the Pentagon to commission a third-party study meant to "identify deficiencies in the treatment of wounded warriors and offer recommendations to the secretary of Defense and Congress to improve such treatment," the measure states.

The House approval of Kildee's amendments comes amid furor on Capitol Hill over revelations about former service members who died while on a Veterans Affairs waiting list for medical appointments in Phoenix. According to Kildee's staff, "at a time when our wounded service members are not getting the adequate care they deserve, it is a misplaced priority to spend more money on such nuclear refurbishment programs for outdated weapons systems, especially when the Pentagon has not even asked for it." [Source: Global Security Newswire | Douglas P. Guarino | 23 May 2014 ++]

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## VA HISA Grants Update 02 ► H.R.4674 Introduced

Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA) has introduced a bill that would reimburse veterans waiting for housing grants to be approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The bill, H.R. 4674, would authorize the VA to reimburse veterans retroactively for housing grants once an application has been approved. Brownley said the legislation would help veterans who had encountered delays. "When a veteran is tragically diagnosed with a service-connected terminal illness, they should have the comfort of living the remainder of their lives with the independence and dignity they deserve," Brownley said in a statement. "They shouldn't have to wait for the VA to approve their housing claim to make that happen." The VA provides grants for purchasing or constructing homes to veterans with certain disabilities caused by their military service. Those grants can also be used to renovate veterans' current homes to accommodate their disabilities. [Source: The Hill | Cristina Marcos | May 22, 2014 ++]

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## Vet Bills Submitted to 113th Congress ► As of 28 May 2014

For a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 113<sup>th</sup> 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](http://www.thecapitol.net/FAQ/cong_schedule.html) for dates that you can access them on their home turf.

**Tentative 2014 Legislative Schedule 113th Congress, 2nd Session:** The below list identifies the remaining expected non-legislative periods (days that the Senate *will not* be in session)

| Date                    | Action            | Note                    |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Jun 30 - Jul 4          | State Work Period | Independence Day- Jul 4 |
| Aug 4 - Sep 5           | State Work Period | Labor Day- Sep 1        |
| Target Adjournment Date | TBD               |                         |

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

- H.R.4656 : **Caring for America's Heroes Act.** A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to improve access to mental health services under the TRICARE program.
- H.R.4674 : **Guarantee Housing for Terminally Ill Veterans Act.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the specially adapted housing assistance program for individuals with terminal illnesses, and for other purposes.
- H.R.4682 : **Veterans TRICARE Choice Act.** A bill to provide for coordination between the TRICARE program and eligibility for making contributions to a health savings account.
- H.R.4688 : **Gold Star Families Equality Act.** A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to provide appropriate recognition for the survivors of members of the Armed Forces who die while serving on certain active or reserve duty, to expand the availability of the Gold Star Installation Access Card for survivors of deceased members of the Armed Forces, and to extend commissary store and exchange store and other MWR retail facility benefits to the parents of such members.
- H.R.4720 : **MOH VA Enrollment Priority.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the priority for enrollment of medal of honor recipients in the health care system of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- H.R.4725 : **Expand VA Hospice Care to All Vets.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to ensure that all veterans are eligible to participate in hospice care programs of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- H.R.4741 : **Increase DIC Payment Amount.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for an increase in the amount of monthly dependency and indemnity compensation payable to surviving spouses by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- S.2316 : **VA OIG Wait Time Report.** A bill to require the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs to submit a report on wait times for veterans seeking medical appointments and treatment from the Department of Veterans Affairs, to prohibit closure of medical facilities of the Department, and for other purposes.
- S.2334 : **Improving Opportunities for Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses Act of 2014.** A bill to amend the Small Business Act and title 38, United States Code, to provide for a consolidated definition of a small business concern owned and controlled by veterans, and for other purposes.
- S.2337 : **Hmong Veterans' Service Recognition Act.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to inter in national cemeteries individuals who supported the United States in Laos during the Vietnam War era.
- S.2362 : **Prohibit VA Employee Performance Awards.** A bill to prohibit the payment of performance awards in fiscal year 2015 to employees in the Veterans Health Administration, and for other purposes.
- S.2396 : **SBA Vet Program Improvements.** A bill to establish the veterans' business outreach center program, to improve the programs for veterans of the Small Business Administration, and for other purposes.



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## **Veteran Hearing/Mark-up Schedule ▶ As of 29 May 2014**

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 or questions they want them to ask at the hearing. At <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/committees.tt?commid=svete> can be found the Membership of each committee and their contact info. You can view the text of all completed SVAC hearings at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/committee.action?chamber=senate&committee=va&collection=CHRG&plus=CHRG>. Missed House Veteran Affairs committee (HVAC) hearings can viewed at <http://veterans.house.gov/in-case-you-missed-it>.

➤ **Wednesday, June 11, 2014 (tentative).** SVAC will hold a hearing to discuss pending legislation.

- S. 1606 (Udall) CBOC naming
- S. 1637 (Manchin) United We Stand to Hire Veterans Act
- S. 1643 (Cardin) Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education
- S. 1662 (McConnell) Veterans Health Care Improvement Act of 2013
- S. 1682 (Casey) Veterans Education Counseling Act of 2013
- S. 1684 (Toomey) Service members Transition Improvement Act of 2013
- S. 1717 (Kaine) SERVE Act of 2013
- S. 1736 (Durbin) Serve Act
- S. 1740 (Landrieu) VA Major Medical Facility Lease Authorization of 2013
- S. 1751 (Heller) Authority for contracted disabilities exams for disability
- S. 1755 (Toomey) Dignified Interment of Our Veterans Act of 2013
- S. 1863 (Brown) Continued Education program for Medical Professionals
- S. 1892 (Collins) Canadian Forces Base Gagetown, New Brunswick Veterans registry
- S. 1985 (Moran) Veterans Health Care Access Closer to Home Act 2014
- S. 1987 (Feinstein) EUL at the West Los Angeles Medical Center
- S. 1993 (Warren) Veterans Care Financial Protection Act of 2014
- S. 1999 (Graham) SCRA Rights Protection Act of 2014
- S. 2009 (Udall) Rural Veterans Improvement Act of 2014
- S. 2013 (Rubio) VA Management Accountability Act of 2014
- S. 2014 (Durbin) GI Education Benefit Fairness Act of 2014
- S. 2091 (Heller) 21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act
- S. 2095 (Moran) Veterans Health Care Access Closer to Home Act 2014
- S. 2128 (Cornyn) VAMC naming
- S. 2145 (Feinstein) Veteran Voting Support Act
- S. 2179 (Murray) Homeless Veterans Services Protection Act of 2014
- S. 2182 (Walsh) Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act
- S. 2184 (Wyden) CBOC naming
- S. RES. 399 (Cornyn) Expressing support for the American GI Forum



**Cannon House Office Building and the Dirksen, Dirksen, & Russell Senate Office Buildings**

[Source: <http://www.veterans.senate.gov/hearings> & <http://veterans.house.gov/legislation/hearings> May 29, 2014 ++]

**\*Military\***



**Nuclear Weapon Safety ► Air Force Problems**

Security forces at an Air Force base in Montana failed to stop a simulated capture of a nuclear weapon, revealing a "critical deficiency," according to internal documents obtained by the Associated Press. The Malmstrom Air Force Base was tested with an "Empty Quiver" scenario last August, in which a nuclear weapon is stolen from one of the base's 150 nuclear-tipped missiles. But security forces failed to recapture the weapon within a certain time frame, thereby flunking the test. In January, a commander at the base told the AP that the simulation "confused our airmen. We were off by a matter of seconds." Meanwhile, the internal report placed blame on several areas: It said insufficient training was at the heart of the problem, beginning with a lack of familiarity among the security forces with "complex scenario" exercises. It also cited unspecified shortcomings in "leadership culture" and a lack of standardized simulations not only at Malmstrom but throughout the nuclear missile corps.

After this critical internal report, the base faced another test two months later and security forces passed. The Air Force failure comes less than a year after Eric Schlosser's explosive book *Command and Control*, which found that the U.S. Air Force has come incredibly close to accidentally setting off nuclear weapons several times. At the "Damascus Incident" in 1980, for example, a worker at an Air Force base dropped a socket during regular missile maintenance and pierced a Titan II ballistic missile, sending rocket fuel spraying. That almost led to an accidental nuclear explosion in Arkansas. In a conversation with *The Wire* last September, Schlosser noted that because of the Air Force's compartmentalization and secrecy, many of

its leaders didn't know about the safety breaches until he uncovered them. That suggests that outside reporting by the AP and others is just as valuable as the Air Force's own internal investigations. The AP's reporting over the last six months has numerous concerns with the Air Force's nuclear missile units, including low morale, poor training and leadership, and institutional neglect. [Source: GovExec.com | The Wire - Eric Levenson | May 21, 2014 ++]

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## **Blue Star Museums Program ► Free Admission thru Labor Day**

Beginning on Memorial Day more than 2,000 museums nationwide are offering free admission to military personnel and their families this summer. The Blue Star Museums program was launched 21 MAY at the San Antonio Museum of Art in Texas. This is the fifth year for the program created by the National Endowment for the Arts with the group Blue Star Families and the Defense Department. The [free admission](#) offer runs through Labor Day in September. It's extended to military service members, including National Guard and Reserve members, and their families. The initiative began in 2010 with fewer than 1,000 museums. New participants this year include the High Museum in Atlanta and The Thinkery children's museum in Austin, Texas. [Source: Associated Press article May 21, 2014++]

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## **M4A1 ► Army Begins Issuing 500,000 Upgraded M4 Carbines**

The first soldiers have begun receiving the upgraded M4 carbine, the M4A1 — the same weapon used for decades in special forces units. The 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas, is the first to get the converted weapons, Army officials announced 21 MAY. The new features of the deadlier weapon include a heavy barrel, ambidextrous fire control and a new fully-automatic drop-in trigger option to replace the M4's 'burst' setting. The barrel's weight allows the weapon to better resist heat and cook-off, allowing a sustained rate of fire. "Those piece-parts are part of conversion kits currently being applied at Fort Riley, and that increased capability not only includes an increased rate of fire, resistance to cook-off, but improved ergonomics," said Product Manager for Individual Weapons Lt. Col. Shawn Lucas. The Army is spending an estimated \$120 million on the program, which amounts to roughly \$240 per weapon, with plans to convert the Army's inventory of 500,000 previously fielded M4 carbines through 2019.



