

RAO

BULLETIN

1 August 2014

PDF Edition

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*** DoD ***



DoD Suicide Policy Update 05 ► 6% Rate Decline in 2013

Suicides in the military dropped by 6 percent last year, a decline that Pentagon officials hope signals a reversal in a tragic trend — but that some advocates say does not reflect the true scope of the issue in the military and veterans’ community. According to data published 22 JUL by the Defense Department, 479 service members — 259 active-duty troops, 87 Reserve members and 133 National Guard members — died by suicide in 2013, down from 319 active-duty members and 203 non-activated Reserve and Guard members in 2012. The rate per 100,000 — a measure used to compare incidence across the services and the civilian population — also dropped for the active-duty force, from 22.7 to 18.7. The civilian rate, adjusted for demographics similar to those who serve in the military, is 18.8 per 100,000, according to calculations by the Army and the National Institutes of Mental Health.

A new method of accounting instituted this year by DoD presents a challenge in interpreting the extent of the drops within each service and the various force components. For the first time, the Pentagon counted

as active duty only those in the active component, including academy cadets and midshipmen. Excluded were Reserve members and National Guard members who were mobilized at the time of their deaths, who previously had been counted as active-duty personnel. The Pentagon also changed its methods for calculating rates. Under the old system, the rate in 2012 was 17.5 per 100,000. But the new system indicates the rate for that year — which saw the highest number of military suicides since the Pentagon began close tracking in 2001 — was 22.7 per 100,000. The new rate for 2013, 18.7 per 100,000 among active-duty members, was calculated using the new definition of active component.

Defense officials say the change was made to improve programs to serve the individual components. According to Defense Suicide Prevention Office director Jacqueline Garrick, the new accounting methods provide a better perspective on which communities are affected, allowing DoD to tailor programs to the components. For example, while reserve members on active duty have access to numerous programs and initiatives on base and in their workplace, they may return home to areas where there is less support. Understanding how many reservists have been affected will improve strategies to help them, Garrick said. “We’re trying to really target in on specific things ... we’re looking at access to care in remote and rural areas,” she said. DoD has implemented numerous mental health and suicide prevention programs to reverse what has been a growing problem since the advent of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While military suicides are often thought to be linked to combat service and the psychological stresses of war, Pentagon reports show that more than half the service members who commit suicide never deployed to a combat zone.

Military suicides began rising in 2006 and hit 284 active-duty deaths before dipping slightly in 2010 and 2011, then soaring to 319 in 2012. The Army, the largest service, had the highest number of suicides among active-duty troops in 2013, 123. The Air Force recorded 48 suicides, down from 50 in 2012, while the Marine Corps had 45, down from 48. The Navy saw the largest percentage decrease — a 25-percent drop to 43. Among Reserve and National Guard troops, the Army Reserve had the highest number of suicides in 2013, 60, for a rate of 30.1 per 100,000. The Army National Guard also recorded a high rate, 33.4 percent per 100,000, with 119 suicides in 2013. Those numbers do not incorporate the Veterans Affairs Department estimate of 22 veterans — those who served at some point but have left the military — who die each day by suicide.

Paul Rieckhoff, founder and CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, cautioned against declaring victory over the declining active-duty figures because the data is offset by the alarming increased numbers in the Reserves and National Guard. “We know that most post-9/11 suicides happen after veterans leave the Department of Defense. To get a full picture of the scope of veterans suicides, we must assess the rate for the entire population of veterans who have served since 9/11,” Rieckhoff said. DoD officials said that while they are heartened to see a decline, they continue to pursue the goal of zero suicides in the U.S. military. “One loss to suicide is one too many. We will continue to do everything possible to prevent [it],” Garrick said. If you or someone you know is considering suicide, the Veterans Crisis Line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 800-273-8255. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | Jul 22, 2014 ++]

Agent Orange Okinawa Update 07 ► No evidence in Kadena AFB Barrels

There is no evidence that dozens of empty chemical drums, unearthed last year on former U.S. military property, contained the toxic defoliant Agent Orange, according to a Japanese government report. The

Okinawa Defense Bureau of the Ministry of Defense tested the final 61 of 83 barrels that were unearthed from land adjacent to the Kadena Air Base fence line. While it found they contained ingredients used in Agent Orange, they were of the incorrect consistency and quantities, leading officials to believe they were to be used as a common herbicide. The defense bureau also reiterated that it was unlikely that the barrels were a health risk. Tests have shown the air and water, on and off base, are safe.



A drum is pulled from the ground Jan. 28, 2014 & Japan Ministry of Defense workers examining a badly rusted drum inside a plastic-draped tent.

“There is no evidence that the barrels contained Agent Orange,” the report said. It was posted on the defense bureau’s website earlier this month. “The soil samples that found dioxins and herbicides were taken from immediately beneath the barrels. It is highly unlikely that the ground in the vicinity area is polluted with dioxins of higher levels. “Also, the soil collected this time was taken from the depth that no human beings are directly exposed to. Therefore there is little possibility that the polluted soil has impact on surrounding environment.” U.S. Air Force officials said they were still analyzing the report but planned to comment on its findings and release an English translation of its executive summary on Facebook and kadena.af.mil/, according to an 18th Wing spokesman.

The barrels caused a stir when they were found buried under a soccer field on land reclaimed from Kadena. The field is separated from Kadena’s Amelia Earhart Intermediate School and its playground by a raised expressway. The Bob Hope Primary School and the Kadena middle and high schools are nearby. The U.S. military’s position has been that Agent Orange, which defoliated jungles during the Vietnam War and has been blamed for a slew of health problems in veterans, was never stored, shipped through or used on Okinawa. A study commissioned by the DOD has backed that assertion. The military discontinued use of Agent Orange in the early 1970s. Some veterans who served on Okinawa during the war have claimed they witnessed its use and burial on the island but have been unable to convince the Department of Veterans Affairs to approve medical claims for exposure.

Agent Orange was made up of two major components, the chemical compounds 2,4-D butyl ester and 2,4,5-T butyl ester, mixed at a 50-50 ratio, Japanese officials said. Last year, Japanese officials found 2,4,5-T, in 22 barrels that were unearthed from the site. The report said 2,4-D was found in the subsequently exhumed 61 barrels. However, that doesn’t mean Agent Orange was found. The two base ingredients are common pesticides and herbicides that were widely used around the world for decades, but they were not mixed with solvents that would indicate they were going to be used in Agent Orange, and they were free from markings indicating use in Agent Orange. In addition, there was much more 2,4,5-T than 2,4-D, which led Japanese officials to believe they were meant for something else, like an herbicide. The report also indicated the barrels contained other pollutants such as the herbicide pentachlorophenol, gasoline or another fossil fuel, the insecticide DDT and polychlorinated biphenyl.

The depth of the barrels indicates they were most likely buried by the U.S. military after it took the area during World War II and before 1988, a year after the Japanese reclaimed the land. Traces of dioxins were detected in water samples in the area where the barrels were found but at levels below environmental standards, the report said. "Therefore, it is quite unlikely that the buried barrels have had an impact on the environment or created a health hazard," Okinawa City Mayor Sachio Kuwae at a news conference earlier this month. Kuwae said deeper excavation is planned to ensure there was no further contamination. Air Force officials have said base drinking water meets all U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards; it comes from a commercial Japanese source not connected with the area groundwater. [Source: Stars and Stripes | Matthew M. Burke & Chiyomi Sumida | Jul 24, 2014 ++]

Twilight Tattoo Update 01 ► AUG 2014 Schedule

Twilight Tattoo is an hour-long, live-action military pageant featuring Soldiers from the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) and The U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own." Experience a glimpse into American history through performances by The U.S. Army Blues, vocalists from The U.S. Army Band Downrange and U.S. Army Voices, The Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps, and The U.S. Army Drill Team. The performances scheduled for the following are free and open to the public:

- Wednesday – Aug. 6
- Wednesday – Aug. 13
- Wednesday – Aug. 20



Soldiers from the Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps perform during Twilight Tattoo.

The history of Twilight Tattoo began more than 300 years ago as British troops were summoned from the warmth and hospitality of local pubs by a bugle and drum call to return to the barracks. The familiar tune told tavern owners "doe den tap toe," or "time to turn off the taps." The troops knew the call to mean "taps off," and minutes later they were back in their tents. The modern-day call is known as "Tattoo" and during basic training the call signals the time to quiet down and hit the bunks. For the U.S. Army Military District of Washington (MDW), the call serves as a tribute dedicated to the vitality of our nation and to the

sacrifices of those who forged America into the land of the free and the home of the brave. It is for our forefathers and fellow Americans that MDW proudly presents “Twilight Tattoo.”

The U.S. Army Military District of Washington (MDW) Twilight Tattoo can trace its own history back to the years before World War II. At that time, on the grounds of Fort Myer in Arlington, Va., the 3rd Cavalry Regiment held military shows during the winter months. The Military District of Washington revived the traditional show in 1961 to showcase the talents of its ceremonial units. As Twilight Tattoo grew in popularity, the Army adapted the show, its location and the time of year it was performed to fit the growing needs of the American people. Settling on performances in Washington, D.C., throughout the summer months, has allowed for thousands of audience members to experience the ceremony and pageantry of the United States Army.

Twilight Tattoo performances begin at 7 PM. Pre-ceremony pageantry begins at 6:45 PM. Performances from July 9 through Aug. 20 will be located at Whipple Field on Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Arlington, Va. Field locations may vary. Check <http://twilight.mdw.army.mil/schedule> prior to attending a specific date. For more information on group reservations, contact the U.S. Army Military District of Washington at (202) 685-2888. [Source: Military.com Veterans Report Jul 14, 2014].

DoD/VA Seamless Transition Update 24 ► Conditions Only Partially Met

The Government Accountability Office published a report recently that said plans made by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense for an interoperable electronic health record (iEHR) system fully satisfied only one of six statutory conditions placed on the project. The GAO audit was part of the conditions on funding the project, with not more than 25 percent of funds for 2013 to be released until all of the statutory conditions were met. The GAO was satisfied with the two departments' memorandum agreement that outlined cost-sharing provisions and principles for the project. However, other requirements were only partially satisfied, including:

- Defining the budget and cost baseline for the development of the iEHR program for each department through 2018; GAO said the estimates submitted did not reflect the change in direction after the two agencies ditched their plan for a joint system in early 2013
- Identification of the deployment timeline for the system.
- Establishment of data standardization schedules.
- After the two agencies went their separate ways, their expenditure plan did not provide an accurate view of the cost of the work to be done, nor offer significant insight into the path forward, the report noted.

GAO recommends that any future expenditure plans include verifiable spending plans by department, as well as an integrated master schedule, a data standardization schedule and more. The VA has just awarded a \$162 million contract to update its VistA EHR system, and contractors and commercial EHR vendors are teaming up to bid on a Defense contract estimated to be worth approximately \$11 billion over its lifecycle for an iEHR system. Lawmakers continue to keep an eye on DOD and VA for the failed joint project, however, and are keeping the purse strings under tight control until they see progress toward interoperability. [Source: TREA News for the Enlisted Jul 14, 2014 ++]

POW/MIA Update 34 ► IG Issues Scathing Report of Pentagons Efforts

The Defense Department's inspector general has drafted a stinging rebuke of the Pentagon's struggling effort to recover the remains of missing servicemembers from past wars, concluding the mission lacks the most elemental building blocks for success. According to a draft report of its investigation obtained by ProPublica, the mission lacks agreed upon goals, objectives and priorities. It lacks a strategic plan and up-to-date policies. It lacks standard operating procedures, a complete centralized database of the missing, and a disinterment plan, among other flaws. Many of these same issues were also laid out by a ProPublica and NPR investigation earlier this year. The shortcomings have contributed to a remarkably low number of identifications each year — just 60 in 2013 out of the tens of thousands missing from World War II, Korea and Vietnam 2014 despite about \$100 million annually to get the job done.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel announced an overhaul in late March of the MIA effort. The current agencies involved in the mission will be consolidated within the next year into a new agency. The revamped organization will have quite a job ahead of it. The Inspector General also laid out problems with leadership at the main agency involved with the mission, which have yet to be publicly acknowledged by the Pentagon. Complaints from about 50 current and former Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command employees, "paint a picture of long-term leadership and management problems resulting in a hostile and dysfunctional work environment," the report states. "If left uncorrected, the problems driving these complaints will be brought into the new Defense agency ... hindering mission accomplishment." About a dozen former JPAC employees have told ProPublica that they loved the mission but quit because of leadership issues.

When the Pentagon announced the revamp of the mission this spring, it stressed a structurally flawed system rather than issues regarding individual leaders and sidestepped any questions about accountability. Most of the leaders within the various agencies have been in charge in different positions for decades. The Inspector General recommended that the Pentagon immediately "take corrective action" on the leadership problems, as well as cut back on staff to eliminate duplicative positions among the various agencies. In addition to personnel issues, the IG also criticized the Pentagon for lacking defined metrics. The report says the Pentagon needs to develop a policy to address the nearly 10,000 unidentified servicemembers who have been buried as "unknowns" in American cemeteries around the world. It also calls for realistic prioritization of the 83,000 total MIAs, including "uniform criteria and policies across conflicts to categorize and declare a MIA service member as not likely to be recoverable." About 50,000 were lost at sea in downed ships or aircraft, making their remains unlikely to be found. Failing to acknowledge that prevents objectives from being set, in both accomplishment and for efforts like collecting family DNA reference samples, the IG said. "If DoD established policy criteria to make a "non-recoverable" determination, many MIA cases could be re-categorized and the families notified that DoD will no longer actively pursue these cases," the report states.

The Pentagon can't make all the changes on its own. The law currently requires a body to be found before someone can be taken off the MIA list. The Pentagon also must figure out when to stop the entire mission. The IG writes that "in the absence of a defined end state and sunset criteria for actively searching for past conflict MIAs, the accounting mission can be expected to continue in perpetuity with ever-diminishing results and ever-increasing difficulty justifying costs." In an addendum to the report, under "additional issues," the inspector general defended JPAC's limited use of DNA, which was contrary to what ProPublica and NPR found to be standard practice around the world. The report repeated JPAC claims that dental and other medical records are often the better and faster source of identification. Outside scientists told ProPublica that while there are limitations to DNA, JPAC should be using it more. The Pentagon

declined to comment on the report, saying the draft report was "pre-decisional." A final report, after comments are gathered from all agencies involved, is expected to be publicly released by the end of the month. [Source: ProPublica | Megan McCloskey | Jul 12, 2014 ++]

POW/MIA Update 35 ▶ **New Agency Will Be Stood Up on 1 JAN**

Defense Department officials testified 15 JUL that the new agency to replace the troubled POW/MIA accounting community in charge of recovering and repatriating the remains of troops killed in past conflicts will be stood up on 1 JAN. Joint Personnel Accounting Command as ordered by the secretary of defense in February, said Michael Lumpkin, the assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low-intensity conflict. Lumpkin testified before the House Armed Services' military personnel subcommittee, which for years has pressed for reform and in 2009 helped pass a congressional mandate that the DOD recover at minimum of 200 remains annually beginning next year. On Tuesday, Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC), chairman of the House subcommittee, said he was pleased that the DOD is moving ahead with the changes. "What a positive report — that is very unusual in Congress," he said.

The DOD efforts to recover 83,000 Americans still missing from past conflicts have so far fallen far below the goal set by Congress and been dogged by incompetence and dysfunction, including claims agencies ignored leads, arguing against identifying remains in government custody, desecrated and mishandled of remains, and failed to keep critical records. An interim inspector general report, obtained last week by ProPublica, outlined some of the problems:

- A remarkably low number of identifications each year — just 60 in 2013
- No standard operating procedures, or central database of the missing.
- Leadership and management problems resulting in a hostile and dysfunctional work environment.
- No acknowledgment that as many as 50,000 missing at sea are unlikely to be recovered.
- Defense secretary Chuck Hagel ordered the overhaul and consolidation in February and called maximizing the number of identifications a top priority for the DoD.

Lumpkin said the new central agency will open at the start of 2015 but will not be fully operational until January 2016. "Throughout this process, operations to account for the missing and to keep their families informed will continue," he said. Jamie Morin, director of DOD Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation, said JPAC and DPMO as well as the Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory, which handles forensic work, will continue on recovery efforts until the new agency is completely operational in 2016. "We are building something up while we are shrinking something down to ensure that this is seamless," Morin said. Plans for the new agency call for:

- Oversight by a newly created DOD policy undersecretary who's central task will be the recovery effort.
- A medical examiner in charge of all identification and scientific operations.
- Centralized data base and case management system containing all POW/MIA case information

Lumpkin said the department will also try to improve the way it treats the families of those still missing in action. "From a business perspective, who is the customer here? We haven't focused on the families as much as we could," he said. "I think that is the underlying piece we all agreed upon." [Source: Stars & Stripes | Travis J. Tritten | July 15, 2014 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries ► 140715 thru 140731

"Keeping the Promise", "Fulfill their Trust" and "No one left behind" are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II (73,539) Korean War (7,822) 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 . 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 25 JUL 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. Master Sgt. **Lawrence O. Jock**, assigned to Battery A, 955th Field Artillery, 8th U.S. Army, was lost July 14, 1953, in North Korea. He was accounted for June 25, 2014 -- the 64th anniversary of the start of the Korean War. He will be buried with full military honors Aug. 1, 2014, in Malone, N.Y. The 37-year-old soldier was serving as a forward observer with a field artillery battery in the 8th Army when his position was attacked on July 15, 1953 by Chinese forces in Kangwon Province, North Korea. After the battle, Jock was listed as MIA. His remains were among those of 350 to 400 U.S. servicemen turned over by North Korea between 1991 and 1994. They were identified through DNA samples provided by his family.

Lawrence Jock's surviving relatives in northern New York knew next to nothing about the Army combat veteran. Since he was identified relatives have learned that he was decorated veteran of World War II who enlisted before America entered the conflict in December 1941. "He was a patriot even before the Japanese attacked us. That was something I could tell the family," said 1st Sgt. Ronald Spanton of the New York Army National Guard. Spanton, a casualty assistance officer in northern New York, researched Jock's military background. He learned that Jock joined the service in the 1930s, served as an infantryman in Europe with the 100th Infantry Division during WWII and was awarded a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star for Valor. Jock also served with U.S. occupation forces in Japan. The only living relative with a memory of Jock is his niece, now 78, who recalls him coming to her mother's house to say goodbye before going to Korea.

World War II

- The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced July 9, 2014, that two U.S. servicemen, missing from World War II, have been identified and are being returned to their families for burial with full military honors. The two servicemen are Army Air Force Staff Sgts. **Robert E. Howard**, 21, of Moravia, Iowa, and **David R. Kittredge**, 22, of Oneida, Wis. The individually identified remains of Howard will be buried on July 19, in Moulton, Iowa. The individually identified remains of Kittredge will be buried at a date and location still to be determined. Some of the remains could not be individually identified and they will be buried as a group in a single casket, at a future date at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C. On April 16, 1945, three aircraft were flying in a formation on a bombing raid to Wittenberg, Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany, when the pilots of two other aircraft reported seeing Howard and Kittredge's aircraft hit by enemy fire. The B-26B descended into a deep dive and exploded upon ground impact. In 2007, a German aircraft researcher interviewed eyewitnesses, who reported seeing two deceased crew members buried near the crash site under an apple tree. He also reported the crew members as being exhumed in 1947 or 1948, by an allied recovery team. In June 2012, a German national informed the U.S. government that he found possible human remains in Muhlanger, which he believed to have been associated with an April 1945, B-26B crash, and turned them over to the local police. In July 2012, a JPAC team began excavating the site recovering human remains, personal effects and aircraft wreckage. JPAC also took custody of the remains that the local German national had previously recovered. To identify Howard's remains, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools such as mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA). To identify Kittredge's remains, scientists from JPAC and AFDIL also used mtDNA and dental comparisons, which matched his records.
- The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced 21 JUL that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, lost during World War II, have been identified and are being returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Marine Pfc. **Randolph Allen** of Rush, Kentucky, will be buried July 29 in Arlington National Cemetery, Washington D.C. In November 1943, Allen was assigned to the 2nd Marine Division, which landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll, in an attempt to secure the island against stiff Japanese resistance. Over several days of intense fighting approximately 1,000 Marines were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded. As a result of these attacks, Allen was reported killed in action on Nov. 20, 1943. In the immediate aftermath of the fighting on Tarawa, U.S. service members who died were buried in a number of battlefield cemeteries. During World War II, U.S. Navy Combat Engineers, "SeaBees," significantly restructured the landscape to convert the island for use by the military. In 1946 when

U.S. Army Graves Registration Service personnel attempted to locate all of the battlefield interments, many of the burials could not be located. From Nov. 12-27, 2013 a private organization, known as History Flight, excavated what was believed to be a war time fighting position on the island of Betio. During this excavation History Flight recovered five sets of remains, personal effects and military equipment. Four sets of remains were determined to be Japanese service members and the fifth set was believed to be that of a U.S. Marine. Two sets of military identification tags which correlated to Allen were also found in the fighting position. In the identification of Allen's remains, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools such as dental and skeletal comparison, which matched Allen's records.

[Source: http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news_releases/ Jul 30, 2014 ++]

* VA *



VA Walk-ins ► Wait Time

Anyone whose wait at the doctor's office had them believing they had been forgotten will be able to relate to what retired U.S. Marine Jeffrey Duck says happened to him at a Orange City Florida Veterans Affairs clinic. Duck, 53, patiently sat for three hours before realizing he might be the only one left at the Orange City VA clinic. Duck did not have an appointment when he walked into the clinic about 1 p.m. on 21 JUL to have his pain medication prescription refilled. "I expected to have to wait you know, because everybody else has got an appointment so it is fair that they get seen first," Duck said while sitting in his Deltona home Wednesday. "I figured it would be a while." A while turned into hours. Duck watched as workers started leaving for the day and was told people in the back knew he was in the lobby waiting.



Jeffrey Duck

Duck said after realizing that he had been forgotten and left sitting in the lobby of the clinic, all the news of a “broken VA system” came to his mind. His ordeal started shortly after arriving at the Orange City clinic Monday afternoon. Duck was seen by a nurse at 1:30 p.m. and then told to go back to the lobby and wait to hear about his prescription. Then at 3 p.m. he realized it was taking longer than he expected, so he talked to a front desk person and was told that walk-ins take longer than those with appointments. The front desk attendant spoke to someone in the back of the office. “So I knew that they were aware that I was there,” Duck said. As he waited, Duck said his pain level increased and since he had only three pills left, he held off taking them until he got his prescription filled. He got up and walked around the lobby to ease his pain in his lower back, shoulders and neck.

At 4 p.m. workers started leaving the clinic but Duck was told twice people working the back offices knew he was there, he said. After the place seemed empty, Duck said he could still hear voices and people moving the back offices, so he thought it would be just a matter of time before someone attended to him. The last human movement he saw was a blond woman leaving with only caught a glimpse of the back of her head. After that everything was quiet and he slowly realized he had been forgotten and left alone at the closed clinic. So he pulled out his phone and started videotaping his experience, he said. “I said I am the last person here and I better record this because I didn’t want to get arrested for being at the VA, so I wanted to show I am here and not like breaking in or something like that,” Duck said. As he moved around videotaping, the alarm sounded and he called 9-1-1, he said. “I want to report that I apparently got left in a VA medical facility and the alarm has been going off,” Duck told a dispatcher in the 9-1-1 call. “I assume I have been left here all alone and the police are coming.”

Duck — who during a visit at his home Wednesday was wearing a Marine polo, has his honorable discharge paper displayed on a wall and a Marine Corps license plate on his vehicle — is a patriotic veteran. His fervor got him in trouble a few years back when pulled down a neighbor’s flag because it was flying upside down. He burned the flag because he felt the way it was displayed was disrespectful to veterans. He was charged with petty theft and criminal mischief but the 2010 charges were dropped after he fulfilled the conditions of a pretrial agreement. Duck said he wants to see veterans get better care, respect and service at VA clinics, so he called the media after making the 9-1-1 call because of the problems plaguing the Veterans Health Administration. “Sincerely I didn’t think it would be a bad idea to bring attention to this,” Duck said. “If you want something fixed, you got to keep it in the news.”

The incident prompted the VA to issue an apology to Duck. Michael Strickler, spokesman for the Veterans Health Administration in Orlando, said the agency apologized to Duck. Strickler provided a statement to the newspaper. “We want to apologize to Mr. Duck for his experience yesterday (Monday) at the Orange City VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic,” the statement said. “The Orange City VA’s Chief Medical Officer reached out to Mr. Duck to assist him with his health care needs. We are looking at our closing procedures and will make changes to ensure that this does not happen again.” [Source: Daytona Beach News-Journal | Patricio G. Balona | 2Jul 23, 2014 ++]

VA Claim Filing Update 03 ► DAV NSOs More Important Than Ever

Filing a disability claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs has always been easier and more efficient with the help of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) organization. But seeking DAV’s help may be more important now than ever before with the Veterans Benefits Administration’s Fully Developed Claims (FDC) program. Over the past several years, much attention has been rightly focused on efforts to reform

VBA's claims processing system and reduce the unacceptable backlog of pending disability compensation claims. There are now statistically significant signs of progress.

That progress, which has been made at least in part because more and more veterans are taking advantage of the FDC program. The FDC is an optional initiative that offers veterans and survivors faster decisions from VA on compensation, pension and survivor benefits claims. Veterans and survivors simply submit all relevant records in their possession and certify that they have no further evidence to submit. The VA can then review and process the claim more quickly. A veteran can have his or her claim processed much faster and more accurately if the package is put together correctly, which is where a DAV National Service Officer is prepared to assist. While it is as straightforward as possible, it can be rendered useless if the claim is not assembled correctly.

DAV's National Service officers have been intimately involved with the transition, with unmatched access to the decision makers within the VA, and there is no other veterans service organization more familiar with the ins and outs of the FDC program. The FDC program is unique because the claimant is actively involved in the process, gathering evidence needed to adequately reach a determination. However, the concept is not new. For decade, DAV and other VSOs have been able to submit a complete "fully developed" or "ready-to-rate" claim to VBA. DAV NSOs have long urged claimants to obtain as much of the evidence as possible prior to submitting the claim. However, prior to the inception of the current FDC program, claims considered "fully developed" were handled on a case-by-case basis. There was no formal program with standard procedures or consistency throughout VBA. Even though these claims required less work by VBA and should have resulted in quicker decisions, they were too often treated as just another claim, often sitting for months or years awaiting decisions.

An FDC still requires the completion of several forms and the compilation of records and medical opinions, the VA is rightfully recommending every claimant work with a VSO when filing an FDC. With this tremendous breakthrough and the increasing need for help with claims, DAV has grown its NSO corps to historic highs, with about 280 highly-trained NSOs on staff around the country. If you are need of representation, contact a DAV NSO today. At <http://www.dav.org/veterans/find-your-local-office> offices can be located online. [Source: DAV Newsletter | Joseph Chenelly | May 21, 2014 ++]



VA Health Care Access Update 13 ► Private Care | Don't Open Floodgates

The ambitious push by Congress and its veteran affairs committees to swiftly solve a health care wait-time crisis for tens of thousands of veterans by granting access to private-sector care appears to have run hard aground. After four weeks, House-Senate conferees, working through their staffs to iron out differences in separate veteran health reform bills, need some major breakthroughs, according to lawmakers and staff. "I am very concerned that this conference committee will end up taking a step backward for veterans' health care in this country," said Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT). "That cannot happen. Veterans deserve better." Worries center on the showpiece of both bills: that VA for two years will make private sector care available to veterans if they face waits for VA care longer than 30 days or live more than 40 miles from a VA care facility.

The trouble goes beyond costs, though they are considerable. Lawmakers negotiating a final deal appear only now to be learning the challenges for veterans to access civilian care, and the need for VA to have the resources to monitor and coordinate expansion of purchased care. The unease among lawmakers surfaced during a 16 JUL hearing of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee where acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson presented the VA's longer-term plan to improve access to care. Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), for example, asked about difficulties VA has in getting medical records returned from civilian providers, and monitoring the quality of care veterans receive in the private sector. "One of the biggest challenges we have with purchased care in the community is maintaining continuity of care for the veteran," Gibson said. "The ability to get medical record information back and forth is a vital part of this, [to] ensure the quality of care. I will tell you, if the floodgates open, it will present the department with challenges." The Congressional Budget Office dropped an anvil of hefty cost estimates on both bills, to the shock of fiscal conservative among supporters.

The Senate voted to treat its bill as emergency legislation, which means not appropriating billions of dollars needed to pay for it; the costs simply would be added to the nation's debt. House Republicans want the final bill paid for, but need to find budget offsets that colleagues will accept. With Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, insisting on emergency funding only, the search is on for ways to lower costs enough to entice House conferees to compromise. One idea is to cut, from two years to one, the window for easy access to private sector care for veterans facing long waits or long trips to get care. Another idea is to limit eligibility to current VA care enrollees, eliminating the threat of an enrollment rush and yet addressing the current care backlog.

After discussions with committee staffs, the Congressional Budget Office did lower its cost estimate for the Senate bill (H.R.3230) to \$35 billion in direct spending over 10 years. But CBO cautioned this new estimate ignores any costs from higher usage of VA care after October 2017, even if triggered by the bill's design. In an earlier cost estimate, CBO said VA health costs could spike by \$50 billion a year if as many as two million veterans are enticed to drop current health plans to seek VA-paid care from local docs. The VA's new plan to address the wait-time crisis includes expanding VA medical staff by 10,000 personnel, including 1500 physicians, over the next three years. That sounds like a lot, Gibson said, but it's only a three percent hike to the Veterans Health Administration current staff of 300,000. VA's audit of wait times at health facilities, he said, found that the "number-one cause for scheduling difficulties" was a shortage of doctors. "We have not historically managed to requirements. We have managed to a budget number" regardless of actual need. "And the veterans wound up being the shock absorbers in that process," Gibson said.

VA also wants more facility space to provide direct care, so VA is asking Congress to fund eight large medical facilities from VA's construction backlog list, support leases for 77 more outpatient clinics, and cover minor construction and maintenance projects that would open even more space. Those projects combined would allow eight million more VA health appointments annually, Gibson said. The entire plan would cost \$17.6 billion over three years. Gibson hinted it's a better plan than some lawmakers seek. "I believe the greatest risk to veterans over the intermediate-to-long-term is that additional resources are provided only to support increased purchase care in the community and not to materially remedy the historic shortfall in internal VA capacity. Such an outcome would leave VA even more poorly positioned to meet future demand," Gibson said.

More VA facilities and staff, however, are precisely what Tea Party conservatives in Congress vehemently oppose. And their view is said to be influencing debate among House-Senate conferees. Sen. Mike Johanns (R-Neb.), a Tea Party favorite who will retire from the Senate in December, told Gibson that

what VA needs is competition from private sector health care providers and not more billions of dollars to spend. “If somebody were biting at your backside because they were providing better care, faster care, honest waiting lists, [VA leaders] would go, ‘Holy smoke! If we don’t get our act together [and] if we don’t see more patients during the day, we’re going to lose out,’” Johanns said. Gibson countered that many veterans like and depend on VA care. “But at the end of the day,” Johanns interrupted, “these veterans fight for our freedoms. Why don’t they have the freedom to make their own choice about their health care? And maybe they say... ‘That hospital 20 minutes down the road is simply a better situation for me than the [VA] hospital that’s 250 miles from where I’m at, with a long waiting list.’ ”

To a question from Tester, Philip Matkovsky, assistant deputy under secretary for health administrative operations, said purchasing care in the private sector generally costs taxpayers more than care in VA facilities. Sanders expressed confidence that conferees will reach a deal in time to get a final bill passed before Congress goes on its August break. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Tom Philpott } Jul 17, 2014 ++]

VA Lawsuit | Keslosky~Michael ► Prostrate Cancer Diagnosis

A former Army National Guard soldier has filed a \$4 million federal complaint against the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Plains Twp., alleging he was handed a “death sentence” by medical staff who botched the treatment of his prostate cancer. In his lawsuit, Michael Keslosky III, 58, of Old Forge, claims the VA staff intentionally misled him to believe he suffered from prostatitis — an inflammation of his prostate gland — and ignored clear signs he was suffering from prostate cancer. The delay in detecting and treating the disease caused him to develop terminal, Stage IV cancer that spread to his bones, according to the complaint filed by attorney Scott Schermerhorn of Scranton. The attorney said the case exemplifies problems recently uncovered in the VA medical system, which has been accused of falsifying data to hide long wait lists for treatment that led to the deaths of some veterans.

