

RAO BULLETIN

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PDF Edition



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1. The page number on which an article can be found is provided to the left of each article's title.
2. To read the articles, open the website and slew to the page number of the article you are interested in.
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*** DoD ***



National Defense Budget

Biden Requests \$773 Billion for Pentagon in 2023

Defense Department spending would see a 4% increase in fiscal 2023 under a plan released by the White House on 28 MAR, significantly above what administration officials wanted last year but likely not enough to satisfy congressional Republicans. Administration officials said the \$773 billion plan includes new money to help Ukraine in its fight against Russia, new investments in military aircraft and nuclear deterrence systems, and enough funding to counter “persistent threats including those posed by North Korea, Iran and violent extremist organizations.” The total spending plan translates to an increase of more than \$30 billion, or 4%, over the fiscal 2022 enacted level.

Last year, White House officials sought a boost of less than 3%, prompting a yearlong fight with Republicans and moderate Democrats who eventually added more to the Pentagon’s spending totals. Even with the larger request this year, that debate is likely to repeat. Last week, 40 House and Senate Republicans pushed the White House to increase the national defense budget

by at least 5%, in response to mounting inflation and growing worldwide threats. In a statement Monday, President Joe Biden called the proposed budget plan “one of the largest investments in our national security in history, with the funds needed to ensure that our military remains the best-prepared, best-trained, best-equipped military in the world.”

White House officials noted that if approved, the budget plan would amount to a 9.8% increase in defense spending in the last two years, providing “the resources necessary to sustain and strengthen U.S. deterrence [and] advancing our vital national interests.” For another year, the budget emphasizes research, development, test and evaluation funding, with \$130.1 billion, a 9.5% increase, as the “largest ever.” Included are \$4.7 billion for hypersonic weapons, \$3.3 billion for microelectronics and 5G networking and \$1.3 billion for biotechnology.

Though Congress upended plans last year to divest from “legacy platforms,” the administration has proposed similar plans again, noting it reprioritized \$2.7 billion in spending. The Air Force would retire 150 aircraft and transfer 100 MQ-9s to another government agency, while the Navy would decommission 24 ships — 16 before the end of their service lives. “The department had some success last year making progress in some of these areas, and the reason the department keeps asking is it’s something that needs to happen,” a senior defense official told reporters last week.

The budget requests \$6.2 billion for the European Deterrence Initiative, with \$300 million for Ukraine, as it fights off a Russian invasion. The Pentagon, with China still its “pacing challenge,” seeks \$6.1 billion for the Indo-Pacific Deterrence Initiative. It also includes full funding for modernizing all three legs of the nuclear triad, with \$34.4 billion for the nuclear enterprise. That includes \$6.3 billion for the Columbia-class submarine, \$5 billion for the B-21 bomber, and \$3.6 billion for the next-generation intercontinental ballistic missile known as the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent — with \$4.8 billion for nuclear command-and-control systems.

The Pentagon noted proposed investments in supply chain resiliency, including \$3.3 billion for microelectronics, \$605 million to expand suppliers of hypersonic and directed energy weapons, \$253 million for “critical materials,” \$48 billion for casting and forging, and \$43 million for batteries and energy storage. The White House touted the defense industrial base as a source of innovation, according to a budget summary. “DOD plays a critical role in overall federal research and development that spurs innovation, yields high-value technology, ensures American dominance over strategic competitors, and creates good-paying jobs,” the White House summary said.

“The budget prioritizes defense research, development, test, and evaluation funding to invest in breakthrough technologies that drive innovation, support capacity in the defense technology industrial base, ensure American technological leadership, and underpin the development of next-generation defense capabilities,” it continued. Defense officials have acknowledged the budget reflects lost buying power. The Pentagon finished its budget in mid-January, before the Ukraine crisis and a resulting rise in fuel prices. “Inflation going forward, based on Russia’s impact in

Ukraine on spiking fuel prices, that's a new variable that will have to be addressed, but that happened after we were already done," the senior defense official said.

Biden asked for \$753 billion in overall defense and national security spending for FY22, but Congress ultimately increased that to \$782 billion. An analysis by Capital Alpha Partners' Byron Callan noted the Republican target is likely \$875 billion for overall defense and national security spending. "We don't dismiss the odds of an increase of this magnitude occurring but the final outcome may not be determined until 2023 for appropriations," Callan said in a note to investors 27 MAR. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Joe Gould & Leo Shane III | March 28, 2022 ++]

National Defense Budget

Update 01: Inflation Sparks New Fight over Biden's Military Budget Request



Spiking inflation's potential effect on the Pentagon has emerged as a line of attack for Republicans who argue President Joe Biden's defense budget was already trading water when it was introduced 28 MAR. Inflationary shocks are driving up Pentagon costs for labor, fuel and other materials, prompting Republicans to call for more than Biden's \$813 billion national defense budget request for fiscal 2023. That request would be a \$30 billion, or 4%, boost from the fiscal 2022 level enacted by Congress — which is a nominal increase above the Pentagon's assumption of 2.5% inflation.

The armed services committees' lead Republicans, Sen. Jim Inhofe, and Rep. Mike Rogers, have pressed Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and the armed services secretaries, in a series of letters obtained by Defense News, to explain where their inflation figures came from, noting the Labor Department calculates the Consumer Price Index at 7.9%, a 40-year peak. Both are among Republicans who have called for a 5 percent increase above inflation. Along similar lines Monday, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) was swift to react to the defense budget release, arguing that it "falls woefully short."

"Our commander-in-chief has again failed to budget for the resources that our armed forces actually need," McConnell said, adding: "So even if you accept the White House's rosier

predictions about where inflation is headed, this would amount to a flat funding defense with none of the robust growth we need to keep pace with Russia and China.” Emphasizing China and Russia, the request boasts the Pentagon’s largest research and development budget yet, at \$130 billion for new weapons like hypersonic missiles. It would retire systems like the Littoral Combat Ship, citing the expense to maintain it, and the A-10 Warthog aircraft, which defense officials argue isn’t relevant to a high-end fight. It also boasts \$4.2 billion for the European Deterrence Initiative, an increase of \$360 million, with new funds to help Ukraine repel a Russian invasion.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Jack Reed (D-RI) hailed the forward-leaning investments and said he supports the Pentagon’s “efforts to achieve billions of dollars in savings by offloading unnecessary equipment and programs.” Still, Reed called the request, “an outline and a starting point.” Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks, the Pentagon’s No. 2 civilian, signaled that the Pentagon will work with Congress on some sort of increase for inflation. She said neither the recently passed defense budget for fiscal 2022 nor the new submission for 2023 fully account for the inflation’s effects. “So we’ll be working with Congress through the summer on how this year lands ... and how inflation ends up affecting our service members,” Hicks told reporters. “We built into this ‘23 budget the best information that we had at the time. As in any year, we’re going to be working that as we get closer to the reality, and even in execution.”

Pentagon Comptroller Mike McCord said the White House-approved request would give the Pentagon the resources it needs to defray escalating costs. He also seemed to downplay those costs, saying they would be hard to project for fiscal 2023, much less over a five-year defense plan, known as the FYDP. “We’re a long way off from knowing what’s going to happen in FY23, which doesn’t start for six more months and doesn’t end for 18 more months,” he told reporters. “I think one of the real hard things for everyone is to separate in your mind what happened last month or the month before from saying you know what’s going to happen 12 months from now, let alone across the FYDP.”

Republicans are probing for more answers now. In a five-page letter sent to Austin and the service secretaries, Inhofe and Rogers asked nearly two dozen questions about how the Pentagon and each of the services is planning for inflation, and how their assumptions were formed — but also about the impacts of inflation in fiscal 2021 and 2022. “Put simply, the inflation we are experiencing is effectively a 5 to 8 percent cut to the department’s buying power, which could amount to between \$20-\$30 billion in unfunded costs in fiscal year 2022 alone, not to mention lost buying power in fiscal 2021 and potential lost buying power in fiscal year 2023,” they write.

The two lawmakers also asked about the inflationary effects on military and civilian pay, housing allowances, fuel, operations, maintenance, military construction facilities sustainment, research and development and procurement. In addition, they asked if the Pentagon is has authorized contracting officers to negotiate contract adjustments to absorb contractors’ inflation costs, and what internal requests McCord’s office may have received to reprogram funding to cover inflationary costs. Also, how are senior leaders tracking inflation and have they contracted

for outside support to study it? “Does departmental leadership have a regularized meeting schedule to discuss inflationary effects on departmental budgets?” the lawmakers ask.

The questions hint at the billions of defense dollars at stake as contractors experience the effects of inflation on wages and other costs and may eventually pass those costs on to the government. Friction over the actual size of inflation and how it’s calculated will likely loom large in the push and pull over the annual Pentagon budget, according to Todd Harrison, director of defense budget analysis and of the Aerospace Security Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “Inflation is going to be central to the battle over the defense budget this year, and the further we get into the current year, the more we’re going to know about the inflation environment going forward and the more intense that battle is going to get,” Harrison said.

Though Republican are in the minority now, midterm elections are coming in the fall, and the historical trend is that the party in power will lose seats. Republicans are telegraphing, should that occur, how they would make increases. “It’s the ranking members, Inhofe and Rogers, that are voicing these questions, and we’re facing a midterm election where both chambers of Congress might flip control before this budget is even enacted,” Harrison said. “That would have a big impact on the top line number we end up with.” [Source: DefenseNews | Joe Gould | March 29, 2022 ++]

Iraq’s U.S. Troops

Update 01: Will Likely Be In There for Years to Come

About six months after the U.S. ended its longest war, the outgoing head of U.S. Central Command hinted that U.S. involvement in Iraq is probably going to go on even longer. As the 19th anniversary of Operation Iraq Freedom approaches, there are roughly 2,500 troops still in Iraq, playing a strict advise-and-assist role at the invitation of the Iraqi government. “As we look into the future, any force level adjustment in Iraq is going to be made as a result of consultations with the government of Iraq,” Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie told Military Times on Friday. “And we just finished a strategic dialogue a few months ago — we believe that will continue.”

The result of that dialogue was a formal end to the U.S. combat mission there at the end of 2021, though the thousands of troops who have been rotating into the country since 2014 as part of Operation Inherent Resolve haven’t led combat operations for years. Going forward, McKenzie said, the role will look a lot like it does now, as the Iraqi government comes together to make another go at strengthening the defense of its sovereignty. “So we’re watching that with great interest and wish them well, despite the many roadblocks that are being thrown up by Iranian-based proxy groups,” he said. “They’re proceeding, you know, maybe not the way we would do it. Maybe slower than the way we would do it. But nonetheless, that moving forward in the long term, we would like to have a normalized security cooperation agreement and posture with Iraq.”

That could look like continued training of local forces, advising military leadership and providing weapons to Iraq to help its security forces remain effective. “You want to get to the state where nations, and security elements in those nations, can deal with a violent extremist threat without direct support from us,” McKenzie said. “Right now we have the Iraqis doing the fighting. We’re still helping them. Over time you’d like for them to take a larger share of all the enabling that we’re doing now.”

If this sounds a lot like what U.S. military leaders said for the better part of a decade in Afghanistan, after the U.S. combat mission ended in 2014, that’s because the goals are identical. Commanders consistently touted progress in wresting control of the country from the Taliban, though in reality, Afghanistan’s defense forces remained dysfunctional. The difference in Afghanistan was that the political situation changed, and it became a key presidential campaign platform to end the U.S. presence there.

When President Donald Trump laid the groundwork for a full Afghanistan exit, the understanding was that the U.S. would continue to arm and fund the Afghan military, and possibly look for opportunities to keep training troops outside the country. President Joe Biden then set the 20th anniversary of 9/11 as the hard deadline for pulling all U.S. troops out of Afghanistan. The same political groundswell for a complete departure from Iraq hasn’t materialized. That could be because Iraq’s major security challenges are of great interest to the US: ISIS, which has shown its eagerness to attack on U.S. soil; and Iran’s funding of militias in Iraq, part of its larger role in state-sponsored terrorism.

McKenzie has often repeated that the Iraqi government really wants U.S. troops in its country, though of course, so did the Afghans. “Let me emphasize, whatever we do in the future is something we’ll jointly arrive at with our partners: with the government of Iraq; and again, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO — very significant, important and growing presence in Iraq, again at the explicit request of the Iraqi government,” McKenzie said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers| March 18, 2022 ++]

DoD PF/BC Program

Body Composition and Fitness Policy Standards Overhauled



The Defense Department updated its physical fitness and body composition program guidelines March 10. The changes open the door for each military branch to revamp their own policies if they so choose, a move that the services have been consistently working toward in recent years. The latest update to [DoD instruction 1308.03](#), which comes on the heels of ongoing studies from the Marine Corps and the Army, eliminated much of the department's restrictive language originally featured in the program. The update generalizes its goals to allow the branches to tailor their guidelines to the needs of their service members and missions as much as possible.

“Body composition may be evaluated using either Body Fat calculations, waist-to-height ratio, abdominal circumference, height-weight screening, or any combination thereof,” the regulation now reads, as long as service members still meet certain criteria under each option. So, if a branch decides to use a body fat calculation method, such as Bod Pod — a device that measures the weight and volume of a person to determine body density — they only have to ensure that service members remain within certain body fat percentages.

While the composition tables used by each branch are expected to be updated after the services have come up with new policies and provided feedback to the department, female servicemembers still must not have over 36 percent body fat while male servicemembers may not have more than 26 percent body fat. Additionally, no branch is allowed to set minimum body fat limits below 26 percent for women and 18 percent for men. If a branch instead decides to rely on height-weight screening tables, the policy mandates that servicemembers must meet Body Mass Index standards no bigger than 27.5, with minimum limits not allowed to be below a BMI of 19.

As for using the taping method, which has been heavily criticized in the past, how the branches choose to tape is now up to the service, as long as the method has been scientifically proven to be effective and accurate. Any determination of body composition that relies on abdominal or waist circumference, for example, must use evidence-backed reference indexes that have been corrected for height so as to not unfairly affect short or tall servicemembers. According to Laurel Tingley, a Media Operations Officer for the Air Force, the branch is currently developing a plan based on the new waist-to-height ratio policy that follows 1308.03's update. The Air Force should have the plan out later this year she said.

Physical fitness testing was also previously mandated DoD-wide with suggestions in the former version of the policy included running, sit-ups, pull-ups and other exercises. In the update, all of the language involving specific options for testing has been removed. This means that each branch now has free-reign to test their service members' fitness levels as they see fit, whether that still involves running or crunches or now allows for less injury-inducing options, a move the Army has tried to make in the past few years with their updated Army Combat Fitness Test.

Lt. Col. Lisa Masters, an Army Reserve officer who said she's struggled with body composition standards her whole career despite stellar physical fitness scores, welcomed the changes. “I have been pushing this [policy update] from the bottom up for as long as I can remember,” Masters told

Military Times. A “common story” Masters cited in her response to the changes was, “being deployed to Iraq in 2018 and watching a girl pass out as she dehydrated herself in the gym with a body wrap, no water or food for 24 hours, and doing cardio hoping to pass tape. Same gym, different day, and guys were lined up to use a neck strengthening device. The muscles built help footballs players, wrestlers, and anyone wanting to pass tape, but have zero fitness value.”

Both stories, she said, are examples of the poor behaviors the current body fat standards drive and why this change has been much-needed. The policy also specifies that testing physical fitness levels needs to happen only at least once a year, and it doesn’t dictate that the evaluation needs to be a literal test, something the Space Force is reportedly taking in stride. The branch is hoping to lead the way into a future in which service-members are allowed to serve as long as they are job-proficient and healthy.

The newest branch plans on potentially eliminating a singular, specific annual test. Instead, they are instituting a “stoplight-like” program in which guardians’ physical fitness is regularly judged as green, yellow or red, based on a variety of factors that can be monitored and recorded daily through wearing something along the lines of a Garmin or FitBit. “Powered by FitRankings technology, guardians will create individual profiles that connect to their wearable or app, providing in-platform fitness data for any activity and allowing data standardization,” FitRankings, which the Space Force has contracted for this goal, said in a March 14 release.

“Guardians’ wearables will provide real-time data and insights that enable guardians to track fitness goal progress, optimize programming and assess physical readiness criteria instantaneously.” This would allow the Space Force to meet the regulation’s requirement of testing service members fitness levels at least once a year, without actually forcing them to singularly train for a specific testing event. The updated policy also dictates that the branches should create their tests based on occupational requirements. This would mean that those in more physically demanding fields such as infantry or artillery may have different assessments than occupational specialties like intelligence or administration, although each field would have to be evaluated on a standardized level at some point in the year.

Each branch must submit a report on the previous calendar year’s physical fitness and body composition statistics for their service members, with the first report due June 1, 2022. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Rachel Nostrant | March 21, 2022 ++]

Military Household Goods

Update 04: Plan to Fix Troops’ Moves Hits another Roadblock

Connected Global Solutions, an unsuccessful bidder for the \$6.2 billion worldwide household goods moving contract, has filed a protest in federal court, again delaying Defense Department

efforts to fix many of the long-standing problems plaguing service members who must change stations.

The new contract essentially outsources the management of the household goods moving process, although U.S. Transportation Command will oversee the program. The winning bidder will pull together a network of moving companies from across the industry and coordinate military moves and warehouse services, integrating functions that are currently performed by more than 900 commercial movers. The contractor will be fully responsible for these moves, bringing accountability to the program.

Following U.S. Transportation Command's 4 NOV decision to award the contract to HomeSafe Alliance, a joint venture of KBR Services LLC and Tier One Relocation LLC, the two unsuccessful bidders — Connected Global and American Roll-On Roll-Off Carrier Group Inc. — filed protests with the Government Accountability Office. GAO denied both protests 3 MAR. Connected Global then filed a protest March 14 in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, the next option for unsuccessful bidders. Following the GAO's ruling, TRANSCOM began the transition period with HomeSafe Alliance 4 MAR, and work under the new contract had not stopped as of 21 MAR.

The contract includes a transition period of nine months and a three-year base period, but with option periods the value of the contract could grow to about \$18 billion over time. Connected Global has asked for work stoppage with their protest, according to one industry source. The delay could extend the timeline for implementation of the new program well into 2023, depending on the time the case remains before the court and whether its decision sends TRANSCOM back to the drawing board. For this year's moving season, service members will still move under the current household goods program, in which more than 900 commercial companies handle about 325,000 shipments year at a cost of about \$2.2 billion. Service members often have more than one shipment with their moves.

Because of the shortage of quality movers, capacity has long been a problem in the military moving arena, with shortages of truck drivers and labor for packing, loading and unloading. Service members have had trouble getting moves scheduled and having their household goods delivered on time, and the pandemic has exacerbated the delays. Damaged and lost belongings have also been a problem. TRANSCOM's attempt to address those problems has been in the works since early 2019, when it announced plans to hire one company to manage household goods moves around the world. The command originally awarded the contract to American Roll-On Roll-Off Carrier Group in May 2020, but GAO sent TRANSCOM back to the drawing board in 2021 after upholding protests from HomeSafe and Connected Global.

At the request of Connected Global, court documents have been sealed to protect proprietary, confidential and source selection information, and the judge has issued a protective order. But some details are found in the GAO's 21 MAR public announcement of its decision to deny the protests. TRANSCOM and the bidders involved had been notified on 3 MAR. According to GAO,

Connected Global had asserted that TRANSCOM’s conduct of discussions with the bidders “was not meaningful, that the agency unreasonably evaluated technical proposals, and the agency performed an improper best-value tradeoff analysis.”

GAO found that TRANSCOM’s source selection authority found a “discernable difference” between the proposals of Connected Global and HomeSafe in two areas: getting enough mover capacity; and soliciting subcontractors and the criteria for awarding moves to those subcontractors. Many military families have complained about the quality of their moves, as TRANSCOM’s current system struggled to find any mover to move household goods especially in peak season, when there’s more competition with commercial moves.

GAO’s denial of Connected Global’s protest stated that after comparing its proposal with that of HomeSafe, TRANSCOM’s source selection authority found that “HomeSafe’s technical proposal, taken as a whole, represents superior technical capability with an added emphasis on improving the customer’s experience during the move process. ...” Although Connected Global submitted a lower bid — by about \$225 million over the life of the potential \$18 billion contract — GAO noted that the source selection authority “traded off a price premium of less than 1.5% for a proposal that the [authority] considered ‘superior,’ ‘innovative’ and ‘impactful.’”

According to the GAO decision, the source selection authority concluded that after comparing the proposals of the two bidders under all technical capability factors, “HomeSafe’s technical proposal, taken as a whole, represents superior technical capability with an added emphasis on improving the customer’s experience during the move process, as compared to CGSL’s proposal.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | March 22, 2022 ++]

Dietary Supplements

Update 04: DoD Issues Instruction on Banned Ones



The Defense Department has issued an instruction (https://www.opss.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/DoDI_6130_06_Use_of_Dietary_Supplements_in_the_DoD_508.pdf) that governs the use of dietary supplements among service members, creates a new training requirement and bars any on-base retailers from selling products with any banned ingredients. The guidance, nearly a

decade in the making, also requires the creation of an online database that service members can reference before using any sort of pre-workout or other supplement promising an edge. “Dietary supplements include ingredients such as vitamins, minerals, herbs, amino acids, and enzymes,” according to the instruction released earlier this month. “Dietary supplements are marketed in forms such as tablets, capsules, soft gels, gel caps, powders, and liquids.”

A range of anabolic steroids are also on the list, as well as substances that are more commonly considered recreational drugs. One of the ingredients has a close chemical make-up to the drug PCP, with the same sedative and hallucinogenic effects. Nine are classified as synthetic cannabinoids, which many troops will probably recognize from the wave of popularity of drugs like Spice and K2 in the military going back a decade or so. While those won’t be confused for dietary supplements, there are some overlapping elements.

“The primary reason cannabinoid and synthetic stimulant guidance was put in the dietary DoDI is because many of these products ... come in either food form, can be added to food, or can be directly ingested through the mouth,” Maj. Charlie Dietz, a Pentagon spokesman, told Military Times on Thursday. For instance, cannabidiol is an ingredient in some workout recovery products. DoD has been developing dietary supplement guidance for the past decade, as the rise of bodybuilding culture — coupled with the wide array of products available — has raised the popularity of supplements among service members, with some data suggesting that dietary supplements are more popular in the military than in the general population.

Because the DoD database is so vast, the best bet is to manually enter all the ingredients of any supplement product to see if a banned substance comes up. As for future training, several DoD organizations will coordinate to create and track it. It won’t be an annual requirement, but part of professional education that troops will receive when they enter service, as well as periodically as they complete promotion requirements. Military health and wellness staff will also receive safety training, according to the instruction.

For any troops prescribed a banned substance for a specific medical purpose, or who receives a substance as part of DoD-sanctioned research, according to the policy, use must be recorded in their electronic health records. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers | March 25, 2022 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse

Reported MAR 16 thru 31, 2022

Lt. Col. Brandon Bailey – This veteran presented himself as being retired from the Air Force after nearly 20 years of distinguished service to his country, with a combat tour in Afghanistan under his belt and a Purple Heart and Bronze Star pinned to his chest. He claimed he spent years as a search-and-rescue and battlefield medicine specialist. He said combat wounds caused a total

and permanent disability that has stopped him from working, following his medical discharge from the Air Force. But it isn't true.



Air Force Maj. Brandon Bailey, 332nd Expeditionary Operations Support Squadron medical crew director Sept 23, 2008

For the past two years, Bailey has been the subject of a federal investigation into a complex web of financial and bankruptcy fraud he spun over the course of a decade. The former major was expelled from the Air Force, following a 2010 court-martial conviction for illicit drug use and theft while stationed in Iraq. The decision aimed to strip him of his pay, benefits and access to Veterans Affairs resources. Then, unbeknownst to the Air Force, the service continued sending him paychecks — for seven years. So Bailey cashed in. All told, he stole about \$1.5 million — including around \$820,000 in pay and benefits from the Air Force — from an array of federal agencies and financial institutions while getting paid for consulting and teaching jobs under false pretenses, federal prosecutors said.

He hustled the bankruptcy system and likely laundered money through his mother's bank account, according to court documents. "He never medically retired from the Air Force. At no point during his military service did Brandon Leross Bailey receive the Purple Heart medal," federal prosecutors wrote in a 2020 indictment. Under a plea deal the DOJ struck with Bailey and his attorneys, the government plans to drop all but two of the 13 counts of misconduct against him. He pleaded guilty in June 2021 to stealing money from the Air Force and to bankruptcy fraud. His sentencing hearing was scheduled for 23 MAR at U.S. District Court in the Southern District of Alabama in Mobile.

Federal lawyers recommend the court sentence Bailey to three years of supervised release, to repay between \$1.5 million and \$3.5 million to those he defrauded, and to turn over his four-bedroom, three-bath house in Maine, his Ford F-150 pickup truck, several properties in Alabama and the contents of 11 bank and investment accounts. "Bailey is a serial fraudster for whom a low-end guidelines sentence is reasonable," the Justice Department wrote in a 11 JAN memo. James Davis, a law enforcement coordinator with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Mobile, told Air Force

Times 17 MAR the government is not seeking jail time because Bailey already faces enormous losses.

A federal judge will make the final call on whether Bailey will spend time in jail, how much money he must return and other terms of his punishment at a the sentence hearing. The maximum penalty he could receive for the two counts totals 15 years in prison followed by six years of supervised release, a \$500,000 fine, another special fee of \$200 and restitution of stolen funds. He is awaiting sentencing in Conecuh County Jail in southern Alabama, according to his lawyer, Brian Lockwood. Lockwood declined to comment on Bailey's behalf 17 MAR. [Source: AirForceTimes Rachel S. Cohen | March 21, 2022 ++]

Overseas Deployed Troops

Update 02: US Has 100,000 Troops in Europe for First Time Since 2005



The United States has 100,000 service members operating in Europe, the largest number in nearly two decades, as the Pentagon shifts forces in the wake of Russia's war on Ukraine. The last time troop levels were this high in Europe was in 2005, according to U.S. European Command records. EUCOM now has about 65,000 troops permanently based in Europe, with additional rotational units that have supplemented the mission for several years. In January, there were roughly 80,000 total U.S. troops in Europe.

But Russia's new invasion of Ukraine last month sparked a dramatic increase in the number of deployments for temporary missions on the Continent. Many of those troops were sent to the eastern part of Poland near Ukraine's border. "In the face of Russian aggression, the United States has recently deployed additional forces and now has approximately 100,000 U.S. service members in Europe," EUCOM said in a statement Tuesday. Personnel have been deployed to reassure allies, train with host-nation forces and contribute to contingency plans, the statement added. A big difference between now and the U.S. military's Cold War footprint is that American forces are spread out far and wide in 19 countries, including in old Warsaw Pact states that are now part of NATO.

Germany still has the most U.S. troops, with 38,500, according to the latest EUCOM figures. After that comes Italy with 12,000. Poland and the United Kingdom have 10,000 each. Romania has 2,400 U.S. troops, while Spain has 2,500. As of 15 MAR, the U.S. had 2,500 troops spread out across the Baltics and 1,500 in Slovakia, which borders Ukraine, according to EUCOM figures. The positioning of forces depends on a range of factors, including what exercises the military has going at a particular time and contingency operations such as the U.S. effort to reassure allies along NATO's eastern flank.

The last time there were 100,000 American troops in Europe, the military's long post-Cold War drawdown was facing complications because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Between 2001 and 2005, troop levels on the Continent held steady while Europe-based units carried out numerous deployments to the Middle East. Still, the U.S. military footprint in Europe, and the Army's in particular, steadily shrank in subsequent years as armored brigades and other units departed their garrisons in Germany for stateside bases. But in 2014, the U.S. gradually began rebuilding its force posture in Europe, prompted by Russia's initial Ukraine invasion, which resulted in a boost in rotational deployments involving tank brigades and other units focused on reinforcing NATO's eastern flank.

Troop levels in Europe have always been in flux depending on security conditions. They were at their highest levels in 1945, at the end of World War II, when there were more than 3 million U.S. troops in Europe. That number was slashed to 128,309 by 1948 as the military demobilized, according to EUCOM historical records. The Cold War brought troops back en masse, hitting a high in 1957 with more than 450,000 troops in Europe. Over the next 30 years, force levels fluctuated but remained high. The late 1980s marked the second major buildup as Cold War tensions escalated once again. In 1987, there were nearly 350,000 troops in Europe. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the long drawdown began. [Source: Stars & Stripes | John Vandiver | March 15, 2022 ++]

Ukraine

Update 06: 'No Fly Zone' Test



Many are calling for a “no-fly zone” over Ukraine. Few appear to be grappling with the details required to make it an actual policy proposal. If you’re proposing an NFZ, here are some of the questions you need to answer first:

- 1.** What are the historic cases of NFZ success that you seek to emulate?
- 2.** How will your proposal work differently from the failed versions (Iraq, Bosnia, Libya), which didn’t alleviate most of the civilian harm, nor end the fighting, and ultimately led to participation in the ground war itself?
- 3.** What organization will operate your NFZ? If the UN, how will you get past the certain Russian and Chinese veto? If NATO—whose current unity is a clear Russian target—how to handle the alliance division that it would spark, and likely non-unanimity in approving and then implementing it?
- 4.** Does your proposal call for shooting down aircraft, but not suppressing the ground-based Russian radar, surface-to-air missiles, electronic warfare, and command-and-control units and systems that would endanger the aviators who are enforcing it? If you do propose to attack these Russian targets, what do you expect to happen next?
- 5.** What are the zone’s rules of engagement and geographic area? (Note: Simply adding a creative adjective like non-kinetic or limited does not answer this.)
- 6.** How will the NFZ handle Russian aircraft that enter the zone? Shoot first to prevent civilian harm? Or wait for the bombs or missiles to drop, and then respond after the fact?
- 7.** How will the NFZ handle the likely edge cases and deliberate provocations, such as our jets being lit up with targeting radar, making them potentially dead in seconds if they don’t fire first?
- 8.** Most of the Russian aircraft that are striking Ukrainian targets launch their weapons from inside Russian or Belarusian airspace. Will you shoot down those too, or let them operate freely, as long as they fire from just across the border? A similar question applies if your plan includes suppression of Russian air defenses, which can strike at aircraft across the border?
- 9.** The vast, vast, vast majority of Russian military activities that cause civilian harm are not air strikes but missiles, artillery, and especially MLRS rockets. Will your NFZ fly over all that activity with no action? How will you answer the inevitable criticisms about watching civilians die from overhead? If you do attack the overall Russian ground force, what do you expect to happen next?
- 10.** In all past NFZ cases, only one side had airpower. But the Ukrainians still have an operative air force. Notably, its drones are striking Russian forces to valuable effect in the very same areas of the proposed NFZ. As well, Ukrainian civilians are flying hundreds of their own drones to provide reconnaissance to the military, spotting for Russian troops and targets. Will your zone also ban these official and unofficial Ukrainian forces? If so, will you shoot them down if the

Ukrainians fly them to defend their cities? If not, will you run escort missions when Russians target them?

-o-o-O-o-o-

I (Peter Singer, Strategist) want to aid Ukraine too, but to do so we need policy options that are both implementable and of actual military and political utility. These include rushing resupplies of ammunition, equipment, and all the other supplies in their logistics system that are already running low; more antitank weapons and SAMs, especially of longer-range types that Ukrainian forces are already trained to use; donating easily transferable and deployable counter-UAS systems as Russia increases its use of drones for ISR and strikes; and holding NATO exercises on Russia's other borders to tie down its forces outside of Ukraine and thus divert potential reinforcements to the invasion.

What doesn't help embattled Ukraine are bumper-sticker proposals and op-eds that may sound tough but simply wave "jazz hands" over all the actual elements needed to make them real [Source: DefenseOne | Peter Singer | March 14, 2022 ++]

DoD Vaccination Program

Update 05: Supreme Court Ruling Sides with Navy

The Supreme Court is giving the Navy a freer hand determining what job assignments it gives to 35 sailors who sued after refusing on religious grounds to comply with an order to get vaccinated against COVID-19. The high court in a brief order 25 MAR sided with the Biden administration and said that while the lawsuit plays out, the Navy may consider the sailors' vaccination status in making deployment, assignment and other operational decisions. The group that sued includes mostly Navy SEALs.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh wrote that there was a "simple overarching reason" that he agreed with the court's decision. The Constitution makes the president, "not any federal judge," the commander in chief of the armed forces, he wrote, noting that courts have been traditionally "reluctant to intrude upon the authority of the Executive in military and national security affairs." Three conservative justices — Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch — noted that they disagreed with their colleagues' decision and would have sided with the group of SEALs. Alito wrote that his colleagues were "rubberstamping the Government's request." "These individuals appear to have been treated shabbily by the Navy, and the Court brushes all that aside," Alito wrote.

A federal judge in Texas in January issued a preliminary injunction barring the Navy from acting against the sailors. The Biden administration said it was not asking the Supreme Court to block parts of the lower court order barring the sailors from being disciplined or discharged but only the requirement that their assignments be made without considering their vaccination status.

That requirement posed “intolerable risks to safety and mission success,” the administration had argued. “Navy personnel routinely operate for extended periods of time in confined spaces that are ripe breeding grounds for respiratory illnesses, where mitigation measures such as distancing are impractical or impossible. A SEAL who falls ill not only cannot complete his or her own mission, but risks infecting others as well, particularly in close quarters, including on submarines,” Biden administration lawyers wrote.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin last year made vaccinations mandatory for service members. Navy guidelines allow for exemptions to the vaccine requirement on religious and other grounds, including medical reasons and if a servicemember is about to leave the Navy. The Biden administration says the Navy has received more than 4,000 requests for religious exemptions, but it said that as of the start of February only about 80 had been fully adjudicated. It said one religious exemption had been granted. Lawyers for the group of sailors that sued had argued that the Navy had granted hundreds of non-religious exemptions. They said that in asking the high court to allow vaccine status to be considered, the Navy was seeking “license to engage in hostile tactics designed to coerce plaintiffs into disregarding their religious beliefs.”

Lower courts had denied the Biden administration’s plea to be allowed to consider vaccination status. That includes a federal judge in Texas, Reed O’Connor, who was nominated by former President George W. Bush, and a three-judge panel of the 5th U.S Circuit Court of Appeals. Two of those judges were appointees of former President Donald Trump while the third was appointed by former President Ronald Reagan. [Source: The Associated Press | Jessica Gresko | March 25, 2022 ++]

National Guard Vaccine Mandate

Biden Administration Seeks To Dismiss Oklahoma Lawsuit

The Biden administration is asking an Oklahoma federal court to dismiss the state’s lawsuit over the National Guard’s vaccine mandate. In a motion filed 25 MAR, the government argued that the case should be dismissed “in its entirety” after U.S. District Judge Stephen Friot of the Western District of Oklahoma turned down the state’s motion for preliminary injunction against the mandate in late December, arguing then that the plaintiff’s claims were largely without merit. The “fundamental conclusion” of Friot’s original ruling, the government argues, now requires dismissal of the case.

The motion follows a heated battle between the Pentagon and Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt (R) over the military’s vaccine mandate, which largely escalated late last year. Stitt in November became first governor to come out against the Pentagon’s vaccine mandate for the National Guard, when he asked Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to exempt his state’s guard members from the mandate in November. He later appointed the current head of the state’s National Guard, Brig.

Gen. Thomas Mancino, who wrote a memo stipulating that no member of the state's Guard was required to get vaccinated. Austin formally turned down Stitt's request in late November, which led to the state filing the lawsuit against Austin and President Biden in early December.

At issue are two federal statutes under which the National Guard operates; Title 32 of the U.S. code stipulates that the Guard is under state control, but Title 10 places the Guard in federal control. In its motion to dismiss, the government largely pointed to what Friot has already said about the mandate. Therefore, it lacks standing to bring the case altogether. "The Court has already 'concluded that the defendants are acting well within the authority granted by the Constitution and laws of the United States' by requiring members of the National Guard to be vaccinated against COVID-19," the government wrote. "Oklahoma is thus wrong that 'nothing in Titles 10 or 32 of the United States Code permits the President of the United States to impose a vaccine mandate on the National Guard members,'" it continued.

