

RAO BULLETIN

15 September 2021

PDF Edition



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2. To read the articles open the website and slew to the page number of the article you are interested in.
3. Numbers contained within brackets [] indicate the number of articles written on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to raoemo@sbcglobal.net 'or' raoemo77@gmail.com
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DoD



NDAA 2022

Update 01: \$25 Billion More Proposed Ahead of House Bill's Markup

House Armed Services Committee ranking member Mike Rogers (R-AL) planned to offer an amendment to his panel's draft 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, which was set to be debated in committee on 1 SEP. It would increase weapons procurement spending by \$9.8 billion, drawing significantly from the military's unfunded priorities lists. Defense News obtained multiple summaries of the amendment, which were circulating on Capitol Hill 30 AUG. The amendment came as HASC Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA) unveiled a draft NDAA that matches Biden's request of \$744 billion for Pentagon and Energy Department defense programs.

Republicans, and some Democrats, have said for weeks that Biden's national defense proposal, which planned to divest some ships and aircraft to prioritize modernization, is inadequate to deter a rising China. Rogers said in a statement he hopes to see the amendment supported. "We cannot afford to cut corners and play politics with our national security," Rogers said. "President Biden's proposed defense budget for FY22 was wholly inadequate — leaving our men in women in uniform in a vulnerable position and projected weakness to our adversaries." Rogers' amendment would

- Bar the Navy from decommissioning three aging cruisers, as part of a \$4.7 billion seapower spending addition over Smith's mark.
- Include \$1.5 billion for another DDG-51; \$1.2 billion for an additional amphibious assault ship; \$668 million for an added oiler and \$567 million to expand procurement to three Virginia-class submarines per year.
- Add \$1.7 billion for air power, including \$394 million for four additional KC-130Js for the Navy and Marine Corps; \$340 million for two additional P-8 Poseidons for the Navy; and \$212 million for nine additional UH-60 Blackhawks for the Army National Guard.
- Propose \$878 million in ground vehicle additions, including \$234 million for Abrams tank upgrades; \$183 million for HMMWV modifications; \$139 million for Stryker upgrades and \$120 million for the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle program.

- Add \$5.2 billion for research, development, test, evaluation accounts, including \$3.7 billion for “emerging technologies,” according to one summary. Budget lines for military construction and facilities improvements would net another \$3.8 billion in total.

At least one Democrat, House Armed Services Committee vice chair Elaine Luria, had announced support for the Rogers amendment. Luria, who represents a shipbuilding-heavy district in Virginia, lauded the bill’s “significant investments” in shipyards and naval vessels that would be used to deter China in Pacific waters. “Without additional resources, we will lose another generation of shipbuilding in this country, and we will be less prepared to defend both the U.S. and our allies’ interests,” Luria said. “I intend to join Ranking Member Rogers and support the amendment adding \$25 billion to our defense budget.”

Last month, the evenly-divided Senate Armed Services Committee advanced a version of the FY22 NDAA that included \$25 billion above Biden’s proposal. A FY22 defense appropriations bill that tracks with Biden’s budget advanced out of the House Appropriations Committee, but with less support. In the narrowly divided House and the 50-50 Senate, Democrats will likely need Republicans to pass defense measures. For months, Rogers has been among the Republicans signaling that the path to gaining GOP support involves a defense plus-up. Smith and other lead Democrats have acknowledged that Republicans have significant leverage in that push.

Earlier this month, Smith told Defense News he doesn’t agree with the increase but is open to the idea as a means of advancing the bill. “The people who want to spend more than the Biden number have built a lot of support, and yes, I think that [\$25 billion increase] is a potential bipartisan pathway,” Smith said. “I don’t support it, I don’t think that’s where we should go, but at the end of the day, I have one vote.” He added, “The reality is, as we’ve seen with the defense appropriations bill, we do not have the votes to pass it with just Democrats, and that’s the worst kept secret in the building,” “And it is very important to pass a defense bill; it has a lot of important policies that we’re trying to get done.”

Subsequently the panel voted 42-17 during its markup of the fiscal 2022 National Defense Authorization Act on Wednesday, with 14 Democrats joining Republicans on the \$23.9 billion measure 1 SEP. Though appropriations bills ultimately set spending levels, the vote is a strong step toward boosting defense after the Senate Armed Services Committee, on a bipartisan basis, advanced its own \$25 billion increase in July. If approved, the new top-line spending level for defense would be \$740 billion.

Also on 30 AUG, more than two dozen House Democrats warned against an increase, in a letter led by progressive Reps. Mark Pocan and Barbara Lee to Smith, rebuking the SASC’s plus-up when “America’s largest national security thread is a global pandemic.” “Surpassing the President’s request by such a larger and unwarranted amount should not be the starting position of the House Armed Services Committee, particularly when current defense spending levels should already be reduced,” they wrote. [Source: DefenseNews | Joe Gould | August 30 & September 1, 2021 ++]

NDAA 2022

Update 02: Tattoos & Piercings

Congress wants to know if tattoos and piercings are keeping too many potential recruits out of the military. On 1 SEP, during debate over the annual defense authorization bill draft, members of the House Armed

Services Committee unanimously approved language which would mandate a new report on whether “tattoos and body modification for potential enlistees have become a deterrent to meeting recruitment goals.” The research, which would be due in March 2022, would include “the exact number of potential enlistees per year that are denied access to the military due to tattoos and body modifications” and comparison of military rules to private-sector policies.



The measure passed without opposition. It still has to survive negotiations with the Senate later this year before it becomes law. But the move recognizes “changing cultural norms and emerging demographics” of the country, and the challenges that presents to recruiters, according to committee members. A 2015 Harris poll found that about half of millennials (born between 1980 and 1995) have at least one tattoo, and at least a third of all Americans have gotten one. Rules regarding tattoos or piercings vary from service to service, but most prohibit offensive imagery or tattoos on the face, upper neck and hands.

Military officials have noted in recent years that recruiting has gotten more progressively difficult. Defense Department studies have shown that up to 70 percent of Americans between 17 and 24 are ineligible for military service due to obesity, mental-health issues, past drug use, or insufficient education. The military and tattoos go hand-in-hand, but have you seen this jaw-dropping ink innovation? Pentagon officials have also pushed to expand their pool of recruits from non-traditional sources as they try to attract individuals with high-tech skills for cyber operations. The committee’s language also asks the military to consider “the benefits of offering tattoo removal as an incentive to meet recruitment goals.” The provision is one of hundreds of policy issues — including a 2.7 percent pay raise for troops — in the annual authorization bill draft, which is expected to come up for a full House chamber vote in the next few weeks. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | September 1, 202` ++]

NDAА 2022

Update 03: Bar Dishonorable Discharge for Covid-19 Vaccine Refusal

Service members who refuse to get vaccinated against COVID-19 would not face dishonorable or other-than-honorable discharges under a plan approved by a House panel on 1 SEP. The troops could still be forced from the ranks, but would receive honorable discharges. Supporters said the idea is to ensure those individuals aren’t given a lifelong mark on their military record because of personal concerns about the vaccine. “I believe that the military should be able to require these vaccines, and I think every person of sound judgment in this country should take a vaccine,” said Rep. Mike Rogers (R-AL) and ranking member

of the House Armed Services Committee. “However, if somebody in good faith in the military says they can’t do it, they shouldn’t be stained for the rest of their lives with a dishonorable discharge.”

The proposal was included with Democratic and Republican support in the committee’s draft of the annual defense authorization bill, a massive budget policy measure that has passed every year for more than five decades. Amendment sponsor Rep. Mark Green (R-TN), and an Army veteran, said that an other-than-honorable dismissal “significantly impacts an individual for the rest of their lives, including future employment ... We should not destroy their lives for this.” The move comes about a month after Pentagon leaders announced plans to make the vaccine mandatory for all service members. Navy and Marine officials announced this week that sailors and Marines will need to be vaccinated in the next 90 days or risk punishment. Army and Air Force officials have yet to announce a timeline.

Just under 60 percent of the force has received at least one vaccine, per data released by the Defense Department last week. Troops who refuse can face various types of punishment, including dismissal from the service. “Many Americans have reservations about taking a vaccine that has only been available for less than a year,” the bill language states. “Reports of adverse actions being taken or threatened by military leadership at all levels are antithetical to our fundamental American values.” Other types of reprimand besides dismissals, such as reductions in rank, would still be allowed under the measure.

Democrats on the committee expressed some reservations about reductions in punishment for insubordinate troops at a time of a national health crisis, but ultimately agreed with Green’s proposal. But they said they hoped it would not discourage vaccine acceptance. “What we’re asking servicemembers to do now is to take a shot to protect their fellow Americans,” said House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA). “It is just baffling that service members don’t sign up for that. You put your life on the line to protect the country, but you won’t take a shot to protect the country? It’s something that as long as I live I will never understand.”

The authorization bill still needs to survive a full House vote and negotiations with the Senate before it can be sent to the president to become law. That process is expected to take several more months. Meanwhile, dismissals for vaccine refusals could begin within the next few weeks. Lawmakers did not say whether they would push to make the provision retroactive if other-than-honorable dismissals take place before the legislative language becomes law. At least 34 service members have died from coronavirus-related illnesses since the start of the pandemic in spring 2020. Nearly 640,000 Americans have died from virus complications. [Source: AirForceTimes | Leo Shane III | September 2, 2021 ++]

DoD Housing Program

Update 01: Army Illegally Denied Housing Allowance to Reservists

The U.S. Army violated federal law by refusing to pay dual housing allowances to reservists on assignment in Europe and erred by taking disciplinary actions against them, a review board said in a ruling that also recoups a total of \$500,000 for seven soldiers. The decision 27 AUG by the Army Board for the Correction of Military Records could have ramifications for numerous other troops and cost the Army millions more.

- Army finance officials' decisions that "gave rise to the investigative and disciplinary actions ... were erroneously executed and erroneously implemented," the board ruled.

- The board said the service must start paying back the reservists no later than October, and their records are to be cleared of wrongdoing.

A federal court had ordered the board to consider the cases of the reservists, who sued the Army in 2018. Patrick Hughes, a former Air Force attorney now with the Patriots Law Group, said the Army owes about \$500,000 in compensation for the denied payments and the debts the reservists incurred. Hughes said the next step is to obtain payouts for other soldiers who were ensnared by the Army's faulty interpretation of regulations. He is preparing a wider class-action case against the Army that could have tens of millions of dollars at stake. "We think there could be thousands of soldiers who were affected," Hughes said.

At issue in the case was a contention by Army finance officials in Europe that reservists who mobilized from the U.S. weren't entitled to a basic housing allowance for their American residence and an overseas housing allowance if the Army could not provide on-post accommodations. For years, reservists received dual allowances when mobilized. Unlike active-duty troops, who move with their household goods, reservists generally are activated for shorter assignments and must maintain two households if the Army can't provide base housing. But around 2016, Army finance officials in Europe changed their interpretation of the federal Joint Travel Regulation. As a result, reservists received only one allowance. The erroneous interpretation led the Army to take multiple "unjust actions," the board said when detailing the case of Maj. William Colin Schneck in its ruling.

After years of investigating, Hughes said he had concluded that the problem can be traced to Army finance officials in Germany who came up with a "half-cocked idea" to save money. "That idea ended up getting endorsed by Army G-1, and there you are," Hughes said, referring to the Army's highest-level personnel office. The Army board issued seven decisions, one for each reservist in the Patriots Law Group case, and it came to the same conclusion in each one:

- The Army erred by denying dual housing allowances and seeking recoupment of past payments. The board also ordered the service to take other steps, including deleting all negative findings, such as letters of reprimand or files stored in Army criminal databases, from the soldiers' records.
- In addition, the ruling directed the Army to authorize special selection boards to determine whether promotions are now in order for the affected troops.

Schneck, who is owed about \$56,000, remains infuriated that the board's action came only after a yearslong legal battle and the threat of a federal lawsuit. "No soldier should have to pay to make the Army do the right thing," he said. "The Army has left me to piece my career back together in the aftermath alone." The other reservists who sued are Bradley Wolfing, Ryan Mirabal, Alexander Gardiner, James Copas, Timothy Kibodeaux and Louis Morelli. Hughes said that besides the financial fallout, his clients were denied promotions, and some were forced out of the service. The damage lingered for some reservists in the civilian sector, he added. Those who had been flagged in criminal databases had difficulty passing background checks.

While the board's ruling applied only to the seven reservists involved in the Patriots Law Group's lawsuit, a legal precedent has now been established and other lawsuits are in the works, Hughes said. A related case that could underpin a class-action suit involves Col. Richard Gulley, who is now retired. He was ordered to repay \$135,500 of his housing allowance. Gulley said that over five years, he was subjected to repeated investigations, harassment and even arrest by Army criminal investigators while serving as a U.S. Africa Command deputy chief of staff in 2017.

Gulley, a commercial airline pilot, was charged with fraud and larceny by the Army just before his 2017 retirement but never was prosecuted. He said he still faces questioning over the issue every time he passes through customs as part of his job. He and others involved in the cases against the Army say they repeatedly sought support from their representatives in Congress to investigate the matter, but they say action was never taken. In commenting on the board's ruling, Gulley recounted the ordeal the Army put him through as a result of the erroneous interpretation.

"It took four-and-a-half years to solve what any first-year law student could have understood correctly," Gulley said. "I had to endure four investigations in six years, three arrests, CID harassment, assassination of my character and multiple secondary legal consequences due to the Army's lack of leadership with regards to reserve travel regulations."

[Source: Stars and Stripes | John Vandiver| August 30, 2021 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse

Reported Sep 01 thru 15, 2021

Fat Leonard | Retired CWO Admits Taking \$45K in Bribes

Nearly four-and-a-half years after his indictment, a former U.S. 7th Fleet official on 31 AUG admitted he traded classified ship schedules in exchange for luxury hotel stays, meals and entertainment while helping a Singapore-based company secure inflated Navy ship husbanding contracts. Former Chief Warrant Officer **Robert Gorsuch**, 54, of Mississippi, agreed to plead guilty to one count of bribery of a public official, the U.S. Attorney's Office in San Diego, Calif., announced. Gorsuch could face up to 15 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine when he is sentenced, although under the plea agreement he's agreed to pay an undetermined amount in restitution.



Gorsuch is the first of the so-called "GDMA Nine" – all former 7th Fleet officials indicted in March 2017 – to plead guilty to federal charges in the bribery, conspiracy and corruption investigation involving Glenn Defense Marine Asia and Leonard Glenn Francis, its owner and chief executive officer. Gorsuch was the flag administration officer for the Yokosuka, Japan-based 7th commander and staff from January 2005 to March 2008. In 2007 and in 2008, he gave Francis classified ship schedules and planned movements of several ships, including amphibious assault ship USS Tarawa (LHA-1) and guided-missile destroyer USS Hopper (DDG-70), according to prosecutors. In exchange, Gorsuch admitted that Francis covered Gorsuch's expenses worth some \$30,000 during stays at the luxury hotels Shangri-La Hotels in Cebu, Philippines; in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and Sydney, Australia; and the Ritz-Carlton in Tokyo, according to his plea agreement.

He also admitted to attending a \$15,000 party Francis covered at the Manila Hotel in the Philippines. “Gorsuch essentially sold his honor for a few nights at the Shangri-La,” Randy Grossman, the acting U.S. attorney for the Southern District of California, said in the announcement. “Gorsuch sacrificed his integrity for so little and caused so much harm in the process. Today, Gorsuch has admitted his part in this scandal and will be held to account for his conduct.” Until a week ago, Gorsuch’s case was on track for trial starting 1 NOV along with the other eight 7th Fleet defendants: Retired Rear Adm. Bruce Loveless; Capts. David Newland, James Dolan, Donald Hornbeck and David Lausman; Marine Corps Col. Enrico DeGuzman; Lt. Cmdr. Stephen Shedd; and Cmdr. Mario Herrera.

Those officials “are accused of trading military secrets and substantial influence for sex parties with prostitutes, extravagant dinners and luxury travel,” federal prosecutors said in announcing Gorsuch’s guilty plea. So far, 34 Navy officials, defense contractors and GDMA employees have been charged in the case, and 26 have pleaded guilty, Grossman said, “admitting that they collectively accepted millions of dollars in luxury travel and accommodations, meals, or services of prostitutes from Francis in exchange for helping GDMA win and maintain contracts and overbill the Navy by over \$35 million.”

- “Mr. Gorsuch’s guilty plea unequivocally memorializes his participation in the charged corruption scheme, wherein he and others sacrificed the honor of serving our great nation with distinction in return for personal gain,” Kelly P. Mayo, director of the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, Defense Criminal Investigative Service, said in the statement. “The comprehensive joint investigation that exposed Mr. Gorsuch’s illegal activities is but one example of the lengths DCIS and its investigative partners will go to pursue justice for the warfighter and defend the integrity of the men and women who truly exemplify service before self.”
- “Mr. Gorsuch will be held fully accountable for accepting lavish gifts in exchange for, among other things, passing classified information to Mr. Francis and GDMA,” said Omar Lopez, director of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service. “NCIS and our law enforcement partners remain committed to rooting out bribery and corruption wherever it exists and thwarting the potentially grave attendant consequences.” [Source: USNI News | Gidget Fuentes | August 31, 2021 ++]

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Fat Leonard | Retired Colonel Admits Taking \$67K in Bribes

Retired U.S. Marine Corps colonel implicated in the so-called [“Fat Leonard”](#) scandal pleaded guilty 3 SEP to accepting more than \$67,000 in hotel stays, extravagant meals and other perks, according to the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Southern California. **Enrico DeGuzman**, 63, was indicted in 2017 with eight other officers for allegedly accepting kickbacks as part of a scheme spearheaded by “Fat Leonard” Glenn Francis, a magnate who owned Glenn Defense Marine Asia, a company that raked in lucrative port servicing contracts from the Navy while plying officers in the West Pacific with luxury hotel stays, meals, prostitutes and other perks.



Col. Enrico DeGuzman, [center left]

DeGuzman pleaded guilty to a charge of bribery of a public official and admitted to sharing confidential information on ship movements with Francis while helping with “evaluating and indoctrinating potential new Navy members into Francis’s cabal,” the attorney’s office said in a statement announcing the guilty plea. Among the infractions DeGuzman admitted to as part of his plea agreement, he copped to attending a Francis-funded \$20,000 dinner at Petrus Restaurant in Hong Kong during a 2006 port visit, and getting fake receipts from Francis “to conceal and cover up their corrupt relationship,” the attorney’s office said.

DeGuzman served as fleet marine officer on the staff of the Japan-based U.S. 7th Fleet from July 2004 to July 2007, according to his attorney’s office. In a July 2007 email as he left his 7th Fleet assignment, DeGuzman warned Francis in an email that, “unfortunately, I don’t think I’ll be able to influence people [in my next assignment] like I did there at 7th Fleet,” according to the attorney’s office. DeGuzman faces a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

“With every extravagant meal, Enrico DeGuzman violated his duty to serve the United States with honor and integrity,” said acting U.S. Attorney Randy Grossman in a statement. “Today those choices have caught up to him, and he has been held accountable.”

Francis pleaded guilty in 2015 to bribery and fraud charges, admitting that he presided over a massive conspiracy involving his company, Glenn Defense Marine Asia, Navy officials, tens of millions of dollars in fraud and millions of dollars in bribes and gifts — from cash to booze-soaked parties, luxury travel, prostitutes and Spanish suckling pigs. Chief Warrant Officer Robert Gorsuch was indicted with DeGuzman and several others back in 2017 and pleaded guilty to similar bribery charges last week. Meanwhile, seven others indicted with them await their day in court. They are retired Rear Adm. Bruce Loveless, Captains David Newland, James Dolan, Donald Hornbeck and David Lausman, Cmdr. Mario Herrera and Lt. Cmdr. Stephen Shedd. All have pleaded not guilty.

Their trial was slated to commence on 1 NOV but has been pushed back to February, according to the attorney’s office.

So far 27 have pleaded guilty, “admitting that they collectively accepted millions of dollars in luxury travel and accommodations, meals or services of prostitutes from Francis in exchange for helping GDMA win and maintain contracts and overbill the Navy by over \$35 million,” the prosecutor’s office said in its release announcing Gorsuch’s guilty plea. The Justice Department passed hundreds of lower-level cases back to the Navy for adjudication — including some involving 60 admirals — but Navy officials have declined to say how those cases were adjudicated, citing “the ongoing nature of the investigation.” [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | September 7, 2021 ++]

Afghan Withdrawal

Update 16: DOD Says Military Did Not Leave Its Working Dogs Behind

The Pentagon is pushing back after a widely-circulated photo of caged working dogs in an aircraft hangar at Hamid Karzai International Airport led social media purveyors to believe that the U.S. left behind military working dogs. The Pentagon said no military working dogs were left in Afghanistan as American troops withdrew from Afghanistan on 31 AUG. “To correct erroneous reports, the US military did not leave any

dogs at Hamid Karzai International Airport, to include the reported ‘military working dogs,’ Eric Pahon, a Defense Department spokesman, wrote in an email to Military Times.



The Defense Department is stressing that while people were the primary focus in the evacuation effort, the U.S. government made it a priority to ensure its working dogs returned home, Pahon said. “We invest hundreds of thousands of dollars into these dogs,” Pahon said. “We wouldn’t leave them behind.” An earlier statement put out by the American Humane Society said that the dogs left at the airport are military contract dogs, belonging to private contracting companies. “I am devastated by reports that the American government is pulling out of Kabul and leaving behind brave U.S. military contract working dogs to be tortured and killed at the hand of our enemies,” wrote Dr. Robin R. Ganzert, president and CEO of American Humane. “These brave dogs do the same dangerous, lifesaving work as our military working dogs, and deserved a far better fate than the one to which they have been condemned.”

A volunteer organization called Kabul Small Animal Rescue (KSAR) has representatives on the ground in Afghanistan working to save the stranded contract dogs in Kabul, Pahon said. “Photos circulating online were animals under the care of the Kabul Small Animal Rescue,” he added. “Despite an ongoing complicated and dangerous retrograde mission, U.S. forces went to great lengths to assist the Kabul Small Animal Rescue as much as possible.” Though KSAR raised funds to secure a charter flight to take the dogs to safety, no plane ever touched down. Pahon estimated that there are around 150 contract dogs left on the ground.

One of the contracting companies identified as having dogs on the ground is GardaWorld. Though it did not specify the number of dogs GardaWorld has in Kabul, its media relations team said that it is working with KSAR to bring them all home safely. “Our team has worked relentlessly with numerous dedicated charities to rescue our dogs and all the animals under KSAR’s care,” the team said in a statement to Military Times. “We have no intention of giving up on our dogs, despite the gruelling setbacks, and we will continue to work with a growing and dedicated team to evacuate all our dogs.” Kabul Small Animal Rescue did not immediately respond to a request for comment. [Source: ArmyTimes | Sarah Sicard | August 31, 2021 ++]

Military Draft

Update 08: Women Register Plans Advance for Potential Draft



Plans to require women to register with the Selective Service System for the possibility of a future military draft took another step forward after a key congressional panel backed the change as part of a must-pass military budget policy bill. The House Armed Services Committee approved the proposal by a 35-24 vote, with support from all Democrats and several Republicans on the panel. Supporters said the time to include women in cases of national emergency is long overdue.

“The current male-only registration sends a message to women not only that they are not vital to the defense of the country, but also that they are not expected to participate in defending it,” said Air Force veteran and author of the amendment Rep. Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA). “It also sends a message to men that they, for some reason, are uniquely and perhaps unfairly depended upon. This needs to change.” Senate lawmakers included similar language in their draft of the annual defense authorization bill, making it likely that some version of the proposal will remain in the final compromise draft of the legislation. The authorization bill — which includes items such as the annual military pay raise and specialty pay authorizations — has passed each year for more than five decades.

Currently only men between the ages of 18 and 25 are required to register for potential conscription in the event of a prolonged war. The new rules would include women on those lists too. “Whatever the emergency is, if it’s so great that we have to go to a draft, we need everybody,” said Army veteran Rep. Mike Waltz (R-FL). “We need men, women, gay, straight, any religion, black, white, brown. We need all hands on deck.”

The idea of requiring women to participate in the draft has been considered in the budget bill debate in the past, including in 2016, when lawmakers established a commission to research the idea. Last year, the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service offered its recommendation that women be included in potential draft lists, given the military’s prior decision to open all combat posts to women. That had been the legal basis for excluding women from conscription in the past. Despite that, in June the Supreme Court declined to hear a challenge to the men-only rule, saying a final decision was more appropriately left to Congress.

Conservatives on the committee objected to the idea, saying that the move upends traditional gender roles and is not urgently needed, given military commanders’ past stated preference for the all-volunteer force. “I feel confident in an emergency that the women of this country would step up and volunteer as needed,” said Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-MO). “This current system does not fence off anyone. It seems like this is a solution in search of a problem.”

But women rights advocates have argued for the change, saying inequitable treatment affects social perceptions of men and women. Under the current system, if men fail to register for a possible draft, they can face criminal penalties and be ruled ineligible for federal loans and other benefits. Women do not face such punishment. The full defense authorization bill is expected to be voted on by the full House later this month. A compromise version of the measure is expected to be finalized and set to the president later this fall. [Source: AirForceTimes | Leo Shane III | September 2, 2021 ++]

Commissary Elimination

Update 06: DoD Backs Away From Merger Plan w/Exchange Systems



Defense officials have backed off plans to consolidate the commissary and exchange systems according to a new DoD report citing flaws in their previous recommendations about the benefits of a merger. (<https://www.militarytimes.com/pay-benefits/2019/08/22/is-dod-moving-too-quickly-to-merge-commissaries-and-exchanges>). Such a plan would actually cost an additional \$1.5 billion, according to a new DoD report to Congress, signed 23 AUG by Virginia Penrod, acting under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

The previous analysis, completed in 2018, had a “single-minded fixation” on cutting costs, diverting the focus away from the customer, the new report stated. “Successful retailers are currently focused on digitization and the customer.” DoD “has determined that the 2018 [business case analysis] recommendation to consolidate the resale organizations is not feasible, and no longer supports such a consolidation,” concluded the report to Congress. The projected costs of a consolidation “have increased substantially and are now prohibitive,” according to the new report. The defense resale system includes the Defense Commissary Agency, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, the Marine Corps Exchange and the Navy Exchange Service Command.

Those costs would likely have been borne by customers, reduced contributions to quality of life programs on military installations, or both, said Steve Rossetti, president of the American Logistics Association, a trade group of manufacturers and distributors who supply products to commissaries and exchanges. For years, some officials within DoD have taken aim at the cost of the commissary benefit in particular, which receives about \$1.1 billion a year in taxpayer dollars to provide discount groceries to authorized customers in the military community around the world.

Advocates, long concerned that consolidation could pose a threat to the future of the commissary and exchange benefits, were also concerned that DoD was moving too quickly toward a merger. “First and

foremost, we're concerned about preserving the commissary and exchange benefits," said Nicole Russell, government relations deputy director of the National Military Family Association. Many families rely on the benefits, "especially those struggling financially," she said, because of the competitive prices. "We're glad DoD has finally closed this chapter and is focusing on a lot of other issues important to our families."

In 2019, NMFA was among 27 groups in The Military Coalition who sent a letter to the House and Senate armed services committees saying that if costs of a merger were more than anticipated in that 2018 analysis, the defense resale system might not be able to continue to provide low-cost groceries, and support for MWR programs on military installations. The previous analysis did understate the costs of a merger, and overstated the savings a merger could achieve. The new analysis found the consolidation would require an additional \$1.5 billion in costs that were understated in the [2018 analysis](#), which was conducted by a DoD task force, primarily with consultants Boston Consulting Group.

Customers "deserve to know that every dollar they spend at the cash register is going to be well managed," Rossetti said. "DoD recognizes that. This study makes the case. Congress was wise to order the reevaluation. This yields a more realistic view that will serve the patrons better. If they had moved to [merge the organizations] with inaccurate numbers, it could have been a train wreck." Among the underestimated merger costs were the costs for integrating the IT systems of each of the exchange systems and the commissary system. The 2018 report didn't address the cost of merging and relocating the headquarters of the organizations.

The 2018 analysis and recommendations led to then-Deputy Secretary of Defense David Norquist giving the green light to consolidation in 2019, pending required changes in law that would allow consolidation. But plans were put on hold. After questions were raised about the validity of the 2018 analysis, Congress ordered a review by the Government Accountability Office. GAO concluded that DoD and Congress needed more reliable information on the expected savings and costs of consolidating, which prompted Congress to order another DoD review. The new DoD review states that DoD can get significant benefits for the resale systems and their customers "without the massive upheaval and investments of time, money and talent that consolidation would consume."

DoD instead intends to pursue additional savings and efficiencies like their Joint Buying Alliance, which began in late 2019. Since then, officials said, they've saved military customers \$75 million, including \$45 million by lowering prices on goods in several departments, such as health and beauty, and electronics; and another \$30 million by identifying special buys with vendors. This alliance includes the commissary agency, AAFES, NEXCOM, MCX and Coast Guard Exchange.

- The 2018 business case analysis recommended eliminating 20 percent of products to save money, but didn't identify any consumer research to justify that. In the 2021 report, DoD found that one otherwise successful commercial retailer tried to cut costs by eliminating 20 percent of its stock assortment, but the resulting customer reaction and drop in sales "quickly convinced the retailer to reverse course and reinstate the dropped products."
- This 2018 recommendation to reduce customer choices by eliminating some products is a dated approach, "in contrast with successful and fast growing retailers who focus on the consumer and innovation. This contradicts the 2018 [business case analysis] assertion that customer experience would not be impacted," the new report found.

- That 2018 report double-counted some expected savings, which also contributed to the overestimates of the savings through a merger.
- The 2018 report didn't include any assessment of the risks a merger would pose to the commissary and exchange benefits — nor did any of the previous studies on consolidation. The new report did, stating: “The department has identified unacceptable risks and consequences associated with consolidation.”

Between 60 percent and 90 percent of corporate/commercial consolidations have failed completely, or at least failed the pre-consolidation financial and operational goals, according to the 2021 working group's extensive literature review. Mergers that succeed usually improve a company's competitiveness, such as acquiring new technologies, buying out competitors, expanding to new customer segments, extending the operating footprint, or leveraging intellectual property. “None of these advantages that define successful mergers is relevant to military resale consolidation,” the 2021 report states.

And merging these organizations is not as simple as merging two discount retailers. Among the many issues to be considered are the numerous lines of business between the entities, such as selling groceries, and varying retail operations such as retail stores, restaurants, lodging facility operations, movie theaters, and convenience stores. Each exchange has at least three lines of business that would normally be separate commercial companies, the 2021 report notes. “As a result, consolidation of defense resale is really a 10-plus way consolidation over a worldwide footprint.” The risks “have the potential for very significant unintended consequences and long-term negative impacts on the resale organizations,” the report stated.

Yet another complexity: the commissary system is “radically different” in fundamental areas from the exchange operations, to include the fact that the commissary agency gets the majority of its operating funds from taxpayer dollars, and isn't focused on making a profit. Commissaries sell most of their products at cost plus a 5 percent surcharge at the cash register. Unlike commissaries, exchanges sell their goods at a profit. They rely on sales and other revenue, to cover operating expenses. Revenue generated by the exchanges also helps fund certain morale, welfare, and recreation activities. And the stores have a variety of impacts on the military mission, some of which were starkly apparent during the pandemic, which started well after the 2018 report. For example, commissaries were designated as “mission essential” and have stayed open for the most part during the pandemic. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | September 2, 2021 ++]

DOD Valley of Death

Gap between Research and Acquisition

Two provisions in the latest version of a House defense bill seek to bridge the "valley of death," the acquisition-process obstacles that can stop promising technology from getting to troops in the field. One would establish a five-year pilot program to more quickly identify such technologies, and the other would expand Navy programs that foster small-business innovation. The provisions appear in a draft of the National Defense Authorization Act as marked up by the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. A copy of the draft was obtained by Defense One.

The bill tasks the Strategic Capabilities Office, or SCO, with identifying “critical cross-service operational needs” of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, the combatant command that deals most directly with

China. SCO will then designate a mission manager to work with the military's various research arms and agencies to "develop and deliver solutions, including software and information technology solutions," as well as to test and evaluate those solutions. That's a bit different from the way the Defense Department funds research and engineering now, along several specific research modernization areas in emerging technology, such as quantum computing, hypersonics, artificial intelligence, etc. The hope is that by aligning more closely with specific missions that the command is undertaking, the Department can better spend research money to deliver new technologies that answer precise needs.

The draft NDAA also includes \$8.6 million, an increase of \$5.0 million, to expand the Navy's Small Business Innovation Research, or SBIR, fund and the Small Business Technology Transfer and Small Business Technology Transfer program, or STTP, across the entire department. Why? The Navy "has demonstrated success" in mentoring companies that have reached the second phase of the SBIR funding, allowing them to better navigate the Defense Department's various hurdles. In other words, the Navy has figured out a better way to get non-traditional companies needed funding outside of the lengthy competitive process that the military undertakes with other programs.

Both of those provisions could help the Defense Department with its long-standing "valley of death" problem. "DOD has long noted the existence of a chasm between its science and technology community and its acquisition community that impedes technology transition from consistently occurring. This chasm, often referred to by department insiders as 'the valley of death,' exists because the acquisition community often requires a higher level of technology maturity than the science and technology community is willing to fund and develop," notes a November 2015 Government Accountability Office report. An updated GAO report from June 2019 found that the Department had made some progress addressing the gap but that problems remained, especially at the middle management level.

Martijn Rasser, senior fellow and director of the technology and national security program at the Center for a New American Security, said "The budget boost to expand Navy's SBIR/STTR Transition Education Program department-wide should help to encourage smaller companies to pursue business with the Pentagon." Reducing red tape and increasing the visibility and transparency of other transaction authorities will "make it easier for companies not well-versed in defense acquisitions to become vendors." However, he said, the draft is missing "specific measures to bridge the gap between development funding and becoming part of a program of record. That is the biggest challenge for start-ups that must manage cash flow and the demands for recurring revenue by their investors."