Keslosky’s care was so poorly managed by the VA that he was never advised he had cancer, Schermerhorn said. He first learned of the diagnosis when he was provided a letter a VA official wrote to U.S. Rep. Matt Cartwright, D-17, who wanted information on Keslosky’s case after he sought help. The July 26, 2013, letter stated the veteran was diagnosed with Stage IV cancer on Jan. 10, 2011. The problem, Schermerhorn said, is the VA never told him that. “We found out when he was sitting in my office with his records. I looked them over and said, ‘Do you understand you’re diagnosed with prostate cancer that metastasized to the bones?’” Schermerhorn said. Keslosky, a suspended Old Forge police officer, served in the National Guard for about 12 years prior to his discharge in 2004. He said he was wary of seeking medical treatment at the VA starting in 2006, but had no choice since he lost his health care insurance when he was suspended without pay by Old Forge in 2005. He continues to fight to be reinstated.

The medical malpractice claim was filed with the VA through the Federal Torts Claims Act, an administrative action that is required before a lawsuit can be filed. The VA has six months to review the claim to determine if it will pay the requested damages. If it declines the claim Mr. Keslosky can file a federal lawsuit. Jason Cave, acting public affairs officer for the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center, said he could not comment on the case because it is pending. Schermerhorn said the VA is attempting to blame his client for the delay in his treatment, falsely claiming in letters to Mr. Cartwright and U.S. Sen. Bob Casey that he repeatedly missed or canceled appointments. “It was easy for them to say in these letters that the mistakes were his fault, that he didn’t show up for appointments and did not follow through on treatment,” he said. “I knew this wasn’t true, but at that point, who would believe you?” Now that news of the scandal

at the VA has broken, his claims have gained more credibility, he said. “They would cancel appointments on him. He’d get to New York City and they’d say we don’t have you in the system, or your doctor is not here,” Schermerhorn said.

The complaint, filed 15 MAY, says Keslosky repeatedly requested surgery to have his prostate removed, but was instead provided hormone therapy and radiation treatments. The failure of the VA to perform the surgery and/or provide otherwise proper care caused the cancer to progress to the point he is no longer a candidate for surgery. Keslosky said he has not been given any estimate of how long he has to live. He said he is still undergoing hormone treatment and is taking four other cancer medications. Despite his condition, he said he feels “great.” “The doctors are amazed that with the cancer in the bones, I have no pain,” he said. “It’s only by the grace of God I’m able to function as normal as I do.” Regardless of the outcome of his treatment, he said he’s hopeful his case against the VA will help improve care for veterans. “I’m asking for all veterans who have been similarly abused and those who lost their lives or are terminal like me to get justice so this doesn’t happen to anyone else,” he said. [Source: The Times-Tribune | Terrie Morgan-Besecker | Jul 15, 2014 ++]

VA Funding Needs ► \$18B to Hire Medical Staff, Lease Space

Veterans Affairs Department officials want nearly \$18 billion more in funding over the next three years to hire more clinicians, lease more space and cut down on wait times for medical appointments. The money is also partly designed to serve as a down payment on rebuilding VA’s reputation, proving to the public that with enough resources, the department can once again be a reliable asset for veterans seeking care. In his first testimony on Capitol Hill, acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson acknowledged to the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee that VA today “has serious problems” that will take years to correct. “We understand the problems we face. We own them. We are taking decisive action to begin to resolve them,” Gibson said. “We can turn these challenges into the greatest opportunity for improvement in the history of the department.”



In his first formal appearance on Capitol Hill, Acting Veterans Affairs Secretary Sloan Gibson (left) told senators some of his needs to reduce wait times

Those challenges include nearly nonstop scandals over the past four months, including recent revelations about whistleblower retaliation and data manipulation in dozens of facilities. But the overarching issue that forced the resignation of Gibson’s predecessor — retired Army Gen. Eric Shinseki,

who stepped down in May — was system wait time problems, covered up by administrators trying to protect performance bonuses. As of July 3, more than 636,000 veterans — about 10 percent of VA’s total appointment caseload — faced a wait of a month or more for medical appointments. To fix that, Gibson wants to hire 10,000 clinicians in coming years and find more space for medical appointments through leases, VA facility improvements and new construction — moves that he said would provide not only a short-term fix but also a longer-term solution to the underlying resource issues. “I know it sounds like huge numbers,” he told lawmakers. “But [VA] historically has not managed to veterans’ requirements, we’ve managed to budget numbers.” Congress is already considering an emergency VA reform bill that would boost funding by about \$30 billion over the next three years, according to Congressional Budget Office estimates. But that measure would allot only \$500 million to new hiring initiatives; the rest would be used to increase access to private care options for veterans having trouble accessing VA care.

The department already has seen dramatic jumps in funding over the last decade, adding about \$100 billion to its base budget since fiscal 2004 and about \$70 billion since fiscal 2008. The additional funding request drew concerns from several senators, who questioned whether better management and use of existing resources would provide more results for veterans. But Gibson insisted that addressing the fundamental problems behind the wait times will require more resources, and failing to back those plans “will mean that the wait times will get longer.” He also outlined a number of recent audits and policy updates to address the other scandals, and repeated his promise that VA whistleblowers will be protected — and those who retaliate against them will face punishment. The pending reform legislation would also make it easier to fire senior executives for mismanagement and poor performance. Committee chairman Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said he hopes that measure will move forward soon. But so far, issues of the cost and scope of the bill have held up a final draft. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane | Jul 16, 2014 ++]

VA Clothing Allowance Update 04 ► Disability Compensation Supplement

Veterans who have unique clothing needs as a result of a service-related disability or injury may receive a supplement to their disability compensation. The clothing allowance reimburses you if your clothing gets permanently damaged by a prosthetic or orthopedic appliance you wear, or by a prescribed medication you use on your skin. If eligible, you can receive a one-time or yearly allowance for reimbursement. You may receive a clothing allowance as a Veteran who uses either of the following:

- Prosthetic or orthopedic appliance, such as a wheelchair or crutches, because of a service-connected disability (Note: soft and flexible devices, such as an elastic stocking, are not included)
- Medication prescribed by a physician for a service-connected skin condition that causes permanent stains or otherwise damages outer garments

Additional clothing allowances may be provided if more than one prosthetic or orthopedic appliance, or medication described above, is used and/or affects more than one type of clothing garment. Payments are based on the rate table set by law. You can view the current rate table to determine the benefit amount at http://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/special_Benefit_Allowances_2012.asp. The present rate of up to \$753 per years has not been changed since 2012. To receive annual payment, you must establish eligibility by August 1 of the year for which you claim payment. To Apply submit VA Form 10-8678, Application for Annual Clothing Allowance to the prosthetic representative at your local VA medical center. You can use the VA Facility Locator at http://www.va.gov/landing2_locations.htm to determine your nearest VA health care facility. If you have not submitted a claim for disability compensation, you

must complete the application prior to filing for clothing allowance. For more information, call VA toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.

Applications are collected throughout the year and held until the closing date of August 1st. They are then processed and Veterans will receive payments between September 1st and October 31st. This is an annual payment and will only be made during this time frame. If you have not received your payment by October 31st, you should contact your local prosthetic representative. [Source: Military.com Veterans Report Jul 14, 2014 ++]

VA Rural Access Update 19 ► Transportation Grants Total \$815,051.50

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the White House Rural Council announced 11 JUL the award of eight grants, totaling \$815,051.50, which will improve access to health care for Veterans living in highly rural areas. The grants will assist over 11,000 Veterans in 7 states and 56 counties by providing up to \$50,000 per highly rural area to fund transportation services for Veterans to and from VA medical centers and other facilities that provide VA care. The grants are part of a program authorized by Congress to help state Veterans Service Agencies (SVSAs) and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) operate or contract for transportation services to transport Veterans to VA medical centers and other facilities that provide VA care.

In July 2013, VA began accepting applications for grants to help state Veterans Service Agencies and VSOs operate or contract for transportation services to transport Veterans to VA medical centers and other facilities that provide VA care. A new regulation establishes the program that will administer these grants. Transportation will be provided at no cost to Veterans. “VA is committed to ensuring that all Veterans, including those who live in rural and remote areas, have access to the health care they have earned through service to our country,” said Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan D. Gibson. “These grants will play a critical role in expanding access to VA healthcare for Veterans.” Organizations awarded the grants include:

- Virginia Department of Veteran Services (\$8,825.00 for one county in VA.) approximately benefiting over 89 Veterans;
- American Legion Post 20 (\$49, 764.00 for one county in S.D.) approximately benefiting 1,507 Veterans;
- Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8988 (\$80,000.00 for two counties in CA.) approximately benefiting 849 Veterans;
- Nevada Department of Veteran Affairs (\$46,850.00 for one county in Nevada) approximately benefiting 1,285 Veterans;
- Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7202 (\$150,000.00 for 13 counties in far west Texas) approximately benefiting 1,579 Veterans;
- Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (\$100,000.00 for two counties) approximately benefiting 1,756 Veterans; and
- North Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (\$379, 612.50 for 36 counties in N.D.) approximately benefiting 5,477 Veterans.

[Source: VA News Release Jul 11, 2014 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 138 ► VBA Completes 1M Claims in FY 2014

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on 14 JUL announced that the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has completed its one millionth disability claim in fiscal year 2014, and is on track to complete more than 1.3 million claims this year – ensuring that nearly 200,000 more Veterans will receive decisions on their disability claims than fiscal year 2013. Since 2011, VBA has been implementing the largest transformation in its history, fundamentally redesigning and streamlining the way it provides benefits and services to Veterans, their families and survivors. “VBA has made significant progress toward eliminating the backlog, but there is more work to be done to reach our goal of processing all disability claims within 125 days at a 98-percent accuracy level in 2015.” said Allison Hickey, Under Secretary for Benefits. “VBA’s employees, half of whom are Veterans themselves, believe that Veterans should not have to wait for the benefits they have earned and deserve. While we work to drive down the backlog of disability claims, we must also improve productivity on other categories of non-rating work.”

In the past four fiscal years, VA surpassed one million completed claims by the end of each year. Passing the one-million mark this year in early July represents major progress in providing more Veterans and their family members with timely, accurate decisions. VBA has reduced the claims backlog by more than 55 percent from its peak of 611,000 in March 2013 – and Veterans with pending claims have been waiting, on average, 128 fewer days for a decision on their claim. At the same time, the accuracy of rating decisions continues to improve. VA’s national “claim-level” accuracy rate is currently 91 percent – an eight-percentage-point improvement since 2011. These rating decisions often determine eligibility for other VA benefits and services, including non-rating claims, which are tracked and managed in other categories on the Monday Morning Workload Report. These categories also have increased as more rating claims are completed, but VBA has not lost focus on non-rating work. VBA has taken the following actions to automate and improve the timeliness and accuracy of non-rating claim decisions:

- **Online Dependency Claims** – VBA developed a new Rules-Based Processing System (RBPS) to automate dependency claims. Since inception, self-service features in RBPS have enabled over 75,000 Veterans to add or change the status of their dependents online. Over 50 percent of the dependency claims filed through RBPS are now automatically processed and paid in 1-2 days.
- **Dependency Claims Contract** – VA recently awarded a contract for assistance in entering data from paper-based dependency claims into VA’s electronic rules-based processing system. The contractor is entering the information from the paper-based dependency claims just as a claimant would enter information if filing the claim online. The contract calls for 40,000 dependency claims to be processed per month when operating at full capacity. The contractor is currently ramping up to that capacity.
- **Up-front Income Verification for Pension** – A new data-sharing initiative with the Social Security Administration and the Internal Revenue Service enables VBA to verify the income of pension applicants before awarding benefits and eliminates the annual income reporting requirement for pension beneficiaries.
- **Burial Claims** – VBA published a new regulation, effective July 7, 2014, that allows automatic payment of the one-time burial allowance to a Veteran’s spouse without requiring the surviving spouse to apply for the benefit. Under this new regulation, as many as 62,000 surviving spouses will now receive timely burial benefits each year.
- **Drill Pay Adjustments** – Veterans cannot legally receive VA benefits and drill pay concurrently. VBA is working to streamline and automate the drill pay offset process through an upfront agreement from National Guard and Reserve members.

- **National Call Center Initiative** – Effective July 14, employees at the St. Louis and Phoenix National Call Centers are now also processing dependency claims. The initiative begins on July 14 at the St. Louis and Phoenix Regional Offices and will be expanded to all of our Call Centers shortly thereafter.
- **Hiring Temporary Employees** – VBA is in the process of hiring 200 temporary employees, who will be provided specialized training in processing the less complex non-rating claims and work actions.

VBA posts data on the disability claims backlog, the non-rating workload, and other publicly available data on their performance on a weekly, monthly, and annual basis through their reports website <http://www.vba.va.gov/reports>. For more information about disability and other Veterans benefits, go to <http://www.ebenefits.va.gov>. [Source: VA News Release Jul 14, 2014 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 139 ► Claims-Related Issues

In mid-JUL TREA, represented by Deputy Legislative Director Mike Saunders, met with Undersecretary for Veterans' Benefits Allison Hickey to discuss the claims backlog and other claims-related issues. This was unrelated to all of the recent news surrounding the lack of access veterans have been dealing with related to the Veterans' Health Administration (VHA). Hickey assumed the duties of Under Secretary for Benefits at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on June 6, 2011. At the meeting the following Issues were discussed:



Allison Hickey

- Secretary Hickey said that the Veterans' Benefits Administration (VBA) is considering a new system to better count the claims that VBA receives; currently the process is time-consuming.
- VBA is working on making it easier for people who have changed their names between the time they were in DEERS and the time they applied for VA benefits to actually receive those benefits.
- DoD has recently put all pre-1982 veterans into the DEERS system, making it possible to electronically process all veteran claims for the first time ever.
- Secretary Hickey acknowledged that there are problems with the process of receiving VA disability pay for currently drilling Guard and Reservists; the process for notifying G&R members of the offset is often times years after they begin receiving disability pay, leading to large overpayments that must be repaid.
- The C-123 issue is currently being actively reviewed by VBA. This is the issue about the planes that were contaminated by carrying Agent Orange to Vietnam; crew members who worked on

those planes years later are suspected to have been exposed to dioxin from Agent Orange. No final decisions have been made yet.

[Source: TREA News for the Enlisted Jul 21, 2014 ++]

VA Appeals Backlog Update 01 ► Appeals Resolution Time 923 Days

While there are clearly some doubters most people think that the backlog for disability adjudications has dropped dramatically. Indeed, this week the VA proudly announced that they had just adjudicated their 1,000,000th claim for this fiscal year. However, this is predictably leading to another backlog increase. There is now a backlog for pending appeals of denied claims... as well as increased delays in other claims matters.

One of the areas that have suffered while most of the VA's focus has been on adjudicating initial disability claims is the simple job of changing the number of dependents that is covered by a claim. The VA's own figures show that the number of claims to change the status of a dependent has risen from 35,734 at the start of 2012 to 191,464 on June 28 of this year. As of June 28th the number of pending appeals has reached 279,435. This has been seen as a growing problem since 2012 when the VA's Inspector General (IG) suggested that the VA "revise productivity standards" to ensure review officers get credit only for work that moves an appeal forward, according to the most recent IG report to Congress. That has not yet happened. Laura Eskenazi, Principal Deputy Vice Chairman Board of Veterans' Appeals U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the executive in charge of the Board of Veterans' Appeals, said appeals rates have held steady for nearly 20 years, but the total number has risen as more claims have been filed. "If the expectation is a short time frame [to get a decision on an appeal] that would require some trade-off in the due process," she said.

The average time for a denied claim to work its way through the VA's appeals process shot up to more than 900 days last year After staying between 500 and 750 days for the past decade, what the VA refers to as its "appeals resolution time" hit 923 days in fiscal 2013. That is a 37% jump in one year, from 675 in fiscal 2012. The VA's long time goal is for an appeal to take 400 days to resolve. It should be remembered that veterans have a provision in our appeals process that almost no one else has. It permits all appellants (veterans, survivors or their representatives) to submit at any time in the appeal new evidence or information. That triggers a fresh review of the entire appeal. The Board of Veterans' Appeals can grant, deny or remand the case to one of the VA's regional offices for additional review. This of course slows appeals down but it is a terrific advantage for the veteran and his/her family. [Source: TREA News for the Enlisted Jul 21, 2014 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste, and Abuse ► 140716 thru 140731

Baltimore -- A former Deputy Chief of Veterans Claims in the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs pleaded guilty 14 JUL to extortion in connection with a scheme to fraudulently obtain over \$1.4 million in veterans benefits in exchange for a plea agreement. In January 2011, U.S. Army veteran **David Clark**, age 67, of Hydes, Maryland, retired from the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs as the deputy chief for veterans claims. Clark's duties included submitting claims and documentation on behalf of veterans in Maryland who appointed the MDVA to represent them in obtaining federal benefits from the

VA. Clark also submitted documents to the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation in support of veterans' applications for property tax waivers.

According to his plea agreement, while serving at Deputy Chief of Claims, Clark fraudulently obtained VA compensation for himself and at least 17 others, by submitting false documents to the VA purporting to show that the claimants had been diagnosed with diabetes, and in some cases, that the claimant had served in Vietnam when they had not. The claimants paid Clark half of the retroactive lump sum payment they received in cash or some other amount of cash. These payments to Clark were made in unmarked envelopes, at MDVA offices in Bel Air; at the Fallon Federal Building in Baltimore; and at other locations. In support of these claims:

- Clark submitted fake letters from doctors purportedly treating the veterans, which falsely stated that the claimants suffered from Type II diabetes. Clark used the names and addresses of real doctors who were unaware of his conduct. Each letter stated that the diagnosis of Type II diabetes had been made a year or more prior to the date of the letter, which entitled each claimant to a retroactive lump-sum payment. The letters also stated that the claimants were currently taking insulin, which increased the amount of compensation the VA paid the claimant.
- Clark created counterfeit versions of a Defense Department form for himself and five others, which falsely stated that each had served in Vietnam. These forms also falsely stated that these individuals had received various awards and decorations for the Vietnam service, including that Clark himself had been awarded the Purple Heart Medal. These documents were submitted to the VA to provide false evidence that they qualified for compensation benefits for diabetes.
- Clark submitted false certifications to the SDAT, on behalf of claimants that owned homes in Maryland, that the filers were entitled to a property tax waiver due to a service-connected disability.

The false claims cost the government \$1,151,219 and the loss from the property tax evasion is \$255,555, for a total loss of \$1,407,134, officials said. Clark faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Clark has agreed to forfeit \$1,407,134. A sentencing date is scheduled for 17 NOV. Eight other veterans have previously pleaded guilty to paying Clark cash to submit false documentation to receive VA benefits:

- John Bratcher, 56, of Conowingo, Maryland, a veteran of the U.S. Air Force
- Richard Genco, 71, of Baltimore, a veteran of the U.S. Navy
- Paul Heard, 65, of Baltimore, a veteran of the U.S. Navy
- George Kulla, 68, of Baltimore, a veteran of the U.S. Army
- Sandra Tyree, 65, of Baltimore, a veteran of the U.S. Air Force and former employee of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- Kenneth Webster, 68, of Pasadena, Maryland, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps and a former police officer with AMTRAK
- Raymond Sadler, 63, of Middle River, Maryland, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps
- Kenneth Williams, age 65, of Baltimore, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps.

[Source: WBAL-TV Baltimore | Saliqa Khan | Jul 14, 2014 ++]

VA Claim Processing Update 10 ► 31% Error Rate in 2-yr Crash Project

The Veterans Benefits Administration inaccurately processed 17,600 of 56,500 claims under a crash, two-month project kicked off in April 2013 to eliminate claims older than 2 years, the Department of Veterans

Affairs inspector general reported 14 JUL. The rush to get these claims processed resulted in improper payments of \$40.4 million. The IG said errors occurred because rating staff “felt pressured to complete these claims within VBA’s 60-day deadline.” VA reported last June it had processed 97 percent of disability claims backlogged more than two years. This translated to elimination of 65,000 claims from its overall inventory, VA said at the time. The IG reported the crash project was “less effective than VBA’s existing rating process in providing benefits to veterans quickly.” The IG reported VBA rating staff were supposed to issue provisional ratings for older claims still awaiting medical evidence to back them up. “Provisional ratings provided some claims decisions more quickly; however, they did not allow veterans’ compensation benefits to be granted more quickly,” the IG said. Appeal rights for provisional ratings were also delayed until claims finalization, the IG said.



VBA removed all provisional claims from its pending inventory, despite more work needed to complete them. “This process misrepresented VBA’s actual workload of pending claims and its progress toward eliminating the overall claims backlog,” the IG said. At the end of June 2013 following completion of the Special Initiative, VBA reported 516,922 rating claims pending in its backlog, but only 1,258 rating claims pending over two years, the IG said, statistics that ignored reality, according to the IG. “We estimated 6,860 provisional ratings were still waiting for final decisions as of January 2014, 6 months after the Initiative had ended,” the IG said. “Because VBA did not ensure existing controls were functioning as needed to effectively identify and manage provisionally rated claims, some veterans may never have received final rating decisions if not for our review.”

Allison Hickey, VA undersecretary for benefits, said in a 10 JUL reply appended to the IG report the purpose of the crash project was to get benefits to veterans quicker and that the process gave them another year to submit medical evidence. “The final rating process provides further assurance that veterans who received provisional decisions are receiving the benefits they have earned,” Hickey said. The IG recommended VBA conduct a quality review of all claims processed under the crash program, finalize provisional ratings decisions, and ensure veterans receive full benefits due them. Hickey said VBA concurs and will ensure these recommendations are met by September. [Source: NextGov | Bob Brewin | Jul 14, 2014 ++]

VA Credibility Update 14 ► Gibson’s SVAC Testimony on Actions Taken

In testimony before the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan D. Gibson told members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on 16 JUL that it would take years for the department to rights its wrongs. “I believe in as little as two years the conversation can change. That the

VA can be the trusted provider for care and benefits," Gibson said. He outlined serious problems regarding access to healthcare and key actions the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has taken to get Veterans off wait lists and into clinics. "The trust that is the foundation of all we do – the trust of the Veterans we serve and the trust of the American people and their elected representatives –has eroded," said Acting Secretary Gibson. "We have to earn that trust back through deliberate and decisive action, and by creating an open and transparent approach for dealing with our stakeholders to better serve Veterans." Gibson discussed six key priorities to begin restoring trust:

1. Get Veterans off wait lists and into clinics;
2. Fix systemic scheduling problems;
3. Address cultural issues;
4. Hold people accountable where willful misconduct or management negligence are documented;
5. Establish regular and ongoing disclosures of information; and,
6. Quantify the resources needed to consistently deliver timely, high-quality healthcare.

Gibson testified that VA needs approximately \$17.6 billion in additional resources to meet current demand for the remainder of FY 2014 through FY 2017. This funding would address challenges such as clinical staff, space, information technology, and benefits processing necessary to provide timely, high-quality care and benefits. "We understand the seriousness of the problems we face. We own them. We are taking decisive action to begin to resolve them," said Gibson. "We can turn these challenges into the greatest opportunity for improvement in the history of the department." Gibson also outlined actions that VA is taking now in order to address problems with access to VA healthcare, including:

- The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has reached out to over 160,000 Veterans to get them off wait lists and into clinics. VHA has also made over 543,000 referrals for Veterans to receive care in the private sector – 91,000 more than in the comparable period a year ago.
- VHA facilities are adding more clinic hours, aggressively recruiting to fill physician vacancies, deploying mobile medical units, using temporary staffing resources, and expanding the use of private sector care.
- VA is moving rapidly to augment and improve its existing scheduling system while simultaneously pursuing the purchase of a "commercial off-the-shelf" state-of-the-art system.
- Gibson has directed Medical Center and Network Directors to conduct monthly inspections, in person, of their clinics to assess the state of scheduling practices and to identify any related obstacles to timely care for Veterans. To date, over 1,100 of these visits have been conducted.
- Gibson has directed a comprehensive external audit of scheduling practices across the entire VHA system.
- Gibson has personally visited ten VA Medical Centers in the last six weeks to hear directly from the field on the actions being taken to get Veterans off wait lists and into clinics, and he will continue to make site visits.
- The inappropriate 14-day access measure has been removed from all individual employee performance plans to eliminate any motive for inappropriate scheduling practices. In the course of completing this task, over 13,000 performance plans were amended.
- Where willful misconduct or management negligence is documented, appropriate personnel actions will be taken, including cases of whistleblower retaliation.
- Gibson froze VHA Central Office and VISN Office headquarters hiring – as a first step to ensure all employees are working to support those delivering care directly to Veterans.
- VHA has dispatched teams to provide direct assistance to facilities requiring the most improvement, including a large team on the ground, right now, in Phoenix.
- All VHA senior executive performance awards for fiscal year 2014 have been suspended.
- VHA is expanding use of private-sector care to improve access.

- Gibson sent a message to all 341,000 VA employees – and has reiterated during every visit to VA facilities – that whistleblowers will be protected, and that he will not tolerate retaliation against whistleblowers.
- Gibson has conducted over a dozen meetings and calls with senior representatives of Veteran and Military Service Organizations (VSOs/MSOs) and other stakeholder groups to solicit their ideas for improving access and restoring trust.
- Gibson has made a number of personnel announcements in recent weeks, including: Dr. Carolyn Clancy as interim Under Secretary for Health; Dr. Jonathan Perlin, a former Under Secretary for Health, on temporary assignment as Senior Advisor to the Secretary; Dr. Gerard Cox as Interim Director of the Office of Medical Inspector (OMI); and Ms. Leigh Bradley as Special Counsel to the Secretary.
- As VA completes reviews, fact-finding, and other investigations, the department is beginning to initiate personnel actions to hold those accountable who committed wrongdoing or were negligent in discharging their management responsibilities

Vice President Joe Biden told the St. Louis annual national convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars on 22 JUL that the country has learned there are "many, many" things that must be done to fix the VA. Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan D. Gibson speech at the convention went into much more detail on what has been learned and what is being done to rectify the situation. Refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**VA Secretary VFW Annual Convention Remarks**" for a summary of his speech. [Source: VA News Release Jul 16, 2014 ++]

VA Secretary Update 30 ► Gibson's No. 1 Priority | Clean house

The interim chief of the Veterans Affairs Department spoke repeatedly to Congress on 24 JUL of the need to clean house at the agency, saying only administrative red tape has prevented him from firing more employees. Also on Thursday, however, House-Senate negotiators took a significant step backward on reaching a compromise on a bill that would grant VA officials authority to more easily remove poorly performing staff. Acting Secretary Sloan Gibson fielded several questions from members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee in the morning on why more employees have not been terminated, while lawmakers met in the afternoon to review new proposals to fix VA. Asked during the hearing the No. 1 thing he needed to reform the agency, Gibson said he wanted the "flexibility to expedite personnel actions." "I will use every authority I've got and use them to the maximum extent possible to hold employees accountable," Gibson said. He added, however, that he is "learning the hard way" how difficult that process can be in federal government. Republicans at the VA reform bill conference meeting that day emphasized the need to provide VA with increased firing authority in whatever compromise the parties reach, and to ensure the authority covers employees governed by both VA and government wide provisions of federal statute. [Source: GovExec.com | Eric Katz | July 24, 2014 ++]

VA Secretary Update 31 ► Robert McDonald Confirmed by Senate

Robert McDonald was unanimously confirmed by the Senate 29 JUL as the new Department of Veterans Affairs secretary. The former Army Ranger and CEO of Procter and Gamble was confirmed in a 97-0 vote by lawmakers who said his boardroom experience could be used to overhaul the nation's troubled veteran

health care system. His predecessor Gen. Eric Shinseki stepped down in May amid a growing scandal over long patient wait times and manipulation of appointment data by VA staff. Numerous VA inspector general investigations and testimony on Capitol Hill over the past two months have revealed a deeply dysfunctional agency that often ignored or covered up dangerous shortcomings in care. McDonald, 61, spent 33 years at P&G where he headed up the company's Tide detergent brand and later its global fabric care division before being promoted to president and CEO in 2009. He graduated from West Point and rose to the rank of captain in the 82nd Airborne Division before entering the private sector. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Travis J. Tritten | Jul 29, 2014 ++]

VA Whistleblowers Update 06 ► POGO | Supervisor Retaliation Common

A pharmacy supervisor at the VA was placed on leave after complaining about errors and delays in delivering medications to patients at a hospital in Palo Alto, California. In Pennsylvania, a doctor was removed from clinical work after complaining that on-call doctors were refusing to go to a VA hospital in Wilkes-Barre. Medical professionals from coast to coast have pointed out problems at the VA, only to suffer retaliation from supervisors and other high-ranking officials, according to a report 21 JUL by a private government watchdog. The report compiled by the Project on Government Oversight, a group that conducts its own investigations and works with whistleblowers, is based on comments and complaints filed by nearly 800 current and former VA employees and veterans. Those comments indicate that concerns about the VA go far beyond the long waiting times or falsified appointment records that have received much recent attention, extending to the quality of health care services veterans receive, the report said.

The group set up a website in mid-May for complaints and said it has received allegations of wrongdoing from 35 states and the District of Columbia. "A recurring and fundamental theme has become clear: VA employees across the country fear they will face repercussions if they dare to raise a dissenting voice," said Danielle Brian, the group's executive director. "Until we eliminate the culture of intimidation and climate of fear, no reforms will be able to turn this broken agency around." The report from the group, known as POGO, came a day before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee was to hold a hearing on the nomination of Robert McDonald to be VA secretary. If confirmed by the Senate, McDonald would replace acting Secretary Sloan Gibson, who took over May 30 after Eric Shinseki resigned amid a growing uproar over treatment delays and falsified records at VA hospitals and clinics nationwide.

A federal investigative agency says it is examining 67 claims of retaliation by supervisors at the VA against employees who filed whistleblower complaints. The independent Office of Special Counsel said 30 of the complaints about retaliation have passed the initial review stage and are being further investigated for corrective action and possible discipline against VA supervisors and other executives. Monday's private report details the case of Stuart Kallio, an inpatient pharmacy technician supervisor at the Palo Alto VA Health Care System who complained to superiors about what he described as incompetent, uncaring management and inefficiencies in delivering medicine to patients. The report stated:

- The pharmacy service had steadily deteriorated to the point that it was "in a perpetual state of failure, failing to provide timely, quality care to veterans," Kallio said in a Feb. 26 email to supervisors. He addressed his criticisms up the chain of command as far as Elizabeth Joyce Freeman, director of the Palo Alto VA Health Care System.

- On April 7, the chief of the pharmacy service sent Kallio a letter threatening to suspend him for sending emails "that contained disrespectful and inappropriate statements about your service chief" and others at the hospital, including leadership of the Palo Alto VA.
- Kallio defended himself in a letter to superiors detailing hospital records that showed patients suffering from "missed doses, late doses, wrong doses" of medication. He was suspended for two weeks in June.
- On June 20, the day before his suspension was to end, Freeman placed Kallio on paid leave pending an investigation. Another VA official ordered Kallio not to discuss the case outside the VA, the report said. This month, Freeman became interim director of the VA's troubled Southwest Health Care Network based in Arizona. The former director there retired after reports this spring that dozens of patients have died while awaiting treatment at the Phoenix VA hospital.
- POGO's Brian said an order attempting to gag Kallio, coupled with expansion of Freeman's responsibilities, "seem directly at odds" with a message Acting VA Secretary Gibson has repeated in recent weeks emphasizing the importance of whistleblower protection.

A spokesman for Gibson said 21 JUL that the VA thanks POGO "for bringing these important claims to light." The spokesman, Drew Brookie, encouraged the group to provide relevant information to the VA's Office of Inspector General and Office of Special Counsel so there can be appropriate follow-up. The VA's acting inspector general, Richard Griffin, has issued a subpoena demanding that POGO turn over a list of whistleblowers who filed complaints through its website, which is operated jointly with the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. The groups have refused, saying release of the names would violate the promise they made to whistleblowers. Griffin's office said last week it is investigating possible wrongdoing at 87 VA medical facilities nationwide, up from 69 last month.

Thomas Tomasco, a doctor who worked at the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center in Pennsylvania, told POGO he quit his job "under duress" after he raised concerns about the hospital's on-call policy. He complained that on-call physicians were refusing to come to the hospital in emergencies; instead they provided telephone consultations, which Tomasco said delayed care to patients requiring immediate assistance. After filing the complaint in 2012, Tomasco was suspended for a day without pay — an action that was overturned — and later was removed from clinical service. He eventually quit, saying he was "treated like a pariah with no justification."