Air National Guard members had until Dec. 31 to be vaccinated, but Army National Guard troops still have until June 30. Seven other Republican governors have since vocalized opposition to the mandate, and Austin wrote them letters in February telling them that he had the power to implement the mandate "regardless of duty status." Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) sued the Pentagon over the mandate in January, and Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy (R) joined that litigation. [Source: The Hill | Jordan Williams | March 25, 2022 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials

Reported MAR 16 thru 31, 2022 | Eight



"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



Canup

Salsbury

Allison

Boemar

-- **Army Staff Sgt. Grady H. Canup, 30**, of Greenwood, South Carolina, was assigned to Company C, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. He was reported killed in action on Nov. 14, 1944, when enemy artillery fire hit near his foxhole during the Hürtgen Forest offensive in Germany. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Canup will be buried in Anderson, South Carolina, on April 10, 2022. [Read about Canup](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2917987/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-canup-g) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2917987/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-canup-g>.

-- **Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Richard G. Salsbury, 19**, of Canaan, Maine, was assigned to 345th Bombardment Squadron, 98th Bombardment Group, 9th Air Force. On Aug. 1, 1943, the B-24 Liberator aircraft on which Salsbury was a gunner crashed as a result of enemy anti-aircraft fire. Following the war,

his remains could not be identified. Salsbury will be buried in his hometown. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Salsbury](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2794610/airman-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-salsbury-r) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2794610/airman-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-salsbury-r>.

-- **Navy Fireman 2nd Class Hal J. Allison, 21**, of Paducah, Kentucky, 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 Allison. He will be buried in his hometown on April 8, 2022. [Read about Allison](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2815305/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-allison-h) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2815305/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-allison-h>.

-- **Navy Coxswain Paul L. Boemer, 21**, of St. Louis, 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 Boemer. He will be buried in his hometown on May 3, 2022. [Read about Boemer](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2396791/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-boemer-p) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2396791/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-boemer-p>.



Menken

Shauvin

Phillips

Barrow

-- **Army Cpl. Donald L. Menken, 21**, of Whitesburg, Kentucky, was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action after being wounded on June 10, 1953, while his unit was guarding Outpost Harry on the main road to Seoul. Following the battle, Menken could not be located and no remains were recovered. He will be buried in Ermine, Kentucky, on May 14, 2022. [Read about Menken](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2923468/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-menken-d) <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2923468/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-menken-d>.

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Eugene P. Shauvin, 25**, of Spokane, Washington, was assigned to the 95th Troop Carrier Squadron, 440th Troop Carrier Group. On Sep. 17, 1944, the C-47 Skytrain aircraft he was piloting was shot down over Belgium. The four-person crew, including Shauvin, and five paratroopers died in the crash. Following the war, his remains could not be identified. He will be buried in his hometown in July 2022. [Read about Shauvin](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2953304/pilot-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-shauvin-e) <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2953304/pilot-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-shauvin-e>.

-- **Navy Water Tender 1st Class Milo E. Phillips, 26**, of Pierce, Colorado, 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 Phillips. He will be buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl) in Honolulu, on Aug. 4, 2022. [Read about Phillips](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2554715/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-phillips-m)
<https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2554715/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-phillips-m>.

-- **Army Pvt. Pearl F. Barrow, 36**, of Wichita, Kansas, was assigned to Company F, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. He was reported killed in action on Nov. 20, 1944, when his unit was engaged in battle with German forces near Hürtgen, Germany. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Barrow will be buried in his hometown on a date yet to be determined. [Read about Barrow](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2058577/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-barrow-p)
<https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2058577/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-barrow-p>.

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | March 31, 2022 ++]

*** VA ***



VA Budget FY 2023

Biden Proposes 20% Increase

Veterans Affairs programs would see a 20% increase in funding under the White House budget plan for fiscal 2023 released on 28 MAR, pushing the department's spending total above \$300 billion for the first time. The department has seen steady increases annually as multiple administrations have sought to increase medical care and support services for veterans. Even with that history, however, the fiscal 2023 request represents a major new influx of money for the department, already one of the most expensive in the federal government. Only the Departments of Defense (\$773 billion) and Health and Human Services (\$138 billion) would see more discretionary funding in the plan than VA (\$135 billion).

In 2001, the entire VA budget — including both discretionary program spending and mandatory benefits payouts — amounted to about \$45 billion. The 2023 White House budget request is three times that just for the program spending, not including the mandatory section of the department's budget. Lawmakers will spend the next several months debating and dissecting the White House spending outline, likely making numerous changes before a final compromise budget is reached.

But the plan represents a starting point for those debates, and lawmakers in recent years have only added to White House requests for VA spending, not reduced them.

In the budget request, administration officials said the plan “honors the nation’s sacred obligation to veterans by investing in world-class healthcare ... and enhancing veterans’ general well-being.” The plan includes large increases in outpatient care services (\$29.6 billion, up 32%), mental health care programs (\$8.5 billion, up 15%), prosthetics care (\$4 billion, up 8%) and caregivers support stipends (\$1.8 billion, up 35%). The caregivers’ program has been a source of contention in recent months, as VA officials have been reviewing longtime participants to ensure they meet updated eligibility guidelines. The department is scheduled to add thousands of new families to the program this fall under an expansion mandated by Congress, necessitating the extra money.

The budget anticipated a significant increase in patient care costs as veterans resume medical visits delayed or canceled by the coronavirus pandemic over the last two years. White House officials said they expect to see more than 107.7 million patient visits at VA facilities in fiscal 2023 (an 8% jump over fiscal 2022 projections) and another 39 million community care visits (a 7% increase). The budget request also prioritizes investment in care for women veterans, ethnic minority veterans and LGBTQ veterans, identifying the groups as underserved by current department offerings. Department officials are expected to unveil other budget priorities and guidelines later this week.

The White House plan also includes \$128 billion in advance appropriations for VA programs in fiscal 2024, to prevent any service shutdown in the event of a budget stalemate. The new fiscal year begins Oct. 1, but Congress in recent years has failed to get federal agency budgets finalized by then, leading to some program closures and disruptions. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 28, 2022 ++]

VA Infrastructure

Update 02: Dozens of VAMCs Slated For Closure/Rebuild under New Plan

Thirty-five Veterans Affairs Medical Centers in 21 different states would be closed or completely reconstructed under a nearly \$2 trillion infrastructure overhaul unveiled by department leadership on 14 MAR. In addition, 14 new major VA hospitals would be built along with 140 multi-specialty community-based outpatient clinics. The plan in total would add 80 new medical buildings to the department’s existing inventory of more than 1,200 across the country. The proposals represent a massive restructuring of VA’s footprint in America in coming years and could impact millions of veterans seeking medical care and hundreds of thousands of VA employees.

But, the plan must also get approval from both an independent commission of veterans advocates and Congress before moving ahead, leaving any potential changes years away. Last week, ahead of the plan's release, VA Secretary Denis McDonough touted the changes as a critical rethinking of where VA facilities are located and how the department delivers care to veterans. "We will be shifting toward new infrastructure or different infrastructure that accounts for how healthcare has changed, matches the needs of that market, and strengthens our research and education missions," he said. "Most of all, we'll ensure that veterans who live in [any] location have access to the world-class care they need when they need it."

Congress mandated a reassessment of VA's nationwide infrastructure in 2018 as part of a review styled after the military base closing rounds of the 1980s and 1990s. Under the plan suggested by McDonough, 17 medical centers in twelve states would be completely closed. They include three sites in New York state (Castle Point, Manhattan and Brooklyn), and two sites each in Pennsylvania (Philadelphia and Coatesville), Virginia (Hampton and Salem) and South Dakota (Fort Meade and Hot Springs). Other facilities recommended for closure include:

- the Central Western Massachusetts VAMC;
- the Dublin VAMC in Georgia;
- The Chillicothe VAMC in Ohio;
- The Fort Wayne VAMC in Indiana;
- The Battle Creek VAMC in Michigan;
- The Alexandria VAMC in Louisiana;
- The Muskogee VAMC in Oklahoma; and
- The Palo Alto Livermore VAMC in California.

Seven of the 17 sites recommended for closing are located in the northeast, where the number of veterans (and the overall population) has declined in recent decades. Services at those sites would be replaced by smaller inpatient and outpatient clinics to be built in those areas, or by construction of new VA medical centers in nearby communities. The plan calls for construction of two new major medical sites in Virginia (Newport News and Norfolk) and Georgia (Macon and Gwinnett County) and a new New Jersey facility in Camden to offset the loss of some of the New York sites. The new construction list includes:

- A medical center in King of Prussia, Penn.;
- A medical center in Huntsville, Ala.;
- A medical center in Summerville, S.C.;
- A medical center in Grand Rapids, Mich.;
- A medical center in Colorado Springs, Colo.;
- A medical center in Everett, Wash.;
- A medical center in Anthem, Ari.; and
- A medical center in Rapid City, S.D.

A total of eighteen medical centers would be rebuilt, either on their existing land or at a nearby new location. Three New York state centers are on that list (Albany, Buffalo and St. Albans) as are several other major metropolitan areas: Miami, Atlanta, Phoenix, Indianapolis, San Antonio and Washington, D.C. Other replacement sites include:

- Bedford VAMC in Massachusetts;
- Wilkes-Barre VAMC in Pennsylvania;
- Beckley VAMC in West Virginia;
- Roanoke VAMC in Virginia;
- Durham VAMC in North Carolina;
- Tuskegee VAMC in Alabama;
- Hines VAMC in Illinois;
- Shreveport VAMC in Louisiana; and
- Reno VAMC in Nevada.

McDonough has said in recent weeks that the plan will not displace any VA workers or patients in the short-term, and that efforts will be made to minimize disruptions over the long-term. The plan also calls for numerous improvements to VA staff pay and benefits as a way to strengthen retention efforts, thereby improving care throughout the system. VA officials said the full recommendations would cost about \$98 billion more over the next 30 years than simply maintaining the department's current infrastructure, and about \$41 billion more than modernization efforts projected to be needed over that time frame. That cost — and the potential impact of losing major medical centers in key community centers across the country — will be the focus of debate for lawmakers over the next year.

The independent AIR Commission will conduct public hearings in coming months as part of its review of VA's recommendations, and will submit its own recommendations to the president for further review in early 2023. Whether the White House and Congress will ultimately accept those plans remains to be seen. On 14 MAR, lawmakers offered their initial reactions to the plans but promised closer scrutiny in the months to come. "For far too long, VA's infrastructure has been slowly crumbling. Veterans in every corner of the country deserve better," Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill., and ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, said in a statement. "There are many milestones and hard decisions ahead but retaining the status quo is not an option."

In a preview of fights to come, Rep. Chris Pappas (D-NH) said officials would "jeopardize our veterans' access to care" with plans to close three Community-Based Outpatient Clinics in his state. And Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) also took a more confrontational tone in his early assessment without offering any specific criticism. "Any effort to kneecap our veterans' health care is a non-starter for me," he said. "I will fight tooth and nail against any proposals that blindly look to reduce access to VA care or put our veterans at a disadvantage." The full recommendations are available on the VA web site

<https://www.va.gov/AIRCOMMISSIONREPORT/index.asp>. The report itself can be accessed at <https://www.va.gov/AIRCOMMISSIONREPORT/docs/VISN06-Market-Recommendation.pdf>
[Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 14, 2022 ++]

Telemental Health Care

Update 47: VA Wants to Make Telephone Appointments Permanent



Responders field calls at the Veterans Crisis Line call center

A typical therapist's waiting room may contain a few unremarkable chairs, a handful of outdated magazines and the quiet bustle of a receptionist's desk. But at Department of Veterans Affairs facilities, patients can sometimes be bombarded by swaths of military paraphernalia and fellow service members milling around -- potential triggers that could deter them from seeking mental health support. As Congress and the White House zero in on mental health legislation, some advocates and lawmakers are pushing specifically to establish more robust telemental health care, providing services like psychiatry appointments conducted over the phone, to better serve veterans reluctant to receive in-person care.

Telemental health can be particularly helpful for veterans with lingering negative associations from their time in the military, said Samantha Connolly, a clinical psychologist for the VA Boston Healthcare System. "There are also veterans who maybe didn't have the best experience during their military service, and they don't like to come into a VA facility," Connolly said. "They don't want to sit in a waiting room with other veterans and maybe see regalia or just memories of their time in the service."

Last year, the VA provided 5.6 million telemental health visits, up from 3.2 million in 2020, according to Kendra Weaver, a senior consultant in the VA's Office of Mental Health & Suicide Prevention. "Prior to the pandemic, we often used telemental health as more of a selective or secondary strategy," Weaver said. In October, Rep. Matt Rosendale (R-MT) introduced a bill requiring the VA to report a comprehensive telehealth strategy. Last summer, Sen. Bill Cassidy, (R-LA) and Rep. Doris Matsui, D-Calif., introduced twin Senate and House bills to expand access to telemental health care.

While the recent string of mental health-focused hearings on Capitol Hill and President Joe Biden's call for mental health legislation in his State of the Union address have garnered more national attention, Weaver said the VA has been working on building up its telehealth infrastructure since well before the pandemic. The department dabbled in telehealth as early as the 1960s and '70s, with providers communicating with patients through televisions. After piloting a few programs in the 1990s and early 2000s, the VA formally launched a national telemental health initiative in 2002, including introducing its own video application for virtual appointments, Weaver said. But the pandemic proved a turning point, with the department switching from providing 80% of its care in-person to 80% virtually.

While some veterans may be deterred from seeking help by the intimidating experience of obtaining services at the VA, others may carry lingering worries about how talking with an expert is viewed in the military. "Going to the mental health clinic can jeopardize your career, and sometimes that stigma stays with military service members," said Kenneth Marfilus, a former active-duty mental health therapist. "They might feel more comfortable engaging in a telemental health appointment from the comfort of their home, especially if there's a certain level of anxiety or even some PTSD symptoms that could potentially flare up by going to the clinic." Crowded cities can be a common trigger among veterans experiencing PTSD, so some veterans may prefer to live in more remote, rural areas -- regions that are often under-resourced with VA and mental health care facilities alike.

Marfilus, who has also worked to provide health care to and relocate unhoused veterans through the Syracuse VA Medical Center, said telemental health has long been a way to reach these veterans while also prioritizing their preferred way of life. "It may be easier to find an apartment for a veteran experiencing homelessness in a city center or immediate surrounding areas, but they might not want to live there for reasons ... related to their mental health symptoms," he said. "That's where we see telemental health really kicks in to be able to have them live where they want to live, where they feel most comfortable, but also having that constant communication [with a health care provider]."

Even for veterans living in major metropolitan areas, Connolly said, the stress of navigating a tricky commute or heavy traffic can be a trigger. In Boston, some of her patients have to budget significant amounts of time just to get to their appointments. "I think for some providers, they question, 'How much therapeutic benefit does the session have if getting to and from the appointments has caused so much stress in my patient's day?'" Connolly said. "So I think telehealth can help in those cases, too."

The largest barrier to expanding telemental health services is ensuring veterans have the technology to access virtual appointments. The VA has launched programs to loan veterans phones and computers, as well as support services for users to familiarize themselves with the technology ahead of their first telehealth appointment. Marquis Barefield, the assistant national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans (DAV), said the group has been advocating for

lawmakers to pass legislation to help the VA get the technology it needs to make telemental health services possible for more vets. For those who do not have broadband or internet access, the DAV has been pushing for the expansion of VA initiatives such as the 2018 Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations program.

Partnering with organizations like the American Legion and Walmart, the program offers veterans private spaces with internet and computers to access telehealth appointments. However, the program currently operates only 12 active locations across the country, with one more location expected to be added soon. For veterans who struggle to operate technology, the DAV hopes in-person care remains an option as well. "We want to encourage the VA not to just heavily rely on telehealth and telemental health services," Barefield said. "We also still want them to have their doors open, so if veterans have an opportunity to come back inside of the facilities themselves that option is still on the table as well." [Source: Medill News Service| Maia Pandey | March 17 8, 2022 ++]

VA Covid-19 Vaccines

Update 09: Many VA Workers Remain Unvaccinated but Few Fired

Four months after the deadline for Veterans Affairs workers to be vaccinated against coronavirus, about 40,000 staffers remain unvaccinated but only a few have been fired for refusal, department officials said 22 MAR. The new figures come as Republican lawmakers are renewing their calls to drop the vaccine mandate and allow VA employees to continue to work without penalty even if they ignore the department's rules. As of this week, roughly 330,000 workers (89 percent) in the Veterans Health Administration are vaccinated, according to data released by department officials.

Most department health workers were ordered to receive the vaccine regimen (either the two-shot series or the single-shot option) by 8 OCT, with the rest of the department workforce given an extra month and a half (22 NOV) to meet the mandate. Last fall, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said the vaccine requirement was needed to ensure the safety of staff and patients at department buildings. He also warned that employees who did not meet the deadline could face punishment, including dismissal. Despite those threats, department officials said that as of 22 MAR, "less than a handful of VHA employees have been removed due to noncompliance with the vaccine requirement or noncompliance with safety protocols."

Officials would not release the specific number of firings. Of the roughly 40,000 workers who are not vaccinated, almost 37,000 have requested exemptions for medical or religious reasons. Officials said they are still processing "requests for reasonable accommodation" without endangering patient safety. McDonough has said that while individuals who request religious

exemptions will not have the sincerity of their beliefs questioned, they may be reassigned to other positions that do not require direct interaction with veterans or other staffers.

Last week, during a House Veterans' Affairs hearing on VA workforce issues, multiple Republican members questioned the wisdom of those moves, saying that the department can't afford to lose qualified employees to unneeded mandates. "Staffing shortages will only make wait times longer, and that could have life or death consequences for veterans," said committee ranking member Mike Bost (R-IL) during the event. "With the employment market as tight as it is, the last thing we should be doing is interfering with their employees' personal health decisions, much less firing anyone for exercising their health or religious freedoms."

Other members questioned whether the mandate could scare off potential recruits to the department. VA officials said they have not seen any indication of that so far. "What we are trying to do is make sure that we have a safe environment for the veterans," said Gina Grosso, VA's assistant secretary for human resources operations. "And so we are working hard to find a place where [unvaccinated employees] can work. Our sincere desire is not to have to lose anybody." At least 21,400 patients connected to VA and 255 VA staffers have died from illnesses linked to COVID-19 in the past two years. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | | March 22, 2022 ++]

VA Caregiver Program

Update 76: After Years of Caring Many Caregivers Are Losing a Lifeline

The 36-year-old Afghanistan war veteran can't be left alone with his kids because his hallucinations and outbursts make him a danger to himself and others. He must be handed his medications, or he'll forget to take them. He doesn't drive or work. Or manage his finances, having once spent thousands of dollars in a wild shopping spree while experiencing mania. Still, the former Army sergeant has not been hospitalized for mental health issues in nearly five years -- an achievement he and his wife attribute to her providing around-the-clock care for him, supported by the Department of Veterans Affairs' Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.

In addition to providing health care coverage and community support, the program pays the veteran a stipend that allows the wife to care for him instead of hiring a home health aide. But in the past month, the couple, who live in South Carolina and requested anonymity so they could speak freely about their situation due to concerns about retaliation from their VA caseworkers, learned they no longer qualify for the benefit. They are not alone. With the VA conducting reviews to ensure that participants meet new eligibility requirements introduced last year, as many as 6,000 people may find out this month they no longer will receive the caretaker support some have relied upon for years as they manage the residual wounds of war that continue to shape their lives.

VA officials say the new eligibility rules were introduced to comply with a 2018 law that expanded the program to severely injured veterans of previous wars whose loved ones have cared for them for years without any compensation. By changing the eligibility requirements while expanding the groups of veterans who could apply, the idea was that veterans from past conflicts could get the help they needed without radically increasing the cost of the program. They said the program now provides consistency and will be fair and equitable for all. Cost played a role, as well. During a hearing on the issue in 2018, then-VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin said expansion under the existing rules would add 180,000 caregivers and require \$2.8 billion over the first five years -- a change he said he could not support. Shulkin said he favored expanding the program to only the most severely injured or incapacitated veterans -- a move that would add roughly 40,000 caregivers and ultimately was approved.

But current enrollees and advocates believe it is unfair that legacy participants must meet the new criteria. And, they say, the review process has been inconsistent and fraught with error. They charge that the reviewers have largely ignored the needs of those with traumatic brain injuries and mental health issues -- the "invisible wounds" of war. "The person who did our assessment completely skipped the section regarding supervision, protection and instruction," said the wife, referring to an eligibility requirement that participating veterans must have an impairment that affects their ability to maintain their personal safety. "It is really hard for me to think it was not done on purpose."

That suspicion is common among the families being told they are no longer eligible. "I feel like there was no consideration of my son's situation," said a mother who has served as her son's caregiver for eight years. The mom, who requested anonymity to protect her son, learned she was dismissed from the program just weeks after her son was hospitalized for psychosis. "I told him I plan to appeal, but he tells me not to because 'so many other veterans are more hurt than me,'" she said.

The Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, also referred to as the Family Caregiver Program, was introduced in 2011 for post-9/11 veterans seriously injured in the line of duty, beginning with 200 caregivers who received health care, mental health services, community support and a monthly \$1,600 stipend. It has grown to roughly 33,000 participants who now receive \$1,750- \$3,000 per month, depending on geographic location and the extent of care required. The program was greatly expanded under the 2018 VA Mission Act, which required that eligible combat veterans from previous wars be allowed to apply. By law, World War II through Vietnam War veterans became eligible on Oct. 1, 2020, while combat veterans who served between May 1975 and Sept. 11, 2001, are set to become eligible this October.

With the program's expansion, the VA introduced new eligibility rules that focus on a veteran's need for assistance with activities of daily living, such as bathing, eating, grooming and mobility, as well as their personal safety. While the previous eligibility rules were similar, the VA used a different evaluation scoring system and based stipends on the amount of time required to provide

care, with those in the lowest tier needing 10 hours of care a week. Those in the highest tier -- at least 40 hours of care a week -- receive the largest amount. VA officials have said the eligibility rules were introduced as a result of the Mission Act and announced in October that the department would review the cases of 19,700 "legacy" participants to determine whether they met the criteria.

From the outset, VA officials estimated that most of the participants in the lowest tier would lose eligibility, as would some in the middle tier, or roughly 6,000 veterans. As a result of the outcry from caregivers, advocacy groups and members of Congress over the reviews, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said in March that the department is conducting a "deep dive" into the evaluation process to see what changes need to be made.

- "We are constantly reviewing this. ... Experience dictates that we get smarter at this over time and so we can plow the lessons learned back into it," McDonough said. "We'll be looking at specific improvements in the program." VA officials stressed that those being dropped from the program will receive their current level of benefits and stipends through March 2023.
- "We are trying to get these [reviews] all done by the end of this month so that all veterans and caregivers know that decision and we have at least a year" for veterans to plan while still receiving their stipends, Caregiver Support Program Executive Director Colleen Richardson said in a call with reporters 3 MAR.
- "The program has really changed a lot. ... Battlefield medicine has changed significantly for those that have deployed and so has rehab, so what we're finding is that there are a lot of veterans who are no longer eligible under the current criteria," Richardson said.

Advocates argue, however, that the VA did not need to change the eligibility requirements for existing veterans in the program. Caregivers and groups have sued, calling the new rules "arbitrary and capricious," according to Veteran Warriors Inc. and National Veterans Legal Services Program Inc., the groups representing several caregivers. "The only thing VA was authorized to do was to expand the program, but they restricted it," said Holly Ferrell, Veteran Warriors executive director, during an interview with Military.com. "We shouldn't be [pitting] veterans and caregivers of one era against another." [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | March 18, 2022 ++]

VA Caregiver Program

Update 77: New Eligibility Rules Put on Hold

Since expanding the VA Caregiver program to older veterans, the VA has received roughly 135,000 new applications and doubled the number of participants, according to the department. The law clearly states that the VA is to take into account the caregiver's assessment of a veteran's needs and limitations and the extent to which a veteran can function safely and independently. But it also stipulates that the veteran must have a "need for regular or extensive instruction or

supervision without which the ability of the veteran to function in daily life would be seriously impaired."

The Mission Act which was responsible for having to reduce the number of participants getting care in the program, received overwhelming support in Congress. It had just 74 "no" votes in both the House and Senate. The tightening of the rules it contained made a culling of the veterans eligible inevitable, although lawmakers have begun to discuss countering the more restrictive guidelines. VA Secretary Denis McDonough said the department is looking to determine whether it has flexibility under the statute to make changes.

Democrat Jon Tester, chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, has questioned the VA's emphasis on the activities of daily living and a requirement that veterans have a 70% disability rating to be eligible. And Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) has raised concerns regarding the manner in which the veterans have been notified of their denials, with no explanation for why they were dropped. "Seeing general statements such as the veteran 'no longer meets the program criteria' is not helpful to the veteran or their families in understanding why they have been denied," Rubio wrote in a letter to McDonough in January. "This blanket denial also does little in helping them to prepare the appropriate documentation and materials in pursuing an appeal."

The VA has not released data for how many legacy participants have been dropped from the program, but Veteran Warriors executive director Holly Ferrell said that more than 900 have reached out to her organization seeking help with filing appeals. Ferrell said the group is seeing numerous errors and omissions in assessments, adding that obvious mistakes can help veterans win appeals when presented with medical records and other documentation. "You have assessors who are not documenting anything close to what the medical records state," Ferrell said. "A record will say 'veteran cannot be left alone,' but the assessment will say they don't require assistance with supervision. It's crazy."

She added that, based on what she has seen, the reviewers face even more difficulty assessing veterans with neurological conditions, including traumatic brain injury, migraines, neuropathy and mental health conditions. "VA has misinterpreted the need for supervision, protection and instruction, and we are now questioning whether they even know what the term 'neurological impairment' means," Ferrell said.

The new rules say that to be eligible, veterans must need assistance with activities of daily living or require supervision, protection or instruction for their personal safety. To meet the requirement, they must have "trouble maintaining in a home environment," according to Timothy Jobin, deputy director of VA's Caregiver Support Programs. Jobin didn't elaborate on what constitutes "maintaining," but nodded to examples such as a veteran with a traumatic brain injury or dementia who leaves the stove on or wanders from the home. Other symptoms such as anger -- a common symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder -- likely wouldn't meet the criteria, he said. "We have people come to us and say, 'I need to be around in case that individual gets angry. We want to take that very seriously, but we have different therapies that individuals can engage in to

assist with that. It doesn't quite meet the threshold for supervision, protection, instruction," Jobin said.

The VA is aiming for the reviews to be completed by the end of this month. Those being dismissed from the program should receive a phone call, followed by a letter confirming they are no longer eligible but have a right to appeal and even reapply in the future, VA officials said. "They may not meet the eligibility criteria today, but if in three months from now, they need our assistance or they feel like they meet the eligibility criteria, we really want them to reapply," said Richardson, the director of the Caregiver Support Program.

The 36-year-old Afghanistan war veteran who can't be left alone with his kids because his hallucinations and outbursts make him a danger to himself and others and his wife hope their appeal is successful but also are making plans if it is not. The wife said she will find a remote work job that allows her to continue caregiving or the couple will sell their house. "Financially, we are going to be hurting, but that's not going to change the fact that I'm still going to be here for him. I don't want to go back to where we were," she said. They said they plan to appeal, based on misinformation in their assessment and will even reapply if necessary, especially if the vet's symptoms worsen with age.

But, the wife said, she still doesn't understand why the VA would take away this benefit when, if she wasn't her husband's caregiver, he would hire someone to ensure that he takes his prescriptions, maintains nutrition and makes it to medical appointments. "We worked really hard to at least be stable enough to function in this house, in a protected space," the wife said. "I had to give up on my career. But at least I am proud, because he always says that I pretty much have kept him alive."

Veterans Affairs officials announced 22 MAR that all expulsions from the department's caregiver support program will be halted while officials re-evaluate new eligibility criteria that threatened monthly support stipends for thousands of families. The move is a stunning turnaround for the department, which for months has maintained the moves are necessary to bring the program's membership into order ahead of a massive expansion in eligible families later in fall 2022. However, not all advocates were as optimistic about the long-term fate of the families who already had been marked to leave the program.

Holly Ferrell, executive director for Veteran Warriors, an advocacy group that works with more than 3,500 caregivers in the program, said she hopes the new VA announcement amounts to real change and not simply delaying pain for the families. "Is this a political stunt to get media attention off of the problems, to get caregivers to calm down and to give them false hope?" she said. "We have to remain cautious. [Source: Military.com & MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime & Leo Shane III | March 18 & 22, 2022 ++]

VA Caregiver Program

Update 78: Review would've Booted 90% Of Young Vets from Program

Veterans Affairs officials were on pace to boot 90% of post-9/11 veterans receiving caregivers benefits as part of an ongoing overhaul of the support program before announcing a moratorium on dismissals this week, according to new data released by the department. The figure is far above the 33% estimate VA leaders predicted last fall when they began eligibility reassessments for the roughly 20,000 “legacy” participants of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. It also confirms advocates’ complaints in recent months that the assessments — done purportedly to bring consistency and order to the program — were being conducted in a way that would have massively scaled back assistance to combat-wounded veterans who need near-constant at-home care.

On 21 MAR, VA Deputy Secretary Donald Remy announced that the department would halt all dismissals from the program until officials can fully review changes made to the eligibility criteria in recent years. About 33,000 veterans are currently enrolled in the program, designed to support and compensate full-time caregivers providing at-home assistance to severely wounded veterans. The stipends vary based on where veterans live, but generally hover around \$3,000 a month for the most severely wounded individuals and \$1,800 for others in need of around-the-clock care. About 20,000 of the participants are post-9/11 veterans who were admitted to the program before October 2020, when it was expanded to include Vietnam-era veterans. Officials also changed eligibility guidelines at the time, altering definitions and tests for how to determine which veterans were “unable to self-sustain in the community.”

Last fall, VA leaders announced they would review those older participants to see if they still qualified for benefits. About 70% of those cases have been reassessed, with the 90% rejection rate. Those newly ineligible families did not see their stipends end immediately, but were told to expect the financial aid would end by early 2023. Now those plans are on hold. Without the pause, the department had been on pace to dismiss around 18,000 individuals from the program, effectively cutting its participant total in half by early next year.

On 22 MAR, veterans advocates told Senate lawmakers that the experience has been upsetting and demoralizing for the families involved. “In these 90-minute to 120-minute assessments, the veteran has to sit and listen to all of the things he or she can no longer do,” said Andrea Sawyer, an advocacy navigator at the Quality of Life Foundation and the wife of a severely wounded Iraq War veteran. “That takes an emotional toll for some of these folks. We’ve been told for the last several years to build up our veterans, focus on their independence,” Sawyer said. “And then we have an exam that does nothing but tear them down.”

VA officials said the pause in dismissals will not mean a pause in reassessments. About 30% of those legacy caregivers are still awaiting reviews. However, they insisted the work is being done to gather data for future improvements, and no adverse actions will be taken as a result of the

findings. Caregivers who are found eligible for more benefits will be granted those upgrades. VA officials have promised to meet with advocacy groups and other community activists starting next month to develop new eligibility criteria for the program. They also have said they do not expect the recent problems to delay expansion of the program this fall. Currently, only veterans who served before 1976 or after 2001 are eligible for the benefit, but it is scheduled to be open to all veterans starting this October. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 25, 2022 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse

Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2022

Rhode Island – Sarah Jane Cavanaugh of Warwick was arrested on charges of using forged or counterfeited military discharge certificates, wire fraud, fraudulently holding herself out to be a medal recipient with intent to obtain money, property, or other tangible benefit, and aggravated identity theft. Charging documents allege the following:

- Cavanaugh used the personal identifying information of an actual Marine, and falsely claimed that she served in the USMC from 2009-2016; was honorably discharged; achieved the rank of Corporal; and was wounded in action in Iraq/Afghanistan.
- Cavanaugh used an official Veterans Administration (VA) email account, which was issued to her as a VA employee, to purchase and later display on a Marine uniform a Purple Heart and Bronze Star. She had not been awarded either award. In fact, a search of the Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System, a database containing military-service records, provided no records or information pertaining to Cavanaugh.
- Posing as a combat veteran, Cavanaugh contacted “Code of Support,” and collected \$18,472 in financial assistance for mortgage payments, repairs to her home furnace, a gym membership, and for other unspecified bills,
- Posing as a combat veteran diagnosed with cancer related to her military service, Cavanaugh collected approximately \$4,700 from an internet-based fundraising website,
- Claiming to be a Purple Heart and Bronze Star recipient, Cavanaugh collected approximately \$16,000 from a charity that provides therapy for veterans through art programs, and
- Posing as a wounded combat veteran, Cavanaugh collected \$207,000 from the Wounded Warrior organization to pay for groceries and physical therapy sessions.

It is alleged that Cavanaugh schemed to collect hundreds of thousands of dollars in veteran benefits and charitable contributions from organizations that provide monetary aid to veterans in need. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | March 15, 2022 ++]

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Georgia -- According to a multiagency investigation, multiple individuals in Jamaica engaged in a scheme that involved redirecting the monthly benefit payments of veterans and Social Security recipients to alternate bank accounts. The stolen funds were then allegedly loaded onto prepaid credit cards and mailed to coconspirators in the Miami and Atlanta areas. These individuals also participated in telemarketing scams that targeted elderly US citizens, including veterans. One defendant was sentenced in the Southern District of Florida to 78 months of incarceration and restitution of over \$900,000. The VA OIG, Homeland Security Investigations, and US Postal Inspection Service conducted the investigation. To date, 18 coconspirators have been indicted in connection with this scheme, 15 of whom have been sentenced to a combined 637 months of incarceration, 456 months of supervised release, 36 months of probation, and over \$4 million in restitution. The loss to VA is more than \$7 million. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | March 18, 2022 ++]

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Michigan -- From 2002 to 2019, **Terrie Lynn Christian** of Newaygo engaged in a fraudulent scheme that targeted children's benefits programs administered by VA and the Social Security Administration (SSA). This scheme, which involved obtaining benefits for two fictitious children, resulted in government losses of over \$660,000, including approximately \$110,000 for VA. Christian was sentenced in US District Court to 30 months in prison, three years of supervised release, and restitution of over \$660,000. The VA OIG and SSA OIG investigated this case. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | March 23, 2022 ++]

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Texas -- Ten Texas doctors and a healthcare executive have agreed to pay more than \$1.68 million to resolve False Claims Act allegations involving illegal remuneration in violation of the Anti-Kickback Statute and Stark Law. According to a multiagency investigation, from 2015 to 2018, the doctors allegedly received thousands of dollars in illegal remuneration from eight management service organizations (MSOs) in exchange for ordering laboratory tests from Rockdale Hospital doing business as Little River Healthcare, True Health Diagnostics LLC, and Boston Heart Diagnostics Corporation. Little River funded the illegal remuneration to the doctors in the form of volume-based commissions paid to independent contractor recruiters, who used the MSOs to pay numerous doctors for their referrals.

The MSO payments to the doctors were disguised as investment returns but in fact were based on, and offered in exchange for, the doctors' referrals. As part of their settlements, the defendants have agreed to cooperate with the Department of Justice's investigations of other parties involved in the alleged violations of law. To date, a total of 17 doctors and two healthcare executives involved in this scheme have agreed on settlements totaling more than \$2.7 million. The civil settlements were the result of a coordinated effort between the VA OIG, Department of Health and Human Services OIG, Defense Criminal Investigative Service, and the US Attorney's Office

for the Eastern District of Texas. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | March 28, 2022 ++]

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Pennsylvania -- Dr. **Harry Doyle**, a psychiatrist from Philadelphia, and his wife, **Sonya Doyle**, have agreed to pay a total of \$3 million to resolve alleged violations of the False Claims Act. The alleged violations include submitting false billing to the US Department of Labor Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) for psychiatric services that were not provided, as well as upcoding and double-billing patient claims. As part of the settlement, the Doyles have also agreed to be voluntarily excluded from federal healthcare programs for a period of 25 years. This is the largest recovery against a single psychiatrist in the history of the OWCP. A multiagency investigation of Dr. Doyle's practice revealed that from January 2013 through April 2021, the Doyles allegedly billed for services not rendered, some of which occurred when they were not physically present in the United States. This case was investigated by the VA OIG, the Department of Labor OIG, and the United States Postal Service OIG. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | March 28, 2022]

*** Vets ***



Vet Economic Opportunities

House Hearing on Pending Legislation

The House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a hearing to review legislation regarding education, employment, transition, and housing. Proposals included creating permanent policies to protect VA education benefits in cases of national emergency, expanding eligibility of the self-employment track within Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E), and making it easier for veterans facing housing insecurity to receive rental assistance.

In a statement submitted for the record, VFW National Legislative Associate Director Emily DeVito commented, "The COVID-19 pandemic's massive impact on higher education and training, including unforeseen closures and rapid changes to modalities, brought to the forefront the urgent need for permanent legislation that would direct VA in these times of crisis." Legislation discussed included

- H.R. 6458, to amend title 38, United States Code, to eliminate the requirement to specify an effective period of a transfer of Post-9/11 educational assistance to a dependent.

