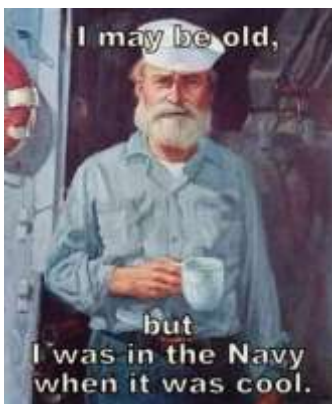


RAO BULLETIN

15 October 2021

PDF Edition



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NOTE

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.
3. Numbers contained within brackets [] indicate the number of articles written to date on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to raoemo@sbcglobal.net ‘or’ raoemo77@gmail.com.
4. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin or articles to other vets or veteran organizations.

*** DoD ***



DoD Budget 2022

Update 03: How the New CR Will Frustrate the Pentagon

The Pentagon isn’t facing a government shutdown, thanks to an emergency budget extension passed 30 SEP. But that doesn’t mean top officials are without budget worries. That’s because the short-term budget deal approved by Congress, known as a continuing resolution (CR), freezes billions of dollars in planned Pentagon acquisition programs, as well as some of President Joe Biden’s top priorities to deter China. It could be months before they move ahead.

The continuing resolution runs from the start of the fiscal year, Oct. 1, through Dec. 3, which gives Congress nine more weeks to pass a fiscal 2022 budget plan for the military and the rest of the federal government. However, it also stalls “new-start” programs and production increases, since all budget lines simply continue at the previous year’s level. Exceptions can be made for “anomalies.” But for now, the continuing resolution means a Pentagon priority — a \$5.5 billion boost for the development and testing of cutting-edge technologies that could deter China — is on hold.

“There’s no goodness with a CR,” Rear Adm. John Gumbleton, the deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget, said at a public forum in August. Navy officials say a CR freezes \$8

billion for new equipment spending, \$2.5 billion in operations and maintenance activities and \$2 billion for personnel.

Delays would hit the Air Force's 16 new-start procurements, which comprise \$2.3 billion of its 2022 budget request. Among the efforts on hold would be a \$300 million initiative to develop cutting-edge hypersonic weapons, as well as production increases for the F-15's Eagle Passive Active Warning Survivability System and the Small Diameter Bomb II, among others. "CRs immediately disrupt major exercises and training events, impede readiness, delay maintenance, impose uncertainty on the workforce, curtail hiring and recruitment actions, and induce inefficient and constrained contracting practices," Air Force spokesman Capt. Jacob Bailey said. "CRs delay the implementation of new technology development in support of national security priorities."

The fledgling Space Force is especially sensitive to continuing resolutions. Chief of Space Operations Gen. John "Jay" Raymond said a CR would delay plans to transfer hundreds of Army and Navy billets as well as certain satellite communications capabilities, mission responsibilities and related funding to the new service. "All those capabilities, all those systems on-orbit, plus the ground stations that operate those capabilities and integrate those capabilities — that all transfers over to the Space Force, beginning 1 October," Raymond said Monday at a Defense One conference. "If there is a continuing resolution, we have to wait until that is resolved."

The Navy budget requested \$4.6 billion to continue building the first Columbia ballistic missile submarine, but service officials have voiced worries the program could be knocked off track by a CR. On the other hand, the program schedules for the naval aircraft and the Arleigh Burke-class destroyers allow for some leeway, they said. "I'm always worried about Columbia, although I don't think it needs money in the first two months. But if we get to a second CR I think we would have to do something there," said Jay Stefany, the acting assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition.

But while Pentagon officials complain of CR pain, a recent Government Accountability Office report found they have actually found ways to cope with the constraints. GAO's recent review of several major defense acquisition programs couldn't find any of the delays and cost overruns that are expected to result from CR-related funding hiccups. For example:

- The Army raised concerns in 2017 that its new Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle program would be delayed by a CR, but officials adapted by pushing a decision to go into production until after regular spending legislation was enacted for fiscal 2018. (The compressed fiscal year did mean the Army had to buy fewer AMPVs than it planned.)
- "When we met with officials from these programs, we learned that while the Selected Acquisition Reports speculated that CRs could have resulted in program delays or cost increases, in actuality, the CRs did not affect the programs," GAO's Sept. 14 report reads.

- The services often postpone service contract start dates and nonessential purchases or training to later in the fiscal year, though defense officials told GAO it can be hard to manage contracts and buy equipment when they don't know what level of funding they'll get.

The CR includes only a few exceptions or “anomalies” for the Pentagon, including \$885 million for the Air Force’s program to buy commercial microelectronic equipment, while another would protect a program to develop jam-resistant GPS equipment. The White House requested those items along with \$6.3 billion in emergency funding to resettle Afghan refugees and \$895 million to repair Navy and Air Force facilities damaged by natural disasters. It would be atypical for Congress to include more than a handful of anomalies for DoD. Over the last 10 years, the Pentagon has asked Congress to include funding for as few as 36 anomalies and as many as 154, but it’s received an average of four each year.