**A soldier fires an M4A1 during a regional Best Warrior Competition in 2012.**

Lucas would not say what units beyond the "Big Red One" would receive the M4A1, but acknowledged that brigade combat teams will receive it first, based on the priorities of Army headquarters, readiness

cycles and unit buy-in. The move comes roughly a year after the Army scuttled a competition for an M4 replacement. Officials for the soldier equipment acquisitions office, PEO Soldier, decided none of the offerings were enough of an improvement to justify the cost of fielding a new carbine. Troops under Special Operations Command have used the M4A1 configuration since 1994. PEO Soldier Command Sergeant Major Doug Maddi called the changes, “minor tweaks to an already pretty darn good system.” “In Afghanistan, there are times when a soldier needs an automatic-capable carbine to put down suppressing fires while soldiers are conducting fire movement and the like,” Maddi said. “They’ve asked for that ... and we’re very pleased we’ll be able to field a weapon system that can offer more lethality when they’re in combat.”

At 7.74 pounds, the M4A1 is a tenth of a pound heavier than the M4. The weight includes the heavier barrel, as well as a back-up iron sight, forward pistol grip, empty magazine and sling. For future upgrades, program officials said they are exploring an improved bolt and bolt carrier, a forward rail for integrating optics, a fold-down front site post, and a match-grade trigger and a suppressor. For now, the concepts are all on the drawing board, officials said. A team from Anniston Army Depot, Alabama, and Tank-Automotive Command in Warren, Michigan, are performing the upgrades at Fort Riley at a rate of 300 weapons per day, or roughly a brigade per week, Maddi said. It works this way: The hardware for the upgrades flows into Anniston, which assembles the upper receivers and ships them to the gaining unit, where conversions take place. As part of the conversions, a laser engraving machine changes ‘M4’ to ‘M4A1’ on the weapons and ‘burst’ to ‘auto.’ [Source: ArmyTimes | Joe Gould | May 21, 2014 ++]

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## **CIPP** ► **Active Duty | Take 3-yrs Off in IRR & Return**

The Air Force is planning to launch their pilot program later this year that would allow airmen to temporarily leave the service to start a family and return three years later. The Career Intermission Pilot Program (CIPP) would at first cover 20 officers and 20 enlisted airmen, Air Force personnel chief Lt. Gen. Samuel Cox said 15 MAY at an Air Force Association breakfast. If the program is a success, it could be expanded to include more airmen. “Some women leave the Air Force because they want to start a family,” Cox said. “So why don’t we have a program that allows them, in some cases, to be able to separate from the Air Force for a short period of time, get their family started, and then come back in?” Cox used the example of a female airman who wanted to start a family to explain how such a program could help airmen, but the program would not only be for women. Air Force spokeswoman Rose Richeson said it would be open to both male and female airmen who want “to meet personal or professional needs outside the service while providing a mechanism for seamless return to active duty.”

Participants would enter the Individual Ready Reserve during their time off, Cox said. Many details have not been determined — such as how airmen would be nominated, and the program’s schedule — but Cox said the board will start selecting the first participants before the end of this year. “It’s going to be a selective group,” Cox said. “It’s not just anybody. We want people that have high potential.” And to ensure their careers don’t suffer while they are raising a family or pursuing their other goals, Cox said their year groups would be reset when they return. For example, if an officer was in the 2000 year group before temporarily leaving the Air Force, Cox said she would be placed in the 2003 year group when she returns. This would aim to keep those who take time off from falling behind and missing out on promotions and other career opportunities. Airmen who enter Individual Ready Reserve are often placed on inactive status, meaning they do not draw pay and are not required to drill. Airmen would only be able to take this career

intermission once, Richeson said. The Navy has also experimented with a Career Intermission Pilot Program, and in 2012 expanded its pilot for three more years.

The Fiscal Year 2009 Defense Authorization Act allowed each of the services up to 2015 to establish programs which allow military members to take a break from active duty military service, in exchange for an extended active duty service obligation upon their return. The Navy was the first branch to implement this authority. Sailors who take part in the Navy's program can take one to three years off and incur a two-to-one service obligation for every month spent in the program. That means that if a sailor took three years off, he would be required to serve for six years after returning to the Navy, in addition to any other service obligations. Sailors' time spent in Individual Ready Reserve also does not count toward retirement, computation of total years of commissioned service, or high-year tenure limitations. While participating in the program, members will receive a monthly stipend of one-fifteenth of their basic pay. Additionally, they will retain active duty Tricare medical benefits for themselves and their family members, and are even eligible for a one-time funded move to anywhere in the continental United States, when they enter the program. According to Navy officials, the pilot program is only for top performers who have the desire to "Stay Navy," but need some time off. It could be for any number of reasons – to pursue a degree full-time, to take care of an ailing parent, or to start a family. The Marine Corps' program is similar in scope. [Source: The Washington Times | Douglas Ernst | May 15, 2014 ++]

**Note:** I could not find any information on whether or not the Army has implemented any similar programs

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## Medal of Honor Citations ► Tanouye~Ted T WWII



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

**Tanouye~Ted T**

**Rank and organization:** Technical Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company K, 442nd Regimental Combat Team

**Place and date:** Rome-Arno Campaign, December 14, 1944

**Entered service at:** Fort MacArthur, Calif, February 20, 1942

**Born:** November 14, 1919, Torrance, California

### *Citation*

Technical Sergeant Ted T. Tanouye distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action on 7 July 1944, near Molino A Ventoabbto, Italy. Technical Sergeant Tanouye led his platoon in an attack to capture the crest of a strategically important hill that afforded little cover. Observing an enemy machine gun crew

placing its gun in position to his left front, Technical Sergeant Tanouye crept forward a few yards and opened fire on the position, killing or wounding three and causing two others to disperse. Immediately, an enemy machine pistol opened fire on him. He returned the fire and killed or wounded three more enemy soldiers. While advancing forward, Technical Sergeant Tanouye was subjected to grenade bursts, which severely wounded his left arm. Sighting an enemy-held trench, he raked the position with fire from his submachine gun and wounded several of the enemy. Running out of ammunition, he crawled 20 yards to obtain several clips from a comrade on his left flank. Next, sighting an enemy machine pistol that had pinned down his men, Technical Sergeant Tanouye crawled forward a few yards and threw a hand grenade into the position, silencing the pistol. He then located another enemy machine gun firing down the slope of the hill, opened fire on it, and silenced that position. Drawing fire from a machine pistol nest located above him, he opened fire on it and wounded three of its occupants. Finally taking his objective, Technical Sergeant Tanouye organized a defensive position on the reverse slope of the hill before accepting first aid treatment and evacuation. Technical Sergeant Tanouye's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the United States Army



**Ted "Tak" Tanouye**

Ted "Tak" Tanouye was born in Torrance, California on November 14, 1919. The eldest of six children in a Japanese American family, he graduated from Torrance High School in 1938. At the time of the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor Tanouye was working in the produce department of Ray's Friendly Market, a local Japanese American owned grocery store.

On February 19, 1942 President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 authorizing the incarceration of Japanese Americans in designated internment camps. Tanouye's parents and siblings were interned in the Jerome War Relocation Center near Jerome, Arkansas. After the Jerome camp was closed on June 30, 1944 the Tanouye family was transferred to the Rohwer War Relocation Center near Rohwer, Arkansas. Ted Tanouye, however, was never incarcerated; having enlisted in the U.S. Army on February 20, 1942.

Tanouye joined the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a unit composed almost entirely of Japanese American soldiers, in 1943 and shipped out for Europe in 1944. The 442nd was sent to western Italy to aid the Allies' advance up the northern Italian coast.

On July 7, 1944—only his third day on the front line—Tanouye was serving as a Technical Sergeant in the 442nd's Company K.] During a battle on that day, near Molino a Ventoabbto, Italy, during which he



received the MOH for his actions noted in the above citation. After recovering from his wounds Tanouye returned to the front lines where, on September 1, 1944, he was wounded by an exploding land mine near San Mauro, Italy. He died five days later on September 6, 1944.

Tanouye was buried in Italy. In 1948 his body was exhumed and returned to Los Angeles. A funeral service was held at the Buddhist Temple in Little Tokyo and Tanouye was interred in Evergreen Cemetery, Los Angeles, California.

For his heroic actions on July 7, 1944, Ted T. Tanouye was posthumously awarded the Army's second-highest decoration, the Distinguished Service Cross. A 1996 review of service records for Asian Americans who received the Distinguished Service Cross during World War II led to Tanouye's award being upgraded to the Medal of Honor. In a ceremony at the White House on June 21, 2000, his surviving family was presented with his Medal of Honor by President Bill Clinton. Twenty-one other Asian Americans also received the medal during the ceremony, all but seven of them posthumously.

In addition to receiving the Medal of Honor, Tanouye was also posthumously awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge, and World War II Victory Medal. Tanouye is the namesake of the Torrance National Guard Army in California

[Source: WWII Medal of Honor Recipients [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted\\_T.\\_Tanouye](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_T._Tanouye) May 2014 ++]

## \*Military History\*



### **Memorial Day Remembrance Update 05** ► **Civil War Surrender Terms**

The first Memorial Day — then called Decoration Day — was celebrated May 30, 1868, three years after the end of the Civil War to honor the Union dead. Compared to a national population of 31.4 million in 1860, the Civil War dead, both Union and Confederate, are now roughly estimated at 750,000 and possibly more. After World War I, the holiday commemorated all U.S. war dead. In 1971, Memorial Day became an official national holiday. “Historical Statistics of the United States (Millennial Edition)” lists war dead by conflicts as follows: the Revolutionary War, 4,435; the War of 1812, 2,260; the Mexican War, 13,283; the Spanish-American War, 2,446; World War I, 116,516; World War II, 405,399; the Korean War, 36,576; the

Vietnam War, 58,200; the Persian Gulf War, 382. In addition, the Pentagon reports 6,809 deaths in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and related combat zones as of 22 MAY.

War mixes horror and heroism. More fitting than any Memorial Day commentary is the following description of Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox to Ulysses S. Grant. It comes from Princeton historian James McPherson's Pulitzer Prize-winning account of the Civil War, "Battle Cry of Freedom." ...

The terms [Grant offered] were generous: officers and men could go home "not to be disturbed by U.S. authority so long as they observe their paroles and the laws in force where they may reside." This clause had great significance. It guaranteed Southern soldiers immunity from prosecution for treason. Lee asked another favor. In the Confederate army, he explained, enlisted men in the cavalry and artillery owned their horses; could they keep them? Yes, said Grant; privates as well as officers who claimed to own horses could take them home to put in a crop to carry them and their families through the next winter. "This will have the best possible effect upon the men," said Lee, and "will do much toward conciliating our people." After signing the papers, Grant introduced Lee to his staff. As he shook hands with Grant's military secretary Ely Parker, a Seneca Indian, Lee stared a moment at Parker's dark features and said, "I am glad to see one real American here." Parker responded, "We are all Americans."