- H.R. 6604, Veterans Eligible to Transfer School (VETS) Credit Act.
- Discussion Draft, to make permanent certain educational assistance benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in the case of changes to courses of education by reason of emergency situations, and for other purposes.
- Discussion Draft, Quality Education for Veterans Act of 2022.
- Draft to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to update the payment system of the Department of Veterans Affairs to allow for electronic fund transfer of educational assistance, administered by the Secretary, to a foreign institution of higher education.
- Draft bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to ensure that a member of the Armed Forces, granted a general discharge under honorable conditions on the sole basis that such member failed to obey a lawful order to receive a vaccine for COVID-19, is eligible for certain educational assistance administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- Draft bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand the eligibility of veterans who may receive self-employment assistance under the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Discussion Draft to amend title 38, United States Code, and the United States Housing Act of 1937, to make certain improvements to the supported housing program for veterans commonly known as “HUD-VASH”
- Discussion Draft to amend title 38, United States Code, to permanently authorize the use of certain funds to improve flexibility in the provision of assistance to homeless veterans, and for other purposes
- Draft Bill, VA Home Loan Transparency and Consumer Protection Act of 2022
- Draft bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to make certain improvement to the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) of the Department of Defense, and for other purposes

Go online to <https://www.vfw.org/advocacy/national-legislative-service/congressional-testimony/2022/3/eo-pending-legislation> to read the testimony or, for a 99 min video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAZG09Yxwt8&t=611s> to watch the hearing. [Source: Weekly VFW Action Corps | March 21, 2022 ++]

Vet Ukraine Support

Update 01: US Veterans Head To Ukraine to Fight, But Faces Hurdles

From an undisclosed location in Ukraine, a former Georgian soldier runs a combined tactical operations center and military training camp that sends U.S. and other foreign fighters to battle Russia. “We are still in the process of recruitment,” Mamuka Mamulashvili told Military Times in a Skype interview. “There are a lot of guys joining us. On the list, there are now about 750 men, mostly from Georgia, and the United Kingdom. We have a lot of Americans.” Mamulashvili

leads the Georgian National Legion, one of several paramilitaries integrated into the Ukrainian armed forces after the War in the Donbas, part of the larger conflict between Russia and Ukraine, began in 2014.

Now, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, some U.S. military veterans eager for a war with what they see as a righteous cause have pledged to come to Ukraine's defense. The Georgian National Legion hopes to relieve the Ukrainian military of some of the logistical burden that comes with organizing overseas recruits. But absorbing the 16,000 foreigners — the number that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy claims have volunteered — will be a challenge.

Flooding conflicts with foreign fighters can animate extremist movements or offer experience to the already radicalized. And though the vast majority of fighters who travel to Ukraine will be well-intentioned, it's not clear how many will be particularly helpful on the battlefield given language and training barriers. Foreigners may be more useful in a propaganda role to signal global unity rather than as a front-line fighting force. Three veterans spoke with Military Times and offered a mix of plans for how they would fight in Ukraine.

Only one intended to join the fledgling International Legion that Ukrainian officials have been promoting. But all three echoed similar concerns about Ukrainian embassies that are slow to process applications and worries about contractual obligations. "The contract with the Ukrainians sounds a little bit more ambiguous — a little more long-term," said a Marine veteran who is traveling now and who hopes to join a unit other than the International Legion. He had connected with a group of like-minded U.S. veterans on Reddit. "They vetted me and put me into a Signal group chat with about 15 people and we've been organizing," said the U.S. veteran, who asked that his name be withheld for this article.

Setting up an international legion is a bold undertaking for a government that, while punching above its weight class in its war with Russia, is nevertheless facing overwhelming odds. Ukraine is trying to screen applicants as fast as possible, Ukrainian Maj. Gen. Borys Kremenestkiy, a military attaché in Washington, D.C., told Military Times. But vetters have to parse out those with criminal records and those who are too old or otherwise unfit for service.

So far, the embassy has received about 6,000 applications, Kremenestkiy said, adding that about half immediately were turned down for various reasons. Of those 3,000, the embassy has approved about 100 people to join Ukraine's International Legion. "It's not surprising that there have been administrative challenges given the scale of foreigners who have responded to this call," said Austin C. Doctor, director of counterterrorism research initiatives at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's NCITE Center. "But from a broader security standpoint, I think it's especially important that the Ukrainian government does its best to create the administrative infrastructure to incorporate these hires into formal units for purposes of monitoring and accountability."

The processing delays have caused some volunteers to grow frustrated. It took one 82nd Airborne Division Army veteran days even to get in touch with the Ukrainian embassy and submit his application, he told Military Times. He received a notification indicating that his application was being reviewed, but was not given a timeline on when it may be approved or denied. “Every hour feels like a day, he said. “Every day feels like a week. At the end of the day, as a combat soldier, what is the rush?” Others are not so patient.

Kremenstkiy said he was aware that some volunteers have been traveling to Ukraine without going through any formal process to join the International Legion. But his goal is to properly vet as many as possible, even if that takes longer than desirable. “I don’t have a big staff to work with and we have other areas, like working with the Pentagon on security assistance,” he said. “That is more important.” “We have to see everyone or talk to everyone,” he said. “So they can try and go on their own, but I have a task to talk to everyone.” While U.S. citizens can go abroad to enlist in a foreign military, they could be in legal trouble if they’re “recruited or hired” in the U.S., which may be why Ukraine is having volunteers sign contracts when they arrive. The Defense Department still has discouraged U.S. citizens from volunteering.

“We still do not believe that Ukraine is a safe place for Americans to go,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters March 7. “We urge them not to go. And if any are still there, we urge them to leave.”

Beyond organizational delays, some U.S. volunteers are uncomfortable committing to fight in Ukraine for the duration of the war, especially without knowing exactly how the end is defined. Corey Wetherholt said he has joined an independent militia over concerns about the ambiguous commitment. The veteran is no stranger to volunteering in foreign war zones. After being administratively separated from the Marine Corps following two years in the infantry, Wetherholt headed to Syria as a volunteer for the People’s Protection Unit, or YPG. After seven months in Syria, he returned to the United States, but before long he was in Iraq with the Sinjar Resistance Units, or YBS.

On his way home from 13 months in Iraq, Wetherholt heard about Russia’s invasion and changed his plans. Once in Ukraine, Wetherholt linked up with other foreigners who served in Iraq and Syria. The group, which he declined to name, plans to go to Kyiv, Ukraine, for paperwork that would show they were operating in the country with the permission of the Ukrainian government and are not Russian forces. “No ideology or politics, just guys who wouldn’t wanna miss out on a just war,” Wetherholt said. “The big one.”

Integrating foreign volunteers will be a challenge if the 16,000 number claimed by Ukraine is accurate, according to Ilmari Kähkö, a Finnish military veteran and an associate professor at the Swedish Defence University in Stockholm, who has researched the volunteer phenomenon in Ukraine. “While some of the volunteers will no doubt contribute to the military effort on the Ukrainian side, many probably won’t have much of an effect,” Kähkö told Military Times. “However, there is a political benefit for Ukraine in receiving volunteers from abroad, as this

makes the Ukrainian cause more relevant in other countries. The propaganda value may be considerable.”

There’s also good reason to be skeptical about any volunteer’s plans that involve fighting for independent groups outside official Ukrainian channels. Kähkö said his Ukrainian contacts doubt such units “can constitute any considerable forces.” And any independent fighters could be forced to join the International Legion or cease activities. The Ukrainian military has greatly increased its command and control in recent years, and any units independent of its efforts present practical problems, Kähkö said — like friendly fire. “This said, one possible explanation for the existence of volunteer units could be red tape,” he explained. “Many foreign volunteers no doubt want to get to the fight fast, and the Ukrainian army might not offer the quickest way to do this.” “Then again, I have already seen photos of Swedish volunteers in Ukrainian gear, so the process seems to be quick.”

Ukraine has a history of volunteer battalions that sprouted up in the early days of the War in the Donbas. In 2019, about 17,000 people from more than 50 countries traveled to participate in the conflict, the Soufan Center nonprofit estimated, most fighting for pro-Russian separatists. Mamulashvili’s Georgian National Legion was organized in 2014 and has served as a clearinghouse for some of those foreigners who fought on the Ukrainian side. The Georgian’s unit officially was integrated into the Ukrainian armed forces in 2016. “We are under control of Ukrainian armed forces,” Mamulashvili said. “We work with several different structures. And we work under their command.” Mamulashvili’s forces have unique insight into integrating foreign fighters that the burgeoning International Legion lacks. “They have no experience in doing such a job. And they’re using our skills,” Mamulashvili said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Kyle Rempfer, Philip Athey & Howard Altman | March 14, 2022 ++]

Vet Colleges

Update 02: Some May Be Tricking Veterans into Taking out Student Loans

A recent federal review found a troubling trend: Veterans reported college advisers had led them to believe the government would cover the cost of their education, only to find out later that student loans would be necessary. So the U.S. Department of Education is warning the nation's colleges not to swindle American veterans, and it's inviting vets who have been deceived to come forward with their experience. The warning, issued 16 MAR, marks one of the first public actions from a newly restarted enforcement unit within the Education Department. That office is meant to safeguard taxpayer money and ensure students get the education they pay for.

Kristen Donoghue, the head of the recently restarted unit, said the bulletin could help prevent the predatory behaviors that may leave some with tens of thousands in debt, but also serves as a reminder that “there’s a cop on the beat.” Borrowers who feel they were misled into taking out

loans should submit a complaint to the Federal Student Aid office which can be done at <https://studentaid.gov/feedback-center>. The Federal Student Aid notice listed several types of allegations from students with connections to the military:

- Students led to think GI Bill benefits would cover all of their educational costs but who then found out they would have to take out loans.
- Students told to sign paperwork who didn't realize they were signing up for loans.
- Students told to fill out loan applications as a backup plan while "being falsely advised" the loans would not be necessary.
- Students pressed to start classes before their GI Bill benefits were verified.
- Students told programs qualified for GI Bill benefits that in reality did not qualify.
- Students told to take out loans to cover costs until their GI Bill benefits were processed, even though they were enrolling in programs not approved for the benefits.
- Students promised a military discount on tuition that didn't exist or that wasn't applied.
- Students receiving bills for loans for which they didn't know they had applied.

The return of the "enforcement unit" comes after former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos had deprioritized the office. Under DeVos, the government also rejected tens of thousands of people seeking financial relief and saying their colleges misled them. The Education Department was then the subject of a class-action lawsuit that remains ongoing. In October, the Biden administration announced it would again create the office and said Donoghue, who previously had worked for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, would lead it.

As of February, the Education Department has sent back nearly \$2 billion to students who were able to prove their schools misled them. Most recently, the agency sent millions of dollars to students who were defrauded by DeVry University and other colleges that have since closed. But the Department still had a backlog of nearly 88,000 applications as of September. [Source: USA TODAY | Chris Quintana | March 18, 2022 ++]

Vet Fugitives

15 thru 31 March 2022

An East Tennessee man who deserted the US Navy in 1976 and stole another man's identity while on the lam will spend the next 25 months behind bars. And when he gets out, the Navy wants to recall him to active duty for some military justice. On March 21, in Greeneville, Senior US District Judge J. Ronnie Greer also sentenced **Jerry Leon Blankenship** to three years of supervised release when he exits federal prison. According to federal records, an active Navy warrant — 8804455 — seeks to try Blankenship at court-martial for desertion, and the US attorney said the military plans to extradite him.

In an agreement he forged with those federal prosecutors on Aug. 24, 2021, Blankenship, 65, of Newport, agreed to plead guilty to two civilian charges: misuse of a Social Security number and fraud with identification documents. He had faced up to seven years in a federal penitentiary and \$500,000 in fines, although the typical sentence runs from 24 to 30 months for the two charges. It all began to unravel for Blankenship in March of 2021, when Randy T. Clark received a message from Walgreens about a COVID-19 vaccination he never received. Clark provided a detective in North Carolina the address the drug chain said the man was using in Newport, Tennessee.

The case was turned over to Sgt. James Knipper of the Tennessee Highway Patrol's Criminal Investigative Division. He found that Blankenship had renewed his Tennessee driver's license using Clark's identity, including his birthdate and Social Security number. And it was the third time Blankenship had done that. Video surveillance from the Walgreens also showed Blankenship got the COVID-19 shot, not Clark, although he used Clark's identity to obtain it. On May 27, 2021, authorities arrested Blankenship and he made a full confession.

Court records reveal that Blankenship walked away from the Navy after completing boot camp. After a failed marriage in the 1980s, he hooked up with a woman he called "Cookie." She was in a child support battle with Clark, and that's how Blankenship obtained his Social Security number. According to court documents, he never formally divorced his wife. Cookie soon left him and Blankenship began dating Chrystal Parker, the estranged daughter of his wife, although Blankenship wasn't her biological or adoptive father.

He and Parker settled in Newport and over the next 26 years raised three children. The couple established a successful home repair business. And Parker and their children and grandchildren apparently never realized that Blankenship was a deserter who had stolen another man's identity until he was arrested. A dozen Cocke County citizens wrote letters to the judge asking for leniency, including a retired soldier and a retired Marine. [Source: <https://coffeeordie.com> | Carl Prine | March 22, 2022 ++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

Elmer Bigelow | WWII



*The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the
MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously*

To
Elmer Bigelow

Ranks and organizations: U.S. Naval Reserve Watertender First Class

Places and dates: USS Fletcher off Corregidor Island, Philippine Islands, Feb 14, 1945

Entered service: Sept. 21, 1942

Born: July 12, 1920 in Hebron, Illinois



Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Elmer C. Bigelow likely knew that rushing into a smoke-filled compartment on a burning ship without any protection wouldn't end well for him. But he also knew the World War II ship's crew would suffer devastating effects if he didn't, so he put his life on the line anyway to save them. For that, he posthumously earned the Medal of Honor.

Bigelow was born on July 12, 1920, to Albert and Verna Bigelow. Sometime after his younger brother, Lester, was born, their parents divorced. Both boys lived with their mother and stepfather in Hebron, Illinois. Bigelow's friends growing up remembered him as a quiet, easy-going boy who liked to hunt and ride his motorcycle. After graduating from Hebron Community High School in 1938, he worked in nearby Woodstock, Illinois, at Alemite Die Casting & Manufacturing. Bigelow's younger brother joined the Navy during that time and survived the bombing of the USS West Virginia during the Pearl Harbor attacks.

The incident likely led to Bigelow's choice to enlist in the Naval Reserve, which he did on Sept. 21, 1942. After training, he reported to the destroyer USS Fletcher, which set sail for the Pacific Theater in October 1943. Bigelow rose in the ranks from a firefighter to a water tender, which meant he was responsible for tending the fires and boilers in the steam ship's engine room. At some point, Bigelow got to spend two hours with his similarly deployed brother as their ships met to refuel in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, according to an article in the (Woodstock, Illinois) Northwest Herald. That's the last time the siblings saw each other.

On Feb. 14, 1945, the Fletcher found itself in battle off Corregidor Island in the Philippines. Bigelow was standing on the topside of the ship when an onshore 6-inch Japanese gun fired, hitting

the Fletcher and penetrating its lower decks. The shell exploded into fragments, which killed several men, hit a gun magazine and set fire to several powder kegs in an ammunition room. Knowing that the next few minutes were crucial to keeping the ship from being destroyed, Bigelow jumped into action. He picked up a pair of fire extinguishers and rushed below deck to try to quell the growing flames. There was no time to spare, so Bigelow bypassed putting on a rescue-breathing apparatus and dropped into the magazine hatch despite the flames and blinding smoke that billowed out. According to his Medal of Honor citation, the burning powder smoke seared his lungs with every breath, so he forced himself to quickly put out the fires and cool the cases and bulkheads.

Bigelow made it back out of the compartment, but the damage to his lungs was done. The 24-year-old succumbed to his injuries the next day. According to the Northwest Herald newspaper, Lt. Arthur H. Murray Jr. wrote to Bigelow's mother to inform her of the loss. Murray assured her that her son wasn't in pain and fell into a coma before he died. The young sailor disregarded his own safety for the greater good. His courage and actions kept the ship's damaged magazine from exploding — a disaster that would have left the Fletcher at the mercy of the pounding Japanese guns on Corregidor. "It was your son's devotion to duty and his quick thinking that saved the ship and the lives of many of his shipmates," Murray wrote.

For his sacrifice, Bigelow earned the Medal of Honor. The award was presented to his mother, stepfather and brother on Feb. 15, 1946 — one year to the day after he died — during a ceremony at Great Lakes Naval Base. Bigelow was initially buried overseas, but his family had him repatriated to the U.S. after the war was over. The fallen hero was buried in Linn-Hebron Cemetery in his hometown on Nov. 2, 1948. Bigelow's name has lived on. In 1957, the destroyer USS Bigelow was commissioned. A residence hall at Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base (now Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story) in Norfolk, Virginia, was named after him in 1974. To this day, Bigelow Avenue runs through his hometown. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | February 14, 2022 ++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

Robert Dunlap | WWII



The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the

MEDAL OF HONOR

To

Robert H. Dunlap

Ranks and organizations: U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Captain, 2d Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, 5th Marine Division

Places and dates: Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands, February 20 - 21, 1945

Entered service: May 1942

Born: Oct. 19, 1920 in Abingdon, Illinois



Marine Corps Maj. Robert Hugo Dunlap was one of about 70,000 Marines who landed on the shores of Iwo Jima in late February 1945. At the time, neither he nor his compatriots knew how fierce the fight to overtake the strategic island would be, but he knew he had a job to do. Like many others in the battle, Dunlap did his job with uncommon valor, and that earned him the Medal of Honor.

Dunlap was born on Oct. 19, 1920, to William and Leona Dunlap. He had a younger brother named Harold, and they grew up in Abingdon, Illinois. Dunlap was an active teen who played football and basketball and did track during high school. After graduation in 1938, he went to Monmouth College in Monmouth, Illinois, where he majored in economics and business administration. Dunlap continued to do track and play football while there. In fact, according to Jeff Ranklin, a historian at Monmouth College, he had been offered a contract by the Philadelphia Eagles, but World War II got in the way.

On March 5, 1942, Dunlap joined the Marine Corps Reserve, but he wasn't called to active duty until he graduated from Monmouth in May 1942. After attending candidate's class, he received his commission on July 18, 1942, then went to parachute training school in San Diego. He was assigned to the 3rd Parachute Battalion in December 1942. The unit was eventually sent to the Pacific. By December 1943, Dunlap was the leader of a platoon that was pinned down by heavy Japanese fire on Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. Despite Dunlap's shy and quiet nature, his commanding officers said he exposed himself to the heavy fire and rallied his men to regain lost ground. For his leadership and courage, he was awarded a letter of commendation from famed Navy Adm. William Halsey.

Dunlap returned to the U.S. in March 1944 to join the newly formed 5th Marine Division, only to be deployed to the Pacific again that summer. On Oct. 2, 1944, Dunlap was promoted to captain and took charge of Company C, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines. By February 1945, U.S. forces had slowly maneuvered their way closer to a full-scale invasion of the Japanese mainland. Before they could do that, though, they needed to capture the tiny island of Iwo Jima, which could put U.S. bombers in striking distance of Japan. Marines and some naval forces began landing on the island on Feb. 19, 1945. Dunlap's unit was in one of the first waves.

On Feb. 20, Dunlap led his troops from low ground toward the island's steep cliffs. The Japanese, who were entrenched in underground tunnels and caves, pounded them with artillery, mortars, rifles and machine guns. Company C steadily inched forward until the onslaught was too great to continue, but Dunlap refused to have his progress halted. He pushed ahead of his men, crawling about 200 yards until he made it to the base of a cliff about 50 yards from the Japanese lines. From there he was able to locate the enemy's gun positions. He then crawled back to his unit and passed that vital information on to supporting artillery and naval gunfire units.

Dunlap spent the next two days and nights working without sleep to direct supporting fire upon the enemy, often putting himself in harm's way to do so. According to his Medal of Honor citation, he "skillfully directed a smashing bombardment against the almost impregnable Japanese positions despite numerous obstacles and heavy Marine casualties." Dunlap's leadership inspired his men during a critical phase of the battle. His efforts slowed the Japanese defense enough for Marines to eventually move forward and take Mount Suribachi, where the iconic photo of Marines raising the U.S. flag was taken on Feb. 23, 1945.

On Feb. 26, as fighting continued, Dunlap was wounded in the left hip. He was evacuated to Guam and then the U.S., where he spent several months in and out of hospitals. For much of that recovery, Dunlap was in a full body cast. Meanwhile, after five intense weeks of fighting, U.S. troops finally declared Iwo Jima secured on March 26. But the win came at a huge price. The Marines suffered more than 25,000 casualties, including nearly 7,000 dead. Of the nearly 300 men Dunlap led onto Iwo Jima, fewer than half survived the first four days of fighting, Rankin said.

On Dec. 18, 1945, Dunlap and five other service members attended a White House ceremony to receive the Medal of Honor from President Harry S. Truman. In total, Dunlap and 26 other men earned the medal for their actions at Iwo Jima — more than any other battle in U.S. history. Just a few days before receiving his medal, Dunlap married his college sweetheart, Mary Louise Frantz. They went on to have two children. Dunlap's daughter, Donna Butler, told the Galesburg Register-Mail newspaper in 2014 that after the war, her dad spent about 18 years as a farmer back in Abingdon before becoming a schoolteacher. He continued his work as an educator until he retired in 1982.

Dunlap died on March 24, 2000, in Monmouth, Illinois, at age 79. He was buried in the town's Warren County Memorial Park. Dunlap was a member of the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution along with his cousin, Navy Vice Adm. James Bond Stockdale. Stockdale,

who grew up in Abingdon alongside Dunlap, also earned a Medal of Honor for his actions in 1969 during the Vietnam War. In 2014, a veterans memorial in Abingdon was dedicated to the two men. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | February 21, 2022 ++]

Vet Lawsuits | Michael White

USN Vet Sues Iran for \$1B Alleging Jail Torture



A U.S. Navy veteran who was jailed in Iran for nearly two years sued the Iranian government on 17 MAR for \$1 billion, alleging that he was kidnapped, held hostage and tortured. The federal lawsuit describes in unsparing detail the “prolonged and continuous” abuse that Michael White says he suffered behind bars, including being beaten and punched, whipped on his feet, deprived of food and drink, and pressured to falsely confess that he was a spy for the U.S. government. “Mr. White endured this trauma for nearly two years, never knowing if or when he would be released and reunited with his family, repeatedly promised that his conditions would improve soon, only to be crushed psychologically when they did not,” the lawsuit states.

The allegations in the complaint mirror the claims made by White in a 156-page manuscript that he wrote behind bars and that was later obtained by The Associated Press. The 31-page complaint traces White’s travel to Iran, saying he was lured there in the summer of 2018 by a woman he considered his girlfriend so that he could be kidnapped by Iranian government agents and put in prison. He was charged with insulting Iran’s Supreme Leader and cooperating with the U.S. government against Iran — charges the lawsuit says were fabricated — and sentenced without a trial to 10 years in prison.

The suit also alleges that White’s imprisonment was an effort by Iran to extract concessions from the Trump administration and to “manufacture additional leverage for diplomacy” in the aftermath of Iran’s withdrawal in 2018 from a landmark nuclear deal with the U.S. Diplomats are currently trying to salvage a deal that would bring Iran back into compliance with limits on its

nuclear program. The lawsuit was filed in federal court in Washington, D.C. Besides White, other plaintiffs include his mother and two brothers.

It was not immediately clear if Iran planned to formally respond to the complaint, or if it had a lawyer who might enter an appearance in the case. If Iran does not respond to the allegations, a judge could enter a default judgment on White's behalf, enabling White to collect damages from a fund set up for victims of acts of state-sponsored terrorism. The State Department arranged for his release in June 2020, flying him back to the U.S. as part of a deal that spared additional prison time for an American-Iranian doctor convicted in the U.S. of sanctions violations. White later made a videotaped appearance at that summer's Republican National Convention in a segment with former President Donald Trump and other hostages and detainees freed during the Trump administration. [Source: The Associated Press | Eric Tucker | March 17, 2022 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule

As of APR 1, 2022

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\vetterans 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\vetterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, Milton.Bell126@gmail.com. [Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | March 31, 2022 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs

Scheduled As of APR 1, 2022



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 | March 31, 2022 ++]

Veteran State Benefits

New York

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

- Veteran Homes
- Financial Assistance
- Employment
- Education
- Recreation
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing
- Burial
- Taxation
- Women Vet Program
- Homeless/Low Income Vet Assistance
- Other

[Source: <https://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/new-york-state-veterans-benefits.html#2> | April 2022 ++]

*** Vet Legislation ***



VET Bill Progress

16-31 MAR 2022

The following was discussed during the 16 MAR House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health hearing regarding pending legislation. To watch the hearing go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dl0D8fdOrjc&t=565s>:

H.R. 4993, Veterans Emergency Care Reimbursement Act of 2021

Legislation, which states that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reimburses veterans for a third-party copayment of more than one hundred dollars for non-VA emergency treatment. This means if an eligible veteran seeks care at a non-VA emergency room and has a copayment exceeding one hundred dollars, VA will reimburse the funds.

While this legislation is a step in the right direction, VA needs to do the right thing and reimburse in full. It continues to disregard the court rulings of *Wolfe v. Wilkie* in 2019, and *Staab v. Shulkin* in 2016. The courts ruled that the Emergency Care Fairness Act of 2009 excludes VA from denying reimbursement of non-VA emergency expenses. VA needs to correct this error before more veterans are harmed financially by a non-VA emergency room visit bill.

H.R. 5738, Lactation Spaces for Veteran Moms Act

According to an article published in the Journal of Human Lactation, seventy-five percent of women veterans paired with a VA medical center's maternity care coordinator were still breastfeeding at four weeks postpartum. Embarrassment about nursing in public and a lack of public lactation spaces are barriers to breastfeeding that may require women to limit activities outside the home, like doctor appointments, or even discontinue breastfeeding altogether. Discontinuation of breastfeeding can impact a household's financials with the added cost of formula. Another consideration is the increased risk of infection and cancers for both mother and child. Therefore, providing a private area for lactation or nursing benefits everyone. This legislation to require a designated lactation space at VA medical centers.

We would like for these spaces to be accessible only to female veterans and visiting public, and to be equipped with electrical outlets. This public lactation space shall not replace a VA employees' lactation space, which is required by law, and is equipped with a sink and a closely located locked refrigerator for milk storage. Retaining a designated employee area eliminates awkward situations or inconvenience when an employee needs to use the space during a specified breastfeeding break time and removes the requirement of a locked refrigerator nearby. In addition, not all insurance plans, like TRICARE, cover a battery-charged breast pump. Therefore, the lactation space needs electricity. In the interim, each VA facility can designate a public, secured exam room in a central location that meets all requirements including proper signage.

In October 2019, the Orlando Veterans Affairs Medical Center opened a functional lactation room for both nursing and lactation for use by female veterans, family members, and guests. This is a step in the right direction to benefit both mothers and babies who come through the doors of VA facilities.

H.R. 5754, Patient Advocate Tracker Act

This legislation would require VA to create an information technology system for veterans to file and track a complaint through the patient advocate program. Building transparency and communication during a frustrating and vulnerable time for veterans, family members, and friends increases trust in VA and the program.

For the past eight years, the VFW has partnered with Student Veterans of America (SVA) to select student veterans from across the country to research and advocate for improving an issue that is important to veterans. VFW-SVA Fellow and Grand Valley State University graduate Cameron Zbikowski focused his semester-long research proposal on improving VA's patient advocate program. While VA uses the patient advocate tracking system (PATs) for internal tracking and reporting by VA, veterans have no way to check the complaint status themselves without further burdening the patient advocate with this task. Cameron's proposal was built on the premise that if the technology is out there to track a pizza from order to doorstep, why is a veteran unable to do the same with a complaint filed with a VA patient advocate? The VFW believes this vital upgrade to PATs will instill faith and trust in veterans regarding VA. Allowing

veterans or family members the opportunity to track complaints gives hope that their voices are not unheard.

H.R. 5819, Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act

This proposal increases the structural alterations amount. The need for building materials, such as lumber for a wheelchair ramp and other durable medical equipment that allows veterans to remain in their homes, increased significantly over the past two years. By VA increasing the amount covered or reimbursed, veterans are provided the opportunity to eliminate potential hazards in their homes and create safe environments without added financial burden. A navigable home lessens the risk of falls, accidents, and injuries, while allowing independence and facilitating home assistance if needed.

H.R. 5941, Fairness for Rural Veterans Act of 2021

The intent of this legislation is to add State homes in rural areas with a significant need for beds to fourth in order of the State home grant priority list. The focus needs to be on prioritizing the State homes based on significance of needs, regardless of the nearest State home. This language would prioritize State homes by location, rural versus urban, even if they have the same need for beds. Prioritizing a State home facility because of its location over a facility that has greater need leaves veterans needing placement without available beds.

H.R. 6647, Reimbursement for Emergency Treatment Furnished To Veterans by VCC Program

The legislation would amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements relating to the eligibility of veterans to receive reimbursement for emergency treatment furnished through the Veterans Community Care program, and for other purposes. Closing gaps in access to care is critical, especially if it is within the first few months of newly established care, such as with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). VA's last update on access to care in February 2022 indicates that scheduling new patient primary care appointments within fifty miles of Washington, D.C., ranged from twenty days to eighty days. A veteran should not have to worry or choose to seek non-VA emergency care for up to eighty days because of the inability to pay the bill or uncertainty about VHA reimbursement. This circumstance potentially adds financial stress to a veteran who may have severe physical or psychological conditions. The VFW supports this proposal to eliminate the gap of VA coverage if a veteran requires non-VA emergency care within the first sixty days of enrollment in VHA prior to their first appointment with a VA provider.

H.R. 6823, Elizabeth Dole Home & Community Based Services for Veterans & Caregivers

As life expectancy continues to increase, so must life quality, and for many veterans that means having home health care as a choice. The VFW continues to advocate for long-term care options as stated in our legislative priority goals and resolution, which is why we support this proposal. Home health care benefits the veteran, caregiver, and VA in many ways. Caregivers relieve VA of the necessity to place veterans in institutional long-term care. Even though veterans may require assistance with daily activities, being at home offers independence and familiarity, which

is essential for veterans in the beginning stages of dementia. This freedom to remain in their homes needs to be supported by VA services and funding, while not financially stressing veterans and their families.

A Kaiser Family Foundation report released in February 2022 states that almost twenty-five percent of individuals who died from COVID-19 lived in long-term care settings. People living in nursing homes most often cohabitate with two beds per room separated by a curtain and share a bathroom, increasing the likelihood of becoming ill or dying. By residing at home, a veteran's risk of exposure to infectious diseases decreases.

This bill contains many ways VA would expand home and community services for veterans and their caregivers. VA would be required to partner with a state's Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) program to ensure veteran care is coordinated. All medical centers would have the Veteran Directed Care Program, Home Maker and Home Health Aide Program, Home-Based Primary Care Program, and Purchased Skilled Home Care Program to support and provide veterans a non-institutional care setting. Caregivers would receive a warm handoff to home and community service programs if they are denied or discharged from the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). By closing the gap, caregivers would be more aware of other VA programs that provide caregiver support besides PCAFC. VA would pilot a program to address locations with home health aide shortages. Offering both medical and financial support would make the decision to keep the veteran at home easier.

Discussion Draft, Long-Term Care Veterans Choice Act

This legislation would require VA to cover the expenses to reside in a medical foster home for any veteran eligible for nursing home care. The bill also creates a system for VA to track veterans' interest and denials to be placed in a medical foster home, care expense responsibility, the number of medical foster home applicants, and VA's workload to run the program. Veterans residing in medical foster homes are provided a home environment while receiving VA Home Base Primary Care.

As the veteran population ages, the number of individuals requiring daily assistance increases. VA needs to offer more alternatives to extended care. According to a Government Accountability Office report from 2019, VA provided nursing home care for over 39,000 veterans. VA also projected that number to increase by sixteen percent. It is anticipated that Vietnam War veterans will comprise the largest segment of this population. An increase in this population means an increase in its cost of care. A VA-funded study in 2019 concluded that medical foster homes cost seventy-one dollars less per day than community nursing homes. In addition, twenty-seven percent of veterans living in community nursing homes are willing to pay out of pocket to live in medical foster homes. Veterans prefer to live in a home environment with caretakers.

A home environment improves a person's physical and mental well-being. Veterans in medical foster homes are more protected from contagious diseases than in institutional facilities. According to a 2019 issue of Health Services Research, veterans living in a community home

have a twelve percent higher mortality rate than veterans residing in a medical foster home. Allowing veterans to choose to live in a medical foster home is a cost-effective solution that better their well-being. It is a win-win for VA, veterans, and medical foster home caregivers.

[Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | March 21, 2022 ++]

DoD Housing Program

Update 06: H.R.7144 | Occupant Feedback Tool

On 17 MAY Rep. Thompson, Glenn [R-PA-15] introduced **H.R.7144**, a bill to direct the Secretary of Defense to develop a feedback tool for use by members of the Armed Forces and their spouses to identify, rate, and compare housing, and for other purposes. For those plagued by ongoing military housing-related health and safety problems such as mold, this bill would provide an urgently needed platform to voice concerns and seek resolution. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | March 28, 2022 ++]

Reserve Benefits

Update 06: H.R.7041/S.1291 | Record of Military Service for Members

U.S. Rep. Chris Pappas of New Hampshire is part of a group of lawmakers that introduced the bipartisan bill H.R.7041, **Record of Military Service for Members of the Armed Forces Act of 2022**, to help National Guard and Reserve members receive their benefits upon retirement or completion of service. It was referred to the House Committee on Armed Services 9 MAR. A particular form is frequently required by the Department of Veterans Affairs, other benefits organizations and private sector institutions to certify qualifications for benefits after completion of service. Pappas and other sponsors of the bill said it can be difficult and confusing for both the VA and servicemembers to prove all service periods because of the way the form is drafted. Plus, there is no single form used by the Reserves or the National Guard that is similar.

The bill would update the main form and provide all servicemembers with proof of service that will consolidate all service periods. It would allow them to apply for all entitled benefits while reducing confusion. “Providing all those who have served our country the same record of their service, one of the most valuable documents for a veteran to possess, is essential to ensuring equitable access to benefits following their service,” Pappas, a Democrat, said in a statement. A similar bill, S.1291, has been introduced in the Senate.

The bill is supported by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Reserve Organization of America, National Guard Association of the United States, and the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States. [Source: Associated Press | Chris Pappas PR | March 9, 2022 ++]

Military Spouse Employment

Update 09: S. 3909/H.R.2974 | Military Spouse Hiring Act

A bill designed to reduce the staggering unemployment rate among military spouses took a major step forward this week with its introduction in the Senate by Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) alongside Sens. John Boozman (R-Ark.), Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.), and Mike Rounds (R-S.D.). The **Military Spouse Hiring Act (S. 3909)**, the Senate companion to H.R. 2974, would expand the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) to create a new target group for military spouses, whose jobless rate has remained between 22% and 24% for over a decade.

Congress established the WOTC in 1996 to incentivize businesses to hire members of select target groups who face significant barriers to employment. There are currently 10 target groups, including qualified veterans, ex-felons, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. Employers who take advantage of WOTC receive a tax credit equal to 40% of up to \$6,000 of wages paid to, or incurred on behalf of, an individual from one of the target groups in their first year of employment who performs at least 400 hours of work for that employer.

Military-mandated moves every two or three years have a significant impact on a spouse's ability to find and maintain employment. Additionally, employed spouses often see their résumés discarded by future hiring managers due to the sporadic nature of work experience (different locations and jobs) and gaps in employment history resulting from short assignments (a school, for example). Reducing the high unemployment and underemployment rates among military spouses will take a multipronged approach:

- **Programs and Resources**: DoD must maintain and expand programs and resources focused on enhancing professional development, upskilling, and education.
- **Licensure Portability**: The Defense-State Liaison Office must continue to develop interstate compacts for the multiple professions requiring licenses or certifications. The licensure/certification fee reimbursement program is a positive step toward addressing fees associated with PCS moves.
- **Incentivized Hiring**: Businesses are reluctant to hire military spouses due to the short time they typically reside in one location. Including military spouses as a target group under WOTC is an important policy lever to address this reluctance.