Missouri's senators speaking at the St. Louis annual national convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars chided the Veterans Affairs Department for the "shameful" handling of its healthcare crisis and the agency's treatment of whistleblowers. Sens. Roy Blunt (R) and Claire McCaskill (D) ripped the department, which has been steeped in controversy since a May report found an agency hospital in Phoenix kept 1,700 veterans off official patient lists. That report was soon followed by a White House-mandated audit of the VA medical network finding that more 57,000 veterans had to wait at least three months to see a doctor. "The numbers are shameful, the response has been shameful," Blunt said, calling for veterans to have more access to private care. "Competition may not be a bad thing at all" for the VA's medical network, according to Blunt, who argued that the agency should be "really good at a few things" like treating post-traumatic stress disorder and prosthetics. But, he said, the VA "probably isn't the best place to get your heart stent ... or your blood pressure checked."

Earlier, Sen. Claire McCaskill took the agency to task for its treatment of whistleblowers. She told the audience we must "pull out all the stops so that a new day dawns at the VA where whistleblowers are protected, not punished. She predicted that the various investigations into the VA would uncover a level of "calcified middle management" responsible for the scandals plaguing the agency. "Well Harry Truman would say that's like kissing your sister. It doesn't work," McCaskill told the audience. "They need to be

gone and they need to be gone immediately.” McCaskill has introduced legislation that calls for any employee found to be guilty of retaliation against a whistleblower to be fired. [Source: AP & The Hill | Matthew Daly & Martin Matishak | Jul 21, 2014 ++]

VAMC Phoenix AZ Update 07 ► Gibson Progress Report

Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan D. Gibson today told members of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has taken action on the four recommendations made in the Interim Report of the Office of Inspector General for the Phoenix VA Health Care System. The final report of the IG has not been published. “We have taken actions on all of the recommendations in the Inspector General’s interim report on Phoenix which was released in May,” Gibson said. “The Inspector General confirmed we have systemic issues when it comes to patient scheduling and access, and we are working to address this serious issue. We have identified Veterans on wait lists at Phoenix, including those identified by the IG in their interim report, and have reached out to immediately begin scheduling appointments. We have reviewed wait lists nationwide, including the New Enrollee Appointment Request (NEAR) list, and not only are we reaching out to contact those Veterans to get them into clinics, but we have posted the information online so Veterans can review our progress.

The Acting Secretary visited the VA health care system in Phoenix on 5 JUN as the first of his 13 medical center visits in the past seven weeks. Below is the text of Office of the Inspector General’s (OIG) four interim recommendations, along with the actions VA has taken to implement each:

First. OIG “recommend the VA Secretary take immediate action to review and provide appropriate health care to the 1,700 veterans we identified as not being on any existing wait list.” In response:

- VA announced on June 4 that the Department had reached out to all Phoenix, Arizona-based Veterans identified by the IG as not being on any wait list to immediately begin scheduling appointments for all Veterans requesting care.
- Of those Veterans identified by the IG, 1,035 Veterans requested and were scheduled for medical appointments.
- As of July 18, 2014, 844 of the 1,035 Veterans have completed those appointments or have an active future appointment; with the initial appointment being offered within 30 days. Any appointment scheduled more than 30 days in the future is the result of the provider’s clinical judgment or the Veterans preference to get an appointment at a later date.
- As of July 18, 2014, 191 of the 1,035 Veterans did not show up for or canceled their appointment prior to the scheduled time. The Phoenix VA Health Care System will reach out to these Veterans again to ensure their health care needs have been addressed.
- Of the remaining 665 Veterans, all have been contacted, and either indicated they didn't want an appointment or did not respond to multiple phone calls and a certified letter offering an opportunity to schedule an appointment.

Second. OIG “recommend the VA Secretary review all existing wait lists at the Phoenix Health Care System to identify veterans who may be at greatest risk because of a delay in the delivery of health care (for example, those veterans who would be new patients to a specialty clinic) and provide the appropriate medical care.” In response:

- Acting Secretary Gibson initiated a review of all wait lists at the Phoenix VA Health Care System.

- As part of the review, VA reached out to more than 5,000 Veterans in Phoenix to coordinate the acceleration of their care. The 1,700 Veterans identified by the OIG are a subset of those 5,000 Veterans.
- Those Veterans included all individuals on the Phoenix VA Health Care System's New Enrollees Appointment Request List (NEAR), Electronic Wait List (EWL) and patients who were waiting greater than 90 days to receive a scheduled appointment.
- Once contact had been made, Phoenix staff scheduled Veterans for appointments based on the Veterans' preference for the timing of their appointments as well as appropriate clinical need.
- Clinical staff attempted to accommodate all needed appointments at the Phoenix VA Health Care System. Where capacity did not exist to provide timely appointments, staff referred patients to non-VA community care in order to provide all Veterans timely access to care.
- Since May 15, VA has scheduled 2,300 appointments at the Phoenix VA Health Care System and made 2,713 referrals for appointments to community providers through non-VA care.

Third. OIG "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." In addition, on May 21, 2014, former Secretary Shinseki directed the Veterans Health Administration leadership to personally review their processes to ensure VA is doing everything possible to schedule Veteran patients for timely appointments. In response:

- VA health care facilities nationwide continuously monitor clinic capacity in an effort to maximize VA's ability to provide Veterans timely appointments given their clinical conditions.
- Where VA cannot increase capacity, VA is increasing the use of care in the community through non-VA medical care.
- Approximately 200,000 new VA appointments nationwide were scheduled for Veterans between May 15 and June 15, 2014.
- Additionally, nearly 40,000 individual Veterans have received referrals for their care to private providers in the community in order for Veterans to receive needed care as quickly as possible.
- Each of VA's facilities continuously reaches out to Veterans waiting greater than 90 days for care to coordinate the acceleration of their care.
- Facility clinical staff continuously evaluate Veterans currently waiting for care to determine if the timing of their appointment is medically appropriate given their individual clinical conditions.

Fourth. OIG "recommend the VA Secretary direct the Health Eligibility Center to run a nationwide New Enrollee Appointment Request report by facility of all newly enrolled veterans and direct facility leadership to ensure all veterans have received appropriate care or are shown on the facility's electronic waiting list." In response:

- The Health Eligibility Center, in connection with the Veterans Health Administration Support Services Center, developed a report to identify those individuals currently waiting on the New Enrollee Appointment Request (NEAR) List.
- As of May 15, 2014, approximately 64,000 Veterans were currently pending on the NEAR list.
- As of July 15, 2014, approximately 2,100 individuals remained on the NEAR list.
- A preliminary analysis of the 61,900 Veterans removed from the NEAR list shows:
 - a. 20 percent cancelled their request for an appointment.
 - b. 11 percent scheduled an appointment.
 - c. 2 percent were placed on the Electronic Wait List.
 - d. 7 percent requested and were referred to other VA services.
 - e. 7 percent were in the early stages of eligibility and verification.
 - f. 52 percent are still in process

- Of the 52 percent in process, VA has made several attempts to contact those Veterans by phone. After verifying mailing addresses, VA sent certified letters to every Veteran who could not be reached by phone

[Source: VA Press Release July 24, 2014 ++]

VAMC Gainesville FL ▶ Alleged Surgical Care Issues Unfounded

The VA OIG conducted a healthcare inspection in response to allegations concerning the Surgical Service at the Malcom Randall VA Medical Center (the facility), Gainesville, FL. The facility is part of the North Florida/South Georgia VA Healthcare System in Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 8. We did not substantiate that a cardiopulmonary resuscitation event in the operating room was not handled appropriately. The inspection finds were:

- OIG inspectors did not substantiate that surgeons were not allowed to perform a certain procedure in the operating room so that surgical mortality data would be lower.
- OIG inspectors did not substantiate that patients deemed at high risk of mortality were sent to a local hospital so that if these patients died, the deaths would not count against the facility’s surgical mortality data.
- OIG inspectors noted that a team from VISN 8 completed a site visit to the facility in 2013 and made recommendations to strengthen the facility’s surgical program. The facility developed and completed action plans based on these recommendations. The OIG Inspection team made no recommendations.

[Source: DVA OIG Oversight Report No. 14-00992-210 July 14, 2014 ++]

VAMC Albuquerque NM Update 01 ▶ Proper Protocol followed in Vet Death

Acting Veterans Affairs Secretary Sloan Gibson said 17 JUL that staffers at Albuquerque’s VA hospital responded properly when a veteran died after collapsing in the medical center’s cafeteria. Hospital staff faced scrutiny after the death of 71-year-old Jim Napoleon Garcia, who received CPR on the floor while an ambulance was called to take him to an emergency room 500 yards away. Gibson, speaking to reporters shortly after meeting with staff at Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center, said an initial review found staffers followed procedure in providing help to the Vietnam War veteran. “I thanked every single one of them individually,” Gibson said. “As I heard what they did, and I stood and looked at them in the eye, I was very proud.”

Hospital emergency experts have said its standard for medical centers to require staffers to call 911, even when patients are near an emergency room. VA officials say such policy is in place at its hospitals across the country. Emergency response records show that an ambulance arrived to help Garcia about 10 minutes after the 911 call. Officials said VA staff along with Kirtland Air Force Base personnel immediately responded in providing basic life support to Garcia. Gibson said it would have been difficult to keep Garcia on an automated external defibrillator or perform CPR if he was placed on a gurney and rush to the emergency room on foot. A woman who called 911 said a table of doctors did nothing after Garcia’s collapse, records show. But Gibson said it’s too soon to know who was in the cafeteria at the time. He also

said his department is reviewing the case to see whether system wide changes are needed. Potential revisions could include requiring “crash carts” of medication in key areas around VA campuses. [Source: The Associated Press | Russell Contreras | Jul 17, 2014 ++]



Acting Veterans Affairs Secretary Sloan Gibson talks to reporters July 17 at the Albuquerque, N.M., VA hospital.

Legionnaires Disease Update 07 ► Three More Claims Settled

The Department of Veterans Affairs has related to the Legionnaires' disease outbreak in the Pittsburgh VA Healthcare System, according to court documents filed on 23 JUL.

- **Cheryl Ann Evans** sued the VA in April over the Jan. 30, 2013, death of her husband, Brant James Evans, 58, of Freedom. The Marine veteran contracted the disease in summer 2011 while being treated for lung cancer at the University Drive hospital in Oakland, the lawsuit says.
- Army veteran **Edward Stockley**, 64, of Baldwin Borough and his wife, Paula, sued the VA in March. He contracted the disease at the hospital in November 2011. The Vietnam veteran used the hospital's water fountains while filling out forms and undergoing physicals to become a volunteer, according to the lawsuit.
- **Sandy Riley** sued the VA in May over the July 4, 2012, death of her brother, Lloyd Mitchell Wanstreet, 65, of Jeannette. The Navy veteran contracted the disease while being treated for dehydration and a leg infection in June 2012 at the hospital, the lawsuit says.

The VA's response to the Evans and Riley lawsuits contained routine denials of liability but didn't contest the specific claims related to the relatives. The response to the Stockleys insisted they couldn't seek recovery with a lawsuit because as an employee, even an unpaid volunteer, his contraction of the disease represented a work-related injury covered by federal workers' compensation laws. A federal mediator filed reports in all three cases saying they had been resolved during mediation sessions on Wednesday. The reports don't provide any details on the settlements. A Justice Department spokesman and Douglas Price, the attorney for Evans and the Stockleys, could not be reached for comment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease occurred in facilities in the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System from February 2011 to November 2012. The CDC traced the problem to bacteria-contaminated water at the Oakland and O'Hara campuses. The VA has settled at least five other claims by veterans or their survivors for the outbreak that sickened at least 22 and killed at least six. [Source: Pittsburgh Tribune-Review | Brian Bowling | Jul 23, 2014 ++]

VA Loans ► Underutilized Say Real Estate Experts

Too many troops and veterans either don't know about their VA home loan benefit or are being discouraged from using it, experts say. The Veterans Affairs Department should modernize the program and fund outreach efforts to educate real estate professionals and loan counselors — as well as troops and vets — about the benefit, said Son Nguyen, who heads the nonprofit Veterans Association of Real Estate Professionals. Nguyen said defense officials also need to do a better job of educating troops about the benefit. About 100 real estate and lending professionals recently attended VAREP's first national policy conference in Washington, D.C., to discuss ways to further the group's mission of increasing the use of VA home loans by troops and veterans. Nguyen questioned why only 1.9 million of the 16.4 million veterans who own homes obtained their loans through VA. More than 1 million troops and 22 million veterans are eligible for the program, which has guaranteed loans on more than 20 million homes since its creation 70 years ago.

A \$200,000 VA home loan saves a veteran about \$200 a month, said John Bell III, VA's assistant director of loan policy and valuation loan guaranty service. The median income of buyers using the program — about 17 percent on active duty — is \$71,064; the average loan, which requires no down payment, is \$234,000. Experts say military and veteran homebuyers often don't identify themselves as such, so their real estate agents and lenders don't know they're entitled to the benefit. Nguyen cited a VA survey that found 4 percent of veterans who used another type of home loan said their lender and/or real estate agent also discouraged them from using the VA loan program, while 8 percent said they didn't know about the benefit. But those figures may be understated, according to VAREP. Because professionals say VA loans often take longer to finalize than other loans, many sellers in today's competitive market are more inclined to accept offers from buyers who aren't using the VA program.

Bell said VA is taking steps to ease those issues. The loan review process now takes about 4 1/2 business days; Bell said the goal is to shorten that to 24 to 48 hours. Because of complaints about the appraisal process, they've also been pushing to recruit more VA-approved appraisers. Nguyen said borrowers would benefit from seeing a broader comparison of loans. He noted that lenders now must provide comparisons of Federal Housing Administration loans and conventional loans, but suggested VA loans be added to the mix "for more in-formed decision-making." [Source: NavyTimes | Karen Jowers | Jun 30, 2014 ++]

GI Bill Update 176 ► Housing and Book Stipend Delayed Payments

Nearly 80,000 veterans eligible for the new G.I. Bill saw their college terms disrupted last year because the VA was late distributing \$61 million in housing and book stipends, according to estimates released by the Department of Veterans Affairs Inspector General Friday. Investigators extrapolated the figures in a review of 200 student cases where the VA was late paying out book and housing money to 18% of the veterans. Most of those delays were only a few weeks. But for 8% of the students, it took a month or longer to get money for housing or books, long enough to detrimentally impact their school year, investigators said. The VA, which administers the new G.I. Bill, paid out \$5.4 billion in housing and book stipends to 789,000 students in 2013. The agency has vastly improved its processing time from the program's inception in 2009, when more than half the veterans seeking benefits had to wait weeks or months for their money. Investigators blamed recent delays on several factors, including the complexity of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill law.

Veterans can be eligible for three different programs and must expressly indicate on their applications which ones they are not seeking money from. Failure to do this creates processing delays and the VA can do a better job of informing veterans about this issue, the Inspector General says. In addition, the veterans agency has not set a deadline for colleges to certify enrollments and many certifications come in late, creating further delay. Beyond those students who didn't get their money, investigators found about 4% who received cash for books that was never recovered after the veterans withdrew from college classes. The Inspector General estimated that on a yearly scale, this could amount to a loss of \$41 million. The VA, in response, agreed with the findings and promised to take steps to correct the problems. [Source: USA TODAY | Gregg Zoroya | July 11, 2014 ++]



GI Bill Update 177 ► WyoTech & Heald College Recruiting Questioned

Their college campuses are for sale and they're under attack from federal regulators, but that hasn't stopped a pair of for-profit schools from recruiting new students at military bases. The actions raise questions not just about the schools' military marketing strategy but also about the trustworthiness of service education fairs. Recruiters from WyoTech and Heald College manned tables at education events at four military bases in California in mid-JUL alone, encouraging active-duty and separating troops to sign up for classes this fall. School representatives said they have no plans to curtail their new-student enrollment efforts for military and veteran students in days to come. But exactly what those schools will look like this fall remains to be seen.

Their owner, Corinthian Colleges Inc., has agreed to sell off 85 of its 97 U.S. schools — including all of the WyoTech and Heald campuses — after the Education Department restricted the company's access to federal student aid. That came in response to the company's failure to turn over records concerning enrollment and job placement data, and allegations that the schools were using fraudulent data in marketing claims to prospective students and altering student's grades. Most of the degree programs take at least a year to complete, but Corinthian officials have agreed to work to find a new buyer within six months. Company officials said they plan a seamless transition for students, whether Corinthian remains in control of classes or turn them over to new management.

WyoTech offers degree programs in automotive and electrical trades. Heald is known mostly for its health care and business associate degree programs. Along with online class offerings, the schools have 16 campuses in six states, with the largest presence for both in California. Corinthian spokesman Kent Jenkins said the company is optimistic it can find a buyer for the schools, citing the "high quality" of the schools.

All current students and recruits who sign up for classes are being required to sign paperwork asserting they have been informed about the impending sale and the Education Department allegations, Jenkins said. But it's unclear how much that information is making its way into marketing pitches to troops and veterans, who make up about 6 percent of Corinthian's total students. The company boasts about 80,000 students in the United States, 9,000 of whom are using GI Bill benefits to pay for classes.

Last week, the California attorney general unsuccessfully petitioned a federal court to require the company to warn students of the legal action and financial troubles in all marketing. Phil Cataquiz, an education official at Naval Base Coronado who organized an education fair this week that featured both schools, said he was unaware of the legal and financial problems facing the schools, and received no extra notification from Corinthian officials about any possible disruptions in operations. He said both schools meet Defense Department requirements to participate in on-base college fairs, and base officials don't do additional vetting to avoid being seen as endorsing or condemning a particular institution. A review of schools in good standing was last conducted in fall 2013, and would not cover any problems that have surfaced in the last few months.

Last week, officials at Student Veterans of America issued a release offering additional assistance to veterans or family members attending Corinthian schools, and urging the Education Department to find ways to allow those students to complete their degree programs. In response to the schools' participation at the military education fairs, SVA spokesman Will Hubbard said, "as veterans look to use their VA benefits to earn a post-secondary degree, we're advising them to be cautious of institutions whose futures are uncertain." Jenkins said he believes any students considering the schools "should be confident in enrolling" because of the transition plans in place. Meanwhile, another review of schools eligible to take part in on-base recruiting and education fairs is scheduled to be completed in September. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane | Jul 18, 2014 ++]

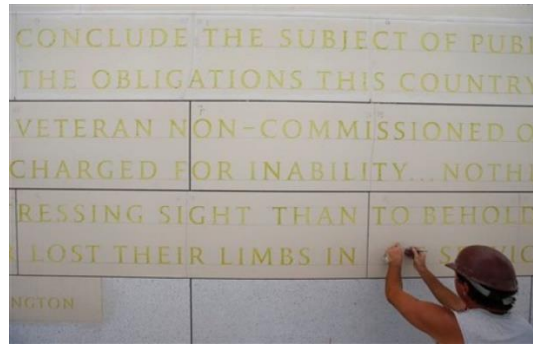
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[American Veterans Disabled For Life Memorial](#) ► Dedication 5 Oct

Army Lt. Dawn Halfaker was on patrol 10 years ago in Baqubah, Iraq, when a rocket-propelled grenade tore through her military vehicle and exploded inside. When she woke up from a coma, the West Point graduate found out her right arm was gone and her career as a military officer was over at age 24. It's the kind of sacrifice millions of U.S. soldiers have made dating back to the American Revolution. Veterans groups say there are as many as 4 million living today with the scars of war. Now Halfaker will be among those pictured in a new memorial rising near the National Mall within view of the U.S. Capitol. The American Veterans Disabled For Life Memorial will be the first memorial in Washington dedicated to

veterans who come home with life-changing injuries. It's a project 16 years in the making and is set to be dedicated Oct. 5.



Original design proposal and work on the stencil for an inscription of a quote by President George Washington, to be sandblasted into stone at the Disabled Veterans' Life Memorial Foundation under construction

Glass walls will carry inscriptions and photographs telling veterans' stories from different eras. Bronze silhouette sculptures will represent their service. A ceremonial flame will burn on the water's surface in a star-shaped fountain representing the five branches of military service, surrounded by a grove of trees. The idea was inspired by the camaraderie of soldiers' campfires and the flame as a symbol of renewal, designer Michael Vergason said. "I think it will bring it home for visitors. I think it will give people a better understanding of how somebody's life is forever changed and really help them understand the sacrifice a little bit more," Halfaker said. "It's hard to explain to somebody what being in combat is like." Halfaker created a consulting business after leaving the military and serves as chairwoman of the Wounded Warrior Project. The only thing she doesn't like about the memorial, she said, is the term disabled. She doesn't think of herself that way.

Construction has been underway for nearly a year and the memorial plaza was taking shape as The Associated Press had a look at its progress. Workers have been installing black stone elements for a fountain and reflecting pool. A Rhode Island stone carver is working to hand-carve inscriptions from George Washington and Dwight Eisenhower, in the site's marble Wall of Gratitude. Those who planned the memorial near the Capitol wanted to ensure lawmakers and their staffs see the memorial each day "and realize there's a human cost when you send our troops into harm's way," said project executive W. Barry Owenby, who is also a veteran.

While controversies have arisen over other memorials honoring Eisenhower, Martin Luther King Jr. and World War II veterans, this project has not drawn the same scrutiny or criticism. But it has gone through the same oversight reviews as any other memorial project. "Who could take issue with honoring those who have given a life sacrifice?" said Arthur Wilson, a disabled Vietnam veteran and co-founder of the Disabled Veterans' Life Memorial Foundation that is building the memorial. "It's a reminder that needs to be there every day." The project is even more timely now, he said, considering the revelations of health care problems in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

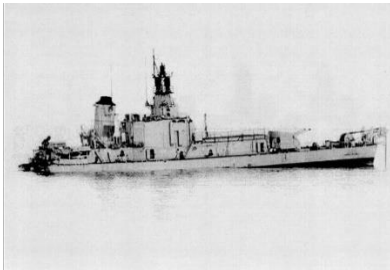
The idea began in 1998 with Florida philanthropist Lois Pope, former Veterans Affairs Secretary Jesse Brown and Wilson, and it quickly drew support in Congress. By 2000, the authorizing legislation was signed by President Bill Clinton. While some memorial projects rely on federal dollars, this memorial has been funded almost entirely with privately raised funds. Organizers raised about \$80 million from more than a million donors. The Disabled American Veterans organization contributed about \$10 million. Pope

and her foundation also contributed about \$10 million. A federal grant of about \$6 million was secured to remove a road that crossed the site. The memorial will eventually be operated by the National Park Service. Once it's finished, Vergason, the site's designer, said the fall will be a perfect time to visit. The memorial includes a grove of ginkgo trees that turn yellow in early November, just in time for Veterans Day. [Source: The Associated Press Jul 23, 2014 ++]



Vietnam Veterans Memorial Update 14 ► Lawmakers want 74 names added

The crew of the destroyer Frank E. Evans (DD0774) is fighting once again, 45 years after their ship sank in the South China Sea after a terrifying collision. This fight is on behalf of 74 shipmates who died that day in 1969 — and whose names are absent from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial because of what survivors and family members call a technicality. The Allen M. Sumner-class destroyer was ordered from combat operations off Vietnam in 1969 to participate in an international exercise called Sea Spirit that involved more than 40 ships. But that exercise turned tragic on June 3, 1969, when the Australian aircraft carrier Melbourne cut the destroyer in half.



USS Frank E. Evans (DD0774) & HMAS Melbourne after collision which took 74 lives



Among the lost were three brothers: Boatswain’s Mate 2nd Class Gary Sage, Radarman 3rd Class Gregory Sage and Seaman Apprentice Kelly Jo Sage. Master Chief Gunner’s Mate Lawrence Reilly survived while his 20-year-old son, Boiler Technician 3rd Class Lawrence Reilly Jr., perished. And Tim Wendler, who now serves as president of the USS Frank E. Evans Association, lost his father days before his own second birthday. Survivors and family members, many of whom donated to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, were incensed to learn in 1982 that the names of their loved ones were not etched into it. The crew had been deemed ineligible because the collision happened 110 miles outside the geographical combat zone defined by an executive order.

Survivors and families called the ruling inconsiderate and have been working to overturn it for decades. They recently made headway, when House lawmakers passed a defense bill May 22 that included an amendment urging Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel to add the names to the Vietnam Memorial, a move supported by Navy Secretary Ray Mabus. “There is no reason to cling to this rigid definition of the combat zone,” said Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA), who proposed the amendment. “This is a ship that was providing support in Vietnam. It was called away on a training exercise. It was going to return to combat duty. These are sailors who would not have been there but for their duty in Vietnam.” Schiff said he is hopeful the names will be added after meetings with Hagel, who is the first Vietnam vet to lead the Pentagon.

The crew had provided supporting fire for combat operations days before the collision and would have returned after the exercise. The survivors also point to exceptions made in the past, such as inclusion of those who died in transit to or from Vietnam. For example, President Ronald Reagan in 1983 ordered that 68 Marines who died on a flight outside the combat zone be added to the wall. In all, more than 300 names have been added to the wall since its unveiling – the most recent 14 were added May 11. Even if the defense bill is signed into law, the amendment cannot force Hagel to make the change. But Hagel can order the names added without legislation. Spokesmen for Hagel’s office did not respond to questions by July 18 about whether Hagel intended to add the names under his own authority or after the bill’s passage. To grant their inclusion on the wall “would be enormously meaningful to the families,” Schiff said. “It would really provide great solace to them to see their loved ones memorialized this way, and it doesn’t detract at all from the more than 58,000 other people who are on the wall. None of them, I think, would begrudge the sailors their place.” [Source: NavyTimes | Lance M. Bacon | Jul 28, 2014 ++]

Veterans' Treatment Court Update 22 ► California

Some veterans find the transition to civilian life very difficult. Those who resort to abusing alcohol or using illicit drugs to ease the pain sometimes run afoul of the law. Fortunately, the nationwide effort to establish “veteran courts” continues. Veteran courts are hybrid drug and mental health courts that serve veterans struggling with addiction, serious mental illness and/or co-occurring disorders. They promote sobriety, recovery and stability by offering veterans treatment alternatives instead of incarceration. Sacramento recently became the 18th* California county to establish a Veteran’s Treatment Court for those charged with a criminal offense. The court will divert eligible Sacramento County veterans into treatment programs with more options than regular criminal justice system, including expungement or reduction of charges. Participants must suffer from sexual trauma, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, or mental health problems stemming from U.S. Military service and be eligible for VA benefits. There are also restrictions on the types of crimes that are appropriate for the program. Participants who go through the veteran court will be paired with mentors to help them through the criminal justice

system and treatment. Mentors must be veterans that can commit to a minimum of one year participation, complete an orientation/training, and be able to pass a criminal background check. If you are interested in becoming a Sacramento County Veterans Treatment Court mentor, contact franklinsc@saccounty.net . Other counties that have established veteran treatment courts include: Alameda, El Dorado, Kings, Los Angeles, Orange, Placer, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Francisco, San Diego, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Tulare and Ventura. [Source: CALVET Newsletter Jul 2014 ++]

CA Vet License Plates ► Sales Low | Production Uncertain

California veterans were quick to voice their disappointment when the state’s VETERAN license plate was replaced by an HONORING VETERANS version that appealed to family and friends of veterans. A bill, sponsored by the County Veterans Service Officers and the California State Commanders Veterans Council and signed by the Governor authorized the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to recreate the specialty plate. The law requires CalVet to collect and hold pre-paid VETERAN license plate applications until 7,500 are received before DMV will actually produce the plate. CalVet has until the end of this year to accomplish that task. Once that threshold is crossed, DMV will produce the plates and take responsibility for processing future applications. That same “hold and wait” process applies to all new specialty license plates in California. As of June 30, CalVet had received fewer than 200 of the 7,500 hundred applications needed by year’s end for plate to be produced. Unless sales skyrocket in the next six months and the threshold number is reached, the VETERAN plates will not be produced, and the money sent to CalVet to reserve plates will be refunded to those who paid. HONORING VETERANS plates will still be available.

Both VETERAN and HONORING VETERANS plates can be personalized and can be customized with the distinctive military branch or veterans service organization logo of choice. Proceeds from the sale of these plates help support efforts of the California Department of Veterans Affairs and 56 county veteran service offices to connect veterans and their families with the benefits they’ve earned through military service. The veteran license plate program is a partnership between the California Department of Veterans Affairs, the California Department of Motor Vehicles, and the California Association of County Veterans Services Officers, Inc. To purchase either of the two specialty plates, go to <http://www.calvet.ca.gov/VetServices/Pages/License-Plates.aspx> . You may also call CalVet at (877) 741-8532 (toll free) to request that a specialty license plate application be mailed to you. [Source: CALVET Newsletter Jul 2014 ++]

System Worth Saving Update 01 ► AL Task Force Visits St. Louis MO

The veterans who came 14 JUL to the Soldiers Memorial Military Museum in St. Louis, MO told of their frustration getting care at Veterans Affairs hospitals. “I know how to fight a war, but I don’t know how to fight the system that’s supposed to take care of me,” said Michael Saffold Sr., an Army Special Forces veteran who lives in St. Louis. He attended a town-hall meeting hosted by the American Legion’s System Worth Saving (SWS) Task Force. Representatives were in St. Louis in mid-JUL to help veterans get the services they need, including care from the health system that has come under fire for long wait times and mismanagement. Saffold, 52, said he didn’t receive proper diagnosis for a blood clot in his hip at John Cochran VA hospital. He also said he waited more than a year to get a new primary care physician. He’s

not alone in his frustration with wait times. An audit released last month of 731 VA hospitals and clinics found more than 57,000 veterans have been waiting 90 days or longer for their first appointments.

The VA St. Louis system, which includes the John Cochran and Jefferson Barracks hospitals and various clinics, ranked fifth worst out of 141 health systems in the country for average wait times for new patients to get specialty appointments. Patients wait an average of nearly three months, according to the audit. An additional 64,000 who enrolled in the VA system over the past decade have never had appointments, including 1,354 in St. Louis (10th most nationally), 188 in Kansas City, 102 in Poplar Bluff, Mo., and 71 in Columbia, Mo. For veterans already in the system, waits were much shorter. Established patients at VA facilities in St. Louis waited 2½ days to be seen in primary care. The longest average wait in the state for veterans already in the system was about 10 days for a specialty appointment in Poplar Bluff, sixth-worst in the country. The audit said wait times for new patients nationwide and in Missouri exceeded the 14-day goal. The wait time for primary care appointments at Columbia’s VA hospital was 43 days, the longest of the state’s four centers.

“I’ve pretty much given up on the VA for services,” said Air Force veteran Wayne Hutchison, 67, who attended the Monday SWS meeting. He said Jefferson Barracks employees three times have rejected his efforts to get a hearing aid, even though his hearing loss was caused by his work as a jet mechanic. “I figure the least they could do is give me a hearing aid and some glasses,” said Hutchison of High Ridge. “That’s all I’m asking for.” About 40 people attended the meeting Monday and some praised the care they have received, including disabled Army veteran Jack Massey of Belleville. He said his VA doctor had called him that day to check on him. “Let them help you,” Massey said.

The American Legion's System Worth Saving (SWS) Task Force was created in 2003 to conduct annual evaluations of health-care quality at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers and other facilities. Their modus operandi is to set up a Veterans Crisis Command Center in the area they are visiting where the SWS team members and community providers can help those affected by long wait-times for appointments at area VA facilities. Veterans can get help filing for VA benefits, advice on legal issues and aid enrolling in VA health care. Centers that opened last month for veterans and family members in Phoenix, Fayetteville, N.C and El Paso, Texas, helped more than 1,800 veterans. In JUL centers were opened in St. Louis MO and Fort Collins, Colo. Between now and October, crisis centers will come Baltimore, Maryland. They also plan to visit Clarksburg, West Virginia; White City, Oregon and Harlingen, Texas.

Verna Jones, director of the Legion’s Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division in Washington, urged veterans dealing with long wait times and other issues to go to to a “crisis command center” to get help from Legion officials and community providers. “We want it to be a healthy system,” said Jones of VA hospitals and clinics. “We don’t want veterans to have to wait.” Vets can track the Task Force’s progress at <http://www.legion.org/systemworthsaving>. For further info on the Task force call the American Legion’s Washington DC Office at (202) 861-2700. [Source: St. Louis Post Dispatch | Leah Thorsen | Jul 14, 2014 ++]

Retiree Marijuana Use ► UCMJ Legal Gray Area

Retired from the military and want to light up a joint in a state that has legalized pot? Getting high will put you in a legal gray area, but no need to be paranoid. The chances of being charged with a crime are

practically nil, legal experts say, even though retirees are technically still subject to military law that forbids pot smoking anywhere, including Washington state and Colorado where recreational marijuana use is now allowed. Cities and states around the country have adopted liberalized pot laws in recent years as American views on the drug have mellowed. But the Department of Defense has said unequivocally that servicemembers and civilian employees can never use marijuana because of prohibition by the Uniform Code of Military Justice and federal law, which still considers it an illegal street drug. The long arm of military law also extends to retired servicemembers who draw pension payments. In rare cases, the services have recalled retirees to charge them with crimes. “As a practical matter, they can,” said Eugene Fidell, a Yale University law professor and former president of the National Institute of Military Justice. “But the chances that a retiree would get charged under the UCMJ for marijuana use are so close to zero, I don’t think anyone should lose sleep over it.”