The surrender completed, the two generals saluted somberly and parted. "This will live in history," said one of Grant's aides. But the Union commander seemed distracted. Having given birth to a reunited nation, he experienced a post-partum melancholy. "I felt .. sad and depressed," Grant wrote, "at the downfall of a foe who had fought so long and valiantly, and had suffered so much for a cause, though that cause was, I believe, one of the worst for which a people ever fought." As news of the surrender spread through Union camps, batteries began firing joyful salutes until Grant ordered them stopped. "The war is over," he said; "the rebels are our countrymen again, and the best sign of rejoicing after the victory will be to abstain from all demonstrations." To help bring those former rebels back into the Union, Grant sent three days' rations for 25,000 men across the lines. This perhaps did something to ease the psychological as well as physical pain of Lee's soldiers.

So did an important symbolic gesture at a formal ceremony three days later when Confederate troops marched up to stack arms and surrender their flags. As they came, many among them shared the sentiments of one officer: "Was this to be the end of all our marching and fighting for the past four years? I could not keep back the tears." The Union officer in charge of the surrender ceremony was Joshua L. Chamberlain, the fighting professor from Bowdoin who won a medal of honor for Little Round Top [a crucial engagement at Gettysburg], had been twice wounded since then, and was now a major general. Leading the Southerners as they marched toward two of Chamberlain's brigades standing at attention was John B. Gordon, one of Lee's hardest fighters who now commanded Stonewall Jackson's old corps. First in line of march behind him was the Stonewall Brigade, five regiments containing 210 ragged survivors of four years of war. As Gordon approached at the head of these men with "his chin drooped to his breast, downhearted and dejected in appearance," Chamberlain gave a brief order, and a bugle call rang out. Instantly the Union soldiers shifted from order arms to carry arms, the salute of honor. Hearing the sound General Gordon looked up in surprise, and with sudden realization turned smartly to Chamberlain, dropped his sword in salute, and ordered his own men to carry arms. [Source: The Washington Post | Robert J. Samuelson | May 25, 2014 ++]

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## Aviation Art 66 ► Ramriders



# Ramriders

By Richard Taylor

As the Allied Air Forces began their massed attack on Germany's oil refineries, the Luftwaffe was about to hit back with a new battle tactic— the Sturmgruppe! Closing at high speed with all cannons blazing, Unteroffizier Willi Maximowitz is seen flying his distinctive “Black 8” with IV Sturm/JG3, as he dives in to attack a formation of USAAF B-24s from the 93rd Bomb Group. The American gunners have a frightening task on their hands to fend off the attack until help arrives. [Source: <http://www.leisuregalleries.com/ramriders.html> May 2014 ++]

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## Military Trivia ► Enemy Compassion over Nazi Germany

On Dec. 20, 1943, Second Lt. Charles "Charlie" Brown was desperately trying to keep his heavily damaged plane, a B-17F bomber known as 'Ye Olde Pub,' aloft over Germany. This was the crew's first mission and they had been in the second wave of bombers targeting Focke-Wulf airplane manufacturing plant near Bremen in northwest Germany when they ran into very heavy flak during their bombing run. The anti-aircraft fire blew out the Plexiglas nose, destroyed one engine and damaged two others. There were holes all over the fuselage and the tail was half gone; they couldn't keep up with the rest of the bombers. Suddenly, they were attacked by a wave of eight Messerschmitt fighters, followed by another seven. His crew fought back and downed one or two of them, but then Brown, who was wounded along with most of his crew lost control of his plane. It flipped over and spiraled down, causing Brown to lose consciousness.



The Germans figured the bomber was spiraling to its death and left. What they could not have known was Brown had finally regained control with just hundreds of feet to spare. Of his crew members, one was dead and six wounded, and Brown was alone in his cockpit since his co-pilot copilot Spencer "Pinky" Luke along with two other unharmed men, were tending to the others. Blood of the wounded crew was splattered throughout the plane's interior. When Brown asked for a damage report, one of the crew replied, "We're chewed to pieces." Directly below them was a German airfield. On the airfield German pilot Franz Stigler, a former commercial airline pilot whose father and brother had both died while serving their country, was refueling and re-arming his Messerschmitt Bf-109. When he heard Brown's B-17 Flying Fortress roaring overhead, barely 200 above the ground, he looked up, dismayed at how low it was. Oberleutnant (Lieutenant) Stigler had already shot down two B-17s that day and one more added to his total would mean he would receive the Knight's Cross, Germany's highest military award. He took off in his fighter as soon as he could.



Soon after taking off, Stigler located the B-17 and he approached from behind and above the bomber. At that distance he could see the tail was half shot away. Stigler dropped lower, closing, watching for the tail-gunner's machine guns to rise, meaning he'd been spotted, but they never moved. He got close enough to see that the tail-gunner was dead or dying, his blood running down the gun barrel. Stigler edged his fighter alongside the stricken bomber. He had never seen a plane with so much damage still able to fly. There were so many holes in its fuselage he could see crew members tending to their wounded. Stigler remembered a former commander who, during the campaign in North Africa, told them: "You are fighter pilots first, last, always. If I ever hear of any of you shooting at someone in a parachute, I'll shoot you myself." Stigler considered that shooting these men down now would be the same as machine gunning them in parachutes.

Pulling in behind the bomber and concerned he would come under fire, Stigler had his finger on the trigger, one eye closed and the other squinting through his gun sight. He took aim and was about to fire when he realized what he wasn't seeing: This plane had no tail guns blinking. This plane had no left stabilizer. This plane had no tail-gun compartment left, and as he got closer, Stigler saw the terrified tail gunner himself,

his fleece collar soaked red, the guns themselves streaked with it, icicles of blood hanging from the barrels. Stigler was no longer energized. He was alarmed. He pulled alongside the plane and saw clean through the middle, where the skin had been blown apart by anti-aircraft shells. He saw these terrified young men attempting to tend to their wounded. He drew equal to the B-17 and saw that the nose of the plane, too, had been blown away. How was this thing still in the air? He maneuvered toward the disabled bomber's wingtip.



At first, Brown didn't notice the small German plane. He was thinking, thinking, thinking. He had six wounded men in the back. Some were strong enough to jump out, but the critically injured would never survive the cold German forest. He'd have to keep flying, try to make it to England, but the others should jump. He then noticed the German fighter. Flying along the wingtip of the Pub, a relaxed Stigler nodded to Brown but he was in such a state of shock he did not return the greeting. Running through Brown's mind was how daring the German pilot in flying that close to even a badly crippled enemy bomber. Stigler signaled to Brown to land in Germany. Brown, in pain and still recovering from oxygen deprivation, refused. Stigler reconsidered and then tried to get Brown to swing northeast toward neutral Sweden, only 30 minutes away. He didn't think the B-17 could make it back to England. Again, Brown refused, sticking to his course. Stigler continued to escort Brown's Flying Fortress through the skies over Germany partly because he didn't want anyone to shoot them down. When they were finally over the North Sea, Stigler saluted and turned away. He didn't think much of their chances.

Brown himself did not think much of their chances either but a crash-landing was never seriously considered since all pilots of B-17's were under strict instructions that if a crash-landing became necessary as a last resort, survivors were to destroy the aircraft and activate the explosive charge in the highly secret Norden bombsight. Since it appeared to Brown most of the crew would not survive a parachute jump into northern Germany in the winter, and possibly all of them would perish in a crash-landing, Brown would fly back over land to let any of the crew bale out who wished to do so, and would then try and fly the aircraft back to England. All agreed to stay on board and take their chances. Brown managed to get his B-17 back to base. For getting his plane and crew back under such conditions, a Colonel told him he would be nominated for the Medal of Honor. However, during debriefing, he and his crew kept talking about the crazy German who had escorted them to the sea. Immediately after, he and his crew's participation in the mission was classified Secret and ordered not to discuss it with anyone. He never officially received so much as a pat on the back.





Stigler returned to his base and reported that he had shot-down the B-17 over the North Sea. To have done otherwise he would have been court-martialed and possibly shot for letting an enemy go free. By the end of the war he'd flown 487 combat missions and had 28 confirmed kills. He never received the Knight's Cross. He served through the end of World War II and, unable to ever feel at home in Germany living in fear that he'd be found out, relocated to Vancouver, Canada, in 1953. Brown served right up until the beginning of the Vietnam War and eventually settled with his wife in Miami. Still deeply traumatized by the incident, he thought about searching for the German until finally, in January 1990, knowing the odds were against him, he took out an ad in a newsletter for fighter pilots, looking for the one "who saved my life on Dec. 20, 1943." He held back one key piece of information: Where the German pilot had abandoned his B-17.

At home in Vancouver, Stigler saw the ad. He yelled to his wife: "This is him! This is the one I didn't shoot down!" Franz had always wondered if the great risk he'd taken had been worth it, if the American had made it home. Brown had always wondered what the German had been planning to do to him, and why he had let him go. He immediately wrote a letter to Brown. Brown was too impatient to actually read it. He called the operator and had her look up Franz Stigler's number, then placed the call immediately. "When I let you go over the sea," Stigler said, "I thought you'd never make it." "My God," Brown said. "It's you." Tears were streaming down his face. Stigler had answered Brown's secret question without Brown having to ask it. "What were you pointing for?" Brown asked. Stigler, too, was crying. He explained everything: that he could tell that Brown had no idea how bad the plane was, that he was pointing first to the ground, to Germany, and then pointing away, mouthing "Sweden," that he was trying to escort them to safety and that he abandoned them only when he saw the gun swing from the turret. "Good luck," he'd said to Brown from his cockpit. "You're in God's hands."