MOAA continues to work closely with colleagues at the National Military Family Association and Hiring Our Heroes to increase awareness of this important legislation – one more tool to address the military spouse unemployment rate. With nearly a third of servicemembers

considering leaving the service because of concerns with spouse employment, this is not just an issue of family financial well-being — it's a recruitment and retention issue. MOAA is asking readers to contact their lawmakers and ask them to support the Military Spouse Hiring Act. Towards this the following suggested email/letter is provided for your use in doing that:

o-o-O-o-o-

SubJ: Support the Military Spouse Hiring Act to Address High Rates of Unemployment

Dear Sen. _____

I am writing to ask you to co-sponsor the Military Spouse Hiring Act, a bill to address the high rate of military spouse unemployment.

According to DoD's 2019 Active Duty Spouse Survey, military spouses face a staggering unemployment rate, over five times the national unemployment rate. Addressing the decade-long high unemployment among military spouses will take a multipronged approach. In addition to resources and programs supporting professional development and efforts to reduce barriers to employment for those in licensed professions, the establishment of a target group for military spouses under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit is a necessary measure to ensure spouses have employment opportunities no matter where the military sends their servicemember.

Military spouse unemployment not only impacts the financial well-being of military families, but is also a retention issue. Nearly one-third of servicemembers cite concerns with spouse employment as part of their decision to leave the service. As your constituent, I urge you to co-sponsor the Military Spouse Hiring Act and ensure it is either passed as standalone legislation or included in an end-of-year tax package.

*Sincerely,
Your Name
Your Address*

VA Breast Cancer Care

Update 02: H.R.4794/ S.2533 | The MAMMO Act

On 23 MAR the U.S. Senate unanimously passed bipartisan, bicameral legislation to expand veterans' access to high-quality breast cancer screening and lifesaving cancer care. This legislation now moves to the House of Representatives for consideration and needs your help once again to urge lawmakers to pass this important legislation for women veterans into law.

One of every eight women will have invasive breast cancer during her lifetime. Companion legislation, H.R. 4794 and S. 2533, the **Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options (MAMMO) for Veterans Act**, would improve breast health programs and services available to veterans enrolled for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care. Because

women veterans are a minority population within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), they must often rely on community partners for gender-specific health services including their breast health. In 2020, one third of all gender-specific cancer treatment and screening for women veterans using VHA took place in the community, and VA does not expect that proportion of care to change in the near future.

Breast health is essential to a woman's overall health, yet there are often barriers to accessing these vital services. According to the VA's most recent budget summary fewer than half of VA's women patients received gender-specific care in fiscal year 2020—these numbers are particularly low (13%) for senior women veterans who are at the highest risk of certain gender-specific cancers, including breast cancer. In addition, only about 79% of VA's medical centers had a full or part-time breast health coordinator, which can hamper access to community mammography services. Anecdotal research also indicates that women receiving care in the community often report dissatisfaction with communication about eligibility for services, scheduling of timely appointments and getting results of completed diagnostic work. These findings suggest the need for a more strenuous breast health effort in VA.

The MAMMO Act would improve mammography services for veterans by requiring the VA to develop a strategic plan for breast imaging services and establishing a tele-mammography pilot program in states without VA mammography services and in locations where the provision of such services is not feasible. The bill would also require VHA to upgrade all mammography equipment to three-dimensional imaging and to study the availability of genetic testing for the breast cancer gene for veterans. These requirements, in addition to studies and increased partnerships with designated providers within the National Cancer Institute network and the Department of Defense should help improve access to high-quality breast cancer care for all women veterans.

DAV is asking readers to either use the following prepared message or their own to email or write their Representative urging them to cosponsor and support H.R. 2916.

o-o-O-o-o-

Subj: Please Support Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options for Veterans Act

Dear Rep _____,

I urge you to cosponsor and support H.R. 4794, the Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options (MAMMO) for Veterans Act.

The MAMMO Act would improve mammography services in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) by requiring the Secretary to develop a strategic plan for breast imaging services and establish a tele-mammography pilot program in states without VA mammography services and in locations where the provision of such services is not feasible. The bill would also require VA to upgrade all mammography equipment to three-dimensional imaging and to study the availability of genetic testing for the breast cancer gene for veterans. These provisions, in addition to required studies and increased partnerships with designated providers within the National Cancer Institute

network and the Department of Defense, should help to improve access to high-quality breast cancer care for all women veterans.

VA is making progress, but too many women veterans lack access to quality breast health services and breast cancer care. According to the VA's most recent budget summary, fewer than half of VA's women patients received gender-specific care in fiscal year 2020—these numbers are particularly low (13%) for senior women veterans who are at the highest risk of certain gender-specific cancers, including breast cancer. In addition, only 79% of VA medical centers had mammography coordinators which can hamper women's access to community care in centers that lack on-site mammography services. These findings suggest new focus on improving breast health for veterans using VA is needed. H.R. 4794, the MAMMO Act, includes provisions that will help improve the quality and access to services for women veterans who rely upon VA their health care.

Please let me know of your intentions regarding this important legislation.

Thank you for your support of the nation's women veterans.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Address

[Source: Disabled American Veterans | Andrew Marshall | March 24, 2022 ++]

Congressional Resources

Member's Contact Info & Vet Bill Status

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, asking them questions, or seeking their assistance:

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

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>. Note that anyone can sign up and use MOAA's Legislative Action Center at <https://moaa.quorum.us/issueareas>. You do not have to be a member.



Army Recruiting

Update 17: Study Finds Older Recruits Would Help Deal With Shortages

The U.S. Army, faced with an increasingly difficult recruiting environment, should target older Americans for service rather than focusing almost exclusively on high schoolers and recent graduates, an Army-commissioned survey said. “In the coming years, devoting more resources toward recruiting older individuals may help in the Army’s effort to reach its targeted end-strength goals,” the Rand Corp. think tank said in a report released this week. The study, which focuses on ways to attract more people over the age of 21, comes as the military grapples with trying to win new members in the midst of historically low unemployment. A strong job market, combined with higher numbers of people ineligible for service because of obesity and substance abuse, means the Army must find new strategies, Rand said.

The study was commissioned after the Army in 2018 missed its recruiting goal for the first time since 2005, falling short of its target of 76,500 by about 6,500 soldiers, or around 8.5%. Although the Army has subsequently met targets, it’s goals have been “substantially reduced,” Rand said. Recruits who are older than 21, as a group, score higher on qualification tests, Rand found. After completing basic combat training, older recruits also are more likely to complete their first-term contract, to be promoted and to reenlist for an additional term. “During interviews, recruiters noted that older recruits are typically more committed than young recruits once they become involved in the recruiting process,” Rand said. “That is, they are less likely than younger recruits to wash out or lose interest.”

Older soldiers make up the smallest part of the enlisted ranks. Data from 2002-2017 show those between the ages of 22 and 24 make up 16 % of the enlisted ranks while those between the ages of 25 and 35 account for 12 %. Meanwhile, those 21 and under make up 71 % of the enlisted force. While older people represent a potential growth area for Army recruiting, there are obstacles. For starters, there is the challenge of identifying and talking to people who may be interested in service but who have left school. Developing a plan for engaging with older recruits remotely is one possibility, the study said. “In the long term and in a post pandemic world, virtual recruiting could help mitigate the challenges of finding physical locations where large numbers of both younger and older individuals congregate,” the Rand report said.

Incentives also should be considered, such as expanding the Army Loan Repayment Program, since many possible recruits are likely to have some form of college debt. Also, older recruits are more likely to need waivers to join since past drug offenses are more common, as are health issues, such as poor eyesight or hearing. Finding a more streamlined process for handling waivers in a timely manner could make a difference in getting older recruits into the Army, the study said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | John Vandiver | March 17, 2022++]

Navy Hawaii Fuel Leak

Update 04: Shuttering Red Hill Impact on Fueling the Fleet



Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's announcement this month that the Defense Department would defuel and close down the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, was a step toward ending a months-long ordeal in which thousands of military families saw fuel leak into their tap water. But while the Pentagon's shuttering of Red Hill seeks to end the water crisis, it also raises questions about how a Navy increasingly focused on war in the West Pacific will fuel the fleet.

The 20 Red Hill tanks were built into a mountain ridge in 1943, and the 25-story-high containers can collectively hold a quarter-million gallons of fuel. They also sit 100 feet above an aquifer that hundreds of thousands of Oahu residents rely upon for water. Officials have blamed the fuel leak that has affected more than 9,000 Army, Navy and Air Force households on an "operator error" in November. Austin's 7 MAR statement announcing the closure notes that the military is already moving toward more distributed refueling options, and that a centralized fuel hub like Red Hill "makes a lot less sense now" than it did 79 years ago.

"The distributed and dynamic nature of our force posture in the Indo-Pacific, the sophisticated threats we face, and the technology available to us demand an equally advanced and resilient fueling capability," Austin said. "To a large degree, we already avail ourselves of dispersed fueling at sea and ashore, permanent and rotational. We will now expand and accelerate that strategic distribution." To be sure, there are plenty of Defense Logistics Agency fuel points and options for gassing up from Japan to Singapore and Australia, according to Bradley Martin, a retired Navy

surface warfare officer and current director of the RAND Corporation's National Security Supply Chain Institute.

But should a war break out, all those links in the refueling chain will be targeted, and Red Hill is a well-fortified and hard-to-replace position for storing massive amounts of fuel. "It's going to complicate how the joint force would deal with a contingency," Martin said. "They'll have to come up with some sort of alternative to keep the supply of fuel going in the event a war should start. That's going to be difficult." Austin has given Navy and Defense Logistics Agency leadership until May 31 to come up with a plan for "safe and expeditious defueling" of Red Hill, to be completed in a year.

While the Pentagon will likely assess putting more fuel afloat via continuously underway tankers to resupply the West Pacific, Martin said he thinks the options for another mass fuel storage site in Hawaii will be "fairly limited." "There are aboveground tanks, those will be helpful for storage on a day-to-day basis, but when we start worrying about things being attacked, that's going to probably be something we'd rather not deal with," he said. "It's all going to make the war in the Western Pacific, should it occur, more complicated." Building another Red Hill-type facility in Hawaii is likely out of the question because of costs and environmental studies that could take a generation to resolve, said Martin, who called the shuttering of Red Hill "inevitable." "You can't dump fuel into the drinking water of a major city and expect there not to be consequences," he said. "Now that it has happened, they're going to have to figure out a way to deal with it."

The United States dodged a bullet when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, because they did not strike the aboveground fuel storage there, and that's why building Red Hill underground was of such importance back then, according to Mark Cancian, a retired Marine Corps colonel and senior advisor with the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "If the Japanese had gone after the fuel farm, it would have made operations in the Pacific much more difficult," Cancian said. Cancian questioned the efficacy of having a bunch of afloat fuel tankers bobbing in the Pacific should war with China break out, but he added that there's already "a broad recognition" that supply lines in general would be vulnerable in such a situation.

While the November fuel leak remains under investigation, Red Hill may also offer the Pentagon and Navy a tough lesson about the perils of putting off infrastructure maintenance. "That type of maintenance is typically an easy thing to defer, because you don't necessarily see the disaster until it happens," Martin said. "A quick look at the Navy's budget execution will tell you that base operating support, that type of stuff, has been underfunded and we're seeing the consequences." The Sierra Club alleges that the Red Hill facility has suffered at least 73 leaks since it was built, though the Navy denies this, the Honolulu Civil Beat reported in December.

The Hawaii Department of Health recommended that the Navy implement groundwater monitoring wells and leak detection systems back in 2008, and 27,000 gallons of fuel escaped from one tank in 2014, Honolulu Civil Beat reported. "If things aren't correctly maintained, eventually they're going to fail in a way that is unfortunate and is going to create a crisis," Martin said. "And

that’s sort of what happened here.” Defense officials are asking for a \$1 billion fund for expenses related to the fuel-tainted water in Hawaii — from continuing needs of military families, to draining the fuel storage tanks and more cleanup as part of the Fiscal Year 2023 budget request released this week.

The new “Red Hill Recovery Fund” asked is in addition to the \$1 billion that Congress has already provided to deal with the effects of the fuel leak DoD Comptroller Michael J. McCord, said during a 28 MAR press briefing. McCord said the \$1 billion investment represents the commitment by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin “to do the right thing by our military families and our neighbors in Hawaii.” [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | March 29, 2022 ++]

Switchblade Drones

Single Use Weapons Being Used in Ukraine

President Joe Biden is ramping up efforts to help Ukraine fight back amid Russia’s invasion, announcing a new and extensive package 16 MAR he said would “provide unprecedented assistance” to the country. The increase in military aid includes a delivery of 100 Switchblade drones, small and precise weapons packed with explosives that are able to strike targets in “kamikaze” fashion, according to a U.S. official.



Q: What are Switchblade drones?

A: They are small, unmanned aircraft that are launched from a tube, and that experts say are capable of inflicting significant damage. According to its manufacturer, the drones can cruise at around 65 mph and come fitted with cameras and GPS systems. They are single-use, which means they explode after striking their target and are not recoverable after they have been launched. The Switchblades also have a “wave-off” feature so that operators can abort a mission if civilians appear near the target or if the enemy withdraws.

The drones have blade-like wings that emerge when the device is launched. Switchblade drones are cheaper than most U.S. drones, and come in two sizes, according to AeroVironment, the manufacturer. The Switchblade 300 model weighs about five pounds, flies up to 15 minutes at a time, and is designed to be carried in a backpack, assisting small infantry units tracking the Russians’ movements.

The Switchblade 600, by comparison, weighs about 50 pounds, flies up to 40 minutes and is known as a “loitering missile” that can target armored vehicles. It is not yet clear which version the United States will be sending Ukraine. AeroVironment’s switchblade drones were first used in Afghanistan against the Taliban in response to 9/11, according to the company website. In a statement earlier this month, the firm said that it stood ready to help Ukraine “win against the Russian military and strategically deter future aggression.”

Q: How do Switchblade drones work?

A: “The tube is set up like a little mortar on the ground,” Steve Gitlin, who served as AeroVironment’s Chief Marketing Officer, said during a 2020 interview in which he described the product. “Using the ground control system, the operator launches it. It exits the tube. Its wings spring open. Its propeller spins up, and it starts flying in the direction the operator wants it to and streaming live video back to that operator, viewable on the screen in the middle of that hand-control unit,” he continued, adding that once the threat is identified, “they then designate that target on the control station screen, and the Switchblade then navigates itself in the terminal guidance mode and detonates on to that target.”

Gitlin said that the Switchblade was also able to follow the target, changing direction if necessary. The drones are unique in their ability to hover above a potential target, strategically waiting for the right moment to conduct a precise strike. They are part of a category of weapons known as “loitering munition,” says Ingvild Bode, an associate professor at the Center for War Studies, a research group within the University of Southern Denmark, because they “are designed to loiter over battlefields, within potentially quite a broad geographical area, where they search for a particular class of target,” such as radars. “When they have found the target [they] launch themselves onto it” — hence the “kamikaze” label.

Their small size and weight make them stand out, says Bode, as does their ability to launch a strike on a target autonomously. While humans are often involved in confirming a strike remotely, she says, their operating systems are “technologically capable of doing that on its own, and I think that is the big difference.”

Q: What impact could the drones have on the war in Ukraine?

A: The U.S. offer of 100 switchblade drones is “quite a lot,” Bode says, but “we’re not talking about a number that would win the war for Ukraine.” While they would not be “decisive,” the drones could help Ukrainian forces defend more territory against Russian incursions, she says, provided they are not shot down. A senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the Pentagon, said that he would not rule out that more of the drones could be sent to Ukraine in future shipments, in similar rolling fashion to how the Pentagon has been sending antitank missiles and shoulder-fired antiaircraft weapons.

On paper, switchblade drones can be more precise than many of the weapons used by Russian and Ukrainian forces, such as fire bombs. But “because there is so much uncertainty about how the AI targeting algorithms these systems include actually function, and whether they can function

effectively in urban warfare, we don't know whether they'll be more effective" in this particular war, says Bode. A senior U.S. defense official said it's "safe to assume" that one of the drones' purposes is "to deliver a punch." This official added that he would not rule out whether the United States would send more of the drones to Ukraine in rolling fashion, as the Pentagon has with Javelin antitank weapons and Stinger missiles, human-portable weapons that are designed to take out low-flying aircraft. [Source: Washington Post | Jennifer Hassan, Dan Lamothe, Annabelle Timsit | March 17, 2022 ++]

Military Fraud & Abuse

Update 13: Officer Charged With Taking Bribes for Afghan Refugees Visas



Navy Reserve officer Cmdr. Jeromy Pittmann, then a lieutenant commander in Afghanistan in 2014

As the Taliban closed in on Kabul, Afghanistan, in August 2021, service members, veterans and good Samaritans around the world raced to evacuate as many Afghan citizens as possible. And while the U.S. military was able to evacuate around 130,000 refugees by mid-September, thousands of Afghans left behind attempted to obtain Special Immigrant Visas for their service to the U.S. during the War on Terror, for which there are only a limited amount. From 2018 to 2020, Navy Reserve officer **Jeromy Pittmann**, 53, was allegedly accepting bribes for the coveted visas, according to a recently published press release announcing the charges against him.

Pittmann, a commander who lived in Pensacola, Florida, and Naples, Italy, appeared in federal court March 11 on charges of accepting bribes and conspiring to commit visa fraud after recommending unknown Afghan nationals for SIVs. He faces up to 20 years in prison if found guilty of both charges. According to court documents, Pittmann began receiving emails beginning around February 2018, from an unnamed co-conspirator, listed only as CC-1 and as being located in Kabul. The co-conspirator — believed to have worked alongside Pittmann during his deployment to Afghanistan between March 2014 and March 2015 — asked for Pittmann's help in procuring SIVs for other Afghan citizens.

"I have been contacted some people they needed a recommendation letter from an American supervisor or engineer or COR [Contract Representative]," the Feb. 3, 2018, email read. "Do you

think you can write them a recommendation letter for SIV? They will pay for it. Pittmann, according to court documents, allegedly responded by asking who the recommendation letters were for. His co-conspirator informed him the letters were for five of his cousins. Email transcripts from the co-conspirator allege that at least some of the clients had worked for the U.S. government at North-Kabul Afghanistan International Airport, Bagram Air Base and Camp Marmal Mazar, but they were unknown to Pittmann. Court documents also allege that Pittmann asked how much the clients were willing to pay in response.

According to the affidavit of Special Agent Kevin Naylor, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), Pittmann allegedly attempted to provide more than 20 SIVs between 2018 and 2020 in this fashion, receiving thousands of dollars in the process. During one of the other alleged cases of bribery, the co-conspirator asked Pittmann for his passport number and signature, as required by the National Visa Centers for processing. According to court documents, while Pittmann originally denied, writing, “that is a big negative. I am not allowed to provide my passport number,” he ultimately did use that information to verify fraudulent letters submitted to the National Visa Center in New Hampshire after receiving emails from the government agency requesting it.

According to court documents, money was wired to accounts belonging to Pittmann for his letters and verifications, first to a Bank of America account in Hayward, California, and then to an account with USAA in Pensacola, for “family support.” In response, Pittmann allegedly wrote back in his 2018 email, saying, “I got it today. Thank you and thank your friend for sending it. I just wish the money would keep coming. Ha. Maybe one day we will get a business started. It would be nice to pay off my debts.” Pittmann also allegedly joked about making the fraud scheme long-term, emailing his co-conspirator in a separate instance, stating, “we need some contracts so we can make some real money.”

Separate court documents show that Pittmann and his wife filed for bankruptcy in 2019. While records were not included in available court documents, Naylor alleged in his affidavit that not only has the investigation revealed Pittmann’s actions to be true, but that Pittmann himself has admitted to the charges against him. Ret. Lt. Col. Margaret Stock, an immigration attorney in Alaska who has spent years working to procure visas for Afghan refugees, commented on Pittmann’s alleged actions and the impact they may have on the many deserving Aghans seeking SIVs legitimately.

“All of the individuals who got letters from him are now permanently ineligible for any US visa,” Stock said in an email to Military Times. “Hopefully none of them were desperate for these fraudulent letters because they really did qualify for an SIV but simply weren’t able to find their old supervisors to verify their employment. Finding their old supervisors has been a big challenge for many Afghans who are legitimate applicants for the SIV program...What Commander Pittmann did was very serious because he violated the trust that the American people placed in

him as a military officer,” she said in an email to Military Times, adding, “it does not appear that there was any damage to U.S. national security and the scheme was quickly uncovered.”

Stock added that it appeared the U.S. government was able to flag all of the SIVs applications Pittmann had put forward. Stock also noted that any Afghan citizens involved with the fraud scheme would also not be eligible for a visa, regardless of other qualifications such as military service. SIGAR, Naval Criminal Investigation Service and the Defense Criminal Investigative Service are still investigating, while Attorney Matt Kahn of the Justice Department’s Fraud Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Anna Dronzek are prosecuting. Pittmann, like all accused U.S. citizens, is considered innocent until proven guilty. [Source: Military.com | Rachel Nostrant | March 16, 2022 ++]

Military Fraud & Abuse

Update 14: USN Lt. Lied about Relationship with a Chinese Defense Firm



Lt. Fan Yang, left

A Navy flight officer was sentenced to four years in prison on 16 MAR after federal officials discovered he lied on his security clearance paperwork to hide his connections to China and the head of a Chinese defense contracting firm, as well as violations of gun laws. The case of Lt. Fan Yang, revealed in court documents and a Justice Department press release, started before Yang became an officer in 2013 and eventually grew to include his family business and wife as money flowed in from employment contracts he signed with Chinese partners.

Yang lived in Jacksonville, Florida and was a crew member on one of the Navy's P-8 Poseidon aircraft. A naturalized citizen since 2006, Yang joined the Navy briefly from 2005 to 2007 but was discharged, according to court records. He re-joined the service as an Officer Candidate School applicant after getting a degree in electrical engineering. Sometime in between all these events, Yang met a Chinese citizen named Songtao Ge, according to the Justice Department. Ge is described in court documents as "Chairman of Shanghai Breeze Technology Co. Ltd" who, during his many trips to the U.S. between 2013 and 2018, "invested time and money in obtaining

tactical weapons training by hiring U.S.-based firearms and tactical instructors with prior military experience."

The relationship between Yang and Ge grew during those years and by 2016 Yang got the Chinese businessman to hire his wife, Yang Yang, to "handle business operations, conduct business negotiations, collaborate with other factories, declare products at customs, and conduct other similar business" for the company in exchange for an initial salary of \$3,000 per month. "The money was used to pay Yang Yang's salary, Shanghai Breeze's expenses in the United States, and for goods that [Ge] ordered the Yangs to purchase," the press release explained. The funds were "frequently routed through the Yangs' family business," it added.

The Navy officer started to run into trouble in 2017 and again in 2018 when he purchased two 9mm handguns and filled out paperwork declaring they were for his use. Yet Ge "reimbursed the Yangs for both purchases and had [one] pistol engraved with his initials -- 'G.S.T.' -- and the phrase 'Never Out of the Fight.'" This led to two of the charges against Yang: lying on firearms forms and conspiring to violate firearms laws that prohibit ownership by foreigners. Yang ran afoul of the law again on his security clearance paperwork. According to court documents, he had had a top secret security clearance since 2012. However, in renewing that clearance in 2019, he omitted his relationship with Ge, various financial entanglements with China, and his wife's job with Ge's company.

The couple's relationship with Ge was deep enough that the man had been to their home and paid for the two to visit him in Nebraska. Court documents show that Yang's shipmates told investigators that he asked his Navy chain of command for time off in July 2018, telling them the family was going to "Disney." In reality, the pair secretly traveled to Nebraska and met with Ge.

"Lt. Yang brought discredit to the Navy and threatened military operational readiness when he decided to make straw purchases of firearms for a foreign national and lie about that relationship during his security clearance background investigation," Special Agent in Charge Michelle Kramer of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service said in the press release. "Lt. Fan Yang swore an oath to protect this country, but instead he posed a significant risk to U.S. national security," Special Agent in Charge Sherri E. Onks of the FBI's Jacksonville Field Office said in the press release.

Although Yang's case is reminiscent of Jonathan Toebbe, a Navy nuclear engineer who recently plead guilty to sneaking classified documents to federal agents posing as foreign spies, federal officials did not allege that Yang used his clearance to transfer information or intelligence to Ge or any other Chinese nationals. The Navy, when asked about this case, was not able to immediately offer a comment on Yang's current status with the service.

For his part, Yang was sentenced to four years in prison followed by three years of supervised release. His wife pleaded guilty in December 2020 and ended up serving 14 months of prison time for her role in the charges. Ge pled guilty in November 2020 to lying on export documents and trying to fraudulently "export special forces maritime raiding craft and engines to China,"

according to the press release. He was sentenced to three and a half years in federal prison in July 2021. [Source: Military.com | Konstantin Toropin | March 17, 2022 ++]

Military Fraud & Abuse

Update 15: Navy O-5 Select Arrested For Sex Trafficking



A Navy security officer in Virginia tried to help further the career of an undercover detective he thought was a prostitute, posting an ad that garnered over a dozen responses, prosecutors said this week in court. Lt. Cmdr. **Charles M. Cranston Jr.**, of Chesapeake, Va., also told the vice detective that he had a studio and an OnlyFans page to help make money, authorities said at a hearing Tuesday in Henrico County Circuit Court, Norfolk's WTKR News 3 reported. A longtime member of the Navy's law enforcement and security branch, Cranston pleaded guilty at the hearing to a charge of commercial sex trafficking to receive money.

The felony charge involves soliciting, recruiting or encouraging a person to engage in prostitution. Cranston could face one to 10 years in prison for the felony conviction. A jury or court also has the discretion to impose a lesser sentence of up to 12 months in jail or a \$2,500 fine, or both. Neither he nor his attorney provided comment when reached by WTKR. Cranston was arrested at a Norfolk base on Nov. 18 on charges related to an incident near Richmond early that month, police said at the time. The Navy confirmed he was then serving with U.S. Fleet Forces Command.

Prosecutors at the 22 MAR hearing said Cranston had responded to an ad targeting potential sex trafficking, which was posted by the Henrico County Police Division's vice unit on Nov. 2. Detectives worked with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service during the investigation. Using the alias "Tony," Cranston sent text messages agreeing to split the costs of the hotel room with the supposed prostitute and discussing what would take place there, authorities said. Cranston had served in the Navy for 27 years at the time of his arrest, his LinkedIn profile showed, including a stint as the enlisted community manager for the master-at-arms rating, where he was responsible

for helping manage the careers of sailors in the security specialty. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Chad Garling | March 24, 2022 ++]

USAF Discharge Policy

Now Easier For New Parents to Leave Air Force, Space Force

Dual-military couples in the Department of the Air Force now have more flexibility to decide their next steps after childbirth or adoption. For couples in which one active duty airman or guardian is married to another, the military is offering either person up to a year after their child arrives to ask to leave the Air Force or Space Force. The new policy began March 1. Only one member of the couple can request separation for pregnancy, childbirth or caregiving reasons, while the other must fulfill his or her service commitment. They can still apply to get out based on other voluntary issues like hardship, the Air Force said in a March 8 press release.

“Caregiver separation and childbirth separation give both parents more time to learn how to balance family and career, allowing them to continue to contribute to the [Department of the Air Force] mission before making a decision to separate,” the release added. Airmen and guardians can apply to leave as soon as the day after a child is born or adopted, though they can’t depart later than 12 months after that paperwork is filed. “Waivers of active duty service commitments will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis,” the service said. Only female troops were allowed that 12-month window before the rule change. Another past version of the Air Force policy let women request separation before giving birth, but not after.

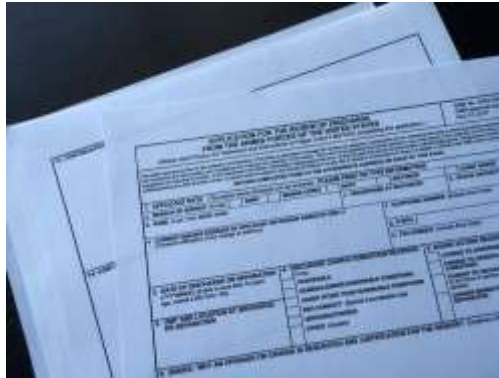
The update follows a series of other changes in the Department of the Air Force aimed at keeping women and families in the service longer, and making life easier for members who may feel pulled between personal and professional obligations. Those decisions can be more challenging when two spouses are both juggling military service commitments and careers. “It’s vital that we continue to find creative ways to develop and retain talented and skilled airmen and guardians,” Air Force personnel boss Lt. Gen. Brian Kelly said in the release. [Source: AirForceTimes | Rachel S. Cohen | March 6, 2022 ++]

Discharge Review Boards

Update 02: Mechanism to Restore Entitlement to Veterans Benefits

You have spent countless years of your life serving your country with honor and distinction, only to find yourself facing a discharge less than fully honorable due to misconduct. Your retirement could be lost, the education benefits you earned are now gone and your entitlement to other Department of Veterans Affairs benefits has been stripped away as well. The various discharge

review boards provide a mechanism to restore your entitlement to those veterans benefits in the form of a discharge upgrade. While the name of the board seems self-explanatory and the process appears straight-forward, it can be very complicated for some.



The discharge review boards exist for all branches of the military and have the power to correct inequities or improprieties in military service records. This can mean upgrading a discharge from other than honorable to general under honorable conditions and can result in the restoration of some veterans' benefits administered by the VA. An upgrade from general to honorable would restore a service member's access to Post 9/11 GI Bill education benefits and allow the service member to take advantage of educational opportunities following service while avoiding the ever-inflating cost of an education.

Besides upgrading a military discharge classification, the boards possess the power to change a service member's reentry code, correct the narrative reason for separation, and even change the separation authority. This could result in a service member becoming eligible to reenlist in the military or avoiding having to explain why their DD-214 lists things like "drug abuse" or "serious misconduct" under the narrative for separation. A service member has the right to submit a request to the discharge review board so long as the application is made within 15-years from the date of his or her separation from service. The service member is required to complete a DD-Form 293 (<https://arba.army.pentagon.mil/documents/DDForm293.pdf>) and it is highly recommended that a comprehensive petition be submitted along with the completed form in order to increase the chances of the board granting relief.

The petition should be drafted in an organized and well-labeled manner to allow the board to find the information they seek in the short time they will spend conducting their review. The drafter must know the specific information the board will seek and how to persuasively present that information in the light most favorable to the applicant. Often times service members attempt to go about it on their own and are denied because they fail to provide supporting documents or adequately explain why they should be granted relief.

In 2014, the Under Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, issued policy guidance to the various review boards instructing them to consider post-traumatic stress disorder as a potential mitigating factor in instances of military misconduct. The memorandum instructs the boards to give "liberal

consideration” to any petition in which PTSD could be considered to have been an underlying cause or factor in the misconduct. The memorandum and its policies have provided relief for countless service members who were discharged at a time when PTSD and its effects on an individual’s behavior were largely misunderstood by society.

In 2017, Under Secretary of Defense Anthony Michael (A.M.) Kurta issued guidance to the boards that expanded upon Secretary Hagel’s and instructed the boards to consider any underlying mental health condition as a mitigating factor in military misconduct. The Kurta memo acknowledged that mental health conditions are often undiagnosed or diagnosed years after the veteran has left service and has directed the boards to give liberal consideration even in these circumstances when doing so is supported by evidence indicating the condition existed during a veteran’s military service. This includes instances where a traumatic brain injury, one of the most common injuries from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is present, as well as instances of sexual assault or harassment.

The following year, Under Secretary of Defense Robert Wilkie issued guidance to the boards directing them to consider numerous factors when a petition for relief is sought on the basis of equity, injustice, or clemency grounds. The Wilke memorandum states that an honorable discharge characterization does not require flawless military service and requires the boards to consider whether the discharge characterization received by the service member is disproportionate to the alleged offense and whether the service member received disparate treatment compared to other service members who have committed the same or similar offense. Similarly, the boards have received guidance directing them to correct a service member’s military records when the veteran was discharged under the archaic policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”

A discharge characterization of anything less than fully honorable does not have to deprive you of access to veterans’ benefits indefinitely, and the stigma that may be associated with a certain type of discharge doesn’t have to either. The review boards have the power to upgrade a discharge characterization and routinely do for service members who submit a compelling petition and the proper supporting documents. In some cases, this can result in the restoration of entitlement to all veteran benefits, including access to health care for service-connected disabilities and hundreds of thousands of dollars in disability compensation. For more information on Discharge Upgrading and Discharge Review Refer to http://dd214.us/reference/DischargeUpgrade_Memo.pdf. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Eric Duncan | March 24, 2022 ++]

Fort Ord Toxic Exposure

On EPA’s List of the Most Polluted Places in the Nation

For nearly 80 years, recruits reporting to central California's Fort Ord considered themselves the lucky ones, privileged to live and work amid sparkling seas, sandy dunes and sage-covered hills.

But there was an underside, the dirty work of soldiering. Recruits tossed live grenades into the canyons of "Mortar Alley," sprayed soapy chemicals on burn pits of scrap metal and solvents, poured toxic substances down drains and into leaky tanks they buried underground. When it rained, poisons percolated into aquifers from which they drew drinking water.

Through the years, soldiers and civilians who lived at the U.S. Army base didn't question whether their tap water was safe to drink. But in 1990, four years before it began the process of closing as an active military training base, Fort Ord was added to the Environmental Protection Agency's list of the most polluted places in the nation. Included in that pollution were dozens of chemicals, some now known to cause cancer, found in the base's drinking water and soil. Decades later, several Fort Ord veterans who were diagnosed with cancers - especially rare blood disorders - took the question to Facebook: Are there more of us? To learn more about the situation at Fort Ord, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Fort Ord Toxic Exposure**". [Source: AP & AirForceTimes | Martha Mendoza/ Juliet Linderman and Jason Dearen | February 23, 2022 ++]

Navy Days

Ship Driving



Helmsman with an attitude

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang

‘Bitchbox’ thru ‘Blivet’

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

Bitchbox – (USN) Intercom or amplified circuit used to communicate between spaces of the ship.

Bitching Betty – The (usually female-voiced) cockpit warning system of many aircraft today.

Bitter End – Properly, the free or loose end of a line. Originally, the bitter end of a mooring line was taken to the bits to secure it. Bittersweet - A radio call signifying that friendly aircraft are in danger from a surface AAW missile launch, or that the presence of friendly aircraft is preventing a missile shot.

Bits – A shipboard mooring fixture, comprised of cylindrical posts similar to BOLLARDS, mounted in pairs.

Black and Bitter – Coffee, no sugar or cream added.

Black and Sweet – Coffee with sugar.

Black Cat - During World War Two, a PBY Catalina which was painted black and used for night reconnaissance patrol.

Black Cat Merchant - (RN) Someone who is always exaggerating.

Black-Hand Gang - See SNIPE. Older (ca. WW II), less politically-correct form is ‘Black Gang.’ Originally, it referred to the appearance of men who had been handling or working around coal, but the term has come to refer to the engine room crew. During WWII, members of the Black Gang were issued black “Dixie Cups” instead of white ones, and were therefore sometimes called “Black Hats.”

Black-shoe - Member of the surface or submarine community. Until recently, the only approved footwear for these communities was black in color. More recently, brown footwear is optional, but seldom seen due to tradition.

Black Water – Sewage.

Blank flange - (1) A plate bolted onto an open pipe to prevent flooding or leaks while work is performed on a piping system. (2) Pancakes. (3) Someone who acts like an idiot (aka 'blank file').

Bleed Air – In gas turbine engines, compressed air that is removed ('bled') from the compressor section at various points. Can be used for various applications, such as maintaining clean airflow in the engine, anti-icing, air conditioning, or to provide start air to another engine.

Blivet - (1) Traditionally, "Ten pounds of shit in a five-pound sack." (2) A rubber fuel bladder. (3) A modified droptank (may be purpose-built or a field modification) used to haul small cargo, especially in tactical aircraft, or used to haul dangerous or toxic cargo outside of the aircraft.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | March 31, 2022 ++]

* Military History *



Quasi-War

Result of XYZ Affair with France

The XYZ Affair (1797-1798) involved an American peace delegation in France, three agents of the French Foreign Minister (labeled as X, Y, and Z in President John Adams' initial communications with Congress), and the French Foreign Minister's demand for a bribe from the American delegation. The Affair played a major role in the adoption of the Alien and Sedition Acts.

After the French Revolution of 1789, Britain and France were in almost constant conflict until the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Unfortunately, the new American republic became embroiled in the French/British struggle with enormous implications for domestic politics in the United States. When France and Britain went to war in 1793, France – the U.S. ally in the American Revolution – hoped for U.S. support. But President Washington believed that the fragile new nation could not afford a war and declared U.S. neutrality.