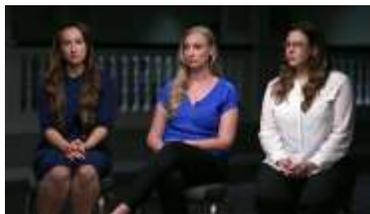
Tara Murphy Dougherty, CEO of data analytics firm Govini, said "The Valley of Death has been just that for innovation: death. It is one the most significant barriers for smaller, innovative companies to partner with DoD, so any bridges that Congress can build across it through legislation is a welcome change," But, she said, a narrow focus on the transition between science and technology and programs of record could "fail to capitalize on a critical opportunity to take an enterprise-wide approach and ensure attention is also put on much-needed, but otherwise left-behind cross-service capabilities."

One individual who was familiar with the draft legislation described the SCO effort as "excellent" but also only a partial fix. "If there are other sections that also ensure these types of early capability development efforts can transition from [research, development, evaluation and testing] and initial operating concept to full-scale acquisition programs, then the valley of death just might get bridged." [Source: Defense One | Patrick Tucker | August 25, 2021++]

Military Domestic Violence

Update 02: \$1 Billion Spent by DoD Not Reaching Survivors

The Pentagon has spent more than \$1 billion on a program meant to help survivors of domestic abuse since 2015. But advocates and survivors told CBS News that they couldn't get help. "I've never had anyone report to me that they received any type of help with moving, any type of help with food assistance, any type of help with just getting a protection order," said Lisa Colella, who runs the private nonprofit Healing Household 6, which aims to support veterans' caregivers and survivors of domestic violence. "I don't think the program is useful at all."



Several women told CBS News that the military did not take their allegations of domestic violence seriously.

That military program, called the Family Advocacy Program, is one of the resources commanders are required to tell victims about following the reported allegations of abuse, according to Defense Department policy. The military also offers domestic violence survivors a benefit called transitional compensation — a stipend intended to help survivors pay for basic living expenses after they leave an abusive home. Colella, who quit her restaurant job to become an advocate for domestic violence victims, said the assistance isn't reaching survivors. "In all of the 700 people I've spoken to, I've only known two that have said that they even qualified for it, and only one that could show me a record of payment for that," Colella said.

Commanders decide whether service members will be punished for domestic violence and if the case moves to a court-martial. Of the hundreds of survivors Colella has helped, only two of the cases went to a court-martial. "You only get the compensation if your spouse is convicted of some type of assault or domestic violence and were removed from the military. So the criteria is almost impossible to meet," Colella said.

The lack of support for survivors is a story CBS News heard repeatedly during its two-year investigation into domestic violence in the military. Roughly 100,000 incidents of domestic abuse have been reported to the military since 2015, CBS News found. And many survivors who reported abuse to the military told CBS News that they feared for their safety. None of those cases went to trial. "There was no protection for me. There was no help. There were no resources," said Liz Knight, who called Army police weeks after giving birth after she was allegedly physically assaulted. You can read her story at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/military-domestic-violence-survivors-investigation-norah-odonnell-cbs-news>

Colella's work as an advocate started unofficially when she managed a restaurant in North Carolina near Camp Lejeune. Her staff would open up to her about problems at home after their spouses returned from deployments. She started her nonprofit in 2014. "They were angry, that they were drinking more, that they

were blocking them out of bank accounts, that all they had was their tip money to feed their children," Colella said of the stories her staff shared. Of the 100 servers who worked for her, she said about 75 to 80 were military spouses and about half had told her they were victims of domestic violence. "I realized that there wasn't a lot of help. So I decided to just do this myself," she said. Colella's organization offers survivors who experience domestic violence and abuse help navigating the reporting process, getting financial assistance, finding food and shelter and locating mental health resources, and educates spouses about domestic abuse.

Erica Johnson, a retired Air Force master sergeant who reported being physically and sexually assaulted, said the lack of support "is a pretty extensive epidemic." "Victims have needs. And they need to get what they deserve in terms of mental health, and support, financial situations," Johnson said. Colella said a culture of tolerance can cause "significant trauma" for survivors. "Women who are abused have a very difficult time seeking employment, staying with employment. There's the consequence of losing health care. There's the consequence of not being able to support your children and having them taken from you," she said. Survivors said they are still dealing with trauma. "It's mostly the nightmares, and waking up at night, and not being able to have relationships, because I'm terrified," Johnson said. Knight said she frequently has anxiety. "I'll never be the person I was before I met him." [Source: CBS News | Norah O'Donnell, Kristin Steve, Len Tepper, Adam Verdugo, Caitlin Yilek | September 8, 2021 ++]

DACOWITS

Update 01: Pentagon Revives Committee on Women in Service



One of the Pentagon's oldest advisory committees has been spared from elimination after female veterans in Congress got wind of the move and protested. In a 14 AUG memo obtained by Military.com, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered the reinstatement of the 70-year-old Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, known as DACOWITS, which was dissolved at the start of this year as part of a sweeping review of the Pentagon's 42 advisory committees.

"In its 70-year history, DACOWITS has contributed significantly to the Nation, our Armed Forces, and more importantly, to our Service women who serve today, in the past, and in the future," the memo, addressed to the under secretary of defense for Personnel and Readiness, a position freshly filled by Gil Cisneros, states. "I request you target the DACOWITS' work to its core elements and, when appropriate, task work to other DoD Federal advisory committees better suited to address broad, DoD-wide policy issues."

Austin's wholesale dissolution of the committees and launch of the review was widely seen as an annulment of outgoing President Donald Trump's last-minute efforts to pack multiple advisory panels,

including the Defense Business and Defense Policy boards, with his acolytes. Military.com exclusively reported in June that the Pentagon's Manpower and Reserve Affairs office had called for DACOWITS to be replaced by a committee that would cover a wider spectrum of issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion -- a move that critics said would dilute focus and overtax members who volunteer their expertise.

Committee supporters have pointed to DACOWITS' track record as a reason to keep the group: Of more than 1,000 recommendations made since 1951, some 98% have been at least partially implemented by the Defense Department or through acts of Congress, according to a historical review published earlier this year. And while substantial barriers to women's military service have been pulled down in the last decade, most notably the longstanding prohibition on their serving in ground combat and special operations roles, advocates point to the military's struggles to retain senior women and curtail sexual assault as evidence of the work still to be done.

Following the Military.com report, all six female veterans in Congress, led by Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA) and Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA) sent a letter to Austin saying the elimination of DACOWITS could "harm women in the Armed Forces by eliminating an important advocacy component." "We believe we can tackle diversity, equity, and inclusion without disbanding one of the military's most effective tools to advance women," the lawmakers wrote.

In a late August interview, Luria, a retired Navy commander, recalled how the options available during her military service had been radically changed in 1994, while she was a midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy, with the overturning of the Pentagon policy barring women from serving in fighter aviation and other direct combat units. DACOWITS was instrumental to that change. Luria said the integration of women into previously closed jobs and fields today continues to require close attention and oversight. "I just think that the work of DACOWITS is so important because these challenges are always present and always evolving," she said.

Queries to the Defense Department about Austin's reasoning for restoring the committee did not receive an immediate response, but officials indicated a Pentagon announcement would be forthcoming soon about all the committees dissolved in the review. While Austin's move to start fresh with advisory committees was likely a response to Trump, it also highlights his interest in positioning the Pentagon to be conversant in a broader range of issues related to diversity and equality. For example, in one of his earliest reversals to Trump-era policy, Austin established new rules in March enabling transgender individuals to serve in uniform.

In his August memo, his support of DACOWITS' continuation is qualified by concerns about the committee's need to modernize and improve diversity of representation in membership. DACOWITS will resume operations, he said, only after its charter has been amended and approved by the Pentagon -- a process, along with new member confirmation, that likely will take the remainder of the year to complete. "I appreciate the deep, valuable expertise that former DACOWITS members provided to the Department, but I am concerned that we are missing opportunities that promote diversity of background, experience, and thought in support of the DACOWITS mission," he wrote.

Of the 21 committee members who served in 2020, 12 were retired officers who attained the rank of colonel or captain or above; five were men; four were retired senior enlisted troops; at least nine were people of color; and just two were civilians who had never served in uniform. The extent of the committee's LGBTQ representation is not clear. Recent committee members who spoke with Military.com were

supportive of efforts to improve diversity and entertain issues affecting transgender troops, but adamant that DACOWITS should retain its tight focus on barriers to women's service.

"There were enough issues that still remain with women being able to serve to their best ability that it was necessary to keep it separate," said Judy Fedder, a retired Air Force lieutenant general who had been nearing the end of her DACOWITS term. "During the four years I was on the committee, the 'Me Too' movement was being spotlighted. That issue alone is enough to demonstrate the necessity of keeping service women's issues separate and distinct from that overall focus on diversity." Retired Marine Col. John Boggs, one of the few men on the panel, warned that military leaders should be cautious about trying to reduce committee membership or resources in efforts to find efficiencies.

"Sometimes, expediency leads to collateral damage. DACOWITS was clearly collateral damage," he said. "What DACOWITS does right now it does very well. ... They're doing God's work for the DoD." [Source: Military.com | Hope Hodge Seck | September 2, 2021

DoD Pay and Benefits

Update 05: Government Looking Into Ways to Slow Pay Growth



You won't find a single member of the military, of course, who thinks that they're overpaid, but according to some federal mandates, they might be. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released a report 10 SEP with some alternative approaches to setting military basic pay, ones that would slow the rapid growth pay scales have been seeing in recent years.

- One would be creating a different cost index, though CBO found that their in-house test model didn't really differ much from the Employment Cost Index year-over-year.
- Another, more impactful option, would be to use the ECI on the full complement of military compensation: not just basic pay, but the basic allowance for subsistence and the basic allowance for housing.

That way, those substantial expenses in addition to basic pay would be more standardized, and grow in proportion to each other. The Bureau of Labor Statistics creates the index yearly, averaging the growth of wages over the previous year. "If applied in the future, it could slightly slow the growth in spending for regular cash pay and associated expenses. In 2030, it could reduce annual costs by roughly \$3 billion (or 1.7 percent)," according to the report. "But other costs, such as special and incentive pays to address any recruiting and retention problems that might arise, could erode some of the savings."

Researchers have been looking into the possibly of shaving some costs in the personnel realm, because while the defense budget makes the most headlines with its big acquisition programs, it's actually people who the services spend the most money on — about a quarter of the \$740 billion-plus yearly allowance.

Technically, service member pay is supposed stay apace with the federal employment cost index. Law mandates that the basic pay scale be adjusted yearly with the ECI as a guide.

The traditional benchmark has been to stay in the 70th percentile, so that troops are earning more than about 70 percent of civilian wage earners with similar skills and experience. That level is meant to make military service attractive enough to prospective recruits without spending more money than would be necessary to man the services appropriately. But the data show that the current levels have been at about 90 percent for enlisted troops and 83 percent for officers, for over a decade. The conclusion could go one of two ways: either troops are overpaid, or the 70th percentile benchmark is wrong. The biggest concern about making changes, per the CBO report, would be the possible effects on recruiting and retention.

For an 18-year-old high school graduate with no work experience or higher education, E-1 pay and benefits aren't half bad. Same for a freshly commissioned O-1, who likely had their bachelors degrees paid for by their service. But it's a delicate balance, setting pay rates to be competitive but not overly so. "As the pay of service members has increased relative to civilian pay in past years, the share of recruits that DoD considers high quality has also risen substantially and exceeds its goals," according to the report. "The opposite would probably happen if pay for service members slowed significantly relative to civilian pay."

The growth would likely slow by only 0.1 percent, the report continues, but the effect of that is unknowable at this point. To counteract any negative effects, DoD may have to use incentive pays to recruit for certain jobs and retain certain ranks. That might make more sense than trying to keep basic pay attractive, according to CBO. "Targeted pay has been more cost-effective than across-the-board increases, and any decline in savings would probably be smaller if DoD used those force management tools rather than across-the-board pay raises," according to the report." [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | September 10, 2021 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials

Reported SEP 01 thru 15, 2021 | Twenty Two

"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 as of FEB 2019 are: World War II 73,025 of which over 41,000 are presumed to be lost at sea, Korean War 7665, Vietnam War 1589 (i. e. VN-1,246, Laos-288, Cambodia-48, & Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7), Cold War 111, Iraq and other conflicts 5. Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home.

For a listing of all missing or unaccounted for personnel to date refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil> and click on 'Our Missing'. Refer to <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories> for a listing and details of the 141 accounted for in 2005. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

== Mail: Public Affairs Office, 2300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D. C. 20301-2300, Attn: External Affairs Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420

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



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

- <https://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>
- <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases>
- <http://www.thepatriotspage.com/Recovered.htm>
- <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org>
- <https://www.pownetwork.org/bios/b/b012.htm>
- <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>

LOOK FOR

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Richard W. Horrigan, 24**, was a pilot with the 22nd Fighter Squadron, 36th Fighter Group, 9th Air Force, serving in Germany. He was a part of an armed reconnaissance mission to the Alt Lönnewitz Airfield on April 19, 1945, piloting a P-47D Thunderbolt fighter. He crashed while strafing enemy planes parked at the airfield, likely due to anti-aircraft fire. Interment services are pending. [Read about Horrigan](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2746344/pilot-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-horrigan-r) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2746344/pilot-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-horrigan-r>.

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Ernest N. Vienneau, 25**, of Millinocket, Maine, was a pilot assigned to the 340th Bombardment Squadron, 97th Bombardment Group, 15th Air Force, based out of Amendola, Italy. On Nov. 6, 1944, the B-17 Flying Fortress bomber on which he was serving as co-pilot came under heavy anti-aircraft fire while on a mission over Maribor, Yugoslavia, in present-day Slovenia. During the barrage, a piece of flak penetrated the cockpit and struck Vienneau in the head, mortally wounding him. He will be buried on Oct. 9, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Vienneau](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2578211/pilot-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-vienneau-e) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2578211/pilot-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-vienneau-e>.

-- **Army Air Forces Sgt. Francis W. Wiemerslage, 20**, was assigned to the 549th Bombardment Squadron, 385th Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force, serving in Germany. He was the ball turret gunner on a B-17G Flying Fortress bomber during a mission over Dresden, on March 2, 1945. Enemy fighters attacked the bomber between Berlin and Leipzig, and the plane was shot down. Two of the nine crew members survived the incident, while the rest, including Wiermerslage, were killed. Interment services are pending. [Read about Wiemerslage](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2759363/airman-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-wiemerslage-f) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2759363/airman-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-wiemerslage-f>.

-- **Army Cpl. Charles E. Hiltibran, 19**, of Cable, Ohio, was a member of Headquarters Company, 1st

Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Hiltibran will be buried in Urbana, Ohio. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Hiltibran](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2160039/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-hiltibran-c) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2160039/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-hiltibran-c>.

-- **Army Cpl. Roy H. Thomas, 22**, of St. Charles, Virginia, was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 12, 1950, after his unit was attacked by enemy forces as they attempted to withdraw near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Thomas will be buried in Woodway, Virginia. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Thomas](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2456499/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-thomas-r) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2456499/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-thomas-r>.

-- **Army Pfc. Berton J. McQueen, 20**, was assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division. In August 1944, his unit landed on the southern coast of France as part of Operation Dragoon. On Nov. 22, 1st Battalion engaged in a battle with enemy troops in Clefcy, a town in the Alsace region. McQueen was mortally wounded by German artillery shrapnel and taken to an aid station where he died on Nov. 23, 1944. Interment services are pending. [Read about McQueen](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2704132/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-mcqueen-b) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2704132/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-mcqueen-b>

-- **Army Pvt. Stephen C. Mason, 21**, of Jersey City, New Jersey was assigned to Headquarters Co., 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. He was reported missing in action during Operation Market Garden after his patrol failed to return from a mission to the enemy lines near Beek, Netherlands on Nov. 3, 1944. His body was unable to be recovered. He will be buried in North Arlington, New Jersey. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Mason](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2703540/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-mason-s) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2703540/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-mason-s>.

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Frank G. Vejar, 19**, of Douglas, Arizona, was a member of Heavy Mortar Company, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 30, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Vejar will be buried in his hometown. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Vejar](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2155844/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-vejar-f) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2155844/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-vejar-f>.

-- **Army Sgt. Bernard J. Sweeney, Jr., 22**, of Waterbury, Connecticut, was assigned to Company I, 330th Infantry Regiment, 83rd Infantry Division. His unit had been engaged in battle with German forces near Strass, Germany, in the Hürtgen Forest, when he was reported missing in action on Dec. 16, 1944. His body was not recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Sweeney](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2663635/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-sweeney-b) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2663635/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-sweeney-b>.

-- **Marine Corps Cpl. Andrew Pellerito, 22**, was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Pellerito was killed on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending.

[Read about Pellerito](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2762635/marine-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-pellerito-a) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2762635/marine-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-pellerito-a> .

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Jack E. Hill, 21**, was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Hill died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. He will be buried Nov. 11, 2021, in Seattle. [Read about Hill](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2541475/marine-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-hill-j) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2541475/marine-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-hill-j>.

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 1st Class Harvey C. Herber, 34**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Herber. Interment services are pending. [Read about Herber](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2746422/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-herber-h) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2746422/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-herber-h>.

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Walter S. Belt, Jr., 25**, of Cleveland, Kansas, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Belt. He will be buried on Oct. 9, 2021, in Ellsworth, Kansas. [Read about Belt](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2663101/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-belt-w) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2663101/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-belt-w>.

-- **Navy Hospital Apprentice 1st Class Keefe R. Connolly, 19**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Connolly. Interment services are pending. [Read about Connolly](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2762666/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-connolly-k) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2762666/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-connolly-k>.

-- **Navy Radioman 3rd Class Charles A. Montgomery, 21**, of Folcroft, Pennsylvania, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Montgomery. He will be buried in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Montgomery](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2566872/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-montgomery-c) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2566872/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-montgomery-c>.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Edward E. Talbert, 19**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Talbert. Interment services are pending. [Read about Talbert](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2746442/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-talbert-e) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2746442/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-talbert-e>.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Joe R. Nightingale, 20**, of Kalamazoo, Michigan, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Nightingale. He will be buried on Dec. 7, 2021, in Augusta, Michigan. [Read about Nightingale](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2066976/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-nightingale-j) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2066976/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-nightingale-j>.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Joseph C. Rouse, 23**, Rouse was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Rouse. Interment services are pending. [Read about Rouse](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2756920/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-rouse-j) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2756920/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-rouse-j>.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Wesley E. Graham, 21**, of Watervliet, Michigan, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Graham. He will be buried on Oct. 27, 2021, in Augusta, Michigan. [Read about Graham](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2217973/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-graham-w) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2217973/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-graham-w>.

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Arthur R. Thinnes, 17**, of Milwaukee, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Thinnes. He will be buried on Oct. 15, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Thinnes](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2683381/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-thinnes-a) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2683381/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-thinnes-a>.

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class John G. Bock, Jr., 18**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Bock. Interment services are pending. [Read about Bock](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2761525/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-bock-j) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2761525/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-bock-j>.

-- **Navy Steward's Mate 2nd Class Jesus F. Garcia, 21**, of Agana, Guam, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Garcia. He will be buried on Oct. 6, 2021, in San Diego. [Read about Garcia](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2087836/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-garcia-j) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2087836/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-garcia-j>.

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | September 2021 ++]



VA SUD Program

Substance Use Disorder Resources

VHA-enrolled veterans diagnosed with substance use disorders (SUD) had higher rates of suicide than those with depression or PTSD according to the 2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report at <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2020/2020-National-Veteran-Suicide-Prevention-Annual-Report-11-2020-508.pdf>. Spreading awareness and reducing the stigma related to SUD is important in addressing and eliminating veteran suicide. Resources are available for anyone who needs help and can be instrumental in preventing someone from reaching the crisis point. VA's SUD Program offers specific treatment programs in many states. Refer to <https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/sud.asp> to find a location near you. However, VA is dedicated to providing access for all veterans and areas without the program still offer SUD treatment. For any veteran in crisis, you are not alone. The Veterans Crisis Line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by phone (1.800.273.8255, press 1), text (838255), or online chat by visiting VeteransCrisisLine.net. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | September 13, 3021 ++]

VA Manila OPC

Announcements & Reminders 8 SEP 2021

I hope everyone enjoyed the long Labor Day Weekend. It's hard to believe we've entered September and that we are quickly approaching the 18-month mark of life under COVID-19 in the Philippines. With Manila scheduled to remain under Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) effective tomorrow, September 8, 2021 through September 15, 2021, the VA Manila will continue our operations status quo – with appointments available in person. Veterans can access confirmation of their scheduled appointments online in MyHealtheVet if you wish to have verification of your scheduled appointment should you encounter a check point. The Clinic is also sending text messages via VetText as further confirmation of your scheduled appointments.

Veterans who are concerned about travel to Manila can contact the Clinic to see about converting their scheduled in-person appointment to a virtual care appointment (telephone or Veteran Video Connect (VVC)). Veterans who are converting to virtual care appointments should try to complete needed lab work locally in your community before your scheduled virtual appointment and send those results to your care team via MyHealtheVet. Having updated lab results available for your provider helps us to provide you the best possible care. If converting your appointment is not an option, we can always cancel and reschedule to a later time if that works better for you.

Some Veterans who received a vaccine from VA Manila have shared that the CDC Vaccine Card they were issued at the Clinic is not being accepted by local authorities as evidence that they received a COVID-

19 vaccine. Veterans and spouses who received a vaccine at VA Manila should be advised that the Philippine Department of Health considers those vaccinated at VA Manila as having been ‘vaccinated outside of the Philippines’.

VA and the US Embassy have shared the process that you may wish to go through to register your vaccine with the Philippines Bureau of Quarantine (BOQ) and receive an International Certification of Vaccinations (ICV) – also referred to as a “yellow card”. Veterans having difficulties with only their US CDC Vaccine card may find these ICVs more widely accepted. As more and more Philippine citizens return from overseas having been vaccinated, I suspect a more formalized verification system will be implemented within the Philippines for those vaccinated from non-Philippine sources to register their vaccine. We will continue to keep Veterans apprised of new developments on this front and realize how important having valid and readily accepted proof of your vaccine will be in the coming weeks and months.

COVID-19 VACCINE UPDATES:

The US Food and Drug Administration recently extended the expiration date of VA Manila’s current vaccine supply through September 21, 2021. VA Manila will continue to provide scheduled and walk-in appointments on weekdays between now and Tuesday, September 21, 2021. Manila will be open for weekend vaccination appointments and walk-in vaccinations for Veterans and spouses this upcoming weekend, Saturday, September 11, 2021 and Sunday, September 12, 2021. Scheduled appointments are available between 8AM to 12PM both days, and walk-ins will be accommodated between 10AM and 12PM.

If you are a non-enrolled Veteran who has never been a patient at the Manila Outpatient Clinic, or a spouse of a Veteran, you can register for a vaccine by email. Please refer to previous clinic updates for a copy of the scheduling worksheet. Send completed worksheets to ManilaCOVIDVaccine@va.gov. A member of the VA Manila Staff will contact you. VA Manila is still unable to provide COVID-19 vaccines to dependents and caregivers. We estimate there are many thousands of Veterans and spouses who are still waiting for a vaccine, and we must prioritize these groups first. We continue to encourage any caregivers to avail of the first vaccine option that is presented, even if it is through your LGU or local Department of Health.

Many Veterans are asking about COVID-19 booster vaccinations. At this time, we are still awaiting further information from VA regional and national clinical leadership about if/when these may be available at the Manila VA Clinic. Current guidance for Pfizer vaccine recipients is that a booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine may be recommended 8 months following the completion of the 2-dose series. There are also recommendations for those individuals who are immunocompromised. Since VA Manila did not start vaccinated until April and didn’t conclude vaccines for our first patients until mid-May 2021, the 8 month time window will not open for Veterans in the Philippines until February 2022. There is no recommendation for Janssen / J&J Vaccine booster shots at this time. We will continue to update Veterans as more information is received.

Daily Walk-In Hours for COVID-19 Vaccinations between Sept 8 – Sept 21, 2021

VA Manila is trying to accommodate COVID-19 vaccines for as many Veterans, spouses, widows of Veterans, and CHAMPVA recipients as possible. To accomplish this goal, will be administering vaccines every weekday through September 21, 2021. Veterans and spouses can contact the Clinic to pre-register and get scheduled, which may assist with travel at this time. Walk-ins will also be accepted daily from

10AM – 12PM. In addition to weekday vaccine appointments, VA Manila will have dedicated COVID-19 Mass Vaccine Clinics on the following Saturdays and Sundays:

- Saturday, September 11, 2021 08:00 – 12:30 ** Walk-in Hours from 10A – 12P **
- Sunday, September 12, 2021 08:00 – 12:30 ** Walk-in Hours from 10A – 12A **

How do I get scheduled for an appointment?

Getting an appointment for a COVID Vaccine is easy – follow one of these 3 steps!

- A dedicated phone line has been set up at the VA Manila Clinic to accommodate the high demand to schedule vaccine appointments. Veterans can contact the Manila Outpatient Clinic at +63-02-8550-3888, Press Option 2 for the Outpatient Clinic, then press 3 for COVID-19 Vaccine Scheduling. Please understand that there may be extended hold times over the next several days as we try to schedule as many Veterans as possible. The Clinic's phone lines are open Monday to Friday from 8AM to 3PM, as well as on weekends during scheduled vaccine appointments.
- If you would like to be scheduled for vaccination on one of the upcoming Saturday or Sunday mass vaccination clinic days, you can send a Secure Message to your primary care team via MyHealthVet with your preferred date and time. One of our staff members will get back to you to confirm your appointment.
- You can also send an email with your preferred date and time to ManilaCOVIDVaccine@va.gov. Please include your last name, last 4 of your SSN, and your current address and phone number in your email so that we can confirm the information on file. VA Manila will send you a text message to confirm your appointment time, or an email reply if no cellular phone is on file.

What vaccine is available?

VA Manila will be providing the Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson and Johnson (Janssen) vaccine to Veterans. The link to the Janssen / Johnson and Johnson Vaccine information page from the US Centers of Disease Control and Prevention is <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/janssen/index.html>. This vaccine confers protection with just one-dose, rather than the two dose regimens required by the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. Using the Janssen / Johnson and Johnson vaccine will allow VA Manila to vaccinate twice as many Veterans and save many Veterans the time and expense of traveling to the Clinic twice to receive their vaccinations. This is the only vaccine that will be available during the upcoming vaccine campaign. There will not be a choice between other US FDA approved vaccines, and VA Manila does not know if future vaccine shipments will be made available and what type of vaccines may be sent to the Clinic in the future.

All three US FDA approved vaccines are safe and effective against COVID-19 virus, and are considered highly effective against severe illness, hospitalization, and death from the Coronavirus. While some vaccines report higher levels of protection, the three vaccines have not been studied head-to-head against one another, so it is not possible to make a comparison between the Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson and Johnson vaccines. We strongly recommend all Veterans receive a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible.

OTHER VA MANILA OPC CLINIC UPDATES

The U.S. Embassy, along with the VA Manila Regional Office and Outpatient Clinic, will be closed in recognition of the following upcoming public holidays:

- US Columbus Day Monday, October 11, 2021
- PH All Saints Day Monday, November 1, 2021

- PH All Souls Day Tuesday, November 2, 2021
- US Veterans Day Thursday, November 11, 2021
- US Thanksgiving Day Thursday, November 25, 2021

NOTE: Plan ahead and order your refills 10 workdays in advance of holiday closures. Air21 is also closed on these holidays so medications will be delayed if you fail to request refills 10 days in advance. If you run out of medications for a service-connected condition, you can buy the medicine from a community pharmacy and file a claim for reimbursement from the FMP.

FOREIGN MEDICAL PROGRAM UPDATES

VA’s Foreign Medical Program has been making progress at improving the timeliness of claims processing. As of today, FMP is processing claims received on June 15, 2021, and opening mail received on September 2, 2021. Veterans with questions about their claims’ status are welcomed to contact FMP directly at VHA Office of Community Care, Foreign Medical Program (FMP), PO Box 469061, Denver, CO 80246-9061 USA Toll-free phone: +1 (877) 345-8179 or Fax: +1 (303) 331-7803 or website Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS) at <https://iris.custhelp.va.gov> or Email: hac.fmp@va.gov. FMP can be reached by selecting option 4. Their hours of operation in Denver, Colorado when converted to Philippine Standard Time are 8:05 pm to 6:45AM Monday evening to Saturday Morning. Veterans in the Philippines can also contact VA Manila’s local telephone numbers and transfer to FMP phone numbers in the United States without international long-distance charges.

- VA Manila Main Telephone Number: +63 (02) 8550-3888
- VA Manila Toll Free Number: #MyVA (#6982) – any mobile in the PH

MEDICAL PROGRAM PARTICIPATING HOSPITAL UPDATES

Contact VA Manila for an updated FMP Participating Provider roster of facilities and healthcare providers in the Philippines. These are facilities who have informed VA Manila that they will provide service-connected healthcare services to Veterans on a credit basis and will bill FMP directly. This allows Veterans to receive service-connected care in the Philippines without out-of-pocket expenses. VA Manila and VA does not accredit or recommend any healthcare provider in the Philippines and is only providing this list for your reference only. Veterans should not draw any conclusions about the providers on this list based on their willingness to directly bill the VA Foreign Medical Program.

VETERANS WITH CPAP/BIPAP MACHINES ISSUED FROM VA MANILA

Veterans who received a CPAP / BIPAP Machine issued from VA Manila should visit the following website: www.philips.com/src-update. On this site additional information will be provided. Veterans should register their devices with Philips, who will be responsible for replacing any recalled devices. Based on this global recall, there are currently shortages of new machine replacements. A link to a YouTube video from Philips at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SR-vXWQEFw> has further information and guidance.

Since VA Manila no longer has a prosthetics department at the Outpatient Clinic, we will be unable to provide replacement devices to Veterans in the Philippines. Veterans who are service connected for sleep apnea or other sleep respiratory disorders may wish to utilize the Foreign Medical Program to obtain replacement devices. Veterans with service-connected disabilities related to sleep apnea can confirm their eligibility for replacement devices with the Foreign Medical Program directly.

Daniel Gutkoski, MHA

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US Embassy to the Philippines, Seafront Compound
1501 Roxas Boulevard, 1302 Pasay City, Metro Manila
Direct: +63 (02) 8396-3735 Toll Free: #MyVA (#6982)

VA Women Vet Programs

Update 41: I Am Not Invisible Campaign

Leaders across the Department of Veterans Affairs are mitigating barriers for women veterans and increasing access to benefits and services through new technology solutions. Within VA's Center for Women Veterans, division Director Lourdes Tiglao highlighted a new campaign called **I Am Not Invisible** (IANI), which aims to spotlight diversity across the veteran community. IANI is increasing awareness and dialogue about women veterans as well as highlighting their skills and expertise.



“The importance of that is making sure that veterans, whether they’re male or female, across different demographics, they see that women veterans served. Many times, you’ve probably heard that when someone says ‘veteran,’ the first thing that comes to mind is a male veteran,” Tiglao said during ACT-IAC's VA Initiatives for Women Veterans webinar earlier this month. “We don’t always hold space to make sure that we own our space as women veterans.” IANI also aims to make sure that women are comfortable in their service and to create a community of support as they transition out of the military. To foster these communities, the Center for Women Veterans also hosts networking opportunities to connect women veterans and ensure their voices are heard.

At the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), leaders are conducting outreach to women veterans to build new spaces to share experiences and create new learning opportunities, said Cheryl Rawls, executive director of outreach, transition and economic development at VBA. “We’ve been conducting roundtables across various demographics ... to listen to the issues and concerns and some of the barriers they find for access with Native American women veterans, with Caribbean and international women veterans,” Tiglao said. “We will try to reach women veterans wherever they are... to make sure that no one feels that they are any less deserving of their service because they are not seen.”

While VA evolves to drive equity, the department is honing in on education. Many times, women veterans are not aware of their full range of benefits and services, Tiglao said. VA is accelerating awareness campaigns to ensure all veterans receive equal opportunities after service. “We’re trying to connect those women veterans together to feel empowered, to find support and to be mentored,” Tiglao said. “The first part of providing positive impact is acknowledging their existence, providing a platform for them to speak

their mind and helping them to feel empowered to have a voice. Their opinions and voices are valued at VA, and we will do our best to address those.”

As service members transition out of the military, Rawls is working to boost veteran participation, so they better understand the range offerings at VA. Rawls' team recently launched a women's health training module that provides a safe environment for women to talk with other women about their health and get the help they need. “As we are continuing to evolve, we are listening to you,” Rawls said. “We are continuing to put out programs and projects ... and we're at a pace now where we are sprinting.”

VA is also launching new technology tools like call centers, new reproductive health capabilities and telehealth to expand access services and benefits. Luwanda Jones, deputy CIO at VA's Office of Strategic Sourcing, said that IT capabilities are enabling better care and removing barriers. “What the pandemic allowed us to do was to expand our telehealth capabilities. We're looking at approximately 11 million veterans that access telehealth between the time that the pandemic started until now. We're looking at how we can use artificial intelligence to make sure we can provide the capabilities that we need to provide for our women,” Jones said.

Looking ahead, the Center for Women Veterans is working with the Veterans Experience Office to develop new tools that are tailored for women veterans. Tiglao said that many of VA's existing tools are generic across veterans and dilute the needs of minority communities. “This is all going to be a part of an ongoing effort to meet women veterans where they're at in the mode they're comfortable with. It's not to force us to come to us. It's just one way to show that we're listening to our women veterans across various demographics, and that we're lowering the barriers for them to reach us,” Tiglao said. [Source: GovernmentCIO Media & Research | Sarah Sybert | August 30, 2021 ++]

VA Bedford Healthcare System

Dead Vet Not Found on VA Campus for Over a Month



Confusion over proper procedures at a Veterans Affairs hospital allowed a dead veteran to go unnoticed in a stairwell for more than a month after he was reported missing, according to a federal report released 9 SEP. The report by the VA's inspector general detailed a series of missteps by VA staffers and police who searched for the missing veteran at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital campus in Bedford, Massachusetts. The body of 62-year-old Tim White, a U.S. Army veteran, was wearing the same clothes as when he was last seen in May 2020. White was found about 20 yards from his room in an

emergency exit stairwell of his residential building, which is on the grounds of the VA hospital but is operated by Caritas Communities, an organization that provides services to homeless people.

A preliminary report on White's death found no evidence of injury or foul play. VA investigators determined the stairwell was never searched, in part because VA police wrongly believed that since White's residence building was privately operated, it wasn't their responsibility to search the stairwell. For the same reason, VA staff didn't monitor or clean the area. The report identified other lapses. VA rules require staffers to follow a specific protocol when searching for missing patients that includes searching stairwells. But White was considered a resident, and not a patient, so those rules weren't followed. Poor communication also hampered the search. Shortly after White disappeared, Bedford police asked the VA police to use dogs to search the property. The VA police didn't respond to the request for two weeks.