They met at a 379th Bomber Group reunion, together with 25 people who are alive now - all because Franz never fired his guns that day. For the rest of their lives, Charlie Brown and Franz Stigler became close friends. Both also felt that they should tell their story to as many people as would hear it, not for money but to make people realize that there's always another way that the world could be infinitely better



than it was. Stigler and Brown both had heart attacks and died in 2008, six months apart. Stigler was 92; Brown, 87. In their obituaries, each was listed the other as "a special brother. The complete story can be found in a book written by Adam Makos and Larry Alexander entitled A Higher Call. [Source: Together We Served April 24, 2014 ++]

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## **Military History** ▶ **Wham Paymaster Robbery**

The Wham Paymaster Robbery was an armed robbery on a United States Army paymaster transporting over \$28 000 in gold and silver coins (\$744 thousand in present-day terms) and his escort that occurred on May 11, 1889. Major Joseph W. Wham was transporting a payroll from Fort Grant, Arizona Territory to Fort Thomas when he and his escort of eleven Buffalo Soldiers were ambushed. During the attack, the bandits wounded eight of the soldiers, forced them to retreat to cover, and stole the payroll. As a result of their actions under fire, Sergeant Benjamin Brown and Corporal Isaiah Mays were awarded the Medal of Honor while eight other soldiers received a Certificate of Merit. Eleven men, most from the nearby Mormon community of Pima, were arrested with eight tried on charges of robbery. At trial all the accused were found not guilty and the stolen money has never been recovered. For details on how this robbery was done and its aftermath refer to the addendum to this Bulletin titled, **“The Wham Paymaster Robbery”**. [Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wham\\_Paymaster\\_Robbery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wham_Paymaster_Robbery) May 2014 ++]

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## **WWII Prewar Events** ▶ **Hitler’s Nuremberg Audience Sep 1935**



**Thousands of young men flocked to hang upon the words of their leader, Reichsfuhrer Adolf Hitler, as he addressed the convention of the National Socialist Party in Nuremberg, Germany on Sept. 11, 1935.**

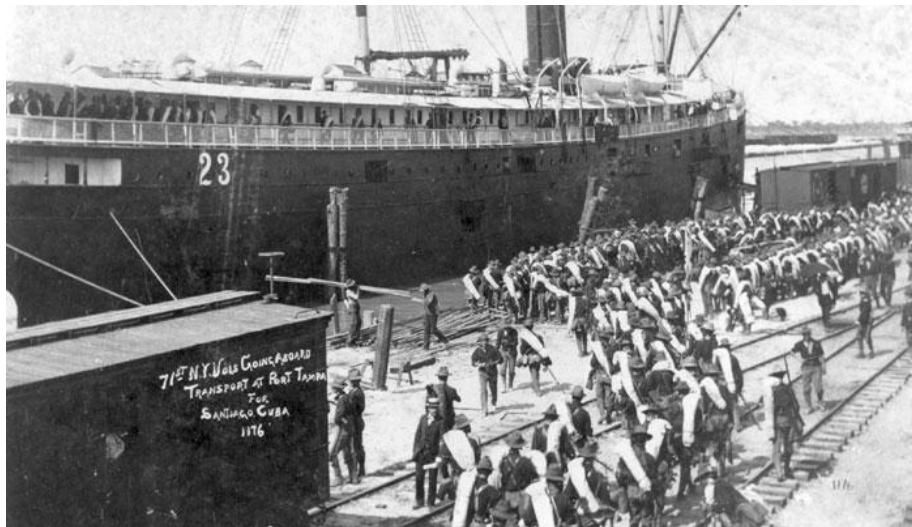
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## Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 30 Jun

Significant events in U.S. Military History are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 01 - 30 Jun**”.

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## Spanish American War Image 49 ► Port Tampa Embarkation



A black and white photo taken in 1898 of soldiers loading ship at Port Tampa during the Spanish American War.

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## Faces of WAR (WWII) ► US Army Lieut. Gen. Jonathan Wainwright



US Army Lieut. Gen. Jonathan Wainwright, 62, wearing uniform hat, looking painfully emaciated, after his recent release from isolated imprisonment by the Japanese for over 3 yrs

**WWI in Photos 101** ► **Battlefield in Chateau Wood Oct 1917**



**Soldiers of an Australian 4th Division field artillery brigade walk on a duckboard track laid across a muddy, shattered battlefield in Chateau Wood, near Hooze, Belgium, on October 29, 1917. This was during the Battle of Passchendaele, (Third Battle of Ypres) fought by British forces and their allies against Germany for control of territory near Ypres, Belgium. Casualties and losses: Allies between 200,000 & 448, 614 – Axis between 217,000 & 410,000. It was considered a Allied tactical and strategic victory but an operational failure.**

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**\*Health Care\***



**Tricare Pharmacy Copay Update 11** ► **Prevent Rx Fee Hike**

Both the House and Senate defense bill reject administration proposals to consolidate TRICARE health care options and implement enrollment fees for TRICARE For Life (TFL). But, the Senate defense bill

includes the administration’s proposal to dramatically alter the TRICARE pharmacy benefit (as well as [cap military pay raises and increase housing costs for military families](#)). The proposal would change pharmacy benefits in three key ways:

**1) Copay increases**

The charts below illustrate how pharmacy copays would increase over the next decade. Retail and mail-order copays would double or triple while the MTF would remain cost free.

| Retail (1 month) | Current | FY15 | FY16 | FY17 | FY18 | FY19 | FY20 | FY21 | FY22 | FY23 | FY24 |
|------------------|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Generic          | \$5     | \$5  | \$6  | \$7  | \$8  | \$9  | \$10 | \$11 | \$12 | \$13 | \$14 |
| Brand            | \$17    | \$26 | \$28 | \$30 | \$32 | \$34 | \$36 | \$38 | \$40 | \$43 | \$45 |
| Non-Formulary    | \$44    | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  |

| Mail order (3 month) | Current | FY15 | FY16 | FY17 | FY18 | FY19 | FY20 | FY21 | FY22 | FY23 | FY24 |
|----------------------|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Generic              | \$0     | \$0  | \$0  | \$0  | \$0  | \$9  | \$10 | \$11 | \$12 | \$13 | \$14 |
| Brand                | \$13    | \$26 | \$28 | \$30 | \$32 | \$34 | \$36 | \$38 | \$40 | \$43 | \$45 |
| Non-Formulary        | \$43    | \$51 | \$54 | \$58 | \$62 | \$66 | \$70 | \$75 | \$80 | \$85 | \$90 |

**2) Mandatory mail-order refills of maintenance medications for all TRICARE beneficiaries**

The FY 2013 defense authorization act required all TRICARE For Life beneficiaries to refill maintenance medications through either the mail-order pharmacy or an MTF for at least one year. The Senate version of the FY 2015 defense bill would expand this requirement to all TRICARE beneficiaries.

**3) Non-formulary medication restrictions**

Drugs not listed on the [TRICARE formulary](#) would only be available on a limited basis via the retail pharmacy system. These drugs would still be available through mail-order pharmacy or the MTF.

Those concerned about the deterioration of our benefits are encouraged to communicate with their legislators about it. You can send your legislators an editable MOAA suggested message asking them to resist efforts to dramatically increase TRICARE pharmacy copays. To do so go to <http://capwiz.com/moaa/issues/alert/?alertid=63227256>. [Source: MOAA Legislative Update May 30, 2014 ++]

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**VA Dental Treatment Update 07 ► Maxillofacial Prosthodontist Work**

In the VA’s patient population, it’s not uncommon for some Veterans to lose part of the oral cavity or have facial defects due to trauma, head and neck cancer, or both. These patients are normally treated by a dental specialist employed in the VA dental service. A maxillofacial prosthodontist is a dental specialist who provides prosthetic reconstruction for the oral cavity and the maxillofacial region as well. A typical request to the maxillofacial prosthodontist is to provide an oral prosthesis to patients who are missing parts of their oral cavity, so that they can more easily eat, drink and speak. In cases where parts of the facial area need to be restored – such as a missing nose, ear or eyes – they will also be called on to provide this kind of restoration.

Such a case is Louis Matarangolo, a veteran who had part of his maxillary palate and nose removed many years ago due to a facial tumor. As a result, he had difficulty talking and eating, and he did not feel



comfortable in public. His reconstruction called for a prosthesis to close the palatal defect and a nasal prosthesis made out of medical-grade silicone to restore the missing nose. Teamwork was vital to the success of this rehabilitation. It involved a dental specialist as well as dental technicians at Dobbs Labs, Inc. in Hoover, Ala., and a maxillofacial prosthetics technician at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center in Bronx, N.Y. Dr. Phan, maxillofacial Prosthodontist, provided an accurate reproduction of the defect areas and their surrounding anatomical structures, as well as measurements, so that both the dental and the nasal prostheses could be fabricated. An impression known as “facial moulage,” was taken of the entire face and sent to the prosthetics technician, along with current and past photos of the patient, so that the artificial nose would accurately reflect the patient’s pre-surgery appearance.



**Dr. Phan produces a master cast “moulage” of Matarangolo’s face from which two different prostheses were made to accommodate seasonal changes to skin color and then pigments are applied to match the skin tone**

The dental laboratory technician created the oral prostheses from the measurements provided on the laboratory prescription. The nasal prosthesis was then waxed up and processed to match the patient’s skin tone and complexion. After this step, the prostheses were returned, and Dr. Phan began the process to fit them to the patient. This involved seeing how they fit when he talked, ate, and smiled – would they stay in place without dislodging? Could he breathe OK? Did he like them? That feedback and gave it to the technicians, and they changed the prostheses to fit Matarangolo’s needs. Sometimes at the delivery visit, pigments have to be applied to ensure the seamless transition between the natural and artificial skin tones. And due to the seasonal changes that affect skin color – tan in the summer, paler skin in the winter – they developed two different nasal prostheses for him. Dr. Phan said of his contribution to VA’s dental program, “I find my field of work highly rewarding when I know that my service has such an impact on someone’s quality of life. Practicing maxillofacial prosthodontics allows me to combine medicine, dentistry and art into one. It gives me even more satisfaction when I am able to provide valuable service to those who gave us the freedom we have today. For our returning troops who may have maxillofacial defects sustained by wartime injuries, prosthetic reconstruction provided by VA dental services fills a gap in cases where surgical reconstruction may not be feasible.” [Source: Vantage Point | Dai Phan | 20 May 2014 ++]

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## **Polio ► WHO Declares Public Health Emergency**

A resurgence of the polio virus and its rapid spread to new countries prompted the World Health Organization (WHO) on 5 MAY, 2014, to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. The WHO recommends certain precautions to international travelers. All travelers to or from the countries currently infected and exporting wild poliovirus -- Pakistan, Cameroon, and the Syrian Arab Republic -- should receive polio vaccinations within twelve months of international travel. U.S. citizens should be

aware that they may be subject to additional polio vaccination requirements to enter or exit these countries. In addition, WHO declared seven countries -- Afghanistan, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Israel, Nigeria, and Somalia -- infected with wild poliovirus but not currently exporting it. These countries pose an ongoing risk for wild poliovirus exportations in 2014. U.S. citizens visiting or residing in these countries may wish to take additional precautions, including determining if they should receive polio vaccinations prior to international travel.

Just two years ago — after a 25-year campaign that vaccinated billions of children — the paralyzing virus was near eradication; now health officials say that goal could evaporate if swift action is not taken. Polio, short for poliomyelitis, is a highly contagious virus spread in feces; although only one case in 200 causes symptoms, the hardest-hit victims can be paralyzed or killed. With so many silent carriers, even one confirmed case is considered a serious outbreak. There is no cure. Unlike influenza or other winter viruses, polio thrives in hot weather. Cases start rising in the summer and often explode when the monsoon rains break the summer heat, flooding sewage-choked gutters and bathing the feet of romping children with virus, which they pick up by touching their feet or a ball and then putting a finger in a mouth. Though the disease primarily strikes children, evidence has mounted that it also crosses borders in adult carriers, such as traders, smugglers and migrant workers. There is no specific treatment or cure, but several vaccines exist.