When Britain and the United States signed the Jay Treaty in 1794 to maintain the peace between the two nations, France saw that treaty as deeply unfair. For example, Britain could seize goods from U.S. ships sailing to France if it paid compensation. By 1796, outraged at U.S. actions, France started seizing American ships trading with Britain (seizing well over 300 by the end of 1798), and the French government refused to receive the new U.S. ambassador to France, Charles C. Pinckney. In response, President Adams called a special session of Congress on May 16, 1797

and asked Congress to support a military build-up for a possible conflict with France. This period is referred to as the Quasi-War with France.

At the same time, Adams decided to send a delegation to France in an effort to maintain the peace. Adams chose Charles C. Pinckney (who was already in Europe), Elbridge Gerry, and John Marshall as the U.S. envoys. Their instructions were to seek to maintain neutrality and commercial relations while not committing the United States to financial support of France. In late 1797, the American envoys in France found themselves trying to work through three intermediaries – Jean Conrad Hottinguer (labeled X in initial coded communications), Pierre Bellamy (Y), and Lucien Hauteval (Z) – to start negotiations with the French Foreign Minister, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord.

The intermediaries told the U.S. envoys that certain conditions must be met in order for France officially to receive the American diplomats: first, the diplomats needed to apologize for anti-French sentiment in Adams' 16 MAY speech to Congress. Second, they must give Talleyrand 1,200,000 livres (£50,000 or \$250,000); such personal "payments" were seen as a common practice in French diplomacy. Third, the United States must make a large loan to France and pay claims by U.S. merchants against France for ships that France had seized after the Jay Treaty. When news reached Paris of more French victories in the ongoing war in Europe, Talleyrand and the French government began to threaten the U.S. envoys.

On 22 OCT and 8 NOV, Marshall wrote long dispatches to U.S. Secretary of State Timothy Pickering explaining the situation - dispatches which would play an important role in the coming political explosion. Informal talks continued throughout the winter of 1797-1798, but were fruitless. After repeated efforts to start negotiations without paying a bribe or providing a loan, on April 24, 1798, Marshall sailed for home while Pinckney went to the south of France for personal reasons. Gerry, against the advice of his colleagues, remained in Paris in an effort to engage negotiations, a decision for which he was later heavily criticized.

Across the Atlantic, Thomas Jefferson, Adams' vice-president, believed that the U.S. had dealt unfairly with France. As a result, Jefferson and his allies did not support Adams' actions, particularly preparations for a possible war with France. Jefferson was also skeptical of the peace mission, writing that "The nomination of the envoys to France does not prove a thorough conversion to the pacific system." In November 1797, before news of France's demands for a bribe reached America, Adams asked Congress to take a firm hand with France and to fund stronger military defense, but those plans met considerable resistance from Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans in Congress.

The coded dispatches from Marshall arrived on March 4, 1798, and by March 5, Adams announced to Congress that the mission had failed. As more of the dispatches were deciphered, Adams and his Cabinet were outraged by French actions, but Adams did not want to make the dispatches public because he thought that releasing them would endanger the lives of the American ministers.

On March 19, 1798, Adams asked Congress to arm American vessels, shore up coastal defenses, and manufacture arms. While Jefferson privately criticized Talleyrand's actions, he believed that Adams and the Federalists were over-reacting to the dispatches and conveniently using the incident to encourage a war with France. Jefferson called Adams' message to Congress "insane." In a letter to James Madison, Jefferson indicated that he hoped to stall congressional action for as long as possible. At the time, Madison was living in retirement at Montpelier while supporting the formation of the new Democratic-Republican Party. The vice-president explained "if we could but gain this season, we should be saved. The affairs of Europe would of themselves relieve us."

Some Republican members of Congress believed that the full dispatches would show that France was ready to negotiate. The Republican press, including James Callender, also wanted full disclosure of the dispatches. On 2 APR, the House passed a resolution for Adams to publish the dispatches in their entirety. Adams immediately agreed to make them available to Congress since he knew the dispatches would support his calls for a strong defense, and the American ministers were safely out of France. On 3 APR, he released the correspondence, using X, Y, Z in place of the names of the French agents. He asked Congress to examine the documents behind closed doors. When the dispatches were read in Congress, even many Republicans were appalled by French actions. The Senate quickly voted in favor of publication of the dispatches, and they were soon printed in the newspapers.

This disclosure inflamed public opinion against France, and John Adams' popularity rose. "Millions for defense but not one cent for tribute" became a popular Federalist slogan, and the Federalists increased their majority in the House of Representatives in the 1798 elections, directly contributing to the adoption of the Alien & Sedition Acts (and the Jeffersonian response with the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions).

Although the incident helped drive the military build-up, war was never declared. The French government reversed itself and dropped the demands, and Adams, over considerable opposition from his own party, proposed another peace mission. By late 1800, Adams had forged the Treaty of Mortefontaine with France to restore peace (although word of the treaty arrived in the United States too late to help Adams in the bitterly-contested election of 1800).

As for Jefferson, while he wrote to Madison that the actions of the French "were very unworthy of a great nation...", he insisted that "these papers [the dispatches] do not offer one motive the more for our going to war....". Jefferson was not sure if the French Directory knew of Talleyrand's plot and never liked how the XYZ affair was used for political gain. As late as 1799 he wrote a friend that "you know what a wicked use has been made of the French negotiation: and particularly of the XYZ dish cooked up by Marshall, where the swindlers are made to appear as the French government." For Jefferson, it was not easy to shake his romantic notions of his time in France and the early ideals of the French Revolution. [Source: Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia | March 20, 2022 ++]

WWII Spy Virginia Hall

Allies' Most Dangerous in France during the War



Virginia Hall is awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by Maj. Gen. William Donovan, head of the Officer of Strategic Services

In September 1945, just as World War II ended, a small ceremony was held during which Virginia Hall was presented the Distinguished Service Cross. Hall was the only civilian woman to receive the award, the Army's second-highest decoration for valor, during the war. She had spent years undercover in occupied France, gathering intelligence, helping downed pilots evade capture, and eventually organized more than a thousand resistance fighters to conduct sabotage operations. Due to her efforts, she had been declared the Allies' "most dangerous spy," but the ceremony was kept private to protect her identity as she went on to serve in the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency for another two decades.

By the time Hall joined the OSS and eventually received her commendation, though, she was already an experienced intelligence agent. Hall was born in 1906, to an affluent Baltimore, Maryland family. After studying briefly at Radcliffe and Barnard colleges, she moved to Paris, hoping to become a diplomat with the State Department. The prospects for such employment were slim to none for most women at the time, and Hall could only land a clerical job, first at the embassy in Poland and later at a consular office in Turkey. After a hunting accident there, her left leg was amputated below the knee, necessitating the use of a wooden prosthetic for the rest of her life.

"She had been given a second chance at life and wasn't going to waste it. And her injury, in fact, might have kind of bolstered her or reawakened her resilience so that she was in fact able to do great things," Craig Gralley, a retired CIA officer who wrote a biography about Hall, told NPR in 2019. In 1939, with war breaking out across Europe, Hall volunteered to drive an ambulance in France. With France's defeat, she was forced to move to London, where she caught the eye of Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE), which was tasked with conducting espionage and irregular warfare in occupied territory. As the citizen of a then-neutral country who could speak

French and had traveled extensively in the region, Hall was sent back to France as the agency's first female operative, posing as a reporter for the New York Post while she operated in the cities of Toulon and Lyon.

Initially sent only to collect intelligence on economic and political conditions in occupied France, Hall's mission soon grew to encompass reporting on German troop movements, documenting the construction of submarine bases and recruiting a network of other spies to operate in the country. Under the codename Heckler, the mission became the primary hub for British spy operations in France, supplying agents with money, documents and safehouses, covertly shuttling downed airmen around the country, and providing information on German military activity. It was dangerous work, as around 25% of SOE agents were killed during their missions, and many others would face torture and deportation to concentration camps when captured. That includes 39 women agents sent to France by the Special Operations Executive — a third of whom never returned.

Adept at disguise, and with her seemingly unassuming demeanor, Hall evaded detection for a year. "She could be four different women in the space of an afternoon, with four different code names," said Sonia Purnell, author of the Hall biography "A Woman of No Importance," in a 2019 interview with NPR. During her time in Lyon, the Gestapo was never able to identify Hall, who operated under the codename "Germaine", knowing only that they were pursuing a "limping lady." Among her pursuers was Klaus Barbie, known as the "Butcher of Lyon," who circulated wanted posters of "Germaine" that declared her "The Enemy's Most Dangerous Spy – We Must Destroy Her!" Barbie would later escape to South America, before being arrested and returned to France in 1983.

With the Allied invasion of North Africa in late 1942 and the German occupation of Vichy France, Hall was forced to flee the country. In November of that year, Hall trekked 50 miles across a snowy, 7,500-foot pass through the Pyrenees Mountains to Spain. She was briefly arrested there, but eventually secured her release. Once back in London, British intelligence considered Hall too compromised by the Gestapo to return to France, but it was now 1944 and the American-led OSS was expanding its own operations in France ahead of the planned invasion of Normandy.

In March 1944, under the codename "Diane," Hall was back in France, once again relying on her guile and disguises to remain undetected. "She got some makeup artist to teach her how to draw wrinkles on her face," said Purnell. "She also got a fierce, a rather sort of scary London dentist to grind down her lovely, white American teeth so that she looked like a French milkmaid." However, Hall's superiors at the time were wary of placing a woman in charge of such an operation, and so the OSS would only make her a deputy. Nonetheless, Hall made her way back to Paris, where she began organizing more than a thousand resistance fighters. They would go on to spend months blowing up bridges, cutting telephone lines, and conducting ambushes — with

Hall reporting almost daily to London about their activities — ahead of the Allied landings in Normandy and the subsequent advance across Europe and into Germany.

By the end of 1944, France had largely been liberated, and while Hall was selected for another mission in Austria, the war in Europe ended before it was carried out. Hall continued her intelligence work with the CIA until her retirement in 1966, but she was relegated to office duties. The nature of this activity also meant that her accomplishments remained fairly unknown for years. In addition to the Distinguished Service Cross, which then-President Harry Truman had offered to present publicly before Hall declined, she was also made a member of the Order of the British Empire. Once more Hall was recognized for her valor with little fanfare, so as to not compromise her identity.

Hall passed away in 1982, but in recent years her story, as well as those of other women who worked for the OSS and other intelligence organizations during World War II, have begun to be shared and given the public recognition they deserve. And while Hall rarely, if ever, talked about her accomplishments, the “limping lady” can be remembered as one of the most formidable spies of World War II. [Source: Task & Purpose | Max Hauptman | March 17, 2022 ++]

Bird Warfare

Navy’s First Aircraft Carrier Had a Dedicated ‘Pigeoneer’

Military working dogs get plenty of well-deserved credit for their vital role in sniffing out bombs and patrolling the bases of the U.S. armed forces. But they are far from the only animal to have saved the lives of service members over the years. In fact, when America’s first aircraft carrier, the USS Langley, was commissioned exactly 100 years ago on 19 MAR, some of its most important passengers were not pilots, navigators, or other sailors, but pigeons.



Carrier pigeons release from a Langley seaplane, Navy guidance on proper method of holding a pigeon in the hand, and Langley pigeon loft

“On the stern, an elaborate pigeon house was built with food storage, nesting, training, and trapping areas” which was later to be re-built into the executive officer’s quarters, wrote Rear Adm. Jackson Tate, who served on the Langley early in his career, in 1978 for the naval magazine Proceedings. “The radios of those days were very rudimentary, and most cross-country flights carried crates of homing pigeons in case of emergency,” he said.

Though the idea of a pigeon coop on a Navy ship may sound odd today, the birds had a proven battle history long before they swooped aboard the Langley. Ancient Egyptians sent messages via pigeons as far back as 3000 BCE, and in 1896 the Navy established the U.S. Naval Pigeon Messenger Service to ferry messages from ship to shore. The Navy built pigeon lofts up and down the East Coast, which came in handy when communicating with warships heading south to fight Spain in the Caribbean during the Spanish-American war in 1898, according to the Naval History and Heritage Command.

Even after the Navy outfitted its new ships with wireless telegraph machines in 1902, pigeons still proved their worth in the budding world of naval aviation. In World War I, Navy pilots carried pigeons with them aboard seaplanes while patrolling for submarines along the French coast. “The aviators used pigeons to dispatch messages in the event of a crash or other emergency as wireless radio sets were large and cumbersome to carry aboard aircraft,” wrote the Naval History and Heritage Command in an article about the birds. “Upon release, the pigeon would carry the message to its home loft at one of the U.S. Navy air stations in France.”

If the idea of a small bird saving people’s lives isn’t heartwarming enough, keep in mind that once the pigeon arrived at a loft, it would go through a little slot that rang a bell alerting the pigeon master to retrieve the message. The birds were so useful that the Navy created a “pigeon trainer” enlisted rate. Officially their job was called Quartermaster (Pigeon), but the QM(P) sailors were also known as pigeoneers, Naval History and Heritage Command wrote.

Though it sounds like a joke, pigeon training was a serious skill: QM(P) candidates trained at a special school for six to 12 months before they could work at a naval air station’s pigeon loft. There was a lot to learn, according to a 1918 Navy manual for pigeoneers. “It included such things as when to bathe them (every other day and never on extremely cold days); how to build rapport with a bird; how to properly hold a bird; how often to clean their perches and nest boxes; and what they should be fed (50 percent Canada peas, 25 percent Argentine corn, 15 percent Kaffir corn or milo maize, and 10 percent whole rice),” wrote Naval History and Heritage Command.

The pigeons were so valuable to sailors that armed guards conducted nightly patrols of the grounds of Naval Air Station Anacostia, the largest pigeon school in the country with some 300 birds. “They were well cared for, with bright and airy lofts that had running water, electricity, and a hospital ready to provide medical care if they fell ill,” according to the command. All of this goes to show that the use of pigeons in naval warfare was likely better understood than the use of aircraft when USS Langley was commissioned. As Rear Adm. Jackson Tate recalled, much of the construction of the Langley was learned on the fly. “No one was sure what the aviators wanted, except that there was to be a deck that planes could land on,” Tate wrote in 1978.

Langley was not the world’s first aircraft carrier: technically balloon carriers went back as far as 1849, the French started building seaplane carriers in 1911, and the United Kingdom commissioned the HMS Argus, the first full-length flat deck carrier, in 1918. However, Langley was a turning point in the U.S. Navy, which at the time still believed battleships would be the

backbone of a modern fleet. It was Cmdr. Kenneth Whiting who began to shake things up. “Whiting was a man far ahead of his time in the very conservative Navy of the 1920s,” Tate wrote. “His junior years, spent mostly in armored cruisers and in the Navy’s earliest submarines, built up his lack of awe for the so-called backbone of the fleet.”

Eventually, Whiting got his wish, and in 1919 the Navy sent a coal-hauling ship, the USS Jupiter, to Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Virginia to be converted into America’s first aircraft carrier. The strange ship’s tall metal girders and wooden flight deck made it look like a covered wagon from the Wild West, and the crew nicknamed it the “Covered Wagon” as a result. “The Langley (CV-1) was unpopular, unlovely, un-usual, and ugly—to say the least,” wrote Tate, but, “like her namesake prairie schooner, she would carry a bold breed of pioneers, among them the author, to new horizons.” The pigeons were right there exploring new horizons with them, though there were some hiccups along the way. At one point, Tate recalled, the pigeon quartermaster “appeared once to protect vociferously” the test firing of the ship’s guns, which were located on either side of the pigeon house, upsetting the birds. “The gun firing was deferred more or less permanently,” Tate said.

Sadly, the pigeons who so bravely accompanied sailors on the first U.S. aircraft carrier did not spend much time aboard. Vice Adm. Alfred Melville Pride, who also served aboard the Langley, recalled that the birds generally returned to the ship if they were released a few at a time for exercise. But “one bright day” the whole flock was released while the ship was anchored off Tangier Island in the Chesapeake Bay. Instead of returning to the Langley, the birds flew south for Norfolk Navy Yard, where they had been first trained and where they now roosted in the cranes. “We flew the ‘pigeon quartermaster’ down, and he climbed up, after dark, and caught the pigeons; but the pigeons never went to sea again,” Pride wrote for Proceedings in 1979.

Despite the pigeons going AWOL, the plans for the Navy’s next aircraft carriers, the Lexington (CV-2) and Saratoga (CV-3), included compartments for pigeons, Pride noted, though the lofts were eventually turned into berthing compartments. The pigeon’s tour of duty aboard the Langley was over, but Navy pigeons continued to serve with distinction. In 1941, the Navy redesignated pigeon trainers as Specialist X, or SPX(PI) for short. In 1943, the rating was opened up to women, but they had to have the same skills as men, namely “they should have experience working with birds or other animals and know how to drive a car in order to pick up pigeons that got lost during training sessions,” wrote Naval History and Heritage Command.

Pigeons were often used on large balloons, called airships, which conducted stateside anti-submarine patrols. The pigeons came in handy when the radio broke or during radio silence, carrying standard messages in black capsules and emergency messages in red capsules. While the Specialist X rating was phased out after World War II, the humble pigeon still answers the call to serve America from time to time.

marine pigeon Even as recently as 2003, the 1st Marine Division brought pigeons with them to Iraq to serve as canaries in the figurative coal mine for detecting possible nuclear, biological and

chemical agents being used against them. The pigeons took the place of chickens, who did not fare well in the Marines' camp.

“The integration of these new ‘marines’ [chickens] into the Division was difficult,” according to a 2006 Marine history of the invasion. “Several of the birds disappeared immediately, followed by suspicious cooking fires in hidden corners of the camp. Others made their escape from the hands of inexperienced chicken wranglers and ‘deserted’ into the desert.” So remember, next time you lose cell phone service or you can’t log onto your military computer because it’s nearly as old as you are, there is a solution, and they have tiny little feet and weird red eyes. [Source: Task & Purpose | David Roza | March 21, 2022 ++]

WWII Operation Longcloth

Burma Campaign Chindits Mission

The Chindits, known officially as the Long Range Penetration Groups, were special operations units of the British and Indian armies which saw action in 1943–1944 during the Burma Campaign of World War II. British Army Brigadier Orde Charles Wingate formed the Chindits for raiding operations against the Imperial Japanese Army, especially long-range penetration: attacking Japanese troops, facilities and lines of communication deep behind Japanese lines. Their operations featured prolonged marches through extremely difficult terrain, undertaken by underfed troops often weakened by diseases such as malaria and dysentery. Controversy persists over the extremely high casualty-rate and the debatable military value of the achievements of the Chindits.



Brigadier Orde Wingate, Nigeria Regiment troops boarding an RAF Dakota, and a Chindit column crossing a river in Burma; men suffering from dysentery often went naked.

The original intent of Operation Longcloth had been to use the Chindits as a part of a larger offensive. When this offensive was cancelled, Wingate convinced General Wavell to send the Chindits into Burma anyway. Accordingly, on 8 February 1943, Operation Longcloth commenced and 3,000 Chindits, Wingate with them, began their march into Burma.

The Chindits crossed the Chindwin River on 13 February and faced the first Japanese troops two days later. Two columns marched to the south and received their air supply drops in broad

daylight to create an impression that they were the main attack. They even had a man impersonating a British general along with them. The RAF mounted air attacks on Japanese targets to support the deception. These columns were to swing east at the beginning of March and attack the main north-south railway in areas south of the main force. One column successfully carried out demolitions along the railway, but the other column was ambushed. Half of the ambushed column returned to India.

Five other columns proceeded eastward. Two of them proceeded towards the main north-south railway in Burma. On 4 March, one column reached the valley and demolished the railway in 70 places. The second column arrived two days later to do the same. Despite these successes, however, the railway was only temporarily disabled, and resumed operation shortly afterwards.

On many occasions, the Chindits could not take their wounded with them; some were left behind in villages. Wingate had, in fact, issued specific orders to leave behind all wounded, but these orders were not strictly followed. Since there were often no established paths in the jungle along their routes, many times they had to clear their own with machetes and kukris (and on one occasion, a commandeered elephant). Supply was delivered by air using three Hudsons and three Dakotas of 31 Squadron operating out of Agartala in eastern Bengal.

Once in Burma, Wingate repeatedly changed his plans, sometimes without informing all the column commanders. The majority of two of the columns marched back to India after being ambushed by the Japanese in separate actions. After the railway attacks, Wingate decided to cross his force over the Irrawaddy River. However, the area on the other side of the river turned out to be inhospitable to operations. Water was difficult to obtain and the combination of rivers with a good system of roads in the area allowed the Japanese to force the Chindits into a progressively smaller "box".

In late March, Wingate made the decision to withdraw the majority of the force, but sent orders to one of the columns to continue eastward. The operations had reached the range limit of air supply and prospects for new successful operations were low, given the Japanese pressure. The columns were generally left to make their own way back to India. On the journey back, the most difficult actions involved crossing back over the Irrawaddy River. The Japanese had observers and patrols all along the river bank and could quickly concentrate once an attempt at a crossing was detected.

Gradually, all the columns broke up into small groups. Wingate's headquarters returned to India on its own ahead of most of the columns. Through the spring and even into the autumn of 1943, individual groups of men from the Chindits made their way back to India. The army did what they could for the men. In one case, a plane was landed in an open area and wounded men were evacuated by air. Part of one column made it to China. Another body of men escaped into the far north of Burma. Others were captured or died.

By the end of April, after a three-month mission, the majority of the surviving Chindits had crossed the Chindwin River, having marched between 750–1,000 miles. Of the 3,000 men that

had begun the operation, a third (818 men) had been killed, taken prisoner or died of disease, and of the 2,182 men who returned, about 600 were too debilitated from their wounds or disease to return to active service. Of the remaining men, Wingate practically handpicked those few he would retain, while the rest were put back under the normal army command structure as part of their original battalions.

Although British Army officers in India criticized the effectiveness of the Chindits (Japanese railway communications had been out of commission for less than a week), their effect on the morale of the Allied troops in India was refreshing, and they were given plenty of publicity. Wingate wrote an operations report on returning to India, which was controversial for many reasons, including attacks on officers under his command. The report had a tendency to excuse any mistakes made by its author (Wingate), while making vicious attacks on other officers, often based on limited information.

Eventually, through his political allies in London, a copy of the report was given to Winston Churchill, who was impressed and took Wingate with him to the Quebec Conference. His concepts for long-range penetration operations behind Japanese lines received official backing at high level, and he obtained substantial U.S. support for his force. The US Army also began its own plans for the group that later became Merrill's Marauders. [Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chindits> | March 2022 ++]

Every Picture Tells A Story

Near Miss



Attacking a formation of Martin B-26 Marauders in the first months of 1945, this long-nose Focke-Wulf FW 190D of Jagdgeschwader 51 “Mölders” II. Gruppe just escapes the fate of the B-17 *Miss Donna Mae II*. The speeds at which he was flying and the bombs were falling means he likely never even saw them as they flashed by.

WWII Bombing of Germany

Aachen



Aachen

Cathedral of Aachen

Eschweiler

Aachen is the westernmost city in Germany, and borders Belgium and the Netherlands to the west, the tri-border area. Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman Emperor, took over the governing of Aachen in 768 AD. The imperial palace was located by the source of warm springs and soon became Charlemagne's permanent residence. As years went by, the town became more and more prosperous. Charlemagne was buried in the Cathedral of Aachen, the construction of which he had personally overseen in 824. The town's ties with Charlemagne were reflected in its numerous priceless architectural heirlooms carefully preserved for centuries.

During World War Two, Aachen was at grave risk. People were unprepared when 75 bombs hit the cloister in the first large-scale attack by English bombers on January 15, 1941 which dumped 176 high explosives bombs and 3,000 incendiary bombs. The city could not be evacuated because the air raid system broke down, and 145 people were killed or injured.

Because the fire brigade was overtaxed, 18 boys and girls created a group to guard the cathedral around the clock from then on. Light was forbidden during air raids, and in the dark of the cathedral the children climbed the tower stairs, hanging on to swaying railings and listening to the thunderous explosions echoing greatly because of the cathedral's acoustics. As the attacks became heavier, the young guardians of the cathedral helped perform the dangerous jobs of cleaning up debris and clearing duds. In the end, the cathedral survived, despite five fires and a direct hit by a heavy bomb. Above is a contemporary wire photo showing the devastation to the old city center describing Aachen as an "enemy stronghold."

During the next four years, there were repeated large attacks on the cathedral city: on July 14, 1943 with 294 dead, on April 11, 1944 with 1,525 dead, on May 25, 1944 with 198 dead and on May 28, 1944 with 167 dead. On October 21, 1944, 65% of all dwellings were demolished after six long weeks of American bombing, and hundreds more civilians died. 64 smaller bomb attacks

also took place on Aachen, and its citizens took to the shelters 1,984 times during these years. By the time Americans occupied ancient Aachen, it was 85% destroyed by bombing. The remains of Charlemagne were hidden in the woods beforehand by Germans hoping to protect them. The occupying Americans later ordered a G.I. to go and bring the remains of the Emperor back, and the soldier supposedly asked upon his return with the sack of bones, “So, where do I dump this?”

Eschweiler, above, was colonized in the Neolithic period and it was first mentioned in 828 by Charlemagne’s biographer. Weisweiler is also now a municipality in the district of Aachen. They were both bombed in a joint British-American operation called “Operation Queen” on November 16, 1944. 1,204 heavy bombers of the 8th U.S. Air Force hit the three towns of Eschweiler, Weisweiler and Langerwehe with 4,120 bombs, devastating the central cores of cities and small towns alike.

WWII Bomber Nose Art

[95] What’s Up Doc?



Military History Anniversaries

01 thru 15 APR

Significant events in U. S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 APR**”. [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | April 2022 ++]



Coronavirus Trials & Studies

Update 01: Down the Road Risks for Cardiovascular & Mental Health

The most menacing fallout from COVID-19 often shows itself only after the initial “acute” infection passes. A team of VA researchers has been shining a light on COVID’s dangerous and enduring consequences—most recently, in research spotlighting heart and blood vessel conditions and mental health disorders that arise weeks or months after the initial COVID bout. The researchers, with the VA St. Louis Health Care System, published their findings on COVID’s post-acute effects on the heart and blood vessels (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-022-01689-3.pdf>) in the Feb. 7, 2022, issue of Nature Medicine, and findings on the chronic effects on mental health (<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj-2021-068993>) in the Feb. 16, 2022, issue of the British Medical Journal.



The research team found that, even in people not needing hospitalization while infected with COVID-19, serious health issues could persist, or pop up, in the weeks and months after the first, acute stage. The researchers identified cardiovascular consequences including blood clots, strokes, and heart failure, and mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and substance use disorders.

COVID-19: far from benign

For many people, COVID-19 infection comes with only mild or moderate symptoms, such as an irksome cough and shortness of breath that last for a few days. But this first phase can be the “tip of the iceberg,” according to the Nature Medicine and BMJ studies’ principal investigator, Dr.

Ziyad Al-Aly. “Those who go on to experience serious chronic consequences—effects that commonly last a lifetime—are the ones who will bear the scars of this pandemic.” Al-Aly heads up both the Clinical Epidemiology Center and the Research and Development Service at the VA St. Louis Health Care System. He is also a nephrologist—a doctor who specializes in kidney disease—and a clinical epidemiologist with expertise in big data. His group analyzes huge data sets too complex for conventional computer software.

In his research, Al-Aly specializes in COVID’s chronic effects, which are known technically as “post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2” and informally as “long COVID” or “long-haul COVID.” Studies conducted by Al-Aly and others have shown that long COVID can affect nearly every organ system. “People return to their doctor with fatigue, brain fog, amnesia, strokes, new-onset diabetes, kidney disease, heart disease, and more,” the physician-researcher says. From the wide range of chronic consequences of COVID, Al-Aly and his team decided to zero in on the cardiovascular and mental health aftermath because of these health issues’ “profound and wide-reaching ramifications for individual and public health,” says coauthor Dr. Yan Xie, a clinical epidemiologist with the VA St. Louis Clinical Epidemiology Center.

Looking at a study period of about a year, the group compared the cardiovascular and mental health risks for those who had COVID-19 and survived the first 30 days of infection with the same health outcomes among those who were not infected.

Long COVID’s cardiovascular risks

The research team’s in-depth analysis of cardiovascular complications following COVID-19 infection found increased risks for serious conditions such as heart attack, heart failure, blood clots, and stroke. Overall, those with COVID were 55 percent more likely than the non-COVID group to suffer a major adverse cardiovascular event such as heart attack, stroke, or death. Broken down, the researchers’ major conclusions include:

- Heart disease occurred in 4 percent more patients who had COVID than didn’t. This is more significant than it may seem, Al-Aly points out, as it translates into some 3 million people in the United States with these types of complications because of COVID.
- Those who had been infected with COVID-19 were 72 percent more likely to get coronary artery disease (which is caused by plaque buildup in the artery walls, and presents risks including heart attack).
- The COVID-19 group was 63 percent more likely to experience a heart attack.
- The COVID-19 group was 52 percent more likely to have a stroke.

Heightened risks were seen even in people who had mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms early on, and in those who did not have a known cardiovascular condition before their infection. “Governments and health systems around the world should be prepared to deal with the likely significant contribution of the COVID-19 pandemic to a rise in the burden of cardiovascular diseases,” the researchers write in *Nature Medicine*. “Because of the chronic nature of these

conditions, they will likely have long-lasting consequences for patients and health systems and also have broad implications on economic productivity and life expectancy.”

Long COVID’s mental health risks

In their examination of mental health conditions after COVID-19, the researchers identified elevated risks for issues such as anxiety, depression, stress disorders, opioid use, substance use disorders, and sleep conditions. “We’ve all suffered some sort of distress from this pandemic—maybe a measure of anxiety or difficulty sleeping,” says lead investigator Al-Aly. “But these challenges are magnified, especially in those who were admitted to the hospital during the acute part of their COVID battle but also in many who experienced only mild or moderate symptoms.”

Compared to those who did not have COVID, those in the COVID group had a 60 percent higher risk of having any mental health disorder or mental health-related prescriptions. Findings by the type of mental health issue were:

- Anxiety: 35 percent higher risk in the COVID-19 group
- Depression: 39 percent higher risk
- Sleep disorder: 41 percent higher risk
- Opioid use: 76 percent higher risk
- Opioid use disorders: 34 percent higher risk
- Non-opioid substance use disorders: 20 percent higher risk.

The reasons for the increased mental health risks after COVID are not completely clear, the researchers say. Biologic changes may occur in the body that affect the brain, and nonbiologic changes such as social isolation and trauma may also be at play. Given the large number of people who have survived COVID-19, the findings on cardiovascular and mental health could translate into a huge impact in the United States and around the world, the authors point out.

VA’s standout data resources

In both studies, the researchers analyzed medical records in a database within VA, which operates the largest integrated health care system in the United States. The analysis in each case included nearly 154,000 patients who had tested positive for COVID-19 in a defined time frame in 2020 and 2021. (The time frame predated the delta and omicron variants, as well as wide availability of vaccines.) Using sophisticated statistical methods, the researchers compared these patients’ health information related to cardiovascular and mental health to data from more than 11 million people who had not had COVID-19 infection—about half of them from the same time frame and the other half from a pre-pandemic timespan.

“A strength of our research was the large number of patients and the ability to leverage the breadth and depth of the VA’s electronic health records system,” highlights Al-Aly. As a pioneer in the use of electronic health records, VA “can offer answers to questions about areas including the pandemic that would be hard for others to address.” Al-Aly also credits his multidisciplinary research team representing VA, as well as Washington University and Saint Louis University, for making the rigorous analyses possible. “We brought together public health experts from across

disciplines, successfully marrying the medical and research perspectives.” Along with Al-Aly and Xie, coauthors on the Nature Medicine article about cardiovascular risks were Evan Xu, with VA St. Louis and Saint Louis University, and VA St. Louis’s Benjamin Bowe. Xu also contributed to the BMJ mental health study.

Urging steps to protect, prepare

The team hopes their research and that of other groups will encourage individuals, health care systems, and policymakers to remain vigilant concerning the virus. The best defense against long COVID, according to the researchers: Avoid getting COVID in the first place. That means taking steps such as getting vaccinated and boosted, wearing high-quality masks, and washing hands regularly, Xie specifies. For those who become infected and develop cardiovascular or mental health conditions, Xie says, “We hope our results will make it easier for them and their health care providers to identify these conditions and initiate treatment.”

From a broader, public-policy perspective, Al-Aly urges a prompt and robust response to support the at-risk population, which he hopes from the mental health perspective will avert a suicide crisis and compounded opioid epidemic in upcoming years. Xie, too, emphasizes the importance of responsive action. “There will be millions of people with new heart disease and mental health issues as a result of COVID who will need attention and care. Governments and health systems should be prepared for this. It is very important to address these issues now, before they become much larger crises down the road.”

Al-Aly says he and his colleagues will continue studying long COVID. “As a physician and a researcher myself, working with a group of full-time researchers, we will continue to leverage our expertise to answer questions that the public, including Veterans and Veterans’ organizations, care about.” Al-Aly’s ongoing research includes an examination of the link between long COVID and diabetes. “By generating more awareness of the spectrum of health complications long-haulers face,” he says, “we can work to nip this long COVID crisis in the bud and keep it from ballooning into a larger public health plight.” [Source: VA Research Currents | Tamar Nordenberg | February 28, 2022 ++]

Drug Price Gouging

Update 09: Insurance Companies Sue Walgreens for Overcharging for Drugs

A number of health insurance companies, including Blue Cross and Blue Shield units are suing Walgreens, alleging that the company has been engaged in a fraudulent scheme to overcharge for prescription drugs by submitting claims for payment at inflated prices and made false statements to conceal the scheme. Walgreens has overcharged the plaintiffs hundreds of millions of dollars, the plaintiffs said in a 21 MAR complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.

According to the suit, Walgreens created a program under which it submitted usual and customary prices to the insurance companies that were “five, ten, or twenty times higher” than what cash customers paid. Walgreens knowingly and wrongfully overcharged the insurance companies by submitting false and inflated usual and customary prices to the plaintiffs, the complaint says. It also intentionally concealed from the companies the actual cash prices offered to members of the general public by making false statements and omitting material facts, the complaint says.

The Senior Citizens League wants to stress that, like anyone who is sued in court, those who are suing have to prove their case and the fact that there is a lawsuit doesn’t mean the things they are charging are true. But with so many Americans struggling to pay for the drugs they need, and with legislation to lower drug prices held up in Congress, it is troubling to hear about this. Like so many cases involving large corporations, this case is likely to go on for a very long time and could eventually be settled out of court. However, it reinforces our belief that Congress needs to act to lower drug prices, and reinforces our determination to fight as hard as we can to make that happen. [Source: The Senior Citizens League Weekly Update | March 21, 2022 ++]

Medication Guidelines

MTF’s Adding QR Codes to Prescription Packaging



Throughout 2022, military treatment facility (MTF) pharmacies will be replacing printed monographs or MedGuides, the paper medication guides that come with many prescription drugs, with QR (Quick Response) codes on prescription packaging. (<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/medication-guides>) Patients can request a paper copy if they prefer the printed version.

Benefits of switching to QR codes for drug monographs include reduced use of paper, increased privacy of patient information, and the ability to share more robust information in a variety of formats to best meet patient needs. Scanning the QR code will open a web link allowing patients to access prescription information sheets, brief informational videos, tools to help remind you to take your medication, and the ability to share information about your medication with family members, caregivers, or health care professionals.

The use of QR codes has exploded during the pandemic as establishments switched to digital options for everything from restaurant menus to real estate listings to MOAA's Legislative Action Center. Most mobile phones have a QR code reader integrated into the camera. To access drug information, open your phone's camera and point it at the QR code on your prescription vial from about 6 inches away. It will scan automatically and provide a link to additional information. Refer to <https://www.wired.com/story/how-to-scan-a-qr-code> for more on 'How to Scan a QR Code'.