"Mr. White's disappearance did not receive the attention it deserved from (the) VA, an agency that is required by federal law to provide for the protection of all persons on its property," the investigators concluded in their report, which offered several suggested changes in procedure. In a formal response to the investigative report, the VA said it would adopt many of the suggestions laid out in the report. The chief of the VA police department resigned earlier this year. "We extend our condolences to the family and friends of this patient and are deeply saddened by this loss," the VA wrote.

Messages left with Caritas Caritas Communities organization were not immediately returned 9 SEP. In an earlier statement, Caritas had said that while it provides services and housing on site, the stairwell is controlled by the VA. U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton, who had sought an investigation into White's death, said that the report shows the need for big improvements. "Tim White deserved better from the country than dying alone in a stairwell," Moulton said in a statement. "His life might have been saved if the Bedford VA Police Department did its job." [Source: Associated Press | September 10, 2021 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse **Reported 01 thru 15 SEP 2021**

Newport News, Va — A Portsmouth woman was sentenced 27 AUG to 9.5 years in prison for wire fraud and aggravated identity theft in connection with a scheme to defraud veterans. "What is most egregious about the defendant's conduct is that she used her own status as a former veteran to defraud and take advantage of other veterans," said Raj Parekh, Acting U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of Virginia. "The sentence imposed in this case reflects the serious nature of these fraud schemes and the potential consequences that those who victimize veterans, who have sacrificed so much for our country, could face in the Eastern District of Virginia."

According to court documents, **Rita Copeland**, 59, operated an entity known as "Veteran Services of the Commonwealth." From 2016 through 2020, Copeland purported to provide caregiving, contracting, and rental assistance services to various veterans. Copeland caused a number of victims to apply for Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) grants through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Such grant payments are to be used for certain designated improvements to the residences of veterans. Copeland failed to perform all of the promised work and used a portion of these payments to her own benefit, contrary to the designated purposes of the funds.

Copeland also diverted the income and retirement fund payments of another veteran to a bank account that she had opened. In addition, Copeland fraudulently obtained and diverted loan funds and used the credit and debit cards of this elderly victim. Finally, Copeland engaged in a rental fraud scheme, purporting to link veterans and others with landlords, but then diverted rental and security deposit payments to her own benefit. In total, from at least 2017-2020, Copeland's fraud schemes impacted at least 29 victims, resulting in a combined loss of approximately \$430,000.

Combatting elder abuse and financial fraud targeted at seniors is a key priority of the Department of Justice. Elder abuse is an intentional or negligent act by any person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to an older adult. It is a term used to describe five subtypes of elder abuse: physical abuse, financial fraud, scams and exploitation, caregiver neglect and abandonment, psychological abuse, and sexual abuse. Elder abuse is a serious crime against some of our nation's most vulnerable citizens, affecting at least 10 percent of older Americans every year. Together with our federal, state, local, and tribal partners, the Department of Justice is steadfastly committed to combatting all forms of elder abuse and financial exploitation through enforcement actions, training and resources, research, victim services, and public awareness. [Source: DoJ Eastern District of Georgia | U.S. Attorney's Office | August 27, 2021 ++]

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New Orleans, La — A federal grand jury in New Orleans returned an indictment 27 AUG charging a Louisiana physician for his role in distributing over 1,200,000 doses of Schedule II controlled substances, including oxycodone and morphine, outside the scope of professional practice and not for a legitimate medical purpose, and for maintaining his clinic for the purpose of illegally distributing controlled substances. The indictment also charged the physician with defrauding health care benefit programs, including Medicare, Medicaid, and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana, of more than \$5,100,000, given that the opioid prescriptions were filled using health insurance benefits.

According to court documents, Adrian **Dexter Talbot**, M.D., 55, of Slidell, owned and operated a medical clinic located in Slidell that accepted cash payments from individuals seeking prescriptions for Schedule II controlled substances. In 2015, Talbot took a full-time job in Pineville, Louisiana, and although he was no longer physically present at the Slidell clinic, he pre-signed prescriptions to be distributed to individuals there without seeing or examining those individuals. In 2016, Talbot hired another practitioner who also pre-signed prescriptions to be distributed in the same manner at the Slidell clinic. With Talbot's knowledge, individuals were filling their prescriptions that were issued outside the scope of professional practice and not for a legitimate medical purpose using their insurance benefits, thereby causing health care benefit programs to be fraudulently billed for filling prescriptions that were written without an appropriate patient examination or determination of medical necessity for the prescription.

Talbot is charged with one count each of conspiracy to unlawfully distribute and dispense controlled substances, maintaining a drug-involved premises and conspiracy to commit health care fraud, as well as four counts of unlawfully distributing and dispensing controlled substances. The defendant was scheduled for his initial court appearance 10 SEP before U.S. Magistrate Judge Michael B. North of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana. If convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of 10 years for conspiracy to commit health care fraud and 20 years each for all other counts. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The FBI, HHS-OIG, VA-OIG, and the Louisiana Office of the Attorney General's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit are investigating the case. [Source: DoJ Office of Public Affairs | August 27, 2021 ++]

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Boston, Mass. —A spinal device manufacturer based in Malden, Mass. and its Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) were arrested 7 SEP and charged in connection with a kickback scheme to bribe surgeons to use company products in exchange for sham consulting fees. **Kingsley R. Chin**, MD, 57, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., the CEO and founder of SpineFrontier; **Aditya Humad**, 36, of Cambridge, Mass., the company's CFO; and SpineFrontier, Inc., were indicted on one count of conspiracy to violate the Anti-Kickback Statute, six counts of violations of the Anti-Kickback Statute and one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering.

According to the indictment, SpineFrontier, Chin and Humad paid, and conspired to pay, millions of dollars in bribes to surgeons in the form of sham consulting fees for work they did not perform. The defendants allegedly bribed surgeons to use SpineFrontier's products, and in turn, SpineFrontier received millions of dollars in revenue from surgeries the surgeons performed. The defendants allegedly entered into contracts with surgeons, agreeing to pay the surgeons between \$250 and \$1,000 per hour for purported consulting for SpineFrontier. In reality, however, the defendants allegedly paid the surgeons for using SpineFrontier's products. Although the surgeon-consulting program was purportedly directed at gathering technical feedback about SpineFrontier's products, the indictment alleges that Chin and Humad designed and used the program, and the bribes they paid pursuant to that program, to induce surgeons to use SpineFrontier's products in surgeries that were paid for by federal health care programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, TRICARE and VHA.

It is further alleged that the surgeons frequently spent only a small fraction of their reported time, if any at all, performing actual consulting. On numerous occasions the bribe amounts were determined following a review of the number of procedures a surgeon performed and the amount of revenue those procedures generated for SpineFrontier. The defendants allegedly paid each surgeon described in the indictment between \$32,625 and \$978,000 in bribes during the conspiracy.

This indictment follows two guilty pleas in related criminal prosecutions. In August 2020, **Jason Montone**, D.O., 45, of Lawson, Miss., pleaded guilty to conspiracy to violate the Anti-Kickback Statute and obstruction and John **Balzer**, 43, of Lenexa, Kan., pleaded guilty to conspiracy to violate the Anti-Kickback Statute and one count of witness tampering. Montone and Balzer are scheduled to be sentenced on March 22 and 23, 2022, respectively.

The charge of conspiring to violate the Anti-Kickback Statute provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release, a fine of \$250,000 or twice the gross gain or gross loss resulting from the offense, whichever is greater, forfeiture and restitution. The charges of violating the Anti-Kickback Statute provide for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release, a fine of up to \$100,000, forfeiture and restitution. The charge of conspiracy to commit money laundering provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release, a fine of \$500,000 or twice the value of the property involved in the transaction, whichever is greater, forfeiture and restitution. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors. The details contained in the indictment are allegations. The defendants are presumed innocent

unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law. [Source: DoJ District of Massachusetts | U.S. Attorney's Office | September 7, 2021 ++]

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Philadelphia, Penn – Richard Meleski, 58, of Chalfont, PA, was sentenced to three years and four months in prison, three years of supervised release, and ordered to pay \$302,121 in restitution for a particularly disgraceful fraud scheme to steal Veterans Administration (VA) benefits by pretending to be a veteran who had been captured by the enemy during combat. In July 2020, the defendant pleaded guilty to one count of healthcare fraud, two counts of mail fraud, one count of stolen valor, two counts of fraudulent military papers, as well as two counts of aiding and abetting straw purchases, and one count of making false statements in connection with receiving Social Security Administration disability benefits.

The charges stemmed from Meleski fraudulently claiming to have served as an elite Navy SEAL and falsely representing that he had been a Prisoner of War in order to secure healthcare benefits from the VA worth over \$300,000. Due to his false representation as a Prisoner of War, the defendant received healthcare from the VA in Priority Group 3, effectively receiving healthcare before other deserving military service members. In reality, Meleski never served one day in the United States military.

The defendant also filed for monetary compensation from the VA for PTSD suffered during an armed conflict in Beirut in which he rescued injured teammates. In his application for disability benefits for PTSD, Meleski falsely represented that he had been awarded the Silver Star for his heroic actions during his time as a Navy SEAL. Again, Meleski never served a single day in the United States military and was never awarded such commendation. Meleski also submitted another application to the VA for monetary compensation in which he included obituaries of actual Navy SEALs alongside whom he falsely said he had served. He traded on the actions of these true service members in an attempt to bolster his application for monetary benefits.

In addition the defendant filed for disability benefits from The United States Social Security Administration (SSA) for injuries he claimed to have received during his time in the military. Meleski falsely testified under oath in connection with an SSA Disability proceeding. [Source: DoJ Eastern District of Pennsylvania | U.S. Attorney's Office | September 8, 2021 ++]

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Gulfport, Miss. – A Biloxi VA employee has pled guilty to stealing government property. According to court documents, **Chad Paul Jacob**, 54, pled guilty to stealing personal protective equipment (“PPE”), electronics, and medical equipment while working as the Assistant Chief of Supply Chain Management for the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System. Beginning in 2009 and until December 2020, Jacob stole VA property which he resold at local pawn stores and on his personal eBay account. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Jacob stole N-95 masks and resold them for grossly inflated prices. In total, Jacob made more than \$50,000 selling the stolen N-95 masks and over \$9,000 selling stolen iPads and iPhones.

Jacob is scheduled to be sentenced on December 7, 2021 and faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. A federal district judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors. [Source: DoJ Southern District of Mississippi | U.S. Attorney's Office | September 7, 2021 ++]



Vet Unemployment 2021

Update 05: Well-Below National Levels, Matches Pre-Pandemic Levels

The veterans unemployment rate fell last month to pre-pandemic levels as national jobless rates continued their steadily decline of recent months. According to data released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics on 3 SEP, the unemployment rate for all veterans dropped from 4.0 percent in July to 3.6 percent in August. That's the first time the mark has been below 4 percent since February 2020, before the outbreak of coronavirus in America prompted widespread business closings and layoffs. The 3.6 percent rate translates into roughly 300,000 working-age veterans unable to find steady employment last month, down about 160,000 individuals from August 2020.

Nationally, the unemployment rate declined for the fourth consecutive month in August, to 5.2 percent. Despite the improvement, that figure still sits well above pre-pandemic monthly jobless rates of around 3.5 percent. BLS officials said that so far in 2021, the U.S. economy has averaged about 586,000 new jobs a month. Veterans unemployment rates generally outpace civilian sector figures, although not typically by a gap as large as the August numbers. In the 38 months before the pandemic began, the veterans monthly jobless rate was more than 1 percentage point different from the national rate only twice. In the 17 months since coronavirus impacts, the veterans rate has bettered the overall U.S. estimate by more than 1 percentage point 13 times.

Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars era saw the biggest job improvements in April, posting a 3.1 percent unemployment rate, the lowest for that group since December 2019. The group makes up about 20 percent of all former military members in America today, and about 43 percent of all working veterans. About half of all veterans in America are retired or otherwise no longer actively seeking employment. Lawmakers have approved a series of veteran-focused job training programs in response to the pandemic, arguing that their lack of time in the civilian job market compared to peers could leave them at a competitive disadvantage. But the recent numbers suggest that veteran job seekers may be emerging from an economy crippled by coronavirus faster than many of their peers. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | September 3, 2021 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs

Scheduled As of SEP 15, 2021



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. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown on the Hiring Our Heroes website <https://www.hiringourheroes.org> for the next month. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date Listings of upcoming Vet Job Fairs nationwide providing location, times, events, and registration info if required can be found at the following websites. Note that some of the scheduled events for the next 2 to 6 weeks have been postponed and are awaiting reschedule dates due to the current COVID-19 outbreak. You will need to review each site below to locate Job Fairs in your location:

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

[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | September 15, 2021 ++]

Retiree Annual COLAs

Update 05: Could Congress Again Come for Your's



Congress has an enduring history of tapping into COLA at the expense of your retired pay, and it could very well happen again. As we inch toward what could be the largest growth in COLA since 1982, when it came in at 7.4%, we remain guarded as to any current attempts by Congress to reduce, in any fashion, the legislated protections of the purchasing power of retired pay, survivor and veteran benefits, and Social Security. We have many reasons to be wary of such covert efforts. The history of COLA attacks is well documented. With projected CPI increases leading to a COLA that might top 6%, the significance of this annual adjustment warrants a close look on two fronts:

- As noted above, Congress could channel some of the increase into their efforts to control outlays in response to the growing national debt.
- The high COLA holds broad personal implications -- after all, the increase is tied directly to inflation, which results in higher costs across the board, including your TRICARE benefits.

Thankfully The Military Coalition (TMC) have a long history of watching out for our service members, their families, and survivors especially when it comes to ensuring protection from inflation. In fact, landmark legislation in 1985 served as the impetus to create TMC and established a blueprint of how leadership and followership can be leveraged to change a law before it has a chance to degrade or eliminate or reduce a service-earned entitlement.

This particular assault on COLA started with the passing of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act, otherwise known as 1985 Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act. At the heart of this legislation was the suspension of automatic, indexed increases such as those tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Congress enacted a five-year halt to COLA increases in federal outlays with exceptions for Social Security, veterans' benefits, and some other programs – but not for military retiree pay. President Ronald Reagan signed this legislation Dec. 12, 1985.

Treating retirees as non-veterans was unacceptable to two particular leaders who organized other like-minded advocates to overturn this legislation. Thus became TMC, founded by Col. George F. Hennrikus, Jr., USAF (Ret), from The Retired Officers Association (now the Military Officers Association of America) and Sgt. Maj. C.A. “Mack” McKinney, USMC (Ret), from the Non Commissioned Officers Association. TROA and NCOA joined 14 others to form The Military Coalition and fight to reverse the legislation omitting military retirees from the exemptions protecting COLA:

- Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA)
- Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS)
- Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service (COA)
- Fleet Reserve Association (FRA)
- Marine Corps Reserve Officers Association (MCRA)
- National Association for Uniformed Services/Society of Military Widows (NAUS/SMW)
- National Military Family Association (NMFA)
- Naval Enlisted Reserve Association (NERA)
- Naval Reserve Association (NRA)
- Reserve Officers Association of the United States (ROA)
- The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA)
- U.S. Army Warrant Officers Association (USAWOA)
- U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association (CPOA)
- U.S. Coast Guard Chief Warrant and Warrant Officers Association (CWOA)

How did the coalition tackle this beast of a project, getting a brand-new law reversed? First, the people making up this new coalition came to the table with years and decades of experience. Of note, Robert W. Nolan, the senior registered lobbyist with the Fleet Reserve Association and a retired Navy chief petty officer, leveraged his 25 years' experience on the Hill to guide and fuel the efforts. Paramount was the need to stay on message and rely on their strength of 1.3 million active, reserve, and retired members among those associations.

The coalition inundated Congress with 50,000 mailgrams highlighting the projected 22.5% lifetime loss in pay, and the overall inequity of treating retirees as though they were not veterans. The coalition went public at the National Press Club to gain wide awareness of the COLA disparities. Its members and staff visited over 60 Senators and other key leaders on the Hill – and even held a breakfast to honor the cosponsors and supporters. (MOAA – then TROA – kept its members up to date on these activities via The Retired Officer magazine; the information above came from an article in the September 1988 issue by the late Col. Paul Arcari, USAF (Ret), then-deputy director of Legislative Affairs. The strength of the message, delivered by an organized body of experienced representatives from our uniformed services communities representing over a million constituents, carried the day; President Reagan signed legislation Oct. 21, 1986, exempting all federal government civilians and military from cuts to their COLA increases.

The 1985-86 legislative cycle was far from the last time elected officials have looked to decrease your earned COLA to cover other budget gaps. Today, the coalition has 35 associations, representing nearly 5.5 million members, families, and survivors continuing its work to defend the buying power of your benefits. Membership in these organizations along with supporting their legislative efforts by contacting our senators and representatives about issues of concern is critical. When was the last time you communicated with your legislator about veteran benefits? [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Dan Merry | September 01, 2021 ++]

Vet Suicide

Update 54: Risk among Veterans Declined During Pandemic



Suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts among veterans declined significantly in the first 10 months of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for those under age 65, a study published 25 AUG in the journal JAMA Psychiatry found. However, while the group of veterans who contracted COVID-19 during the course of the study period was small, they reported more than twice the frequency of suicidal thoughts, something the authors described as needing "future research to examine the potential link between COVID-19 infection and suicidal behavior."

The study, which surveyed more than 3,000 veterans in November 2019 and again a year later -- 10 months after the pandemic was declared -- found that suicidal ideation, defined as suicidal thoughts or ideas, decreased for the entire group by about one-fifth, from 10.6% of those surveyed to 8%. The declines were most significant -- by approximately one-third -- in the 18 to 44 age group, which saw suicidal ideation drop from 22% to 15.4%, and the 45 to 64 age group, which dropped from 15.7% to 10.3%. Older veterans were the cohort that saw little change, according to the study "Prevalence and Trends in Suicidal Behavior among U.S. Military Veterans during the COVID-19 Pandemic." Available at

[https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2783601?guestAccessKey=4ac3b0d1-89a3-4e0e-bf31-a93859cba731&utm_source=For The Media&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ftm_links&utm_content=tf1&utm_term=082521](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2783601?guestAccessKey=4ac3b0d1-89a3-4e0e-bf31-a93859cba731&utm_source=For%20The%20Media&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ftm_links&utm_content=tf1&utm_term=082521)

Mental health professionals have had concerns about the strain of the pandemic on veterans, who are at a higher risk for suicide due to factors such as chronic physical and mental health conditions and loneliness. The adjusted suicide rate among veterans has risen nearly 30% since 2010. Experts feared that the pandemic, which has led to social isolation and decreases in veterans seeking medical care, would create an unprecedented spike in suicides, the authors, many of whom are university researchers who treat patients at the Department of Veterans Affairs, noted. Instead, they found that suicidal ideation increased in just 2.6% of those surveyed, or 82 veterans. "These results suggest that despite grim forecasts about the COVID-19 pandemic possibly creating a perfect storm for suicidal behavior, the prevalence of suicidality did not appear to increase among military veterans nearly 10 months into the pandemic," the authors wrote.

The study found that, among the 82 veterans who reported an increase in suicidal thoughts, most reported having lifetime post-traumatic stress disorder, low social support and issues with alcohol. The highest risk factor for developing suicidal thoughts during the pandemic was having previously attempted suicide. Notably, the third-highest risk factor was whether the veteran had contracted COVID-19, according to the survey. That finding prompted the authors, led by Brandon Nichter, with the Department of Psychiatry at the University of California-San Diego, to call for more research on the relationship between COVID-19 and suicidal ideation.

The authors of the study noted that, of those respondents who had COVID-19 and reported suicidal thoughts, most characterized their illnesses as "not severe," raising the possibility that even asymptomatic to moderate COVID-19 infection may be associated with elevated suicide risk. But, the researchers said, it is possible that those who reported increased suicidal ideation and also contracted COVID-19 may have had unrecorded or unmeasured health conditions that put them at risk for both. The majority of those surveyed for the data set used by researchers were male -- nearly 92% -- and 79.3% were white. They had an average age of 63. However, enough younger veterans responded for the researchers to conclude that the decline was significant in their age groups. They theorized that younger veterans may have been able to better garner social support during the pandemic than seniors and may be more resilient to stressors and adversity as a result of their military service.

The study is significant because it is the first to look at veterans' suicidal tendencies during the pandemic. It also is the first to suggest that having COVID-19 may be associated with suicide attempts or thoughts. More than 307,000 veterans in the VA health care system have tested positive for COVID-19, including 13,472 who have died. The authors also cautioned that their conclusions may be tempered because of several constraints on the data: the survey likely underestimated suicidal ideation, given possible reluctance to speak up by those surveyed; that suicidal ideation may have emerged later in the pandemic and has yet to be studied; and that the cohort was mostly older, male and white, requiring more research to determine whether the findings apply to the more general veteran population.

During the survey, eight respondents attempted suicide. The research did not note whether any of them had COVID-19. If you or someone you know is in crisis, contact the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-

8255 (press 1) or via www.veteranscrisisline.net. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | August 25, 2021 ++]

PTSD Treatment Research

Update 01: GluA1 Protein Impact



A new company, with funding from the U.S. Army, may have found the secret to treating PTSD with a pill or some other direct form of medicine. Right now, treatments for PTSD range from virtual reality to electronic brain stimulation to hallucinogens and ecstasy. But while these can lessen symptoms, they don't offer a direct cure. Dr. Jennifer Perusini, founder of Neurovation Labs, says PTSD has a unique biomarker called GluA1. It's a protein that is part of a glutamate receptor system, which helps memory formation. But trauma can also spur the creation of GluA1.

In 2014, during experiments for her doctoral thesis, she found that rats subjected to traumatic experiences had more GluA1. They also experienced anxiety and symptoms associated with PTSD, even when they weren't experiencing threatening noises and lights. Blocking the protein removed the anxiety, but the rats still displayed a healthy reaction to new frightening stimuli. That's key, because it's important to retain the ability to be scared by actual threats. Perusini is currently in pre-clinical trial mode for a medicine that can block GluA1, and the clinical trial process could take years. But she already has financial support from the Air Force and from the Army through the Army's xTech program, which awarded her \$145,000 to develop her model that targets the protein.

Neurovation Labs was one of five companies xTech featured this week as part of a showcase of finalists that had passed through the program. Zeke Topolosky, chief of the strategic partnerships office at the DEVCOM Army Research Laboratory, told Defense One that the competition to get into the xTech program is strong. "We get about 300 to 400 proposals. We select about 50 to do a live pitch... That's when we do really technical vetting: 'OK, this solution is really viable. It works. It solves a problem the Army needs solving.' Those are the companies that make it out of the pitch round," he said. In addition to funding, the program also helps companies navigate the Army's acquisition process to speed new technology development and deployment. [Source: DefenseOne | Patrick Tucker | September 3, 2021 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule

As of SEP 15, 2021

The Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is intended to serve as a one-stop resource for retirees and veterans seeking information about events such as retirement appreciation days (RAD), stand downs, veterans town hall meetings, resource fairs, free legal advice, mobile outreach services, airshows, and other beneficial community events. The events included on the schedule are obtained from military, VA, veterans service organizations and other reliable retiree/veterans related websites and resources.

The current Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is available in the following three formats. After connecting to the website, click on the appropriate state, territory or country to check for events scheduled for your area.

- HTML: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html.
- PDF: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf.
- Word: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc.

Note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date/time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and/or other military retiree/veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, Milton.Bell126@gmail.com.

[Source: Retiree/Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | September 15, 2021 ++]

State Veterans' Benefits

Minnesota 2021

The state of Minnesota provides a number of services and benefits to its veterans. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**State Veteran's Benefits – MN**" for an overview of those in the below categories. They are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below plus the state's current position on veteran issues refer to MOAA's www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard & <http://mn.gov/mdva>:

- Housing
- Healthcare
- Financial Assistance
- Employment
- Education
- Recreation
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing
- Burial
- Taxation

- Women Veteran Program
- Homeless Vet Programs
- Other

[Source: <https://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/minnesota-state-veterans-benefits.html> | September 2021 ++]

*** Vet Legislation ***



Family Care Giving

Update 01: H.R.3321 | Credit for Caring Act of 2021

The **Credit for Caring Act** introduced by Rep. Linda T Sanchez (D-CA-38) on 18 May 2021 has been referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. It would create a new, non-refundable federal tax credit of up to \$5,000 that would help eligible working veteran, military, and other caregivers address the financial challenges of caregiving. This credit would provide critical financial relief to a broad population of hidden heroes that may or may not qualify for support for Department of Veterans Affairs or the Department of Defense but nevertheless incur personal expenses to provide care and support to those who depend on them. In doing so, these caregivers often help delay or prevent more costly medical care that might otherwise be paid by the U.S. taxpayer. [Source: The Enlisted Association | September 8, 2021 ++]

Military Spouse Employment

Update 07: H.R. 2974 | Military Spouse Hiring Act

The **Military Spouse Hiring Act** introduced by Rep. Antonio Delgado (D-NY-19) on 4 May 2021 has been referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. It would create a target group within the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) for employers who hire military spouses and provide a proven economic boost for their communities. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Defense reported a 22% unemployment rate among military spouses, which had remained stagnant since 2012. Employers have expressed concern that hiring and training military spouses who may move within a few years is not cost effective for their companies. We believe expanding WOTC to include a military spouse target group would provide a multi-pronged approach to incentivize employers to tap into a talented pool of potential employees, while also tackling the extreme unemployment rate of military spouses. [Source: The Enlisted Association | September 8, 2021 ++]

Vet Employment

Update 14: H.R. 3582 | Veteran Employment Recovery Act

The **Veteran Employment Recovery Act** introduced by Rep. Pat Fallon (R-TX-4) on 28 May 2021 has been referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. It would expand both short-term unemployment and long-term unemployment tax credits under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) for recently separated servicemembers with a service-connected disability and veterans who have previously received unemployment benefits. We know finding employment during military transition is challenging enough, and made even more difficult if the veteran has a service-connected disability. The Act would temporarily increase the value of the WOTC for recently separated veterans with a disability and veterans who have been unemployed for more than 6 months as our nation's economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. [Source: [Source: The Enlisted Association | September 8, 2021 ++]

VA Mental Health Care

Update 44: H.R.4627 | Veterans' Culturally Competent Care Act of 2021

Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester, Lisa [D-DE-At Large] introduced 07/22/2021) The **Veterans' Culturally Competent Care Act of 2021** on 22 JUL 2021. The bill currently has only 8 cosponsors. It would require mental health providers participating in VA's Community Care Network program to meet the same clinical standards and requirements as those applicable to VA mental health providers. It would further require that community care providers engage in training on military culture and a number of other issues common among veterans, including military sexual trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and screening for and management of suicidal ideation.

DAV has had longstanding concerns about the inability to gauge the quality and accessibility of services provided by non-VA providers for specialized mental health care—particularly for treatment of conditions common among veterans or unique to military service, such as post-traumatic stress disorder related to combat and military sexual trauma. A 2018 study published by the RAND Corporation found that many non-VA providers surveyed expressed reservations about their lack of preparedness for treating conditions related to veterans' military service.

DAV strongly believes that veterans deserve the same standard and quality of care whether they are accessing care in VA or when seeking health services through the VA's Community Care Network. We support H.R. 4627, in accordance with DAV Resolution No. 028, which notes that care provided to veterans in the community, when VA care is inaccessible, should be delivered through responsive integrated networks that deliver culturally competent, high quality evidence-based care. DAV is asking that readers use the following editable prepared letter to urge their Representative to support passage of this bill:

o-o-O-o-o-

Subj: Please Support H.R. 4627, Veterans' Culturally Competent Care Act of 2021

Dear Rep. _____,

As your constituent, I am writing to ask you to support H.R. 4627, the Veterans' Culturally Competent Care Act of 2021, a bill that would require mental health providers participating in VA's Community Care Network program to meet the

same clinical standards and requirements as those applicable to VA mental health providers. It would further require that community care providers engage in training on military culture and certain conditions to improve treatment and their understanding of issues that impact veterans, including military sexual trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and screening for and management of suicidal ideation,.

DAV has had longstanding concerns about the inability to gauge the quality and accessibility of services provided by non-VA providers who are treating veterans for unique conditions associated with their military service such as post-traumatic stress disorder related to combat and military sexual trauma. A 2018 study published by the RAND Corporation found that many non-VA providers expressed reservations about their lack of preparedness for treating conditions related to veterans' military service. I believe veterans should have access to care from providers that are knowledgeable about issues affecting veterans' health, whether that care is provided in the veterans health care system, or through the VA's Community Care Network.

Please cosponsor and support passage of H.R. 4627, the Veterans' Culturally Competent Care Act of 2021. Thank you for your support of the nation's service-disabled veterans.

*Sincerely,
Your Name
Your Address*

[Source: [Source: The Enlisted Association | September 8, 2021 ++]

VA Pharmacy

Update 11: S.1779 | Veterans Preventative Health Coverage Fairness Act

While service-connected disabled veterans rated higher than 50% do not incur costs for medications, those with lower disability compensation ratings using VA for their health care are currently required to pay out-of-pocket for many of the prescription drugs, preventative health medications and health screenings they need. H.R.1779, the **Veterans Preventative Health Coverage Fairness Act**, would add preventative medications and services to the list of no-fee treatments that VA covers and eliminate copayments for such items and services.

This includes immunizations, cancer screenings, vitamin supplements and tobacco cessation products, well-woman visits and other potentially life-saving assessments recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. In contrast, these same medications and services are provided free of charge to service members, military retirees and many civilians. DAV believes that asking veterans to pay for part of the benefits they earned in service to the nation is fundamentally contrary to the spirit and principles underlying those benefits. Therefore, DAV strongly supports S. 1779, in accordance with DAV Resolution No. 019, which calls for the elimination or reduction of VA co-payments for service-disabled veterans. Towards this they have prepared the below editable letter and are asking veterans to forward it to their legislators:

o-o-O-o-o-

*Subj: Please Support S. 1779, the Veterans Preventative Health Coverage Fairness Act
Dear Sen. _____*

On May 20, 2021, Senators Tammy Duckworth (IL) and Susan Collins (ME) introduced the Veterans Preventative Health Coverage Fairness Act, which would add preventative medications and services to the list of no-fee treatments that VA covers and eliminate copayments for such items and services.

While service-connected disabled veterans rated higher than 50% do not incur costs for medications, those with lower disability compensation ratings using VA for their health care are currently required to pay out-of-pocket for many of the prescription drugs, preventative health medications and health screenings they need. This includes immunizations, cancer screenings, vitamin supplements and tobacco cessation products, well-woman visits and other potentially life-saving assessments. In contrast, these same medications and services are provided free of charge to service members, military retirees and many civilians.

I ask that you support S. 1779 and consider being a cosponsor of this important legislation. Please advise me of your intentions with respect to this bill.

*Sincerely,
Your Name
Your Address*

[Source: DAV National Commander | Andrew Marshall | September 7, 2021 ++]

Vet Homelessness

Update 108: S.2172 | Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (MT) introduced comprehensive legislation—S. 2172, the **Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021**, to strengthen and expand services to veterans who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless. Specifically, the bill would:

- Adjust grants awarded by the VA for comprehensive homeless service programs;
- Increase the maximum rates of per diem payments provided by the VA;
- Create a program to provide services to assist veterans with navigating housing and health care resources;
- Create a grant program for homeless veterans that coordinates alcohol and substance use disorder recovery services;
- Increase and extend the appropriations for homeless veterans re-integration programs;
- Require the Comptroller General of the United States to provide a report on the availability of affordable housing for veterans who have participated in any program administered by the Homeless Programs Office of the VA; and
- Create two pilot grant programs to care for elderly homeless veterans and improve public transportation services for veterans.

Many veterans experience homelessness due to conditions stemming from military service, including post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries. Homeless veterans also have a higher prevalence of mental health issues, and are at greater risk for suicide. DAV supports S. 2172 in accordance with DAV Resolution No.119, which supports legislation to maintain and improve VA's programs and services to eliminate veteran homelessness. You can assist in supporting their effort by using their prepared editable letter below to ask your Senators to cosponsor and support this important bill.

o-o-O-o-o-

Subj: Please Support S. 2172, Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021
Rep. _____

As your constituent, I ask you to support S. 2172, the Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021. This comprehensive bill, introduced by Senate Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jon Tester, would strengthen and expand services to veterans who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless. Specifically, the bill would:

- Adjust grants awarded by the VA for comprehensive homeless service programs;
- Increase the maximum rates of per diem payments provided by the VA;
- Create a program to provide services to assist veterans with navigating housing and health care resources;
- Create a grant program for homeless veterans that coordinates alcohol and substance use disorder recovery services;
- Increase and extend the appropriations for homeless veterans re-integration programs;
- Require the Comptroller General of the United States to provide a report on the availability of affordable housing for veterans who have participated in programs administered by the Homeless Programs Office of the VA; and
- Create two pilot grant programs to care for elderly homeless veterans and improve public transportation services to veterans.

Many veterans experience homelessness due to conditions stemming from military service, including post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries. Homeless veterans also have a higher prevalence of mental health issues, and are at greater risk for suicide.

Please inform me of your intentions to cosponsor and support S. 2172, the Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act.

Thank you for your support of our nation's veterans who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless.

Sincerely,
Your Name
Your Address

[Source: DAV National Commander | Andrew Marshall | September 9, 2021 ++]

Note:

1. If in doubt as to your legislator's online contact info or who they are, the below websites provide ALL legislator's names with contact info to facilitate the copying and forwarding of suggested letters to them:

- ❖ <https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22members%22%5D%2C%22congress%22%3A%5B%22117%22%5D%7D%22%20-%20House>
- ❖ <https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22members%22%5D%2C%22congress%22%3A%5B%22117%22%5D%2C%22chamber%22%3A%22Senate%22%7D%22%20-%20Senate>

2. To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 117th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate. Bills are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole. To read the text of bills that are to be considered on the House floor in the upcoming week refer to <https://docs.house.gov/floor>.