**A man with an atrophied right leg and a child with a deformity of her right leg due to poliomyelitis**

The State Department recommends that U.S. citizens visiting or residing in countries where wild poliovirus is of concern should check the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Traveler's Health website for specific vaccination requirements and travel recommendations for each country, and check the WHO webpage for regional poliovirus information. You can also check the Country Specific Information report for each country on the Bureau of Consular Affairs' travel.state.gov website. It is always a good practice to check the information on any country through which you may transit on the way to your destination, since the transit countries may also have their own specific vaccine requirements. [Source: New York Times | Donald G. McNeil Jr. | MAY 5, 2014 ++]

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## **TRICARE RP Demo Project Update 09 ► Phase III Starts 1 JUL**

Phase III of the Philippine Demonstration starts July 1, 2014, in Iloilo City, Iloilo. The demonstration is for TRICARE Overseas Program (TOP) Standard beneficiaries who live in the Philippines and receive care in designated demonstration areas. Within the designated demonstration areas, TOP Standard beneficiaries are required to see approved demonstration providers to ensure TRICARE cost-shares their claims, unless they request and receive a waiver from the TOP subcontractor, Global 24 Network Services. Phase I encompassed Metro Manila; Angeles City, Pampanga; and Olongapo City, Zambales. Phase II included five cities in the province of Cavite: General Trias, Naic, Bacoor, Imus and Cavite City.

International SOS Assistance, Inc., the TOP contractor, and Global 24 Network Services administer the benefit under the Philippine Demonstration. TOP Standard beneficiaries who get care from approved demonstration providers receive quality health care with lower out-of-pocket costs. Deductibles and cost-shares still apply. Also, these approved demonstration providers have agreed to file claims with the TOP claims processor on the beneficiary's behalf. Your residence is determined by the physical address listed on your health care claims, regardless of the address listed in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). TOP Standard beneficiaries using a Philippine APO/FPO address on the *TRICARE DoD/CHAMPUS Medical Claim—Patient's Request for Medical Payment* form (*DD Form 2642*) for medical care received in Phases I thru III designated demonstration areas are required to follow the rules of the Philippine Demonstration to ensure that TRICARE cost-shares their claims.

If you travel to the Philippines, live in the Philippines outside of a demonstration area or live in a demonstration area but receive care outside of that area, you must see a certified provider. The Philippine Demonstration does not apply to pharmacy or dental services. All beneficiaries must continue to use certified pharmacy or dental providers. Refer to <http://www.tricare-overseas.com/philippines.htm> for more information and to view the Philippine Approved/Certified Provider list. [Source: TRICARE Overseas Program Standard Health Matters Newsletter May 2014 ++]

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## **TFL Pharmacy Benefit Update 05 ► Express Scripts Explains Pilot**

Last year the NDAA included a TFL mail order pharmacy pilot program which is now going into effect. (It was included to stop the dramatic increases in TRICARE drug co-pays that the Administration proposed but did not get.) Following is an explanation of how the program is working that Express Scripts wanted you to see:

Did you receive a letter notifying you that one or more of your maintenance medications is on the list for the new TRICARE® For Life (TFL) Pharmacy Pilot? If so, you need to take action to avoid paying the full cost of your medication. This new Pilot program requires TFL beneficiaries living in the United States who fill select maintenance medications at a retail pharmacy to switch these prescriptions to TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery or a military pharmacy. Maintenance drugs are those that you take regularly for a chronic condition such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol. If one of your medications is on the list, you need to take action. To find out if your drugs are covered by the Pilot, call Express Scripts at 1(877) 882-3335 or visit <http://www.tricare.mil/tflpilot>.

If you find one of your medications on the list, the easiest option for you is to transfer your medication from a retail pharmacy, at a cost of \$51 for a brand name 90-day supply, to Home Delivery, at a cost of \$13 for a brand name 90-day supply. Home Delivery is convenient, safe and cost-effective. With Home

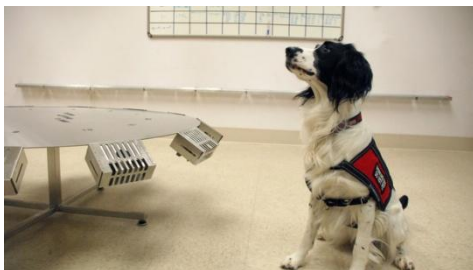
Delivery, maintenance medications you take regularly are delivered to your home at a cheaper cost than filling your prescriptions at a retail pharmacy. Plus, with Worry-free Fills®, refilling your medications is easy.

For more than three years, 96% of surveyed beneficiaries who use Home Delivery reported they were satisfied. It's easy to make the switch to Home Delivery. You can call Express Scripts Member Choice Center at 1(877) 882-3335. You can also make the switch online by logging in to your account at <http://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE>. (Once you log in, look for the "Prescriptions" sections on your home page. Then, click "Transfer to Home Delivery.") You can also have your doctor fax your prescription to 1-877-895-1900. Visit [www.tricare.mil/tflpilot](http://www.tricare.mil/tflpilot) for all your options. Remember: If one of your medications is covered by the Pilot and you haven't switched to Home Delivery or a military pharmacy after two fills, you'll be responsible for 100% of the cost if you continue to receive your prescription from a retail pharmacy. Make the switch to Home Delivery today. With the convenience and cost savings, you'll be glad you did. [Source: TREA News for the Enlisted May 19, 2014 ++]

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## **Cancer Detection ► Canine Use Study Shows Promise**

Fido is more than man's best friend. He could help save your life. Research shows that dogs' snouts may be more accurate than advanced laboratory procedures when it comes to detecting cancer. According to Bloomberg, University of Pennsylvania researchers use Labrador retriever Tsunami to sniff out ovarian cancer. Researchers say she is more than 90 percent successful in identifying the scent of ovarian cancer in tissue samples, opening a new window on a disease with no effective test for early detection that kills 14,000 Americans a year. When found early, there's a five-year survival rate of over 90 percent. A canine snout has four times the amount of olfactory cells as a human's. Italian researchers recently found that specially trained dogs were able to sniff out prostate cancer from urine samples with an astounding 98 percent accuracy, Bloomberg said. The study, which involved more than 600 samples, is the largest study completed on cancer-sniffing canines. "Our study demonstrates [that] the use of dogs might represent in the future a real clinical opportunity if used together with common diagnostic tools," said Gian Luigi Taverna, the author of the prostate cancer research, reported recently at the American Urological Association in Boston.



**Cancer detection dog McBaine is trained to sniff out the odorants that indicate a woman has ovarian cancer, a disease that has no effective test for early detection**

Dogs have been detecting cancer outside of studies as well. [BBC News said](#) a woman in England credits her spaniel for detecting a cancerous tumor in her breast. The dog reportedly sniffed and pawed at her owner's breast until the woman examined herself, finding a lump. The cancerous tumor was removed and the dog's owner underwent chemotherapy. Right now, a large number of questions surround the concept of using dogs in a clinical setting. Bloomberg said: Questions remain on whether one type of dog is

better than another, how to systemize their use and the financial viability of any such system. As a result, most current research is looking at how to copy the canine ability to smell disease either with a machine or a chemical test. The InSitu Foundation is working to gain Food and Drug Administration approval for a canine medical scent detection kit that would utilize breath samples to detect lung cancer. Still other researchers are hoping to develop a robotic nose of sorts that replicates a dog's ability to smell disease. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | May 20, 2014 ++]

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## **Lupas ► T-Cell Activation Therapy**

Like most autoimmune diseases, lupus can wreak havoc on the human body. It attacks healthy cells and damages joints, blood vessels and vital organs, including the kidneys, liver, heart and brain. In extreme cases, lupus can even be fatal. Dr. Charles Via, a professor in the Department of Pathology at the F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine at the Uniformed Services School of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Md., is conducting research that seeks both an earlier diagnosis and better therapies for lupus. Although the cause of lupus is still a mystery, research suggests genes and sex hormones play a factor, because women -- particularly minorities -- are especially prone to contracting lupus during their childbearing years. For this reason, lupus is an important focus area for military-trained rheumatologists such as Dr. Charles Via, a professor in the Department of Pathology at the F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine, who spent eight years on active duty in the Army and 16 years taking care of patients for the Veterans Affairs Department before coming to the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences here.



**Dr. Charles Via**

Via said, "A lot of service members are affected by lupus. And with more women joining the military each year, it will become an even bigger problem for the Department of Defense until science gets a better handle on lupus." Via is working toward this goal by conducting research at USU that seeks both an earlier diagnosis and better therapies for lupus. "Lupus has several manifestations, and it can seem like many different diseases. Therefore, it's often misdiagnosed or overlooked," he said. "Treating lupus is also problematic, because immunosuppressive drugs are commonly used, and they lower a person's resistance to infection." In response to these shortcomings, Via's lab is exploring ways to shift the body's immune response toward cell mediated immunity, a process involving T-cell activation to target and kill harmful pathogens. Unlike current treatment for lupus, Via's method does not shut down all or part of the immune system, thereby compromising the body's ability to heal itself. Rather, it changes the balance of the immune response by inhibiting the lupus-promoting response.

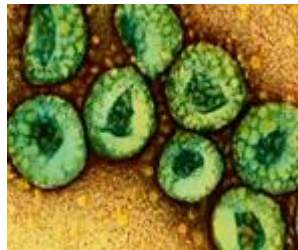
While conducting this research, Via's team also discovered T-cell responses vary among individuals. Some are lupus-prone, but most are not. "There are genetic differences in the T-cell response to a pathogen," Via explained. "A subset will give a lupus response instead of a normal response to eliminate it. So now we're trying to identify the genetic makeup of lupus-prone T-cells with the goal of developing a

blood test that can identify lupus-prone individuals." Such a test could indicate which patients are at risk for more severe disease, he added. "I've taken care of lupus patients for more than 35 years now. I've seen their suffering and disability firsthand," he said. "Lupus strikes people, particularly women in the prime of their life when they are trying to juggle career and family responsibilities. To be able to give them better treatment options, and hopefully prevent lupus flares in the first place, is a goal all lupus researchers share." [Source: USUHS | Christine Creenan-Jones | May 16, 2014 ++]

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## **MERS-CoV Update 01 ► Global Cases Triple in 6 Weeks**

The global total number of cases of the Middle East coronavirus has nearly tripled in the past month and a half, according to the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC). At the end of March, the agency reported, the world had seen 221 cases; in the following six weeks ending 16 MAY, another 400 were recorded. That includes 188 fatalities. But those 621 cases do not include new cases reported today from Saudi Arabia, which recorded another six patients and three deaths. That brings the hard-hit nation's own totals to 520 cases with 163 deaths, up nine and three respectively, from the ECDC's toll. Saudi Arabia is followed in number of cases -- although not closely -- by the United Arab Emirates, which has recorded 67 cases and nine deaths, according to the ECDC. Seven other countries in the region have a total of 24 cases and 12 deaths. Other regions -- Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas -- have seen a total of 19 cases and seven deaths and all patients have had primary epidemiological links to the Middle East.