MOAA supports efforts to modernize MTF pharmacy services, and appreciates the Defense Health Agency has maintained the option of printed prescription drug information for those who prefer to receive a printed copy. There are still a number of seniors who don't or cannot use a cellphone (like myself). Air Force pharmacies began implementing QR code technology in 2019, so some may have already encountered QR codes on their prescription vials. Your MTF pharmacist is also a resource for information about your prescriptions. Patients are still encouraged to ask their pharmacist any questions they may have about their medications. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Karen Ruedisueli | March 16, 2022 ++]

Postprobiotics

Companies Are Pushing For Gut Health. Research Hasn't Caught Up



In the past decade, probiotics have become an important way to support gut health and immunity - and a growing source of revenue for supplement companies. Now those companies are pushing a new buzzword: postbiotics. These newer supplements are said to help with weight loss, digestive health or immunity. There are even new combination supplements that contain prebiotics, probiotics and postbiotics in one capsule. The problem? There's a gap between research on the efficacy of postbiotics and over-the-top promises made by companies selling them as supplements. Can postbiotics really help "melt inches off my waist overnight?" Of course not. Here's a look at what postbiotics are, what they are meant for, and why you don't need to buy any unproven supplements just yet.

What are postbiotics?

Probiotics, or "good" bacteria, have many well-known health benefits. When the correct probiotic strain is prescribed for a specific ailment, there's strong science to support their efficacy. Now researchers are studying whether the dead microbes, or postbiotics, are also beneficial. When

small living microbes such as bacteria and fungi die, they break down into smaller parts such as amino acids, cell wall fragments and lysates, which may offer health benefits. These are postbiotic, or quite literally, "after life." To make supplements, scientists purposely inactivate or "kill" live microorganisms through spray-drying, radiation or pasteurization to create postbiotics.

In 2021, the nonprofit organization International Scientific Association of Probiotics and Prebiotics (ISAPP) defined postbiotics as "a preparation of inanimate microorganisms and/or their components that confers a health benefit on the target host." So the big difference? Probiotics are live, and postbiotics are dead. Put simply, prebiotics are the "food" that feeds probiotics (which are "live," so they need to eat). When probiotics die, some of the waste products can have health benefits and are known as postbiotics.

Are postbiotics effective?

Because postbiotics are already "dead," they are likely to have a longer shelf-life than live probiotics and, thus, a wider application for use in supplements and foods. But it's too soon to know whether postbiotics can be just as beneficial and effective as probiotics. Scientists are currently investigating. "Since postbiotic refers to cell wall material and metabolites from the 'good' bacteria, it makes sense that consuming their metabolites directly would provide benefits," said Andrea M. Liceaga, an associate professor of food science at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind. But many of the effects have been reported based only on in vitro studies without living subjects, Liceaga said. "More clinical trials are needed to fully understand their effectiveness in human health."

The key to making postbiotic supplements is learning which microbes confer a health benefit and at what dose. To date, in vitro and animal studies have documented specific postbiotic components that show antioxidant, antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory effects; inhibit the growth of cancer cells; and protect immune health. But these studies need to be replicated in humans before specific supplement recommendations can be made.

A few postbiotic supplements that have been tested in humans are available in Europe. For example, Pylopass, made of spray-dried dead cell fragments of *L. reuteri*, is used to help control ulcers caused by *H. pylori*. And Lacteol Fort, made from nonviable cells from *L. acidophilus*, is used to treat irritable bowel syndrome. These brands aren't readily available in the United States. Instead, American stores are more likely to sell postbiotics that contain butyrate, or a novel three-in-one prebiotic, probiotic and postbiotic combination.

Butyrate is hotly debated. While ISAPP doesn't technically classify butyrate as a postbiotic, that doesn't stop many supplement companies from selling it as one - often promoting it for weight loss. The evidence for that use is mixed. "Even if you take all of the butyrate in the world and eat fast food everyday, you won't lose weight," said Gregor Reid, distinguished professor emeritus at Western University in London, Ontario. "You can't look for this magic bullet unless you change your lifestyle and diet."

Some people don't naturally make enough butyrate in the gut, and this may be linked to weight gain. If your gut is not making enough butyrate, it may signal a problem with your digestive system that can't simply be fixed by taking butyrate supplements. "If you start taking probiotics, eating fermented foods and taking prebiotics, you will start to develop a better gut microbiota and therefore will produce more butyrate and get healthier," Reid said. "If you just take butyrate supplements, it won't solve your problem. Companies making claims like that should be facing FDA scrutiny."

And what about those three-in-one combo pills? "You have to be cautious," warned Mary Ellen Sanders, the executive science officer of ISAPP, based in Centennial, Colo. "If you use the terms 'prebiotic,' 'probiotic' or 'postbiotic,' each of the substances has to be independently tested and shown to be beneficial in humans," Sanders said. "You'd have to contact the company to see if they have such research, and it may be unlikely that they do."

In an ideal world, specific types of postbiotics would be sold only once clinical studies have established a health reason and a correct dosage, but some supplement companies have skipped that step (and, yep, it's legal). Reid explained that a supplement "fails the definition of probiotic or postbiotic if it's never been tested." ISAPP defined these terms hoping that globally accepted definitions will bring consensus among researchers and manufacturers, and help guide consumers when purchasing products.

Are postbiotic supplements worth buying?

Years ago, when probiotics were a new supplement on the market, it was difficult to know which one to purchase for a specific health benefit. That problem was solved when the term "probiotic" was defined, and the U.S. Probiotics Guide was later established. This database lists probiotic-containing foods and supplements by brand name, probiotic strain, medical use and dosage, and is relied upon by physicians, dietitians and consumers to ensure that the right probiotic is used for the right reason.

At this point, there's no such database for postbiotics. "For postbiotics, there may be advantages, but we need more information on effect and dosage," said Reid, who believes that if a company is making money by calling something a postbiotic, it should conduct studies to prove efficacy. "These companies know how to suck people in to buy their products," Reid said. "If a product says it is 'postbiotics,' ask them questions: which postbiotics, what's the effect, what is the dose, and where's your evidence?"

I did ask these questions to two U.S.-based postbiotic manufacturers, each of whom sent me dozens of studies on postbiotics in general. But neither company provided any research on the specific claims they were making on the products they sell, since they have not done any clinical research. That means the effects and dose of their products are truly unknown. While there may be no harm from taking these products, there may be no benefit, either. They certainly won't melt inches off your waistline overnight.

Sanders doesn't think postbiotics are going to have the same range of benefits as live microorganisms. "We can look forward to more high-quality clinical trials about what effects they have and who can benefit," Sanders said. "But should everyone be taking postbiotics? Current evidence does not support this." Postbiotics are a promising idea with lots of research on the way, and hopefully scientists will learn more about the right dose of which postbiotic to take for different health issues. Until then, ask postbiotic companies to provide you with proof that their product is effective. If it hasn't been tested and has no proof of efficacy, why would you take that supplement?

[Source: The Washington Post | Cara Rosenbloom | March 21, 2022 ++]

Acupuncture

Update 03: How BFA Can Help Relieve Your Pain



Battlefield acupuncture involves placing a single, tiny, gold, semi-permanent needle into one or more of five key points on the external ear to relieve pain

In Chinese medicine, acupuncture dates back more than 2000 years. The Military Health System has developed a modern modification of this ancient practice, known as Battlefield Acupuncture, or BFA. Military health care providers are finding that ear acupuncture, which involves inserting small needles into different areas of the ear, is successful in relieving pain of injured or ill service members. "BFA is highly effective and markedly alleviates acute or chronic pain in approximately 80-85% of patients," regardless of the underlying cause, said Dr. Jeff Leggit, a professor and medical acupuncturist at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences website, in Bethesda, Maryland.

Leggit described it as an "invaluable tool." Providers can administer BFA quickly and safely. There's virtually no risk of drug interactions or side effects, he said. BFA can also reduce the need for narcotics. "A modification of the protocol can also be exceedingly helpful in treating migraine and tension-related headaches," Leggit said. Nearly every military hospital or clinic has at least one individual who has been trained in BFA, added Dr. Arnyce Pock, associate dean and medical acupuncturist at USU. "Moreover, the use of BFA in particular and acupuncture in general is

becoming increasingly more common in [Department of Veterans Affairs] facilities as well," she said.

Retired Air Force Col. (Dr.) Richard Niemtzow developed BFA in the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, to deliver pain relief quickly and efficiently in combat and other military situations. He was the first full-time physician acupuncturist in the military after having been a radiation oncologist. Leggit and Pock are part of the team that now teach BFA to military medical students, doctors, nurses, and others across the MHS. The course lasts up to four hours. It includes lectures and hands-on practice, said Leggit.

In March, Leggit and Pock taught a BFA course to graduate military nursing students at USU. The course trained providers who are not physicians nor acupuncturists, such as advanced practice nurses, to provide BFA to patients for pain management. "USU recognized the importance of giving its graduates training in BFA as a valuable tool in their analgesic 'toolbox', regardless of which specialty they decide to pursue," said Pock. "Being able to effectively treat pain is something every physician needs to be able to do."

How Does It Work?

The BFA protocol involves placing a single, tiny, gold, needle into one or more of five key points on the external ear, Leggit said. Providers insert the needles one at a time. "Patients are typically asked to take a short walk after the insertion of each needle," said Pock. "This activity seems to activate the neural pathways associated with the alleviation of pain." After inserting a needle, the acupuncturist assesses the patient's pain level. If the patient is satisfied or their pain has decreased to a level of zero or one on a 10-point scale, the provider pauses the treatment. The needles remain in place for three to four days before falling out on their own, said Pock.

The acupuncturists can continue treatments for as long as needed. "In some situations, depending on the underlying condition, one or two treatments may be all that's needed," said Leggit. "Other patients with more chronic conditions may require long-term treatment on a regular or recurring basis. Some may only need periodic maintenance treatments, say, one to two times a month."

BFA can treat almost any type of acute or chronic pain. It works very quickly – usually within seconds or minutes, said Pock. "The one caveat is that a conventional diagnosis must be made first, so that the attending clinician understands the underlying source of the pain," said Leggit. "In other words, it's important to treat the underlying cause as well as manage symptoms such as pain." According to these experts, BFA can be particularly valuable for providing care in austere environments. Demand for BFA has been steadily increasing, Pock added. For more information, talk to your health care provider. [Source: Health.mil | Claudia Sanchez-Bustamante | March 23, 2022 ++]

Diabetes

Update 31: Foods Diabetics Should Avoid

Uncontrolled Type 2 diabetes can bring on kidney failure, heart attack, or stroke, so most diabetics learn quickly that their diet needs a drastic makeover. Knowing the health effects and glycemic index of foods is crucial to controlling blood sugar (adding more daily exercise is a good idea too), but thanks to popular low-carbohydrate lifestyle and a recent surge in low-to-no-sugar recipes, snacks, and other options, eating smart has become easier to manage. Here are foods diabetics should avoid.

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Trans Fat-Laden Spreads

Industrial trans fats are created by adding hydrogen to liquid oils to solidify them, which makes them more shelf-stable and affects texture. Think commercially prepared shelf-stable peanut butter, nut spreads, margarine, cheese spreads, creamers, and frozen dinners. In addition, trans fats are added to many crackers, muffins, and other baked goods to extend shelf life. Diabetics should avoid these at all costs, according to the American Diabetes Association.

'100 Calorie' Portioned Snack Packs

Pretzels, small cookies, crackers, and other packaged foods are made with refined flour and fast-digesting carbs that can raise blood sugar, and despite being touted as a diet assist for calorie counters, these snack packs are full of trans fats. A 1-ounce (28 gram) serving of crackers or pretzels has 22 grams of carbohydrates, Dr. Anis Rehman says. Eat whole foods such as nuts or a few low-carb vegetables with a small portion of cheese if you need to graze.

Expensive Juice Cleanses

Juice cleanses, detox drinks, and anything people drink as a meal substitute are often touted as healthy. But they are really Trojan horses for sugar and lack protein and fiber, which help keep blood sugar steady and are often high in calories as well. "Fruit should be eaten whole," Rehman says. So skip these, save money, eat an orange and, if you need minerals and vitamins added to your diet, take basic supplements.

'Sugar-Free' Foods

Just avoid these Frankenfoods altogether. Commercially made sugar-free items are normally very highly processed foods made with unwanted chemicals and extra trans fat to make them palatable. Eat whole foods, smaller quantities, and try drinking plain water when you think you are hungry between meals.

Salad Toppings and Croutons

These carbohydrate-heavy crunchy toppings might get used without considering the effect they have on blood sugar — but consider it. "If you are dining out, ask to hold the croutons," Rehman says. If you are constructing a salad at the salad bar, add sunflower seeds, carrot strips, sliced radish, or jicama to your salad for texture.

Fish Sticks

Sometimes more so than chicken nuggets, fish sticks are coated heavily in breadcrumbs, and deep-fried shrimp and fish can have an extra-thick coating. "Just avoid fried foods in general, especially seafood," Rehman says.

Bread

All commercially baked white and wheat breads are made with refined flour and have similar glycemic indexes, according to research published by Harvard Medical School. Better to bake bread with almond flour or a protein flour blend if the craving is there.

Cereals and Granolas

Loaded with hidden and not-so-hidden sugar, even the healthiest-seeming breakfast cereals are diabetic land mines with a high glycemic index. Granolas seem a healthier option, but they are often equally sugar-laden. According to the American Diabetes Association, the better choice is oatmeal or oat bran, which have a lower GI value — 55 or less. There are many high-protein and low-carb granolas available in grocery stores, too.

Honey and Agave

Seemingly healthy, honey and agave are ingredients diabetics should be careful with. "Some 'hidden' sugars are problematic. Honey, just because it is natural, doesn't mean that more is better. It is still sugar," says registered dietitian and food sensitivity expert Lisa Hugh. Agave is slightly better in the glycemic index but must be portioned carefully.

Potatoes

Any way you slice them or cook them, potatoes are a high-GI food and should be avoided by diabetics. Mashed potatoes and french fries, for example, each have a GI over 75. Try baked sweet potatoes, which have a lower GI score, or go even lower with mashed cauliflower made from cauliflower rice, easy to find in grocery stores' frozen sections or to make yourself.

Grains and Rice

White rice is a high-GI food and should be avoided. Believe it or not, pasta has around a 20-point lower GI score than even brown rice. The best choices for grains and rice replacements are foods such as whole-grain barley, rye berries, and even whole wheat pasta. Many people use cauliflower rice as a rice substitute, too.

Bakery Goods

Commercially baked cupcakes, cookies, pies, scones, and muffins are never recommended for diabetics. They are extremely high on the glycemic index. Diabetics can learn to make these treats with healthier swaps for flour and sugar, but still need to watch their portions.

Alcohol

"Cocktails and especially wine and beer are to be avoided," says Ysabel Montemayor, the lead registered dietitian at meal delivery service Fresh n' Lean. She recommends that your quality

calories and healthier carbs come from whole foods rather than drinks. Occasions sometimes call for a toast, so try and stick to a plain vodka soda or a neat whiskey.

Sweetened Fruit Cups

Often packaged and sold as healthy snacks for kids, these syrup-drenched fruit pieces are not for a diabetic to consume. Whole fruits are absolutely okay to eat in moderation, but the more processed, the more dangerous. Even fruit juices are recommended to drink on a limited basis. Low-glycemic fruits include peaches, apples, cherries, and strawberries.

Sweet Iced Tea

Southern-style sweet iced tea is a disaster for a diabetic and akin to sugary sodas. Unsweetened ice tea, unsweetened black coffee, and whole milk are good choices, but keep sweet iced tea on the no-go list. There is promising research that supports daily coffee and green tea consumption as having a positive effect on Type 2 diabetes.

[Source: Cheapism | Janet A. Aker | March 15, 2022 ++]

Muscle Cramps

Why You Get Them & How to Deal With Them

At some point, you might have experienced a cramp or some muscle spasm. When your muscle contracts suddenly, it might be for a few seconds, or sometimes it can even last for a few minutes. These cramps occur when your muscle spasms and there are some involuntary contractions. Getting cramps in your legs is actually quite common but getting cramps in other areas except legs is not that common though you can still get it. Following are some of their causes, what to do if you get them, and how you can prevent them:

Dehydration

This can be a major cause of getting cramps. If you are exercising, there will be even more water lost from your body in the form of sweat. Hot weather can lead to dehydration as well.

Sitting or Standing

Your muscles need to move. If you sit or you stand in one place for far too long, it can lead to you getting cramps. People who sit at desks for the whole day might have cramps because they are sitting in such positions for such long periods of time. Even traveling for too long can cause cramps, so it is important that you move around when you can to relieve tension. It is important to develop good posture as well because this can ensure that you do not get cramps or any aches because of sitting in these positions.

Overuse of a Muscle

After an intense workout or a long run etc., you might get cramps. This can happen because the muscle gets over-excited. After all, the nerves that run from your brain get overexcited. If you do

an intense workout suddenly and your muscles are not used to it, they might respond by cramping. Always increase the intensity of muscles gradually.

Mineral Deficiency

It is important that you have the electrolytes in your body, and these prevent you from getting cramps. If you do not have enough calcium, sodium, potassium, or magnesium in your diet, this can cause cramps. You can get all these nutrients by eating nuts, bananas, spinach, and yogurt. These foods can ensure that you get all these minerals again.

More Serious Problems

Usually, cramps might not be due to some severe issues. However, sometimes you might get more serious issues. If you feel any muscle weakness, swelling, or redness in your legs or cramping, then show it to your doctor.

- Hardened arteries in your legs can restrict blood supply- your arteries might be too narrow, and your legs might not be getting enough blood supply, especially when you try to exercise.
- Nerve Compression in The Spine Due To Lumbar Stenosis
When this happens, you might feel pain, but you might feel a lot of pain if you walk for a long time.
- The Depletion of Magnesium, Potassium, or Calcium
A poor diet can lead to you having these deficiencies, or you might also use some diuretic that can cause cramps.

What to Do When You Get a Cramp?

When you get a cramp, then try and stretch the muscle in the opposite direction to which it is cramping and getting tight. You can also massage the area to get the cramp to relax. If you have a foam roller around then, you can use that to loosen up the muscles in the area that you are getting the cramp. Foam rollers are great tools for stretch and muscle recovery in general, so you can use them a lot even if you do not always get cramps.

You can also try heat and cold therapy for your muscles. In this, you have to apply heat to the muscle when it cramps. You can use a towel and put it in a bowl of hot water, and apply that towel to your muscles for about twenty minutes. You can also fill rice in a sock, microwave it until it is hot, and then use it in the cramped area for twenty minutes. After the contracting is gone, you can apply ice packs to the area as they ease all sore muscles.

How do you prevent cramps?

- You should drink enough water every day. The exact amount might vary and change depending on your height, weight, level of physical activity, etc. Women who are breastfeeding or pregnant should drink a lot of water. Other than water, you can also have milk, herbal teas, and fruit juices.

- If you have any deficiencies, then try and meet them. Eat foods that can give you all the nutrients that you require. Eat a lot of fruits and vegetables. If you still do not get these nutrients from foods, then you can consider a supplement. Pregnant women take magnesium supplements sometimes to help with muscle cramps.
- If you are about to exercise, make sure you warm up well before starting any exercise. Do some static and dynamic stretches. Make sure that you stretch your muscles well before you start as well. If you get cramps at night, you can stretch before you go to sleep.

Conclusion

If you keep getting cramps, then you might have to show that to your doctor. If you have done everything that you can to prevent it, then there might be an issue. Even if your cramps are too painful, you should consult a doctor. Most cramps can be treated at home, and the issue is not a huge problem. Mostly it might be that you have not consumed enough electrolytes etc. But as mentioned above, some issues might be more severe, and you will have to visit a doctor in such a situation as it can be difficult and harmful for you.

[Source: Ziggie Social | August 13, 2021 ++]

Showering

Reasons to Do it Every Other Day



The majority of individuals shower at a minimum once each day, sometimes more. However, if the individual asked themselves why they are required to clean themselves every day. They might recognize that they shower more than is necessary. As a matter of fact, regular showers do not provide any benefits in terms of looks and health. Following are some benefits of not showering so frequently.

Less Exposure to Infection

Individuals might be contemplating that having a shower each day is healthier than showering every other day. However, in reality, it turns out to be the reverse. Frequent showers might interrupt the balance of the skin's microorganisms, resulting in the skin being less protective and more

susceptible to infection. The immune system requires specific stimuli from dirt and bacteria. Therefore showering too frequently might lead to a weakened immune system and its capability to safeguard against viruses.

The Skin Would Appreciate It

Taking hot, long showers might feel soothing and keeps the skin clean; however, this type of shower could lead to aging prematurely. The skin is enclosed with an outer layer that is fatty. It traps the moisture in order to sustain the skin looking younger and staying plump longer. Scrubbing and washing the skin could remove this protective layer, causing the skin to be wrinkled, dry, and irritated.

Hair Might Begin Growing Faster

This might sound very contradictory; washing the hair every day could eventually make it appear duller and greasier. When hair is washed each day, individuals are removing the outer layer of sebum which acts as a protective shield. Sebum is a safeguard against damage. As a reaction, the pores will begin to manufacture additional sebum, resulting in the scalp being irritated and feeling itchy. Eventually, this will result in the pores being clogged. This in turn could impair the growth of hair, plus prevent the hair from appearing and feeling its best.

Might Lose Weight

Taking a shower that is relaxing might sound awesome after consuming a tasty meal. However, this routine might actually lead to the individual putting on some additional pounds. The ability to digest food properly requires adequate blood flow to the stomach. When the individual gets into the shower, this results in the temperature of the body dropping. This could lead to confusion of the digestive system. If done frequently, it might damage the digestive system, leading to the individual putting on some additional pounds.

Less Prone To Allergic Reactions

Showering too frequently might contribute to those irritating allergies. When the acid mantle in the skin is damaged, it decreases the skin's capacity to fight against peripheral stimuli. Removing the dirt from the skin allows the immune system to become lazy. This then could result in asthma, allergies, and maybe even diabetes.

Beneficial To the Reproductive System

Similar to the skin, the fragile area that surrounds the reproductive organs also requires bacterial balance in order to remain healthy. The water that is used to clean the skin might consist of heavy metals plus other dangerous chemicals. Including the perfumes and artificial additives which are found in shower gels and soaps. Being exposed to chemicals such as these on a daily basis might interrupt the good bacteria inside the reproductive organs. Leading to irritation, itching, and several other infections.

[Source: The Outdoor Wear Team | August 4, 2021++]



SGLI/VGLI

Update 22: Senate Votes to Raise Maximum Coverage to \$500,000

Service members and veterans would be able to boost their life insurance coverage by \$100,000 under a bill passed by the Senate on 23 MAR. The bill, dubbed the Supporting Families of the Fallen Act, S.2794 would increase maximum coverage from \$400,000 to \$500,000 for both the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance plan and the Veterans' Group Life Insurance plan. Neither plan has had an increase in the cap on coverage offered since 2005.

"Sometimes, it's the little things that really help," Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R-AL), the bill's sponsor, said in an interview with Military.com ahead of its passage. "There's not a lot being saved by these military families, there's not a big savings account, and so there's not a lot to lean on if there's a death in the family. So I think this gives us another opportunity to give peace of mind to some of the families." The bill was approved by the Senate in a voice vote without objections.

Both insurance policies are administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Qualified service members, including all active-duty members, cadets at military academies and certain members of the reserves and National Guard, are automatically enrolled in the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance, though they can choose to decline coverage. The Veterans' Group Life Insurance is open to veterans who had the service members' plan and are within one year and 120 days of leaving the military.

Neither plan is free -- though the Defense Department reimburses the premium when a service member is in a combat zone -- but they offer service members and veterans a low-cost option for life insurance. Service members and veterans who choose the \$500,000 coverage would pay about \$6 more per month for their premium than under the \$400,000 plan, according to Tuberville's office. Tuberville, whose father died of a heart attack during military training while on active duty, said he was inspired to sponsor the bill because of his family history, as well as hearing from concerned military families.

An increase in coverage is particularly important now as inflation drives up the cost of living, he added. "Coming from the education field, I can see the opportunities of couple of kids that their dad passes away at 10 or 12 years old, and then they want to go to college years after that," Tuberville, who previously coached football at Auburn University, said when asked how he envisions the increased coverage helping families. The bill has been endorsed by several military

and veterans organizations, including the Military Officers Association of America and the Wounded Warrior Project.

"The Supporting Families of the Fallen Act is long overdue and will authorize the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) and Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) to catch up with inflation," Dana Atkins, president and CEO of the Military Officers Association of America, or MOAA, said in a statement shared by Tuberville's office. "This legislation is ultimately about supporting the families of service members, and MOAA looks forward to growing bipartisan support for this important modernization of life insurance." The bill must still pass the House before becoming law. A similar bill, H.R.3793, was introduced in the lower chamber last year by Rep. Chip Roy (R-TX) and has 13 bipartisan cosponsors. Tuberville said he has spoken with House members about the bill and thinks it "has good support there." [Source: Military.com | Rebecca Kheel | 24 March 24, 2022 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs

Update 79: Efforts to Lower Prescription Drug Prices Continue

Although Congress has so far failed to pass legislation to lower prescription drug prices, they have not given up trying to do so. This 16 MAR, the Senate Finance Committee was scheduled to hold a hearing entitled "*Prescription Drug Inflation: an urgent need to lower prescription drug prices in medicines.*" In addition, leaders in both houses have said they will continue to work on legislation that can gain enough support to pass. As we've reported in the past, the Democratic majority has been unable to agree among themselves on legislation to lower drug prices and Republicans have said they will not vote for any drug-lowering legislation the Democrats have come up with so far.

Because of the impasse in Congress, the Biden administration has been looking for ways to lower drug prices either through executive orders or through administrative rule-making. An example of the latter is a Medicare proposal aimed at lowering out-of-pocket drug costs. It is a complicated measure but that's because the manner in which drug prices are set is very complicated and not at all transparent. Very briefly, this new rule mandates that Medicare Part D plans apply all "price concessions" they receive from pharmacies to the final sale price. However, it wouldn't ensure the rebates that manufacturers pay to insurers and pharmacy middlemen also apply at the point of sale. Critics argue those rebates are shrouded in secrecy and have ultimately led to higher initial list prices.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) said in January that the proposed rule would reduce costs of prescriptions for those who need them, and improve transparency and competition in the Part D program. However, Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs) argue that the proposal would limit its function to bring lower drug costs to consumers. PBMs have repeatedly

argued that drug manufacturer price setting is the root cause of high drug costs. PBMs are something no one outside of the prescription drug world had ever heard of until the drive-in recent years to lower drug prices. They are pitted against the big drug manufacturing companies in the battle, with each accusing the other of being the reason for the outrageously high prescription prices Americans are paying and each are pouring millions of dollars into lobbying efforts to try and defeat any proposed legislation that might harm their profits.

As we said, it's very complicated. In all of this, The Senior Citizens League's goal remains the same: prescription drug prices are too high, and we need government action to lower them. A drug that will cure or control a medical condition does no good if the person who needs the drug can't afford it.

[Source: TSCL Weekly Update | March 12, 2022 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs

Update 80: Pressure Mounts for Presidential Actions on Prices

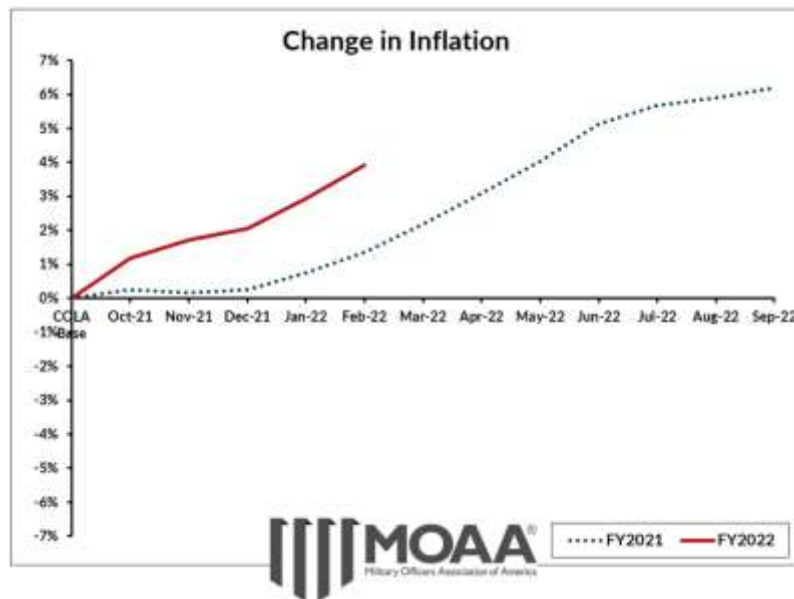
When it comes to seniors' issues, the main focus of Congress continues to be on the high cost of prescription drugs. The Republicans in the Senate continue to unanimously refuse to support the broad legislation put forth by Democrats that includes provisions to reduce drug prices, and Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) still has not agreed to the bill, meaning there are not enough Democratic votes to pass it. Democratic leaders in the Senate are negotiating with Manchin to see if they can make the changes he seeks so they can pass the bill this year but so far, there has been no breakthrough.

Because of the impasse, there is a group of nearly 100 liberal Democratic members in the House who are urging President Biden to issue executive orders insofar as he can, to lower drug prices. While that is one way to overcome Congressional deadlock, it may be only temporary. That's because executive orders by one President can easily be overturned by another, or by the courts. President Obama signed 276 executive orders and hundreds of presidential memoranda during his eight years in office, while President Trump issued 220 executive orders during his single term.

President Biden has issued 84 executive orders so far and in his first days in office he overturned many Trump-era policies. Democrats prefer to pass legislation that would make the drug-price reductions permanent, but if negotiations with Senator Manchin continue to prove fruitless, it becomes more likely that the President will issue some sort of executive orders. [Source: The Senior Citizens League Weekly Update | March 21, 2021 ++]

Cola Watch 2022

CPI Increase as of FEB



The February 2022 CPI is 278.943, 3.9 percent above the FY 2022 COLA baseline. The Consumer Price Index for March 2022 is scheduled to be released April 12. The CPI baseline for FY 2022 is 268.421. The calculation is made by comparing the average CPI from July through September of the current fiscal year to the average for the same months of the year prior. Remember, active duty pay raises are calculated differently. This information is calculated from the non-seasonally adjusted Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W). Calculation for monthly COLA change: (Monthly CPI-Yearly baseline CPI)/Yearly baseline CPI. Learn more about CPI on the BLS web page <https://www.bls.gov/cpi>. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | March 17, 2022++]

Military Discounts

Update 02: There's Help for Home Depot Customers Who Aren't Tech Savvy

Some military retirees have expressed their dissatisfaction with Home Depot's recently changed discount policy, saying those who aren't "tech savvy" may be left out. The national home improvement chain opened up its everyday discount to 16 million more veterans, but that comes with more requirements for verifying military service. Previously, military retirees and currently serving military could simply show their military ID at the cash register and get a 10% discount. Veterans who left the military before retirement could get a discount, but only on certain holidays.

Now, all veterans who haven't been dishonorably discharged are eligible for the discount every day, and both active duty members and veterans are required to be verified. To get the discount, those eligible must create an account and verify their eligibility through Sheer ID by going to https://www.homedepot.com/c/military/?cm_sp=vanity-_-military-_-OCT21. During that one-time process, you create an account that will allow the discount to be automatically applied when shopping online, and a QR code to be scanned from your mobile phone in-store at checkout.

There's the rub, say some retirees. "Older veterans who are not as tech savvy generally, used to be able to present a valid military ID to get the 10% discount. That no longer works," said James Fender, a retired Army lieutenant colonel, in an email to Military Times. "Do you see the problem this will cause older non-tech-savvy vets? They DO have a valid military ID in their pockets, but they MAY NOT have a smartphone," he said. "According to the manager at my local Home Depot ... they're just out of luck." But a spokeswoman for Home Depot said customer service departments in stores or online are ready to work with them. If someone is having trouble registering, they can seek help online through customer service representatives who can walk them through it, said Home Depot spokeswoman Yanique Woodall.

Those in the store having a challenge because of the verification requirement should speak to an employee, she said. "They will direct them appropriately and make sure they're taken care of," she said. Asked specifically if someone who isn't tech savvy can go to a Home Depot store and get the discount, she said, "they should speak with our frontline associates, and they have the ability to take care of the customer." "Our job at the end of the day is to take care of the customer."

Although Home Depot has opened the discount to potentially 16 million more veterans on a daily basis, the amount of the discount is now limited to \$400 per year, per person. Spouses of those registered can also register for their own account, and the spouse and veteran would be eligible for a combined \$800 discount each year, on a total of \$8,000 in purchases. The change in policy also means the discounts can be used online, where more items are available. Woodall declined to specify how many people have signed up for the military and veteran discount, citing proprietary reasons. "However, with the recent program expansion to now include all veterans, active service members and spouses, it can be utilized by more of our customers," she said.

"It's a much more robust program," Woodall said. "We have customers who are very pleased with the ease and convenience of the one-time registration," Woodall said. "I'm glad we have the opportunity to offer them a discount, and even more delighted to expand it," she said. The changes to the Home Depot military discount program are similar to those that another national home improvement chain, Lowe's, made to their military discount program in 2017, using a third-party online verification system. The Lowe's program doesn't have a yearly maximum discount cap.

A number of commercial retailers have begun using verification services to provide discounts to those in the military community, which makes it easier to provide discounts to veterans who don't always have identification. According to the SheerID website, the verification process helps

businesses make sure they're giving discounts to customers they're trying to reach, and not to those who don't qualify for the discounts. Commercial retailers aren't required to offer discounts to veterans or anyone. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | March 18, 2022 ++]

Predatory Car Sales

California Eyes Safeguard for Military Personnel



Enlisted members of the military would get an automatic 30-day cooling off period in California when they buy or lease vehicles, under a proposal backed 29 MAR by the state's attorney general and leader of the state Senate. They argued that those individuals are often the targets of predatory auto sales practices. Vehicle dealers near military bases may offer "special deals" for military personnel that in fact include inflated prices and financing.

There is no cooling off period for the general public under California law, according to the Department of Motor Vehicles. State law offers a two day cooling off period for those who buy a used vehicle for less than \$40,000, but only if the buyer purchases a contract cancellation option agreement. Most dealers allow a three-day window, but that's subject to negotiation, said Sen. Susan Talamantes Eggman.

Under the bill by Talamantes Eggman and Senate President pro Tempore Toni Atkins, the 30-day window to return any purchased or leased vehicle would apply to enlisted service members up to and including the rank of Army, Marine Corps and Space Force sergeant, Air Force staff sergeant, and Navy and Coast Guard petty officer second class. "This is a very vulnerable group, some of our more junior enlisted service members," said California Attorney General Rob Bonta, who proposed the bill. "They have a little bit less experience in the world, they're often younger and they're often more financially vulnerable. Their wages are less than some of the more senior members of the military."

The proposal comes amid soaring prices and diminished availability of vehicles due to pent-up demand and supply chain shortages during the coronavirus pandemic. Eight out of 10 new car buyers paid above sticker price in January, according to Edmunds.com, while the price of a used vehicle had jumped 39% by last fall over a 12-month period. More than half of U.S. families have less income than is considered necessary to buy an average-priced used vehicle. Representatives

of the California New Car Dealers Association and Independent Automobile Dealers Association of California did not respond to requests for comment.

The same pending legislation would make it easier for service members to end auto leases when they are reassigned or deployed. The provisions are part of a broader consumer protection bill for members of the military authored by Talamantes Eggman, who served four years in the U.S. Army as a combat medic and sits on the Senate’s Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. Bonta said the proposed legislation grew out of his office’s investigation and prosecution of businesses that target military families, as well as discussions with service members, military lawyers and financial counselors.

“The alarming things that I heard ... made it abundantly clear to me that our existing laws needed some reinforcement,” Bonta said. “Unfortunately, businesses too often try to take advantage of service members and their families.” The bill is set for its first committee hearing April 19. Among other things, the bill would:

- Clarify an existing state law that allows members of the California National Guard and Reserve to defer payments on mortgages and other debts while they are deployed.
- Make clear that service members don’t accrue interest on their deferred mortgage obligation. Expand service members’ right to appear remotely or through a representative in small claims cases aimed at reclaiming improperly withheld security deposits.
- Bar businesses from accessing or using personal information on chip-based military identification cards.
- Increase service members’ protections under the federal Military Lending Act and the state Unfair Competition Law
- Bar businesses from offering military discounts on the condition that service members or veterans waive their rights under federal or state law.

[Source: The Associated Press | Don Thompson | March 29, 2022 ++]

Inmate Care Package Scam

Watch Out for Fake Service Sites

If you have an incarcerated family member or friend, sending a package is a way to show you care. But do your research beforehand. BBB Scam Tracker has gotten several reports of fake inmate care package services targeting people online.