*** Military ***



Basic Allowance for Housing

Update 09: Temporary Hike Likely Imminent

Military members and families affected by surging housing costs in 56 areas around the country may soon get relief through a temporary hike in their Basic Allowance for Housing. DoD officials had not officially confirmed the initiative to Military Times by publication time, but the start is imminent, according to a Pentagon source with knowledge of the discussions. The temporary BAH hike has been approved by DoD personnel officials and is scheduled to take effect 1 OCT, the source said.

A partial copy of an “action memo” within the Defense Department, which has been circulating on social media, requests temporary BAH increases of between 10 to 20 percent for 56 specific areas. The memo from J.B. Busch, DoD’s director of military compensation policy, to Leonard Litton, acting deputy assistant secretary of defense for military personnel policy, asks for Litton’s approval of the temporary BAH hikes and states the temporary rates would remain in effect through December 2021. Typically, BAH rates are adjusted once a year and the new rates take effect 1 JAN.

According to several internal sources, officials are still hashing out the guidance for implementation of the temporary BAH hike. According to the memo, troops will have to request the additional BAH and qualify for it based on certifying they have incurred higher housing costs. But there are no details yet on how that process will work. In those 56 areas, “the large majority of members are expected to be eligible” but the exact percentage is unknown, according to the memo. Assuming the maximum number of certifications, the estimated cost to the services would be about \$159 million, officials stated.

In July, Military Times reported on the difficulty troops and families have been facing as they move to new duty stations, with some paying hundreds of dollars more per month for rentals than their housing allowance covers, if they can even find a rental. Some families delayed making their permanent change of station move, while others set up house in expanded RV campgrounds on base. Some told Military Times they had to live far from base just to find a rental or had to rent housing in unsafe neighborhoods or in less-than-satisfactory condition, while still sometimes paying more than their BAH. Defense officials told Military Times then that they were exploring a temporary, out-of-cycle increase in BAH rates for some areas.

According to one list of the military housing areas in line for temporary BAH hikes, five would get a 20 percent increase; 11 would get a 15 percent increase; and 40 would get a 10 percent increase. It’s not clear whether the list is finalized, but the five areas with a 20 percent increase are listed as Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base, California; Eglin Air Force Base, Florida; Boise, Idaho; Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho; and Spokane, Washington. The temporary increases don’t apply to every location. The most current list available — the 56 areas — represents about 18 percent of the 306 military housing areas in the country. Military housing areas geographically group individual ZIP codes, and include rental markets surrounding a duty station or a metropolitan area. The individual MHAs are named for the installation or nearest city.

Defense officials contend they have the authority to temporarily increase the BAH because, by law, the secretary of defense can increase it by up to 20 percent when a president issues a national disaster declaration. On March 13, 2020, President Trump declared a national emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “The

effects of COVID-19 on the rental market in the United States have resulted in housing availability shortages in many [military housing areas] resulting in significant increases in housing costs,” the memo states. “The temporary BAH increases are expected to partially offset the increases in out-of-pocket costs for service members in the most seriously affected [military housing areas].”

The increases will apply to all paygrades and all types of housing within an area. For example, an area may be designated for a 10 percent temporary increase, but the data for apartments may indicate a local increase in housing costs below 10 percent and the data for single family houses may indicate an increase in housing costs above 10 percent. However, all rates for all types of housing will be increased by 10 percent. The memo clearly states that the increased BAH rates are only payable to troops who certify that they are paying higher costs. It appears this increase wouldn’t apply to military privatized housing, since the rent for privatized housing is based on actual BAH, which is paid by allotment directly to the privatized housing landlord. However, DoD hadn’t confirmed that by press time. [Source: NavyTimes | Karen Jowers & Davis Winkie | September 13, 2021 ++]

Navy Uniform & Grooming

Update 09: Series of Changes Unveiled

The Navy has unveiled a wave of uniform and grooming updates — including multiple hairstyle updates for men and women, and guidance regarding earrings, high heels and smartwatches.

- Men are now permitted to shave their heads or sport flat tops, faded and high and tight hairstyles that have either squared or rounded gradual tapers in the back, according to a new naval administrative message released Aug. 31. Sideburns may be worn, too, except in the case of bald sailors, if they are not longer than the length of hair.
- Women now may wear short hairstyles that reveal the scalp, such as hairstyles that include a tapered back or side. One hard hair part is allowed, and must be no longer than four inches or wider than an eighth of an inch. Bald hairstyles still remain unauthorized for women, except for those with medically prescribed treatment.

“These changes recognize hairstyles that are now pretty standard in society and is also aligned with presenting a professional military appearance while in uniform,” Rob Carroll, head of uniform matters on the staff of the chief of naval personnel, said in a Navy news release. “This gives women more options for greater ease on hair care, especially while on deployment when longer styles can be tougher to maintain,” Carroll said. “Female Sailors have been asking for this flexibility.” These hairstyle changes are effective immediately.



Another significant change included in the NAVADMIN is earrings for men. Men may don earrings if they are wearing civilian clothes while in a leave or liberty status, regardless of whether they are on a military installation or not. However, they are still barred from wearing earrings while wearing civilian clothes and performing official duties. Women also have more options wearing high heels in uniform and can wear heels as high as 3 inches now — a slight increase from the previous maximum height of two and five-eighths inches. These heels may be purchased commercially if they align with other uniform standards such as color, design and fabric. Those who have accents or other forms of punctuation in their legal names will also have those marks reflected on their name tags, name patches, or name tapes on Navy uniforms.

Likewise, the NAVADMIN also stipulates guidelines for prescription glasses and sunglasses, noting that frames must be silver, gray, black, navy blue, brown or gold. It's also OK if they are translucent or transparent, or have small logos. Sunglasses may also be green. "There are just so many options available today for glasses and we needed to get some standardization of appearance in uniform," Carroll said. "This change allows for a wide variety of options, ease of compliance and enforcement as well as maintaining a professional military appearance." Black retainer straps may be worn for safety purposes only, and eyeglasses are still barred from being worn on the top of the head or around the neck when not in use.

Fitness trackers and smartwatches may be worn in uniform, effective 60 days from the release. "Only one wristwatch/smartwatch and one fitness tracker can be worn simultaneously and each on a different wrist," the NAVADMIN said. "When wearing a bracelet, a wristwatch/smartwatch or fitness tracker is not authorized on the same wrist as the bracelet." Colors for these devices worn in uniform may be solid black, brown, dark green, grey, navy blue, tan, white, copper, gold metal, silver metal, or a combination of gold and silver metals.

"Navy uniform policy updates are the result of Fleet feedback, uniform working group discussions, command sponsored requests and direction from Navy leadership," the NAVADMIN said. Several of the uniform changes were also addressed during Task Force One Navy listening sessions in 2020 and 2021. The task force was stood up in 2020 in order to address systemic racism within the service, evaluate racial disparities in the military justice system, and examine the fairness of the promotion and advancement process to eliminate "destructive biases."

"We review commonly asked questions submitted by Sailors from around the fleet, we look at trends, and discuss policy considerations," Carroll said. "TF1N did not drive the policy changes, but it can be noted that some of the changes align with the Navy's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives." Go to <https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Portals/55/Messages/NAVADMIN/NAV2021/NAV21183.txt?ver=aAzH8850PXz5XCKbTUdKCO%3d%3d> to read the full list of uniform updates. [Source: NavyTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | September 1, 2021 ++]

Army Rail OPS
One 160 Man Army Unit Left To Handle Worldwide Needs.



If the Army got into a large-scale war, it has only one unit of its own to run all rail operations — the 757th Expeditionary Rail Center. But rail support has already been flagging in peacetime, according to a new Government Accountability Office report. More than two-thirds of Army equipment is moved by rail to port for shipment overseas. Once it arrives, especially in Europe, it's often continuing via rail, as well. But in 2015, the Army cut the 757th ERC from 600 soldiers down to 180, instead relying on civilian employees to pick up the rest of the work. That might not have been the best move.

“The remaining crews have been in high demand and Army officials said it is unclear what would happen in a large mobilization,” the GAO report reads. Making matters worse, about half of the tracks used to move all that gear by rail have been “closed due to defects,” inspectors said. Additionally, four of 60 installations had not met, or have not even scheduled, their five-year ultrasonic inspection timeline standard set by the Army, according to the report. The Army also “doesn’t have an overall program to ensure that tracks are inspected and deficiencies corrected,” according to the report.

The 757th ERC’s main job is in its title — moving Army equipment around by rail in an “expeditionary” setting, such as in Europe to counter any actions by Russia on NATO’s eastern flank. While it’s not the 757th ERC’s official job, the unit also provides rail operating crews in the continental United States, or CONUS, as a “stopgap measure,” Army officials told investigators. In 2018, the demand for the 757th ERC’s crew in CONUS “occurred frequently and regularly.” A 2020 Army study also evaluated rail assets, such as how many trains had to be used to meet requirements. But the study did not determine how many rail operating crews would be necessary for a large-scale mobilization, according to the GAO report. And those rail lines need a look.

The GAO made three recommendations to address the problems, all of which fall to Army Materiel Command:

- Secretary of the Army should ensure that AMC sets a requirement for trained rail operating crews in case of a large mobilization. The AMC commander should then compare the requirement to their existing capability, especially at key CONUS installations.
- Secretary of the Army should also ensure that AMC “analyzes and quantifies” the risk associated with the number of trained rail operating crews required and available to support a large mobilization then take actions to mitigate that risk.
- Secretary of the Army should ensure that the AMC commander require a quality assurance program for oversight of the conditions of the Army rail track and implement the program. At a minimum, the program should cause the “timely and complete” inspection of rail track, use of waivers for track use, tracking and monitoring repairs, prioritizing rail improvement efforts and periodic reporting of updated track conditions to decision makers.

The report was provided to the secretary of the Army. It was published for public viewing on 23 AUG. As of 30 AUG, all three recommendations listed online remained open and did not include responses from the Army. [Source: ArmyTimes | Todd South| August 30, 2021 ++]

National Guard Deployment

Update 01: Alcohol Ban/Curfew Hits Border Mission after DWI Death

A Georgia National Guard soldier assigned to the federalized National Guard mission at the southwestern border was arrested and charged with manslaughter 5 SEP. Within hours, a ban on alcohol consumption and a new curfew for all Guardsmen on the Title 10 border mission was instated, Army Times has learned. Spc. Bianca Farmer was driving a GSA rental vehicle with two other soldiers on Interstate 2 in McAllen, Texas, when she lost control of the vehicle and struck a pair of light poles, according to a source familiar with the incident. The source spoke with Army Times on condition of anonymity in order to discuss an ongoing investigation.



Spc. Bianca Farmer & Spc. Nashyra Whitaker

First responders quickly arrived on scene and pronounced of the Louisiana National Guard deceased. An NCO from the Georgia National Guard suffered non-life threatening injuries, according to the source. Online jail records revealed the McAllen Police Department arrested the driver, Farmer, and charged her with intoxicated manslaughter with a vehicle, driving while intoxicated and intoxicated assault with a vehicle. The soldiers were all assigned to Joint Task Force-North, which consists of more than 3,000 troops from the Guard and other components of the military providing detection and monitoring, logistics and transportation support to U.S. Customs and Border Protection along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Eduardo Natividad, JTF-North spokesperson, told Army Times that the command “has no further information to provide” on the crash beyond the Louisiana National Guard’s public acknowledgement of Whitaker’s death, “as there is currently an ongoing investigation.” Spc. Bianca Farmer was arrested by the McAllen Police Department on suspicion of DWI manslaughter. (Courtesy/Hidalgo County Sheriff’s Office) The crash was only the most recent in a string of service member deaths among the Guard troops assigned to JTF-North.

- Last month, an Alabama National Guard soldier died of COVID-19 while isolating in his hotel room two weeks after a positive test.

- And in July, a Louisiana National Guard soldier — who was assigned to the same company as Whitaker, the soldier killed Sunday — died when multiple civilian vehicles struck him while crossing a McAllen street at 3:30 a.m. local time. A source with knowledge of that incident told Army Times that officials believe the soldier was intoxicated.

New alcohol policy and curfew

Within hours of the accident, the commander of the Guard task force on the mission issued a new policy memo completely banning possession and consumption of alcohol for all Guard troops on the Title 10 border mission. Army Times obtained a copy of the memo. “The current environment, processes, and procedure within the Joint Operations Area of Operation Phoenix Guard are failing to prevent alcohol related misconduct,” said Col. Bradley Leonard, commander of the 110th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and Task Force Phoenix, in the memo. “This destructive behavior has irrevocable and fatal consequences, and without my immediate action, puts our [servicemembers] and civilians as well as this mission in dire risk.”

In the memo, Leonard instituted a 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew for all troops assigned to the task force, save for those on the night shift. He also ordered that all servicemembers “will not consume or possess any alcohol,” in addition to stricter vehicle accountability measures. There have also been other alcohol-related incidents, including ones involving sexual assault and sexual harassment, within the task force, said the source with knowledge of the incidents. A Maine National Guard soldier was charged with kidnapping, two counts of sexual abuse, and one count of aggravated assault after an incident that occurred in Arizona in December.

The policy changes are driven by a need for safety, Leonard explained in the memo. “These measures will combat this destructive behavior to ensure our [servicemembers] return home alive and safe,” he said. Natividad, the JTF-North spokesperson, confirmed the new policy and characterized it as “typical of those implemented for service members during deployments.” “For the safety of service members deployed in support of the Southwest Border mission, policies have been in place since January 2021 that limit alcohol consumption,” he said. “A zero tolerance policy, issued on September 5, 2021, is now in effect.” Natividad did not respond to questions about why the alcohol policy was not implemented after the July death, which a source said also involved alcohol. [Source: ArmyTimes | Davis Winkie | September 7, 2021 ++]

Drone Defense

Update 05: Navy Arming Surface Ships with ‘DRAKE’



Gunner’s Mate Kyle Mendenhall shows Drone Repellent System

With the use of drones becoming more prevalent, the Navy has found a way to ensure all of its surface ships can repel unmanned aerial vehicles. The Drone Restricted Access Using Known Electromagnetic Warfare system, or DRAKE, built by Northrop Grumman and originally used on Humvees during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is now used across the Navy's surface fleet.

"Anybody these days can kind of just buy a \$1500 drone and they can use it to fly over the gates and anything else that they want and come see the ship if they really needed to. So, the Navy saw a very big need for having something to defend ourselves against something so simple that is so common these days," Gunner's Mate Kyle Mendenhall told reporters aboard USS Kansas City (LCS-22) last month. "What this essentially does is it works like a normal jammer. So whenever we have a drone that gets a little bit too close, or flies somewhere that it shouldn't be, or is in any way, shape or form a risk to us, we can just turn on our DRAKE and the DRAKE will basically keep it from coming close to the ship," he added. "So it projects basically like an umbrella. So when the drone flies in, this will just cut off the signal."

The system can be used both off battery power and plugged into the ship. DRAKE was originally mounted on HUMVEES and used to prevent improvised explosive devices (IED) from detonating in Iraq and Afghanistan. "What this does is it repels drones based on the frequency that they use. So it has pre-programmed frequencies that are common-used frequencies amongst drones and it has the ability to just stop the signal from going," Mendenhall said. "It won't necessarily knock them out of the sky, but what it will do – like I said – is as soon as they hit that wall, they can't go any further."

With the ability to emanate both high-band and low-band signals, the DRAKE system effectively places a shield around the ship by disconnecting the signal between the operator and the UAV, therefore preventing the drone from coming too close. Operators of the DRAKE can wear the system as a backpack and move around the ship. Kansas City, which has not yet had to use the blocking capability, has multiple DRAKE systems aboard. "If we encounter a [drone] that happens to come up on the forward-end of the ship, up near the foc'sle, and then it just decides to bolt and go to the aft end on the flight deck, I can just pick this backpack up, I can run to the flight deck and I still keep blocking that signal to make sure the drone stays away from us," Mendenhall told reporters.

The DRAKE system can also be configured based on the geographical location in which a ship is operating. "Depending on the AORs, so the area of responsibility that we're in, we can reconfigure the frequencies that this blocks based on the area that we're in," Mendenhall said. "So it doesn't have to just be specific [to] the one I bought at Target that was \$50 . . . we can reconfigure it based on where we're going." While the Navy has for several years been grappling with large Iranian drones operating in the Persian Gulf, the threat to surface ships operating in U.S. Central Command was recently highlighted by an exploding drone that killed two crew members on a merchant tanker off the coast of Oman in July. CENTCOM at the time said samples from the drone used in the attack were "nearly identical to previously collected examples from Iranian one-way attack UAVs."

The DRAKE system is constantly in use aboard the ship to detect drones, though it's not always emanating the signals required to block a UAV. "Every duty section has these available to them. So these are always able to be implemented at any time," Mendenhall said. "It's hard to detect which direction a drone comes from and they can come from the water side and we would never see it, so we always will have one that's operating to be able to detect and deter." In the continental United States, Mendenhall needs authority from the ship's commanding officer to use the system, but can employ DRAKE if a threat arises.

“If it’s something that we deem a threat, I can turn it on no big deal, and I will backfill basically the chain of command,” he said.

The ship’s anti-terrorism watch officers have the necessary authority to use the blocking system. “So when we’re in port, we still have use of it,” Mendenhall said. “And we try to refrain from using it, if you will, unless it absolutely is necessary because just because it picks up a signal, doesn’t necessarily mean it’s a threat to us. So it does have a wide range to be able to just detect. But it doesn’t always mean that it’s a threat. Basically, we’d have to see it over our ship to know that it’s a threat to us.”

This isn’t the first system a U.S. Navy ship has used to block a drone threat. During a transit through the Strait of Hormuz in 2019, amphibious assault ship USS Boxer (LHD-4) downed an Iranian drone that came too close. Boxer was likely using an anti-Unmanned Aerial System Marine Air Defense Integrated System (MADIS) that was mounted on a Marine Corps MRZR to take down the drone, USNI News reported at the time. [Source: USNI News | Mallory Shelbourne | September 7, 2021 ++]

Russian Military Strength

Update 05: Nuclear Torpedoes



The Russian Navy continues to develop how it intends to deploy its latest strategic weapon – a bus-sized torpedo tipped with a nuclear warhead. The Poseidon weapon, described in U.S. Navy documents as an Intercontinental Nuclear-Powered Nuclear-Armed Autonomous Torpedo, will require new bases and facilities and new images, which gives hints as to where and how the Russian Navy could use the new weapons.

Satellite images from Maxar taken earlier this month and provided to USNI News confirm that a special purpose ship, Akademik Aleksandrov (<http://www.hisutton.com/Akademik-Aleksandrov.html>), is using the facility. And the vessel appears to have a Poseidon round, or related surrogate load, aboard. The facility is on the Northern shore of the Northern Dvina River on the edge White Sea. Work on the new quay started in 2018 and was substantially completed in 2020. Akademik Aleksandrov has been observed there in July and August. There is also a large building that was recently built adjacent to the new quay and may also be

related to Poseidon operations. This specific quay appears directly connected to Poseidon testing activities, according to the imagery.



Severodvinsk is where many of Russia’s most advanced submarines are built and is already closely associated with Poseidon. The ships and specialist submarines involved in early tests have been based there. The submarine Sarov (B-90) was launched in 2007 and appears purpose-built for testing oversized torpedoes such as Poseidon. It is based just along the river. Poseidon represents a new category of strategic weapons and changes the shape of the nuclear threat. Although the specifications of the system are obscured by secrecy, guesstimates and misinformation, the new weapon is expected to run extremely deep and fast, based on suppositions from the design.

The system will be carried by a fleet of new host submarines designed to field the submarines. The first of these, K-329 Belgorod, is currently based just across the river from the new pier. The submarine is undergoing sea trials (<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/06/russias-gigantic-submarine-belgorod-sails-for-the-first-time>) and is currently rigged for sonar calibration. A second Poseidon-carrying submarine, Khabarovsk, is under construction nearby. Ultimately four Poseidon submarines are expected to be built, with operational patrols starting in the coming years. Observation of facilities such as the new quay will build a picture of the Russian Navy’s new capabilities. It also shows the massive cost of the program, requiring new support infrastructure and an array of test ships and submarines. [Source: USNI News | H. I. Sutton | August 31, 2021 ++]

Military Base Name Changes

Update 04: Renaming Opportunity Offered to Public

The Defense Department’s Naming Commission, tasked with rechristening everything in the military that was named in honor of the Confederacy, on 6 SEP unveiled its crowdsourcing website at <https://www.thenamingcommission.gov/recommend-a-name>. The commission is taking suggestions from

the public on what to call 10 Army posts and two Navy ships named either for Confederate troops or to honor Confederate roots. “As we work with the local communities, we welcome input from the American public,” retired Navy Adm. Michelle Howard, the chair of the Naming Commission, said in a release. “This feedback will help us determine names that appropriately reflect our military today and recognize the courage, values and sacrifices of our military men and women.”



USS Chancellorsville (CG-62) & USNS Maury (T-AGS-66)

Up for renaming are Forts A.P. Hill, Lee, Pickett and Belvoir, Virginia; Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Forts Gordon and Benning, Georgia; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Rucker, Alabama; and Fort Polk, Louisiana; as well as the cruiser Chancellorsville and the oceanographic survey ship Maury. The website offers no parameters for suggestions, but last year, retired Brig. Gen. Ty Seduile, a member of the commission, published a list of possibilities in the Washington Post. That included redubbing Belvoir as Fort Ulysses S. Grant, for the commander of the Union army, and Hood to Benavidez, for Vietnam Medal of Honor recipient Master Sgt. Roy Benavidez.

Others have suggested renaming Benning for Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe, whose posthumous Medal of Honor nomination for actions in Iraq is still tied up in bureaucracy. Missing from the list is the cruiser Antietam, which earlier this year had been under consideration. “... it depends on whether or not you see Antietam as a Union victory,” Howard told reporters in May, of the battle that ended in a sort of truce, with Confederate troops withdrawing, though the Union took more casualties. Camp Beauregard, Louisiana, often cited as another Army post named for a Confederate soldier, isn’t under consideration because it’s a state-controlled National Guard installation, and the commission is only looking at DoD properties.

Though the discussion of renaming Confederate-named posts, in particular, has circulated for years, the Pentagon and Congress began making more deliberate moves last year, in the wake of nationwide demonstrations against racism. The most recent National Defense Authorization Act required DoD to stand up a commission and rename all Confederate “items” — to include not only posts and ships, but street names, buildings, etc. — by fall 2023. “And yes, we understand based on the extensiveness of the assets, that this is going to take some time,” Howard said in May, adding that their lists will include cost estimates for modifying signage and other elements. That will include a handful of things named for Gen. Robert E. Lee around the United States Military Academy, his alma mater, including the cadet barracks, a road, a gate and an award.

The renaming effort marks a shift embraced at the highest levels of the Pentagon, though former President Donald Trump in 2020 threatened to veto any legislation that included mandatory changes. “The American Civil War was fought — and it was an act of rebellion, it was an act of treason at the time — against the union, against the stars and stripes, against the U.S. Constitution,” Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers in July 2020. “And those officers turned their back on their oath.”

Furthermore, he added, he personally knew of troops who were uncomfortable with the names, including a Black staff sergeant who served with him at Fort Bragg. “He said he had to work every day on a base that represented a guy that enslaved his grandparents,” Milley recalled. [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | September 7, 2021 ++]

Army Adversary Assessments

Chinese Tactics Pub 7-100.3 Released

The Army wants you to get smart on China’s military structure and tactics. To facilitate this they released a brand-new comprehensive — and unclassified — assessment of China’s military strategy, structure, capabilities and tactics in early August. “Chinese Tactics,” the new Army Techniques Publication 7-100.3, is part of a series of publications that aim to provide updated unclassified assessments of the tactics and capabilities utilized by potential U.S. adversaries in combat. The 252-page Chinese Tactics document “serves as a foundation for understanding how Chinese ground force think and act in tactical operations,” its preface says.

Army writers compiled it from intelligence products, translated Chinese military doctrine and other sources. The Army released a manual on North Korean tactics earlier last year, and Army officials have said there are similar guides forthcoming that analyze Russia and Iran’s tactics as well. The first two publications of the series can be accessed at:

- https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN33195-ATP_7-100.3-000-WEB-1.pdf
- <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=843347>

“While some of the material is also in other U.S. Government publications, these manuals are unique in the level of detail they provide,” explained Jennifer Dunn, a senior Army Training and Doctrine Command intelligence analyst, in an article discussing the publications. “These assessments are based on the most up-to-date information available. Subject matter experts within the Department of Defense and intelligence communities have vetted them, ensuring their veracity and applicability to the greater Army training and intelligence community.”

China’s operational approach and capabilities

The driving principle of China’s warfighting philosophy is one of “active defense,” the manual says. This is “a fundamentally defensive political and strategic stance,” the authors explain, but one “enabled — when required — by operational and tactical offense.” People’s Liberation Army thought has evolved in recent years to acknowledge that China “may have to become involved in local or regional conflicts in order to maintain the regional or international economic order, protect the CPC, or otherwise support Chinese economic or political interests.” The Chinese Armed Forces include the PLA, plus two paramilitary components: the People’s Armed Police, responsible mainly for internal security, and the China Militia, a loosely-organized strategic reserve of “poorly trained and equipped part-time regional military units.”

The publication explains that the PLA and China Militia have been downsizing somewhat for decades in pursuit of modernization — a “quality over quantity” approach — while not sacrificing the massive manpower advantage that drives PLA tactics. The report highlights China’s missile and rocket capabilities, as well. The PLA even has a “Rocket Force” as a branch of its military, described as “the largest missile

force in the world, operating well over 1,000 short-range, medium-range, and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and over 300 long-range cruise missiles.” And when it comes to missiles and rockets, “there is not a U.S. equivalent to [the PLA’s Rocket Force].” Chinese planners think that those missiles, in addition to an emphasis on rocket artillery in the PLA ground force, can help make up for what the still-modernizing PLA Air Force lacks in both fixed-wing and rotary-wing close-air support capability.

Force structure

Amid recent reforms, the PLA Army has transitioned to a brigade-driven organization that has almost entirely eliminated its operational division and corps headquarters. The Army assesses that the PLA’s combined arms brigades are “similar in size, capability, and organization to the U.S. Army’s brigade combat team.” “It is entirely possible that [China] was influenced by BCT organization when designing the CA-BDE,” the publication says.

Table 2-1. Comparison of PLAA combined arms brigade to U.S. brigade combat team

	<i>PLAA Combined Arms Brigade</i>	<i>U.S. Brigade Combat Team (BCT)</i>
Maneuver	4–6 battalions	3 battalions
Artillery	1 howitzer battalion 1 rocket battalion	1 howitzer battalion
Air defense	3 batteries, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-propelled guns. • Man-portable air defense systems. • Short-range missile systems. 	None
Reconnaissance	Comparable to U.S. BCT	
Engineer and protection	Comparable to U.S. BCT	
Logistics and sustainment	Newly established Likely less capable than U.S. BCT	

The maneuver component of the combined arms brigades varies depending on whether the unit is motorized, mechanized, or armored. The PLA Marine Corps consists of six light brigades that are similar in structure to the PLA Army brigades, but they are considered to be more capable of expeditionary operations — or amphibious assault.

Airborne, air assault and spec ops

The PLA Air Force has a rapid-response airborne corps intended to deploy “light, strategically mobile ground forces that can provide a significant military presence anywhere in China in a very short period of time.” The corps’ maneuver assets includes six light brigades, a mechanized brigade, an air assault brigade and a special operations force brigade. That force includes two light brigades that could respond in a manner similar to the 82nd Airborne Division’s Immediate Response Force, the manual says. But the PLA AF only has the assets to deploy two airborne light brigades at once, or half of a mechanized brigade.

The PLA Army also has two air assault brigades, raising China’s cross-branch total to three. China’s special operations forces are utilized differently than their U.S. counterparts, the manual explains. “[PLA] SOF brigade operations generally do not focus on training or interacting with foreign militaries; they instead focus on direct action—deep reconnaissance and commando operations in support of group army operations,” the document reads. “SOF brigades are more similar to U.S. Army Ranger light infantry and long-range reconnaissance units than traditional [American] SOF.”

System and psychological warfare

Another key part of China’s approach to fighting is “system warfare,” the manual says. System warfare is the act of targeting and disabling the enemy’s capabilities — such as communications, information systems, or ISR — to create favorable conditions to isolate and overwhelm enemy ground units. This system warfare approach nests well with the PLA’s emphasis on psychological warfare, the publication explains. “An opponent may believe its position untenable by having vulnerable nodes of its systems rendered ineffective, rather than having the entire system destroyed,” it says. “An opponent may view continued resistance as futile — not because of the direct threat of physical force — but because it has been deceived into thinking its situation is hopeless.” Thus psychological operations, considered to be SOF territory in the U.S. Army’s force structure, are a fundamental part of the PLA’s overall approach.

Dunn, the TRADOC intelligence analyst involved in writing the manual, explained that understanding these capabilities and approaches is fundamental for Army leaders who want to be as prepared as possible to compete or fight against Chinese forces. “[It is] essential for the Army, especially for the regionally aligned elements, to thoroughly understand the adversary they are most likely to encounter in future conflicts,” she said, indicating that TRADOC is overhauling doctrine governing opposing forces at the Army’s training centers to incorporate the material. “For the Army to remain ahead of its adversaries, training against a robust and realistic threat for task proficiency is essential.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Davis Winkie | September 1, 2021 ++]

Military Coronavirus Impact

Update 06: Active-Duty USN & USMC Have 90 Days to Be Vaccinated



Sailors and Marines will need to be vaccinated against COVID-19 in the next 90 days or risk disobeying a lawful order and facing “punitive or administrative action or both,” according to two Big Navy messages sent to the fleet this week. Reserve members will have 120 days to get vaccinated, according to a message from Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro.

“The Chief of Naval Operations and Commandant of the Marine Corps have authority to exercise the full range of administrative and disciplinary actions to hold non-exempt Service Members appropriately accountable,” Del Toro’s message states. “This may include, but is not limited to, removal of qualification for advancement, promotions, reenlistment, or continuation, consistent with existing regulations, or otherwise considering vaccination status in personnel actions as appropriate.” His message also notes that refusing the vaccine without a valid exemption constitutes a failure to obey an order or regulation under Article 92 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. “As the faithful maritime protectors of our country in

peacetime and war, each of us must take ownership of our readiness to preserve and protect the force, and ensure the success of our mission,” the SECNAV’s message states.

The Navy and Marine Corps guidance follows the signing of a memo 24 AUG by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin mandating that all servicemembers get vaccinated and leaving it up to the services to figure out how. The day before Austin signed that memo, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration granted full approval of the Pfizer vaccine, sparking the effort to fully vaccinate more than two million servicemembers. Just less than 60 percent of the force has been vaccinated. Roughly 64 percent of Marines and 86 percent of sailors are already fully vaccinated, according to the latest Pentagon numbers.

Disease modeling forecasts show that the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 “will continue to spread throughout the remainder of 2021,” according to a message to the fleet sent 31 AUG by Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday. Data and modeling indicate that the available vaccines will continue to be effective against severe illness and death, the CNO’s message states. The message also states that the 12 sailors who have died of COVID were not immunized, although one unidentified sailor was partially vaccinated.

No vaccine for COVID or otherwise is 100 percent effective, and breakthrough cases can occur, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Some fully vaccinated people will get sick, and some will even be hospitalized or die from COVID-19,” a CDC site on breakthrough cases states. “However, there is evidence that vaccination may make illness less severe for those who are vaccinated and still get sick. The risk of infection, hospitalization, and death are all much lower in vaccinated compared to unvaccinated people.” Those who have had COVID before are not exempt from the vaccine, according to the CNO’s message. Servicemembers participating in COVID-19 clinical trials will be exempt, however.

Sailors and Marines will be mandated to receive the two-shot Pfizer vaccine. Del Toro noted that the full approval of the Pfizer vaccine “provides additional confidence” in the vaccine’s safety. Alternately, servicemembers can voluntarily opt for the two-dose Moderna or one-dose Johnson and Johnson vaccines, which are allowed under an emergency-use authorization by the FDA, though both are expected to receive full authorization at some point. Troops will be considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their second dose, or two weeks after the one-dose vaccine. “Booster shots are still under evaluation and will be addressed via separate message,” the CNO message states.

The mandatory vaccination drive will be coordinated through military treatment facilities, and the CNO’s message encourages everyone to still practice good hygiene, “cough/sneeze etiquette” and other measures to reduce COVIDs’ spread. Medical and religious exemptions are the only paths by which a servicemember cannot get the now-mandatory vaccine, according to the message. “Prior to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, Navy service members will have access to healthcare providers to address questions regarding the risks of COVID-19 and the benefits of COVID-19 vaccination,” the message states.

Unit commanders will need to provide counseling for troops refusing the vaccine and whose exemption request was denied, according to the message. “Protecting the health of the force and warfighting readiness is of paramount importance,” Del Toro’s message states. “Vaccination is the most effective tool we have to prevent widespread manifestation of COVID-19 in our force.” To read Del Toro’s and CNO’s full messages go to:

- https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Portals/55/Messages/ALNAV/ALN2021/ALN21062.txt?ver=Vbl_3soAE1K4DhYwqjSGLw%3d%3d NAVSEC

- <https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Portals/55/Messages/NAVADMIN/NAV2021/NAV21190.txt?ver=mG6Zday9ICjIOVsV4HyZEw%3d%3d> CNO

[Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | September 1, 2021]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang

‘VA’ thru ‘Vulture's Row’

Every profession has its own jargon and the Navy is no exception. Since days of yore the military in general, and sailors in particular, have often had a rather pithy (dare say ‘tasteless’?) manner of speech. That may be changing somewhat in these politically correct times, but to Bowdlerize the sailor’s language represented here would be to deny its rich history. The traditions and origins remain. While it attempted to present things with a bit of humor, if you are easily offended this may not be for you. You have been warned.

Note: ‘RN’ denotes Royal Navy usage. Similarly, RCN = Royal Canadian Navy, RAN = Royal Australian Navy, RM = Royal Marines, RNZN = Royal New Zealand Navy, UK = general usage in militaries of the former British Empire

VA – (1) Veteran’s Administration. (2) Designation for an Attack squadron.

Vampire – Radio codeword for an antiship cruise missile.

Vasco - (RN) Ship’s navigator.

VAQ – Electronic warfare squadron.

VC – (1) Vietcong. (2) Composite squadron (i.e. a unit flying multiple types of aircraft).