At Main Street Marijuana in Vancouver, Wash., a customer buys marijuana on the first day of sales at the store on July 9, 2014.

Greg Rinckey, a former military prosecutor and partner in the Tully Rinckey law firm in Washington, D.C., also said pot charges are extremely unlikely. “I just don’t see them court-martialing any retirees for smoking pot,” he said. There are a growing number of places where getting high is OK. This week, Washington became the second state to open a regulated, recreational marijuana market, following suit with Colorado. The District of Columbia has made strong moves this summer toward decriminalizing use and possession, though Congress must approve. A total of 21 states have legalized marijuana use in some form. Recent changes to pot laws caused the DOD to underscore its position — pot remains a big no-no. In a memo to the services last year, the assistant secretary of defense for readiness and force management underscored the department’s prohibition on marijuana use among military personnel “at all locations.” The Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson Air Force base in Alaska, a state where growing and using small quantities of pot has been legal since 2012, warned airmen earlier this year that “all servicemembers, including retirees, cadets and reserve members entitled to pay” can be charged for pot under the UCMJ.

Under military law, possessing more than an ounce can be punished with a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and five years in the brig. Those caught with less than an ounce face the same discharge and pay punishments but only two years confinement, according to the Air Force. Courts martial for retirees are few and far between, but they do happen. In 2012, retired Gen. David Petraeus was found to be having an affair while working as CIA director. The case blew up into a nationwide scandal and talk ensued about criminal charges for adultery, which is illegal under the UCMJ. Petraeus was never charged, but in 1999, Army Maj. Gen. David Hale faced a similar situation and was recalled from retirement, then found guilty by a court martial for having affairs with the wives of four of his subordinates. The Army

reduced his rank and cut back his pension payments as punishment. However, Fidell and Rinckey said the military is very selective in such prosecutions and typically only pursues the most severe crimes. In Hale’s case, the offenses were committed while he was still serving and happened during a time when the military was being hammered publicly for misconduct among top officers and feeling pressured to send a message.

Recreational pot use among retirees does not rise to that level, they said. Charging a 70-year-old veteran for smoking a joint “just wouldn’t look good for the military,” Rinckey said. Retirees also do not need to worry about being reported to the military by their VA doctor. Those who smoke legal marijuana and receive treatment through the Department of Veterans Affairs may be asked for blood or urine in the course of routine care — that is for diagnosis purposes and not drug testing in any legal sense. The VA told Stars and Stripes it cannot prescribe medical marijuana to patients because of federal law, but it does not care whether veterans use pot in states where that is allowed. “VA is aware that some veterans who reside in states with marijuana programs and who also receive care in VA, do indeed participate in marijuana programs,” spokeswoman Gina Jackson wrote in a statement. “Given the differences between state and federal laws regarding marijuana, a veteran’s decision to participate in a state marijuana program is a personal one and not one dictated administratively by VA.” Overall, retirees are likely in the clear when it comes to legal pot, but there may be only one option for those who want complete peace of mind. Rinckey said those looking for zero legal risk should just not smoke it. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Travis J. Tritten | July 12, 2014 ++]

Vet Driver’s License Update 10 ► Nebraska Starts Issuing

Nebraska veterans now have the option to display their status on driver’s licenses and state identification cards. The state began allowing the veteran designation on 1 JUL. The new cards could make it easier for veterans to show that they qualify for special offers and discounts at stores and restaurants. It also could help law enforcement identify those who may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or other combat-related ailments. Veterans who want the designation must register with the Nebraska Department of Veterans’ Affairs and request the designation when renewing or applying for a duplicate identification card at the Department of Motor Vehicles. The Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs has about 4,000 names in its registry so far, and officials are adding 90 to 100 per day, said director John Hilgert. The department estimates that about 138,000 veterans live in Nebraska.

Hilgert, who also heads Nebraska’s veterans’ homes division, said the registry is updated daily and shared with the Department of Motor Vehicles. “It’s going to have a positive impact and will make it easier for veterans to self-identify,” he said. The registry could also help state officials reach out to veterans about federally recognized presumptive medical conditions, which in turn could help them qualify for additional government benefits, Hilgert said. The registration process requires veterans to submit proof of their service, either through a DD-214 form or other discharge papers. Hilgert said the department has worked to advertise the program through American Legion halls and other service groups. Nebraska veterans’ groups are also trying to spread word about the new notation, said Greg Holloway, who represents the Disabled Veterans of America and Vietnam Veterans of America. “It helps you get that 5 or 10 percent discount, which does add up over time,” said Holloway, an Army veteran who served in Vietnam. “It’s up to you (whether to participate), but I don’t think it’s such a bad idea.” [Source: The Associated Press | Grant Schulte | Jul 14, 2014 ++]

Army Retiree Council ► 2014 Recommendations

On 2 MAY, the Chief of Staff, Army (CSA) Retiree Council concluded its 54th meeting after advising Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond T. Odierno and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III about the concerns of the retired community. The Council's Co-Chairmen, retired Lt. Gen. James Lovelace and retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth Preston, emphasized their appreciation for the Army's Soldier For Life (SFL) program and the 1 MAY launch of the new SFL website with its robust section for Retired Soldiers at <http://soldierforlife.army.mil/retirement>. At the time of its annual meeting, the CSA Retiree Council represented 918,000 Retired Soldiers and 246,000 surviving spouses. In addition to advice and recommendations, the Council provided the CSA with an assessment of how current Army programs and initiatives and proposals for new laws and policies may affect the retired community.

During its annual meeting, the Council discussed policies and programs with 18 Army and Department of Defense senior leaders. They also reviewed 22 issues nominated by installation and Army Service Component Command retiree councils. Six issues involved health care, seven related to benefits or entitlements, and nine concerned retirement services or communications. The Council's most significant recommendations included:

- Sustaining the Army Surgeon General's initiative to increase the number of Medicare-eligible Retired Soldiers and their families being cared for within Army medical treatment facilities where capacity exists.
- Sustaining no-cost copays for generic drugs ordered through Express Scripts, minimal co-pay increases for brand name pharmaceuticals, and never raising pharmacy copays more than the current year's cost of living adjustment.
- Retaining the commissary benefit in the continental United States, adding generic products and incorporating the Commissary into the Exchange to maintain the benefit, if necessary.
- Supporting legislation that maintains the current cost of living adjustment method instead of the "chained" consumer price index method.
- Issuing permanent identification cards to spouses over age 65.
- Reviewing current funding procedures in order to fully fund retiree appreciation days.
- Institutionalizing the Soldier For Life (SFL) program within the Army G-1's authorization document and funding requirements.
- Promoting the SFL message, "Once a Soldier, Always a Soldier . . . A Soldier For Life" to Soldiers from initial entry training through and after retirement.

The Council's complete report is available <http://soldierforlife.army.mil/retirement/RetireeCouncil.html>.
[Source: Army Echoes Jun – Sept 2014 ++]

USS Slater (DE-766) ► Last DE Afloat in America

During World War II, 563 Destroyer Escorts battled Nazi U-boats on the North Atlantic protecting convoys of men and material. In the Pacific they stood in line to defend naval task forces from Japanese submarines and Kamikaze air attacks. Today, only one of these ships remains afloat in the United States, the USS SLATER who returned to her home berth in Albany, N.Y. Launched in 1944, Slater served gallantly in both the Battle of the Atlantic and the Pacific Theater during World War II.



In 1951, Slater was transferred to Greece under the Military Defense Assistance Program. Renamed AETOS (Eagle), she served as an Hellenic Navy training ship for 40 years. In 1993, after deactivation, she was brought back to the United States by a group of former destroyer escort sailors. Since 1998, she underwent restoration drydocked at Caddell's in Staten Island for much-needed hull repairs, funded privately. There Slater's paint scheme was returned to her 1945 dazzle camouflage. Since 2010 \$1.3 million was raised to get her towed to the shipyard, have her hull blasted and painted, reinforce the waterline and several other suspect areas.



Afloat again, USS SLATER leaves the drydock.

After leaving drydock she was manned by a working crew of volunteers, destroyer escort sailors from World War II, Korea, and Vietnam for the 24-hour journey to Albany. The Destroyer Escort Historical Museum has amassed the largest collection of original documents, photographs and objects from destroyer escorts in the country. Their collections are open for research throughout the year. The Destroyer Escort Historical Museum is located at Broadway and Quay, Albany, NY 12202 to visitors. Tours are given July 4 through November, Wednesday through Sunday, 10AM - 4PM. Admission fees are Adults: \$8, Seniors (65+) \$7, Children (6 -14) \$6, and Children (5 and under) free. Your experience at the ship will take at least 90 minutes. Also:

- Food, beverages, candy, gum or tobacco products are not permitted aboard ship. Water is the only refreshment provided at the museum.
- The tour will require climbing open stairways and walking through tight spaces and may be strenuous for some visitors.
- For your safety, wear low-heeled, non-slip walking shoes and casual dress.
- Tours are given rain or shine. Visitors should opt for rain gear over use of umbrellas as they make traversing the ship difficult.

- Large bags and strollers are not permitted on the ship.
- Hand held cameras are permitted on the tour. Tripods are not permitted.
- There are no restrooms on board ship. You should use the facilities on shore before the tour.

For more info call (518) 431-1943 or refer to <http://www.ussslater.org>. [Source: Legion Town USA Jun 24, 2014 ++]

Vet Federal Jobs Update 02 ► How to Land | Choosing your path

As a whole, the federal government represents one of the largest, most veteran hungry job markets in the country. It's also one of the most competitive — and unconventional. To help you sort it out, Military Times quizzed hiring officials and advisers from many of the largest veteran employers in the federal government, as well as outside experts, for tips on how vets can land federal jobs. They provided advice covering every step of the process. Their advice for choosing your path was:

- 1) **Think about the job you want, not just the agency.** Many agencies will have jobs with similar roles and functions, which means more options to pick from, said Tim McManus, a vice president at the Partnership for Public Service. For example, a vet who wants to do federal work helping other current and former service members can choose from among VA, the service branches, the Defense Department, the Labor Department, the Housing and Urban Development Department and others, said McManus, who added: "I would encourage vets to pursue their passions."
- 2) **Decide if you want to change direction.** If you love what you've been doing in the military, that experience could translate into a better starting position with the feds. But if you got stuck with a military occupational specialty you didn't like, the transition can be a great time for a course correction. Hakeem Basheerud-Deen did just that. After nearly 25 years in the Air Force, he took a different approach in his federal career and ended up at the Office of Personnel Management — an agency he hadn't even heard of before. "Some of these programs ... can give opportunities to change careers, open up new possibilities, and that's what it was for me," said Basheerud-Deen, now OPM's director of veterans services.
- 3) **Follow the money, not the crowd.** Some agencies are seeing their budgets scaled back as Congress seeks to trim costs; others are facing new challenges and getting the funding to address them, McManus said. Your odds of getting a job will be better at the latter agencies — the ones whose profiles, and budgets, are growing. That said, you may also improve your employment chances by seeking work at some of the more obscure federal departments that don't get as much attention, or as many applications, as the ones you read about in headlines.
- 4) **Talk to the agency's vet hiring office.** Most of the largest federal agencies have special offices dedicated just to helping and hiring vets, said Lawrence Wark, director of VA's version of that office. Reach out to such offices for specific direction and advice early in your transition process. And it might not hurt if your name rings a bell when they're thumbing through résumés later.
- 5) **Consider your destination.** Your chances of landing a federal job may improve if you're willing to move to a federal hub, such as Washington, D.C., Cheshier said. But some agencies and departments, such as those under the Justice Department, have a presence throughout the country, according to Trevor Norris, deputy director of human resources in that department's Justice Management Division. That "provides an opportunity for vets to work close to home," he said.

[Source: NavyTimes | George Altman | Jul 14, 2014 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 157 ► **First lady: Vets Face 'Unacceptable' Job Barriers**

The difficulties that military veterans face securing jobs are “unacceptable” and the notion of a veteran mired in homelessness should “horrify all of us,” Michelle Obama said Wednesday in Los Angeles. The first lady spoke to the crowd of 900 business, government and community leaders gathered for the United Way’s Unite for Veterans Summit, which focused on ending homelessness and improving job prospects for military veterans. “After everything they have done for us, the idea that any of our veterans are spending months or even years struggling to find a job is unacceptable,” she said. The first lady also said that ongoing work in Los Angeles at the local, state and federal level was essential to the administration’s recently announced goal of eliminating veteran homelessness by the end of 2015.



Of the 58,000 homeless veterans in the U.S., more than 6,000 reside in the county of Los Angeles, according to a count conducted by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. The first lady cautioned that a “tiny percentage” of veterans end up on the streets, but linked homelessness to the overall need for employment and housing assistance to those returning to civilian life. “With our war in Iraq over and our war in Afghanistan drawing to a close, thousands of men and women who risked their lives for our country are transitioning back home” she said. “We cannot make the same mistakes with this generation that we made in the past.”

The first lady is on a two-day swing through Los Angeles that includes a political fundraiser at the home of HBO executive Michael Lombardo and a 16 JUL luncheon honoring music educators at the Grammy Museum. The first lady’s comments come the same day that a top federal official acknowledged scandals at the Veterans Affairs Department undermined trust in the agency that provides veterans with health care. The first lady avoided addressing the problems uncovered at the VA, but singled out the VA’s grants that fund local nonprofits’ housing and assistance programs. Issues faced by veterans and military families have remained one of the first lady’s top priorities. More than 400,000 veterans and their spouses have found jobs under Joining Forces, the employment program launched by the first lady and Dr. Jill Biden. [Source: The Associated Press | Matt Hamilton | Jul 8, 2014 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 158 ► **Recruit the Disabled for Non-Combat Jobs**

While veterans’ groups are pushing the Senate to expand protections for disabled troops when they travel abroad, lawmakers in the chamber are considering expanding military jobs to disabled individuals at home. On 23 JUL, veterans’ groups and a bipartisan coalition of senators led by former Senate Majority Leader

Bob Dole lobbied again for adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, arguing the move could provide international support for troops left disabled from war injuries. The treaty, modeled after the Americans with Disabilities Act, requires countries to provide disabled individuals equality under the law. Already, 141 countries have ratified the measure, but concerns over whether the treaty would mandate new regulations on U.S. businesses have stalled its adoption in the Senate.



Sen. John McCain left, and Sen. Tom Harkin at the Capitol in Washington

Sens. John McCain (R-AZ) and Tom Harkin (D-IA) said they’re continuing to work to dispel those myths, and to again establish America as a worldwide leader in providing protection and opportunities for the disabled. But Harkin’s wants to push that idea even further, including an amendment in a Senate draft of the annual defense appropriations bill last week that would require the military to study the possibility of allowing disabled individuals to enlist in the military in non-combat and support roles. “The military now permits individuals to remain on active duty if they acquire a disability while serving their country,” Harkin said during an appropriations hearing 17 JUL. “However, for a person with a similar disability who wants to enlist in the military and be a part of our defense establishment, they would not allow that, even if they needed the same reasonable accommodations.”

The Defense Department already follows federal law mandating “reasonable accommodations” for disabled civilian employees, but no such exceptions are made for enlistees. “They’re not going to be combat people, but we have a lot of people with disabilities who are lawyers who would like to enter the JAG Corps and be a part of our military,” Harkin said. “For every one combat person, there are 10 behind them.” Lawmakers mandated a similar study from the Air Force last year, but were disappointed in the results. Harkin said service officials studied how well able-bodied airmen wearing silencing headphones performed various tasks, rather than looking into whether deaf individuals could succeed in those same goals.

The latest measure was unopposed in the appropriations committee, but like the disability treaty faces an uncertain future. While concerns about regulatory overreach have stalled progress on the treaty ratification, congressional gridlock has stalled progress on the defense appropriations measure. If it passes, that likely will not happen until after the November elections, and only if House members are persuaded to leave the study in the bill. But supporters of both measures are hopeful they can gather enough support for each initiative before the end of the year. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane | Jul 23, 2014 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 29 Jul 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 Retiree Appreciation Days list is always available online at <http://www.hostmtb.org/RADLIST-2014.html>. [Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | Jul 29, 2014 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 1 thru 30 Aug 2015

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date in the below list. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown below for the next 4 weeks. For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. visit the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's website at <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events>.

Lakehurst, NJ

August 1 @ 9:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Gulfport/Biloxi, MS

August 5 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

North Platte, NE

August 5 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Sioux Falls, SD

August 6 @ 10:00 am [Details](#)

El Paso, TX

August 7 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Little Rock, AR

August 7 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Minneapolis, MN

August 7 @ 11:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Peoria, IL

August 8 @ 9:30 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Marquette, MI

August 9 @ 9:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Fresno, CA

August 12 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Fort Bragg Veterans Jobs Summit

August 12 @ 1:00 pm to August 13 @ 5:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Farmingdale, NY

August 14 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Camp Lejeune, NC - Military Spouse Networking Reception

August 19 @ 7:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Ft. Sill, OK

August 20 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Camp Lejeune, NC - Military Spouse Hiring Fair

August 20 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Ft. Gordon, GA

August 21 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Charlotte, NC - Transition and Benefits Career Fair, A Part of the 96th Annual American Legion National Convention

August 26 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Ft. Polk, LA - Military Spouse Networking Reception

August 26 @ 7:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Ft. Polk, LA - Military Spouse Opportunity Fair

August 27 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Kaneohe Bay, HI

August 28 @ 10:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

Tampa, FL

August 28 @ 11:00 am [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Assn 29 Jul 2014 ++]

Vietnam Vets [10] ► Donlon~Roger

In 1964, Roger Donlon, a 30-year-old Special Forces soldier, was sent into the thick of the jungle in Vietnam. It was his first deployment, but he and the 11 soldiers on the team he was leading had been well-trained and well-prepared. The soldiers were sent in as advisors to the South Vietnamese. Their job was to train and equip them to fight off the Viet Cong. The men were excited, as young men are when they travel to a new country, a new culture, and they were filled with hope that they were going to be able to help people help themselves, the now-80-year-old said. They knew the risks: they could be killed, or, perhaps worse, be captured and taken as prisoners of war. “We all vowed to each other we would fight until the end,” he said.

On July 6, just six weeks after the team arrived, they faced that test. In the cover of night, about 800 or 900 Viet Cong ambushed the camp at Nam Dong about 30 miles west of Da Nang. The team was far-outnumbered with half or more of the 300 South Vietnamese they were working alongside turning to fight against them. Even though the odds were stacked against them, the men of the 7th Special Forces Group hunkered down to fight. They rescued their ammunition from a blazing building and began to take positions around the camp. Donlon dashed to the main gate, shooting down the men who were trying to use explosives to blast their way through. Many men were wounded in the initial onslaught of heavy gunfire,

falling grenades and exploding mortar shells. Despite a severe stomach wound and being shot in the shoulder, Donlan continued fighting and working to evacuate the injured men.

They had lost radio contact and so Donlon moved from position to position, hurling hand grenades as he went. “I was reassuring each member of the team that we were still a fighting force,” he said. They began to take casualties. Sgt. John Houston was killed and Master Sgt. Gabriel ‘Pop’ Alamo died in Donlon’s arms. Australian Warrant Officer Kevin Conway, who was also at the camp, became the first soldier from his country to be killed in action. “It was hard for me to inform them of the casualties we took, but I felt it was important for them to know their teammates had died for the sake of their brothers,” he said. “When that happens you have a renewed strength; it’s almost impossible to describe.” In the light of day, after five long hours of battle, the team was victorious. They had held onto the camp. For his work inspiring his men to “superhuman effort,” Donlon received the first Medal of Honor of the Vietnam War.



Roger Donlon, Julian Olejniczak and Thurman Brown hold a photo of their Army Special Forces team taken in Vietnam in 1964.

But, he wouldn’t be the same. “Pop died in my arms,” he said. “When that happens you make a silent vow that if you live, you’ll conduct the rest of your life in ways that bring respect and honor to their lives. They gave all their tomorrows.” After receiving that award, he wasn’t supposed to be sent back to the same In late June, with the 50th anniversary of the battle near, Donlon, who lives in Kansas, and three surviving members of his team were honored at the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne)’s annual dinner. Before the dinner, he said everyone carries wounds of war, some visible, some not. He hopes sharing his story will help some of today’s soldiers’ fight off discouragement. “You get discouraged when you see things go awry, you think you are preparing people to defend their own country and then they don’t,” he said. “Some people want help and some don’t. You just have to keep doing your job and being the best at it.”

The 7th Group named their headquarters building at their compound near Crestview after Donlon — “a complete surprise,” he said — and other locations after the men who fell in the battle. He believes that’s a step in the right direction of honoring their memories. “Now the next generation will ask who was John Houston, who was ‘Pop’ Alamo?” he said. “And then they will think about the great accomplishments these men made and will want to be better people and better soldiers as they continue to shoulder the responsibilities of defending our great country.” [Source: Emerald Coast Daily News | Lauren Sage Reinlie | Jul 5, 2014 ++]

OBIT | Theodore “Dutch” Van Kirk ► 28 Jul 2014

The last surviving crewman of the Enola Gay, the B-29 that dropped the atomic bomb over Hiroshima, died overnight at his Stone Mountain home. Theodore “Dutch” Van Kirk, 93, was the navigator on the Aug. 6, 1945 flight that dropped the “Little Boy” atomic bomb. With the 2010 death of Morris Jeppson, Van Kirk became the only one of the dozen crew members left. For a number of years, he lived at a retirement community in Stone Mountain where by chance he found himself sharing the place with James Starnes, an Atlantan who had a front-row seat at history. Starnes was the navigator on the USS Missouri and the mighty battleship’s officer of the deck on Sept. 2, 1945 who greeted Japanese officials boarding to officially surrender. “We were two individuals who happened to be at historic dates,” said Starnes, who said his friend died Monday after being hospitalized for a few weeks. “The passing always hurts so much. I told someone today that this was the first time I shed a tear for someone in a long time.”



Capt. Theodore Van Kirk, center, as he and the rest of the crew return from the mission over Hiroshima, Japan Aug. 6, 1945 and at the retirement community where he lived on Aug 25, 2010

Starnes learned that Van Kirk was living in Stone Mountain from a Time Magazine article. A mutual friend who also lived in the retirement community introduced them. For more than a decade, the two men put on “dog-and-pony” talks around metro Atlanta about the two events that ended World War II. The two became close friends, Starnes told The Atlanta Journal Constitution Tuesday. “I like to say Dutch ended the war, and I made it official — got them to sign on the dotted line,” Starnes told The AJC in 2010. “He was very responsible for the success of the bomb drop.”

A native of Pennsylvania, Van Kirk joined the Army Air Corps before Pearl Harbor, and became a navigator after washing out as a pilot. After World War II, Van Kirk returned home and had a long career as an executive with DuPont. Officials at the Park Springs Retirement Community in Stone Mountain on 29 JUL confirmed Van Kirk’s death. [Source: The Atlanta Journal-Constitution | Mike Morris & Steve Visser | Jul 29, 2014 ++]

OBIT | Jon R. Cavaiani ► 29 Jul 2014

Retired Sgt. Maj. Jon R. Cavaiani, age 70, a former prisoner of war and recipient of the nation’s highest military award, died 29 JUL in Stanford, California. He much of his career at Fort Bragg, where he served with the 5th Special Forces Group.



Sgt. Maj. Jon R. Cavaiani

In 1971 as a platoon leader, Cavaiani was tasked with protecting a remote radio relay site along the demilitarized zone known as Hickory Hill when it came under attack on 3 JUN according to his medal citation. In the midst of an intense barrage of artillery and small-arms fire, Sgt. Maj. Cavaiani helped organize an evacuation of 15 wounded men while also leading efforts to defend the small base as it was overwhelmed by a much larger enemy force. Disregarding his own safety, "he repeatedly exposed himself to heavy enemy fire in order to move about the camp's perimeter directing the platoon's fire and rallying the platoon in a desperate fight for survival." When the time came for his platoon to be evacuated, the soldier "unhesitatingly volunteered" to stay behind to help direct helicopters to rescue his team. The intense enemy fire forced Sgt. Maj. Cavaiani and a small number of other troops to stay behind, pitted against an overwhelming enemy force. He led the final defense of Hickory Hill and then provided cover fire while his remaining soldiers escaped. Alone, the soldier played dead and avoided capture for 11 days, according to officials. He was captured by North Vietnamese soldiers after trying to signal a U.S. helicopter and spent 661 days in captivity.

"I saw two shadows on the rock and decided discretion was the better part of valor," Cavaiani said at his retirement on Fort Bragg in 1990. The Vietnamese who captured him was a little old man with a rifle who was probably shaking harder than he was, Cavaiani said. But the American was wounded, burned and exhausted and could no longer resist. He was released in March 1973, after spending much of his confinement in a solitary cell. "I was not the most cooperative of prisoners," he said. Cavaiani said receiving the Medal of Honor did not make his life as a soldier any easier because it also left a burden to play the part of a model soldier. "You have to maintain, you know, the image," he said.

His death was announced by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. Officials on Fort Bragg said he had been battling illnesses associated with leukemia for some time. They said he died with his wife, Barbara, at his side. With his death, there are now 79 Medal of Honor recipients living today. Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland, commander of U.S. Army Special Operations Command, said Sgt. Maj. Cavaiani exemplified the best in our Green Berets and inspired generations of soldiers. "A true American hero, Jon made time to teach, coach and mentor Special Forces soldiers of all grades," Lt. Gen. Cleveland said. "He will be missed by all, particularly those of us who since Vietnam served with him, but he and his gallantry will never be forgotten. The inheritors of his legacy, today's Green Beret, will see to that."

Cavaiani retired from the Army in 1990 after 21 years of service. Born in Ireland and raised in England, he moved to the United States in 1953 and joined the Army a year before becoming a naturalized citizen. He volunteered for Special Forces and later served with Task Force 1 Advisory Element, Studies and Observations Group, an elite reconnaissance unit in Vietnam. He would later serve as an instructor on Fort Bragg before holding numerous other posts within the Special Forces community while tallying more than 5,000 parachute jumps. His last Army job was as a chief instructor at the Army ROTC detachment at the University of California, Davis. He retired during a ceremony on Fort Bragg in which he was hailed as a

hero. At the time, he said he would retire to his 294-acre farm in central California, where he would grow peaches. "I'm just a farm boy," he said at the time. In 2011, he became a Distinguished Member of the Special Forces Regiment and was honored on Fort Bragg. In addition to the Medal of Honor and the Prisoner of War Medal, Sgt. Maj. Cavaiani also received the Legion of Valor, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star medal with valor and Purple Heart with oak leaf clusters. [Source: Fayetteville Observer | Drew Brooks | Jul 29, 2014 ++]

America's Most Beloved Vets ► World War I (1)



Alvin York



Bill "Bojangles" Robinson



Billy Mitchell



Buster Keaton

- Claiming "don't want to fight" when drafted, Alvin York received the Medal of Honor for leading an attack on a German machine gun nest, taking 32 machine guns, killing 28 German soldiers, and capturing 132 others.
- The black tap dancer and actor Bill Robinson served as a rifleman and drum major for the 369th Infantry Regiment, nicknamed the "Harlem Hellfighters."
- The father of the Air Force and namesake of the B-25 Billy Mitchell led one of the first coordinated air-ground offensives at the Battle of Saint-Mihiel.
- The vaudeville and film star Buster Keaton served in France with the 40th Division, entertaining troops as one of the Sunshine Players.

State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► Arkansas 2014

The state of Arkansas 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 – AR**" 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 benefits refer to <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/arkansas.html> & <http://www.veterans.arkansas.gov>.

- Arkansas Veterans Home
- Financial Assistance Benefits
- Education Benefits

- Other State Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/arkansas-state-veterans-benefits.html>

Jul 2014 ++]

*** Vet Legislation ***



NDAA 2015 Update 04 ► Committee Approves Defense Money Bill

The Senate Appropriations Committee has approved a fiscal 2015 defense money bill that fully supports the Senate Armed Services Committee’s earlier embrace of key military compensation curbs sought by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Senate Committee bill rejects administration proposals that would restructure and dramatically consolidate TRICARE plans and steeply raise fees. The Senate measure also rejects the Pentagon’s proposal to cut \$200 million from the annual subsidy for commissaries. Committee action averts proposals that would have forced some commissaries to cut hours of operation and a few even to close. But Senate appropriators have shaped a funding bill that supports DoD’s proposals concerning pay raises, basic allowance for housing and pharmacy co-pays.

- **Pay Cap:** A second straight cap of 1 percent on the annual military pay raise. A 1.8 percent increase is needed this January to keep pace with private sector wage growth.
- **BAH Cap:** A dampening for three years of yearly increases to Basic Allowance for Housing which is paid to a million service members living off base in the United States. The goal is to slow BAH adjustments until the allowances cover only 95 percent of local rental costs. Current BAH rates cover 100 percent of members’ local rental costs at stateside assignments. Current rates also cover average renter’s insurance, but that would end, just as the Joint Chiefs propose, if the Senate defense bill becomes law.
- **Higher Drug Co-Pays:** Pharmacy co-payments would increase for beneficiaries who have prescriptions filled at retail outlets, or choose to use brand name medicines instead of less costly generic drugs. This change largely would impact military retirees and their families.

The goal is to “fully incentivize” use of TRICARE mail order and also generic drugs to save on program costs. By changing behavior, and also by collecting higher fees, the Department of Defense estimates it

would save \$829 million in 2015. The Congressional Budget Office estimates savings of \$4.4 billion over five years. The prescription drug plan calls for the following changes:

- Prescriptions filled at base pharmacies would remain free. But the current \$17 co-pay at retail outlets for a 30-day supply of a brand name drug on the military formulary would jump to \$26 in January, and by \$2 more annually over seven years to reach \$40 by 2022 and then \$45 by 2024.
- Beneficiaries now face a co-pay of \$44 to get non-formulary drugs at local pharmacies. Under the plan, non-formulary drugs could only be obtained through home delivery and the co-pay for a three-month supply of mail order pills would climb from \$43 to \$51 in January and increase annually thereafter to reach \$66 by 2017 and \$90 by 2024.
- Co-pays for brand name drugs on the formulary, if filled by mail, would double from \$13 to \$26 next year, and increase by \$2 to \$4 annually to reach \$34 by 2019 and \$45 by 2024. Generic drugs would continue to be available at no charge by mail order until 2019 when a co-pay would be set at \$9 for a 90-day supply. The current \$5 co-pay for generic drugs at retail would be increased by \$1 a year, starting in 2015, and reach \$14 in 2024.

[Source: NAUS Weekly Update Jul 25, 2014 ++]

VA Congressional Fix ► Legislative Attempts to Date

After the Veterans Affairs Department scandal broke back in May, there were a lot of proposals to fix the agency, and there was a bipartisan push to make the changes a reality. But in the weeks and months since, that momentum has slowed amid international, border and funding crises. Still, the push for a VA overhaul continues as a bicameral, bipartisan conference committee seeks to iron out the differences between reform bills passed in the House and Senate. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) said at a press conference 15 JUL House Republicans are holding up progress on the negotiations. “We’re having a little trouble getting the House to help us complete the conference,” Reid said. “Just because we want something done when we’re in conference doesn’t mean it gets done.”

Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, was more optimistic, and criticized Reid’s remarks. “Conference committee negotiations are going well, and I remain confident we will reach an agreement soon,” Miller said, according to The Hill. “But the primary focus remains on getting the deal done right rather than getting it done by a certain date.” Miller has continued to put out new legislation to address VA’s problems and punish the employees responsible. After initially stating VA already had authority to rescind bonuses paid to employees found guilty of manipulating patient data, Miller has sought to statutorily certify it does by introducing a bill to that effect.