How this scam works

- You find a website that offers to send care packages to inmates. The website looks professional and allows you to specify the prison or facility, as well as the inmate's name. You add items to your cart and place your order.
- However, when it's time to make a payment, you may notice some strange instructions. Many fake care package sites claim they currently don't or can't take credit card payments. Instead, you're asked to make a payment via a third-party app, such as PayPal, Zelle, or CashApp. If you make the purchase on a scam site, your account will be charged, but the care package won't arrive. These websites are fake and designed to receive payments (without producing the goods). Any attempts to get in touch with customer service representatives will be met with silence.
- Check out the full article at <https://t.e2ma.net/click/jlsoue/3cbhhbb/rb27qm> or reports from victims.

How to spot these scams:

- Understand the laws around care packages. Prisons have strict rules about inmates can receive. Each item in the care package needs to be carefully selected to meet prison regulations. Be sure to check with the specific facility. Learn more about care package laws.
- Check website reviews from outside sources. Don't rely on reviews found directly on the website. These are often made up by scammers. Instead, research companies on other websites, such as BBB.org. Look closely at customer reviews, with a watchful eye for complaints about unfulfilled services or refusal to refund money. If you can't find any reviews, search the company or website name along with the words "scam" or "fake" and see if you come across any negative reports.
- Always use your credit card to pay. Be wary of any company that won't allow you to use a credit card to pay. Once you send money through a third-party app, it can be much harder, if not impossible, to get your money back.
- Read the full article at <https://t.e2ma.net/click/jlsoue/3cbhhbb/nw37qm> for more tips.

For more information

See the [BBB Tip: Smart Shopping Online](#) for more ways to avoid scams when making online purchases. Also, learn how to [spot a lookalike website](#). If you've spotted a scam (whether or not

you've lost money), report it to [BBB Scam Tracker](#). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Learn how to spot a scam at [BBB.org/SpotAScam](#). [Source: Better Business Bureau | March 18, 2021++]

Shipping Container Scam

In The Market for a Shipping Container? Don't Waste Money on This One



If you are looking to buy a shipping container, watch out for the so-called “Sea Can Scam.” This crafty con uses real business addresses to trick people into paying for a shipping container that doesn’t exist.

How this scam works

- You see an ad online for shipping containers at a very competitive price. You reach out to the business and are directed to a professional-looking website. You even do background research by searching for their physical address online. An online map shows their address is in a shipping yard. Everything checks out!
- After some back and forth with a customer service representative, you agree to purchase the container. You are asked to pay up front before you can arrange pick up.
- However, after paying, the customer service reps become difficult or impossible to contact. If you visit the business in person, you find there is indeed a shipping container company at that address. Unfortunately, they are a different business with no knowledge of your purchase or the website you visited. Scammers use the addresses of legitimate businesses as a cover for their scams. They steal your money and personal information while damaging a real business’s reputation.

How to spot these scams:

- Double check the business’s contact information. Before contacting a business, review their website and contact information carefully. Physical addresses are usually a good indication that the business is for real, but make sure the website matches information you can find on local maps. For example, if a business’s contact phone number on their website is different from what appears for that address on Google Maps, consider it a warning sign.

Another red flag is a physical address that comes up as an empty lot or a residential home when searched.

- Read reviews. Be sure to read reviews, and not just those that appear on the business's website. Search for reviews on third-party websites and keep a close eye out for any reports of scams or less than honest business practices.
- Be skeptical of extremely low prices. If a price sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- View the container before you buy. See high dollar items in person before you buy. If a seller won't let you see their product or insists you pay first, you're probably dealing with a scammer.
- Be wary of aggressive sales tactics. Scammers will often apply some serious sales pressure so you will make a purchase without thinking your decision through. Don't give into these tactics, especially when purchasing an item that costs several thousand dollars.

For more information

Avoid getting scammed by reviewing the [BBB Tip: Smart Online Shopping](#).

If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to [BBB Scam Tracker](#). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Learn how to spot a scam at [BBB.org/SpotAScam](#). [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | March 25, 2022 ++]

Early Retirement Myths

Beware of These



Saving for retirement is challenging and sometimes overwhelming work. It's a reality borne out by the numbers: half of American households over the age of 55 have no retirement savings at all, according to the Manhattan Institute. Furthermore, about 40 percent of households headed by people aged 55 through 70 lack the resources to maintain their standard of living during retirement. So, when members of the FIRE movement (Financial Independence Retire Early) brag about accumulating so much wealth they're able to retire in their forties, or when marketers target you with early retirement proposals and gimmicks, it's best to view such claims with a hefty dose of

skepticism. Few people manage to save enough money to retire on time, let alone decades early. Here are some of the myths about the ways to successfully retire early.

Maximizing Stock Market Contributions Will Make You Rich

Many people who wish to retire early think they can simply hit it big by playing the stock market, says Chris Abrams, founder of Abrams Insurance Solutions. But this approach doesn't always pan out, particularly if you're trying to accumulate enough wealth to depart the workforce decades early. "While investing in the stock market can certainly help you create a passive income stream, it's far from being a safe bet," says Abrams. "The financial recession taught us that the value of your portfolio can be wiped clean at a moment's notice." It's best to avoid putting all your retirement eggs in the one basket, particularly the stock market basket, adds Abrams.

Forex Trading Is an Easy Way to Get Rich Quick

Another big myth that needs to be debunked is that Forex trading, which is the process of changing one currency into another, is an easy way to get rich overnight, says Paul Sundin, CPA and financial adviser for Emparion. "You can't rely on your savings multiplying itself as soon as you trade. People only perceive this as a quick way to retire primarily because of the high financial rewards being spoken of by successful traders," says Sundin. "The misconception is that it's easy, when in fact there are too many factors to consider to even speak of it as such. Even seasoned traders can't guarantee you a 100 percent success rate." Just like any other profession, being successful requires learning and developing your strategy over time, adds Sundin. "There's no shortcut to learning the ways of the stock market and definitely not a sure and easy way to retire early," he says.

Passive Income Streams Require Little Work

A steady chorus of FIRE advocates have suggested that creating your own blog or your own brand is one of the key steps to quickly generating the money you need to retire early. Blogs, they point out, create a passive income stream — money that you'll earn with little effort. The reality is that there's quite a bit of work involved in building and maintaining a lucrative blog, especially at the outset. "This myth is perpetuated by the internet marketers who sell e-books about the tactics of creating passive income," says Joseph Meyer, creator of the site The Dollar Soldier. "They focus on the big money but fail to mention that you'll likely spend hundreds of hours on creating content and bringing traffic to your website." Additionally, says Meyer, many businesses require employees, which creates another burden for you. "Unfortunately, the most lucrative business models require the most work," says Meyer.

No More Lattes ... Like ... Ever

Along with finding ways to generate oodles of passive income, there are also those who espouse doing away with your overpriced lattes. The reality however, is that completely banishing your frothy customized coffee drinks forever is not going to make you rich enough to retire decades early. Sorry to be the bearer of bad news (or good news depending on how much of a latte addict

you are). You'd be hard pressed to find a FIRE movement member who got there because they never ordered another Starbucks beverage.

Your Parents' Wealth Will Take Care of You

Another dangerous myth is that your parents' wealth will be your golden ticket to early retirement — which is unlikely unless you're part of the wealthiest 1 percent. "If your parents are still living and working on their businesses or investments, you can never tell how long their money will last the family. Even when you inherit their wealth, if all you're doing is spending and there's no inflow of income, then eventually you'll exhaust it all," says Sundin of Emparion.

Downsizing Will Help

How often have you heard that downsizing your home is one of the best ways to accelerate retirement savings? While that may be true in some cases, it's not always a guaranteed path to early retirement success, says Ben Reynolds, CEO of Sure Dividend. "Switching from a big house to a small one might sound like it will save you money, but it can also depend on the new location you choose and other factors," explains Reynolds. "Figuring out the financial difference of living in a new area means looking at expensive repairs your old home might not have had, as well as property taxes and living costs for your new area." In other words, do your research carefully and make sure you're not simply trading one expense for another. While a smaller house may cost less upfront, you may end up in a community where the property taxes are higher or everyday living expenses are steeper, ultimately saving little to no money at all.

You Plan to Abide by the 4% Rule

A common notion bandied about in association with successfully managing your retirement stockpile, particularly if you start living off of it decades earlier, is the idea that if you just withdraw 4% of your investments during the first year of retirement (whenever that retirement happens to begin) and then withdraw that same amount adjusted for inflation each year thereafter, the money will last forever. "How much do you have saved? Can you live on just 4%?" says John Hill, founder of Gateway Retirement in Rock Hill, South Carolina. "This myth overlooks market downturns and the inflation you may face in retirement." In addition, people are living longer, and therefore could need their money to last well into their nineties.

FIRE Movement Members Are Just Like You

FIRE advocates are generally well-off individuals to begin with, says Jim Pendergast, senior vice president of altLINE, part of The Southern Bank Company. "This is one secret FIRE communities don't want folks to know because it sort of undermines the whole movement," says Pendergast. "Most are already successful business owners or solopreneurs who can dedicate the bulk of their income to aggressive retirement investments."

Early Retirement Is Actually the Goal

If you truly listen to the desires of people, and even what the FIRE bloggers are preaching, all they're really saying is to create a life that you truly enjoy, suggests Daniel Penzing, creator of the personal finance site Maze of Our Lives. "They're saying create a life that you don't need to take

vacations from," says Penzing. And mostly, that's achieved by amassing enough money that you don't have to toil away in jobs that don't bring you happiness or joy. With enough money squirreled away, you become your own boss, writing your own ticket and deciding where and how you spend your time – including where and when you work.

[Source: Cheapism | Mia Taylor | December 29, 2021 ++]

Car Repair

Update 03: 16 More Lies Your Mechanic Has Told You

Car owners place a lot of trust in mechanics to limit maintenance and repairs to what a vehicle needs. But when there's a sizable knowledge gap between vehicle owner and mechanic, that trust can be betrayed by unscrupulous mechanics. That's why there are some things a car owner should know before heading into the shop for even a routine oil change that will help look out for fibs auto shops may tell to get you to spend a bit more

You Have a Leak

Though a leak is not out of the question, this is usually a tactic of really bad auto shops. Ask to see exactly where the car is leaking, Consumer Reports says. Coolant sprayed on the engine isn't a leak: It's fraud.

It Costs This Much

Always ask for an estimate first. If you have doubts about a price, check it against free calculators such as Consumer Reports' repair estimator. If it's well over, walk away.

I Can't Give That Information

If a mechanic diagnoses a problem, car owners are owed an explanation in terms they can understand, Consumer Reports says. A mechanic should also be able to provide an estimate for service. Lastly, they should be able to show the damage or wear to as vehicle. If they can't show any of that, get a second opinion.

The Car Also Needed This

Absolutely not. As Angie's List points out, you're responsible only for the work you authorize. If a mechanic decides you need more maintenance, they have to run it by you first. If they do unauthorized work, refuse payment. If they won't relinquish the car, call police immediately.

The Air Filter Is Filthy

Unscrupulous mechanics keep fake, dirty filters around to squeeze more work out of you, Angie's List says. Check the manual. If it's way too early for a filter to be changed and the car hasn't been driven all that hard, don't buy it. "Engine air filter replacement intervals today are generally in the 25,000-mile range, but are a common upsell at every oil change," Calkins says. "A little dirt on the

filter doesn't mean it's bad, only that it's doing its job. If light from a 100-watt bulb will pass through at least half the filter area, the filter is fine."

The Fuel Filter Is Filthy

"On gasoline engines, fuel filter replacement is rarely necessary on modern vehicles unless a restricted filter is diagnosed as part of a larger fuel system issue," Calkins says. "Diesel fuel filters do require regular service, and it is very important that it be done."

I'm a Certified Mechanic

An actual certified mechanic should have no problem displaying their certifications. Look for certificates and plaques from the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence, the Better Business Bureau, or AAA.

These Are New Tires

Each set of tires comes with a build date that says when they were manufactured. If you feel like a deal is too good to be true, see if those tires have a few years on them already. "Additionally, although tires might have a pressure printed on their sidewalls, the number in the owner's manual or on the inside of the driver's door jamb is the one that should be used," says Matt Smith, senior editor of automotive pricing and analysis site CarGurus. "The number on the sidewall might indicate the maximum pressure the tire can handle, but that figure doesn't take into consideration the specific car being driven. The number in the manual is designed to keep the tires working safely and efficiently."

This Part Is Guaranteed for Life

A lifetime brake warranty or muffler warranty may cover brakes and mufflers — but only specific parts, and some shops will use this as an excuse to charge for others (the pipes that connect to the muffler, for example), while all will still charge for labor. A lifetime of "free" parts will never be free, notes mechanic Doug Flint in Alexandria, Virginia.

Foreign Cars Cost More to Maintain

It is 2022 and there are still independent repair shops out there trying to make a premium on "foreign" car maintenance. Toyota sells the third most cars of any automaker in the United States, and it, Subaru, Nissan, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Honda, Mazda, Hyundai, Kia, Volkswagen, and Volvo all build cars at U.S. facilities. According to YourMechanic.com, a Porsche or BMW is the costliest to repair, and Toyotas and Hondas the least. It isn't foreign cars that are costly to repair ... it's luxury cars with expensive equipment.

Old Part? What Old Part?

If unconvinced an old part needed replacing, ask to see it or ask for the part back and check with another mechanic to see if the work was necessary. Mechanics will usually give you the old part, but hit you with a "core charge" because they won't get the broken part to rebuild for resale.

The Car Needs a Tuneup

It's been a generation since any car has needed a tune-up. If a car dates back to the 1990s or beyond, maybe give it more routine maintenance; if not, you don't need spark plugs or oil filters changed every 20,000 to 30,000 miles. Mechanic who say otherwise doesn't have your or your 21st Century car's best interests in mind. "With electronic ignition, tune-ups are a thing of the past," DeLorenzo says. "A big part of that was new spark plugs. However, manufacturers are fitting cars with plugs that will go longer than 100,000 miles."

The Car Needs a Lube Job

Unless you're driving a truck with ball joints and tie rods that need lubrication or an older car where the ball joints aren't sealed, you'll never need to bring a car in for this kind of maintenance. Unless a shop specializes in trucks or older cars, it should never ask you if your vehicle needs this service.

The Car Needs Synthetic Oil

Consider this one carefully. High-performance and luxury cars usually require synthetic oil, but it's far from mandatory. Synthetic oil does have benefits — longer life and longer periods between oil changes — but older cars sometimes don't react well to it. Consult a car manual and consider the cost. Synthetic oil tends to be a bit pricier.

The Car Needs Premium Fuel

Some cars require premium fuel. But unless an owner's manual explicitly states a need, don't bother. "Using high-grade fuel in an engine designed to run on regular typically won't deliver any noticeably positive effects — you'll notice more difference in your wallet than in your engine," Smith says.

You Can't Run Your Own Diagnostics

Oh no? Then why does Lifehacker point out a whole bunch of On-Board Diagnostics equipment readily available on Amazon — not to mention that with Android and iPhone apps readily available, running diagnostics on a vehicle isn't as impossible as it once was, or as mechanics would have owners believe.

[Source: Cheapism | Jason Nottle | February 01, 2022 ++]

Tax Burden on Washington Vets

As of MAR 2022

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, excise, and property taxes can more than offset the lack of or a low 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. Washington's total state tax burden is ranked as the 37th highest in the nation at 12.02%. Following is a breakdown of the taxes you can expect to pay if you move to Washington state in 2022:

Sales Taxes

The Washington state sales tax rate is 6.5%, and the average WA sales tax after local surtaxes is 8.89%.

- Groceries and prescription drugs are exempt from the Washington sales tax
- Counties and cities can charge an additional [local sales tax](#) of up to 3.1%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 9.6%
- Washington has 726 [special sales tax jurisdictions](#) with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax
- Washington has a **lower state sales tax** than 90.4% of states

Washington treats candy and soda as a grocery. Prepared Food is subject to special 10% sales tax rates under Washington law. Additional sales taxes can be levied on specific types of services or transactions, such as car rentals, real estate sales, and hotel rooms. Also, many sovereign Native American reservations within the state have specific local sales tax laws, based on individual agreements with the state government. Additional excise taxes apply to purchases of gasoline, cigarettes, and other goods.

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 Washington state government are the fuel tax on gasoline and the so-called "sin tax" collected on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. Other general taxes, similar to excise taxes, may be collected on other items including firearms, vehicle sales, tanning salons, transportation tickets, gas guzzlers, and more. Washington collects an average of \$628 in yearly excise taxes per capita, one of the highest average per capita excise taxes in the country.

- **Alcohol:** The tax is already added to the purchase price. 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.
 - The Washington excise tax on beer is \$0.26 per gallon, higher than 52% of the other 50 states. Vermont's beer excise tax is ranked #24 out of the 50 states.
 - The Washington excise tax on Wine is \$0.87 per gallon, higher than 50% of the other 50 states. Washington's excise tax on wine is ranked #25 out of the 50 states.
 - The Washington excise tax on liquor is \$35.22 per gallon, one of the highest liquor taxes in the country. Washington's excise tax on Spirits is ranked #1 out of the 50 states. All liquor stores in Washington are state-owned, so excise taxes for hard alcohol sales are set

by the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS) and not by the state. In Washington, taxes include an alcohol-specific sales tax and retail (17%) and distributor (10%) license fees, converted to a per-gallon rate. The Washington liquor tax applies to all hard alcohol (alcoholic beverages other than beer and wine), and is already included in the purchase price by the retailer.

- **Cannabis:** Purchases are subject to a 37% marijuana excise tax. Medical marijuana Purchases are not taxed.
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans in Washington is \$17.95 per phone service plan, one of the highest cellphone taxes in the country. Washington's average cellphone tax is ranked #2 out of the 50 states. The Washington 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 monthly bill.
- **Cigarettes:** The Washington excise tax on cigarettes is **\$3.03 per 20 cigarettes**, one of the highest cigarettes taxes in the country. Washington's excise tax on cigarettes is ranked #6 out of the 50 states. The Washington cigarette tax of \$3.03 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 Washington excise tax on gasoline and diesel is 49.4¢ per gallon each and is ranked 7 highest out of the 50 states. The Washington gas tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations 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 92% from 1993 to 2020.
- **Vehicle:** Washington 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 Washington State Department of Licensing and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid. Refer to <https://www.dol.wa.gov> for the current amounts charged.

Personal State Income Taxes

Washington does not have a personal or corporate income tax. However, people or businesses that engage in business in Washington are subject to business and occupation (B&O) and/or public utility tax. The business's gross receipts determine the amount of tax they are required to pay. Businesses that make retail sales or provide retail services may be required to collect and submit retail sales tax. Retirement Income is not taxed.

Property Taxes

State law requires that county assessors appraise all property at 100 percent of its true and fair market value in money, according to the highest and best use of the property. Fair market value or true value is the amount that a willing and unobligated buyer is willing to pay a willing and unobligated seller. The county assessor values real property using one or more of three professional appraisal methods. You may appeal your property's assessment to the county board of equalization in the county where your property is located.

Real property includes land, improvements to land, structures, and certain equipment affixed to structures. Personal property includes furnishings, machinery and equipment, fixtures, supplies, and tools. The primary characteristic of personal property is its mobility. Personal property tax applies to personal property used when conducting business or to other personal property not exempted by law. Most personal property owned by individuals is specifically exempt. However, if these items are used in a business, personal property tax applies. For more information on how your residential property is assessed and valued see [A Homeowner's Guide to Property Taxes](#) (pdf).

Property taxes make up at least 9.4 percent of the state's General Fund, which supports public services for Washington residents. [Revenue at a Glance](#) provides more detail on property taxes and how they help fund these services. The Washington Department of Revenue does not collect property tax. They oversee the administration of property taxes at state and local levels. Property taxes account for about 30% of Washington's total state and local taxes. Properties are appraised at 100% of fair market value. A property tax exemption program is available for persons age 61 or older, or persons unable to work due to a physical disability. The property, which can include up to an acre of land, must be owner/buyer occupied.

The state offers a senior property tax exemption program for those whose household income does not exceed a designated amount. If your annual income for the application year does not exceed the designated amount, your home will be exempt from all excess and special levies approved by voters. For senior exemptions and deferrals, refer to <http://dor.wa.gov/Content/FindTaxesAndRates/PropertyTax/IncentivePrograms.aspx>.

The state's tax deferral program works in conjunction with the exemption program. A senior citizen or disabled person may defer property taxes or special assessments on their residence if they meet certain age (over 60), disability (80%), ownership, occupancy and income (\$57,000) requirements. The state pays the taxes on behalf of the claimant and files a lien on the property to indicate the state has an interest in the property. The deferred taxes must be repaid to the state plus 5% interest when the owner dies, sells or moves from the home, or doesn't have sufficient equity in the property. Qualified people may participate in both or one of these programs.

You should pay your property taxes directly to the county treasurer's office where your property is located. Contact data for Washington's 39 counties County assessor and treasurer websites is available at <https://dor.wa.gov/find-taxes-rates/property-tax/county-assessor-and-treasurer-websites>. For more details on property taxes, call 800-647-7706.

- The annual median property tax in Washington is \$2,631 per year for a home worth the median value of \$287,200 which is the 12th highest of 50 states. Counties collect an average of 0.92% of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year which is 23rd highest of 50 states. Washington has one of the highest average property tax rates in the country, with only eleven states levying higher property taxes.
- Vermont's median income was \$72,034 in 2019, so the median yearly property tax paid by Vermont residents amounts to 3.65% of their yearly income which is ranked 11th highest of 50 states.
- The exact property tax levied depends on the county in Vermont the property is located in. For localized property tax rates, find your county in the county list at <http://www.tax-http://www.tax-rates.org/washington/property-tax#Counties>. Your county's property tax assessor will send you a bill detailing the exact amount of property tax you owe every year.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

The estate tax is a tax on the right to transfer property at the time of death. Washington replaced the inheritance tax in 1982 with an estate tax. Effective January 1, 2009 the Washington State filing threshold became different from the federal filing threshold for completing the estate tax return. A Washington decedent or a non-resident decedent who owns property in Washington State may owe estate tax depending on the value of their estate. Estate tax forms, rules and information are specific to the date of death. For 2019 the exclusion level was \$2,193,000. This tax begins at 10% and rises to 20% on a graduated scale.

In addition to the Washington estate tax, there is a federal estate tax you may have to pay, but the exemption is much higher. The federal estate tax exemption is \$12.06 million in 2022. It is portable between spouses. This means that by taking certain legal steps, a couple can protect up to \$24.12 million from estate taxes. The top federal estate tax rate is 40%.

Working Families Tax Credit

Starting in 2023, the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) program will provide a payment of up to \$1,200 to low-to-moderate income individuals who meet certain eligibility requirements. Who is eligible? To qualify for this credit, you must meet all of the following for the tax year the credit is claimed:

- You (and your spouse, if filing a joint return) have filed a federal tax return.
- Meet the requirements for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), OR would meet the requirements for EITC, but are filing with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).
- Be at least 25 and under 65 years of age OR have a qualifying child.
- Lived in Washington for at least 183 days.

The credit amount varies depending on the number of qualifying children and income level. The maximum credit amount ranges from \$300 to \$1,200 depending on the number of qualifying children 0 to 3 or more. These amounts are then reduced based on income thresholds, similar to

the federal program. The minimum credit amount is \$50, regardless of the number of qualifying children.

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.salestaxhandbook.com> or <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 call 800-647-7706 or visit the Washington Department of Revenue site <http://dor.wa.gov/Content/Home/Default.aspx> or <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#Washington>. [Source: Various | March 2022 ++]

* General Interest *



Notes of Interest

MAR 16 thru 31, 2022

- **Post Office.** Congress has finally passed a bill, the Postal Service Reform Act, which will shore up the finances of the Postal Service, thereby insuring the uninterrupted delivery of the needed prescriptions.
- **Starbucks freebie.** In an effort to recycle more and reduce waste, Starbucks started a program in 1995 called *Grounds for Your Garden*. Baristas scoop used coffee grounds into empty bags from their espresso beans. Bags of grounds are available for free at many Starbucks locations, ready for you to use for your compost bin or garden.
- **Russian Humor.** A video released in early March depicting Russian cosmonauts waving goodbye as they leave U.S. astronaut Mark Vande Hei behind on the International Space Station is simply a joke, according to Russian officials.

- **Alcohol.** Excessive drinking has been estimated to cost the Defense Department \$1.1 billion per year in lost productivity and medical treatment. It also is thought to result in the loss of roughly 320,000 work days a year and lead to roughly 34,400 arrests per year.
- **Travel to RP.** On 10 FEB Philippine government added a travel requirement for incoming foreign passengers that they show travel Insurance for COVID-19 treatment with minimum coverage reflected on the policy of \$35,000 (i.e. P750,000).
- **POW/MIA Accounting Podcast.** MajGen (Ret.) Kelly McKeague, the Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency speaks in the podcast at https://www.buzzsprout.com/1746671/10268901?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EBB%2003.22.2022&utm_term=Editorial%20-%20Military%20-%20Early%20Bird%20Brief to the incredible work of recovery, remains, and identification that the DoD goes through to ensure no one is left behind.
- **Ronald Reagan.** Check out the 5 min clip at <https://youtu.be/mN3z3eSVG7A> to listen to Reagan telling Soviet jokes.
- **Smokers.** Walmart is removing tobacco products from select locations, including some stores in California, Florida, Arkansas and New Mexico. Cigarette smoking is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths per year in the U.S., according to the CDC.

[Source: Various | March 31, 2022 ++]

Ukraine

Update 07: POW Postings May Constitute Human Rights Violation

It's been 27 days since President Vladimir Putin launched the Russian invasion into neighboring Ukraine, with journalists and citizens alike taking to social media to share up-to-the-minute accounts of war on the ground across the country. Some videos that have circulated on places like Twitter and Facebook include Russian troops taken as prisoners of war by Ukrainian forces, explaining that they didn't know what they were doing and they are ashamed of the role they've played in this conflict.

In fact, Ukraine's top law enforcement agency, the Security Service of Ukraine, shared a compilation of videos of captured Russian soldiers to its Facebook page, one of which in particular showed soldiers explaining that they had not been briefed that they were going into battle but rather performing a training exercise. "The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), the main security arm of the Ukrainian government, has a Telegram account with about 868,000 subscribers where it has posted videos of captured Russian soldiers who appear under duress or are revealing their names, identification numbers, and other personal information, including their parents' names and home addresses," Human Rights Watch noted.

Across multiple platforms, the SBU has nearly a million followers, according to the nonprofit. In addition, Ukraine's Internal Affairs Ministry has a Telegram channel with more than 800,000 followers to which it shares similar content. The types of being shared media seem to confirm what much of the world believes about the conflict as the international community largely condemns Russia and rallies around Ukraine. But there is no way to independently verify that the Russian troops filmed are not under duress or saying what they feel they need to in order to survive. Showing videos of POWs, regardless of the content or under what conditions it is obtained, is a violation of international law, experts say.

"Articles 13 and 14 of the third Geneva Convention protect POWs from insult and from becoming the object of public curiosity," Leila Sadat, special adviser on crimes against humanity to the International Criminal Court, told Military Times. "The idea is that the soldiers fighting for their state are really pawns in someone else's chess game," Sadat added. "They are neither the instigators of the war nor responsible for carrying out their mission other than for any kind of intentional crime they commit themselves."

The articles of the Geneva Convention that cover the rights of POWs require governments to protect them from "insults and public curiosity. Likewise, prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity," the document reads. Social media did not exist when the third Geneva Convention was ratified in 1949, but its articles were designed to encompass future conflicts, according to Julia Grignon, associate professor of law at Laval University and a co-director of the clinic of international criminal and humanitarian law.

"They can adapt to the evolution of contemporary conflicts, because the way the provision is drafted is broad," Grignon told Military Times. "We could interpret the provision in a sense to cover new behaviors during armed conflicts. So today, the fact that public curiosity is Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, whatever the platform is, this is forbidden, there is no exception." But it's not just on Ukrainian official media accounts to avoid sharing these videos. "Social media platforms should also clarify whether and how videos of POWs that are incompatible with the Geneva Conventions fall under their existing policies and, if necessary, develop new policies to identify and suppress the spread of such content," Human Rights Watch said in a release.

Journalists and media organizations too must be careful to vet open-source videos, photos and other types of media. According to Sadat, these accounts are worth discussing and referencing but should not be shared directly. "Media organizations should not distribute, in my view, the videos; they can speak of them but should not 'play' them as that is making matters worse," Sadat said.

Grignon echoed that, adding also that it is imperative for the Ukrainian government to ensure that its troops are educated on the rights of prisoners enumerated by the Geneva Convention and practice them, including shielding them from the media. "It should be Ukrainian soldiers that respect the Convention," she said. "They shouldn't give access to journalists, for example. The

way to respect the Convention is that journalists shouldn't have access to the prisoners of war.”
[Source: MilitaryTimes | Sarah Sicard | March 22, 2022 ++]

China's Military Expansion

Update 02: Some Islands It Built in South China Sea Fully Militarized



Johnson reef Chinese structures and buildings (left) at the man-made island on Johnson reef at the Spratlys group of islands in the South China Sea are seen on March 20, 2022.

China has fully militarized at least three of several islands it built in the disputed South China Sea, arming them with anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems, laser and jamming equipment and fighter jets in an increasingly aggressive move that threatens all nations operating nearby, a top U.S. military commander said 20 MAR. U.S. Indo-Pacific commander Adm. John C. Aquilino said the hostile actions were in stark contrast to Chinese President Xi Jinping's past assurances that Beijing would not transform the artificial islands in contested waters into military bases. The efforts were part of China's flexing its military muscle, he said.

“I think over the past 20 years we've witnessed the largest military buildup since World War II by the PRC,” Aquilino told The Associated Press in an interview, using the initials of China's formal name. “They have advanced all their capabilities and that buildup of weaponization is destabilizing to the region.” Aquilino spoke with the AP onboard a U.S. Navy reconnaissance aircraft that flew near Chinese-held outposts in the South China Sea's Spratly archipelago, one of the most hotly contested regions in the world. During the patrol, the P-8A Poseidon plane was repeatedly warned by Chinese callers that it illegally entered what they said was China's territory and ordered the plane to move away.

“China has sovereignty over the Spratly islands, as well as surrounding maritime areas. Stay away immediately to avoid misjudgment,” one of the stern radio messages said in a veiled threat. But the U.S. Navy plane dismissed the multiple warnings and pressed on defiantly with its reconnaissance in brief but tense moments witnessed by two AP journalists invited onboard. “I am a sovereign immune United States naval aircraft conducting lawful military activities beyond the national airspace of any coastal state,” a U.S. pilot radioed back to the Chinese. “Exercising

these rights is guaranteed by international law and I am operating with due regard to the rights and duties of all states,” he said.

Navy commanding officer Joel Martinez, who led the P-8A Poseidon’s crew, said there has been an incident when a Chinese jet flew close to a U.S. aircraft in a dangerous maneuver in the disputed region. The U.S. flight crew calmly reminded the Chinese to comply with aviation safety regulations, he said. As the P-8A Poseidon flew as low as 15,000 feet near the Chinese-occupied reefs, some appeared to be like small cities on screen monitors, with multi-story buildings, warehouses, hangars, seaports, runways and white round structures Aquilino said were radars. Near Fiery Cross, more than 40 unspecified vessels could be seen apparently anchored.

Aquilino said the construction of missile arsenals, aircraft hangars, radar systems and other military facilities on Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross appeared to have been completed but it remains to be seen if China will pursue the construction of military infrastructure in other areas. “The function of those islands is to expand the offensive capability of the PRC beyond their continental shores,” he said. “They can fly fighters, bombers plus all those offensive capabilities of missile systems.” He said any military and civilian plane flying over the disputed waterway could easily get within range of the Chinese islands’ missile system. “So that’s the threat that exists, that’s why it’s so concerning for the militarization of these islands,” he said. “They threaten all nations who operate in the vicinity and all the international sea and airspace.”

China sought to shore up its vast territorial claims over virtually the entire South China Sea by building island bases on coral atolls nearly a decade ago. The U.S. responded by sending its warships through the region in what it calls freedom of operation missions. The United States has no claims itself but has deployed Navy ships and aircraft for decades to patrol and promote free navigation in international waterway and airspace. China routinely objects to any action by the U.S. military in the region. The other parties — the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei — claim all or part of the sea, through which approximately \$5 trillion in goods are shipped every year.

Despite China’s aggression, the long-simmering territorial conflicts should only be resolved peacefully, Aquilino said, and cited the Philippine government’s successful move to bring its disputes with China to international arbitration in 2013 as a good template. A U.N.-backed arbitration tribunal that handled the case invalidated China’s sweeping historical claims in the South China Sea under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea. Beijing dismissed the ruling as sham and continues to defy it.

Washington’s main objective in the disputed region is “to prevent war” through deterrence and promote peace and stability, including by engaging American allies and partners in projects with that objective, Aquilino said. “Should deterrence fail, my second mission is to be prepared to fight and win,” he said. [Source: Associated Press | Jim Gomez /Aaron Favila | March 20, 2022 ++]

Ukraine Foreign Fighters

Legality of Fighting for Ukraine



Four foreign fighters from the UK (left) plus other foreign fighters from the UK (right) pose for a picture as they are ready to depart towards the front line in the east of Ukraine at the main train station in Lviv, Ukraine 5 MAR

As thousands of would-be fighters from outside the country volunteer to help Ukraine defend itself against Russia's invasion, some may also face legal consequences in their home countries. Citizens of Canada, Georgia, India, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States are among the volunteers, Reuters and other media organizations have reported. Below is a summary of some of the laws governing foreigners who have signed up for Ukraine's "international legion."

Is It Legal For Americans To Volunteer?

U.S. citizens are not barred from serving in another country's military, the State Department's website says. Serving as an officer or fighting against a country that is at peace with the United States can be grounds for giving up citizenship voluntarily, but Supreme Court precedent says foreign military service alone cannot be used to strip Americans of citizenship.

A separate U.S. law dating back to 1794, the Neutrality Act, prohibits citizens from making war against foreign governments at peace with Washington and carries a prison sentence of up to three years. The law, which could technically apply to volunteer military action against Russia, was used to prosecute Americans involved in an attempted coup in Gambia in 2014. But otherwise it has been rarely enforced in modern history, according to David Malet, a professor at American University in Washington, D.C. "Absent links to domestic terrorism, it's hard for me to imagine Americans being prosecuted for going to Ukraine," Malet said.

What about Australian, British and Indian Volunteers?

Britons traveling to Ukraine to fight could be subject to prosecution upon return, according to a UK Foreign Office travel advisory last updated 9 MAR. Asked by Reuters what charges would apply to UK volunteers, a spokesperson for the British Foreign Office declined to comment. The United Kingdom's Foreign Enlistment Act, last updated in 1870, blocks citizens from joining foreign militaries fighting countries at peace with Britain, but it has not been applied to modern

conflicts. The UK Foreign Secretary initially voiced support for citizen volunteers to fight in Ukraine, but later warned against any travel there.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has urged his country's citizens not to join the military fight in Ukraine, telling reporters last month that there are "uncertainties" about the legal position of foreign civilian combatants.

The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs did not respond to a request for comment about the legality of Indian citizens joining the Ukraine forces. In a case involving Indians traveling to Iraq in 2015, the ministry told the Delhi High Court that allowing Indians to participate in another country's conflict "would lead to the allegation that the Indian government is promoting terrorism in other countries."

Have Any Countries Given The All-Clear?

Germany has said it will not prosecute volunteers who join the fighting, and Danish and Latvian leaders said they would allow their citizens to volunteer. Canadian defense minister Anita Anand has said whether Canadians volunteer is "an individual decision."

What If Foreign Fighters Are Captured In Ukraine?

International law requires Russian forces to treat foreign fighters as prisoners of war, regardless of their nationality, said Daphné Richemond-Barak, a professor with the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy in Israel. That means Russian soldiers must give volunteers who are captured food, water and medical treatment. However, a Russian Defense Ministry spokesman in early MAR said Western "mercenaries" fighting for Ukraine would not be treated as lawful combatants and would face criminal prosecution or worse, according to Russian news agency TASS.

Could Volunteers Be Prosecuted For Wartime Conduct?

Because volunteers will be fighting as members of the Ukrainian army, they are unlikely to face charges in their home country over their specific actions in the war, with the exception of prosecution for war crimes or similar conduct, experts say.

[Source: Reuters | Jacqueline Thomsen | March 14, 2022 ++]

DPRK Missile Program

Update 06: Kim Jong Un's U.S. "Nuclear War Deterrent" Test

North Korea says it test-fired its biggest-yet intercontinental range ballistic missile under the orders of authoritarian leader Kim Jong Un, who vowed to expand the North's "nuclear war deterrent" while preparing for a "long-standing confrontation" with the United States. The report by North Korean state media on 18 MAR came a day after the militaries of South Korea and Japan

said they detected the North launching an ICBM from an airport near capital Pyongyang in its first long-range test since 2017.