Veer – (1) To pay out line or chain, as in increasing the scope of the anchor. (2) A change of wind direction in the clockwise direction (as one looks into the wind).

Vertical Envelopment – Landing troops ashore via helicopter.

VertRep – VERTICAL REPlenishment. Bringing stores aboard ship by use of a helicopter.

VF – Fighter squadron.

VFA – Fighter-Attack squadron.

VFR - Visual Flight Rules. An FAA-specified series of flight rules used when an aircraft is not under positive radar control. When flying VFR, an aircraft's pilot has sole legal responsibility for safe flight and collision avoidance.

Vittled In - Something good. "OS Bloggins really vittled in when he cut the MESS MOTHER'S grass at the PIG OF THE PORT contest."

Vittler - (RCN) The stores rating who looks after issuing rations to the cooks and takes care of the ordering and storing of food onboard. From the word ‘victual’ (which is pronounced ‘vittle’).

VMA – Marine attack squadron.

VMAQ – Marine electronic warfare squadron.

VMC - Visual Meteorological Conditions.

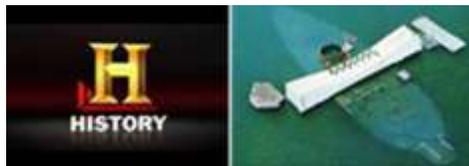
VMFA – Marine fighter-attack squadron.

VS – Anti-submarine warfare squadron.

Vulture's Row - The catwalks and galleries along the island of an aircraft carrier, where crewmembers often congregate to watch flight operations. RN/RCN form is "goofers" (goofing stations).

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | September 15, 2021 ++]

* Military History *



WWII Wehrmacht War Crimes

How German Armed Forces Became a Willing Instrument of Genocide

During World War II, the Germans' combined armed forces (Heer, Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe) committed systematic war crimes, including massacres, mass rape, looting, the exploitation of forced labor, the murder of three million Soviet prisoners of war, and participated in the extermination of Jews. While the Nazi Party's own SS forces (in particular the SS-Totenkopfverbände, Einsatzgruppen and Waffen-SS) of Nazi Germany was the organization most responsible for the genocidal killing of the Holocaust, the regular armed forces of the Wehrmacht committed many war crimes of their own (as well as assisting the SS in theirs), particularly on the Eastern Front in the war against the Soviet Union. According to a study by Alex J. Kay and David Stahel, the majority of the Wehrmacht soldiers deployed to the Soviet Union participated in war crimes.

Before the war

When the National Socialists (Nazis) came to power, it was welcomed by many officers of the Wehrmacht as a way of creating the Wiederwehrhaftmachung of Germany, namely the total militarization of German society in order to ensure that Germany did not lose the next war. As such, what both the Nazis and the German Army wanted to see was a totally militarized Volksgemeinschaft that would be purged of those perceived internal enemies like the Jews who it was believed had "stabbed" Germany in "the back" in 1918.

As such, many officers willingly embraced National Socialist ideology in the 1930s. Acting on his own initiative, the Defense Minister Werner von Blomberg had purged the Army of all its Jewish personnel in February 1934. On December 8, 1938, the Army leadership had instructed all officers to be thoroughly well versed in National Socialism and to apply its values in all situations. Starting in February 1939, pamphlets were issued that were made required reading in the Army. The content can be gauged by the titles: "The Officer and Politics", "Hitler's World Historical Mission", "The Army in the Third Reich", "The Battle for

German Living Space", "Hands off Danzig!", and "The Final Solution of the Jewish Question in the Third Reich". In the last essay, the author, C.A. Holberg wrote:

The defensive battle against Jewry will continue, even if the last Jew has left Germany. Two big and important tasks remain: 1) the eradication of all Jewish influence, above all in the economy and in culture; 2) the battle against World Jewry, which tries to incite all people in the world against Germany.

Attitudes like the ones expressed above colored all the instructions that came to Wehrmacht troops in the summer of 1939 as a way of preparing for the attack on Poland. The Nuremberg Trials at the end of World War II judged that the Wehrmacht was not an inherently criminal organization, but that it had committed crimes during the course of the war. More recently, the judgement of Nuremberg has come under question. [Source: https://wiki2.org/en/War_crimes_of_the_Wehrmacht August 2021 ++]

Lake Michigan's U-Boat

Why WWI UC-97 is at the Bottom of the Lake



In 1992 crewman aboard a ship owned by A and T Recovery on Lake Michigan dropped cameras into the deep to confirm what sonar was telling them — there was a German U-boat resting on the bottom of the Great Lake. Luckily, it was a full 73 years removed from the end of the Great War that saw German submarines force the United States to enter the war in Europe. How it got there has nothing to do with naval combat.

In the days before a true visual mass medium, the American people were restricted to photos in newspapers to get a view of what the war looked like. World War I was the first real industrial war, marked for its brutality and large numbers of casualties, not to mention the advances in weapons technology that must have seemed like magic to the people who had never seen poison gas, automatic machine guns, and especially boats that moved underneath the waves, sinking giant battleships from the depths. So after years of hearing about evil German U-boats mercilessly sinking tons and tons of Allied shipping and killing thousands of sailors while silently slipping beneath the waves, one of those ships began touring the coastal cities of the United States — and people understandably wanted to see it.

The November 11, 1918 Armistice demanded that the German navy turn over its ships to the British but instead of doing that, the Germans scuttled the bulk of their fleet near the British base at Scapa Flow. The submarines, however, survived. Seeing that there were so many U-boats and that German technology surrounding U-boats used some of the best technology at the time, the British offered them out to other

nations, as long as the submarines were destroyed when their usefulness came to an end. The United States accepted and four U-boats were allotted to the United States. The intent was to use them to raise money needed to pay off the enormous war debt incurred by the government of the United States.

Officers and sailors went to England in March and took possession of the boats. The Navy retained the alphanumeric name carried by this former Imperial German Navy vessel at the time of her acquisition. UC-97, a minelaying submarine, had been launched at Hamburg, Germany, by Blohm & Voss on 17 March 1918; and commissioned in the Imperial German Navy on 3 September 1918. Oberleutnant zur See Walter Wiedemann (who had been credited with sinking eight ships while in command of UC-73 in the Mediterranean) assumed command of the new unterseeboote, which he retained until the Armistice stilled the guns of the Great War on 11 November 1918. Consequently, she was surrendered according to the terms of the Armistice and interned at Harwich, England.

UC-97 was placed in special commission on 15 March 1919 for the voyage to the United States, Lt. Cmdr. Holbrook Gibson in command. Although the U.S. crew worked feverishly to prepare the submarine for the voyage across the Atlantic, faulty machinery kept UC-97's men from completing their mission until she was well out to sea. Thus, when she set sail with UB-88, U-117, and UB-148 on 3 April, Bushnell (Submarine Tender No. 2) had to tow her. By late afternoon of her first day at sea, however, the U-boat's American crew succeeded in getting her diesel engines running and, for the remainder of the voyage, she moved under her own power.

The unit of 5 ships, which had received the interesting name of *Ex-German Submarine Expeditionary Force*, steamed first to Ponta Delgada in the Azores and then to Bermuda, whence the four U-boats and Bushnell set course for New York City, N.Y., where they arrived on 27 April 1919 after a rough voyage. At New York, the boats became the objects of interest to a horde of reporters, photographers, and tourists, who joined Navy Department technicians and civilian submarine builders in swarming over and through UC-97 and the other boats.

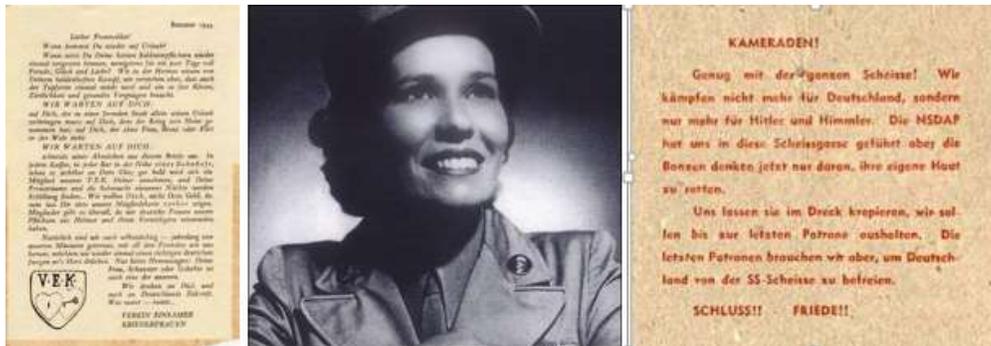
Soon, however, U-97 received her itinerary for the Victory Bond campaign. Of the six regions into which the coastal areas and major waterways of the United States were divided, she drew the Great Lakes, an assignment that required her to negotiate the locks of the Canadian-controlled St. Lawrence canal system. UC-97's refusal to break with traditional practice on board a man-of-war and fly the Union Jack at the fore caused trouble at each Canadian port of call along the way. Lt. Cmdr. Charles A. Lockwood, Jr., her commanding officer at that juncture, who later rose to fame in World War II as Commander Submarines, Pacific Fleet, however, stuck to his guns and was later vindicated by Canadian naval officers who applauded his pertinacious observance of time-honored naval tradition.

Once she cleared the last locks and entered the Great Lakes, UC-97 began a whirlwind series of visits to U.S. ports, large and small, along the littoral of Lakes Ontario, Erie, Huron, and Michigan. Although scheduled to visit Lake Superior ports as well, the U-boat had to cut short her voyage because of wear on the engines. Thus, in August 1919 she started back down the coast of Lake Michigan toward Chicago, Illinois, where she arrived at the beginning of the last week of the month.

When they successfully raised that money, the Navy continued touring the ships as a way to recruit new sailors. The UC-97 was sailed up the St. Lawrence Seaway into Lake Ontario and then Lake Erie. It was the first submarine ever sailed into the Great Lakes. Eventually, though, the novelty of the ship wore off, and after raising money, recruiting sailors, and giving all the tech she had on board, the boat just sat on the

Chicago River. All the other subs taken by the US were sunk according to the treaty's stipulations. UC-97 couldn't really move under her own power and was towed to the middle of Lake Michigan, where she was sunk for target practice by the USS Wilmette, forgotten by the Navy for decades after. [Source: [Business Insider](#) | Blake Stilwell & Raymond A. Mann | February 19 & August 30, 2021 ++]

League of Lonely War Women OSS's WWII Psychological Warfare Campaign



Barbara Lauwers (center) plus leaflet and custom toilet paper (left & right) made by the MO

During World War II, Barbara Lauwers led one of the most successful psychological warfare campaigns in the entire war; she interrogated and influenced the defection from seasoned German prisoners that saw battle along the Russian front to deserters looking to do some good. She then used them to conduct disinformation operations along Nazi-occupied Italy. Later she would help form a mysterious unit referred to as the League of Lonely War Women (LLWW), or Verein Einsamer Kriegerfrauen (VEK) in German, targeting the emotions of homesick Germans.

Women played an integral role in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) serving as clerks, map makers, cryptography specialists, and researchers while stationed in the U.S. during World War II. Few had the traits or skills to be successful working as spies overseas, and yet many women garnered respect as legends for their tradecraft, espionage, and wit to outsmart the Nazis. These women were dubbed “The Glamour Girls,” and amongst the notable names — including Virginia Hall, Betty McIntosh, and musician Marlene Dietrich — was Barbara Lauwers, who helped build several black propaganda campaigns to cripple the Nazi’s morale.

Before the war, Lauwers studied and practiced law in her native Czechoslovakia, where she mastered the craft of detecting a lie. Her husband immigrated to the United States in 1941; after the attack on Pearl Harbor, he joined the U.S. Army. She followed him in 1943 and was assigned to the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). Following her initial training, she was selected by the OSS for her extensive fluency in European languages and flew to Washington, D.C., to begin learning the intricacies of how to counter the pro-Nazi regime. Lauwers’ first duty station was in Algiers, Algeria, but she started conducting counterintelligence in Rome the following year.

When the Allies entered Rome in June 1944, Lauwers and members assigned to the Morale Branch (MO) were sent to Italy to recruit cynical German officers who no longer believed in the cause. After an

unsuccessful attempt by German resistance forces to assassinate Adolf Hitler using bombs smuggled into a secret meeting by a suitcase in Berlin, the MO launched Operation Sauerkraut to build on the momentum. Betty McIntosh — a legendary OSS MO member who served in the Far East — wrote about Lauwers and the mission in her book “Women of the OSS: Sisterhood of Spies,” detailing how the operation was to select defected and trusted German army soldiers passing through frontline posts to deliver false information to create turmoil amongst the ranks. Some of the black propaganda issued were fake orders, new rumors about the lack of confidence in senior Nazi leaders, and “official” proclamations.

According to McIntosh, Lauwers and her teammates had a strict policy for determining who would be selected since the job entailed hazardous duty and great risk to their lives? Lauwers based her choices on maturity, intelligence, and nerve, as most of the prisoners she was interviewing were young German, Slovak, and Czech men coerced by force to do the Germans’ “dirty work” in the war. She was able to quickly relate with them since she was a Czechoslovakian native herself, using her charm, erudite wit, and proficiency in English, Czech, Slovak, German, and French languages to build rapport. Those who were hand-picked were then transferred from their prison camp to MO, issued Army fatigues, and began field training.

Upon agreeing to work for the Allies, Lauwers would give these soldiers new identities issued by the OSS Research & Analysis teams using intelligence reports to mold key characteristics to their documents. The painstaking process was taken seriously in order to nail the smallest details. Once members from the MO felt confident and could trust their newly turned recruits, OSS officers issued them German uniforms, weapons, and instructions of what to do once they penetrated Nazi units. They carried 3,000 leaflets and were told to nail them to trees and leave others on buildings and trucks. If questioned, they relied on de-escalation tactics like bartering with Italian cigarettes and referring back to their training.

Senior Allied officials were impressed with the success of the operation and urged further commitment of MO OSS officers to help train the Fifth Army Intelligence Branch (G-2) across Italy and into France. Association of Lonely War Women Following the success of Operation Sauerkraut, the League of Lonely War Women was created and led by Corporal Lauwers. The plan was to prey upon the emotions of German soldiers. Leaflets would be distributed to Germans on leave containing instructions to show up to common places like bars and restaurants wearing a red heart-shaped cutout identifying their membership. If done correctly, a member from the LLWW would approach them and fill the void of a woman’s attention missing in their life. The ruse was designed to cast doubt — both psychologically and emotionally — showing that if the wives and girlfriends of their fellow serviceman were being unfaithful, their own spouses who welcomed them home must be doing the same.

The leaflets distributed around town were so convincing that The Washington Post ran a story on Oct. 10, 1944, reporting, “German soldiers on leave from the Italian front have only to pin an entwined heart on their lapel during furloughs home to find a girlfriend.” Lauwers personally wrote each letter and made sure to use the same slang that German soldiers used to ensure no one doubted its authenticity. The LLWW targeted the soldiers both at restaurants and in the bathrooms, their messages never relenting, not even in the peace of a bathroom stall. Custom toilet paper was inscribed with messages that read, in German, “Comrades! Stop this shit! We do not fight for Germany but only for Hitler and Himmler. The NSDAP led us this damned way but now the bigwigs are only trying to save their own skin. They let us die in the mud; they want us to hold out until the last bullet. However, we need the last bullets to free Germany from this SS shit. Enough! Peace!”

While Lauwers was a part of many successful psychological warfare campaigns, her most revered stint occurred by chance while overhearing a German prisoner talk about the use of Slovak and Czech soldiers attached to their command. Their role was to do menial tasks around the camps. Lauwers sprang into action using typewriters available at the Vatican and created two leaflets, one in Slovak and the other in Czech. The message she wrote was mass produced and broadcast across BBC. Her influence was taken seriously because many of these soldiers were seen crossing over to Allied lines, at least 600 of them holding the leaflets she produced.

She was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for her role in World War II. After the war, she returned to the U.S. and worked small jobs, most notably as a broadcaster for Voice of America and for the Library of Congress. On Aug. 16, 2009, at the age of 95, Lauwers died due to cardiovascular disease, leaving a legacy of one of the many great women to serve amongst the OSS. For a three minute video refer to <https://www.militarytimes.com/video/2021/08/30/history-lesson-the-league-of-lonely-war-women>. [Source: Coffee or Die Magazine | Matt Fratus | September 28, 2018 ++]

Warsaw Under Bombardment

Hitler's Operation 'Wasserkante'

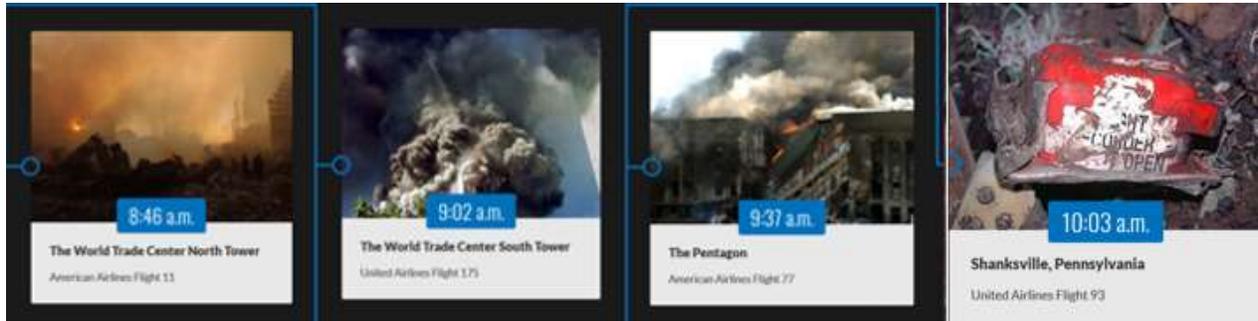
On September 8, 1939, one week into the Nazi invasion of Poland, German armored troops reached the gates of Warsaw. The Polish government and High Command had left the city but a determined garrison awaited the enemy invader and the Poles were able to stave off two consecutive German attempts to take the capital by armored attack. Thus began a siege that would last for three weeks and subject the Warsaw Army of over 100,000 and the civilian population of over one million to a ruthless campaign of aerial bombardment and heavy artillery shelling, causing thousands of casualties and widespread destruction. It was a hopeless battle that could only end in defeat and on September 27 the Polish garrison capitulated.

In mid-September, Hitler had personally intervened in the conduct of the campaign, not for military but for political reasons. Knowing the Soviets would soon invade Poland from the east, and that the agreed partition line between German and Soviet territory ran along the Vistula, he wished to make absolutely sure that Warsaw would fall before the Russians reached it, which was planned to happen on 3 OCT. He therefore told his surprised generals that he wanted the city captured by 30 SEP at the latest.

Rather than take it by a direct assault, he now chose to lay siege to the city and blast it into submission. He ordered General von Rundstedt to assemble all his army group's heavy artillery and mortars around the city and instructed Hermann Göring, the C-in-C of the Luftwaffe, to embark on a ruthless and all-out area bombing of the metropolis (Operation 'Wasserkante'). To learn more on what then ensued refer to the Attachment to this bulletin titled, "**Warsaw Under Bombardment**". [Source: <https://weaponsandwarfare.com/2018/12/28> | September 2021 ++]

9/11 Events

Reflection on Would-Be Suicide Mission



As the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks were unfolding, then-Air Force Lt. Heather Penney was given a mission to intercept hijacked United Airlines Flight 93 before it reached Washington, D.C. Flight 93 was originally supposed to go from Newark International Airport in New Jersey to San Francisco International in California. Just 45 minutes into that domestic flight, hijackers took control of the plane and redirected it toward Washington. The goal of the hijackers still remains unknown, perhaps it was to crash the plane into either the U.S. Capitol Building or the White House.

The rookie F-16 pilot said she believed she would not come back from that mission. "[I remember] how crystal blue the skies were that day," she told ABC News Live anchor Linsey Davis. "There are so many moments that I remember with such clarity that I can touch, taste, feel hear, smell every detail from that day. But what strikes me the most, because of how omnipresent it was throughout the entire day was the deep, clear blue skies."

At first, Penney said it wasn't immediately clear that an airplane had been deliberately flown into the World Trade Center. When the second plane hit, "that's when we knew that our nation was under attack." She went to arm her aircraft, but there wasn't enough time. She and another pilot, Marc Sasseville, had to get in the air. "We did not have missiles. We were on a suicide mission. And in order to be able to take any airliner down, Sass would ram his aircraft into the cockpit where the terrorists were, to destroy the flight controls," she explained. "I would take the tail by ramming my jet into the tail of the aircraft, I would aerodynamically unbalance the airplane and tip it over so it would crash straight into the ground by targeting both ends of the aircraft. It was our plan to prevent any additional casualties."

After witnessing the horror of the attacks in New York, she said she understood what needed to be done. "I had raised my hand and swore an oath to protect and defend our nation," she said. "If this was where the universe had placed me at this moment in time... that this was my purpose. Anyone who had been in our position would have been willing to do the same thing. And the proof is in the pudding, because the passengers on Flight 93 did." "We knew what needed to be done. And there were no tears. The prayers, to be honest," Penney said, were "'Dear God, don't let me mess this up.' Because of how important it was and the potential consequences if we were not successful."

But Penney did not complete her suicide mission. Flight 93 passengers attempted to retake the plane, and in the struggle, the aircraft crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, killing everyone on board. It was the only one of the four hijacked aircrafts that day that did not reach the terrorists' intended target. Penney, whose call sign was "Lucky," said she didn't feel lucky for escaping her suicide mission that day. "When you look back on the timeline, [the Flight 93 passengers] crashed their airliner nearly half an hour before we got airborne. I don't consider myself lucky because what they did was something they never should have had

to do. When they boarded Flight 93 that day, they were just simply going on a business trip or coming home from vacation... They hadn't raised their right hand and sworn an oath to protect and defend like I had. I feel like we were a mission failure for so many reasons."

Penney said she did not have the chance to reflect on what might have been. She "immediately moved to 24/7 combat air patrols," flying from midnight to 4 a.m. for nearly a year, she said. Then, she went to train for combat operations in Iraq, where she served two tours. She said her reflection didn't come until nearly a decade later when commemoration ceremonies honored the first responders, and her story came out. "That's really when I began to think about what I witnessed that day and the meaning of the sacrifice of those first responders and the heroism that they all displayed," she said.

In New York City, 412 emergency workers who responded to the World Trade Center were killed in the attacks. Scores more who survived suffered from a litany of medical conditions, including cancer and respiratory diseases linked to the attacks. Penney hopes that now, 20 years after the 9/11 attacks, the nation can come together in the same way it did then. "We have to make a commitment to stability. We have to make a commitment to engaging in that kind of dialogue and remembering that there are things that connect us... What it means to be an American is so much more than the differences that we [have] between us," she said. "We need to recommit to understanding before judging... that those connections are more important than our differences, and to overcome or move past our fear and into the ability to serve. Move beyond ourselves." [Source: ABC News | Allie Yang | September 10, 2021 ++]

Operation Little Foxley

British SOE Plan to Kill Hitler

During World War II, Operation Foxley was a 1944 plan to assassinate Adolf Hitler, conceived by the British Special Operations Executive (SOE). Although detailed preparations were made, no attempt was made to carry out the plan. Historians believe the most likely date for an attempt would have been 13–14 July 1944, during one of Hitler's visits to the Berghof. This was the last of three plans to assassinate him before it was decided he was more valuable to the Allies alive.

One of the first actual British plans was to bomb the special train "Amerika" (in 1943 renamed "Brandenburg") he travelled in; SOE had extensive experience of derailing trains using explosives. The plan was dropped because Hitler's schedule was too irregular and unpredictable: stations were informed of his arrival only a few minutes beforehand. Another plan was to put some tasteless but lethal poison in the drinking water supply on Hitler's train. However, this plan was considered too complicated because of the need for an inside man. In all there were 22 other attempts starting in 1932 by others to kill Hitler which are documented at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_assassination_attempts_on_Adolf_Hitler.

Ultimately a sniper attack was considered to be the method most likely to succeed. In Summer 1944, a German who had been part of Hitler's personal guard at the Berghof had been taken prisoner in Normandy. He revealed that at the Berghof, Hitler always took a 20-minute morning walk at around the same time (after 10:00). Hitler liked to be left alone during this walk, leaving him unprotected near some woods, where

he was out of sight of sentry posts. When Hitler was at the Berghof, a Nazi flag visible from a cafe in the nearby town was flown.

The plan was to assassinate Hitler during his morning exercise, as he walked unprotected to the Teehaus on Mooslahnerkopf Hill from the Berghof residence. The scheme called for the SOE to parachute a German-speaking Pole and a British sniper into Austria. An "inside man" was recruited, the uncle of a prisoner of war named Dieser, who was a shopkeeper living in nearby (20 km) Salzburg, identified as "Heidentaler", who was vehemently anti-Nazi. Heidentaler would shelter the agents and transport them to Berchtesgaden disguised as German mountain troops, from where they would make the approach to the vantage point for the attack.

A sniper was recruited and briefed, and the plan was submitted. The sniper practiced by firing at moving dummy targets with an accurized Kar 98k with a Mauser telescopic sight, the standard rifle of the Wehrmacht, under conditions that simulated the planned attack. Additionally, a 9mm parabellum Luger pistol fitted with a British-made silencer was provided so that the sniper could quietly deal with any threats while approaching the target. The Luger is now on display at the Combined Military Services Museum in Maldon, Essex. There was some opposition to the assassination plan among the British authorities, particularly from the Deputy Head of SOE's German Directorate, Lt. Col. Ronald Thornley. However, his superior, Sir Gerald Templer, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill supported it.

The proposal for the operation was submitted in November 1944, but was never authorized due to a division within the British government as to whether Hitler's removal was a sound way to expedite victory. By then, he was considered by the British to be such a poor strategist that it was thought possible that candidates who would be in line to succeed him might present more of a challenge to the Allied war effort. Thornley also argued that Germany was almost defeated, and if Hitler was assassinated, he would become a martyr figure to some Germans and possibly give rise to a myth that Germany might have been victorious if he had not been killed by underhand means, leading to the threat of more wars with Germany in the future.

As the Allied war aims had become not merely the military defeat the Third Reich, but to destroy the National Socialist political ideology in Central Europe in general, this rendered the proposed operation potentially undesirable. The debate in the British government divided opinion, and so the operation was not authorized. Its approval was also undermined by a lack of reliable intelligence as to Hitler's daily routine at the Berghof to give the attack team a reasonable chance of success. Hitler left the Berghof for the last time on 14 July 1944, never to return, and committed suicide in Berlin on 30 April 1945, a few days before the war in Europe ended. [Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Foxley | September 2021 ++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

Bruce VanVoorhis | WWII



The President of the United States takes pride in posthumously presenting the

MEDAL OF HONOR

To

BRUCE AVERY VAN VOORHIS

Rank and organization: Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy Bombing Squadron 102

Place and date: Over Greenwich Island Solomon Islands July 6, 1943

Entered service at: U.S. Naval Academy in June 1925.

Born: Aberdeen, Washington Jan. 29, 1908



Van Voorhis first served on the battleship Missouri, then went to Pensacola, Florida, for aviation training; he received his wings as a pilot in September 1931. He hopped ships and squadrons for the next decade before ending up at Naval Air Station Anacostia in the Washington, D.C., area in July 1941, as the U.S. effort in World War II was ramping up. At some point over that decade, Van Voorhis married Kathryn, a widow with a son. The couple went on to have two more boys. In July 1942, Van Voorhis was promoted to lieutenant commander. Soon after, he requested combat duty in the South Pacific after learning that his younger brother, Army 1st Lt. Wayne Van Voorhis, was missing in action in the Philippines.

Lt. Cmdr. Van Voorhis arrived in Hawaii in early 1943. He assumed command of Patrol Squadron 14, then Bombing Squadron 102, which operated out of Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii. In April 1943, the squadron was dispatched to the Solomon Islands. The Allies had regained control of much of the archipelago from the Japanese and were hoping to regain control of the Philippines, as well. On July 6, 1943, Van Voorhis volunteered to command a PB4Y-1 long-range, heavy bomber — known by the Army as a B-24 Liberator — over the Japanese-held Greenwich Island (also known as Kapingamarangi Atoll). It was an urgent reconnaissance and bombing mission to attack before the enemy could strike first.

Van Voorhis knew it would be perilous, but he accepted the mission anyway. He and 10 other men took off in the middle of the night on a 700-mile journey across the Pacific without an escort or other military support. The ride was arduous — the winds were treacherous, visibility was low and the terrain itself was tough to navigate, but they made it just in time for the real struggle to begin. As the bomber flew over an island lagoon, it encountered fierce antiaircraft fire and was quickly pursued by enemy fighters. Van Voorhis

and his crew weren't deterred, though. Despite being forced to fly lower and lower, Van Voorhis made six bombing runs over several Japanese ground installations. They were able to destroy a radio station, anti-aircraft guns and other vital targets with bombs and machine gun fire. Van Voorhis' crew took out one enemy fighter jet in the air and strafed three more seaplanes in the lagoon.

On his very last bombing run, Van Voorhis made sure he was low enough to successfully hit his target. In doing so, though, the bomber itself got caught in the blast. The plane crashed into the lagoon, and all of its crew died. However, their mission was a success, and it contributed to the Allied offensive that eventually drove the Japanese from much of the South Pacific. The fate of Van Voorhis and his crew members wasn't known for a long time. Van Voorhis was listed as missing in action for more than a year before other military members were able to piece together what happened to his aircraft.

Van Voorhis was posthumously promoted to commander. On Aug. 1, 1946, his wife accepted the Medal of Honor on his behalf from Navy Secretary James Forrestal during a ceremony in Washington, D.C. The other members of his aircrew were also honored. Nine received posthumous Distinguished Flying Crosses, while the 10th earned the Navy Cross. It was later learned that Van Voorhis' soldier brother, Wayne, had suffered through the Bataan Death March when the Philippines were captured by the Japanese and had died of malaria in a prison camp in 1942 — before Bruce had even arrived in the South Pacific. His brother's disappearance was the reason Van Voorhis had volunteered for combat duty.

Cmdr. Van Voorhis' body was eventually returned to the U.S. and buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis, alongside some of the crew members who died with him. His legacy has lived on in the military. The destroyer escort USS Van Voorhis launched in 1956. A few years later, an airfield at Naval Air Station Fallon, Nevada — his hometown — was named Van Voorhis Airfield in his honor. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | July 5, 2021 ++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

Frank Baldwin | Civil & Indian Wars



The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the

MEDAL OF HONOR

To

Frank D. Baldwin

Ranks and organizations: Captain, Company D,

19th Michigan Infantry & First Lieutenant 5th U.S. Infantry U.S. Army

Places and dates: Peach Tree Creek, Georgia July 12, 1864 & McClellans Creek, Texas Nov 8, 1874

Entered service: Michigan Horse Guards on Sept. 19, 1861

Born: Manchester, Michigan June 26, 1842



Only 19 men have had the privilege of being called a double recipient of the Medal of Honor. The first to receive that honor was Army Maj. Gen. Frank D. Baldwin, who earned his medals for Civil War bravery and for saving two child hostages years later. Baldwin went on to have a storied career that lasted through World War I.

Baldwin was born on June 26, 1842, in Manchester, Michigan, to Francis and Betsy Ann Baldwin. According to the Texas State Historical Association, he had two half-sisters. Baldwin enlisted in the volunteer Army as a second lieutenant on Sept. 19, 1861, a few months into the Civil War. The 19-year-old initially enlisted with the Michigan Horse Guards but mustered out pretty quickly. He rejoined in September 1862 as a first lieutenant with the 19th Michigan Volunteer Infantry. Baldwin was captured twice by the Confederates throughout the Civil War. He rose to the rank of captain in 1864 and was reassigned to the 3rd Brigade, 3rd Division, 20th Corps of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman's Army.

On July 12, 1864, Capt. Baldwin fought back a Confederate charge, then led his company on a counter charge in battle at Peachtree Creek, Georgia. Despite intense enemy fire, Baldwin charged ahead of his men and was the first to break the enemy line. During the scuffle, he captured two armed Confederate officers and a Georgia regimental flag, known as a "guide on." For his efforts, Baldwin earned the Medal of Honor. He didn't receive it until Dec. 3, 1891. After the Civil War, Baldwin was discharged and attended Hillsdale College. However, he wanted to return to the Army, so he accepted a commission in 1866 into the 19th U.S. Regular Infantry as a second lieutenant. It was two steps down in rank from what he had attained as a volunteer soldier, but that didn't seem to bother Baldwin. In 1867, he married Alice Blackwood, who he'd met in 1863 shortly after one of his stints in captivity with the Confederates. They had a daughter named Juanita.

Baldwin went on to make a career of the Army, and he even became the first person out of just a handful to be awarded the Medal of Honor twice. On Nov. 8, 1874, then-1st Lt. Baldwin led two companies on a mission against a Native American camp at McClelland's Creek, Texas. The soldiers were outnumbered, but Baldwin knew the enemy was traveling with two girls, a 7- and a 5-year-old. According to the Texas State Historical Association, their family had been attacked by the natives in Kansas. Most of the rest of their family was killed, but the girls were taken hostage. Baldwin knew that if he and his party waited for reinforcements, the natives would likely escape and possibly kill the girls. So, he led his men on a raid into the camp. The natives were so surprised that they abandoned the village and most of their belongings.

According to the TSHA, Army scouts were riding through the camp when they found the two girls — emaciated and near starvation — hiding under a pile of buffalo hides. For leading the raid, Baldwin earned a second Medal of Honor on March 17, 1894. He also earned the brevet rank of captain. Baldwin's legacy

only grew from there. He served as a colonel during the Philippine-American War. Formerly known as the Philippine Insurrection, the conflict came after Spain had ceded its colony, the Philippines, to the U.S. after losing the Spanish-American War. However, Filipino nationalists who preferred independence to changing colonial rulers weren't ready to give up the fight. The insurrection lasted from 1899 to 1902.