The two cases in the Americas -- both in the U.S. -- involved healthcare workers who worked in Saudi Arabia. The first U.S. case, in Munster, Ind., has apparently been resolved. The patient has recovered, no longer tests positive for the virus, and has been discharged from the hospital. No secondary cases have been reported. The second patient remains in a hospital in Orlando and was reported to be improving. Several healthcare workers were exposed to the patient before MERS was suspected, according to the Florida health department, but all have tested negative for the virus. The exact number of cases is a moving target and has been dogged by delays in reporting. While the virus continues to cause several cases a day in Saudi Arabia, the risk for people outside the Middle East is said to be extremely low. However, 22 U.S. airports are now displaying signs that warn of the virus. The signs essentially repeat the CDC's travel advisory for people going to and returning from the Middle East. Visitors to the region, the CDC says, should take precautions against infection, including frequent handwashing and avoiding people who are sick. Returning travellers, the agency says, should monitor their own health and see a doctor if they have respiratory symptoms within 2 weeks of coming home. Importantly, they should call first and mention the travel history so the doctor's office can ensure that proper precautions are taken. [Source: MedPage Today | Michael Smith | May 16, 2014 ++]

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## Traumatic Brain Injury Update 37 ► Study Shows Spike in ER Visits

From 2006 to 2010, the rate of visits to emergency departments across the United States for traumatic brain injury increased by nearly 30 percent, according to a new study led by a Pittsburgh physician. The findings, which are published in the recent issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, might be attributable to factors such as greater awareness and more diagnoses of TBI, among other things, according to lead author Dr. Jennifer R. Marin. “Is it that more people are coming in with concussions ... or these injuries?” Marin, a pediatric emergency medicine physician at Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC, said in an interview 13 MAY. “Is it that patients are just more aware or more vigilant?” Another reason for the increase could be that physicians now are more likely to record a TBI in a patient’s medical record even if it’s not the primary reason for the visit, Marin explained, noting that it also could be a combination of the factors.

Marin, who also is an assistant professor of pediatrics and emergency medicine at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, said researchers were driven by the question of whether visits to emergency departments for TBI have changed in recent years, given an increase in attention to these types of injuries. Federal and state legislation, activism on the part of the National Football League and campaigns led by various medical professional societies are only a few of the efforts that have shined a light on TBI over the past decade, Marin pointed out. For the study, the team looked at data from the Nationwide Emergency Department Sample database to determine national trends in emergency department visits for TBI from 2006 through 2010, and also compared the findings to the total visits for all emergencies. The data did not include VA hospitals or the military health system, Marin said. While TBI visits increased 29 percent, total emergency department visits increased only 3.6 percent during the study time frame. “What we found was, in fact, the visit rate did increase rather dramatically compared to the emergency department visits in general,” Marin said. “In fact, it’s not just that more people came [to emergency departments], it’s that more people with TBI came.”

The findings underscore the need for more evaluation into why and how to reverse the trend and minimize the incidence of TBI, which is an “important cause” of injury and death each year, Marin said in a news release. While TBI rates increased significantly among all age groups, the study also showed that the greatest increases occurred among children younger than 3 and adults older than 60. Most of the visits examined in the study were for minor injuries. And the majority of the increase in the incidence of TBI was seen in visits recorded as concussions — considered a “mild” or “minor” TBI — or unspecified head injuries. [Source: Beaver County (Pa.) Times | Jenny Wagner | 14 May 2014 ++]

### \*Finances\*



## **USAA Lawsuit ► Improper Sales Tax Withholding on Claims**

A class action has been filed against USAA automobile insurance companies alleging that USAA has improperly withheld sales tax from military men and women who have made auto insurance claims for their totaled vehicles. The lawsuit alleges that USAA improperly withheld up to 6% of the insured vehicle cost, which on a \$10,000 vehicle can be as high as \$600 per person. Documents filed with the federal court show that USAA withheld sales tax from as much as 75% of policy holders who made claims for totaled vehicles in a one year period. The same documents show that the withheld sales tax at issue in the lawsuit may total over \$17 million. The lawsuit is in federal court and styled Chantal Bastian v. United Services Automobile Association, USAA Casualty Insurance Company, Garrison Property and Casualty Insurance Company, and USAA General Indemnity Company, No. 3:13-cv-01454, Middle District of Florida, Jacksonville Division. The federal court denied without prejudice USAA’s motion to dismiss the lawsuit and the lawsuit is proceeding. For information or to join the suit, you can contact attorney Tracy Markham at 904-794-7005 or [tmarkhamlaw@gmail.com](mailto:tmarkhamlaw@gmail.com). [Source: Veteran’s Corner with Michael Isam article May 25, 2014 ++]

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## **IRA Rollovers ► New Court Tax Ruling | One Vice All**

A recent U.S. Tax Court ruling that declared IRA owners are entitled to just one nontaxable rollover every 12 months across all their accounts upends conventional reading of the law. The decision in Bobrow vs. Commissioner changes the commonly accepted interpretation of the law that held the once-a-year rule applied to each IRA owned by an individual. The ruling prompted the American Society of Pension Professionals and Actuaries to warn its members to be mindful of the ruling until the IRS clarifies its position. “It might be prudent for all practitioners to recognize this court ruling as a possible ‘game changer,’ ” the society wrote in a publication of its Government Affairs Committee. The society noted that only rollovers in which money is directly given to a taxpayer are affected and money can be moved from one custodian to another as often as is wanted.

The more liberal reading of the rule seemed to have the support of the IRS, which has included this statement in its Publication 590: “Generally, if you make a tax-free rollover of any part of a distribution from a traditional IRA, you cannot, within a 1-year period, make a tax-free rollover of any later distribution from that same IRA.” Although the IRS included the above language in the version of Publication 590 it published last month, the agency argued in Bobrow that nontaxable rollovers were limited to a more restrictive reading of the applicable statute. The court agreed with the IRS arguments, writing, “Regardless of how many IRAs he or she maintains, a taxpayer may make only one nontaxable rollover contribution within each one-year period.” The facts of the Bobrow case involved a husband and wife that owned several IRA accounts. In 2008, they moved money between several of the accounts, completing each rollover with the mandated 60-day limit. They believed they had satisfied the legal requirements. However, The IRS challenged their actions in court and won. Bottom line, those considering retirement anytime soon who plan to move both their TSP and old IRA's into new investment types in the first tax year should be prepared to pay the additional tax on the transactions. [Source: [Benefits Pro](#) | Dan Berman | 12 Feb 2014 ++]



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## **TSP Update 18 ► Proposal to Open Program to All Americans**

Policy experts have given mixed reviews to a proposal to open the Thrift Savings Plan to all Americans, with some conservative groups fearing an increased role for the federal government. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) unveiled his plan last week as part of a larger retirement reform proposal. Rubio called it unfair that federal employees and lawmakers have access to the TSP -- a defined-contribution retirement savings account -- but the general public does not. He pitched offering the TSP to all American workers who lack access to a similar, employer-sponsored plan. Some of Rubio's fellow conservatives voiced criticism of the Florida Senator's plan, however. The Heritage Foundation wrote a critique of the proposal, saying it would result in a "huge government-directed windfall" for BlackRock, the investment company with the largest contract with TSP. The number of workers without employer-sponsored plans is estimated at 78 million individuals. Heritage noted that if just one in 10 of those eligible signed up for the TSP, the plan would triple in size.

Romina Boccia, a fellow at Heritage, wrote the TSP expansion would "crowd out private-sector retirement accounts." Both Boccia and Jason Richwine, an economist who criticized Rubio's proposal in the conservative-leaning National Review Online, said the plan would open up TSP to diverting funds toward "politically motivated goals." The authors imagined TSP administrators divesting from companies that are not environmentally friendly or oppose same-sex marriage. "Given the amount of money the government would oversee, that pressure could be a backdoor way for the government to regulate business practices and even political speech," Richwine wrote. He also said the government securities (G) fund, which invests in U.S. Treasury bonds, already provides an exclusive benefit to the federal workforce, and its expansion would be prohibitively expensive.

Not all the reviews were negative, however. The American Enterprise Institute, another right-leaning think tank, defended Rubio's policy offering, arguing the participation and contribution rates would likely be low. Andrew Biggs, a resident scholar at AEI and former official at the Social Security Administration, estimated only about \$5.2 billion in new annual contributions to the TSP under Rubio's proposal. TSP currently manages roughly \$391 billion in assets. The Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank, proposed opening up the TSP for all Americans in 2012. That proposal called for all employers -- except those that provide a defined-benefit pension -- to offer either a collective defined-contribution plan or access to the TSP. "I applaud Senator Rubio for taking a really important step," David Madland, the author of CAP's proposal, told Government Executive. He added the plan would provide individuals with a better way to save their money without adding costs to the government. "I don't see how conservatives could object."

In his most recent State of the Union address, President Obama proposed MyRA, which would give all Americans access to the G Fund. The TSP's overseer, the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, raised serious concerns with Rubio's proposal. An official last week told Government Executive the agency was reluctant to dilute its focus on its current participants and the new responsibilities would "require a completely different set of operational capabilities." [Source: GovExec.com | Eric Katz | May 19, 2014 ++]

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## Saving Money ► Refurbished Electronics

Right now, you could spend \$299 on a brand-new 32GB iPod Touch or you could spend \$219 for the refurbished version. Both come from the Apple store in a sparkling white box with new accessories, a new battery and a one-year warranty. Which do you choose? You may be hesitant to go the refurbished route, but Money Talks News financial expert Stacy Johnson says have no fear. Refurbished electronics are an awesome deal and can save you up to 50 percent off the sticker price.

**What are refurbished electronics?** Refurbished electronics are basically items that have been opened or used at some point. It could be because of any of the following reasons:

- An item bought and returned because the customer didn't like it.
- An item bought and returned for a cosmetic defect.
- An item bought and returned for a functional defect.
- A display or demo item.
- A recalled item.

You may be worried you'll be buying a lemon if you get a refurbished electronic device, but that concern may be overblown. A 2011 report from consulting firm Accenture found that only 5 percent of returned electronics had an actual product defect. Even for those that are defective, most major manufacturers have a rigorous process by which they test, repair and then retest returned items before selling them as refurbished. As a result, you may end up with a refurbished device that has some minor cosmetic issues such as scratches or discoloration, but it should work flawlessly out of the box.