A similar measure was introduced in the Senate with bipartisan support by Sens. Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) and Claire McCaskill (D-MO). Miller’s bill is also likely to find Democratic backing in the House, as Rep. Stephen Lynch, D-Mass., said at a hearing earlier this week he planned to introduce such a measure. Here’s an updated list of all the measures under consideration in Congress to fix VA, several of which have provided the foundation for the conference negotiations. The list does not include the recently submitted S.2606 and H.R.4197:

Bill	Sponsor(s)	Summary	Status in House	Status in Senate
VA Management and Accountability Act	Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla.	Ease firing of SES employees by eliminating notification window and appeal rights	Passed 5/21/14	Passed Appropriations Committee
McCain-Sanders	Sens. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Bernie Sanders, I-Vt.	Ease firing of SES employees but maintain MSPB rights, private care access for certain vets, funding for new medical personnel and facilities	No action	Passed 6/11/14
S. 2545	Sens. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., and Claire McCaskill, D-Mo.	Rescind bonuses paid since 2011 to VA employees identified by the IG as complicit in waitlist cover ups	H.R. 5094 introduced by Miller 7/15/14	Introduced 6/26/14
Demanding Accountability for Veterans Act	Rep. Dan Benishek, R-Mich.	Tie firing of VA managers to completion of IG recommendations	Passed 6/9/14	No action
VA Accountability Act	Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa.	Allow veterans to sue VA employees at employees' expense, ease firing	No action	Introduced 6/3/14
H.R. 1405	Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nev.	Cut VA-wide bonuses by 14 percent for 5 years	Passed 10/28/13	No action
GI Tuition Fairness Act	Rep. Jeff Miller	Eliminate bonuses for senior executives for five years, all public universities charge veterans in-state tuition rate	Passed 2/3/14	Introduced
Fiscal 2015 Veterans Affairs Appropriations	Rep. John Culberson, R-Texas	Prohibits performance awards for senior executives in fiscal 2015, sets funding levels for VA and military construction	Passed 4/30/14	Passed Appropriations Committee (similar provision) 5/22/14
Veterans Access to Care Act	Rep. Jeff Miller	Provide some veterans access to private care at VA's expense, ban bonuses for all VA employees for three years	Passed 6/10/14	Access provision similar to McCain-Sanders bill
Comprehensive Dept. of VA Performance Management and Accountability Reform Act	Rep. Mike Michaud, D-Maine	Establish up-front organizational goals for senior executives and use them in reviewing performance, restricts bonuses to those with positive reviews	Introduced 4/4/14	No action

[Source: www.defenseone.com | Eric Katz | 16 Jul 2014 ++]

VA Congressional Fix Update 01 ► VA Reform Bill Compromise Reached

Weeks of simmering, closed-door disagreement in Congress over how to fix the Department of Veterans Affairs erupted into a public political fight 24 JUL that threatened to derail any chance of a final reform bill this summer. House and Senate leaders broke from negotiations aimed at compromise and instead unveiled dueling bills that differed widely on how much to spend on the deeply dysfunctional federal agency. The moves led to both chambers lobbing allegations of “moving the goal post” and thwarting the democratic process. A month of negotiations had not bridged the divide between House veterans affairs chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), who remains skeptical that more spending will help the VA, and his counterpart Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), who believes the only fix includes spending billions on hiring more medical staff.



Sen. Bernie Sanders



Rep. Jeff Miller

However, in a dramatic legislative turnaround, the chairmen of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees on 28 JUL unveiled plans for a \$17 billion compromise VA reform bill that funds the hiring of more clinicians, expands private care options and makes it easier to fire Veterans Affairs Department executives. The deal, if approved, gives lawmakers a surprising success story to take back to their home districts as Congress begins its extended, pre-election legislative break. The comprehensive veterans measure is one of only a few significant bills to become law this year, and comes after weeks of promises that leaders from both parties would move quickly to address recent VA scandals. "This bill makes certain that we address the immediate crisis of veterans being forced onto long waiting lists for health care," said Sen. Sanders. "It strengthens VA so that it will be able to hire the doctors, nurses and medical personnel it needs so we can permanently put an end to long waiting lists."

The price tag includes \$5 billion requested by VA officials to hire clinicians and renovate underused VA spaces, in an effort to address long-term problems with veterans waiting for care. But another \$10 billion is targeted for a short-term fix to that problem: a dramatic expansion of private-care options for veterans who face waits of 30 days or longer for appointments, or who live more than 40 miles from the closest VA health facilities. It will also pay for leases at 27 new medical facilities in 18 states and Puerto Rico, to give more VA options to veterans. The measure also includes language making it easier for senior VA officials to be fired by the department secretary, a proposal that has drawn strong support from lawmakers and outside critics. Over the last three months, dozens of VA officials have been accused of gaming records to cover up facility problems or protect performance bonuses. Lawmakers have decried a corrosive culture within the bureaucracy, and demanded more accountability throughout the department. Under the compromise, executives fired for mismanagement or poor performance would have a chance to appeal the move, and would be guaranteed an answer within a month.

Both Miller and Sanders said they are confident the legislation can be approved by both chambers this week and sent to the president to become law within days. The House overwhelmingly passed a \$17 billion emergency bill 30 JUL that brings comprehensive reform of the troubled Department of Veterans Affairs health care system one step closer to reality. The 420-5 vote shifted all attention toward the Senate, where a floor vote had yet to be scheduled with only days left before Congress leaves for its August recess. The House is scheduled to start its summer break 31 JUL. The Senate leaves 1 AUG. The Senate also had on its agenda for the week the confirmation vote for Bob McDonald to become the next VA secretary. The two

moves combined would give the department a new leader and billions in new funding, to go along with the mandate from lawmakers to restore public trust in the agency. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane | Jul 28, 2014 ++]

Honor Flights Update 08 ► House Passes H.R.4812

The House of Representatives recently passed H.R.4812, the Honor Flight Act. The bill would codify the process by which the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) provides expedited and dignified passenger screening services for veterans traveling to visit war memorials built and dedicated to honor their service in Washington D.C. Expedited screening services will save veterans' time and show them their proper respect and appreciation. "The 'Honor Flight Act' is a measure that seeks to pay a debt of gratitude to a group of Americans who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to ensure that we are able to enjoy the freedoms that we have today," said Cedric Richmond (D-LA). "Although we may never be able to fully repay our veterans for their bravery, our national memorials bring into focus their lasting contribution and their impact on American history. It just makes sense that they are treated with the reverence and gratitude they deserve when visiting memorials erected in their honor." The Honor Flight Act of 2014 is supported by the Honor Flight Network, a non-profit organization that works with airlines and other non-profits to transport American veterans to Washington, D.C., to visit memorials built and dedicated in honor of their service. On 23 JUL the bill was received in the Senate, read twice, and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.



Lucy Coffey, 108, and Queta Marquez, Bexar County VSO, go through pictures taken while Coffey was in Japan where she served in the procurement office of the WAAC during World War II.

In the interim the nation's oldest living female World War II veteran has finally made it to Washington to see the monuments and memorials. Lucy Coffey, now 108, is a veteran of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps during World War II. The corps took her to Japan before she came home and settled in San Antonio. This weekend, Coffey got to make another trip, this time to see the monuments of the nation's capital. She flew first-class from San Antonio on a trip arranged in part by an Honor Flight group in Texas. On 26 JUL Coffey visited the World War II Memorial and the Women in Military Service for America Memorial at

Arlington National Cemetery before heading to the White House for a tour. [Source: Rep. Cedric Richmond (D-LA) Press Release Jul 24, 2014 ++]

VA Whistleblowers Update 07 ► S.2606 & H.R.4197

Members of Congress want to fire more federal employees. From tax delinquents to Veterans Affairs Department senior executives to workers who do not solve audited problems, lawmakers have made clear they think more feds deserve pink slips. The latest measure S.2606, introduced by Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO) would require VA to fire employees found guilty of retaliating against whistleblowers. Currently, retaliation is a fireable offense, though lesser punishments such as fines and reprimands are also acceptable responses. “Whistleblowers are critical to our efforts to guard against waste and misconduct in government -- and in the case of the VA, against the compromise of patient care,” said McCaskill, a consistent whistleblower champion. “This bill requires the firing of any VA employee found to have retaliated against a whistleblower -- no ifs, ands, or buts -- and I’m hopeful it will be a step in the right direction to change the culture of the VA and ensure our veterans are receiving the highest level of care.”

Federal whistleblowers will be able to appeal their cases for the next three years in any U.S. Court of Appeals with jurisdiction under bipartisan legislation the House passed earlier this week. The All Circuit Review Extension Act (H.R.4197) extends for three extra years a provision in the 2012 Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act that enabled whistleblowers to appeal Merit Systems Protection Board decisions to any U.S. Court of Appeals with jurisdiction. Prior to that, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit had the sole jurisdiction over such cases. The provision in the 2012 law expanding the options for judicial review was only for two years. “The pilot program authorizing whistleblowers to file appeals in U.S. Court of Appeals with jurisdiction has proven to be one of the act’s most vital, and potentially far-reaching, provisions,” said Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA), a co-sponsor of H.R. 4197. “Prior to this pilot program, federal whistleblowers were at the mercy of the Federal Circuit, which had ruled against whistleblowers in an astonishing 226 out of 229 cases since 1994.”

Whistleblowers have played a pivotal role in the large-scale scandal that has engulfed the Veterans Affairs Department over improper scheduling practices, delays in providing vets with medical care, and mishandled paperwork at various VA facilities across the country. There also have been allegations of retaliation against VA whistleblowers. The 2012 law included several new protections for employees who blow the whistle on waste, fraud and abuse within the government. The Make-It-Safe Coalition, which includes dozens of groups that advocate for whistleblower protections, said the so-called all circuit review was the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act’s “most significant structural reform.” The Government Accountability Office is required to assess the law’s effectiveness four years after enactment.

The group said in the first year of the all circuit review pilot program, there were only three whistleblower cases outside of the Federal Circuit, indicating that the change was not flooding other courts with extra work. “Whistleblowers offer essential assistance to congressional oversight efforts to investigate waste, fraud and abuse in the federal government,” said House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-CA), who praised the bill’s sponsor, Maryland Democrat and committee Ranking Member Elijah Cummings. “Unfortunately, however, some would-be whistleblowers have been dissuaded from bringing allegations to light due to previous loopholes in existing law and misinterpretations of congressional intent by the Federal Circuit.”

The VA is currently facing dozens of accusations of whistleblower retaliation; the independent Office of Special Counsel is currently reviewing about 60 such cases in light of employees blowing the whistle on patient scheduling issues and data manipulation. The new VA administration has promised to eradicate any retaliation against those who shed the light on agency shortcomings. Acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson has said that “intimidation or retaliation -- not just against whistleblowers, but against any employee who raises a hand to identify a problem, make a suggestion, or report what may be a violation in law, policy, or our core values -- is absolutely unacceptable. I will not tolerate it in our organization.” McCaskill recently introduced a bill with Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) to allow VA to rescind bonuses paid to employees found guilty of manipulating patient data. [Source: GovExec.com | Kellie Lunney & Eric Katz | Jul 17, 2014 ++]

Tobacco Sales on Base Update 01 ► Senate Provision on Limiting Discounts

Smokers could lose their discount on tobacco products sold at military exchanges under a provision unveiled in the Senate on 15 JUL. Senate Appropriations defense subcommittee chairman Rep. Dick Durbin (D-IL), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee’s defense panel, called the move a common-sense decision to give troops less incentive to use tobacco. “There’s no reason that deadly tobacco products should be subsidized,” Durbin said, arguing that lower prices on the products lead to higher use, which in turn “leads to addiction, health problems, and in some cases death.” The budget bill provision would dump the tobacco discount and force military exchanges to sell the items at full price.



DoD policy calls for limiting discounts on tobacco products sold in both military exchanges and commissaries to no more than 5 percent below “the most competitive commercial price in the local community.” That effectively means the military discount can be much larger when compared to “average” off-base prices. The Navy ended discounts on tobacco products sold on Navy and Marine Corps bases in 2012. But Durbin said tobacco discounts at some installations in the other services run as high as 20 percent below local civilian stores. A 2013 National Institutes of Health study found military discounts of as high as 73 percent in some locations. Critics say that’s one reason why troops smoke and use chewing tobacco at dramatically higher rates than civilians. About 25 percent of troops smoke cigarettes, compared to about 20 percent of civilians, and about 13 percent use smokeless tobacco products, compared to 3 percent of civilians.

Military officials have launched a number of anti-tobacco initiatives in recent years, citing the long-term health costs to frequent users. Durbin cited DoD estimates that say tobacco-related illnesses drain \$1.6 billion annually from military health care accounts. Earlier this year, an analysis from the Kansas-based Institute for Biobehavioral Health Research found that the discounted tobacco products at military bases send a contradictory message to troops and undermine those anti-smoking programs. Navy officials have discussed dropping all tobacco product sales from service exchanges, commissaries and ship stores. That

move prompted pushback from several House lawmakers, who argued that all service members should have access to the products if they're legal and available to civilians. Those same House lawmakers would have to sign off on dropping the tobacco discount before the change could become law. The appropriations bill is expected to move through the Senate this month, but likely won't be finalized until late 2014. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane | Jul 14, 2014 ++]

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

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

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

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
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.5094 : Recoup VA Bonus Authorization.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to recoup certain bonuses or awards paid to employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep Miller, Jeff [FL-1] (introduced 7/14/2014)
- **H.R.5097 : Local Care for Veterans Act.** A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to allow certain veterans to participate in the Patient-Centered Community Care program. Sponsor: Rep Boustany, Charles W., Jr. [LA-3] (introduced 7/14/2014)

- H.R.5112 : **Vietnam Era SE Asia Merchant Marine VA Eligibility.** A bill to provide eligibility for veterans benefits for individuals who served in the United States merchant marine in the Southeast Asia theater of operations during the Vietnam Era. Sponsor: Rep Bishop, Sanford D., Jr. [GA-2] (introduced 7/15/2014)
- H.R.5115 : **Rural Veteran Access to Care Act.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the beneficiary travel program of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep McAllister, Vance M. [LA-5] (introduced 7/15/2014)
- H.R.5131 : **Access to Care and Treatment Now for Veterans Act.** A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to reimburse non-Department of Veterans Affairs medical providers for the provision of certain hospital care and medical services to veterans, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Gabbard, Tulsi [HI-2] (introduced 7/17/2014)
- H.R.5157 : **Vet Education Program Requirements VA Waiver Authorization.** To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to waive certain requirements relating to the approval of programs of education for purposes of the educational assistance programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep Titus, Dina [NV-1] (introduced 7/17/2014)
- H.R.5172 : **POW Accountability Act.** A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to review the list of veterans designated as former prisoners of war, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Johnson, Bill [OH-6] (introduced 7/23/2014)
- H.R.5193 : **VA VISN Delayed Payment Outreach.** To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct outreach to veterans regarding the effect of delayed payments by the Veterans Integrated Service Networks and to direct the Secretary to submit to Congress an annual report regarding such delayed payments. Sponsor: Rep Boustany, Charles W., Jr. [LA-3] (introduced 7/24/2014)
- S.2606 : **Terminate DVA Whistleblower Retaliators.** A bill to require the termination of any employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs who is found to have retaliated against a whistleblower. Sponsor: Sen McCaskill, Claire [MO] (introduced 7/15/2014)
- S.2607 : **Assisted Living Pilot Program for Vets with TBI Extension Act.** A bill to extend and modify the pilot program of the Department of Veterans Affairs on assisted living services for veterans with traumatic brain injury, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Booker, Cory A. [NJ] (introduced 7/15/2014)
- S.2654 : **DVA Outreach on Delayed Payment Effects.** A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct outreach to veterans regarding the effect of certain delayed payments by the Secretary, to require the Secretary to submit to Congress an annual report regarding such delayed payments, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Landrieu, Mary L. [LA] (introduced 7/24/2014)

[Source: <http://www.loc.gov> & <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills> Jul 28, 2014 ++]

* **Military** *



Robotic Cargo Movers ► Military Ponders Future

The K-MAX unmanned helicopter was deployed to Afghanistan in 2011 to haul cargo in and out of warzones. It allowed U.S. forces to cut ground convoys that were vulnerable to roadside bombs. Although initially scheduled only for a six-month deployment, the aircraft is still supporting operations in theater three years later, having flown more than 1,900 missions in which it carried 5.5 million pounds of cargo. The success of the K-MAX is indisputable, military officials have said. However, it still relies on operators to remotely control the aircraft. A fully autonomous aircraft or vehicle able to carry supplies and equipment in and out of challenging, dynamic environments remains a technology of the future. To move closer to that goal, industry has bankrolled internal research and jumped aboard various technology development initiatives led by the services.



K-MAX Unmanned Helicopter

One such effort — the Office of Naval Research’s autonomous aerial cargo/utility system, or AACUS — aims to create an autonomy retrofit package that can be plugged into helicopters, said Max Snell, ONR’s program manager. “Right now we’re doing demonstrations under very simulated environments, so [the technology is] relatively immature. We’re not at a point yet where we’ll fly” without a pilot onboard for safety, he said. The AACUS system consists of a sensor suite, computers and software, and is controlled with a tablet. To operate the system, a user simply plugs a destination into the tablet, and the helicopter will take off, determine its own route, avoid obstacles and land autonomously, Sell said. This is a departure from the K-Max, which needs remote operators to navigate it to a landing site.

During the first phase of the AACUS program, Lockheed Martin and Aurora Technologies developed autonomy systems that were demonstrated at Marine Corps Base Quantico in February and March. Lockheed flew its autonomy package on a K-MAX helicopter, while Aurora’s system was integrated with Boeing’s unmanned Little Bird. In May, ONR selected Aurora to move on to the second phase. ONR and Aurora will work on maturing technologies such as obstacle detection and avoidance and terrain classification, Snell said. They also will test how the system functions in conditions where communications and GPS are not working properly. “We’re going to pay a lot more attention to the ruggedization and weatherization of the system, because right now the way it’s set up ... it’s not production ready by any means,” he said. ONR wants Aurora to further develop its light-detection and ranging sensor to operate in the presence of intense dust, rain, snow and humidity, he said. If successful, such technologies could be

useful for manned helicopters flown in conditions where pilots have degraded vision and the commercial market.

Lockheed and Kaman are not the only unmanned cargo aircraft manufacturers eyeing the commercial market. In May, Sikorsky announced it was building an unmanned UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, which the company intends to market to both military and non-government customers. The aircraft will be able to hold 9,000 pounds internally or externally, and will be constructed from a UH-60A airframe retrofitted with a fly-by-wire system and then further modified with an autonomy kit, said Chris Van Buiten, Sikorsky vice president of technology and innovation. Sikorsky flew an optionally piloted UH-60M called the manned/unmanned resupply aerial lifter, or MURAL, in demonstrations to the Army in April. Later demonstrations will pair it with an unmanned ground vehicle to investigate hazardous areas. Those robotic vehicles are yet another platform that the military could use to tackle cargo missions. The Army and Marine Corps are hosting joint demonstrations of unmanned tactical wheeled vehicles that would remove troops from dangerous convoy missions.

William Moore, deputy to the Commanding General of the Army Sustainment Center of Excellence, said he had briefed the highest echelons of Army leadership on the potential of unmanned ground vehicles. He described to Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond Odierno which technologies need be matured so that UGVs could be procured and fielded in the future, he said at a May conference. Oshkosh Defense has spent years developing and testing an autonomy kit called TerraMax that allows a convoy of trucks to be driven by a single person located safely in the back of the line. The system has been installed on two medium tactical vehicle replacements and demonstrated under the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab's cargo unmanned ground vehicle program. The company is expanding TerraMax to allow vehicles to autonomously conduct road reconnaissance and clearance operations, Oshkosh announced in May. Under the contract with ONR, Oshkosh will modify TerraMax software so that vehicles outfitted with mine rollers or ground-penetrating radar can use the system, said John Beck, chief unmanned systems engineer. "In the case of the ground-penetrating radar, if it detects a suspected target or hazard, it would stop the vehicle, it will alert the operators and the remote operator control station," Beck said. "We would be able to ... operate that mine roller in an autonomous fashion. It obviously changes the vehicle dynamics a little bit. You need to take account for this big thing out in front of the truck when you're navigating."

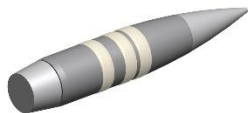
Lockheed Martin and the Army's Tank-Automotive Research, Development and Engineering Center are also developing a kit that would convert large trucks into semi- or fully autonomous vehicles, said Scott Greene, Lockheed Martin's vice president of ground vehicles. Both the Army and Marine Corps are interested in the technology. The autonomous mobility appliqué system, or AMAS, features three levels of autonomy ranging from a warning capability — which could alert fatigued drivers when a vehicle is drifting out of its lane, for instance — to full autonomy, where a driver is not needed to operate the vehicle. An autonomous three-vehicle convoy equipped with AMAS drove throughout a mock town erected in Fort Hood, Texas, earlier this year, Greene said. Lockheed in June announced that AMAS had completed its second set of demonstrations, in which a convoy of six UDVs drove at speeds of up to 40 miles per hour at the Department of Energy's Savannah River site in South Carolina.

All of the vehicles tested — one medium tactical vehicle truck, one medium tactical vehicle replacement, two palletized load system trucks, two M915 line-haul tractors and one heavy equipment transport — operated autonomously. In its recent demonstrations, Lockheed equipped the first truck in the convoy with light detecting and ranging sensors that paint a 3-D model of the environment, Greene said. The remaining vehicles are outfitted with less complex sensors that allow them to follow the lead truck and maintain a safe distance from others in the convoy. The company was only required to equip the first truck with the more sophisticated LIDAR. However, in the event of an IED blast that destroys or damages the first vehicle, the

convoy would stop and remain stalled unless another vehicle was furnished with the more advanced sensor package, Greene said. The company will conduct further safety testing on the system in June, said David Simon, the company's AMAS program manager. "The program will execute a six-week operational demonstration in the July-August timeframe, during which time soldiers and Marines will assess the system benefits in realistic convoy operations." [Source: NDIA | Valerie Insinna | Aug 2014 ++]

EXACTO Program ► Turning Dumb Bullets into Guided Missiles

Imagine if you could transform a dumb bullet into a guided missile? That's what the Pentagon did earlier this year, successfully firing .50-caliber bullets that steered themselves in mid-flight. It has just released a video trumpeting the tip-top targeting of its Extreme Accuracy Tasked Ordnance (EXACTO) program "This video [<http://time.com/2979962/pentagon-selfguided-bullet-innovative-sniper-weapon>] shows EXACTO rounds maneuvering in flight to hit targets that are offset from where the sniper rifle is aimed," the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency says. "EXACTO's specially designed ammunition and real-time optical guidance system help track and direct projectiles to their targets by compensating for weather, wind, target movement and other factors that could impede successful hits. The Pentagon wants the capability for its snipers, making their goal of "one shot, one kill" even more likely. The 21 APR test by DARPA contractor Teledyne Scientific & Imaging shows the new bullet homing in on its target by riding a laser beam aimed by the sniper team at the desired target. Vanes on its body—and an onboard optical receiver—allow it to maneuver in mid-flight.



DARPA's Extreme Accuracy Tasked Ordnance (EXACTO) bullet may be precise, but its artist's rendering of the round is pretty vague

The highly-classified EXACTO program began six years ago. "The ability to more accurately prosecute targets at significantly longer range would provide a dramatic new capability to the U.S. military," DARPA'S original program description said. "The use of an actively controlled bullet will make it possible to counter environmental effects such as crosswinds and air density, and prosecute both stationary and moving targets while enhancing shooter covertness." Such a weapon, DARPA said when it launched the program, could employ "fire and forget" technologies including "fin-stabilized projectiles, spin-stabilized projectiles, internal and/or external aero-actuation control methods, projectile guidance technologies, tamper proofing, small stable power supplies, and advanced sighting, optical resolution and clarity technologies." The Pentagon wants the new gun to be no heavier than the combined 46-lb. weight of the current \$11,500 M107 sniper rifle and all its associated gear (including ammo, tripod, scope and slide rules for target calculations).

Military sharpshooters require extensive and expensive training—all of which could be reduced with a better gun. Snipers "are unable to take a shot the vast majority of the time" because of wind or other weather factors, and a lack of confidence in their ability to hit the target or flee if detected, DARPA has

said. Then-Army Captain Keith Bell, former commander of the Army sniper school at Fort Benning, Ga., told TIME five years ago that he couldn't wait to get his hands on the new bullet. "The EXACTO would be revolutionary," he said from Mosul, Iraq. "It will more than double our range and probably more than double our accuracy." Current sniper rifles can regularly hit trucks at 2,000 meters, but not bad guys. (The record kill is 2,430 meters, just over 1.5 miles. It was charted by Canadian army corporal Rob Furlong against a Taliban fighter in Afghanistan's Shah-i-kot valley during Operation Anaconda in March 2002—but his first two shots missed.) "There's no limit as far as I can see so long as the bullet's stable—I think 2,000 or 2,500 meters is very attainable," Bell said. "Right now, anything past around 800 meters is an extremely tough shot." [Source: Time | Mark Thompson Jul 13, 2014 ++]

Military Tattoo Criteria Update 02 ► Army Recruitment Impacted

Over three months ago the Army announced a new policy limiting the number and placement of tattoos that soldiers could have. Now, recruiters say it is making their jobs harder. According to an article in the Chicago Tribune, the new policy bans "body art on the head, face, neck, wrists, hands and fingers. Soldiers are allowed a maximum of four visible tattoos below the elbow or knee, but they must be smaller than the wearer's hand, which means that "sleeves" are also prohibited. (Extremist, sexist and racist tattoos have always been taboo.)" This makes the Army the toughest service when it comes to a policy regarding tattoos on its members. Prior to the need to increase recruiting after the U.S. invasion of Iraq the tattoo policy was strict, but the need for more soldiers forced a relaxing of the rules. Now, with the reduction in force, the Army decided it could reinstitute the tougher policy. Those currently serving and who are out of compliance with the new regulation have been grandfathered in, so it is only new recruits who are affected. [Source: TREA News for the Enlisted Jul 14, 2014 ++]

Michigan Guard Tuition Aid ► State Program Reestablished

Gov. Rick Snyder has signed a law re-establishing a state-based tuition assistance program for members of the Michigan National Guard. It will cover 100 percent of tuition and fees, up to \$4,500 a year. The state had a similar program for a decade that ended in 2009 because of budget cuts and expanded federal education benefits after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Supporters say Michigan's program will help soldiers whose tuition and fees aren't fully covered by a similar federal tuition-assistance program. It's expected to cost Michigan about \$4.7 million in the next fiscal year. Snyder signed the bill 1 JUL during an event at the Michigan National Guard Joint Force Headquarters in Lansing. [Source: Associated Press article Jul 1, 2014++]



Gov. Rick Snyder

Medal of Honor Citations ► Thomas, Herbert Joseph WWII



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

Thomas, Herbert Joseph

Rank and organization: Sergeant, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, 3d Marines, 3d Marine Division

Place and date: Koromokina River, Bougainville Islands, Solomon Islands, 7 Nov 1943

Entered service at: Blacksburg, Virginia July 1941

Born: 8 February 1918, Columbus, Ohio.

Citation

For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the 3d Marines, 3d Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces during the battle at the Koromokina River, Bougainville Islands, Solomon Islands, on 7 November 1943. Although several of his men were struck by enemy bullets as he led his squad through dense jungle undergrowth in the face of severe hostile machinegun fire, Sgt. Thomas and his group fearlessly pressed forward into the center of the Japanese position and destroyed the crews of 2 machineguns by accurate rifle fire and grenades. Discovering a third gun more difficult to approach, he carefully placed his men closely around him in strategic positions from which they were to charge after he had thrown a grenade into the emplacement. When the grenade struck vines and fell back into the midst of the group, Sgt. Thomas deliberately flung himself upon it to smother the explosion, valiantly sacrificing his life for his comrades. Inspired by his selfless action, his men unhesitatingly charged the enemy machinegun and, with fierce determination, killed the crew and several other nearby-defenders. The splendid initiative and extremely heroic conduct of Sgt. Thomas in carrying out his prompt decision with full knowledge of his fate reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.



Herbert Joseph Thomas Jr.

Herbert Joseph Thomas Jr. was born on February 8, 1918 in Columbus, Ohio to Herbert J. Thomas and Ida Smallwood. He had two older sisters: Ida and Audrey Thomas. The Thomas family did not stay in Ohio very long but moved to South Charleston, West Virginia when Thomas Jr. was seven years old. As a young man, Thomas experienced some difficult times, including the death of his mother when he was 13 years old. He overcame this tragic loss to become a star halfback for South Charleston High School's football team. After graduating from South Charleston High School, his skills on the football field earned him a scholarship to Greenbrier Military School and to Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

Thomas excelled on the college field the same way he had on South Charleston's football field. His outgoing personality and skill caused him to become a leader for the team and a beloved friend to the players. He played for Virginia Polytechnic School's freshmen football team in the fall of 1937. The following year, he had proven his worth and moved up to varsity. His senior year made headlines throughout the country when he led the team in pass receptions and scoring. He was the leading scorer in the state and second in the Southern Conference, which earned him a position on the Virginia All-State College football eleven, a place in the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame and an All-American mention. Herbert J. Thomas was not just an athlete, but he was a business major, an active member of the Business Club and an outstanding cadet.



Herbert J. Thomas Jr. name on Virginia Tech's MOH memorial stone and his grave

Two months before graduation, Thomas left school to enlist in the Army Air Corps but later transferred to the Marines because many of his friends were Marines. Just like his performance on the field, Thomas excelled in the military, being promoted to the rank of sergeant. The heroic sacrifice of Herbert J. Thomas earned him to be posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, Navy Cross, Purple Heart, Presidential Unit Citation and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal. He was the first West Virginian

awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in World War II. On March 26, 1945, the government named a destroyer, the U.S.S. Herbert J. Thomas, in his memory, which his sister Audrey christened. In addition, his town honored his memory by naming the hospital that opened on December 9, 1946 after him.

[Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Joseph_Thomas & www.history.army.mil/html/moh/wwII-t-z.html Jul 2014 ++]

*** Military History ***



Aviation Art 70 ► Mission Beyond Darkness



Mission Beyond Darkness

by Robert Taylor

One of the most remarkable missions during the naval air war in the Pacific. Following the attack against Admiral Ozawa's Japanese carrier fleet on June 20, 1944, Admiral Mitscher defies all rules of naval engagement: In total darkness, with the ever-present danger of enemy submarines, he orders every ship in

his Task Force 58 to switch on lights to guide over 100 returning carrier-borne aircraft, all desperately low on fuel. Amid the confusion, unable to get a landing slot aboard the USS Lexington, and now out of fuel, a pilot and his gunner scramble from their ditched SB2C Curtis Helldiver, as a Fletcher class destroyer maneuvers to make the pick-up.

[Source: <http://www.aviationarthangar.com/avarthamibed.html> Jul 2014 ++]

Military Trivia 92 ► **Ortiz~Pierre | Marine Hero, Swashbuckler, Actor**

The first thoughts that come to mind when one thinks about World War II Marines is them landing on bloody beaches and fighting in steamy jungles of the Pacific. But this was not the role of Marine Pierre Julien Ortiz, who served in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. His exploits and dare-devil attitude were things of fiction yet they were all real. He was an American and a Frenchman with a Spanish name and he lived in remarkable times and did remarkable things. His life was a series of rousing adventures that were the basis for several Hollywood screenplays. He was a ship's mate, a race car driver, a decorated French Foreign Legionnaire with two awards of the Croix de Guerre, a World War II Marine officer with two Navy Crosses and two Purple Hearts, a member of the covert Office of Strategic Services and captured by the Germans only to escape and three years later be captured again - and he was a Hollywood movie actor. He spoke five languages including French, German and Arabic.



Pierre Julien Ortiz

On February 1, 1932, at the age of 19, he joined the French Foreign Legion for five years' service in North Africa in Morocco. Within three years he was a sergeant. He was awarded the Croix de Guerre twice during a campaign against the Rif. When his contract expired, he went to Hollywood to serve as a technical adviser for war films. With the outbreak of World War II and the United States still neutral, he re-enlisted in the Legion in 1939 as a sergeant. He was wounded in action and imprisoned by the Germans during the 1940 Battle of France. He escaped the following year and made his way to the United States. He joined the Marines in June 1942. As a result of his training and experience, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant after only 40 days. He was promoted to captain in December and, with his knowledge of the region, sent to Tangier, Morocco.