Baldwin was promoted to brigadier general in 1902 and returned from the Philippines a year later. He was assigned to command the Department of Colorado, which was a division of the Army at the time. Baldwin retired in June 1906 and chose to remain in Colorado. He came out of retirement for a brief stint when the state's governor asked him to serve as the adjutant general for the Colorado National Guard during World War I. Baldwin died April 22, 1923, in Denver. According to one obituary, he suffered from cirrhosis of the liver and had undergone surgery to relieve his suffering less than two weeks prior. Baldwin was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | July 12, 2021 ++]

Every Picture Tells A Story

V-1 Over London



In retaliation for the D-Day invasion, the Germans unleashed an angry fusillade of V-1 flying bombs from sites inland from the Normandy coast. Here, on 14 June 1944, one of the missiles finally runs out of fuel over London and in silence falls toward an unfortunate neighbourhood of that great city. The white steeple at the left is the famed James Gibbs-designed St Martin-in-the-Fields on Trafalgar Square. So long as you kept hearing the V-1, you were safe from its explosive detonation, but when the buzzing racket of the Argus pulse-jet ceased due to fuel starvation, it was smart to find cover, for the missile would stall, pitch over and head towards whatever lay below it. At its peak, more than one hundred V-1s a day were fired at southeast England, 9,521 in total, decreasing in number as sites were overrun until October 1944, when the last V-1 site in range of Britain was taken by Allied forces.

WWII Bomber Nose Art [82] Midnight Belle



Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 30 SEP

Significant events in U. S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 30 SEP**”. [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | September 2021 ++]

* Health Care *



Covid-19 Variants C.1.2., B.1.1.621, & Delta

New C.1.2

Researchers have identified a new COVID-19 variant called C.1.2. in South Africa that appears to have similar mutations as other variants of concern, according to research published 26 AUG in preprint server medRxiv. Scientists first identified C.1.2. in May in the provinces of Mpumalanga and Gauteng. The strain accounted for 0.2 percent of genomes sequenced in South Africa, rising to 2 percent by July. C.1.2. contains mutations that have been seen in other variants of concern, including alpha, beta and gamma, that "are associated with increased transmissibility and reduced neutralization sensitivity," the report said. As of 13 AUG, the variant has been detected in six of South Africa's nine provinces, as well as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritius, New Zealand, Portugal and Switzerland.

C.1.2. is a sublineage of C.1. — the dominant strain during South Africa's first COVID-19 surge in mid-2020. "It has only been detected in around 100 genomes, a very low number," Dr. Tulio de Oliveira, director of Krisp, said during a 31 AUG conference, Bloomberg reported. "It's still a very small percentage, but again we're really keeping a good eye on that. It has all of the signatures of immune escape." A genome is an organism's complete set of genetic instructions. Each genome contains all of the information needed to build that organism and allow it to grow and develop. The strain does not yet have a Greek alphabet designation because the World Health Organization has not deemed it a variant of concern or interest.

Mu B.1.621 (aka Mu)

The World Health Organization (WHO) classified a new COVID-19 strain as a variant of concern 30 AUG. The strain, named mu, was first detected in Colombia in January, according to the WHO's weekly COVID-19 epidemiological update. B.1.621, the strain's scientific name, has since been identified in at least 39 countries, including the U.S., though its global prevalence is below 0.1 percent based on sequenced cases. Mu is most prevalent in Colombia and Ecuador, where it accounts for 39 percent and 13 percent of cases, respectively, and has consistently been on the rise in those countries, according to the report.

The strain carries "a constellation of mutations that indicate potential properties of immune escape," though further research is needed. It's not yet known whether mu is more transmissible or if it causes more severe illness. Early data suggests the strain has characteristics that allow it to evade some protection offered by current vaccines or monoclonal antibody treatments, similar to levels seen in other variants such as beta.

Delta

The delta coronavirus variant, which accounts for 99 percent of U.S. COVID-19 cases, will likely maintain its dominance over new variants such as mu (B.1.621) and lambda (C.37), virologists told The Wall Street Journal. The virologists said they expect delta to outcompete these strains because of its high transmissibility. In short, other variants can't spread to susceptible people as fast as delta can, which gives it a leg up. "Nothing so far has appeared competitive to delta," Trevor Bedford, PhD, a virologist with the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, told the Journal. This means that new case surges will likely be driven by delta and its sub-variants, not a new virus lineage, virologists said.

At present, delta accounts for about 88 percent of new cases globally, according to data cited by the Journal. Dr. Bedford projected that, on its current trajectory, delta would achieve fixation as the dominant strain worldwide within about a year of its emergence. In contrast, seasonal flu strains typically take two to five years to achieve fixation, he told the Journal. Delta does not appear to produce more severe COVID-19 infections than earlier strains, and vaccines appear effective against the variant, experts said.

[Source: Beckers Hospital Review | Erica Carbajal & Mackenzie Bean | September 1 & 2, 2021 ++]

Covid-19 Treatment

Update 11: Moderna vs. Pfizer Vaccines | Ivermectin Use Soars

Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine creates antibody levels more than twice as high as Pfizer's vaccine, according to a study published 30 AUG in JAMA. JAMA is a peer reviewed medical journal published 48 times a year by the American Medical Association. It publishes original research, reviews, and editorials covering all aspects of biomedicine. The study examined 2,499 healthcare workers in Belgium who had

been fully vaccinated with either of the vaccines. Among workers without previous infection, Moderna recipients' antibody levels were 2,881 units per milliliter and Pfizer recipients' antibody levels were 1,108 units per milliliter.

The researchers said that the stronger immune response observed in Moderna recipients could be a result of the longer interval between their first and second shots. Moderna recipients waited four weeks, but Pfizer recipients waited three. They also noted Moderna's vaccine has a higher concentration of mRNA content. The observed difference in antibody levels correlates with a difference in the vaccines' duration of protection, but more research is needed to determine which vaccine offers stronger protection against coronavirus variants and the risk of transmission.

-o-o-O-o-o-

Prescriptions for the anti-parasite drug ivermectin have soared to more than 88,000 per week as of mid-August, up from the pre-pandemic average of 3,600 per week, according to CDC data. Ivermectin is most often used to treat parasitic worms in animals. It isn't an antiviral, but some physicians have been prescribing it to treat COVID-19. Gregory Yu, MD, an emergency physician in San Antonio, told The New York Times 30 AUG that he has received daily requests for ivermectin from COVID-19 patients over the last week. He has refused the requests, but said he knows some of his colleagues are prescribing it.

The FDA has warned against use of the drug, which is approved only at very specific doses for humans to treat some parasitic worms, as well as some topical formulations for head lice and skin conditions. The CDC warned healthcare providers and the public 26 AUG about reports of severe illness associated with using ivermectin products to prevent or treat COVID-19. Some pharmacists have reported shortages of ivermectin and a growing number of people are getting it from livestock supply centers, where it comes in highly concentrated paste or liquid forms, the Times reported.

"People are going to animal feed stores and getting a formulation that's highly concentrated because it's for 1,000-pound animals," Shawn Varney, MD, medical director for the South Texas Poison Center, told the Times. "They're opening themselves to great potential harm." "Everyone wants some cure for COVID because it's such a devastating illness," he added. "I plead with people to stop using ivermectin and get the vaccine because it's the best protection we have at this point. Everything else is risk after risk." Not all hospitals agree with physicians' prescriptions and are refusing to administer the drug, prompting patient lawsuits.

- In Springfield, Ill., Memorial Medical Center won a court order to deny administering ivermectin to a COVID-19 patient on a ventilator, according to 31 AUG report in The State Journal-Register. A judge sided with Memorial Medical Center, which argued that ivermectin is an unproven treatment for COVID-19 and is potentially unsafe.
- A court ordered a different Illinois hospital to administer the drug to a COVID-19 patient. Elmhurst (Ill.) Hospital administered ivermectin to a comatose COVID-19 patient 3 MAY after a judge's order. The patient eventually was weaned off a ventilator, according to the Journal-Register.
- A judge also ordered West Chester (Ohio) Hospital on 23 AUG to administer the drug to a COVID-19 patient in the intensive care unit, according to the Ohio Capital Journal. The hospital will need to provide the patient with 30 milligrams of ivermectin each day for three weeks.

[Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Maia Anderson & Morgan Haefner | August 30 & 1 September 2021
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TRICARE Overseas Program

Update 24: Take Advantage of New TOP Resources

Did you know the [TRICARE Overseas Program](#) (TOP) made changes on 1 SEP to improve your patient experience? You now have access to a wide range of new resources to help you get the care you need. “International SOS, the overseas contractor, is streamlining its services to make it easier to access quality health care overseas,” said Michael Griffin, program analyst with the TRICARE Overseas Program Office at the Defense Health Agency. “The improvements will help you find and communicate more easily with providers, access services, and more.” Here’s a closer look at what’s changed and how it can help you and your family.

Near Patient Program (NPP)

The TOP has introduced the [Near Patient Program](#) in specific locations. This program gives you access to in-country medical and non-medical professionals who can help you navigate the overseas health care system. To answer questions you may have about medical care in the country you live in these teams collaborate with overseas military hospitals and clinics (<https://www.tricare.mil/mtf>), TOP providers (<https://www.tricare-overseas.com/beneficiaries/resources/provider-search>), and TRICARE Area Offices (<https://www.health.mil/About-MHS/OASDHA/Defense-Health-Agency/TRICARE-Health-Plan/TRICARE-Area-Offices>). “We want to ensure that cultural or language differences don’t impede your understanding of care,” said Griffin. “Connecting with NPP nurses and other clinical staff will help you navigate the local health care system and feel comfortable with your care.”

NPP staff members include nurses, who provide you with day-to-day assistance, and a physician to maintain medical oversight of your care. Clinical quality assurance leads also work with TOP providers to identify how to improve care. They may also offer additional training or support to TOP providers as needed. Each NPP team has a country lead that manages relationships with TOP providers. The NPP is available in: Bahrain, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and South Korea. If you aren’t in an NPP location, the [TOP Regional Call Center](#) (<https://www.tricare-overseas.com/contact-us>) will continue to provide you support.

Medical Records Collection Teams (MRC)

With the addition of Medical Records Collection teams, TOP providers will now submit patient medical records to International SOS. What does International SOS do with your records? They ensure your records are sent to the Department of Defense (DoD). This allows the DoD to include them in your official electronic medical record. These records also ensure continuity of care and help your provider manage the patient administration process. MRC teams have started working directly with providers in the NPP regions illustrated at <file:///C:/Users/User/AppData/Local/Temp/NPP-Fact-Sheet-ENG-Aug-2021.pdf>. This will streamline the records submission process in two ways:

1. *Electronic submissions.* TOP providers will switch from paper to electronic record submission.

2. *Translation services.* TOP providers won't need to submit medical records in English. MRC teams will provide a medically certified translation of any non-English medical records to the military hospital or clinic you're enrolled to.

Do you have TOP Prime Remote? (<https://tricare.mil/primeremoteoverseas>). If so, your translated records will be submitted directly into your electronic medical record. Safely collecting medical records is a key priority. But you must provide consent by signing a Beneficiary Consent to Release of Medical Information Form for International SOS to collect your records. You can download the release form from the TOP website at <file:///C:/Users/User/AppData/Local/Temp/ROMIF-English-Aug-2021.pdf>.

Beneficiary Support Center (BSC)

What is the BSC? It's a one-stop resource to help you with your TRICARE benefit overseas. It is available 24/7 to provide you with the below. You can now have access BSC at <file:///C:/Users/User/AppData/Local/Temp/TOP-21-BSC-Fact-Sheet-Aug-2021.pdf> :

- General assistance
- Telephonic language assistance
- Answers to questions about enrollment, claims processing, and more

One way you can connect to the BSC is by calling your TOP Regional Call Center (<https://www.tricare-overseas.com/contact-us>). But you can also connect to the support center with your computer or mobile device. When the [MyCare Overseas beneficiary app](#) launches (which will also be available as a web-based portal), you'll be able to use the ChatBot tool to find answers to frequently asked questions. You can also start a live chat session with a BSC representative. The TOP will be sharing more information about the app and portal soon.

Do you have questions about these changes? If so, go to the TOP website <https://www.tricare-overseas.com>. You can also call the TOP Regional Call Center or check out the TRICARE Overseas Program Handbook (file:///C:/Users/User/AppData/Local/Temp/Overseas_HB.pdf) for benefit information. And make sure you check out issue 3 of the TRICARE Overseas Program Health Matters Newsletter (file:///C:/Users/User/AppData/Local/Temp/TDP_NL_2021_Issue3.pdf).

[Source: TRICARE Communications | September 7, 2021 ++]

TRICARE Formulary Q&A on Covered Drugs and Supplies

The TRICARE Uniform Formulary (UF) is a list of brand name and generic drugs and supplies that TRICARE covers. It is Developed by the Department of Defense Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee and updated quarterly. At <https://militaryrx.express-scripts.com/notices/formulary> can be seen recent formulary changes. You can search the TRICARE Formulary to:

- Look up costs, quantity limits and therapeutic alternatives.
- Download medical necessity or prior authorization forms.
- See if your prescription is on the Basic Core Formulary (BCF) or Extended Core Formulary (ECF)

- BCF is a list of medications required to be on formulary at all full-service military treatment facilities. BCF medications are intended to meet the majority of the primary care needs of DoD beneficiaries.
- ECF includes medications in therapeutic classes that are used to support more specialized scopes of practice than those on BCF.

A non-formulary drug can be provided at the formulary cost share if your [provider supplies information showing that there is a medical necessity](#) to use the non-formulary drug instead of a therapeutic alternative.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: Is my medication covered by TRICARE?

A: You can find out if your medication is covered by looking it up on the Formulary Search Tool at <https://www.express-scripts.com/frontend/open-enrollment/tricare/fst/#>.

Q2: What can I do if my medication isn't covered?

A: These drugs are not covered for any beneficiary at any pharmacy. These drugs have alternatives available. At <https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Pharmacy/Drugs/MedsNotCovered> you can check the Formulary Search Tool and speak with your provider about alternative medications. You can find more information on non-covered drugs can find more information on pharmacy appeals at <https://www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Pharmacy/Appeals>. *NOTE: In some cases your medication (injections and vaccines) may be covered as a medical benefit so you can call your TRICARE Regional Contractor.*

Q3: What if my medication requires medical necessity?

A: Your provider can call the Express-Scripts prior authorization line @ 1-866-684-4488 to establish the medical necessity or he/she can fill out the medical necessity form that is linked to that medication on the Formulary Search Tool and fax it to Express-Scripts.

Q4: What can I do if my medical necessity was denied?

A: You can contact Express-Scripts Customer Service @ 1-877-363-1303 for information regarding the appeals process.

Q5: Is there an age restriction on my medication?

A: You can look up your medication on the Formulary Search Tool. These will be listed under the "Notes" section.

Q6: How do I get my medication if there is an age restriction?

A: Your provider will need to call the Express-Scripts Prior Authorization line @ 1-866-684-4488 to establish medical necessity.

Q7: What can I do if the request for a medical necessity override was denied?

A: You can contact Express-Scripts Customer Service @ 1-877-363-1303 for information regarding the appeals process.

Q8: *Are there quantity limits on my medication?*

A: You can find out if there are quantity limits on your medication is covered by looking it up on the Formulary Search Tool. These will be listed under the "Notes" section.

Q9: *What can I do if my doctor wants me to take more than the allowed amount?*

A: Your provider can call the Express-Scripts PA line @ 1-866-684-4488 to establish medical necessity for a quantity limit override.

Q10: *What can I do if the request for a quantity limit override was denied?*

A: You can contact Express-Scripts Customer Service @ 1-877-363-1303 for information regarding the appeals process.

Q11: *How can I get reimbursement for a prescription if I paid full price or my other health insurance (OHI) cost share?*

A: You can contact Express-Scripts Customer Service @ 1-877-363-1303 for assistance.

Q12: *How can access more information about my medication like indications and side effects?*

A: The following websites have medication information like indications and side effects:

- www.drugs.com
- www.rxlist.com
- www.webmd.com

Q13: *What can I do if my medical necessity override for a non-covered medication is not approved?*

A: You can contact Express-Scripts Customer Service @ 1-877-363-1303 for information regarding the appeals process.

Q14: *How do I know if generic is required for my medication?*

A: You can find out if generic is required by looking it up on the Formulary Search Tool.

Q15: *How do I get a brand name instead of generic?*

A: Your provider can call the Express-Scripts prior authorization line @ 1-866-684-4488 to establish medical necessity or he/she can fill out the [Brand over Generic Prior Authorization Request Form](#) and fax it to Express-Scripts.

Q16: *What can I do if the request for brand name was denied?*

A: You can contact Express-Scripts Customer Service @ 1-877-363-1303 for information regarding the appeals process.

Q17: *How do I know if my medication requires prior authorization?*

A: You can find out if your medication requires prior authorization by looking it up on the Formulary Search Tool.

Q18: *What if my medication requires prior authorization?*

A: Your provider can either call the Express-Scripts prior authorization line @ 1-866-684-4488 or he/she can fill out the prior authorization form that is linked to that medication on the Formulary Search Tool and fax it to Express-Scripts.

Q19: *What can I do if my prior authorization was denied?*

A: You can contact Express-Scripts Customer Service @ 1-877-363-1303 for information regarding the appeals process.

Q20: *How do I know if my medication requires medical necessity?*

A: You can find out if your medication requires medical necessity by looking it up on the Formulary Search Tool.

[Source: <https://health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Access-Cost-Quality-and-Safety/Access-to-Healthcare/Pharmacy-Program/TRICARE-Formulary> | September 2021 ++]

TRICARE Open Season

Update 04: Dates Set for 2021



TRICARE's 2021 Open Season will run Nov. 8 through Dec. 13, giving eligible beneficiaries a little more than a month this fall to make changes to their coverage. Anyone enrolled in, or eligible for, a TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select plan can enroll in a plan or make changes to their coverage during this period. Updates would take effect Jan. 1, 2022. Reenrollment is not required; if you like the plan you're in, you'll continue with it as long as you remain eligible. Coverage changes outside Open Season require a Qualifying Life Event (QLE). You'll have 90 days after a QLE to make changes; a QLE for any family member allows all family members to change health plans. Get a list of these events and details on how to initiate enrollment changes after a QLE at <https://www.tricare.mil/lifeevents>.

The TRICARE Open Season generally takes place on or near the same dates as the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) Open Season. FEDVIP is a separate program offering coverage to some retirees, reservists, family members, and survivors; learn more about eligibility and program details at <https://www.benefeds.com/eligibility>. Servicemembers can register for FEDVIP benefits from 31 days prior to their military retirement to 60 days after their retirement, in addition to during Open Season. They may also register after QLEs, but these events may differ from TRICARE QLEs; learn

more at <https://www.benefeds.com/education-support/qles>. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Kevin Lilley | September 08, 2021++]

Heart Failure

Update 05: Diet May Affect Risk of Sudden Cardiac Death



Diet is known to influence heart health. Experts recommend a diet low in sodium and saturated fat to reduce the risk of heart disease. A heart-healthy diet also includes plenty of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Research shows that the **Mediterranean diet**—full of fruits, vegetables, fish, cereals, and legumes, with little meat and dairy—may reduce the risk of heart disease. Vegetables on a table being prepared to make a salad, including tomato, radish, cucumber, avocado, lettuce, chick peas, seeds, nuts, and dressing.

Few studies have examined the relationship between overall diet and sudden cardiac death, a common cause of death in the United States. In sudden cardiac death, the heart abruptly stops beating, leading to death within an hour of symptoms. Small studies have suggested that the Mediterranean diet may lower the risk of sudden cardiac death. A team led by Dr. James M. Shikany of the University of Alabama at Birmingham examined whether dietary patterns are associated with the risk of sudden cardiac death. The study was funded by NIH’s National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), National Institute on Aging (NIA), and National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). Results were published in the Journal of the American Heart Association on July 6, 2021.

The researchers analyzed the diets of more than 21,000 participants using a food questionnaire at the start of the study. Participants were asked how often and in what quantities they ate 110 foods in the past year. Both those with and without a history of coronary heart disease were included. Participants were part of the long-running REGARDS study (Reasons for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke) at [https://www.uab.edu/soph/regardsstudy/images/documents/REGARDS Objectives and Design Paper.pdf](https://www.uab.edu/soph/regardsstudy/images/documents/REGARDS%20Objectives%20and%20Design%20Paper.pdf).

Based on the questionnaire responses, researchers calculated a Mediterranean diet score. They also identified five dietary patterns. One, which they termed the “Southern” eating pattern, has large amounts of added fats, fried food, eggs, organ and processed meats, and sugar-sweetened beverages. Other dietary patterns included a “sweets” pattern heavy on added sugar, a “convenience” pattern made mainly of ready-to-eat foods and take-out, a “plant-based” pattern,” and an “alcohol and salad” pattern.

The researchers assessed how closely participants adhered to each dietary pattern. For example, someone could adhere closely to the Mediterranean diet while also adhering to the “sweets” pattern, but to a lesser degree. They also recorded any heart-related events over an average of 10 years. More than 400 sudden

cardiac deaths occurred during the study. Analyses showed that regularly eating a Southern-style diet may increase the risk of sudden cardiac death, while consuming a Mediterranean diet may reduce risk.

Participants with a Southern dietary pattern had a 46% higher risk of sudden cardiac death than those with the lowest adherence. In contrast, people closely following the Mediterranean diet had a 26% lower risk of sudden cardiac death than others with the least adherence. These differences were of borderline statistical significance (not enough to prove they weren't due to chance or some other factor). Among those with no coronary heart disease at the start of the study, those closely following the Mediterranean diet had a statistically significant 41% reduction in risk of sudden cardiac death compared to those with the least adherence.

“While this study was observational in nature, the results suggest that diet may be a modifiable risk factor for sudden cardiac death,” Shikany says. These results support other findings that improving your diet can have a significant effect on heart health. [Source: National Institute on Aging | Erin Bryant | July 20, 2021 ++]

Food Date Labeling

Update 02: What It Means

When you purchase food items at your local grocery store, you may notice a printed sell by date, use by date or best before date on the packaging or item itself and wonder just what that date really means.

- The “Use By Date” is the last day that the manufacturer vouches for the product’s quality. The use by date is the date the manufacturer recommends that the consumer use their product for “peak quality” in the food. So you may eat the food after the use by date, but it likely is not going to be at peak quality if a use-by date has passed.
- The “Sell By Date” on a product is the items expiration date, the end of its shelf life at the store. This is the last date stores are supposed to display the product for sale, after the Sell By Date the stores should remove the product, the store *Shelf Life* has expired. Although the food product may be used and enjoyed past this date, it is not recommended to purchase a product if the Sell By date has past. This date is not as common as a best-by date. If you do purchase a product with an expired **sell-by date**, you should get it on clearance and you should be going to use it very quickly after purchase.
- The “Best Before Date” is, according to the manufacturer, the last date by which a products flavor and/or quality is best. A best-by date denotes the optimal period of time during which the manufacturer feels that their product will retain its original quality. As noted above, the product may still be enjoyed after the “best before date”. Additionally, the manufacturer may call this the “Best if Used By” date, the “Best By” date or some similar wording. These best dates indicates that the quality of their food might begin to diminish after that date, but it is still good to eat and the shelf life is still active for a period beyond that of a pre-determined best-by date.

It may come as a shock, but printed food dates are not federally regulated and do not refer to food safety. Thus, it is usually safe to eat your "expired" food after its printed date has passed. Nor, with some exceptions

dependent on state law, are stores legally required to remove food from the shelf once the expiration date has passed. The expiration dates are strictly “advisory” in nature and are left entirely to the discretion of the manufacturer, thus not truly indicative of an items true Shelf Life. With the exception of infant formula and baby food, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require food companies to place dates on their food products. The only requirement is that the food is wholesome and fit for consumption. States have varying food dating laws. For example, many states require that milk and other perishables be sold before the expiration date, while others do not. [Source: www.eatbydate.com | June 2021 ++]

*** Finances ***



**Military Per Diem
FY 2022 Rates Will Rise**

The Defense Department has announced that per diem rates for military travel will go up slightly for fiscal 2022, which runs from Oct. 1, 2021, to Sept. 30, 2022. The standard per diem rate will increase from \$151 to \$155 daily. Per diem is a daily payment to reimburse you for the out-of-pocket costs for food, lodging and incidental expenses you incur during a permanent change of station (PCS) move or while on temporary duty. Per diem rates limit how much you can be reimbursed for meals and lodging. The per diem rate is also used to determine the Temporary Lodging Expense (TLE) rate.

Per diem is broken down into three categories: Meals, Lodging, and Incidental Expenses. When you travel, you get reimbursed the meal and incidentals portion of per diem automatically. To be reimbursed for your lodging, you must submit receipts showing the lodging's actual cost, or you can use your government charge card to have your receipts automatically entered to your travel account in some cases. For travel to most locations in the continental United States, you are reimbursed based on the standard per diem rates. If your lodging costs less than the maximum amount of \$96, you will be reimbursed only the actual cost; if it costs more, you have to pay the difference out-of-pocket. The meals portion of standard per diem increases by \$4, from \$50 to \$54; the incidental expense portion remains at \$5.

Of course, there are exceptions to this rule: It's nearly impossible to find a hotel in any major city for \$96, so there are several "high-cost" areas that have higher limits for lodging. These areas may have higher reimbursement for meals as well. Also, some areas have higher per diem rates during tourist season, when prices go up. However, for most of the U.S., standard per diem rates apply. If you are traveling outside of the continental U.S., your per diem rates could change on a monthly basis due to fluctuations in exchange rates, as well as other factors. To find the per diem rate for your location refer to <https://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/site/perdiemCalc.cfm>. [Source: TSCL Weekly Update August 28, 2021 ++]

Budgetary Timelines

Update 01: Looming Legislative Sprint Could Impact Your 2022 Benefits

Members of Congress have a few short weeks to pass about a dozen appropriations bills funding the government for the fiscal year beginning 1 OCT, and both the House and Senate have scheduled off days throughout September. Barring a legislative sprint without recent precedent, legislators won't meet their deadline. It's far from a new phenomenon: FY 1997 was the last time calendars turned to October with all appropriations legislation passed. MOAA and countless other organizations have urged lawmakers to break this budget cycle – not just to add certainty and accountability to the process, but to prevent the damage done to your benefits when the fiscal year starts without a federal budget.

Complicating the process is the need to pass legislation altering budget caps tied to sequestration – remnants of the 2011 Budget Control Act. Congress has done this on a bipartisan basis on multiple occasions since the act was passed, but it represents another hurdle in an already delayed process. The usual Band-Aid for a missed deadline comes in the form of a continuing resolution (CR), a law which allows the government to continue operating under existing budget levels over a given time period. Congress passed five CRs last December alone, and has relied on more than 120 since 1998. These measures may keep the lights on, but they come with significant baggage:

Any new programs, including the significant improvements military organizations and veterans fight for each year as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) process, won't take effect. These could include TRICARE reforms, military family support efforts, and many more meaningful changes to your benefits. Any existing programs marked for sunset or for downsizing – programs that aren't meeting the needs of beneficiaries, for instance, or legacy systems in need of modernization – continue under old funding requirements. Military leaders and planners, operating under assumptions tied to FY 2022 budget figures, are forced to adjust course, with significant readiness consequences. What happens when the bandage expires? We last found out in December 2018, when a 34-day government shutdown began after the expiration of the year's second CR. It marked the third shutdown of the 2000s and the 20th since 1977, per the House of Representatives' history website.

In addition to the lack of new programs outlined above, the shutdown comes with its own consequences. The 2018-19 funding lapse was a partial one, with DoD appropriations already becoming law that September. That meant pay issued to DoD servicemembers and retirees was protected (although special pay increases and other benefits from that year's NDAA would have to wait), but Coast Guard, U.S. Public Health Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration members and retirees weren't so lucky. The VA isn't immune, either: While the 2018-19 shutdown didn't disrupt payments, the department in 2013 warned an extended shutdown would have done just that.

Above all else, these budgetary maneuvers breed uncertainty: From the desks of top-level leaders trying to maintain a training schedule to the kitchen tables of uniformed services families, past and present, making emergency plans or scrounging for extra savings. In a perfect world we should not need to but veterans are asked to help their organizations relay these concerns to local lawmakers. Let your legislators know it's time to snap this string of budget failures and make deadlines matter. MOAA will continue to advocate for Congress to meet its own budgetary timelines and seek legislation that supports scheduling discipline to meet deadlines and prevent wasteful CRs.

One way to keep up to date on the latest budget news is to regularly access the MOAA's Advocacy News page at <https://www.moaa.org/content/take-action/advocacy-in-action>. This site highlights the current legislative needs to maintain our benefits and provides a means to connect with our lawmakers to address critical topics. [Source: Military Officers Association of America | Kevin Lilley | September 1, 2021 ++]

Military Pay & Benefits

Update 10: Drastic Changes Needed To Meet Rising Personnel Costs

To counter ever-rising personnel costs in the ranks, defense officials should consider radical changes to troops' compensation packages like replacing annual pay raises with more targeted bonuses and mandating 25 years of service for full retirement benefits, according to a new budget analysis released this week. "While today's U.S. military is near its smallest size since the end of World War II in terms of active duty end strength, personnel costs are at a historic high," wrote Seamus Daniels, associate director for Defense Budget Analysis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). "Left unaddressed, high personnel costs may limit resources for Department of Defense modernization initiatives and could threaten the long-term sustainability of the force."

The CSIS report notes that as military manpower totals have decreased over time, personnel costs for the department have continued to rise. From 1952 to 2016, end strength numbers for the military fell by more than 64 percent, but total DOD personnel spending rose by 110 percent. The average cost per active duty service member for the department in fiscal 2021 was \$136,000. That takes into account things like basic pay, specialty bonuses, housing stipends, and medical benefits. Adjusted for inflation, that figure is down slightly from the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, when it peaked at around \$142,000. In fiscal 2001 the cost per troop for the military was about \$89,000, and in fiscal 1991 it was about \$70,000.

The report said part of that expense is due to a rise in the percentage of officers in the services over the last few decades, since they receive higher pay and benefits. Officers made up less than 14 percent of total active-duty end strength in fiscal 2001 and nearly 18 percent this fiscal year. But compounding annual pay raises and rising medical benefits costs also play a major role, Daniels found. Personnel costs account for about 30 percent of the entire military budget. "Higher personnel costs, coupled with rising costs to operate and sustain existing platforms, necessitate continual increases in the defense budget topline to simply keep the force at its current size," he wrote.

Defense officials in the past have struggled with the issue of rising personnel expenses and constrained military funding. After 2013, when the Budget Control Act capped annual military spending (along with other federal agencies), Pentagon planners backed smaller-than-expected annual pay raises for troops to save funding for modernization and training priorities. But after a few years of that plan, lawmakers overrode administration plans for flattened pay raises, arguing that the potential injury to families' finances and troops' morale outweighed the budget flexibility advantages. The report proposes several policy changes defense leaders should consider to address the problem, or at least to keep the issue of rising costs at the forefront of future budget discussions.

They include offering smaller annual military pay increases and boosting more specialty pays and bonuses, to “reduce turnover for high-skilled occupations while similarly increasing it for low-skilled occupations, where retention is not as important.” It also suggests capping pay for service members after a several years if they fail to gain promotions, and “gradually” increase the years of service for full military retirement benefits from 20 years to 25. In 2015, Congress’ Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission backed both ideas. “DoD has a sacred responsibility to adequately pay and provide for service members and their families, which are the core of the U.S. military,” Daniels wrote. “But the current cost of personnel is unsustainable and must not be accepted as an immutable fact.”

Defense Department officials did immediately respond to a request for comment about the findings. The full report is available on the CSIS web site at https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/210909_Daniels_Trends_MilitaryPersonnelCosts.pdf?zXrLt.OPBj6cJZchUs8WjsEstNDeqzXP. [Source: ArmyTimes | Leo Shane III | September 10, 2021 ++]

Buy Now Pay Later

Pay for Shopping in Installments? Sounds Great! Be Careful



Many online shops offer "buy now, pay later" installment services that target high school and college students. These services are quickly gaining in popularity allowing shoppers to purchase just about anything – from electronics to a pair of shoes – by agreeing to pay a series of smaller installments. Before signing up, consumers should research the option carefully so they can make informed purchasing decision and avoid getting in over their heads.

How Paying in Installments Works

During the checkout process with an online store, in addition to the option to pay with a debit or credit card, there is an option to choose to pay for the order in a specified number of installments. The opportunity to split up payments is appealing to many shoppers, but especially shoppers who may not have or use traditional credit cards when shopping online.

Most of the time, this option comes from a third-party financing company that makes money by charging retailers a small percentage of each sale made through their financing options and by collecting late fees and interest from consumers. Interest rates on pay in installment purchases can range between 0% to 30%, depending on your credit history and the retailer. Installments can last for as little as a few weeks or as long as 39 months. Purchasers will need to be approved by the financing company before taking advantage of an installment payment plan.

Pay in Installment Smart Shopping Tips

- Consider it a loan. Even though many installment payment services come with only a few small payments and zero-percent interest, it's critical to remember it is still borrowing money to enjoy a product before it is paid in full. Ask yourself if paying the total price means spending more than you can actually afford, and make your decision accordingly.
- Stick to a budget. Think about how bi-weekly or monthly payments could affect your budget – even if the payments seem small. Will they cut into the funds set aside for necessary expenses, such as rent or groceries?
- Read the fine print. Before signing up to pay in installments, understand exactly how the service works. Read the fine print of the agreement to find out what company is financing, how long the financing terms are to pay off the purchase and in how many installments, how they handle late payments, and how much interest is charged, if any.
- Get to know the financing company. Look up the financing company on BBB.org to make sure they are a reputable company with honest business practices.
- Know how your credit could be affected. Keep in mind that unpaid debts can be sent to collections agencies and after a delinquent period of 90 days can be reported to credit bureaus. This could have a negative impact on your credit score.

Read BBB's tips on smart online shopping at <https://www.bbb.org/article/tips/14040-bbb-tip-smart-shopping-online>. To learn more about dealing with debt checkout <https://www.bbb.org/article/news-releases/22056-bbb-tip-dealing-with-debt-during-the-covid-19-pandemic> [Source: BBB | August 10, 2021 ++]

Disaster Recovery Fraud

Tips to Steer Clear of It

As a large swath of the nation recovers from wind and flood damage brought about by Hurricane Ida and its remnants, some risk further financial problems at the hands of opportunistic scam artists. Are you looking to repair or replace items after the storm? Or are you looking for a way to help fellow veterans, military members, and others who've suffered? Take a quick look at these nine tips below, courtesy of agencies like the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and other sources:



1. The ‘Partner’ Problem. Scammers may not risk impersonating your insurance company, but some may pretend to be affiliated with your provider as a way to prompt you to give up personal information attached to your policy. Some contractors may claim affiliation with various companies to help legitimize their sales pitch. Never give your insurance details to any providers outside your insurance company.