**Where should you buy them?** Because refurbished electronics may be used, you always want to buy them from a trusted source. Typically, that means a major retailer or manufacturer. Look online in the clearance or outlet sections of these companies' websites such as: [Best Buy](#) ; [Amazon](#) ; [HP](#) ; [Dell](#) ; [Sony](#) ; [Apple](#) ; [Epson](#); and [Newegg](#). You can find plenty of refurbished electronics on eBay as well, but buying through eBay can be tricky. Contact the manufacturer to see if the auction is being run by an authorized reseller, and then double-check their feedback for any recurring problems. If the seller isn't authorized by the manufacturer, you may want to move along. Unauthorized sellers may have vastly different standards when it comes to testing and repairing refurbished items. Plus, these sellers may not offer warranties or accept returns.

**How do you know it's a good deal?** Well, first you need to look up the going price of the item you're buying. How much are retailers selling it for brand new? Refurbished items are often, but not always, a bargain. Just as you would compare prices for any other purchase, you'll want to shop around before buying a refurbished product. Beyond price, you should review how the item was refurbished and what your options are if it ends up being defective. Look for answers to all the following questions.

- What is the refurbishing process?
- Is the item tested again after any necessary repairs are made?
- Could there be cosmetic damage?
- Does the item come with the same accessories as a new item?
- Is there a warranty or return policy that will let you send back a defective item?
- If so, do you need to pay a restocking fee?
- Don't forget to look for coupon codes or promos that may bring your final price down even more.

**Is there anything you shouldn't buy refurbished?**

Although this CNET author at <http://www.cnet.com/news/three-tech-items-you-should-never-buy-refurbished/> makes a case for not buying refurbished TVs, printers and hard drives, we say you probably don't need to make an entire category of products off-limits. Instead, the only thing we advise you to never

buy is something sold as is. While most refurbished products are as good as new, there is always the chance you'll get a defective product that wasn't repaired correctly. Don't get stuck with a lemon. Make sure you have a warranty and the opportunity to make a return. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Maryalene LaPonsie | Mar 2014 ++]

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## Direct Sales Rep Scam ► How It works

Reps for direct sales companies like Avon, Thirty-One Gifts and Mary Kay are finding themselves the targets of a new take on the classic check scam. Scammers pose as new customers and try to con consultants out of hundreds of dollars.

### How the Scam Works:

You are a consultant for a direct sales company, and you receive an email or text message from a potential customer. The exact details of the situation vary. The "new customer" may simply request to purchase a few products, but some scammers provide an elaborate back story. In one recent version, the scammer alleges to be working on a movie filmed nearby and urgently needs makeup for the actors.

The request seems like an easy sale, so you prepare the products and receipt. Then, your new "customer" sends you an urgent message. There was some mix up, and she/he accidentally sent a check for far more money than the purchase amount. The customer suggests that you fix the mistake by depositing the check, keeping the money for the purchase and wiring the remainder to someone else.

The stories given vary. Sometimes you are asked to wire money to a "doctor." Other times, you are supposedly sending cash to the daughter's wedding planner. No matter the tale, a few things are for sure. The check is a fake, and, if you withdraw money against it, you are out those funds.

### Tips to Avoid Fake Check Scams:

Whether you are a professional direct sales consultant or simply selling a few items on Craigslist, check scams are common cons. Here are some tips:

1. **Be wary of checks received from unknown individuals:** When selling to someone you don't know, it is safer to accept cash or credit card payments.
2. **Do not accept overpayments:** Don't take checks for more than the sales price, no matter what convincing story the buyer tells you.
3. **Do not wire money to anyone you do not know:** Wired money is extremely difficult to trace, and you will not be able to recover these funds. The same goes for pre-paid debit cards, a new favorite payment method for scammers.
4. **Confirm before you withdraw cash:** A check can take several days to clear, and, until then, you are responsible for any funds withdrawn against it. To make sure the check cleared, call your bank... not the telephone number listed on the check.

To find out more about scams, check out BBB Scam Stopper <http://www.bbb.org/council/bbb-scam-stopper>. [Source: BBB Scam alert 25 Apr 2014 ++]

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## Secret Shopper Scam ► How It Works

This secret shopper scam is preying on businesses and job seekers alike. Using the names of local companies and their bank account numbers, scammers issue fake checks to "secret shoppers," who are encouraged to deposit the checks and wire back the money.

### How the Scam Works:

- You receive an email informing you that you've been offered a job as a secret shopper. To get started, the message instructs you to reply and confirm your mailing address. After doing this, you will receive instructions and a check to cover your fee and shopping expenses.
- When your check arrives, you notice it uses the name of a real local business. And it may even have the company's account and routing numbers. Your instructions tell you to deposit the check, subtract your fee and shopping expenses and wire the rest back... but don't do it. The check looks real, but it's a fake. Scammers often intercept real checks from businesses and "wash" them to use in scams like these.
- If you deposit the check and draw money against it, you will be responsible for those funds. When the bank rejects the fake check, they will delete the advanced funds from your account.

### Tips for Businesses:

- **Monitor your accounts payable.** If too much time goes by and one of your checks does not clear, stop payment on the check and send out another one to the payee.
- **Use tamper resistant checks.** Checks with security features make it harder for crooks who may intercept them to counterfeit or alter them.
- **Keep track of new check orders.** If you order checks and they don't arrive, be sure to notify your bank/check provider. They may have been stolen.
- **Keep checks secured.** Keep reserve supplies of checks, deposit slips and other banking documents locked up. Limit the number of people who can access them.
- **Put your sensitive or banking info away.** Don't leave checks or other bank records unattended while you serve customers. Someone might take them while you aren't looking.

**For More Information** check BBB's recent coverage of check scams and fake job postings for more tips at <http://www.bbb.org/blog/2014/04/twist-on-check-scam-targets-direct-sales-reps/> and <http://www.bbb.org/blog/2014/04/craigslist-job-scam-touts-fake-bbb-position/>. To find out more about scams, check out BBB ScamStopper at <http://www.bbb.org/council/bbb-scam-stopper>. [Source: BBB Scam alerts 2May 2014++]

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## Tax Burden for Massachusetts Retirees ► As of May 2014

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 Massachusetts:

### Sales Taxes

**State Sales Tax:** 6.25% (food; prescription drugs; fuel costs; gas, oil, electricity; clothing costing up to \$175, are exempt).

**Gasoline Tax:** 44.9 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 50.9 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** \$3.51/pack of 20

### **Personal Income Taxes**

**Tax Rate Range:** Flat rate of 5.5% of federal adjusted gross income

**Personal Exemptions:** Single - \$4,400; Married - \$8,800; Dependents - \$1,000

**Standard Deduction:** None

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** Federal amount

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** None

**Retirement Income Taxes:** Social Security, civil service, state/local government pensions are exempt. Pension income from other state or local governments that do not tax pension income from Massachusetts public employees is exempt from Massachusetts taxable income. Tax Tips for Seniors are available at <http://www.mass.gov/dor/docs/dor/taxtips/seniors12.pdf>

**Retired Military Pay:** Not taxed.

**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**

Massachusetts does not provide for a general homestead exemption but does have a Homestead Act. The Homestead Act permits a homeowner who occupies a house as his/her principal residence to shield up to \$500,000 in equity in that house from creditors. By simply filing a Declaration of Homestead with the appropriate Registry of Deeds, a homeowner may be able to protect his/her residence from the claim of a future creditor. The Homestead Act permits only one spouse to file for the equity protection if each has an ownership interest in the home. The protection offered to the disabled and the elderly is even more comprehensive because it allows a husband and wife who own their own home to each file for the \$500,000 equity protection. For details refer to <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/rod/roddom/homidx.htm>.

Massachusetts also has a [circuit breaker program](#) that offers a real estate tax credit for persons age 65 and older. Certain taxpayers may be eligible to claim a refundable credit on their state income taxes for the real estate taxes paid during the tax year on the residential property they own or rent in Massachusetts that is used as their principal residence. If the credit due the taxpayer exceeds the amount of the total income tax payable for the year by the taxpayer, the excess amount of the credit will be refunded to the taxpayer without interest. For tax year 2012, the maximum credit allowed for both renters and homeowners is \$1,000. To be eligible for the credit for the 2012 tax year; the taxpayer or spouse, if married filing jointly, must be 65 years of age or older at the close of the 2011 tax year; the taxpayer must own or rent residential property in Massachusetts and occupy the property as his or her principal residence; the taxpayer's "total income" cannot exceed \$53,000 for a single filer who is not the head of a household, \$67,000 for a head of house hold, or \$80,000 for taxpayers filing jointly; and for homeowners, the assessed valuation as of January 1, 2012, before residential exemptions but after abatements, of the homeowner's personal residence cannot exceed \$705,000. For additional details on the circuit breaker program refer to <http://www.mass.gov/dor/docs/dor/taxtips/seniors12.pdf>.

**Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

There is no inheritance tax and a limited estate tax on estates valued at \$1,000,000 or more..

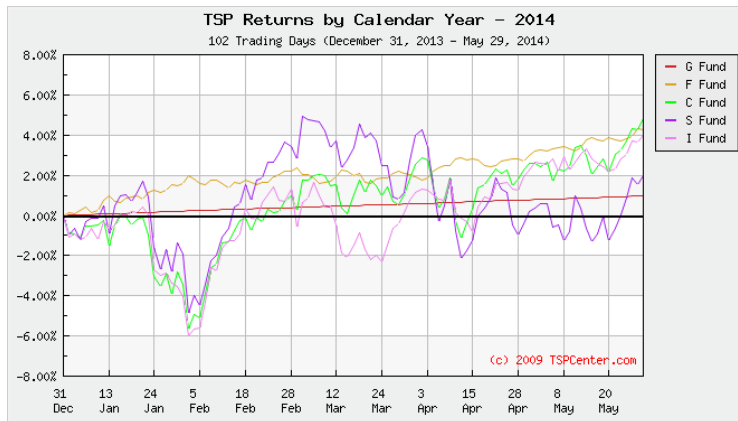
A guide for new residents is available at <http://www.mass.gov/dor/individuals/taxpayer-help-and-resources/tax-guides/guide-for-new-residents/>. For additional information regarding your state income tax liability, visit the Massachusetts Department of Revenue website at <http://www.mass.gov/dor>. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#MASSACHUSETTS> May 2014 ++]

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**Thrift Savings Plan 2014 ▶ Share Prices + YTD Gain or Loss**

**TSP Share Prices for May 29, 2014**

|          | Close     | YTD    |
|----------|-----------|--------|
| G Fund   | \$14.4253 | +0.97% |
| F Fund   | \$16.4105 | +4.25% |
| C Fund   | \$25.0236 | +4.81% |
| S Fund   | \$34.3428 | +2.00% |
| I Fund   | \$26.5846 | +3.99% |
| L 2050   | \$14.5993 | +3.81% |
| L 2040   | \$25.7194 | +3.56% |
| L 2030   | \$24.2332 | +3.30% |
| L 2020   | \$22.4210 | +2.87% |
| L Income | \$17.1277 | +1.85% |



[Source: <http://tspcenter.com/tspReturns.php?view=year> May 30, 2014 ++]