He conducted reconnaissance behind enemy lines in Tunisia for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). During a night mission, Ortiz was seriously wounded in an encounter with a German patrol and was sent back to the United States to recover. In January 1944, he parachuted into the Haute-Savoie region of German-occupied France as part of the three-man "Union" mission with Colonel Pierre Fourcaud of the French secret service and Captain Thackwaite from SIS to evaluate the capabilities of the Resistance in the Alpine region. He drove four downed RAF pilots to the border of neutral Spain before leaving France with his team. Promoted to major, Ortiz parachuted back into France on August 1, 1944, this time as the commander of the "Union II" mission. He was captured by the Germans on August 16 and spent the remainder of the war as a prisoner of war. He was the most highly decorated member of the OSS. In April 1954, he volunteered to return to active duty to serve as a Marine observer in Indochina. The Marine Corps did not accept his request because "current military policies" will not permit the assignment requested. He rose to the rank of colonel in the Marine Reserve.



Ortiz in 'Rio Grande'

After the war, Ortiz worked with director John Ford, a former member of the OSS himself. Two movies were produced depicting the exploits of Ortiz: '13 Rue Madeleine' with James Cagney (1947) and 'Operation Secret' with Cornel Wilde (1952). Ortiz also had parts in such films as 'The Outcast,' 'Wings of Eagles' and 'Rio Grande' in which he played Captain St. Jacques. He also played the part of Major Knott in the film, 'Retreat Hell,' a movie about the Marines at the Battle of Chosin Reservoir in during the Korean War in 1950. According to his son, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Peter J. Ortiz, Jr., "My father was an awful actor but he had great fun appearing in movie." Ortiz died of cancer on May 16, 1988, at the age of 74, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. He was survived by his wife Jean and their son Peter J. Ortiz, Jr.



Ortiz's decorations included two Navy Crosses, the Legion of Merit, the Order of the British Empire, and five Croix de Guerre. He also was made a Chevalier of the Legion d'honneur by the French. In August 1994, Centron, France held a ceremony in which the town center was renamed "Place Colonel Peter Ortiz."

This event was attended by many former members of the local maquis unit in the region, as well as the Marine contingent and Mrs. Ortiz and her son. Navy Cross citations

ORTIZ, PIERRE (PETER) J. (First Award)
Rank and organization: Major, U.S. Marine Corps (Reserve)
Place: Office of Strategic Services (London)
Date of Action: January 8–20, 1944

Citation:

“ The Navy Cross is presented to Pierre (Peter) J. Ortiz, Major, U.S. Marine Corps (Reserve), for extraordinary heroism while attached to the United States Naval Command, Office of Strategic Services, London, England, in connection with military operations against an armed enemy in enemy-occupied territory, from January 8, to May 20, 1944. Operating in civilian clothes and aware that he would be subject to execution in the event of his capture, Major Ortiz parachuted from an airplane with two other officers of an Inter-Allied mission to reorganize existing Maquis groups in the region of Rhone. By his tact, resourcefulness and leadership, he was largely instrumental in affecting the acceptance of the mission by local resistance leaders, and also in organizing parachute operations for the delivery of arms, ammunition and equipment for use by the Maquis in his region. Although his identity had become known to the Gestapo with the resultant increase in personal hazard, he voluntarily conducted to the Spanish border four Royal Air Force officers who had been shot down in his region, and later returned to resume his duties. Repeatedly leading successful raids during the period of this assignment, Major Ortiz inflicted heavy casualties on enemy forces greatly superior in number, with small losses to his own forces. By his heroic leadership and astuteness in planning and executing these hazardous forays, Major Ortiz served as an inspiration to his subordinates and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”

ORTIZ, PIERRE (PETER) J. (Second Award)
Rank and organization: Major, U.S. Marine Corps (Reserve)
Place: Office of Strategic Services (France)
Date of Action: August 1, 1944 – April 27, 1945

Citation:

“ The Navy Cross is presented to Pierre (Peter) J. Ortiz, Major, U.S. Marine Corps (Reserve), for extraordinary heroism while serving with the Office of Strategic Services during operations behind enemy Axis lines in the Savoie Department of France, from August 1, 1944, to April 27, 1945. After parachuting into a region where his activities had made him an object of intensive search by the Gestapo, Major Ortiz valiantly continued his work in coordinating and leading resistance groups in that section. When he and his team were attacked and surrounded during a special mission designed to immobilize enemy reinforcements stationed in that area, he disregarded the possibility of escape and, in an effort to spare villagers severe reprisals by the Gestapo, surrendered to this sadistic Geheim Staats Polizei. Subsequently imprisoned and subjected to numerous interrogations, he divulged nothing, and the story of this intrepid Marine Major and his team became a brilliant legend in that section of France where acts of bravery were considered commonplace. By his outstanding loyalty and self-sacrificing devotion to duty, Major Ortiz contributed materially to the success of operations against a relentless enemy, and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

[Source: Together We Served & http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_J._Ortiz May 2014 ++]

Marine Corps Historical Database ► USMC Casualty Cards

Family members of Marines, who were wounded, killed, deemed a prisoner of war or missing during past wars can now access their loved ones' casualty card using the Marine Corps History Division's new online database. Casualty cards were issued when a Marine was WIA, MIA, KIA or deemed a prisoner of war. Each casualty card lists the military member's unit, service number, type of casualty and date of death. Currently, there are digitized casualty cards for World War II, Interwar period 1946-50, and for war dogs, trained military dogs that served in combat. Korean War cards are scheduled to be complete and released this summer and Vietnam in the fall. While the cards for World War II through Korea are not classified, they can often be very graphic. Therefore, to maintain the dignity and honor of the Marines, the individual cards will only be released, upon request, on a case by case basis. The cards and corresponding database are not comprehensive as there are often gaps or omissions. This does not mean that the event (KIA, WIA, etc.) did not happen, just that the branch did not have a card for the event. To request a copy of the original card, send an email to history.division@usmc.mil or send a request in writing to: United States Marine Corps History Division, Attn: Reference Branch, 3078 Upshur Avenue, Quantico, Virginia 22134. To access the online database, visit the U.S. Marine Corps History Division Casualty Card Databases webpage https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/historydivision/Pages/Frequently_Requested/Casualty-Databases.aspx. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update Jul 18, 2014 ++]

Military History ► WWI | First Battle of the Somme

World War I's First Battle of the Somme is famous chiefly on account of the loss of 58,000 British troops (one third of them killed) on the first day of the battle, July 1, 1916, which to this day remains a one-day record. The attack was preceded by an eight-day preliminary bombardment of the German lines, with expectations that the ferocity of the bombardment would entirely destroy all forward German defenses, enabling the attacking British troops to practically walk across No Man's Land and take possession of the German front lines from the battered and dazed German troops. However the advance artillery bombardment failed to destroy either the German front line barbed wire or the heavily-built concrete bunkers the Germans had carefully and robustly constructed. Much of the munitions used by the British proved to be 'duds' - badly constructed and ineffective. The attack was by no means a surprise to the German forces. The chief effect of the eight-day preliminary bombardment served merely to alert the German army to imminent attack.



The first attacking wave of the offensive on July 1, 1916 went over the top from Gommecourt to the French left flank just south of Montauban. Many troops were killed or wounded the moment they stepped out of the front lines into No Man's Land. Many men walked slowly towards the German lines, laden down with supplies, expecting little or no opposition. They made for incredibly easy targets for the German machine-guns. The British troops were for the most part forced back into their trenches by the

effectiveness of the German machine gun response. Despite heavy losses during the first day - 58,000 British troops alone – the offensive persisted in the following days. Advances were made, but these were limited and often ultimately repulsed. Despite the slow but progressive British advance, poor weather - snow - brought a halt to the Somme offensive on November 18. During the attack the British and French had gained only seven and a half miles of ground, the taking of which resulted in 420,000 estimated British casualties, including many of the volunteer 'pal's' battalions, plus a further 200,000 French casualties. German casualties were estimated to run at around 500,000. [Source: TogetherWeServed July 2014 ++]

D-Day ► **Reporting the Event**

From the first sketchy German radio broadcast to the distribution of images filmed in color, it has taken decades for the full story of the D-Day invasion to come out. At the time, the reporting, filming and taking of photos was neither easy nor straightforward. Here's a look at how news of the D-Day landing got out and how we've been learning about the pivotal World War II invasion ever since.

Radio Confusion. “This is D-Day. We shall now bring music for the Allied invasion forces...”, So said an English-language broadcast from German-controlled Calais Radio in northern France early on June 6, 1944. It was, according to CBS radio in the United States, one of the first reports about an invasion. CBS said the first German reports of the landing reached the U.S. at “12:37 a.m. Eastern War Time” — known as Daylight Savings Time today. But Allied leaders hadn't confirmed the landing yet, and U.S. journalists were wary about Nazi propaganda tricks. A CBS announcer relayed the information, but cautioned: “The Germans are quite capable of faking this entire series of reports.” Finally, nearly three hours later, a reporter cut in on CBS' broadcast and then deferred to a U.S. military officer who read an announcement titled “Communique No. 1” coming in over a crackly line from Allied headquarters in London: “Under the Command of Gen. Eisenhower, Allied naval forces, supported by strong air forces, began landing Allied armies this morning on the northern coast of France.” Ike, as the troops called their commanding Gen. Dwight David Eisenhower, later issued a statement himself, confirming the landing was under way and that it was part of a plan for the liberation of Europe “made in conjunction with our great Russian allies” who were fighting bloody battles westward toward Berlin.

News agencies tell the tale. Across the world, newspaper readers woke up to banner headlines about the invasion. News agencies, including The Associated Press, contributed much of the reporting. From Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force, AP staff writer Wes Gallagher — who later became president of the news cooperative — wrote of “4,000 regular ships and additional thousands of smaller craft” in the powerful assault. The report said initial landings from the English Channel began at 6 a.m. along the Normandy coast between Cherbourg and Le Havre, while gliders and parachutes dropped forces behind German lines. It said the invasion began a day later than originally hoped because of bad weather. “All reports from the beachhead, meager though they were in specific detail, agreed that the Allies had made good the great gamble of amphibious landing against possibly the strongest fortified section of coast in the world,” Gallagher wrote. Another AP reporter, Pugh Moore, described the airborne attack: “Wielding sheath knives and tommy-guns, thousands of American and British paratroops and glider troops swept down on sleeping Cherbourg Peninsula out of the pre-dawn blackness and immediately set about the task of disrupting Nazi rear lines by destroying key bridges, rail yards and enemy strong points.” Also in AP reporting that day was that President Franklin D. Roosevelt spent the morning of the invasion writing a prayer for victory while receiving reports on how the invasion was going.



D-Day beach traffic, photographed from a Ninth Air Force bomber. Note vehicle lanes leading away from the landing areas, and landing craft left aground by the tide

Lost photos. When the first ships hit the coast, one photojournalist was already in the know — and bound to secrecy. Robert Capa was embedded with U.S. troops on Omaha Beach, and his images were the first that Americans saw of the landings — more than a week later. Even then, they didn’t see all of his work. Capa sent four rolls of negatives via couriers to his London editors at Life magazine. Photo editor John Morris had stayed up all night waiting for them. In a recent AP interview, Morris — now 97 — recalled that he sent an assistant to quickly develop the negatives. Haste made waste. “The darkroom lad ... came rushing into my office saying: ‘John, the films are all ruined. You were in such a hurry that I put them in the drying cabinet and turned on the heat.’ There was too much heat and the emulsion ran,” Morris said. Scattered on the darkroom floor were the first three rolls. “There was nothing — just pea soup. “But on the fourth there were 11 frames which had discernible images, so I ordered prints of all of those.” Those frames — images shot from the surface of the English Channel of soldiers, boats and the beach — have been dubbed “The Magnificent 11.”



Some of the first assault troops to hit the Normandy beachhead take cover behind enemy obstacles to fire on German forces as others follow the first tanks plunging through the water towards the German-held shore.

D-Day in color. Decades after the historic day, filmmaker George Stevens came across rare, color movie footage from D-Day and the Allies’ advance that his father had filmed but that had sat untouched in canisters. His father, also named George, shelved his Hollywood career and enlisted in 1942 after seeing Leni Riefenstahl’s Nazi propaganda films. Eisenhower assigned him to head the combat motion picture coverage of the war for newsreels and military archives. But Stevens also took a 16-millimeter camera and boxes of Kodachrome film, for a personal diary that began on D-Day aboard HMS Belfast, a warship that fired the first British volley on that day. The younger Stevens, in a recent AP interview, spoke of the experience of seeing the footage. “This film came on and it was sort of gray blue skies ... and it was on a ship,” he recalled. “It was suddenly, I realized, the morning of the sixth of June — the beginning of the greatest seaborne invasion in history. And I had this feeling that my eyes were the first eyes that hadn’t been there that were seeing this day in color.”

He made a documentary about his father released in 1994 for the 50-year anniversary of D-Day. It features color images of U.S. Gen. George Patton and British Gen. Bernard “Monty” Montgomery; French Gen. Charles de Gaulle arriving in a liberated Paris; flowers thrown by the French onto advancing Allied soldiers; even a red-lipstick kiss smooched on one GI’s face — as well as stomach-wrenching color images of corpses stacked high at the liberated Dachau concentration camp. [Source: The Associated Press | Angela Charlton & Jeffrey Schaeffer | Jun 04, 2014 ++]

WWII PostWar Events ► Returning Russia Soldiers Moscow 1945



The return of victorious Soviet soldiers at a railway station in Moscow in 1945.

Military History Anniversaries ► 1 thru 31 Aug

Significant events in U.S. Military History are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 1 thru 31 Aug**”.

Spanish American War Images 48 ► Port Tampa Camp 1898



A black and white, aerial photo taken in 1898 during the Spanish American War of tents and wagons at a military camp set up at Port Tampa.

WWI in Photos 108 ► French Aeroplane Blessing 1915



The conflict, called the Great War by those involved, was the first large-scale example of modern warfare - technologies still use in battle today were introduced in large scale forms then, some (like chemical attacks) were outlawed and later viewed as war crimes. The newly-invented aeroplane took its place as an observation platform, a bomber, and an anti-personnel weapon, even as an anti-aircraft defense, shooting down enemy aircraft. Here, French soldiers gather around a priest as he blesses an aircraft on the Western Front, in 1915.

Faces of WAR (WWII) ► Captain Joseph J. Foss



Captain Joseph J. Foss wearing the Congressional Medal of Honor in a portrait May 1943. He received the MOH for his heroism at Guadalcanal. In all Foss had 26 aerial victories that equaled Eddie Rickenbacker's World War One record

* Health Care *



TRICARE Claim Appeals Update 01 ► 65,336 Appeals 2009 thru 2013

Appealing a Tricare decision to the highest level within the Defense Health Agency may take nearly a year but that doesn't necessarily mean those decisions go against beneficiaries in the end, according to a report recently provided to Congress. In fact, of the 124 cases that made it to the highest level of appeal from 2009 to 2013, 106 — or 85 percent — of lower level appeals rulings in favor of beneficiaries were upheld. During that time, Tricare beneficiaries appealed 65,336 denials of claims, resulting in 3,913 formal reviews and 303 hearings at the Defense Health Agency level, according to the report. As part of the 2014 Defense Authorization Act, the Senate required the Pentagon provide a report on the Tricare appeals process after beneficiaries and advocacy groups raised concerns about fairness in the process. A few well publicized cases, including one involving a disabled Texas teenager whose horse based physical therapy was recommended by a Tricare hearing officer but later was denied by the Tricare appeals director, prompted the Senate requirement.

The appeals process can involve up to three levels. After beneficiaries receive an initial denial for reimbursement, they can appeal to their regional Tricare contractor; if the denial is upheld, the appeal goes to Defense Health Agency Appeals or Quality Monitoring Contractor, depending on the nature of the case; and finally, an appeal can be made to an independent hearing officer. In 2013, just 27 hearings reached that final level. The hearing officer adopted the lower level recommendations in 23 of those cases and overturned previous decisions in the other four. “There’s no evidence that the director of the Tricare Management Activity summarily overturned hearing officer’s decisions,” Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Jessica Wright wrote in a letter accompanying the report. Still, those facing the appeals process can wait a long time and Tricare is working to improve work flow and case management efficiency, Wright said. According to the report, beneficiaries waited nearly 70 days for a formal review and 298 days for a hearing in 2013. That’s actually an improvement over 2012, when those wait times were 83 days and 342 days, respectively.

Air Force chaplain Capt. Mark Traeger is all too familiar with the lengthy appeals process and what he perceives to be arbitrary decisions by Tricare contractors and the Defense Health Agency. His son Toby, 1, has Down syndrome and Hirschsprung’s disease and needed surgery last September to allow him to defecate properly. The surgery was approved, but a second procedure that entailed using Botox to relax his muscles was denied because it was deemed “cosmetic.” Then, when his parents took Toby home from the hospital the same day as the previously approved surgery, Tricare denied that claim as well, because the approval was for an inpatient procedure only. The Traegers now face a \$17,000 bill for the operation and are at a loss to understand why their claims and appeals have been denied. “As his parents, we’re really familiar with Toby’s medical requirements and we knew how to care for him post-surgery, so the doctors allowed us take him home. But it makes no sense. Tricare would rather we have kept our baby in the hospital overnight?” Traeger said.

Tricare officials could not comment specifically on Traeger case but said the appeals process exists for a reason. “If the recoupment of payments is based on the care not meeting coverage criteria, a beneficiary should have been provided appeal rights and we would encourage them to do so,” Tricare officials said in a written response to Military Times. Traeger said he remains in talks with Tricare and Health Net Federal Services, contractor for the Tricare North Region, to determine what comes next. But in the meantime, the couple paid the bill. “I don’t know what’s going to happen, but anything Tricare could do to at least streamline the process for everyone would be good,” Traeger said.

In her letter to Congress, Wright said DHA has implemented procedures to enhance the performance of the Tricare regional contractors that handle initial appeals. “We will continue to closely monitor this process to ensure it is carried out in a manner required by regulation,” she said. [Source: NavyTimes | Patricia Kime | Jul 29, 2014 ++]

TRICARE School Physical Update 01 ► No Out-of-Pocket Costs

Pencils? Check. Glue sticks? Check. But did you remember to schedule your child’s school physical? As a TRICARE beneficiary, your child can receive annual school physicals, vaccinations and other well-child services, for no out-of-pocket costs. Regular visits to the doctor are important for overall health, especially for children. The visits allow health care providers to track growth and development as well as prevent illness and disease. Well-child visits that support the health and well-being of children from birth until reaching age 6 are all covered by TRICARE. The well-child benefit includes routine newborn care,

comprehensive health-promotion and disease-prevention exams, vision and hearing screenings, and routine immunizations and developmental assessments as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. For children ages 5–11, TRICARE covers annual physicals and vaccinations required for school enrollment.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), measles cases in the United States this year are the highest in nearly 20 years (<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/ed/ciinc/2014-05-22.html>). This is just one example of why it is important for children to receive regular vaccinations. TRICARE covers age-appropriate vaccinations, including annual flu shots, as recommended by the CDC. Help your child get off to a healthy start this fall by adding “annual physical” to your back-to-school checklist. Note: TRICARE does not cover sports or camp physicals. If your child needs a sports or camp physical, you may be required to submit a Request for Non-Covered Services form to your health care provider. Completing this form shows that you know you will be paying for the non-covered service out of pocket. To obtain the form, contact UnitedHealthcare Military & Veterans at 1-877-988-WEST (1-877-988-9378) or visit <http://www.uhcmilitarywest.com>. [Source: TRICARE Health Matters (West) Issue 3: 2014 ++]

Tricare Mental Health Care Update 01 ► Chose of Counselor Types

The TRICARE mental health benefit just got bigger. Beneficiaries can now choose between two qualified mental health counselor types: independently practicing TRICARE Certified Mental Health Counselors (TCMHC) and Supervised Mental Health Counselors (SMHC). TRICARE will authorize TCMHCs as independent providers who meet specific qualification criteria. They must have a master’s degree from a mental health counseling program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) and pass the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination (NCMHCE) by Jan. 1, 2017. TCMHCs can independently treat TRICARE beneficiaries but SMHCs will continue to practice under the referral and supervision of TRICARE-authorized physicians.

Some beneficiaries may worry they won’t be able to continue seeing their current mental health care provider under this new guidance. “This does not have to be a concern,” says Patricia G. Moseley, Ph.D., military child and family behavioral health senior policy analyst at the Defense Health Agency. “TRICARE will not phase out SMHCs but instead will continue to authorize them as TRICARE providers indefinitely. So beneficiaries who are who are currently receiving treatment from a mental health counselor can continue their care with their existing provider whether that is an SMHC or a TCMHC.”

The Defense Health Agency is tasked with making military medicine stronger, better and more relevant for the future. This change moves us one step closer to that goal, ensuring the availability of well-qualified, independent providers for their beneficiaries. For more information about TRICARE mental health coverage, visit <http://www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth>. [Source: TRICARE Benefit Update Jul 18 2014 ++]

TRICARE Prime Update 30 ► FY 2015 Enrollment Fees

TRICARE Prime Enrollment Fees for Fiscal Year 2015 TRICARE Prime enrollment fees are changing for fiscal year 2015 (Oct. 1, 2014–Sept. 30, 2015) for retired service members and their eligible family members, survivors and former spouses. The annual fee for an individual beneficiary will be \$277.92 and

the annual fee for beneficiary family coverage will be \$555.84. There are no TRICARE Prime enrollment fees for active duty service members and active duty family members. For details or more information, visit www.tricare.mil/costs. [Source: TRICARE Health Matters (West) Issue 3: 2014 ++]

Thyroid Diseases ► Hypothyroidism & Hyperthyroidism

Did you know that unusual weight gain, depression and fatigue can be symptoms of a serious medical condition? If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, you have a thyroid condition. If your thyroid is either overactive or underactive, you could experience side effects that can affect your whole life. If you notice any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor. A simple blood test may be able to determine if you are having problems with your thyroid. If your thyroid is not active enough, you have hypothyroidism. This is the most common thyroid disorder. Some of the symptoms include depression, trouble losing weight with proper diet and exercise, always feeling cold, feeling tired and experiencing sudden mood swings. When your thyroid is too active, you have hyperthyroidism. Some of the symptoms include, eye problems such as extreme bulging, dryness and pain; appetite changes and weight loss; anxiety and panic attacks and insomnia. Many treatments are available to help control your thyroid condition. Most are covered by TRICARE. [Source: TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin #265 Jul 18, 2014 ++]

Chickenpox ► Symptoms and Treatment

Chickenpox is a highly contagious viral infection which mainly affects children. A very itchy skin rash with red blisters and mild fever are typical signs. Because most children are now vaccinated, chickenpox (also referred to as varicella) is much less common than it was in the past. If someone comes down with chickenpox, they are contagious after just one or two days, which is before they have any visible rash. But taking precautions and improving hygiene can help to avoid infecting others. Although chickenpox is very unpleasant, it rarely has any serious effects in children who are otherwise healthy. But it may become more severe in newborns and adults, as well as people who have a weakened immune system.



Baby with a typical chickenpox rash and formation of a chickenpox blister

If you get chickenpox you will feel generally ill at first. It causes pain in the joints and headaches, and body temperature rises. The itchy rash typical of chickenpox develops next, usually on your face and torso first, and then spreading to the scalp, and arms and legs. Sometimes mucous membranes and the genitals are also affected. The extreme itchiness is often the main problem, and it can keep you from sleeping. Adults who have chickenpox may not develop a rash, or it may not spread over the body like it does in children. The fever lasts three to five days, but is rarely higher than 39°C. The rash starts as small red spots and bumps, which then grow to form blisters. The blisters contain clear fluid which later turns cloudy. The blisters will then dry up after a few days. Scabs will form and then fall off. It usually takes about three to five days for the blisters to heal. Because the blisters on the skin are in different stages of development at any given time, the phrase “starry sky” is sometimes used to describe their distribution. The total numbers of blisters that someone develops varies widely from person to person. Breaking open the itchy blisters by scratching may cause bacterial infection in the skin, which can leave scars. The risk of scarring is lowest if the crusts just fall off on their own. The amount of scarring will also depend on the size of the blisters.

Chickenpox is caused by the varicella-zoster virus, one of the herpes viruses. These viruses spread by means of droplet infection or direct contact. When someone who is contagious breathes, coughs, sneezes or speaks, very fine droplets of saliva are sent out into the air that can be breathed in by others. Fluid from inside the blisters is also contagious when they break open or are scratched off. Almost any contact with someone who has chickenpox can cause infection – unless you are either vaccinated or have already had chickenpox yourself. Preschool and school-age children between the ages of two and ten are most likely to get chickenpox. Older children or adults who have not been vaccinated can also become infected if they did not already have chickenpox when they were younger. Because most parents now follow this immunization recommendations, the number of cases has fallen considerably, but chickenpox is still one of the most common illnesses in children.

After being infected, it usually takes about two weeks for symptoms to start. But the disease can also develop quite a bit earlier or later. First symptoms may appear one week after infection, or they may take as long as three weeks (incubation period). Most children recover from chickenpox within two weeks. Adults who come down with chickenpox often have a more difficult time than children. That means that the disease may last longer and make them feel much more ill. The risk of developing complications is also higher in adults than it is in children. The virus can also trigger pneumonia in adults who have had a very severe case of chickenpox. Very rarely the viruses may also attack the central nervous system, resulting in meningitis or encephalitis. The risk is greater for people with a weakened immune system, possibly from cancer, AIDS or another serious disease. If you have already had chickenpox once, you are immune for life. You can only get it once.

The varicella-zoster viruses are inactive once someone has recovered from chickenpox, but they stay in the body. Many years later the viruses may reactivate to cause a skin rash that can be very painful. This condition is called shingles (herpes zoster), and it is most common in older people and people who have a weakened immune system. Adults with shingles can infect others who are not immune to the virus. If they are not immune, they will develop chickenpox from the virus. If a woman gets chickenpox within the first six weeks of a pregnancy, the viruses can cause serious birth defects. If a pregnant woman is infected close to the due date, the disease can be life-threatening to the baby, whose immune system is not yet developed enough to fight off the viruses. A doctor can usually diagnose chickenpox by its characteristic rash. Only if the disease is developing in a very unusual way does blood or blister fluid need to be tested for the virus. An antibody blood test may also be used to see whether the person is already immune to the varicella-zoster viruses. This may be necessary if a woman is pregnant.

If you have never had chickenpox and are not vaccinated, you can still get vaccinated within five days of coming into contact with someone who is infected. Doing that can keep you from developing the disease, or at least help make sure you have a milder form. Vaccinations should no longer be given during pregnancy, but a woman who is at risk of infection can also have antibodies injected to fight the viruses. This is called passive immunization, and it is also an option for newborns if their mother has developed chickenpox a few days before or after the birth. In rare cases, people who have been immunized can still get chickenpox. But they will usually have a milder form and their risk of complications is lower. Anyone who has chickenpox should avoid direct contact to other people as much as possible if they might not have had chickenpox. You should be especially careful around pregnant women and people who are at a higher risk of having more severe chickenpox. This also means not spending longer periods of time with other people in the same room.

Usually only the symptoms of chickenpox are treated. But antiviral medication may also be used if symptoms are especially severe, or if someone has a greater risk of complications. Lotions, gels and ointments are often used to relieve itching and dry out the blisters. These kinds of products mostly contain tannins, zinc, menthol or polidocanol. Sometimes oral medication like antihistamines is also recommended to stop the itching. But there is no good-quality scientific research on how effective they are. Symptoms like fever or joint pain can be relieved using medicine that contains acetaminophen (paracetamol). The painkiller ibuprofen is not suitable for children with chickenpox, and children and teenagers can only take acetylsalicylic acid (ASA, the drug in medicines like Aspirin) if it has been prescribed by a doctor and as a last resort. This is because it can cause a rare but dangerous side effect called Reye's syndrome in children and teenagers. A shower is generally better than a long bath because then your skin does not absorb as much water. It is best to carefully pat your skin dry afterwards. [Source: Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care Jun 30, 2014 ++]

Shingles Update 07 ► **Understanding the Disease**

Shingles, also known as zoster or herpes zoster, is a common viral infection that causes a rash that forms painful blisters. Other symptoms of shingles can include fever, headache, chills and upset stomach. According to the National Institutes of Health, shingles can occur at any age, but it is most common between ages 60 and 80. In fact, 50 percent of Americans will have had shingles by the time they are age 80. There is no cure for shingles, but vaccines are available to reduce the risk of developing the condition. Early treatment can minimize complications and reduce severity. To develop shingles, you have to catch chickenpox first, which typically happens in childhood. As people age, their immunity to the chickenpox virus lying dormant in their body declines and their risk of getting shingles increases. Shingles occurs when the varicella-zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox, becomes active again. According to the Mayo Clinic, the most common signs and symptoms of shingles include:

- Pain, burning, numbness or tingling.
- Red rash that begins a few days after the pain.
- Fluid-filled blisters that break open and crust over.
- Itching

It is common for a rash to develop as a stripe of blisters that wraps around one side of the body, but can sometimes occur around one eye or on one side of the neck or face. Prompt treatment can speed healing and reduce complications. Call your doctor right away if you suspect you have shingles. One way to reduce the risk of developing shingles is to get vaccinated. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

recommends adults age 60 and older get the shingles vaccine, whether they recall having had chickenpox or not, as more than 99 percent of Americans age 40 and older have had chickenpox. Talk with your doctor if you have questions about shingles or the shingles vaccine. TRICARE covers the shingles vaccine, Zostavax, for beneficiaries 60 and older. You can get the vaccine at a participating TRICARE network pharmacy or at your doctor's office. [Source: TRICARE Health Matters (North) Issue 3: 2014 ++]

Traumatic Brain Injury Update 39 ► Neuroprosthetic Implants

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) is working to develop wireless, implantable brain prostheses for service members and veterans who suffer memory loss from traumatic brain injury. Called neuroprotheses, the implant would help declarative memory, which consciously recalls basic knowledge such as events, times and places, DARPA officials said. To overcome such memory deficits, "these neuroprosthetics will be designed to bridge the gaps in the injured brain to help restore that memory function," said Dr. Justin Sanchez, DARPA Restoring Active Memory Program manager. "Our vision is to develop neuroprosthetics for memory recovery in patients living with brain injury and dysfunction," he said. The neuroprosthetics developed and tested over the next four years would be as a wireless, fully implantable neural-interface medical device for human clinical use, Sanchez explained.

Each year in the United States, traumatic brain injury affects about 270,000 service members and another 1.7 million civilians, he said. "The traumatic brain injury is really a very devastating injury," said Dr. Geoffrey Ling, an Iraq and Afghanistan war veteran who worked in both war zones studying TBI for former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Navy Adm. Mike Mullen. "One of the biggest consequences of [TBI memory loss] is the ability to do normal functions," Ling said. "How is somebody going to have their livelihood if they can't remember how to do simple tasks?" DARPA's neuroprotheses development is expected to yield "remarkable" benefits for service members and for civilians throughout the world, Ling noted. "But right now our focus here is on those injured service members." In broad funding terms, the implant development would involve assistance from the University of Pennsylvania, which has been selected for an award of up to \$22.5 million, a University of California, Los Angeles team, with an award of \$15 million, and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, with up to \$2.5 million, Sanchez said.

The effects of traumatic brain injury are profound, Ling said. "[TBIs] typically result in a reduced ability or capacity to form new memories or even to produce or recall memories," Ling said, adding that existing treatment options are "very few." In addition to extending available options for injuries and treatment, Sanchez added, "ultimately, we would like to help find solutions for the emotional, social and economic aspects of those injuries." Huge technological and scientific challenges need to be overcome to deliver such medical therapies to injured service members and veterans, he said. They include new medical hardware to interface with the brain and computational models that allow clinicians to interface with the circuits of the brain that produce memory formation and recall, he said. While development of the implant encompasses four years, Sanchez said, one of the goals is to start phasing in some early prototype devices the first year and to collect preliminary data to help guide more complex parts later in the project.

"This is a truly remarkable period of time," Sanchez said. "To think about how we are going to learn about memory in the human brain, to think about the potential for developing those next generation medical neuroprosthetic devices that can provide new options for our injured military personnel, is truly remarkable." [Source: American Forces Press Service | Terri Moon Cronk | Jul 15, 2014 ++]

Traumatic Brain Injury Update 40 ► Sleeping Disorder Treatment

Doctors and experts at the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center want health care providers to try treating sleep disorders caused by traumatic brain injury with some common sense such as a quiet bedroom and staying away from coffee or energy drinks at bedtime. The recommendations mark a shift away from relying solely on medication. In a briefing 16 JUL, Dr. Therese West recommended that health care providers first offer behavioral therapy before prescribing sedatives, antihistamines or benzodiazepines to troops and veterans. West is a subject matter expert at the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC). "We want to make sure that providers are implementing the first line treatments of the stimulus control and sleep hygiene prior to medication," West said. Stimulus control includes removing electronics from the bedroom and creating a proper sleep environment. Sleep hygiene practices include avoiding caffeine and exercising regularly.