The launch extended a barrage of weapons demonstrations this year that analysts say are aimed at forcing the United States to accept the idea of North Korea as a nuclear power and remove crippling sanctions against its broken economy that has been further damaged by pandemic-related difficulties. The Hwasong-17 ICBM, which was fired on a high trajectory to avoid the territorial waters of neighbors, reached a maximum altitude of 3,880 miles and traveled 680 miles during a 67-minute flight before landing in waters between North Korea and Japan, Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency said. The agency claimed the test met desired technical objectives and proved that the ICBM system would be promptly operated during wartime conditions.

The South Korean and Japanese militaries had announced similar flight details, which analysts say suggested that the missile could reach targets 9,320 miles away when fired on normal trajectory with a warhead weighing less than a ton. That would place the entire U.S. mainland within striking distance. Believed to be about 82 feet long, the Hwasong-17 is the North's longest-range weapon and, by some estimates, the world's biggest road mobile ballistic missile system. The missile was first revealed in a military parade in October 2020 and the 17 MAR launch represented its first full-range test.

The KCNA published photos of the missile leaving a trail of orange flames as it soared from a launcher truck on the airport's runway and Kim smiling and clapping as he celebrated with military officials from an observation deck. The agency paraphrased Kim as saying that his new weapon would make the "whole world clearly aware" of the North's bolstering nuclear forces. He vowed his military to acquire "formidable military and technical capabilities unperturbed by any military threat and blackmail and keep themselves fully ready for long-standing confrontation with the U.S. imperialists."

South Korea's military responded to the launch with live-fire drills of its own missiles launched from land, a fighter jet and a ship, underscoring a revival of tensions as nuclear negotiations remain frozen. It said it confirmed readiness to execute precision strikes against North Korea's missile launch points as well as command and support facilities. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, told reporters the United States requested

an open Security Council meeting on the launch and looked forward to having it on 25 MAR. The United States also imposed fresh sanctions against five entities and individuals located in Russia and North Korea over transferring sensitive items to the North's missile program, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

The 17 MAR test was North Korea's 12th round of weapons launches this year and represented the most provocative test since U.S. President Joe Biden took office. North Korea's resumption of nuclear brinkmanship reflects a determination to cement its status as a nuclear power and wrest badly needed economic concessions from Washington and others from a position of strength, analysts say. Kim may also feel a need to trumpet his military accomplishments to his domestic audience and drum up loyalty as he grapples with economic difficulties. The North's tests this year also included demonstrations of a purported hypersonic weapon, a long-range cruise missile and an intermediate range missile potentially capable of reaching Guam, a major U.S. military hub in the Pacific.

The U.S. and South Korean militaries had assessed that the North was preparing a full-range test of the Hwasong-17 following their analysis of two North Korean midrange launches in recent weeks, which they said included components of the new ICBM. Following a highly provocative streak in nuclear explosive and ICBM tests in 2017, Kim suspended such testing in 2018 ahead of his first meeting with then-U.S. President Donald Trump. But negotiations derailed after the collapse of the second Kim-Trump meeting in February 2019 when the Americans rejected North Korean demands for a major release of crippling U.S.-led sanctions against the North in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

The North's previous ICBMs demonstrated potential range to reach the American homeland during three flight tests in 2017. The development of the larger Hwasong-17 possibly indicates an aim to arm it with multiple warheads to overwhelm missile defenses. Kim presided over a ruling Workers' Party meeting on Jan. 19, where Politburo members issued a veiled threat to end his moratorium on ICBM and nuclear tests, citing U.S. hostility. South Korea's military has also detected signs that North Korea was possibly restoring some of the tunnels at its nuclear testing ground that were detonated in May 2018, weeks ahead of Kim's first meeting with Trump.

Some experts say the North may resume nuclear testing in coming months to claim it acquired an ability to build nuclear warheads small enough to fit on some of its new delivery systems, including the hypersonic missile. [Source: The Associated Press | Kim Tong-Hyung | March 24, 2022 ++]



**U.S. Embassy Manila, Philippines
U.S. Consular Agency Cebu, Philippines
March 23, 2022**

Message for U.S. Citizens: Travel to the United States with an Expired U.S. Passport

We know that U.S. citizens are beginning to plan travel as pandemic-related restrictions are lifted or modified around the world. However, COVID-19 restrictions continue to affect our operations at the U.S. Embassy in Manila and the U.S. Consular Agency in Cebu. As a result of ongoing staffing shortages and the need to maintain social distance in our waiting room, we do not expect to return to pre-pandemic appointment levels in the near future. This means appointment wait times may be longer than expected. We will continue to prioritize service provision to U.S. citizens with immediate travel plans or who are in emergency circumstances.

You may be able to return to the United States using your expired U.S. passport through June 30, 2022. [More information will be available soon on the Department of State's travel information website.](#) Remember, you may need to obtain [exit clearances](#) from the Philippine

Bureau of Immigration prior to departure.

We also ask that all eligible U.S. citizens renew their passports by mail. Processing times are the same (four to six weeks) whether you renew by mail or in person. See our [website for more information on the mail-in passport renewal process](#); remember, you can now [pay the passport renewal fee online](#).

If you are traveling to the United States and your U.S. passport is close to expiration, you may want to consider renewing your passport during your trip, rather than before departure. [See the Department of State's website for information on passport renewal wait times in the United States.](#)

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**U.S. Embassy Manila, Philippines
U.S. Consular Agency Cebu, Philippines
March 26, 2022**

Natural Disaster Alert – Taal Volcano at Alert Level 3

Location: Vicinity of Taal Volcano Island and High-Risk Barangays Around Taal Lake

Event: The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) issued an [Alert Level 3](#) for the Taal Volcano today. “This means that there is magmatic intrusion at the Main Crater that may further drive succeeding eruptions,” the alert states. “PHIVOLCS strongly recommends Taal Volcano Island and [high-risk barangays](#) . . . be evacuated due to the possible

hazards of pyroclastic density currents and volcanic tsunami should strong eruptions subsequently occur.”

Taal Volcano Island (TVI) is located approximately 100 kilometers south of Manila on the island of Luzon. PHIVOLCS considers TVI a Permanent Danger Zone (PDZ). Entry into TVI, especially the vicinities of the Main Crater and the Daang Kastila fissure, remains prohibited.

Actions to Take:

- Exercise extreme caution if you live within the affected areas, especially in the barangays surrounding Taal Lake.
- Maintain active awareness of local conditions and refrain from entering the PDZ and high-risk barangays.
- Monitor local media and the [PHIVOLCS website](#) for updates.

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**U.S. Embassy Manila, Philippines
U.S. Consular Agency Cebu, Philippines
March 29, 2022**

**Virtual Town Hall for U.S. Citizens in the Philippines:
Documenting Your Child as a U.S. Citizen**

Are you a U.S. citizen whose biological child was born outside the United States? Do you want to document your child as a U.S. citizen?

Join us for a virtual town hall to answer these and other questions about the U.S. citizenship process for children born abroad to U.S. citizen parents on Wednesday, April 6, 2022, from 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Manila time.

Hosted by the Embassy’s American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit, this virtual town hall is open to all U.S. citizens in the Philippines. If you wish to participate, please RSVP using the form at https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=dFDPZv5a0UimkaErISH0S_YI5wUu9eFMgyaP8VRieBVURDhWU09W0E8wOE1TQ1IJNUtGR0dXRTk5Ri4u. We will email log-in details to confirmed attendees no later than April 4, 2021.

Please note that we are unable to answer questions related to [U.S.visas](#) or [notary services](#) during this town hall. For more information about services available to U.S. citizens in the Philippines, please see our [website](#).

We look forward to seeing you on April 6, 2021!

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**U.S. Embassy Manila, Philippines
U.S. Consular Agency Cebu, Philippines
March 30, 2022**

Message for U.S. Citizens: Restrictions for Foreign Nationals during the Philippine Presidential and Local Election Campaign Period

The 2022 Philippine presidential and local elections are scheduled to be held on May 9, 2022. As the election nears, we remind U.S. citizens that foreign nationals are prohibited by Philippine law from engaging in partisan political activities in the country. The election period officially ends June 8, 2022.

For their safety during the election period, foreign nationals, including U.S. citizens, are discouraged from participating in large rallies or crowds. Foreign nationals found engaging in a protest or mass demonstration could be considered in violation of their immigration status, as stated in Operation Order SMB-2015-026.

Civilians are reminded to continue to observe COVID safety measures, including the wearing of masks and social distancing, throughout the election period.

The Philippine Commission on Elections (COMELEC) has measures in place to ensure the safety of civilians during the election campaign period:

- In accordance with the gun ban currently in effect for the election season, COMELEC Resolution 10728 stipulates that civilians, both local and foreign, are not permitted to carry firearms outside of their residences.
- There will be at least one checkpoint in each town or city manned by military or police personnel who will be in complete service uniform with visible name plates or identification tags.
- Checkpoint personnel cannot require motorists to open the vehicle's trunk or glove compartment but may ask routine questions of the vehicle driver or occupants.

For further information on local safety and security measures during the Philippine election period, please consult:

- Philippine Commission on Elections: <https://comelec.gov.ph/?r=2022NLE/Resolutions>
- Philippine National Police: PNP <https://pnp.gov.ph>
- Philippine Department of the Interior and Local Government: <https://www.dilg.gov.ph/key-officials>

For further information:

- U.S. Embassy in the Philippines: +63(2) 5301-2000 or ACSInfoManila@state.gov
- State Department – Consular Affairs
- 888-407-4747 or 202-501-4444
- [Philippines Country Information](#)
- Enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) (STEP) to receive security updates
- Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

Composting Toilets

Pros and Cons



Taking care of our environment is something that people are currently embracing and are trying to do it in every aspect of life. Whether it's trying to reduce carbon emissions or finding eco-friendly ways to recycle plastic, people are really trying. Some people see composting toilets as being part of taking care of the environment, and in this article, we will look at various composting toilet pros and cons.

Composting toilets are an invention that was created to function without water. They use a natural process to get rid of human waste from our homes. Therefore, adapting the use of composting toilets is a smart solution to eradicating human waste that every household should consider. However, with all the advantages that come with composting toilets, there are still some downsides. It is prudent that you understand both the pros and cons of this invention so as to make informed decisions. But before that, let's get a quick overview of what composting toilet are, and how they function.

Simply put, composting toilets are a category of toilets that use a biological process we refer to as composting, to treat human waste. The composting process involves decomposing of the organic matter, to turn the waste into a compost-like material. However, the process doesn't eradicate all the pathogens. The composting process is made possible by the existence of aerobic microorganisms, (primarily fungi and bacteria), which function under a controlled aerobic

environment. Since most composting toilets don't use any water, they are hence referred to as "dry toilets."

A composting toilet is not a complicated affair at all. Just like a compost pile, a composting toilet works in a similar manner. The system also operates in the same way as the traditional garden composter as it reduces human wastes using natural processes. The natural methods used to reduce these wastes in this process include decomposing and evaporating. What makes this method possible is that the contents of human waste mainly contain water. The rest of the waste that is not water can easily be broken down to be used as fertilizers. Naturally, composting toilets are made to work in the absence of water. Therefore, the waste is instead dropped into a composting compartment, from where the waste is separated into liquid waste and solid waste. This is mostly done by using a slope which allows the force of gravity to take its course.

In addition, the composting chambers contain bacteria and fungi, which breakdown the waste under aerobic environment. Also, most composting toilet designs require carbon additives like coconut coir, sawdust, or peat moss after every use. The additives are meant to create air pockets in the waste to encourage aerobic decomposition. These additives are also used to reduce the amount of potential odor. A large number of composting toilet systems, depend on a composting called mesophilic composting. In composting toilets, you cannot forget ventilation. A ventilation shaft is included to allow oxygen to pass through into the composting chamber, which helps the microorganisms to survive. The vent also allows harmful gases to be released outside to avoid odor in your house. The last thing in this process is the access point, where waste can be removed through after composting.

Advantages of Composting Toilets

Composting Toilets are Eco-friendly

Since people have now become more and more conscious about the environment and how we humans affect it, being eco-friendly is a big plus. When trying to explain the benefits that come with this system, the first question that most people ask is whether the system is environmentally-friendly. "YES." The system is as eco-friendly as it can be. They have a 0% effect on the environment. Also, the system does not use water for decomposing, and therefore, it is an excellent option for water conservation.

Composting Toilets are Cheaper

Although the technology used in composting toilets to remove solid waste is more advanced, the toilets are still cheaper than the traditional toilet systems. The systems are more affordable both in the installation stage, as well as in maintenance. While the cost of installing a traditional toilet will cost you more than \$1,500, a composting toilet will cost you nothing more than \$ 1000. This makes composting toilets a bit tempting as they also have fewer installation requirements.

Easy to Clean and Maintain

Another reason why composting toilet has become so popular is that they are very easy to clean. Unlike the traditional ones, composting toilets do not require other working parts such as septic systems and pipes, among others.

Many Manufacturers Offer Forever Warranties.

Some composting toilet manufacturers offer warranties forever on their products. This shows how confident they are with what they produce, as well as the service these toilets will provide you with. Together with the cost saved from not using 30,000 gallons of water each year for a small family of 4, these toilets are economical.

They Save on Space

If you don't have much space where you live, then a composting toilet is an excellent option for you. For example, if yours is a studio apartment or even smaller, a composting toilet will serve you perfectly. They are small, which makes it easier for you to put it in your small bathroom just the way you want it. In addition, the fact that these toilet systems do not require a septic system saves you a lot of space. For this reason, composting toilets have become popular even in remote areas.

Disadvantages of Composting Toilets

Some Composting Toilets Produce Odors

Since the process of composting the solid waste takes place inside the composite compartment, these toilets may produce an unpleasant odor. The odor may leak beyond your bathroom to the rest of the house, which may not be pleasant. Even though the high-quality composting systems come with an in-built odor-lock mechanism, it can still leak. This normally happens if you don't clean the toilet properly or fail to maintain it accordingly. A composting toilet differs with the traditional ones in that; you have to clean them at least twice a week. This is not the same for the conventional toilets which you only need to clean once in a fortnight.

Peat Moss Menace

With composting toilets, peat moss is requisite that you should have. And, although the peat moss is the dried form of peat that you need to clean around your toilet, it can spread anywhere in the bathroom. The process of cleaning the peat moss bucket can be an uphill task, with it spreading all over and sticking on anything around.

Additional Electricity Bill

Although this may not be a major drawback for several composting toilets, some high-quality ones run on electricity. The electricity makes up for not using water in the composting toilets. In addition, the feature needed to enhance ventilation, or reduce the bad smell, need a power supply to work efficiently. This definitely will add some extra figures on your monthly electricity bill.

Construction

Another possible drawback of the composting toilet system will be the construction of the proper system it requires. Whereas the process of installing the composting toilet is easy, you must ensure

that it properly linked to a reliable greywater system. This helps to contain any contaminants. Also, you have to build a proper ventilation system to ensure that unpleasant odor does not seep back to the house.

Extra Compost Maintenance for the Single Units

In a single unit composting system, there is always a combination of dry and wet waste in the basin. The reason behind this is because fresh waste always adds up on top of the dry waste. The addition, in turn, creates varying levels of composting in the same basin. The inconsistency in the composting process might make the distribution of compost to become difficult. In return, this forces the homeowners to seek the services of septic haulers, which is an additional cost.

Need for a Special Permit

Although under the international building codes, the installation of composting toilets is okay, some local codes in certain communities may restrict their installation. Therefore, it is prudent that you confirm with your local city authorities before you buy a composting toilet. You should also check with the code enforcement agency about which codes and regulations you need to follow.

[Source: <https://greencoast.org/composting-toilet-pros-and-cons> | August 2021 ++]

Hidden Design Features

Update 01: Some More Built-In Functions Often Neglected



As consumers, we interact with so many products on a regular basis that it's easy to overlook all of their features, even when they serve a specific purpose. In fact, many common items boast useful add-ons that can easily be mistaken for inconsequential elements of design, especially when they don't come with instructions. Here are some cleverly built-in functions you've probably been neglecting in your clothes, appliances, and more, plus how and why they came about.

Hole in Measuring Tape

Surprising Use: Holding the measuring tape in place -- Just about every reel of measuring tape has an empty slot in the metallic end hook. Called a nail grab, this is designed to affix to the head of a nail or screw, so the measuring tape can be held in place without an extra pair of hands.

Loops on Shirt Backs

Surprising Use: Hanging up -- Men's dress shirts commonly feature a fabric loop on their back, which one might easily guess is to hang it up on a hook when not being worn. What's more

surprising is what the loops used to signify when first coming into fashion. After reportedly originating among sailors in the Navy, the looped dress shirts became popular among Ivy League collegiates in the 1960s, for whom removing the loop meant they were going steady in a relationship.

Coin Ridges

Surprising Use: Stopping counterfeiters -- Though of little relevance or value nowadays, many coins are still produced with ridges along their edges as a deterrent to counterfeiting. In the early days of the American republic, criminals could shave the edges off of gold and silver coins to sell at a profit, so the US Mint responded by adding ridges, or "reeding," that made it obvious whenever one of its standard-issue coins had been tampered with.

Extra Eyelets on Sneakers

Surprising Use: Heel lock -- Many sneakers and athletic shoes have an extra eyelet for the laces offset beside the normal top loop. These enable the wearer to try a variety of additional lacing techniques that secure the shoe more firmly around one's foot — namely, the heel lock. This method loops and threads the laces through the extra eyelets to prevent slippage or untying, a valuable feature for more strenuous activities like running and rock climbing.

Holes in Padlocks

Surprising Use: Oiling and draining water -- Standard padlocks are built with one to two tiny holes in the bottom surrounding the keyhole. Since padlocks are often used outdoors, the main purpose of the holes is to let water drain out of the lock's inner workings before it can rust or freeze in place. In addition, whenever a lock does become stuck, the holes can be used to apply WD-40 or other oils to lubricate the lock into opening again.

Escalator Brushes

Surprising Use: Preventing clothes from getting stuck -- Escalators have brushes along their sides for the same reason they have yellow borders on their steps — to deter riders from standing too close to the edges. Through subconscious suggestion, this is designed to lower the risk of malfunction or bodily harm if any clothes or other items come close enough to get stuck in the gap, or "skirt," between the escalator's exposed steps and inner gears.

Little Dots on Windshield Glass

Surprising Use: Frit -- If you've ever looked closely at the upper corners of a car windshield or along the edge of bus windows, you've probably noticed the textured black dots baked into the glass edges. Called frit, this ceramic paint serves the main purpose of protecting the window's sealant from ultraviolet rays, as well as concealing and creating a rougher surface for the adhesive to stick to.

Hole in Kitchen Shears

Surprising Use: Herb stripper -- Many, if not most pairs of kitchen shears are built with a serrated opening centered where the handles and blades meet. If you haven't been taking advantage already,

this is meant for use as an herb stripper, so you can destem difficult herbs like thyme, rosemary, and chives in one motion rather than pick all the leaves off by hand.

Backpack Lash Tabs

Surprising Use: Carrying extra items -- Many backpacks from standard brands like Herschel and Jansport come with a diamond-shaped patch sewn into the exterior, known as the lash tab. This feature was originally designed to carry an ice axe when mountaineering, using leather to reduce the risk of freezing. Of course, for the average user today, it can still provide a convenient way to hold other items like a water bottle or headphones for immediate access.

Notched Toothpick Tops

Surprising Use: Toothpick holder -- Yes, even a humble toothpick can have more to it than meets the eye. When you find one that's only pointed on one end with a flat top and grooves on the other, the grooved end can be snapped off to provide a sanitary table stand for the toothpick when not in use. This design is traditional to Japan.

Tab on Rearview Mirror

Surprising Use: Reducing reflectivity -- Many drivers may have never noticed, let alone made use of, the tiny tab located beneath their car's rearview mirror. This is actually responsible for switching the mirror from daytime to nighttime driving modes, using a prismatic glass configuration to dim the reflection and limit the glare of headlights behind you. These manual tilt mirrors were invented for cars in the 1930s and became standard by the 1970s.

Yogurt Lids

Surprising Use: Single-use spoon -- Most single-serving yogurt, applesauce, or gelatin containers are packaged with a tinfoil covering, most of which can be effectively used as a disposable spoon. After peeling away the lid, a few simple folds will suffice whenever you're lacking a more formal utensil for your midday snack. It's difficult to determine how intentional of a design feature this is, or how it got started, but at least one yogurt manufacturer has printed the folding instructions directly on the lid itself.

[Source: Cheapism | JeffreyRindskopf | February 04, 2022 ++]

News of the Weird

MAR 16 thru 31, 2022

Oops! -- When Olivia Crump tried to leave her apartment in Milledgeville, Georgia, on Dec. 28, she was surprised to find a crucial structure missing: the stairs to the ground floor. According to the Daily Mail, Crump said the management company did not notify her about the stairs being removed for construction. "It was impossible to get down without climbing over the ledge with a ladder or scaling the side with a decent drop below," she said. She and her dog were trapped in the apartment for about four hours, during which the dog almost had an accident. While Crump

doesn't plan any legal action, she did note that the absence of stairs could be a fire hazard, and she hopes the management company will compensate tenants for putting them in a dangerous situation. [Daily Mail, 12/29/2021] =

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Short Fuse -- Alvis Parrish, 54, of Jacksonville, Florida, got tired of hearing her boyfriend, William Carter, talk on Dec. 7, so she gave him "just enough" poison in his lemonade to shut him up. Then she called police "so he wouldn't die," clickorlando.com reported. When officers arrived, Parrish was on her front porch, where she was handcuffed. "Do whatever you want," she told them. "If you don't take me, I will kill him." A deputy who spoke to Carter, 61, said he was difficult to interview because he was so tired. Carter said the lemonade tasted funny, then collapsed on the floor. Parrish is facing a charge of poisoning food or water with intent to kill or injure a person. [clickorlando.com, 12/15/2021]

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Signs of the Apocalypse -- In Texarkana, on the border of Texas and Arkansas, Dec. 30 brought a new phenomenon: fish falling from the sky. KXXV-TV reported that people found fish on their sidewalks and lawns, but city officials have an explanation: "Animal rain" occurs when small water animals are swept up in waterspouts or drafts. "2021 is pulling out all the tricks," the city posted on Facebook. "While it's uncommon, it happens ... And please, for the sake of everyone, let's tiptoe into 2022 as quietly as possible." [KXXV, 1/4/2022]

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But Why!? -- The Daily Mail reported that Israeli scientists at Ben-Gurion University have constructed a "fish operated vehicle (FOV)" -- a water-filled tank, camera and computer on wheels -- and have trained goldfish to "drive" it. In the beginning of the trials, the fish just drove around randomly, but eventually they were able to guide the vehicle toward a food reward by changing the direction they were swimming. The researchers said the experiment proved that fish can "overcome environmental manipulation" and if they one day adapt to live out of water, they'll be able to find food. Um, OK. [Daily Mail, 1/4/2022]

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I'll Have the Porridge -- Someone in Royton, Oldham, England, woke up on March 20 and felt like something was missing from their life. And maybe breakfast was particularly difficult that morning. The Manchester Evening News reported that at the Barclay Pizza & Prosecco restaurant, as workers cleaned up after Saturday night's festivities, they found a full set of dentures on the floor in the bar. Barclay owner Emma Whelan posted a photo of a plastic bag containing the false teeth on Facebook, hoping to locate the owner. "We get a lot of things left behind after a night in the Barclay ... but this is a new one," Whelan said. "It must have been a cracking night." [Manchester Evening News, 3/20/2022]

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Oops -- The Roller-McNutt Funeral Home in Little Rock, Arkansas, is facing a lawsuit on behalf of the family of Harold D. Lee of Pauline, South Carolina, who was hoping to be buried next to

his parents at a Quitman, Arkansas, cemetery after his death on Thanksgiving Day 2019. Lee's body was transferred to the Roller-McNutt facility and arrangements were made for the casket and funeral, KNOE-TV reported, but according to the lawsuit, the funeral home alerted the family on Dec. 10, 2019, that they had "accidentally cremated the body." Lee was extremely religious and "stickily (sic) desired not to be cremated, as he believed his body would be raptured following the second coming," the lawsuit stated. His wife, Eunice, was violently shaking in shock when she got the news. The funeral home waived the cost of the funeral and returned \$5,000 after the mistake was made, the lawsuit noted. [KNOE, 3/22/2022]

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Out of the Mouths of Babes -- Kristin Wiley, 49, was pulled over by Indian River County (Florida) Sheriff's officers after she barely missed hitting their stopped vehicle on March 20, The Smoking Gun reported. When they approached the car, they saw her 9-year-old son in the back seat, crying. The officer noted that Wiley's eyes were "watery and red in color," and he smelled alcohol on her breath, so he asked if she'd been drinking. She replied, "No," but her son piped up from the back seat, "Mom, you can't lie to the police. You did drink." He told the officer that his mom had been drinking at a party and said he was "very scared while Kristin was operating the vehicle," the officer reported. A breath test recorded her alcohol content at nearly three times the legal limit. Along with DUI, she was charged with child abuse. [Smoking Gun, 3/21/2022]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/news-of-the-weird> | March 15, 2022 ++]

Advertisements

Once Acceptable Vintage Ads | 01

What Girl Doesn't? No, this is not a joke. Go ahead, look it up; they have a whole website. There's not really a whole lot that has to be said about this hot dog advertisement, other than it was a genius way to sell their food.



Starting in 1849 at a Sierra Nevada foothills trading post, Boner Billy's quickly became famous for...well, obviously their name. Thus, when it became common to call an erection as such, this company was quick to make all manner of ads and innuendoes. Besides, who doesn't like a Big Boner?

Vocabulary

Some Words to Enhance Yours | 220331

Which word best matches these example sentences?

1. (a) The house itself wasn't much to look at, but the hills behind it were _____.
(b) *arcadian* – *yarmulke* – *shambolic* – *girandole*
2. (a) The happy puppies _____ around their mother's feet.
(b) *cravat* – *donnybrook* – *cavort* – *noisome*
3. (a) The wedding party was described as witty and _____.
(b) *bivouac* – *hangry* – *jocund* – *parsimonious*
4. (a) The gelatin mixture _____ed in the fridge.
(b) *congeal* – *virtuoso* – *oracle* – *furphy*
5. (a) The disease has an insidious onset and presents with fever, _____, and weakness.
(b) *adumbrate* – *timorous* – *demarcate* – *malaise*
6. (a) _____ is encouraged in our social group, as long as it's all in good fun.
(b) *aqueous* – *beguile* – *badinage* – *chthonic*
7. (a) Opening up an ice cream stand near the water park proved to be extremely _____.
(b) *remunerative* – *legerdemain* – *milquetoast* – *obelus*
8. (a) All aspects of the business plan were complete except for the initial _____ sources.
(b) *pecuniary* – *curmudgeon* – *maquillage* – *malaise*
9. (a) The man _____d in pain as he waited for help.
(b) *nsufflate* – *dour* – *inchoate* – *writhe*
10. (a) Ryan found his _____ when he lost his job and his wife left him in the same week.
(b) *verdant* – *diphthong* – *nadir* – *pacifist*

Answers

1. Arcadian [ahr-kay-dee-uhn] - relating to a real or imaginary place offering peace and simplicity.
2. Cavort [kuh-vawrt] - to prance or caper about
3. Jocund [jok-uhnd] - cheerful; merry; blithe; glad
4. Congeal [kuhn-jeel] - to change from a soft or fluid state to a rigid or solid state, as by cooling or freezing

5. Malaise [ma-leyz] - a general feeling of discomfort, illness, or uneasiness whose exact cause is difficult to identify.
6. Badinage [bad-n-ahzh] - light, playful banter or raillery.
7. Remunerative [ri-myoo-ner-uh-tiv] - affording remuneration; profitable.
8. Pecuniary [pi-kyoo-nee-er-ee] - of or relating to money
9. Writhe [rahyth] - to twist or contort the body in pain or discomfort.
10. Nadir [ney-der] - the lowest point; point of greatest adversity or despair

[Source: <https://www.wordthirst.com> | March 31, 2022 ++]

Have You Heard or Seen?

God's Aging Plan | Toons | Math 2

God's Aging Plan

The Truth hurts: Most seniors never get enough exercise. In His wisdom God decreed that seniors become forgetful so they would have to search for their glasses, keys and other things, thus doing more walking. And God looked down and saw that it was good.

Then God saw there was another need. In His wisdom He made seniors lose co-ordination so they would drop things, requiring them to bend, reach, and stretch. And God looked down and saw that it was good.

Then God considered the function of bladders and decided seniors would have additional calls of nature, requiring more trips to the bathroom, thus providing more exercise. God looked down and saw that it was good.

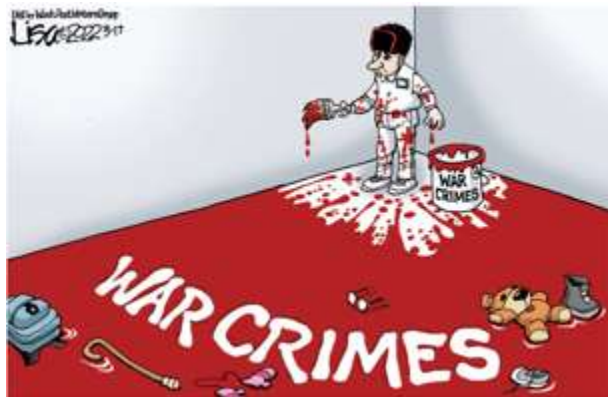
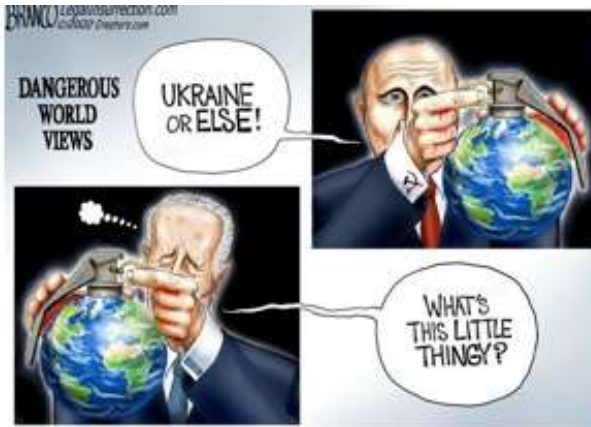
So if you find as you age, you are getting up and down more, remember it's God's will. It is all in your best interest even though you may mutter under your breath.

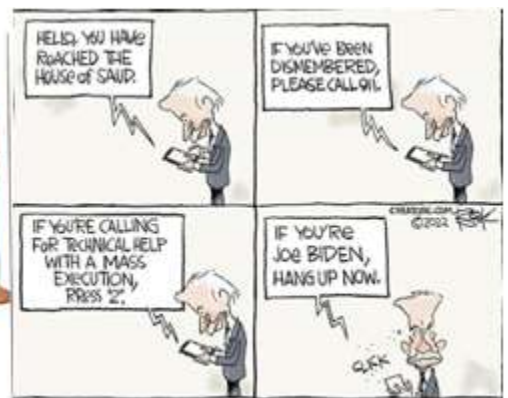
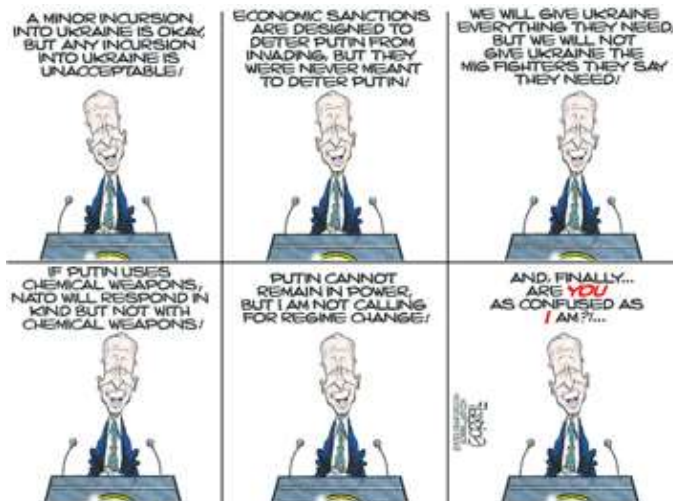
Nine Important Facts to Remember as We Grow Older

- Death is the number 1 killer in the world.
- Life is sexually transmitted.
- Good health is merely the slowest possible rate at which one can die.
- Men have 2 motivations: hunger and hanky panky, and they can't tell them apart. If you see a gleam in his eyes, make him a sandwich.
- Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach a person to use the Internet and they won't bother you for weeks, months, maybe years.
- Health nuts are going to feel stupid someday, lying in the hospital, dying of nothing.
- All of us could take a lesson from the weather. It pays no attention to criticism.
- In the 60's, people took LSD to make the world weird. Now the world is weird, and people take Prozac to make it normal.
- Life is like a jar of jalapeno peppers. What you do today may be a burning issue tomorrow.

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Toons





Math 2

Math isn't everyone's best skill — and even those who are good at it are questioning everything after trying this algebra problem.

$$9 - 3 \div \frac{1}{3} + 1 = ?$$

The question originally went viral in Japan, after a study discovered that only 60 percent of 20-somethings could actually solve it. Are you already feeling frustrated and hopeless at trying to know what the answer is? Watch the video posted by YouTube user MindYourDecisions at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07Abat5iBbw&list=RDCMUChnj59g7jezwTy5GeL8EA_g. In it, Presh Talwalkar, the mastermind behind this question, will guide you to the right answer.

As you can see, not even a calculator can help you, as it will read the problem wrong and arrive at the answer of 9. To solve it correctly in a calculator, you need to write it out like this: $9 - 3 / (1/3) + 1$, which will lead you to 1 as the correct answer. The problem tests your knowledge of PEMDAS, the order of operations formula, which says you must get to the answer by following these steps in this order: parentheses, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, subtraction. In this question, that means dividing 3 by the 1/3 first, which is the same as 3×3 . That will then lead you to $9 - 9 + 1$. From there, $9 - 9 = 0 + 1 = 1$. Ta-da!

If you arrived at 3, 7, or 9 as your answer, you're not alone. Most people have forgotten how to use PEMDAS or interpret the fraction of 1/3 the wrong way. Still not feeling much of a challenge?

Thought of the Day

Golf: A game in which you claim the privileges of age and retain the playthings of youth.

-- Samuel Johnson

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- <https://www.cgretirenw.org> (Listed under VET & RETIREE LEGISLATIVE & GENERAL NEWS)
- <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html> (PDF Edition w/ATTACHMENTS) **\$1K Ransomware demand refused**

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3. **Philippine Subscribers**: Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the Bulletin’s Philippine email directory for additional receipt of notices on U.S. Embassy Manila, TRICARE in the RP, and Clark Field Space 'A' if it is ever reinstated.

4. **Article Retrieval**: Past Bulletin articles are available on request. Bear in mind that the articles were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or have become outdated. To request provide original article title. If unknown provide a brief description of what the article was addressing.

5. **Publishing Frequency**: The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. It is provided as a website accessed document vice email direct access. If you do not receive an email Bulletin Availability notice check to see if it is posted on the website <http://thearmysecurityagency.com/rao.html>. If you can access the Bulletin at the aforementioned site it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my Availability notices. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the mailing list and modify its transmission path if necessary.

6. **Unable to Receive Notices**: Note that some email providers (especially SBCGLOBAL & lately COX and Roadrunner) allow many, but not all, of their users to receive the Bulletin if sent to them in its normal

fashion via my mailing list provider (MLP). For those subscribers adversely impacted by this I maintain a separate direct mailing list (DML) to send in an alternate manner for those not allowed by their servers to receive their Bulletin Availability notices. If you are impacted by this let me know so I can add you to that mailing list which currently contains about 500 subscriber's email addressees.

7. **Article Sources:** Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. At the end of each article is provided the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that that the information was reformatted from the original source and/or editorialized from more than one source. Because of the number of articles contained in each Bulletin there is no way that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken from previously reliable sources. Also, just because an article appears in the Bulletin it does not necessarily mean I support its content. If an article is based on the author's opinion vice a government entity I try to note that after the author's name. Readers who question the validity of any article's content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered or express their opinions. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.

8. **Forwarding Content:** Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin as a whole or its individual articles or attachments to other vets or veteran organizations. However adding advertising or using it for commercial purposes is not authorized.

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