**\*General Interest\***





## Notes of Interest ► 15 thru 31 May 2014

- **COLA.** The Consumer Price Index climbed for the 5th straight month in April, rising to 233.443. It now stands 1.4 percent above the FY2014 COLA baseline of 230.327.
- **Deficit.** Through the first seven months of the fiscal year the annual deficit stands at \$306 billion -- \$181 billion or 37 percent less than it was for the same period in FY 2013. The Congressional Budget Office forecasts a \$492 billion deficit for FY 2014. Our national debt is nearly \$17 trillion dollars.
- **Incarceration.** According to a new report from The Hamilton Project, incarceration in America comes with an annual \$80 billion price tag. If you break it down, keeping people in prison costs each U.S. resident \$260 per year.
- **Median Income.** According to Census information, men ages 25 to 34 actually earn less than they did 40 years ago. The percentage of change in men's median income from the year it peaked to 2012 (adjusted for inflation) was: Ages 25-34 Peaked in 197 - Down 27%; Ages 35-44 Peaked in 1973 - Down 19%; Ages 45-54 Peaked in 199 - Down 17%; and Ages 55-64 Peaked in 2003 - Down 13%.
- **Enlistments.** The military is getting picky in recruiting; only 20% of applicants qualify. 2014 recruiting goal of 2014 of 57,000 is lowest in 10 years. Obesity, tattoos, and minor criminal records exclude 80% of applicants.
- **TRICARE.** Treatment of complications arising from non-covered services are not covered by TRICARE unless the original services were provided by a MTF and approved by the MTF Commander.
- **Stolen Valor.** A new South Carolina law makes it a crime for someone to falsely claim military service to personally profit. The law signed by Gov. Nikki Haley makes the lie a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$500 fine.
- **eBay.** The latest victim of a cyberattack is eBay. The company is now urging its customers – all 145 million of them – to change their passwords to protect their accounts. The data breach occurred in late February or early March.
- **Arlington at 150.** To commemorate Memorial Day and the 150th anniversary of Arlington National Cemetery, Military Times has created a moving digital tribute to America's most hallowed ground and the heroes interred there. Go to <http://www.militarytimes.com/arlington150.html>.
- **VA Underperformers.** Spurred by allegations of mismanagement and scandal at numerous Veterans Affairs facilities, House members on 21 MAY overwhelmingly approved a measure giving the department's secretary more power to fire underperforming employees.
- **VA Healthcare Delays.** A transcript of President Obama's 21 MAY statement with reporter's questions /answers on the VA delay problem is available at <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2014/05/21/transcript-of-obamas-remarks-on-problems-at-the-va/?KEYWORDS=veterans+affairs>.
- **VA Phoenix Bonus.** Secretary Eric Shinseki rescinded a performance bonus of approximately \$9,000 that had been given to the director of the Phoenix VA Health Care System, Sharon Helman, according to a VA spokesman.
- **VA Secretary.** VoteVets polled 3,300 random supporters who are veterans or military family members... only 17 percent believed that Secretary Shinseki should resign. A whopping 60 percent said he should not resign, with 23 percent saying they weren't sure yet.
- **Pay Raise.** Both the House and the Senate introduced legislation that would give federal employees less active duty a 3.3% pay raise in 2015. For active duty the President and the Senate Committee propose 1%. The House bill was silent on a specific pay raise which means that existing law would prevail and next year's pay raise would be 1.8 percent based on the Employment Cost Payment Index.
- **myPay.** Users are reporting problems accessing myPay using their Login ID/Password or SmartCard. Reports indicate users get a blank screen and then are returned to the myPay homepage. If you experience this problem, try to "refresh" or "reload" the webpage using Ctrl R or Ctrl F5. If the error continues, you

may need to clear your entire cache and delete any temporary files residing in your web browser. Check the help section of your browser for instructions. For additional information and help accessing myPay, visit myPay Tips & Tricks page <http://www.dfas.mil/mypayinfo/tipsandtricks.html>.

- **VA Lawsuit.** Gov. Rick Scott says he plans to sue the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs because it will not let state hospital officials inspect federal medical care facilities in Florida. On seven recent occasions at six VA hospitals, inspectors from the state Agency for Health Care Administration were prevented from inspecting facilities.

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## **Tax Tips 2014 ► Don't Threaten IRS Agents**

Doing your taxes can definitely make you feel like you want to kill somebody, but one taxpayer in Rhode Island actually threatened to go through with murder over a major tax bill. Andrew A. Calcione owed taxes from 2008, 2009 and 2010, totaling in a \$330,000 in debt to the IRS. The Warwick IRS office had been calling him to deal with the back taxes directly, and Calcione was not amused by the frequent calls. Last July 15, Calcione called the office. He left voicemails detailing what would happen to the agent if he ever called him again in regards to tax issues, specifying he would torture the agent, rape and kill the agent's wife, injure the agent's daughter and then finally kill the agent. The IRS agent reported the calls to the authorities, who determined the voicemails were brutal enough to charge Calcione. A federal judge found him guilty of threatening to assault and murder (on the accounts of the agent and his two family members.) A judge will determine his punishment this September. The maximum sentence is 20 years behind bars. The U.S. Attorney's office threatened to seek the "toughest appropriate sentence in this case." [Source: GovExec.com | The Wire | Polly Mosendz | May 27, 2014 ++]

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## **Postal Service Update 06 ► To-The-Door Delivery Phase Out**

A House committee on 21 MAY passed a piecemeal provision of U.S. Postal Service reform, voting along party lines to phase out to-the-door delivery in favor of centralized and curbside drop offs. House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-CA) introduced the Secure Delivery for America Act in an effort to find immediate cost savings for the Postal Service while Congress continues to debate a larger overhaul. Issa estimated the measure would save USPS more than \$2 billion annually. The bill would convert 1.5 million of the 37.7 million addresses currently receiving to-the-door delivery to centralized or curbside delivery annually for the next 10 years. This would ultimately result in a 40 percent reduction in households that receive their mail at their doors. Currently, slightly more than one quarter of addresses receive door delivery. The Postal Service would assume the full conversion costs, which Issa estimated would add up to about \$73 per address.



The savings would allow USPS to recoup its full installation costs after just five months, Issa said. He added the new system -- in which every address would have its own secure box grouped together in a central location -- would provide safer delivery than simply leaving packages on a stoop. When the Postal Service identified an address for conversion, it would have to provide 60 days' notice to the customer. Residents could then file a hardship waiver for exemption if they possess a disability that would make it difficult for them to travel to a separate location for picking up their mail. Issa said his bill represented a "common-sense way to help the Postal Service save money," but stressed the measure was not a replacement for comprehensive legislation. He did intimate, however, the provision would provide an opportunity for both parties and chambers of Congress to address postal concerns through a conference committee. Opponents concerns about the bill were:

- Democrats opposed the measure, repeating the claim they have made throughout the series of postal hearings and markups this Congress that USPS "cannot cut its way to profitability."
- Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA) said the bill would place an unfair burden on residents of urban areas, where the vast majority of to-the-door delivery still takes place.
- Rep. Stephen Lynch (D-MA) criticized a provision of the bill that would allow residents chosen for conversion to pay a fee to continue to receive to-the-door service, calling it a "delivery tax." Lynch also pointed to a GAO [report](#) that found some of the data Issa used for his underlying cost savings estimates may be outdated.
- Postal unions said the measure would be detrimental to business. Louis Atkins, president of the National Association of Postal Supervisors, said the up-front costs associated with making the transition would "drag down the Postal Service's finances further."

Issa acknowledged some households may never be ripe for conversion, but defended the fee for delivery as a revenue opportunity for the cash-strapped Postal Service. The Democrats attempted to attach union-backed amendments to the bill, such as guaranteed six-day mail delivery and a return of the surplus payments made to the Federal Employees Retirement System, but they were defeated. [Source: GovExecx.com | Eric Katz | May 21, 2014 ++]

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## **Have You Heard? ► The Zipper**

In a crowded city at a busy bus stop, a woman who was waiting for a bus was wearing a tight leather skirt.

As the bus stopped and it was her turn to get on, she became aware that her skirt was too tight to allow her leg to come up to the height of the first step of the bus.

Slightly embarrassed and with a quick smile to the bus driver, she reached behind her to unzip her skirt a little, thinking that this would give her enough slack to raise her leg.

Again, she tried to make the step only to discover she still couldn't. So, a little more embarrassed, she once again reached behind her to unzip her skirt a little more.

For the second time she attempted the step, and once again, much to her chagrin, she could not raise her leg. With a little smile to the driver, she again reached behind to unzip a little more and again was unable to make the step.

About this time, a large Texan who was standing behind her picked her up easily by the waist and placed her gently on the step of the bus.

She went ballistic and turned to the would-be Samaritan and screeched, "How dare you touch my body! I don't even know who you are!"

The Texan smiled and drawled, "Well, ma'am, normally I would agree with you, but after you unzipped my fly three times, I kinda figured we was friends."

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### Photos That Say it All ▶ The Babysitter



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### They Grew Up to Be? ▶ Albert Einstein

This self-taught high school dropout, considered "lazy, slow and dreamy" flunked the entrance examinations in the Swiss Federal Polytechnic in Zurich at 16. He failed to reach the required standard in several subjects, but obtained exceptional grades in physics and mathematics. He strongly objected to rote learning.

Albert Einstein

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"Onward we stagger, and if the tanks come, may God help the tanks."  
— **Col. William O. Darby**, US Rangers (1911–1945) Commander of Task Force Darby KIA



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### Interesting Inventions ► Unique Umbrella Design



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1. The Bulletin will be provided as a website accessed document until further notice. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's former size and large subscriber base (94,000+) were choking the airways interfering with other email user's capability to use it. They directed us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all email capability if we did not.
2. Readers who have not yet validated their email addree who desire to continue to receive the Bulletin can send a message to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) with the word "KEEP" in the subject line to restore their subscription. Anyone who no longer wants to receive the Bulletin should send a message to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) with the word "DELETE" in the subject line This Bulletin notice was sent to the 17,546 subscribers who have responded to date.
3. Bulletin recipients who reside, or have an interest in the Philippines can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of messages pertaining to Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, VARO/OPC Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.

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6. Past Bulletin articles are available by title on request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net). Refer to the RAO Bulletin Index alphabetically listing of article and attachment titles previously published in the Bulletin. The Index is available under pinned topics at <http://s11.zetaboards.com/CFLNewsChat/forum/27519/>. Bear in mind that the articles listed on this index were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or become outdated.

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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](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net)

Web Access: <http://www.nhc-ul.com/rao.html>, <http://www.veteransresources.org>, or <http://frabr245.org>

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

Member: AMVETS, DAV, NAUS, NCOA, MOAA, USDR, VFW, VVA, CG33, DD890, AD37, & TSCL