According to the DVBIC, more than 300,000 service members have endured traumatic brain injuries since 2000. Sleep disorders are their second most frequent complaint after headaches, West said. Recommendations made public Wednesday were the result of research conducted by military personnel, civilians, and academic experts after frequent complaints by service members about sleep disturbances. Capt. Cynthia Spells, the DVBIC's director of clinical affairs, works closely with service members and veterans to identify critical health issues and develop solutions. At Fort Stewart, Georgia — Spells' previous post before her arrival at the DVBIC — she said, troops were returning with injuries such as mild traumatic brain injury and continuing to exhibit symptoms. They were "not the same" as they were before their concussions, Spells said. Research shows improper sleep could exacerbate TBI symptoms and prevent proper rehabilitation, she added.

The common-sense recommendations made in the DVBIC's clinical guidelines to treat sleep disturbances are not exclusively for service members and military health providers. Spells said the guidance can be used in the medical community to treat anyone with sleep complaints. "All of us tend to take sleep for granted and how important it really is to our day-to-day functioning and our productivity until we don't have access to it, or not enough," Spells said. The DVBIC plans to collaborate with the military as well as the U.S. Surgeon General's office to incorporate the recommendations into the broader health care system. [Source: Medill News Service | Katie Schubauer and Taylor Thornton | Jul 17, 2014 ++]

PTSD Update 172 ► Marijuana Treatment Study Designer Terminated

On 12 MAR, the Health and Human Services Department approved a study protocol designed by Dr. Sue Sisley and sponsor Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, or MAPS, to determine whether cannabis eases PTSD symptoms. Sisley, who was instrumental in developing a research study on the potential effectiveness of marijuana for treating post-traumatic stress disorder then lost her job at the University Of Arizona College Of Medicine. The doctor, an internist and psychiatrist with the school's telemedicine program, was told in June her contract would not be renewed. She received an automatic 90-day extension through September to look for another position. Sisley hired attorney Jason Flores to appeal the termination. Flores said the physician had concerns that the firing will delay the study and have a deleterious effect on veterans. They hoped that Dr. Sisley could be reinstated so she could continue to work and help veterans.



While some states have approved medical marijuana for PTSD, the plant's effectiveness for treating the disorder has never been scientifically vetted in the U.S. The Sisley-MAPS study was to last for three months, with 70 veterans with combat-related PTSD receiving the equivalent of two joints a day — 0.9 grams of marijuana — to smoke or inhale by vaporization. University of Arizona spokesman Chris Sigurdson initially did not cite a reason for Sisley's dismissal but said the personnel decision would not affect the study's timing. He said the university had contacted MAPS and had another principal investigator in mind to lead the study. He could not comment specifically on Sisley's case because it is a personnel matter. But he added that the decision to terminate any contract at the university should not be construed as commentary on a person's performance or failure. "In the case of appointed personnel at the University of Arizona, we can choose not to renew a contract for reasons such as the need for a different area of specialization or emphases, the lack of a continuing position, the need to shift a position or resources," Sigurdson said, citing the university's employee handbook.

MAPS Executive Director Rick Doblin wrote University of Arizona administrators urging them to reconsider Sisley's contract. Saying the study would not exist nor be approved by the federal and state agencies without Sisley's guidance, Doblin called her an "exemplary physician." "Dr. Sisley has a genuine passion for researching marijuana as a possible treatment for PTSD and a long track record providing clinical care to our vets with PTSD. She is also an expert and an educator about the range of medical uses of marijuana," Doblin wrote. Sisley is convinced her termination is related to the marijuana research. Citing opposition in the Arizona Legislature in April to a bill that would have allowed the state to use its medical marijuana fund to support the study, Sisley said she believes the school does not want to cross state lawmakers. Sigurdson said the school had not received any political pressure to terminate any employee and has been proactive in lobbying for the right to conduct marijuana research on campus. He added that the university intended to follow the research agreement signed with MAPS in May to conduct the study. "We don't want anyone to think we don't care about vets because it's absolutely not true," Sigurdson said.

University of Arizona school officials subsequently rejected Sisley's plea to keep her job because, as a contracted physician and professor, she was not entitled to an appeal. "[It's] very disappointing but it's certainly no surprise since UA granted me no fair hearing. No opportunity for due process," Sisley said in an email to Military Times. Sigurdson said Sisley's dismissal would not affect the study's timing and added that the university had contacted MAPS and has another principal investigator in mind to lead the study. However, MAPS rejected that proposal. MAPS executives say that Sisley and veterans plan to attend the Arizona Board of Regents executive committee meeting 7 AUG to support Sisley and request the research be allowed to continue at another Arizona state school — either Northern Arizona University or Arizona State University. Nearly 100,000 people have signed a petition on <http://www.change.org> started by

Ricardo Pereyda, a University of Arizona alumnus and veteran, who says he manages his PTSD symptoms with pot.

The study already has been placed on hold while MAPS waits for the National Institute of Drug Abuse to grow the marijuana needed for the research. As part of the research requirements from the federal government, MAPS must buy Drug Enforcement Agency-licensed marijuana, which is controlled by NIDA. NIDA does not currently have in stock the pot containing the potency of tetrahydrocannabinol and cannabidiol needed for the research. According to NIDA, the marijuana may be ready by January but even then, it's not a certainty. "We are targeting to obtain the cannabis varieties that you are looking for but it is too early to commit their availability in advance," a NIDA official wrote in an email to MAPS. MAPS spokesman Brad Burge said that regardless of what happens with Sisley's appeal, the study will continue. He said the plan is to include a separate study site with at least half the 70 veterans recruited from Colorado. [Source: NavyTimes | Patricia Kime | 14 & 29 Jul 2014 ++]

* Finances *



HAMP Loans ► **Interest Rate Increases for 800K Homeowners**

At-risk homeowners who took advantage of the federal government's emergency plan to help them stave off foreclosure during the housing crisis have a new problem: looming interest rate increases. Banks began sending notices in June, warning that rates for these homeowners will soon rise, and with them, monthly mortgage payments — by an average of about \$200, or nearly 25 percent. Both the increases and the number of homeowners hit by them will be staggered, however, so government officials are hoping the impact will be muted. Still, four states will be hit with half of the nearly 800,000 mortgage payment increases overall — California, Illinois, Florida and New York — and monthly payments will eventually rise as much as \$1,724, so there is certain to be some struggle when the resets hit. Median monthly payments on the loans will climb from \$773 to \$989, according to a report issued by the special inspector general of the Troubled Assets Relief Program.

The Home Affordable Modification Program or HAMP, born at the height of the housing crisis in 2009, gave struggling homeowners the chance to modify their mortgages through a series of adjustments — most commonly, interest rate relief that decreased rates to as low as 2 percent. Banks received incentive payments from the government for each modified loan. The rate relief was not permanent, however. The HAMP program calls for modified loan rates to begin to climb back up to market average rates on the five-

year anniversary of the adjustment, one percentage point each year. The maximum rate will vary, but for most HAMP borrowers, it will be about 4 percent or 5 percent. That means buyers whose loans were modified in 2009 will see their mortgage interest rates rise to 3 percent this year, 4 percent next year, and so on. The first set is slated for adjustment in October. Banks must warn mortgage holders 120 days in advance, meaning the first official notices were sent out at the start of the summer. A second warning note will arrive near Labor Day.

“The majority of HAMP borrowers will experience two or three resets,” said Mark McArdle, chief of the Homeownership Preservation Office, in a Treasury Department blog post. The increases will hit 88 percent of homeowners who took advantage of HAMP — a total of 782,000 mortgage holders. Only 30,000 HAMP loans will reset in October, because very few HAMP loans were approved during the program’s first year. The biggest glut of HAMP resets will come in 2015, when 319,000 homeowners who got HAMP loans in 2010 will face increases. The increase does not impact the roughly 5 million mortgage holders who had their loans modified through “proprietary” programs controlled directly by their banks. McArdle said the Treasury Department is ready to act if the loan resets threaten to trigger more housing trouble. “We will monitor the interest rate resets to ensure that if signs of homeowner distress arise, servicers are ready and able to help by providing loss mitigation options and alternatives to foreclosure,” he said. Back in March, Treasury ordered larger banks to offer financial counseling to mortgage holders, he added. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Bob Sullivan | Jul 23, 2014 ++

Seniors Budget Considerations ► Rising Cost and COLA

In most years, seniors receive a small increase in their Social Security checks, intended to help them keep up with rising costs. But since 2000, the COLA has increased benefits just 41% while typical senior expenses have jumped 84%. That's more than twice the difference! Even though inflation has been at a historic low in recent years, COLA rates are still not keeping up with inflation. To make matters even worse, new changes to COLA calculations, referred to as the "chained" CPI, will have even more of an effect on your Social Security income. Following are eight items to consider in your budget planning for your retirement years:

1. According to national data, housing is the senior budget category that has grown the fastest over the past 13 years.
2. The only senior cost item growing faster than Medicare premiums is petroleum.
3. According to Fidelity Investments, A retiring 65-year old couple needs to have \$220,000 saved to meet healthcare expenses over their retirement.
4. According to CNBC's "America's Cheapest States to Live," Oklahoma has the lowest cost-of-living to help stretch your retirement savings.
5. According to national data, the Budget Killers, Budget Holders, and Budget Savers are as follows:
 - (a) **Budget Killers**
 - Home heating oil – up 251% since 2000
 - Medicare Part B premiums – up 131% since 2000
 - 1 dozen eggs – up 116% since 2000
 - Ground Chuck – up 89% since 2000
 - Homeowners insurance – up 123% since 2000

- (b) **Budget Holders**

- Tube of toothpaste – costs have grown only 6% since 2000
- Telephone, land line – costs have grown at same pace as COLA since 2000
- Apples – costs have grown at same pace as COLA

(c) Budget Savers

- Prescription drugs* – down 12% since 2000
- Athletic shoes – down 2% since 2000
- New car – down 1% since 2000

6. Almost two-thirds of seniors say this year's COLA raised monthly benefits by less than \$19. However, A majority of seniors said their total monthly expenses increased by more than \$119.
7. A majority of seniors spend 11% - 33% of their Social Security benefits on healthcare costs.
8. Experts say seniors will need 40% up to 80% (depending on age) of Social Security benefits for healthcare in the future.

[Source: The Senior Citizens League Jul 22, 2014 ++]

Debt Collection Update 08 ► Stopping Abusive Debt Collection Practices

The next time you're in a room with six other people, look around. One of you is probably being hounded by a debt collector. An April report from the Center for Responsible Lending found that 1 in 7 Americans is on the receiving end of debt collection activities. More concerning is the fact that some of these consumers may not owe the debt at all. Accounts are bought and sold, and balances may be incorrectly stated, or settled accounts erroneously listed as in default. If you've found yourself on the receiving end of debt collection calls – regardless of whether the debt is valid – you'll want to watch the video below to see how Money Talks News finance expert Stacy Johnson recommends you respond. You can access the video by clicking the following site: <http://www.moneytalksnews.com/2014/07/16/4-steps-to-get-debt-collectors-off-your-back/#qk5STiUUulKiEOzK.99>. Then, keep reading the four steps below to stop abusive debt collection practices. Of course, the best way to get debt collectors off your back is to stay out of debt in the first place. However, even debt-free people can erroneously end up on the calling list of abusive collectors.

Step 1: Ask for proof of the debt. When a new debt collector contacts you, your first step should always be to ask for proof of the debt. A popular scam involves collection calls for debt that doesn't even exist. In other cases, third parties buy debts that may have been previously settled or paid off. The Federal Trade Commission says this about what debt collectors must send you to verify the legitimacy of a debt: Every collector must send you a written "validation notice" telling you how much money you owe within five days after they first contact you. This notice also must include the name of the creditor to whom you owe the money, and how to proceed if you don't think you owe the money. After receiving the validation notice, you have 30 days to dispute the validity of the debt. For example, send a copy of the settlement agreement (you did get that in writing, didn't you?) or other documentation if applicable.

Step 2: Stop letting them ruin your day. Nothing puts a damper on your day quite like a debt collection call. Regardless of whether it's a valid debt, get off the phone with these people. Rather than experience that sinking feeling every time the phone rings, ask them to communicate with you in writing. Under federal law, they have to comply. If they don't, see Step 4. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has several sample letters on its website that you can use to request that a collector contact you only by mail, through your attorney or by phone at certain hours.

Step 3: File a complaint about abusive behavior. Let's say the collector continues to call even after you've asked them to stop. Or maybe they're calling your neighbors and telling them you owe a bad debt. Both can be illegal and both should be reported to the government. According to the Federal Trade Commission, debt collectors are prohibited by law from doing any of the following, among other things:

- Calling before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m. unless you have agreed to early or late calls.
- Making threats, using obscenity or calling repeatedly to annoy you.
- Publishing a list of individuals with outstanding debts.
- Falsely claiming to be a lawyer or someone who works for a government agency.
- Discussing your debt with anyone other than you, your spouse and your attorney.
- Claiming you have committed a crime or will be arrested.

If a debt collector does any of the above, let them know you are aware of your rights and will be filing a complaint. Then do so by sending all of the details of the interaction, including the collector's name, date of contact and specific statements made to the attorney general's office in your state, the Federal Trade Commission or the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Step 4: Get a lawyer. Finally, if that doesn't work, it may be time to lawyer up. Federal law allows you to sue a debt collector for abusive behavior, and you could be awarded \$1,000, or possibly more, in damages, plus attorney's fees. That doesn't eliminate the debt if you actually owe it, but it should put a stop to incessant calls and any threatening behavior. If enough other people are having problems with the same collector, you could file a class-action lawsuit and get up to \$500,000 in damages. Some consumer attorneys will take these cases for free, but you have to have great documentation. If you sent a "do not call" letter, it should have a return receipt so you can prove the collector got it. If the company is being abusive on the phone, keep a log to record the time of every call, the person you spoke to and what they said. To find a free lawyer, look for consumer attorneys who offer free consultations.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Maryalene LaPonsie | July 16, 2014 ++]

Reverse Mortgage ► 4 AUG Spouse Eviction Rule Not Retroactive

Here's good news for seniors considering a reverse mortgage: The federal government is about to eliminate a big danger lurking in the most popular reverse mortgage program. As things stand now, federal rules allow mortgage companies to evict widows and widowers whose names don't appear on reverse mortgages issued under the Home Equity Conversion Mortgage or HECM program. According to MarketWatch reverse mortgages allow people age 62 or older to convert their home equity into cash, and almost 600,000 reverse mortgages are currently outstanding nationwide. But the balances on these mortgages become due with interest when the borrower dies. Consequently, a surviving spouse can face eviction if he or she is not listed on the mortgage. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which writes the rules for HECM reverse mortgages, says the rule change takes effect Aug. 4. HECMs, which are FHA insured, are one of three types of reverse mortgages on the market for seniors, but they have by far the largest share of the market.

The new provision in the HECM rules will affect every couple obtaining a reverse mortgage on or after 4 AUG. The provision requires that when a married couple buys a reverse mortgage, both spouses must be named on the mortgage. One of them can be what HUD calls a "non-borrowing spouse." Reverse mortgages will still be potentially risky and expensive, but the rule change will fix a serious problem.

Despite their potential problems, reverse mortgages can play an important financial role for seniors if other options have been exhausted. Used correctly, reverse mortgages can be a valuable tool for seniors to stay in their homes and gain access to money needed for retirement. Seniors who have built up equity in their homes can borrow against a percentage of that and take out a lump sum or a line of credit. The loan doesn't have to be repaid until the homeowner moves out or dies, but borrowers still have to pay property taxes, maintenance and insurance.

Reverse mortgage lenders and brokers note that the loans are highly regulated and require potential borrowers to speak to a certified housing counselor about the potential pitfalls before taking out the loans. The 400-member National Reverse Mortgage Lenders Association, an industry trade group, closely monitors members' advertising, the group's executive told the New York Times. But what about current borrowers? While the HUD rule change protects new borrowers, the effect isn't clear for those who already have reverse mortgages. The new rule will give some protection from eviction to spouses not on an existing mortgage when their husband or wife dies. But the financial requirements for that protection are so steep that few borrowers are likely to qualify, Craig Briskin, a partner at Mehri & Skalet, a Washington, D.C., law firm specializing in class-action suits, told Money Talks News. Briskin's firm and AARP Foundation Litigation are suing HUD in U.S. District Court in Washington over the eviction problem.

If you are married and you have a reverse mortgage on which only one of you is named, your options remain limited. You can:

- Ask your mortgage company if you would be eligible for protection under the new HUD rule.
- Pay off your reverse mortgage.
- Refinance your reverse mortgage, getting a new one with both of your names on the contract.

Paying off a reverse mortgage would be financially impossible for many seniors, however. And, as for refinancing, steep fees and high mortgage insurance charges add up quickly with reverse mortgages; borrowers may now owe too much to qualify for a refinance.

You may wonder why borrowers would keep their spouses' names off their reverse mortgage contracts. But there is a logic behind it: The current HUD rules give both borrowers and reverse mortgage salespeople an incentive to name only the older spouse as a borrower. As ConsumerFinance.gov says: "The older a borrower is, the more money he or she can borrow." The desire to get a bigger loan amount entices some older borrowers to exclude their spouse's name so they'll qualify for more money. Salespeople have an incentive to sell — or even to push — larger loans because their commissions are based on the loan's size. In some cases, aggressive salespeople have dropped second borrowers from loan documents at the last minute, downplaying the significance of the change to the borrowers, Briskin says. Many widows and widowers today "are facing foreclosure because they were left off the reverse mortgage, often without even knowing it," he says. "They didn't realize they were signing away their rights."

For new reverse mortgage borrowers, protection will come at a cost. Since the size of a reverse mortgage is smaller for younger borrowers, adding a younger spouse to your mortgage is likely to reduce how much money you're allowed to borrow, even when the younger spouse is not a borrower on the mortgage. The rules say, "Where a HECM mortgagor has identified a non-borrowing spouse, the mortgagee must base the principal limit on the age of the youngest mortgagor or non-borrowing spouse." Briskin says that, while he is pleased with the protection for new borrowers, he and the AARP foundation will continue pressing HUD in court for further rule changes that prevent evictions of widows and widowers whose spouses obtained reverse mortgages before 4 AUG. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | July 14, 2014 ++]

Saving Money ► Electric Bill

Energy Star. You've probably heard of Energy Star, the partnership between the EPA and the U.S. Department of Energy that identifies energy-efficient products, especially as it relates to energy-intensive items like water heaters and clothes dryers. But Energy Star labels won't just help you save money on big, expensive appliances. Energy Star now offers the label on over 60 different kinds of things, so lightbulbs, TVs, clothes washers, refrigerators, furnaces, fans -- all those -- can earn the Energy Star rating. . And while an Energy Star lightbulb won't yield as much savings as an Energy Star refrigerator, those savings do add up, she says. What's more, many of the Energy Star-qualified products don't cost any more than conventional products. If they do, the EPA won't grant the Energy Star label unless its figures show you'll recoup that extra outlay within five years or less on electricity and water costs.

Nightly Sweep. We all have left fans, lights or appliances on at night while we sleep, but doing so wastes increasingly expensive energy. To save money, do a nightly sweep through the house to make sure all your electric devices are turned off before you go to bed. It may be a pain, but the savings from simply turning everything off can add up quickly. It takes about \$9 per year to run just one compact fluorescent light bulb through the night, \$21 for a conventional bulb and \$35 for a big ceiling fan on high, according to the energy calculators at MichaelBluejay.com. To enlighten you on the impact on your electric bill from lighting, fans, and remotes with suggestions on how to reduce that impact take a look at the video provided at https://www.jea.com/Manage_My_Account/My_Bill/Understand_My_Bill/. It may surprise you to learn that the remotes in your house can be costing you as much as 10 of your electric bill.

Water Heater. Not only does heating your water too hot create the danger of scalding, it can cost you cash. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that a heater set at 140 degrees or higher can waste \$36 to \$61 annually in standby heat losses to keep water at that temperature, and more than \$400 to bring fresh water up to that high temperature. To save even more money, you can turn your electric heater off or turn your gas heater down when you go on vacation to save even more.

Filters. How many times have you put off changing out the filter on your heating, ventilating and air-conditioning system because you didn't want to buy a new filter? Problem is, waiting a long time to change your filter makes your HVAC system less efficient and costs you more in electricity. Dirt and neglect can even cause your expensive HVAC unit to die an untimely death, said Maria Vargas, spokeswoman for the EPA's Energy Star program. Instead, spend a little more to get a reusable filter than you can simply hose off when it gets clogged up with dust and other particles. Using a permanent filter, you'll save money in the long run, cut your utility bill and prolong the life of your HVAC unit. If the disposable AC filters that must be changed every three months are around \$4 each, you can recoup the \$20 to \$40 cost of a permanent filter in as little as 15 months

Appliance Upgrade. Many state and local governments and utility companies offer financial incentives for homeowners to upgrade their appliances to newer, more energy-efficient models. These incentives usually take the form of rebate checks for homeowners who can provide proof of purchase. To save money, find incentives offered in your area by checking the online Database of State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency, or DSIRE at <http://www.dsireusa.org/Index.cfm?RE=0&EE=1>. For instance, searching within the state of New York, DSIRE shows 47 separate tax incentives, grants and rebate programs. That includes a state program that offers a rebate of \$105 for an energy-efficient refrigerator if you recycle the old one, \$75 for a freezer and \$100 for a clothes washer.

Meter Mistakes. Utility workers make mistakes just like the rest of us, and when they make mistakes reading your meter, it can be costly. While you'll probably notice a big error on your utility bill, you may not catch more subtle errors. Make sure you're only getting charged for the electricity you actually used by comparing the meter reading on your utility bill to what you actually see on your meter. If the amount on your meter is lower than the one on your bill, that's a dead giveaway that you're being overcharged. Go to https://search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?p=how+to+read+an+electric+meter+dials&ei=UTF-8&hspar=att&hsimp=yhs-att_001&type=sbc_dial if in doubt as to how to read it check out

Thermostat. Growing up, you probably had a frugal relative who enforced strict limits on how high or low the thermostat could be set. If you don't have one now, a programmable thermostat can play this role for your home automatically. Based on your family's schedule, you can program it to automatically set the target temperature higher in the summer and lower in the winter when your family won't be home. Prices on the thermostats have come down so much -- you can buy one at a hardware store for as little as \$25 -- that installing one is a no-brainer, especially because the EPA estimates the average homeowner can save \$180 per year with a properly programmed unit.

Roof Painting. A 1999 study by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory's Heat Island Group found that in sunny climates, buildings with white roofs required up to 40 percent less energy for cooling than those with black roofs. At current utility rates, that means you could save \$120 or more per year in cooling costs. An inexpensive white, elastomeric coating will do the job and can be found at most hardware stores in states in the southern half of the U.S. Elastomeric coating is a blend of polymers that is durable, flexible and waterproof, and offers the fringe benefit of helping to increase your roof's life span and water resistance. All you'll need to apply it is heavy-duty paint rollers on an inexpensive old paint roller frame, with an extension pole attached to save wear and tear on your back.

Cracks. When you add up the cumulative effect of all the small leaks in your home, it has the effect of leaving a window open all year long. To save money, you can use inexpensive expanding foam or caulk available at your local hardware store to seal cracks in the following areas where cold or warm air typically escapes. Those places include:

- Around windows and doorframes.
- Around the top of the basement wall where the cement or block contacts the wooden frame, known as the rim joist.
- Around the holes in walls where pipes enter and exit your home.

[Source: Bankrate.com | Claes Bell | Jul 15, 2014 ++]

Customer Survey Scam ► How It works

Take our short survey and receive a \$50 gift card! Offers like this claim to be gathering customer feedback for legitimate businesses, but they are really promoting spammy products or they are after your personal information.

How the Scam Works:

- You receive an email or a text message inviting you to complete a customer satisfaction survey. The message says all you need to do is answer a few questions, and you will receive a gift card.

- This scam poses as an Amazon.com customer survey.
- The survey seems normal at first. One recent scam posing as an Amazon.com survey, asks where you shop online, how often you visit the website and how much time you spend on the Internet each day.
- After you complete the survey, the site says you are now entitled to your prize. Unfortunately, the \$50 gift card is "out of stock," so you are instructed to choose one of several dubious products, often something like a weight loss kit and wrinkle cream. The survey was just an elaborate hoax to promote these products.
- In another version of this scam, the "customer survey" asks for personal information, such as address and credit card number. In this scam, con artists are really after information that can be used for identity theft.

How to Spot a Customer Survey Scam:

1. Don't believe what you see. It's easy to steal the colors, logos and header of an established organization. Scammers can also make links look like they lead to legitimate websites and emails appear to come from a different sender.
2. Legitimate businesses do not ask for credit card numbers or banking information on customer surveys. If they do ask for personal information, like an address or email, be sure there's a link to their privacy policy.
3. When in doubt, do a quick web search. If the survey is a scam, you may find alerts or complaints from other consumers. The organization's real website may have further information.
4. Watch out for a reward that's too good to be true. If the survey is real, you may be entered in a drawing to win a gift card or receive a small discount off your next purchase. Few businesses can afford to give away \$50 gift cards for completing a few questions.

To find out more about scams or report one, check out the BBB Scam Stopper which can be found at <http://www.bbb.org/council/bbb-scam-stopper>. [Source: BBB Scam alert Jun 06, 2014 ++]

Phantom Debt Collection Scam ► How It works

Scammers trying to coerce people into paying phantom debts are expanding their intimidation techniques by calling and harassing victims' friends and family. According to the National Consumer League's <http://www.fraud.org>, callers impersonating debt collectors are hoping that social pressure or the fear of losing a job will push victims to fork over the money to pay off the fictitious debt. So how do scammers obtain people's personal information, including the names of loved ones and employers? Surprisingly, it's actually coming from the victims – unbeknownst to them, of course. Fraud.org said: Scammers may be acquiring contact information for a victim's employer or family members through bogus online payday loan applications. Information about consumers who have previously been defrauded [is] also sold and traded among scammers. These so-called "sucker lists" can contain information such as a consumer's home and work address, phone number, occupation, and information about how much money a consumer has spent on previous fake offers.

Debt collectors calling family members and friends is a red flag that something fishy is going on. "Under the federal Fair Debt Collections Practices Act, it's illegal for debt collectors to discuss a debt with anyone but the debtor without permission, but since scam artists are generally trying to collect debt that doesn't exist or is owed to someone else, they don't really give a hoot about following the letter of the

law,” Consumerist said. Victims of these debt collection scams are being cheated out of much more than pocket change, Fraud.org said. Between October 2013 and June 2014, victims lost an average of \$1,748. These tips from Fraud.org will help you protect yourself from becoming the next victim of a debt collection scam:

- Personal info. You should be wary of sharing your personal information, like banking information or credit or debit card numbers, on the phone. If a “debt collector” asks for this information, it’s likely a scam.
- Payday loans. Be careful when you apply for payday loans online because they could be bogus sites. You risk exposing sensitive information about yourself that can be used by criminals.
- Proof of debt. Ask for written proof of the debt you owe, which is an especially good idea if you’re unsure that you owe anything.
- Check it out. If you’re not sure you’re talking to a legitimate debt collector, hang up the phone. Then look through your loan paperwork and call the appropriate lender directly.
- Identity theft. If you are contacted by a scammer, there’s a good chance your personal information has already been compromised. Check out the Federal Trade Commission’s step-by-step process for recovering from identity theft here.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | July 7, 2014 ++]

Tax Burden for Minnesota Retirees ► As of Jul 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 Minnesota:

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 6.875% (food, clothing, prescription and non-prescription drugs exempt); Liquor and beer have a tax at 9.375%. The sales tax rate does not apply to motor vehicles that are subject to the state excise tax on motor vehicles. A few cities and counties also add a sales tax which can be as high as 9.0%.

Gasoline Tax: 47.0 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 53.0 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$2.83/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 5.35%; High – 7.85%

Income Brackets: 3. Lowest – \$23,100; Highest – \$75,891. The tax brackets reported are for single taxpayers. For married taxpayers filing jointly, the same rates apply to income brackets ranging from \$33,770 to \$131,171 (2011). A 6.4% AMT rate is also applicable.

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$3,700; Married – \$7,400; Dependents – \$3,700

Standard Deduction: Single – \$7,250; Married filing jointly – \$10,800. Minnesota allows personal exemption or standard deductions as provided in the Internal Revenue Code.

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security income is taxed by Minnesota to the same extent it is on your federal return. A married couple that receives the average Social Security benefit of \$22,800 and has total income from all sources of less than \$43,400 is not subject to tax on any Social Security benefits, while a

couple with average benefits and total income over \$71,141 must include 85 percent of the Social Security, or \$19,380, in taxable income. If your only income is Social Security, you would not be required to file an income tax return. Pensions, including federal pensions, received while a Minnesota resident are taxable by Minnesota regardless of where your pension was earned. Railroad retirement benefits paid to you by the Railroad Retirement Board are not taxed by Minnesota. If these benefits are included in your federal taxable income, you may subtract them from your taxable income. Taxpayers 65 and older may subtract some income if federal adjusted gross income is under certain limits.

Retired Military Pay: Pensions are taxable.

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

There is a Senior Citizen Property Tax Deferral Program that allows people 65 years of age or older, whose household incomes are \$60,000 or less, to defer a portion of their property tax on their home. This deferral program has two primary advantages for senior citizens. It limits the maximum amount of property tax you pay to three percent of your total household income, and it provides predictability. The amount of tax you pay will not change for as long as you participate in this program. It is not a tax forgiveness program. It is a low interest loan from the state. The deferred tax is paid by the state to your county. Interest will be charged on this loan. The interest rate will be adjusted annually, but will never exceed five percent. A lien will attach to your property.

Minnesota has two property tax refund programs for homeowners: the regular property tax refund, and the special property tax refund. You may be eligible for one or both, depending on your income and the size of your property tax bill. For details refer to <http://www.revenue.state.mn.us/Pages/default.aspx>,

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

Minnesota has an estate tax. The estate tax is a tax on all of the assets of a decedent before they are distributed to beneficiaries. If the estate meets the filing requirements, the estate pays this tax to the IRS and/or the state in which the decedent lived (prorated to any other states where the decedent had property). Many states have a threshold different from the federal level.

Minnesota does not have an inheritance tax. An inheritance tax is a tax on the beneficiaries of an estate (a tax on what you inherit). If you are a beneficiary, you generally do not have to include inheritance on your income tax return. However, you may have to pay income tax if you inherit an IRA/annuity, etc., which includes the decedent's pre-tax dollars. You should be notified by the estate if this is the case. The income tax is owed to the state in which the beneficiary lives (not the state where the decedent lived.).