2. Hang Up, Call Back. If you've received an unsolicited call from someone claiming to represent your insurance agency or a familiar charity, it could be a bad actor relying on brand identification to gain your confidence. If there's any doubt, simply hang up and call back using the number on your insurance policy or on the charity's official website.

3. Caller ID Confusion. Another reason to consider a callback: Sophisticated scammers may add legitimacy to their insurance fraud attempt or fake charity plea by tricking your phone's caller identification into displaying something other than "Spam" or "Unknown Number." Be aware that these programs aren't 100% reliable, and don't provide personal information until you're sure you know who's on the line.

4. Crowdfunding Concerns. Friends or relatives may launch crowdfunding pages seeking support for disaster recovery, and you may want to pitch in. But beware of random stories designed to make emotional pleas separating you from your cash. At <https://www.consumerreports.org/cro/money/crowdfunding-scam> check out some scampaigns to avoid.

5. Check Your Options. Before taking out a high-interest loan or making other financially risky moves, be sure you're not eligible for disaster-related help from the Small Business Administration, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), or other providers. Get some links from the FTC at <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/how-avoid-disaster-recovery-scams>

6. Cash Isn't King. Any contractor seeking payment in cash, gift card, or wire transfer is raising an immediate red flag. And watch for those seeking all or most of the money for a repair job upfront – this could be in violation of state laws regarding down payments.

7. Federal Imposters. Per the FCC, any legitimate federal workers who visit your home will have ID ready to show on request and will not ask for money.

8. Do Your Part. Report scams to the FTC via <https://reportfraud.ftc.gov/#>, the Better Business Bureau via <https://www.bbb.org/file-a-complaint>, or other applicable groups or agencies. You can call the FEMA Disaster Fraud Hotline at 1-866-720-5721.

9. Donate Safe. Unsure how to help? Service-specific relief agencies always need donations to assist servicemembers and the wider military community with needs related to natural disasters and other financial matters. The list of links compiled by MOAA in the wake of 2018's Hurricane Florence has all the information you'll need at <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2018-news-articles/here-s-how-service-relief-agencies-step-up-to-provide-disaster-relief>.

[Source: MOAA Newsletter | Kevin Lilley | September 08, 2021 ++]

Loan Scams

The Lender May be Real, but the Loan is a Scam

BBB Scam Tracker is receiving reports of scammers masquerading as legitimate loan providers. These phony lenders guarantee a quick loan with no upfront fees. But victims who provide their banking information to the scammers are left in the negative.

How the scam works:

- You receive an email advertising a guaranteed loan. The message displays the logo and contact information for what appears to be a legitimate loan company. Before proceeding with the offer, you search for the company online to determine if they can be trusted. You find the name and contact information matches a legitimate company, so you proceed with the loan.
- Once you agree to the loan, the "lender" takes your personal banking information and deposits the money into your account via a check. Then, they demand you buy insurance for the loan before the check officially clears. Unfortunately, the loan check turns out to be fake, something victims often don't realize until after they pay the "insurance." One victim told BBB, "The money will be available the next day, but then it will be rejected by your bank three days later."
- These scammers know that consumers are increasingly aware of phishing attempts, so they use the identity of a business that can easily be verified online. This allows them to gain target's trust and get access to their bank account.

How to avoid loan scams:

- Avoid unsolicited loan offers. Scammers use offers of quick cash to lure you in—don't fall for it. Whether they contact you by phone, email or text or send loan offers by mail, approach all unsolicited offers for money with caution.
- Expect a credit check. These scams often prey on people who may not easily qualify for a loan. No legitimate lender will provide you with a loan without performing a credit check.
- Ensure the business contact information matches the email sender information. Brand identifiers can easily be copied and included in the body of an email, so the most important information for a consumer to verify is the email address of the sender. The domain for the email address typically matches the domain of the official website and should be free of random letters or numbers.
- Research loan providers before accepting an offer. When doing business with an unfamiliar company, don't just verify they're legitimate by searching their name online because you could be missing surprising information. View ratings and reviews to see what other people are saying, and check for a BBB business profile.

For More Information

You can connect with trusted lenders in your area by visiting [BBB.org/search](https://www.bbb.org/search). Be careful and watch out for "guaranteed" loans with upfront fees. If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](https://www.bbb.org/AvoidScams). [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | September 3, 2021 ++]

Tech Support Scams

Update 03: Need Tech Support? Be Careful Which Number You Call

Many people are savvy enough to know that tech support scammers often reach out to potential victims by phone or with a popup. Even if the person takes a few minutes to look online for a number to reach popular streaming services and online shopping services such as Netflix, Microsoft, Amazon, [Roku](https://www.roku.com) or another type

of online service for help, BBB advises to use caution. Scammers will post fake customer support numbers online to fool callers into purchasing unrelated computer software or use a convincing script to remote access a device to cause all kinds of technical issues the user didn't need. Unfortunately, many large companies have been affected by this scam.



How the Scam Works:

- Your laptop or mobile device is acting up or a streaming service is freezing repeatedly. A quick search online reveals the customer support phone number, typically a toll-free number (1-888 or 1-844 number). Once dialed, a "representative" answers and with a few pieces of information provided, the "representative" declares that the account is compromised.
- Skeptical? The "representative" reassures that they can provide proof that the account was hacked; however, they first need remote access to your device. By this time, the desire to get the account recovered and information back could be overshadowing the decision to allow a complete stranger to remote access your personal computer or mobile device. Scam artists often will install malware that records passwords, key strokes, or other files that contain personal information.
- According to [BBB Scam Tracker](#) reports, this scam is often used as a setup for selling expensive computer security software, costing victims between \$200 and \$900. Unfortunately, it does nothing to fix things were never hacked in the first place.

Protect yourself from tech support scams:

- *Refer to contact information listed directly on the business's website*, instead of relying on an internet search for support phone numbers (double check the URL) or use the phone number from the most recent latest bill.
- Never allow a stranger remote access to the computer or mobile device if it has nothing to do with the reason you are calling technical support.
- *Avoid clicking on popup boxes or ads stating that something is wrong.* If a popup doesn't seem to 'go away,' or is difficult to avoid, disconnect from the internet and wi-fi by shutting off the device immediately and restart it.
- *Install virus protection on your computer.*

For More Information

Many tech support scams use similar techniques; see [BBB.org/techsupportscam](https://www.bbb.org/techsupportscam) for more advice. To learn more this type of scam and others, go to <https://www.bbb.org/us/news/scams>. If you've been targeted by this scam, help others avoid the same problem by reporting your experience on <https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker>; in Canada, report it on <https://www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca/report-signaliez-eng.htm> Read more at <https://www.bbb.org/bbb-accreditation->

[standards](#) and <https://www.bbb.org/standards-for-trust>. [Source: <https://www.bbb.org/article/scams> | September 8, 2021 ++]

Natural Disaster Scams

Protect Yourself from “Storm Chasers”



Natural disasters like storms, tornadoes, hurricanes, flooding, and wildfires often bring out the best in people, as strangers reach out to help others in need. Unfortunately, the aftermath of a crisis also brings out contractors taking advantage of those who have already been victimized. Better Business Bureau is warning homeowners affected by natural disasters to beware of “storm chasers” and out-of-town contractors soliciting business. Although not all storm chasers are scammers, they may lack the proper licensing for your area, offer quick fixes, or make big promises they can’t deliver.

There are some things you should do when hiring any contractor (such as getting three estimates, getting everything in writing, and paying with a credit card) plus some things you should know about being evacuated to a storm shelter. Check out:

- <https://www.bbb.org/article/tips/14081-bbb-tip-hiring-a-contractor>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/covid-19/public-disaster-shelter-during-covid.html>

BBB also has these specific tips for victims of natural disasters:

- **Contact your insurance company.** Ask about your policy coverage and specific filing requirements. Save all receipts, including those for food, temporary lodging, or other expenses that may be covered under your policy. Your insurance company may also have recommended contractors.
- **Do your research.** Find businesses you can trust on [BBB.org](https://www.bbb.org). Check your state or provincial government agency responsible for registering and/or licensing contractors. Get references from friends and relatives.
- **Resist high-pressure sales.** Some storm chasers use tactics such as the “good deal” you’ll get only if you hire the contractor on the spot. Be pro-active in selecting a contractor and not re-active to sales calls on the phone or door-to-door pitches. Disaster victims should never feel forced to make a hasty decision or to choose an unknown contractor.
- **Be especially careful of door-to-door contractors.** Many municipalities require a solicitation permit if sales people go door-to-door. Ask for identification. Check their vehicle for a business name, phone number, and license plates for your state or province.
- **Don’t sign over insurance checks to contractors.** Get an invoice from the contractor and pay them directly (preferably with a credit card, which offers additional fraud protection over other forms of

payment). Don't sign any documents that give the contractor any rights to your insurance claims. If you have questions, contact your insurance company or agent.

- **Be wary regarding places you can't see.** While most contractors abide by the law, be careful allowing someone you do not know to inspect your roof and other areas of your house. An unethical contractor may actually create damage to get work. The same goes for attics, crawl spaces, ducts, and other places you cannot easily access or see for yourself.
- BBB is also warning contractors to beware of storm chasers who offer to pay local construction companies substantial amounts of money to use the business's established name, reputation, and phone. They masquerade as a local business, collect the insurance money and then move on, leaving the real business to deal with unsatisfied customers due to bad workmanship, unfinished work, or unfulfilled warranties.

Here are some additional resources:

- <https://www.bbb.org/article/tips/18640-bbb-tip-tree-service-company-you-can-trust> for Tree Services
- <https://www.bbb.org/near-me/general-contractor> to find a contractor near you.
- <https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker> to report scams.
- <https://www.bbb.org> to look up business profiles, file a complaint, or write a customer review.
- Read more about [BBB Accreditation Standards](#) and [BBB Standards for Trust](#).

[Source: Better Business Bureau [March 16, 2021 ++]

Tax Burden on New York Vets

As of SEP 2021

Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. States raise revenue in many ways including sales taxes, excise taxes, license taxes, income taxes, intangible taxes, property taxes, estate taxes and inheritance taxes. Depending on where you live, you may end up paying all of them or just a few. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you move to New York in 2021

Sales Taxes

The New York state sales tax rate is 4%, and the average NY sales tax after local surtaxes is 8.48% which is lower than 86.5% of states

- Groceries, prescription drugs and non-prescription drugs are exempt from the New York sales tax
- Counties and cities can charge an additional [local sales tax](#) of up to 4.875%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 8.875%. For a zip code listing of these refer to http://www.tax-rates.org/new_york/sales-tax-calculator
- New York has 2158 [special sales tax jurisdictions](#) with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax. Refer to http://www.tax-rates.org/new_york/sales-tax-by-county.

Excise Taxes

An excise tax is a tax directly levied on certain goods by a state or federal government. The most prominent excise taxes collected by the state government are the fuel tax on gasoline and the so-called "sin tax" collected on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. An excise tax is not the same thing as the Nevada Sales Tax. The Sales Tax is collected as a percentage of the final purchase price of all qualifying sales, and is collected directly from the end consumer of the product. The state's excise taxes, on the other hand, are flat per-unit taxes that must be paid directly to the state government by the merchant before the goods can be sold. Merchants may be required to attach tax stamps to taxable merchandise to show that the excise tax was paid.

Even though excise taxes are collected from businesses, virtually all merchants pass on the excise tax to the customer through higher prices for the taxed goods. New York collects an average of \$580 in yearly excise taxes per capita, higher than 78% of the other 50 states.

- **Alcohol:** Beer: \$0.14 per gal | Wine: \$0.30 per gal | Liquor \$6.44 per gal. The excise tax on beer is lower than 78% of the other 50 states and is ranked #39 out of the 50 states. The excise tax on wine is one of the lowest wine taxes in the country and is ranked #40 out of the 50 states. The excise tax on liquor is higher than 58% of the other 50 states and is ranked #21 out of the 50 states Nevada state taxes on hard alcohol vary based on alcohol content, place of production, size of container, and place purchased. All excise taxes are included in the price of the beverage. Note that the IRS also collects a federal excise taxes on alcoholic beverages, which are included separately from your alcohol taxes in the final purchase price.
- **Cannabis:** None yet. Proposed: New York would set a 9% sales tax on cannabis, plus an additional 4% tax split between the county and local government. It would also impose an additional tax based on the level of THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, ranging from 0.5 cents per milligram for flower to 3 cents per milligram for edibles.
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans \$17.78 per phone service plan, one of the highest cellphone taxes in the country. It is ranked #3 out of the 50 states. The cellphone tax is already included in the service plan price you pay to your service provider, and may be listed as "Misc. taxes and Fees" or "Other" on your
- **Cigarettes:** The excise tax on cigarettes is \$4.35 per 20 cigarettes, one of the highest cigarettes taxes in the country and is ranked #1 out of the 50 states. The tax is applied to every 20 cigarettes sold (the size of an average pack of cigarettes). If a pack contains more than 20 cigarettes, a higher excise tax will be collected.
- **Fuel:** The excise tax on gasoline is 8.05¢ per gallon, one of the highest gas taxes in the country. and is ranked #3 out of the 50 states. The gas tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations in the state and is in addition to the federal excise tax of 18.4¢ per gallon on gasoline and 24.4¢ per gallon, on diesel. The federal tax was last raised in OCT 1993 and is not indexed to inflation, which has increased a total of 77% from 1993 to 2020. For all state and federal taxes by type of fuel refer to <https://www.salestaxhandbook.com/maine/gasoline-fuel>.
- **Vehicle:** New York collects a **registration fee** and a **title fee** on the sale or transfer of cars and motorcycles, which are essentially renamed excise taxes. Unlike standard excise taxes, however,

the end consumer must pay the tax directly to the New York Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid.

Personal Income Taxes

The average family pays \$1,526.00 in New York income taxes which is ranked 22nd out of 51 states.

Tax Rate Range: Low – 4.0%; High - 8.82%. New York has “tax benefit recapture,” by which many high-income taxpayers pay their top tax rate on all income, not just on amounts above the benefit threshold.

Income Brackets: Eight. Lowest – 0 to \$8,499; Highest – \$1,077,550+. New York's income tax allows couples filing jointly to pay a lower overall rate on their combined income with wider tax brackets for joint filers.

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$0; Married filing jointly – \$0; Dependents – \$1,000 each

Standard Deduction: Single – \$8,000; Married filing jointly – \$16,050; Head of Household \$11,200

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security, military, civil service, New York state/local government pensions are exempt. Also, up to \$20,000 of qualified private pensions for those 59½ and older. Out-of-state government pensions can be deducted as part of the \$20,000 exemption. For more information on senior citizen and retiree benefits refer to:

- <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/publications/income/pub36.pdf>; and
- <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/publications/income/pub361.pdf>

Retired Military Pay: Pension payments received by retired military personnel or their beneficiaries are totally exempt from New York State, New York City, and Yonkers income taxes.

Military Disability Retired Pay: Not taxed. For information on taxes for military personnel in New York State refer to

- https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/file/military_page.htm; and
- <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/publications/income/pub361.pdf>

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.

Website: Department of Taxation and Revenue <https://www.tax.ny.gov>

Tax Forms:

- https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/current_forms/it/it201i.pdf Form IT-201i, Resident Income Tax Return Instructions
- https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/current_forms/it/it201_fill_in_2d.pdf Form IT-201, Resident Income Tax Return
- <https://www.tax.ny.gov/forms> All Tax forms

Penalties. 5% of the tax due for each month (or part of a month) the return is late, up to a maximum of 25%. If your return is more than 60 days late, your minimum penalty is the lesser of \$100 or the total amount due on the return. Interest is compounded daily even if you received an extension of time to file your return and the rate is adjusted quarterly. If the tax you report on your return is less than the correct tax by more than 10% or \$2,000, whichever is greater, you may have to pay a penalty of 10% of the difference between the

tax you reported and the tax you actually owe. For additional penalties refer to https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/file/interest_and_penalties.htm.

Property Taxes

Property taxation is limited to real property. New York State law gives local governments and public school districts the option of granting a reduction on the amount of property taxes paid by qualifying senior citizens. This is accomplished by reducing the assessed value of residential property owned by seniors by 50%. To qualify, seniors must be 65 years of age or older and meet certain income limitations and other requirements. For the 59% exemption, the law allows each county, city, town, village or school district to set the maximum income limit at any figure between \$3,000 and \$29,000. Localities have the further option of giving exemptions of less than 50% to seniors whose incomes are more than \$29,000. Under this option, called the “sliding-scale option,” such owner can have a yearly income as high as \$37,399.99 and get a 5% exemption in places that are using the maximum limit. Go to <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property> for more information.

Star Exemptions

There is no general, statewide homestead property tax exemption. However, a taxpayer’s primary residence may be partially exempted from school taxes under the state’s School Tax Relief Program (STAR) program. Seniors can take advantage of this program that provides a partial exemption from school property taxes. All New Yorkers who own and live in their one-, two-, or three-family home, condominium, cooperative apartment, manufactured home, or farm dwelling are eligible for a STAR exemption on their primary residence. There are two STAR exemptions:

- The Basic STAR exemption is available for owner-occupied, primary residences, regardless of the owners’ ages or incomes. The combined income of all resident owners (owners who live on the property) and of any owner’s resident spouse cannot be more than \$500,000. Income is federal adjusted gross income minus the taxable amount of total distributions from annuities or IRAs. Income documents will be required to establish your eligibility for this program. The property must be the primary residence of at least one owner. Married couples owning more than one property can only have STAR on one property unless they are divorced or legally separated and can provide documentation to support their claim. The approximate benefit is a \$316 tax reduction.
- The Enhanced STAR exemption is available for the primary residences of senior citizens (age 65 and older) with yearly household incomes not exceeding the statewide standard. All owners must be 65 or older by the end of the calendar year in which the exemption begins unless they are the spouse or sibling of an owner who is 65 or older by that time. For example, if you own the property and are applying for an exemption that will begin on July 1, 2016, you or your spouse or sibling must be 65 or older by December 31, 2016. The combined income of all owners and of a resident owner’s spouse cannot be more than \$86,000. Income is federal adjusted gross income minus the taxable amount of total distributions from annuities or IRAs. Income documents will be required to establish your eligibility for this program. The property must be the primary residence of at least one owner. Married couples can only have STAR on one property unless they are divorced or legally separated and can provide documentation to support their claim. The approximate benefit is a \$646 tax reduction.

Veterans’ exemptions

If you're planning to leave active military service, there are three property tax exemptions available to honorably discharged veterans who served significant active duty beyond training. Check with your local assessor to see if these exemptions are offered in your municipality.

- Alternative veterans' exemption -- This exemption is available to veterans who served during a designated time of war, or who have received an expeditionary medal. Available in more than 95% of New York's county, city, town, and village taxing jurisdictions.
- Cold war veterans' exemption -- Veterans who served during the cold war (September 2, 1945, to December 26, 1991) are eligible for a tax exemption on their residential property.
- Eligible funds exemption -- If you purchased property with eligible funds you received upon discharge from active duty (such as pension, bonus, or insurance monies), this exemption may reduce the assessed value of the property,

Go to <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/publications/income/pub36.pdf> for general information on senior citizen and retiree benefits in New York.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax. Regarding the estate tax, if the date of death is on or after January 1, 2004, the estate must file a New York State estate tax return if any one of the following conditions are met: (1) The decedent was domiciled in New York State at the time of death and the total of the federal gross estate, federal taxable gifts and specific exemption exceeds \$1 million; (2) The decedent was not domiciled in New York State at the time of death and the estate includes real or tangible personal property with a situs in New York State, and the total of the federal gross estate, federal taxable gifts and specific exemption exceeds \$1million; or (3) The decedent was neither a resident nor a citizen of the United States, the estate includes real or tangible personal property with a situs in New York State, and the estate is required to file a federal estate tax return. For more information refer to <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/estate/etidx.htm>.

Other State Tax Rates

To compare the above sales, excise, income, and property tax rates to those accessed in other states go to:

- Sales Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/sales-tax-by-state>.
- Excise Taxes (i.e. gasoline, cigarettes, cellphones, automobiles, beer, wine, and liquor: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/excise-tax-by-state>.
- Personal Income Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/income-tax-by-state>.
- Property Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/property-tax-by-state>.
- Income Tax: <https://taxfoundation.org/state-individual-income-tax-rates-brackets-2019>
- State Tax Comparisons <https://www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard>

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For further information visit the New York Department of Taxation and Finance site www.tax.ny.gov.

[Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#NEWYORK> | September 2021 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest

SEP 01 thru 15, 2021

- **USMC Masks.** Marine Cpl. Whitney McHaffie refused to comply with a mask mandate and doesn't want to be vaccinated against COVID-19. A month after the Defense Department's mask mandate for unvaccinated troops went into effect, she was booted from the military, possibly making her the first service member to be forced out of the service for violating COVID-related rules. Video at <https://twitter.com/i/status/1429144627089653766>.
- **Vet Suicide.** Vets who have had COVID-19 were more than twice as likely to contemplate suicide during the coronavirus pandemic as those who never had the illness, a recent JAMA study found. Overall, however, veterans were less likely to have suicidal thoughts during the pandemic than they were before it.
- **VAMC.** VA medical complex in Aurora, Colorado, finally opened, a decade behind schedule and more than \$1 billion over its initial budget, pushing the total tab to more than \$2 billion and putting it among the costliest healthcare facilities in the world.
- **Israel.** A realignment of U.S. Central Command means Israel now falls within its area of responsibility, and no longer U.S. European Command. The move comes as Israel and its neighbors work to improve diplomatic relations under the Abraham Accords.
- **DPRK.** North Korea held its first military parade since President Biden took office, though the event didn't feature major military hardware or a speech from leader Kim Jong Un. Without major weapons or speech from Kim Jong Un, event appeared to be targeted at rallying domestic audience rather than sending message to U.S. or South Korea
- **HMS Hood.** At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXBODH8tkeE> is a 48 minute film on the hunt for the HMS Hood battleship sunk in WW2.
- **POW/MIA.** The nation sets aside the third Friday in September to remember our former POWs and our MIAs. On this day we reflect on the more than 140,000 Americans who were captured in battle and the more than 82,000 Americans who remain missing and unaccounted-for since World War II.
- **WWI Concrete Ships.** During WWI German U-boats were wreaking havoc against Allied ships in the Atlantic Ocean. Replacing these ships was becoming harder as steel supplies dwindled, so US President Woodrow Wilson approved the construction of 24 concrete ships. Concrete is a material sometimes used in the construction of ships, although it's not ideal. The raw materials are cheaper, but the ships require thicker hulls to maintain strength, which either increases its physical size and is harder to push through the water, or reduces the amount of cargo space inside. Of the planned 24 concrete ships, only 12 were under construction by the time WWI ended, so the rest were canceled.



SS Palo Alto

[Source: Various | August 31, 2021 ++]

U.S. Embassy Manila Security Alert



Location: Philippines

Event: U.S. citizens are urged to be cautious and vigilant when living and traveling abroad given the potential threat of terrorist attacks and extremist action against U.S. citizens and interests. As the 20th anniversary of September 11th approaches, the possibility for violence overseas may increase.

Locations where crowds gather such as hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, shopping malls, foreign diplomatic missions, religious institutions, government offices, airports, and public transportation or transportation hubs are especially vulnerable.

Actions to Take:

- Ensure you have a contingency plan for emergencies and review the Traveler’s Checklist at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/travelers-checklist.html>
- Maintain a low profile.
- Report any suspicious activities or security incidents to local police.
- Follow the instructions of local authorities especially in an emergency.
- Avoid crowded places.
- Monitor media and local event information sources and factor updated information into your travel plans and activities.

Assistance:

- U.S. Embassy in the Philippines: +63-2-5301-2000 or ACSIInfoManila@state.gov
- State Department – Consular Affairs: 888-407-4747 or 202-501-4444
- Philippines Country Information is available on the website <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/philippines-travel-advisory.html>.
- Enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at <https://step.state.gov/step> to receive security updates
- Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

[Source: U.S. Embassy and Consular Agency in the Philippines | September 10, 2021 ++]

Afghan Withdrawal

Update 17: U.S. Troops Left Some Departure Messages



Taliban fighters who made their way into the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan may have found a few goodbye messages from American troops. Photos shared on social media appear to show Marines with the 1st Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, and 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment standing in front of spray painted messages to the Islamic State group (ISIS) and the Taliban. They were very direct: “Fuck ISIS. AFG 2021.” Another message had everything a Marine could dream of: “F*** ISIS + Taliban” and a phallic drawing right next to it.

Troops leaving vulgar messages for their enemies is a time-honored tradition, one that appears to go back more than 1,800 years, when Roman soldiers left dozens of explicit drawings after being deployed to repair Hadrian’s Wall, a defensive barrier at the northern border of the Roman Empire. More recently, it was discovered that U.S. troops left behind crude sketches meant for Russian soldiers at an abandoned outpost in Manbij, Syria in October 2019. It’s unclear when the messages at the airport were written, but they may not have stayed for long. Comments on the Instagram posts suggest that many were cleaned up before the Marines departed. Marine Corps officials referred questions about the photos to U.S. Central Command, which did not immediately respond to Task & Purpose. [Source: Task & Purpose | Haley Britzky | September 1, 2021 ++]

Afghanistan 2001 Mission

Reflections of One Who Was There

When planes struck the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, then-Maj. Perry Blackburn, USA, was training with members of his 5th Special Forces Group. They were called back to Fort Campbell, Ky., immediately. “At the time, I thought we were going to war,” said Blackburn, who retired as a lieutenant colonel. Within weeks, President George W. Bush announced the launch of what would become the global war on terror with air strikes against al-Qaida training camps and Taliban bases in Afghanistan. Shortly afterward, Perry’s 12-man team became one of the first to put “boots on the ground” there. They were sent to Khost, close to the Pakistan border.



Then-Maj. Perry Blackburn, USA, served in Khost, Afghanistan, shortly after the beginning of the global war on terror.

“Khost was very volatile,” Blackburn says. “They had a significant threat in the area with al-Qaida, and [Osama] bin Laden could potentially be there.” The plan was to link up with the CIA, local warlords, and the Northern Alliance, and use the assets of the Air Force. “We got on the ground, briefed our plan, got on a helicopter, took off, and linked up with a warlord who presented us [with] who he had,” said Blackburn. “The CIA gave me a million dollars and kit bag. The money was to pay soldiers that were going to fight with us, and anything else I needed to equip them while we were conducting operations.” The Green Berets immersed themselves into the community, growing beards and dressing like locals. They fit in so well, they often had to wear ball caps so fellow Americans could identify them.

There were many challenges, like the language barrier and navigating the rough terrain. There were no Humvees or big military equipment, so Blackburn and his forces used Toyota trucks, ATVs, and even horses to move around the countryside. “I think the colorful thing is ... muscled, chiseled Americans sitting on small horses,” Blackburn recalled. “As glorious as it looked and sounded, it was painful to us to do, and it was not something we looked forward to doing. We’d much rather be in our trucks than on a horse, but we would do whatever we needed to get to the enemy.”

Initially, the only maps available were Russian maps; Afghans used no maps at all. At one point, Blackburn got a call from his commander notifying him he’d unknowingly ventured into Pakistan. The map issue also affected his ability to properly call for air support. “One time, I got so frustrated because we couldn’t find the mark from the map,” he said. “I was 100 meters from the enemy, and I ran out into an open area with a big orange panel.” He set it down, as the fighting continued around him. As his men engaged the enemy, Blackburn called the forward air controller. “I said, ‘If you can’t see this orange panel, I don’t need you!’ So, they came down low, saw it, and said, ‘Roger, I got it!’ I told them, ‘From that location — 500 meters or whatever it was, 63 degrees — that’s where I need you to drop.’ So they did.”

Cultural differences also made things interesting. Blackburn worked with a warlord, Kamal Khan, whose showmanship could slow things down. “Every time he would come in, he’d have to have an announcer that would say, ‘Kamal Khan is the greatest commander that’s ever walked in Khost,’ and on and on. And you’d have to sit there and say, ‘Okay, okay, I’ve got it.’” They developed a rapport, however. Soon, Blackburn had nearly 900 Afghan fighters. Together with his 11 men, and four other 5th Group teams he brought in as company commander, they provided a formidable force, effective in restoring order to the region. “We were extremely lethal in both our application of air power and our own weapons. The Afghans and the Taliban were astonished by our ability to shoot, move, and communicate with each other. It’s one of the things they would cite when they surrendered.”

While Blackburn's group focused on Khost, other special forces teams were conducting similar operations in other areas. He said the 2017 film 12 Strong accurately portrays their interactions with warlords and Afghan fighters. Although some of those teams rotated in and out, Blackburn's team remained in Afghanistan for seven or eight months and took part in Operation Anaconda in March 2002. "This was the last big operation involving the 101st [Airborne Division] and the 10th Mountain Division, along with the SEALs and Delta Force, and we were all intermixed on the battlefield for the first time."

As the U.S. planned to withdraw from Afghanistan, Blackburn said much was accomplished. It's unknown, however, what direction the country will take. "I was in on the invasion of Iraq and one of the last guys out in 2010," he said. "Those of us on the ground knew the Iraqis were not prepared to defend themselves against an external threat. And sure enough, it didn't take long for ISIS to come in and start taking over. You think about the gains made and what the sacrifices were for. "I don't want that to happen in Afghanistan," Blackburn continued. "These sacrifices meant something." [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Pam Windsor | September 7, 2021 ++]

China U.S. Relations

Update 04: Presidents Speak Again As Tensions Continue To Rise



President Biden spoke with Chinese President Xi Jinping for the second time as president, the White House said 9 SEP, amid rising tensions over human rights, military ambitions, trade and the coronavirus. The call Thursday evening in Washington yielded no specific announcements, including about whether the two leaders would meet in person for a much-anticipated summit this fall. It was meant to underscore Biden's view that the United States and China are now the defining global competitors but can cooperate where each finds it useful, a senior U.S. official said before the call.

"The two leaders had a broad, strategic discussion in which they discussed areas where our interests converge, and areas where our interests, values and perspectives diverge," a White House statement said. The call followed discussions among lower-level officials in which U.S. officials had sought to set rules of the road to prevent stiff competition between the two nations from veering into conflict. Those discussions were unproductive, according to the senior Biden administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under rules set by the White House.

Those discussions included a chaotic scene in Alaska in March, when Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his Chinese counterpart publicly rebuked one another. "We have engaged PRC officials in several settings to try to advance and set those parameters, but what we have found, unfortunately, is they have largely been unwilling to engage in serious or substantive conversation on these matters," the official said ahead of the presidents' call. "What we've gotten is talking points which are more designed for propaganda"

and domestic Chinese consumption, the official said. The official used the PRC acronym for the People's Republic of China, the communist country's official name.

Following the approximately 90-minute call, the same senior official described the tone as "familiar" and candid, and the topics wide-ranging. "The two of them talked about not only why lines of communication at the leader level are important, but also about the ability for them to have private conversations," the official said. "That would be a difference. One challenge we've had in interactions over the last few months was the sense that they were playing for the press," the official said. The official would not predict whether calls between the two leaders would become more frequent.

According to CCTV, Xi told Biden that U.S. policy toward China had "caused serious difficulties" in ties and that confrontation between the two would only "bring disaster to both countries and the world." Xi named climate change and the coronavirus pandemic as potential areas of cooperation and agreed to more "in-depth" conversations and regular contact. Chinese official statements have hardened in recent months. The new ambassador to Washington, Qin Gang, said 7 SEP that the United States persists in "wrong beliefs" about China and world affairs and warned of "disastrous consequences" if Washington follows what he called a "Cold War playbook." That was interpreted as a reference to China's store of nuclear weapons. Qin also warned Washington not to cross a red line of Chinese regional interests in the South China Sea and Taiwan and not to interfere in Chinese affairs in Xinjiang, where the United States accuses China of human rights abuses against minority groups.

Biden's choice to be ambassador to China, veteran diplomat and academic Nicholas Burns, has not yet won Senate confirmation and is weeks or months away from taking up his post. The call follows disappointing or inconclusive trips to China by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman in July, and climate envoy John F. Kerry last week, and it comes ahead of what the Biden administration hopes will be a deeper commitment to Chinese climate initiatives in November at a global climate summit backed by the United Nations. With Biden and Xi initially expected to travel to Europe for the summit in Scotland and a gathering a few days before of the Group of 20, in Rome, a meeting between the two had seemed possible.

Biden recommitted this week to attend that November climate session, but Xi's attendance at either forum is not certain. Biden initiated the conversation 9 SEP, to "test the proposition that doing so at the leader level will be more effective than what we have found below him," the U.S. official said. The call also came as Biden is attempting to redirect U.S. foreign policy toward what he calls the threats and opportunities posed by China, and away from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Biden's attempt to make a clean break from Afghanistan was complicated by the collapse of the Afghan government and a deadly terrorist attack in which 13 U.S. troops were killed in the waning days of the U.S. exit last month. China is already moving to establish a foothold in the resource-rich country. China has committed \$31 million in new food aid to Afghanistan and may be exploring ways to use the sprawling Bagram airfield abandoned by U.S. forces. "The U.S. left a trail of destruction in Afghanistan," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said 9 SEP. ". . . The U.S. asks others to respect basic human rights while remaining reticent on its track record of trampling on human rights in Afghanistan and inflicting new miseries on the Afghan people."

Biden and Xi held an approximately two-hour call in February, weeks into Biden's term, that the new administration hoped would set terms for a wary but friendly relationship. Xi has since participated in Biden's global climate summit and said he is willing to cooperate further, but the United States has little to

show for its outreach so far. Chinese officials have sought to link cooperation on climate and other issues to benefits the country might receive from the United States, the U.S. official said. China has not gotten what it wanted from Biden, who has criticized China over human rights and opted to maintain punitive tariffs applied by President Donald Trump. Biden sees the tariffs of as much as 25 percent as leverage to encourage cooperation, U.S. officials have said.

Trump applied the penalties on Chinese goods with the argument that the pressure would yield an omnibus trade agreement between the United States and China on terms favorable to Washington. He reached a preliminary agreement last year but never achieved the larger goal. "The political will to overcome tensions in the relationship while forging a productive path on areas of mutual interest, including addressing the pandemic, climate and economic uncertainty, can only be accomplished at this stage by the two leaders talking," said Myron Brilliant, executive vice president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "It's encouraging but it needs to be reinforced with concrete steps which will be hard but welcomed by the business community."