Visit the Minnesota Department of Revenue site <http://www.revenue.state.mn.us/Pages/default.aspx> for further information,

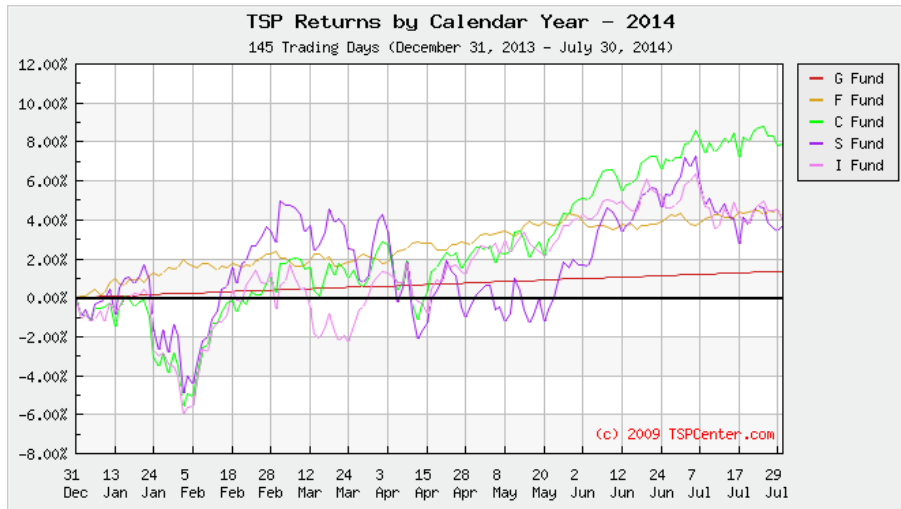
[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#Minnesota> Jul 2014 ++]

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

TSP Share

Prices for Jul 30, 2014

	Close	YTD
G Fund	\$14.4808	+1.36%
F Fund	\$16.3930	+4.14%
C Fund	\$25.7513	+7.86%
S Fund	\$34.9150	+3.70%
I Fund	\$26.5611	+3.90%
L 2050	\$14.8275	+5.43%
L 2040	\$26.0916	+5.06%
L 2030	\$24.5504	+4.65%
L 2020	\$22.6699	+4.01%
L Income	\$17.2434	+2.54%



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

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 Jul 2014

- **Boats.** 12.2 million Boats are registered in the U.S. and the average one is used just 26 days a year, according to the Miami Herald.
- **Safety.** https://www.youtube.com/embed/JHixeIr_6BM?rel=0&autoplay=1&iv_load_policy=3 provides a good object lesson on cell phone use while driving.
- **Congress.** The number of military veterans serving in Congress is continuing to drop. Presently only 20% of America's lawmakers have served in the military and that number is continuing to go down. In the 1970s that number was almost 70%. In this year's primaries so far 105 veterans have won party nominations (down from approximately 135 in the 2012 Congressional elections.)
- **TRICARE.** DoD has awarded Wisconsin Physician Services (WPS) Health Insurance a 6 year \$484 million contract renewal to continue to administer TRICARE for Life. WPS originally was awarded the TRICARE contract in 2004 and has held it since.
- **COLA.** The Consumer Price Index increased another 0.2 percent in June, rising to 234.702. It now stands 1.9 percent above the FY2014 COLA baseline of 230.327.
- **New York.** One in 25 New Yorkers is a millionaire. With 389,100 millionaires, New York ranks fourth on a list of global cities with the highest percentage of millionaires
- **Las Vegas.** Some of the big casinos have altered their Blackjack payouts from three-to-two to six-to-five, according to Pacific Standard. A \$10 blackjack hand no longer wins \$15. The payout is \$12 instead.
- **Cellphones.** Americans will again have the freedom to unlock their cellphones and switch wireless carriers without violating copyright law. House lawmakers passed the cellphone unlocking legislation 25 JUL. The Senate had already approved the bill. It is now a presidential signature away from becoming law.
- **DoD.** About 83,000 Pentagon employees and contractors who held or were eligible for secret clearances had more than \$730 million in unpaid taxes as of June 2012, according to an internal government audit. Of these about 26,000 actually had access to secret documents at the time of the study. Combined, those employees owed about \$229 million in back taxes, GAO found.
- **Iron dome.** To see how Israel's Iron dome defense system prevents incoming missiles from striking protected areas check out <http://manneli.com/movies/Israel-info/Iron%20Dome.html>.
- **50's.** For 4 minutes of 50' nostalgia check out <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj9VKKSv2g>.
- **Philippines.** Muslim rebels in the southern Philippines opened fire on a group of about 50 people who were on their way to a religious celebration on 28 JUL, killing at least 21 and wounding 13, military officials said. The dead included a 2-year-old boy.
- **Gas Prices.** Average as of May 6, 2014

Chart: Ten-Year History of U.S. Average Gas Prices



Base Housing ► For Rent to Other Eligible Tenants

Have perpetually empty houses on your base? Your next new on-base neighbor could be a non-military affiliated civilian getting all the perks of on-base living without any of the sacrifice. If your local base housing company cannot find enough service members or families to live in base housing, a long standing DoD policy allows them to fill those spots with “Other Eligible Tenants,” according to this Air Force fact sheet at <http://www.housing.af.mil/faqs>, including civilians. And, according to the News Journal Bill McMichael 17 JUL article, at least one of those companies is using it.

“The Dolce family loves their new four-bedroom home in the Eagle Heights housing area at Dover Air Force Base. ... Dolce also likes the price: He pays \$1,191 a month for a Dover home with a backyard and garage on a corner lot in what amounts to a gated community. All yard maintenance is included, as are on-site home repairs and emergency response. Ronell, who works in corrections, appreciates the multiple playgrounds and the availability of church services on base.”



McMichael writes that at Dover Air Force Base, housing contractor Hunt Companies, Inc., which manages 25 housing areas, so far has civilians living in six of those — and they say the number is growing. Military officials say they are allowed to look for non-military tenants once occupancy is below 95 percent for at least 90 days. And as the military downsizes housing companies, which manage, renovate and maintain living quarters for the military in exchange for the occupant’s rent, may look increasingly for civilian renters. For a housing contractor empty houses mean lost money. According to the fact sheet, the priority of renter goes like this — “other active duty military, Guard/Reserve military and families, federal civil service employees, retired military and federal civil service, DoD contractors and the general public.”

Without a military ID card, the perks to living on base are limited to the places that don’t check for ID when you enter. So these tenants shouldn’t be able to shop at the PX or commissary or use the fitness or MWR facilities. But they can use the chapels and the parks, playgrounds and restaurants — all of those nice open-access amenities constructed with DoD funds. And while, yes, they’ve had access to this stuff before living on base, there’s a difference between access and living next to it. [Source: PCS, Spouse & Family News | Amy Bushatz | July 21, 2014 ++]

Disney's Armed Forces Salute Update 02 ► Extended thru SEP 2015

The House of Mouse has extended its magic for troops and military family members. Disney's popular Armed Forces Salute was set to expire soon, but Magic Kingdom officials have announced their deep discount program will continue savings through September 2015 for its resorts in Florida and California. Tickets have gone up, because their price is based on their new gate price. The overall discounts remain largely unchanged. For example, while a Four-Day Park Hopper Pass at Orlando's Walt Disney World now costs most people \$354, military visitors will still pay half that at \$177. The current cheaper military ticket prices are still in effect for any trips before Sept 28, 2014. So, if you're still thinking about trip this summer, that same 4-day Park Hopper will cost only \$169. The full range of ticket options can be viewed at <http://www.militarydisneytips.com/Disney-Armed-Forces-Salute.html>. Not eligible for these ticket discounts are: unaccompanied dependents (children), prior service members who did not retire, foreign military members without US issued CAC, DoD civilians, and other service connected disabled who are not DAVPRM or 100%.



Room discounts at Disney resorts also remain the same at 30 percent to 40 percent off regular prices under the new program. There are some restrictions and block-out dates, so be sure to read the fine print when planning your vacation. There are also a limited number of rooms available at the military discount prices, both by resort and room type, so the earlier you book the better. Eligibility extends to:

- Current military Active, Reserve, National Guard, and Coast Guard members.
- Retired Active, Reserve, National Guard, and Coast Guard personnel.
- 100% Service Connected Disabled with the DAVPRM code on their military issued ID.
- Spouses or Unremarried Widows of the above, if the member is unable to go. (**Note:** The Disney Armed Forces Salute benefit is for the member only. While spouses may use their member's benefit, they are not entitled to the benefit themselves and cannot stack their use on top of the members. Non-spouse dependents are not eligible).
- Foreign partners/Coalition partners stationed at a US base are eligible. They must have a permanent US Military issued ID (CAC card with blue stripe).

[Source: NAUS Weekly Update Jul 25, 2014 ++]

Adolf Hitler Assassination Attempt ► 70th Anniversary

Germany on 20 JUL honored a group of Nazi-era officers who tried to kill Adolf Hitler 70 years ago. The plot — portrayed in films such as the 2008 Hollywood movie “Valkyrie” — helped establish a principle under which German soldiers today are encouraged to defy orders if they would result in a crime or violate human dignity. In a somber ceremony, President Joachim Gauck called the July 20, 1944, bombing of

Hitler's Wolf's Lair headquarters in Eastern Prussia a "significant day in German history" for showing the world that there were Germans who opposed the Nazi regime. "It was from this legacy that the newly founded Federal Republic, once it belatedly recognized the significance of the military resistance, was able to draw legitimacy," Gauck said.



German President Joachim Gauck, right, attends a July 20 wreath-laying ceremony at the courtyard of the Bendler Block, a part of the German Defense Ministry, in Berlin.

Hitler survived the bombing and was able to continue his military campaign to conquer Europe and eradicate the continent's Jewish population for another year. Four officers including Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg were executed without trial within hours of the failed assassination. Some 200 supporters were killed later or driven to suicide. While the July 20 conspirators were among the most prominent examples of German resistance against the Nazis, historians have sought in recent years to highlight other, lesser-known men and women who opposed the regime. "Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg has become a symbol of the resistance. The broader public hardly knows the names of the many others," said Linda von Keyserlingk, a historian at Germany's Military History Museum in Dresden, which recently opened a new exhibition about the July 20 plot. Earlier this month Germany's Foreign Ministry honored Ilse Stoebe, who worked at the ministry during the war and tried to warn the Soviet Union of Hitler's plans to attack it. She was executed in 1942. [Source: The Associated Press | Frank Jordans | Jul 20, 2014 ++]

Living Legacy Project ► Trees to Honor Fallen Civil War Soldiers

Visitors along the scenic byway between Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and Charlottesville, Virginia, will begin to notice clusters of trees lining the route. But it's much more than a beautification project. The 180-mile corridor will honor fallen soldiers: 620,000 to be exact. To commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, the Journey through Hallowed Ground Partnership's Living Legacy Project will be planting or dedicating a tree for each man who died in the line of duty from 1861 through 1865. Shuan Butcher, the organization's director of communications, says 1,500 trees already have been planted or dedicated, and the goal is to have all 620,000 grown to maturity by the time the country honors the bicentennial of the Civil War in 50 years. "It would be great to see 620,000 trees in bloom and really contributing to not only the landscape in terms of beautification, but honoring the individuals who fell for the cause and fell for what they believed in," he says.

The project will showcase four types of trees, all in the red family, the color symbolizing courage and bravery: red bud, red oak, red maple and red cedar. The trees will be geotagged, and visitors can access information about each soldier represented, when available, including photos, diaries and records from the 1860s. According to the National Park Service, half of the Civil War's fallen soldiers remain unknown, but even those without records will have a tree dedicated in their honor, Butcher says. "The idea is when visitors and people who want to honor their ancestors visit this hallowed ground, and they see certain trees dotting the landscape, they'll take notice," Butcher says. "We want to create what we're calling the 'cherry blossom effect' just by the sheer mass of these trees that bloom at one time." On June 29, the Marine Corps helped dedicate 500 trees at a ceremony south of Leesburg, Virginia. "For individuals who are serving or who have served in more modern times, this is a chance to connect with people who have served generations before us," says Butcher, an Army veteran.



Marine Capt. Christopher Hall and Cub Scout Brayden Scott tag one of what will eventually be 620,000 ceremonial trees, each commemorating a Civil War soldier who fell in battle.

Marine Staff Sgt. Joshua Miles, with the Battle Color Detachment, participated in the 29 JUN dedication ceremony, where the United States Marine Drum & Bugle Corps performed patriotic music. Miles says events like this are always important, especially if it's anything related to a fallen service member. "It doesn't matter when those service members fell — whether it was the Civil War or Iraq or Afghanistan," he says. Besides its pertinence to service members, Butcher says the Living Legacy Project is a good way for individuals to get involved because many Americans have ancestors who fought in the Civil War, and they can honor that person by planting or dedicating a tree. "It's a great way to tell their story because most of the stories have never been shared," he says.

Each tree costs the project about \$100, which includes site preparation, planting/dedication and lifetime maintenance.

Virginia arborist Peter Hart, who worked with the organization on the project, has a personal interest in honoring soldiers from the Civil War. Two of his great-great grandfathers survived the conflict, while three of his great-great uncles were killed. "Families were torn apart," Hart says. "My great-great grandfather was wounded, and then he was mustered out in 1862 and then he reenlisted on his own on June 3, 1863, with his little brother." The brother, Justin Hart, was dead six months later. "I try to imagine what [my great-great grandfather] went through," he says. "Was he there when his little brother was killed?" The project seems overwhelming at times, Hart says, but "I thought to myself, if this nation can sacrifice 620,000 lives, then we can certainly plant 620,000 trees." It's a nice symbolic statement to have something living to represent a human who died, he says. "I personally feel like the country needs to be reminded of the people who have lost their lives," he says. "It's so present because of all the American men and women

who were killed in the recent battles. I try to imagine what it'd be like if 150 years from now nobody ever paid any respect to them. The time separation ... between today and the Civil War should be irrelevant." To donate a tree or find more information, visit <http://www.hallowedground.org/llp>. [Source: NavyTimes | Charlsy Panzino | Jul 18, 2014 ++]

WWII Ads ▶ **Campbell Soup**



Army rations for our soldiers in the field are cooked and canned for them in the U. S. A. They include appetizing, amply nourishing meat-and-vegetable combinations.

FIRST CLASS FOOD

for a FIRST CLASS FIGHTING MAN

OUR MEN OVERSEAS, brought up on good American home cooking, are getting the kind of food they need and deserve.

Even when miles away from Company mess, they eat rugged, good-tasting meals—food well balanced, well cooked the way an American likes it.

The nation's food canners have cooperated with the Army Quartermaster Corps in the development of these U.S. Army field rations. From Campbell's kitchens, for instance, come a hearty meat-and-vegetable stew and other army field rations—food cooked the American way, then sealed into cans, to be eaten later, thousands of miles away.

The making of army field rations is the Number One job in Campbell's kitchens these days. Millions upon millions of cans are being

produced... prepared and cooked with precise care so that each can of food measures up to the high standard that has been set by the Army Quartermaster experts.

Food for our fighting men comes first. But hearty, fortifying food for folks on the home front is vitally important, too. Campbell's Soups, deep and rich in flavor, give just the good, sound nourishment that war-busy families need these days. That is why so many

homemakers are building meals frequently around hearty Campbell's Soups.

The makers of Campbell's Soups are proud to play a part in feeding a nation at war—making food for men on the fighting fronts as well as for the families at home.

Army field rations, cooked in the U. S. A., go to our fighting men packed in cans. So if tin cans are collected in your locality, salvage every can you open. Remove label, wash, fold in both ends and flatten. Tin is vital to the war!



IRS EITC ▶ **\$15.6B in Bad Payments Made in FY 2013**

In 2010, a new law took effect in an effort to stem Uncle Sam's payments to folks who aren't entitled to them. The Earned Income Tax Credit, or EITC, is among the payments deemed high-risk for such improper payments. Four years later, this tax break for lower-income workers is still proving problematic. A recent

Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration report notes that the IRS itself estimates that around a quarter of EITC payments were issued improperly in fiscal year 2013. Those errant tax breaks are estimated to have cost the U.S. Treasury between \$13.3 billion and \$15.6 billion

The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Government Operations, conducted a 9 JUL hearing on how well the IRS and other federal agencies are complying with the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act of 2010. This law basically required federal agencies each year to estimate the amount of improper payments they issue. An improper payment is defined as one that should not have been made or that was made in an incorrect amount or to an ineligible recipient. This includes not just money sent to the wrong recipients, but also overpayments, underpayments and payments that were made without proper documentation. The tax collector is not alone in sending out money that shouldn't be paid. The subcommittee also heard from the Defense Department and Health and Human Services. All told, according to the Government Accountability Office testimony, federal agencies reported almost \$106 billion in improper payments in 2013. Those payments were made across 84 federal programs, spread among 18 agencies.

The good news is that the 2013 amount was a billion less than what was improperly paid out the prior year. Testimony from the Office of Management and Budget also indicates that more recently, improper payment rates in major programs across the government have been reduced. Areas showing improvement, according to OMB, include Medicaid, Medicare Advantage (Part C), Unemployment Insurance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Pell Grants, and two Social Security programs -- Supplemental Security Income and Retirement, Survivors and Disability Insurance. Plus, says OMB, in 2013 federal agencies recovered more than \$22 billion in overpayments through payment recapture audits and other methods.

Unfortunately for the IRS, the TIGTA report is not such good news. The EITC is a major anti-poverty program, but it has long been the target of lawmakers because of regular reports of abuse. Part of the problem is the tax break's complexity. This leads to honest errors as well as fraudulent claims by taxpayers and also makes it more difficult for the IRS to enforce, testified IRS Commissioner John Koskinen. That said, the commissioner acknowledged that his agency needs to do a better job. "It's an unacceptable rate of improper payments, an unacceptable rate of dollars out the door, and we need to do whatever we can to make a dent in it," Koskinen told the subcommittee. [Source: Bankrate.com | Kay Bell | Jul 15, 2014 ++]

National Debt Projection ► Will Exceed 100% of GDP by 2039

In testimony before the Committee on the Budget, U.S. House of Representatives the congressional budget Office (CBO) made a statement which summarizes their long-term budget projections that were released in the report The 2014 Long-Term Budget Outlook (July 2014). In brief, between 2009 and 2012, the federal government recorded the largest budget deficits relative to the size of the economy since 1946, causing its debt to soar. The total amount of federal debt held by the public is now equivalent to about 74 percent of the economy's annual output, or gross domestic product (GDP)—a higher percentage than at any point in U.S. history except a brief period around World War II and almost twice the percentage at the end of 2008. If current laws remained generally unchanged in the future, federal debt held by the public would decline slightly relative to GDP over the next few years, CBO projects. After that, however, growing budget deficits would push debt back to and above its current high level. Twenty-five years from now, in 2039, federal debt held by the public would exceed 100 percent of GDP, CBO projects. Moreover, debt would be

on an upward path relative to the size of the economy, a trend that could not be sustained indefinitely. At http://www.cbo.gov/publication/45525?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzEmail&utm_content=812526&utm_campaign=Hourly_2014-07-16%2011%3a00 their entire the entire report can be accessed. [Source: <mailto:webmaster@cbo.gov> msg dtd. Jul 16, 2014 ++]

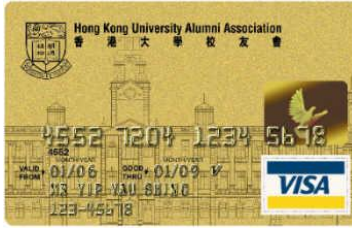
Credit Card Number ► How to Read and Determine Validity

Do you know what the numbers mean on the front of your credit card? Are they just a random accumulation of numbers? Or do they serve a specific purpose? Much like the VIN on your car, credit card numbers are set up to identify certain components of your account. The VIN tells you what manufacturer made your car and even what color it is. The credit card number tells what company issued your credit card but also a great deal about your account information.

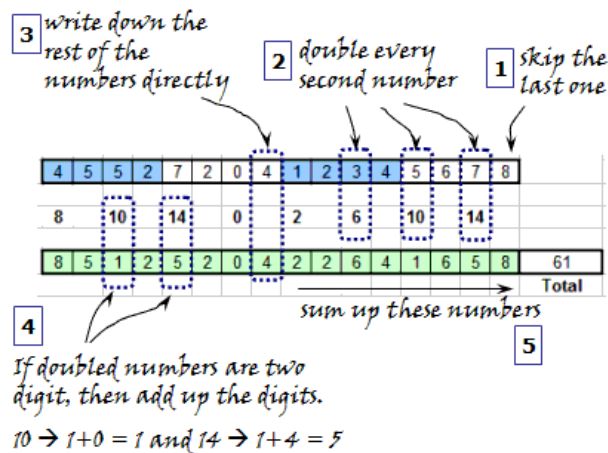


- The first number of a credit card is called the major industry identifier. It will signify the industry of the issuer. Travel and entertainment cards begin with the number 3, so all American Express (34 and 37) and Diners Club (30) begin with a 3.
- The numbers 4 and 5 represent the financial and banking cards. All Visa cards start with a 4, MasterCards with a 5. The number 6 signifies the merchandising and banking cards, and that is why all Discover cards start with a 6. The petroleum industry is represented by 7, so all gasoline credit cards begin with that number.
- Following the major industry identifier number are the specific numbers that represent the bank that issued the card. Then come the numbers that identify your individual account.
- The final digit on any credit card is known as the check digit, and it is determined by a complex algorithm created by an IBM scientist, Hans Peter Luhn, in 1954. While every other digit has a special meaning, this check digit is randomly selected and helps deter thieves from inventing credit card numbers, because only one out of every 10 will be valid.

Have you ever wondered if those numbers on the fake plastic or cardboard credit cards that come with the “preapproved” offers are real or imaginary? If they are not valid, how do you know it?...Just apply the Luhn check and all the those fake credit cards will invariably fail. Here is an example of a VISA credit card



1. Look at the expiry date to see if it's still valid!
2. Note that the credit card number starts with "4"...so it is indeed a VISA issued credit card (VISA cards start with "4" and MasterCard/Maestro cards start with "5").
3. Now, apply the Luhn algorithm to this card. To make it easier to do below is a schematic of the steps towards the Luhn check for this card number 4552 7204 1234 5678:



4. In this case, when we sum up the total, it comes to 61 which is *not* perfectly divisible by 10, and hence this credit card number is **invalid**.

If such a credit card number is ever generated, the value of the check digit would be adjusted in such a way as to satisfy the Luhn condition. In this case, the only value of the check digit, that will create a valid credit card number, is 7. Choosing 7 as the check digit will bring the total to 60 (which is perfectly divisible by 10) and the Luhn condition will be satisfied. So the valid credit card number will be 4552 7204 1234 5677. Will knowing any of this change the way you swipe your card? Probably not. Nevertheless, it does give you insight into the complexity of the development of a credit card number. [Source: LowCards.com | Lynn Oldshue | Jul 14, 2014 ++]

Drones ► Private Eyes in the Skies

Investigators are taking drones to new heights — using the remote-controlled aircraft to catch New Yorkers cheating on spouses, lying about disabilities and endangering their kids. “People want you to believe there’s all this negativity associated with drones . . . but they could be a very helpful tool,” said Olwyn Triggs, a gumshoe for 23 years and president of Professional Investigators Network Inc. in Glen Cove, LI. Triggs recently used a drone to find an upstate man suspected of insurance fraud. Signs on his rural property warned that trespassers would be shot, so she sent in her 2-pound, foot-long Phantom 2 Vision

quadcopter, which costs about \$1,000. “He was supposedly fully disabled,” she said. “We knew he was active but couldn’t prove it because of the layout of the property. I couldn’t risk being shot.” So, as a drone hovered above, snapping images of the man chopping wood, Triggs manned the controls from behind a vehicle about 1,000 feet away. “You need to think outside the box when someone’s acutely aware,” she said, adding the fraudster pretended to walk with a cane. “That’s when you’ll consider using a drone.”



Still, the legality of piloting drones is a gray area. The Federal Aviation Administration deems it illegal to fly them for commercial use, including film and television. But since a federal judge dismissed a \$10,000 fine against a commercial drone user in March, many businesses are going ahead and flying them anyway. “A lot of PIs bought drones [after the ruling],” Triggs said. “But before you use a drone, you’re calling everyone you know just to be sure.” PIs are also using drones to catch cheating spouses. Matthew Seifer recently pretended to test-fly a drone in Central Park. He was actually recording a husband fooling around with a female coworker from 100 feet away. “Sometimes the best thing is to be right there in plain sight,” said Seifer, president of Long Island- based Executive Investigations. “We had to get in and get out real quick,” he added. “We deployed a drone for eight minutes and got five minutes’ worth of video. That was the closure our client was looking for.”

Seifer operates several Phantom models, including the Phantom 2 Vision, and said drones are a “selling point” for clients. Firms like his are charging double for their use — hiking the hourly rate from \$47 to \$97. In another recent case, Seifer was having trouble tailing a fast-driving Long Island doctor suspected of hanky-panky. So the PI parked behind a steakhouse where the doc had taken a lover. “We raised the drone above the restaurant, [and] he was engaged in a sexual act in the front seat of his car,” the investigator said. “[Drones] get us those types of money shots.” Drones have also been used in custody battles. This year, Seifer’s team sent a drone to Sheepshead Bay to record a dad drinking and partying on a boat with his kids. The PI snapped the boat’s serial number and images of the kids, who were not wearing life jackets, from more than 300 yards away. Seifer’s footage has also busted criminals. He recently helped a homeowner in another state file an insurance claim against tenants accused of running a dogfighting ring. “We couldn’t get access to the back of the house through regular means,” Seifer said. “We utilized the drone to get evidentiary video of doghouses, chains and certain individuals.” He turned over footage to authorities, and four people were arrested. The tenant lost his lease. “Clients are amazed,” Seifer said. “The drones are a game changer.” [Source: New York Post | Kate Briquet | Jul 13, 2014 ++]

Normandy Then & Now ► Omaha Beach near Colleville sur Mer



June 6, 1944: Members of an American landing party assist troops whose landing craft was sunk by enemy fire off Omaha beach, near Colleville sur Mer, France on June 6, 1944. At the same location on August 22, 2013 A tourist carries a bucket and spade to her child on the same section of beach.

Have You Heard? ► Naval Humor

"THE FIVE MOST DANGEROUS THINGS IN THE US NAVY"

A Seaman saying "I learned this in Boot Camp..."
A Petty Officer saying "Trust me, sir..."
An Ensign saying "Based on my experience..."
A Lieutenant saying "I was just thinking..."
A Chief chuckling, "Watch this shit..."

NOW THEY TELL ME

During a commercial airline flight a Navy Chief was seated next to a young mother with a baby in arms. When her baby began crying during the descent for landing, the mother began nursing her infant as discreetly as possible. The Chief pretended not to notice and, upon debarking, he gallantly offered his assistance to help with the various baby-related articles. When the young mother expressed her gratitude, he responded, "Gosh, that's a good looking baby...and he sure was hungry!" Somewhat embarrassed, the mother explained that her pediatrician said breast feeding would help alleviate the pressure in the baby's ears. The Chief sadly shook his head, and in true US Navy fashion exclaimed..... And all these years I've been chewing gum.

NAVAL OFFICERS and NAVY CHIEFS

A group of Chiefs and a group of Naval Officers take a train to a conference. Each Naval Officer holds a ticket. But the entire group of Chiefs has bought only one ticket for a single passenger. The Naval Officers are just shaking their heads and are secretly pleased that the arrogant Chiefs will finally get what they deserve. Suddenly one of the Chiefs calls out: "The conductor is coming!". At once, all the Chiefs jump up and squeeze into one of the toilets. The conductor checks the tickets of the Naval Officers. When he notices that the toilet is occupied he knocks on the door and says: "Ticket, please!" One of the Chiefs slides the

single ticket under the doors and the conductor continues merrily on his round. For the return trip the Naval Officers decide to use the same trick. They buy only one ticket for the entire group but they are baffled as they realize that the Chiefs didn't buy any tickets at all. After a while one of the Chiefs announces again: "The conductor is coming!" Immediately all the Naval Officers race to a toilet and lock themselves in. All the Chiefs leisurely walk to the other toilet. Before the last Chief enters the toilet, he knocks on the toilet occupied by the Naval Officers and says: "Ticket, please!"

Moral of the story? -- Officers like to use the methods of the Chiefs, but they don't really understand them.

MASTER CHIEF AND 3 LIEUTENANTS

One day, a Master Chief went to the Officer's Club with his Captain to eat lunch. When they entered the main dining room, they found the place was crowded. They did notice three Lieutenants sitting at a table with two empty chairs, so the Captain asked them if they could join them. They promptly invited them to join them. They ordered lunch and joined them in conversation as they ate. At one point, the Master Chief mentioned he had observed characteristics about many officers from which he could determine the sources of their commissioning. The Lieutenants were eager to hear about this and asked if he could tell how each of them had been commissioned.

The Master Chief turned to the Lieutenant on his left and said he went through ROTC. The Lieutenant confirmed that was correct and asked how he had noted this. The Master Chief replied that the Lieutenant, through his conversation, seemed to have a strong academic background but limited military experience.

The Master Chief then told the Lt on his right that he had gone through OCS with previous enlisted service. The Lieutenant confirmed this was correct and also asked how he had determined this. The Master Chief said, again through his conversation, that the Lieutenant seemed to have a firm military background and a lot of common sense.

The Lieutenant across the table from the Master Chief asked if he had determined his source of commission. The Master Chief replied that the Lieutenant had graduated from the United States Naval Academy. The Lieutenant stated that was correct and asked if he had noticed his high level of intelligence, precise military bearing, or other superior qualities acquired at the United States Naval Academy. The Master Chief replied that it was none of these that led to his determination. He had simply observed the Lieutenant's class ring while he was picking his nose.

ROUTE TO BECOMING AN ADMIRAL

Three men are sitting stiffly side by side on a long commercial flight. After they're airborne and the plane has leveled off, the man in the window seat abruptly says, distinctly and confidently, in a low voice, "Admiral, United States Navy, retired. Married, two sons, both surgeons."

After a few minutes the man in the aisle seat states through a tightlipped smile, Admiral, United States Navy, retired. Married, two sons, both judges."

After some thought, the fellow in the center seat decides to introduce himself. With a twinkle in his eye he proclaims: Master Chief Petty Officer, United States Navy, retired. Never married, two sons, both Admirals."

SEAMANSHIP TEST

One time during the underway watch the OOD decided to test a Chief Petty Officer's seamanship.

"Chief, what would you do if the forward watch fell off the side of the ship?" "Easy, sir, I'd call 'Man Overboard' and follow the Man Overboard procedures."

"What would you do if an officer fell overboard?" "Hmmm," The Chief said, "Which one, sir?"

They Grew Up to Be? ► Parton~Dolly



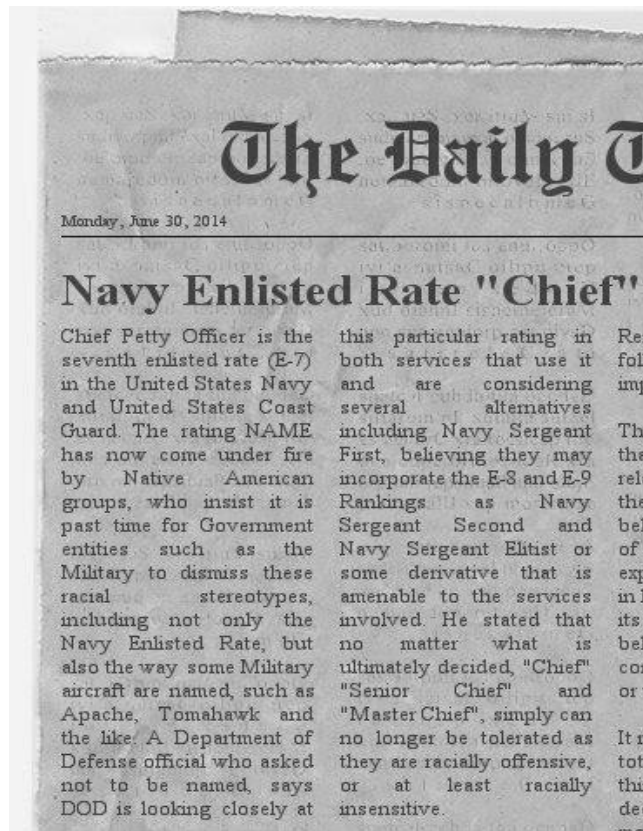
“The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by our nation.”

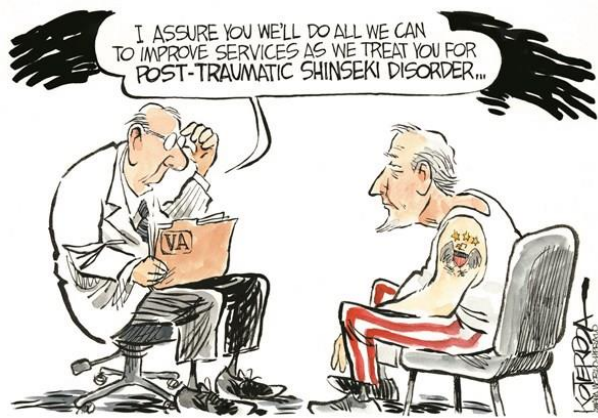
--- **George Washington (1732 – 1799)** America’s 1st President and Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army



Interesting Ideas ► **Can't Read the ATM Screen!**



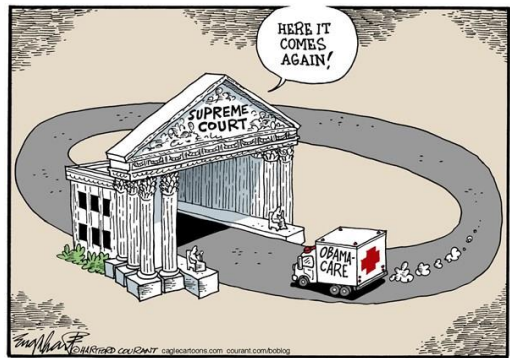




Husband and wife
 had a FIGHT, Wife called up her mom and said; He fought with me again, I am coming to live with you. Mom said, No darling, he must pay for his mistake. I am coming to live with you!!!



Affordable pool for retirees and veterans. Problem is how to get in and out!



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Lt. James “EMO” Tichacek, USN (Ret)

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