China's senior political leadership will gather in November in a run-up to a major Communist Party convocation next year that is expected to further cement Xi's hold on power. [Source: Washington Post | Anne Gearan | September 10, 2021 ++]

Pentagon 9/11 Memorial

Update 03: Remembrance and Reflection



As rebuilding began at the Pentagon after 9/11, so did plans for a memorial to those killed in Arlington, Va., on that day. The memorial would bear the names of the 59 victims on board American Airlines Flight 77 and the 125 people in the building who lost their lives. After the tragedy on Sept. 11, 2001, the 60th anniversary to the day of the groundbreaking to build the Pentagon, its employees and family members who had lost friends and loved ones began talking about the need for a memorial.

In a few years, it became a reality: Groundbreaking took place in 2005, and the Pentagon Memorial was formally dedicated in 2008. Twenty years after 9/11, it remains a place of reflection and remembrance. On two acres alongside the Pentagon, just outside the spot where the plane struck, 184 cantilevered steel-and-granite benches are each engraved with a victim's name and an illuminated pool of water. The benches are arranged from youngest victim to oldest. The curving Age Wall rises in height to represent the ages of the victims: from 3 inches for 3-year-old Dana Falkenberg to 71 inches for 71-year-old John Yamnicky. Dozens of trees provide shade throughout the grounds.

The memorial's unique design was created by architects Julie Beckman and Keith Kaseman. There was one of more than 1,200 entries submitted by architectural designers from around the country. "We were grieving with everyone else, and wanted to contribute to the healing process," said Beckman, who was in New York on 9/11 and witnessed firsthand the destruction of the World Trade Center. "We dove deep into understanding those we lost that day at the Pentagon, from their ages to what they did. We wanted to develop a design that we felt restored some hope and faith, and honored these people who lost their lives,"

One unique aspect of the memorial's design often goes unnoticed by visitors. "One hundred and twenty-five benches face in one direction, with the Pentagon building in the background of your view," said Beckman, now an adjunct assistant professor and director of student development at the University of Tennessee College of Architecture and Design in Knoxville. "That is an indication that those individuals died in the Pentagon that day. And there are 59 benches that face in the other direction, such that when you read their names, the sky is in the background, indicating they were on Flight 77," she said.

Katherine Dillaber was working at the Pentagon the day of the attack, as was her younger sister, Patty Mickley. Mickley died in the crash. Her remains were identified eight days later. Dillaber became involved in the memorial effort, hosting special events at a local community theater that raised more than \$30,000. After the memorial opened to the public, she worked as a docent, sometimes slipping away from work to give a quick tour. "When I was still working at the Pentagon, after the dedication, I would sit on Patty's bench and talk to her," Dillaber recalled. "My sister was supportive to all, silly and loving, so I would often sit out there and smile at fond memories of her. Twenty-four of my coworkers are there, too."

Lt. Col. Suzanne Walker, USA (Ret), now MOAA's director of Membership Events and Protocol, Council/Chapter and Member Support, was involved in assisting family members in the aftermath of the attack. "I personally knew and served with several of the victims of the attack on the Pentagon, and during my time as lead of the Army section of the Pentagon Family Assistance Center, I came to know the family members of many of the victims," she said. "I feel that I have a personal connection with nearly all of those honored in the memorial," Walker said. "I can walk from bench to bench, and remember interactions and conversations I had with those I knew and served with, or with their survivors."

That, says Beckman, is the memorial's primary role. "The memorial is a place where friends and colleagues and loved ones will forever be remembered with a place marked that is specifically for them," she said. "It is intended to spark individual thought and reflection, and I encourage people to visit and write their own story about what happened that day." Source: <https://blog.cheapism.com/dangerous-foods/#slide=19> | June 2021 ++]

Internet Cookies

What They Are | Should You Allow Them

Over the past few years and particularly recently, you might have noticed a change when you browse the internet: Many websites will ask you if you'll accept cookies. It's due to a European data protection and privacy law called the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Your so-called "cookie persona" (i.e. the online collection of your cookies) can be shared or sold to companies, and the law has recognized that

this could compromise your privacy. The result? You get asked everywhere if you're OK with allowing cookies.

What They Are

Cookies are one or more small pieces of data that identify your computer to a website with a unique code. The cookies are sent by a web server to your laptop, phone or tablet while you're on that server's website. (Once you give the OK, of course.) Your device stores the cookies and when you visit the website again, the server recognizes you. In addition to using cookies to know who you are, cookies are often used by marketing companies to target ads towards you, which explains why you might consider buying a pair of jeans on a website, only to see ads for those jeans when you go on other sites.

Should you allow them?

Some websites won't let you fully explore them without allowing cookies, making this a tricky issue. Under GDPR, most people get daily requests from websites to allow permission to use tracking cookies. Users should always ask themselves, "Do I want to have the site accessible to my personal data?" Generally speaking, cookies are fine and you can allow them. They can be useful — and many common activities would be difficult, if not practically impossible to achieve, without them. Authentication cookies, for example, allow a user who logs onto a website to click and view multiple pages on the site without having to re-authenticate each time they try to view another page,. Think: being able to cruise around your online bank information without having to log in to see every page.)

In many such cases, cookies are valid for only one 'session and expire immediately after a web session ends. But, in some cases, servers are programmed to create and accept such cookies to allow users access for many different sessions using 'persistent cookies.' Cookies also allow a site to remember your personalization preferences and refusing to accept cookies can make your user experience less optimal. Cookies have a bad reputation because they facilitate tracking, including across websites. That can allow a provider to track your activity wherever you go online. In general, users should only allow cookies from senders and websites that they really desire and keep it limited. If desired there is software available which weeds out the cookies you don't want while keeping the ones you do. [Source: Yahoo | Korin Miller | August 18, 2021 ++]

Things Only Marines Know

Facts Most Marines Won't Debate

Eleanor Roosevelt is rumored to have once described Marines as having "the cleanest bodies, the filthiest minds, the highest morale, and the lowest morals of any group of animals" she had ever seen. Whether or not she actually said that, and whether or not those things are true about Marines is largely debatable, but here are 22 facts most Marines won't debate:

1. Marines have their favorite words – "Outstanding" is by far any Marine's favorite adjective. It's often used to describe the type of day a Marine is having, but the limits of its usage are tested daily by Marines everywhere looking to add a little motivation into their diction.

2. CHAOS is more than a theory – Defense Secretary James Mattis’ nickname CHAOS is actually an acronym that stands for “Colonel Has An(Another) Outstanding Solution.” The tongue-in-cheek [nickname was first given to Mattis](#) while he was a colonel at Twentynine Palms, California.

3. Marines don’t use their pockets – Whether in cammies or [dress blues](#), Marines definitely have lots of pockets in their uniforms, but they don’t dare use them. Items in their pockets create a bulky, sloppy appearance, so Marines will go to any length to not use their pockets, even to the point of carrying things in their socks.

4. Nicknames are kind of a thing – If your name is too long or difficult to pronounce, it’s likely that drill instructors will rename you “Alphabet.” If you wear glasses, it’s likely [drill instructors may rename you “portholes.”](#) Luckily, nicknames assigned in boot camp aren’t likely to stay with a Marine into the Fleet.

5. The Fleet – The FMF (Fleet Marine Force) is the name Marines give to the “real life” Marine Corps beyond the “pipeline” that includes Marine Corps Recruit Training and MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) school.

6. Marines don’t steal; but they do acquire – Rumor has it there was once a single thief in the Corps, and ever since then Marines have occasionally found the need to ‘acquire’ his or her things back. The cycle is never-ending.

7. Marines are tough as nails – In 1959, [Marine Lt. Col. William Rankin](#) is the only known person to survive a fall from the top of a cumulonimbus thunderstorm cloud. He ejected from his plane at 47,000 feet and fell 40 minutes through the middle of the storm and survived.

8. If they’re not cheating, they’re not trying – Mission accomplishment is a Marine’s top priority, and nothing frustrates a Marine more than when arbitrary rules get in the way. Ernest “Boots” Thomas, one of the U.S. Marines who [raised the flag on Iwo Jima](#), enlisted in spite of being color blind by memorizing the results of another recruit’s test.

9. It wasn’t always, “Always Faithful” – Semper Fidelis was adopted in 1883 as the motto of the Corps. Before that, there had been three mottoes, all traditional rather than official. The original was “Fortitudine” (“With Fortitude”).

10. Mmmmm ... BLT – The most delicious sandwich ever created is also the acronym that describes the Marine Expeditionary Unit’s Battalion Landing Team – the Marine infantry unit designed to be sent into combat first and are often referred to within the Marine Corps as the very tip of the spear.

11. What’s a Good Cookie? – A quick way to tell if a Marine has been on his or her best behavior is to locate the Good Conduct Medal on their chest. If worn by a Marine officer, the presence of this medal indicates the officer was once an enlisted Marine.

12. Field Day is not fun and games – The term field day in the Marine Corps has a very specific meaning – cleaning for inspection. Many civilians hear this term and think of [three-legged races and barbecues](#). This is not the image conjured up by Marines.

13. They were born again – After the Revolutionary War, the Marine Corps was disbanded and went dark for 15 years. When it returned on July 11th, 1798, it celebrated it’s birthday on that date until 1921, when Maj. Edwin North McClellan sent Commandant John A. Lejeune a memorandum requesting the original November 10th date be declared as a Marine Corps holiday.

14. Stand up, Marine – Marines, whether on active duty, retired or veteran, always stand at attention during the playing of the Marines Hymn.

15. POGs and Grunts – Though every Marine is a trained rifleman, infantry Marines (03XX MOS) lovingly call their non-infantry brothers and sisters POGs (pronounced “pogue,”) which is an acronym that stands for Personnel Other than Grunts. POGs call infantrymen Grunts, of course.

16. EGAs EGAs Everywhere! – Marines’ uniforms are adorned practically everywhere with the Eagle, Globe and Anchor symbol. It’s hidden inside their combat uniform’s camo pattern as well as being branded on the heels of their combat boots.

17. “It pays to be a winner” – A common expression used to push Marines and sailors to their maximum potential during Physical Training, the phrase incentivizes the winner of an exercise or a relay race to take a break, complete training or remove a piece of gear.

18. Marines love their Poncho Liner – While the Army has given it a special name — “woobie” – Marines are no less in love with this particularly critical piece of field gear, [especially in cold weather](#).

19. Taco Rice and Cheese – A favorite dish on the island of Okinawa where many Marines get stationed, Marines are especially critical of how this dish is prepared.

20. Where’s my Hooch!? – While Marines may have a reputation with regard to alcohol being born in a pub, a Marine looking for his ‘hooch’ isn’t missing his or her flask. A hooch is what Marines call their tent, or their place to sleep while in the field.

21. Shower Shoe – Most of us have heard the term “boot” applied to someone new in the Corps, but for those Marines who are newer than new and don’t even rate the term “boot,” the term “shower shoe” (a flip-flop worn in the shower) is lovingly applied.

22. Salty Cammies – Every Marine has at least one pair of cammies that have been washed and worn so many times that the dye begins to fade away and the material softens. These are a Marine’s favorite pair of cammies, both because they are worn as well as to impress upon the “boots” and “shower shoes,” how long he or she has served.

[Source: USO | Joseph Andrew Lee | 2019 ++]

Car Servicing

How Often You Really Need to Take Your Car in

In 2020 the coronavirus shutdown changed the way virtually all Americans lived their daily lives — but this year's gradual reopening has put cars back on the road and their service needs back on the front burner. With all that's been going on, it's perfectly understandable if auto maintenance is the furthest thing from most people's minds, but they should consider that an unexpected repair bill is probably the last thing they need right now.



30-60-90 Service Intervals

Most mechanics still recommend the so-called 30-60-90 service interval, which puts your car in the shop for scheduled maintenance at 30,000 miles, 60,000 miles, and 90,000 miles. This is a tried-and-true formula, but according to Consumer Reports, there's no need to rush your car in when it reaches one of those milestones. A well-maintained car can go hundreds of miles beyond all three of those landmarks.

3-6-9-12 Service Intervals

Advance Auto Parts created a tutorial for basic maintenance during the large gaps between the 30-60-90 intervals. They take place at 3,000, 6,000, 9,000, and 12,000 miles. Check things like belts, battery, and cables at three months/3,000 miles, transmission fluid and windshield washer fluid at six months/6,000 miles, power steering and lights at nine months/9,000 miles, and coolant and tires at one year/12,000 miles. Here, too, there's plenty of wiggle room unless a problem is evident.

Drive Once a Week

Although this doesn't exactly qualify as taking your car in for service, it's a good idea to drive for 10 minutes or so once a week or every two weeks, even if you don't have to. The coronavirus shutdown led to a huge increase in employees working from home and forced millions of cars to sit idle for extended periods. Cars are designed to be driven — literally. Long-term lack of use is bad for your car — bad for tire inflation, bad for the gas tank, bad for the battery, bad for brakes, and bad for all the parts and systems that aren't being circulated with motor oil.

Oil Change Every 5,000-10,000 Miles

The standard interval for oil changes has long been 3,000 miles, and it still is for many mechanics and dealerships. The reality, however, is that the past several decades have seen radical improvements in things like engine efficiency, fuel injection, and oil quality. Most cars today require oil changes between 5,000-10,000 miles. Always go with the manufacturer's recommendation in your manual.

Air Filter Every 15,000 Miles

Air filters are critical components that most people can change themselves. Whether you DIY the task or leave it to the pros, air filters should be changed at intervals not exceeding 30,000 miles. If you live in an especially dusty or polluted area, according to CarGurus, you should change your air filter closer to every 15,000 miles.

Fuel Filter Every 30,000 Miles

Fuel filters are just as critical as air filters — an engine won't run if the fuel filter is clogged — but they're not as easy to replace. Generally, fuel filters should be replaced roughly every 30,000 miles. A mechanic can tell what kind of shape your fuel filter is in with a simple pressure test.

Fluids Every 30,000 Miles

As previously discussed, motor oil varies by car and must be replaced more frequently than your vehicle's other critical fluids. They include brake fluid, power steering fluid, coolant, and transmission fluid. They should be changed every 30,000 miles or so and, unlike motor oil, draining and replacing these fluids is not a DIYable task for most.

Spark Plugs Every 40,000 Miles

Most vehicles driven under standard conditions can go 40,000 miles or so without a spark plug change. In terms of all vehicles collectively, however, there's a huge gap in service intervals. Specialty and older vehicles might require a swap every 20,000 miles. A brand new modern car on the other hand, might be able to go as much as 120,000 miles on its original spark plugs.

Brakes Every 50,000-60,000 Miles

A good set of brake pads and shoes should last every bit of 50,000 miles, although they should be checked well before that and taken in for service if they start screeching or making any other odd noise. Rotors should last 60,000 miles. At that point, they should be replaced or, at the bare minimum, resurfaced.

Battery Replacement Every Five Years

Modern batteries produce a full charge until the moment they actually die. That means that when they do fail, they often fail without warning. That usually won't happen until after about five years, which is when AutoZone recommends replacing your battery, even if it seems to be working well. After three years, however, you should periodically get your battery tested by a mechanic if you're not inclined to DIY.

Tire Change Every 6 Years

Treadwear has long been the yardstick for measuring when old tires should be swapped out for new ones. But, according to Edmunds, the chemical compounds found in rubber break down naturally, degrading tires no matter how many miles are driven and no matter what shape the tire's treads are in. Tires need to be replaced roughly every six years, even if they appear to still be in good working order.

[Source: Cheapism | Andrew Lisa | June 18, 2021 ++]

Vocabulary

Some Words to Enhance Yours | 210915

Which word best matches these example sentences?

- (a) The gentlemen decided to all sport _____s for their friend's wedding.
(b) *Enigmatic- Trousseau – Cravat - Charlatan*
- (a) The architect was expected to _____ the initial building plans by the end of the week.
(b) *Quantitative – Ameliorate – Doughty – Adumbrate*
- (a) Her best friend was able to _____ her into running errands with her.
(b) *Minacious – Cajole – Beamish – Soliloquy*
- (a) Larry hadn't eaten in 24 hours and was clearly _____.
(b) *Hangry – Pertinent – Jejune - Corroborate*
- (a) After the dog destroyed the couch and got punished, he was very _____.

- (b) *Obsequious - Sauerbraten – Charlatan – Nimiety*
6. (a) The crops yielded a _____ harvest.
(b) *Embarcadero – Copious – Pithy - Gregarious*
7. (a) The young professional's _____ made his manager chuckle when he said the "physical" versus "fiscal" year.
(b) *Malapropism – Desideratum – Sepulchral - Ambidextrous*
8. (a) The newly appointed young Vice President is epitome of a _____.
(b) *Eponym – Cacophony – Yuppie - Emollient*
9. (a) A) You can _____ an object by looking at it under a magnifying glass.
(b) *Lucrative – Aggrandize – Anthropomorphic - Quire*
10. (a) The group on stage was the _____ officers of the team.
(b) *Hearsay – Euphoric – Abject - Incumbent*

Answers

1. Cravat [kruh-vat] - a short, wide strip of fabric worn by men around the neck and tucked inside an open-necked shirt
2. Adumbrate [a-duhm-breyt] - to produce a faint image or resemblance of; to outline or sketch.
3. Cajole [kuh-johl] - to persuade by flattery or promises; wheedle; coax.
4. Hangry [hang-gree] - feeling irritable or irrationally angry as a result of being hungry.
5. Obsequious [uhb-see-kwee-uhs] - characterized by or showing servile obedience and excessive eagerness to please; deferential; fawnin.
6. Copious [koh-pee-uhs] - large in quantity or number; abundant; plentiful.
7. Malapropism [mal-uh-prop-iz-uhm] - an act or habit of misusing words ridiculously, especially by the confusion of words that are similar in sound.
8. Yuppie [yuhp-ee] - a young, ambitious, and well-educated city-dweller who has a professional career and an affluent lifestyle.
9. Aggrandize [ag-ruhn-dahyz] - to make something appear greater.
10. Incumbent [in-kuhm-buhnt] - (adj) necessary for (someone) as a duty or responsibility | (noun) the holder of an office or post

News of the Weird

SEP 01 thru 15, 2021

Mistaken Identity – Xi Yan of Jurong West in Singapore called animal welfare group ACRES to her home on July 28 because of what she believed was a snake hissing in a cupboard near her bed. She sent a recording of the noise, and ACRES concluded it was probably a black spitting cobra, reported Coconuts Singapore. The rescue team, armed with protective eyewear and snake grabbers, methodically searched her bedroom, but what they came up with was much less threatening: It was a malfunctioning Oral-B electric toothbrush buzzing away. "The problem started because water got into my electrical toothbrush and affected the

mechanism," Xi said. "I should really buy a new one. I don't want to go through this again." [Coconuts Singapore, 8/11/2021]

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Way To Do It – When Hurricane Ida swept through New York, the heavy rain and flooding did an estimated \$50 million in damage. But in the Big Apple, there's a silver lining: The storm may have cleared out a significant portion of the rat population that lived in the sewers and subway system. Experts believe hundreds of thousands of rats may have died as sewer systems were overwhelmed and dumped into local bays and estuaries, where the rodents later washed up on beaches. Bobby Corrigan, longtime pest control expert, told Gothamist, "I can't imagine they would've survived." Conversely, those that did weather the storm appear to be seeking shelter on higher ground, as exterminators report a spike in complaints. [Gothamist, 9/8/2021]

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Suspicious Confirmed – Oddity Central reported on 3 SEP that Li Zhanying of Henan, China, is known in her community for having gone more than 40 years without sleeping at all. Her husband and neighbors confirmed her claims, saying that she stayed up all night to do chores and didn't ever nap. But recently, Li visited a Beijing medical center, where doctors used sensors to monitor her and discovered that Li does sleep -- with her eyes open and while talking to her husband. Doctors called it "sleep when awake," which is similar to sleepwalking. They said Li sometimes had "slow eyeballs and hollow eyes," indicating that she was resting. [Oddity Central, 9/3/2021]

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Rude – Doug Simmons, 44, and Debra McGee, 43, of Chicago, planned a destination wedding in Jamaica, to which they invited 109 guests. "Four times we asked, 'Are you available to come, can you make it?' and they kept saying yes," Simmons explained to the New York Post in late August. But when the big day arrived, the couple realized not everyone had shown up. So Simmons, a small-business owner, sent invoices for \$120 per person to all the no-shows. "This amount is what you owe us for paying for your seat(s) in advance. You can pay via Zelle or PayPal." Simmons said he and his wife were hurt that people didn't show up: "I took that personally." No word on whether they've collected on any of the invoices. [New York Post, 8/27/2021]

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Great Art – Remember the self-shredding Banksy artwork that sold for \$1.4 million in October 2018? Originally called "Girl With Balloon," the piece, now known as "Love Is in the Bin," will be up for auction again in October, the Associated Press reported, and is expected to fetch between \$5 million and \$9 million. Alex Branczik, chairman of modern and contemporary art at Sotheby's, calls the piece "the ultimate Banksy artwork and a true icon of recent art history." Before the auction, the piece will be on display in London, Hong Kong, Taipei and New York. [Associated Press, 9/3/2021]

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Awesome! – Financial advice website FinanceBuzz at <https://financebuzz.com/get-paid-to-watch-scary-movies> is offering the gig of a lifetime for horror movie fans: They want to pay someone \$1,300 to watch 13 classics and monitor their heartbeat while doing so, with the goal of comparing the fear factors of films

with different budgets. United Press International reported that the chosen candidate will get a FitBit to monitor their heartbeat and \$50 to cover movie rental costs. Applications are open through Sept. 26, and a winner will be selected on Oct. 1. [UPI, 9/9/2021]

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Bright Idea – Yves de Mbella, a television personality on NCI in Ivory Coast, was convicted on 1 SEP of glorifying rape after he invited a convicted rapist on his prime-time show to demonstrate how he plied his crimes, using a mannequin as his victim. CNN reported that the segment, during which de Mbella helped the rapist adjust the mannequin and asked if his victims "enjoyed it," aired on 30 AUG. De Mbella, who was fined about \$3,600, apologized for the demonstration, saying he was trying to "raise awareness." [CNN, 9/2/2021]

[Guardian, 7/19/2021]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/news-of-the-weird> | September 15, 2021 ++]

Trivia Oddball Facts

Update 01: Did You Know?

1. The word "lethologica" describes the state of not being able to remember the word you want.
2. Wearing headphones for 1 hour will increase the bacteria in your ear by 700 times.
3. If the population of China walked past you in single file, the line would never end due to the rate of reproduction.
4. The average human body contains enough sulfur to kill all the fleas on an average dog.
5. You are more likely to be target for mosquitos if you eat bananas.
6. The average person's left hand does 56% of the typing.
7. In medieval England, beer was often served with breakfast.
8. The first man-made item to exceed the speed of sound was a leather whip.
9. The most common non-contagious disease in the world is tooth decay.
10. A cat's jaw cannot move sideways.
11. The names of all the continents end with the same letter they started with.
12. If you stood at the bottom of a well, you would be able to see the stars even during the daytime.
13. Grapes will explode if you put them in the microwave.
14. Starfish do not have brains.
15. Cats have better memories than dogs.
16. The largest number of children born to one woman is 69.
17. If you keep a goldfish in a dark room, it will eventually turn white.
18. Clouds fly higher during the day than at night.
19. One human brain generates more electrical impulses in one day than all the world's telephones put together
20. The Bloodhound is the only animal whose evidence is admissible in an American court
21. On average 13 people die each year from vending machines falling on them.
22. An elephant can throw a baseball faster than a human.
23. Arachibutyrophobia is the fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth.

24. Mozart wrote "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" when he was 5 years old
25. There are 3 golf balls sitting on the moon
26. A zebra is white with black stripes, not black with white stripes.
27. You are more likely to be killed by a champagne cork than a spider.
28. A cow gives nearly 200,000 glasses of milk in her lifetime
29. There are 336 dimples on a regulation golf ball.
30. The total length of eyelashes shed by a human in their lifetime is over 30 meters.

Have You Heard or Seen?

Californians | Women-1 | Think Toons

Californians

You know you're in California if...

1. Your coworker has 8 body piercings and none are visible.
2. You make over \$300,000 and still can't afford a house.
3. You take a bus and are shocked at two people carrying on a conversation in English.
4. Your child's 3rd-grade teacher has purple hair, a nose ring, and is named Flower.
5. You've been to a baby shower that has two mothers and a sperm donor.
6. You have a very strong opinion about where your coffee beans are grown, and you can taste the difference between Sumatran and Ethiopian.
7. A really great parking space can totally move you to tears.
8. Gas costs \$1.00 per gallon more than anywhere else in the U.S.
9. Unlike back home, the guy at 8:30 am at Starbucks wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses who looks like George Clooney really IS George Clooney.
10. Your car insurance costs as much as your house payment.
10. You can't remember . . . is pot illegal?
12. It's barely sprinkling rain and there's a report on every news station: "STORM WATCH."
13. You pass an elementary school playground and the children are all busy with their cell phones.
14. Or it's barely sprinkling rain outside, so you leave for work an hour early to avoid all the weather-related accidents.
15. Both you AND your dog have therapists, psychics, personal trainers and cosmetic surgeons.
16. The Terminator was your governor.
17. If you drive illegally, they take your driver's license. If you're here illegally, they want to give you one.

Women

This little old lady goes to the doctor and says, "Doctor I have this problem with passing gas, but it really doesn't bother me too much. It never smells and it's always silent. As a matter of fact I've passed gas at least 20 times since I've been here in your office. You didn't know I was passing gas because it doesn't smell and it's silent."

The doctor says "I see. Take these pills and come back to see me next week."

The next week the lady goes back. "Doctor," she says, "I don't know what you gave me, but now my passing gas... although still silent, it stinks terribly."

"Good", the doctor said, "now that we've cleared up your sinuses, we'll start to work on your hearing."

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An American soldier, serving in World War II, had just returned from several weeks of intense action on the German front lines. He had finally been granted R&R and was on a train bound for London. The train was very crowded, so the soldier walked the length of the train, looking for an empty seat. The only unoccupied seat was directly adjacent to a well-dressed middle-aged lady and was being used by her little dog.

The war weary soldier asked, "Please, ma'am, may I sit in that seat?"

The English woman looked down her nose at the soldier, sniffed and said, "You Americans. You are such a rude class of people. Can't you see my little Fifi is using that seat?"

The soldier walked away, determined to find a place to rest, but after another trip down to the end of the train, found himself again facing the woman with the dog. Again he asked, "Please, lady. May I sit there? I'm very tired."

The English woman wrinkled her nose and snorted, "You Americans! Not only are you rude, you are also arrogant. Imagine!"

The soldier didn't say anything else; he leaned over, picked up the little dog, tossed it out the window of the train and sat down in the empty seat.

The woman shrieked and railed, and demanded that someone defend her and chastise the soldier. An English gentleman sitting across the aisle spoke up, "You know, sir, you Americans do seem to have a penchant for doing the wrong thing.

You eat holding the fork in the wrong hand. You drive your cars on the wrong side of the road. And now, sir, you've thrown the wrong bitch out the window."

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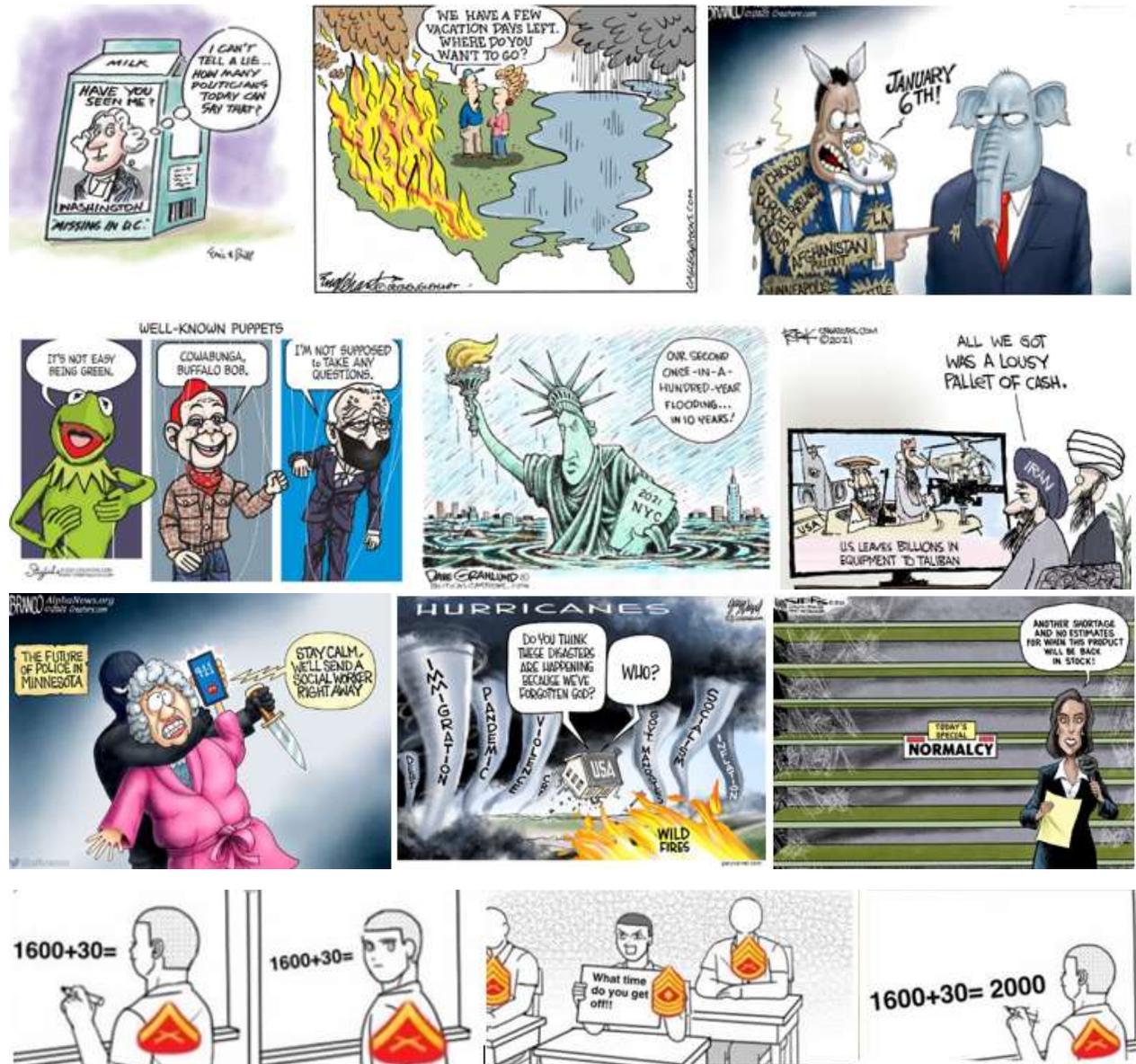
A crowded city at a busy bus stop, a beautiful young woman wearing a tight leather skirt was waiting for a bus. As the bus stopped and it was her turn to get on, she became aware that her skirt was too tight to allow her leg to come up to the height of the first step of the bus. Slightly embarrassed and with a quick smile to the bus driver, she reached behind her to unzip her skirt a little, thinking that this would give her enough slack to raise her leg.

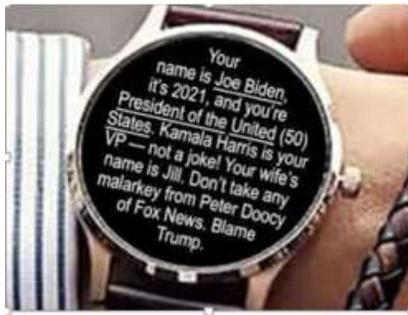
She tried to again take the step, only to discover that she couldn't. So, a little more embarrassed, she again reached behind her to unzip her skirt a little more, and for the second time attempted the step. Once again,

much to her embarrassment she could not raise her leg. With a little smile to the driver. Or a third time she again reached behind to unzip a little more and again was unable to take the step.

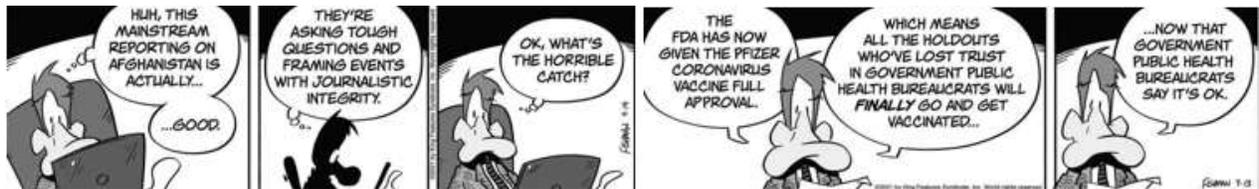
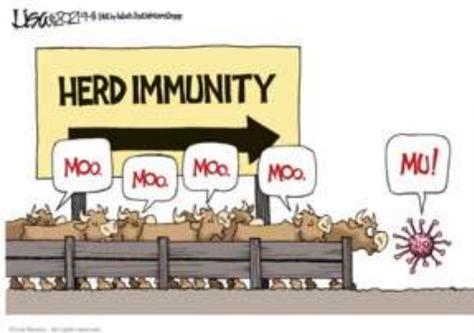
About this time, a large guy who was standing behind her picked her up easily by the waist and placed her gently on the step of the bus. She went ballistic and turned to the would-be Samaritan and screeched, "How dare you touch my body! I don't even know who you are!" The guy smiled and drawled, "Well, ma'am, normally I would agree with you, but after you unzipped my fly three times, I kind'a figured we were friends."

Think Toons

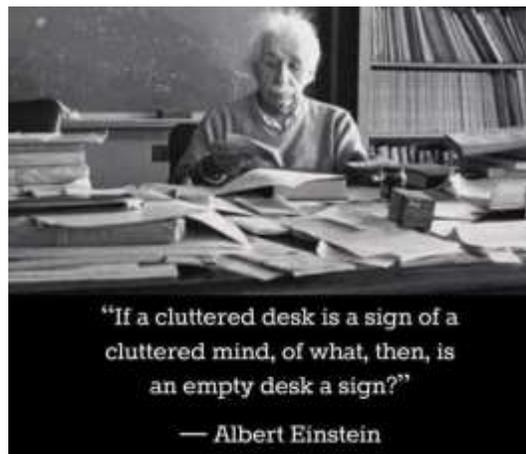




Why Biden checks his watch



Thought of the Week



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