Adding anomalies is a balancing act, said Todd Harrison, director of defense budget analysis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. If the administration got all the anomalies it requested, that would reduce much of the pain a CR causes and give Congress less of an incentive to pass a final appropriations bill for the year. “The anomalies you normally see proposed by the White House are the programs and activities that are higher priority and more subject to disruption,” Harrison said. The Defense Department has adapted such that CRs tend to be “just a bit of a bureaucratic headache” — so long as the stopgap measures don’t go beyond six months, Harrison said. Over the last 60 years, defense has started the fiscal year on a continuing resolution 80 percent of the time.

Will Congress stay deadlocked on the federal budget into February? Harrison said it’s too soon to say, but Congress first has to address its other high profile impasses, over the country’s borrowing limit and massive packages of spending on infrastructure and other domestic priorities for Democrats. “The longer they remain stuck on those things, the longer this CR will ultimately be,” Harrison said. [Source: DefenseNews | Joe Gould, Megan Eckstein & Jen Judson |October 1, 2021 ++]

Nuclear Launch Authority

Update 03: Debate On ‘No First Use’ Mushrooms in Washington



Five years after President Barack Obama turned back from declaring a “no first use” as U.S. policy for nuclear weapons, opponents say the Biden administration is considering it too, and warn that it risks alienating allies. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s ranking member, Sen. Jim Risch (R-ID) said that he believes America’s allies are “very, very upset” with the idea President Joe Biden might reverse decades of U.S. nuclear policy as part of his administration’s sweeping Nuclear Posture Review, expected in 2022. The U.S. has historically maintained ambiguity about whether it would carry out a first strike with a nuclear weapon, but the policy would expressly rule it out.

“It gives more comfort to the enemy that they can plan an attack and do whatever they want to and not worry about us using a first strike,” Risch said of a “no first use” policy. “Nobody wants to use a first strike, but there are scenarios where you can imagine a first strike, and the best thing you can do is keep [adversaries] off balance.” Risch said Tuesday that he is opposing confirmation of Biden’s nominee for assistant secretary of state for arms control, verification and compliance, Mallory Stewart, in connection with the matter. That complicates but doesn’t necessarily sink confirmation for Stewart, who serves as the arms control lead for the National Security Council.

Proponents of “no first use” argue it reduces the chances that China or Russia, mistakenly fearing a U.S. nuclear attack, would launch their own first strike. However, allied leaders in Europe and Asia are likely to see it as an erosion of America’s guarantee to protect them, and it would put the U.S. at odds with the strategic-ambiguity policies of NATO and nuclear-armed U.K. and France. NATO allies, along with Japan and South Korea, have likely been speaking out against the possibility of a “no first use” policy, either to visiting U.S. lawmakers, or through their embassies in the U.S., said William Alberque, the former director of NATO’s Arms Control, Disarmament, and WMD Non-Proliferation Centre.

Declaring that nuclear weapons are only to answer nuclear weapons would worry Asian allies fearful of China and North Korea, pushing South Korea toward fielding its own nuclear arms, Alberque said. In Europe, it would signal to Russia that it can invade its neighbors without fear of a nuclear response — and gain Washington nothing in planned arms control talks with Moscow. “If the United States comes in and says, ‘If Russia invades NATO, we promise not to use nuclear weapons unless you nuke us,’ I think, after the Russians pull themselves off the floor

from laughing hysterically, they're going to say, 'Wait, are you serious,'" Albuquerque said. "What kind of goodwill gesture is that when Russia has short-range nukes all along its border?"

Some within the administration are said to be arguing the Pentagon-led Nuclear Posture Review should take an unorthodox step and seek foreign input from across the political spectrum. The thinking is there are diverse views within allied countries when it comes to nuclear weapons policy. "With the NPR, the question is how broad the representation will be from our allies," said Jeffrey Lewis, a nuclear arms control expert and professor at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies. "The conservatives and the Pentagon want to talk to the same small group of people they always talk to, who tell them what they want to hear. And the people in the Biden administration who want to take a fresh look [at nuclear arms policy] want to talk to a broader range."

On 5 OCT, Risch grilled Stewart at her nomination hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, pressing her to agree with him that allies would strongly object to potential policy change. But Stewart said it would be hard to concede that allies are objecting to the results of the Nuclear Posture Review while it was ongoing — and that the administration was still engaging with allies to address their concerns. "I'm not sure if I understand the term 'strenuous objection.' I think they're concerned," Stewart told Risch, adding: "I don't even know if it's an 'objection.' The point is perhaps through our engagement, we hope to explain and understand, and really hear from them further."

Risch was frustrated, saying: "If we on the Republican side of the committee have an understanding that our allies have strong, strong objections to what you're considering, how is it that you can't concede that?" Asked by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) if she personally believes in a "no first use" policy, Stewart deferred to the ongoing review and said the country has to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in a way that "extended-deterrence commitments to our allies remain strong and credible." "It's important to make sure our allies and partners understand that whatever steps we take, our commitment to their defense is unshakeable," Stewart said.

After the hearing, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez told reporters that he had not heard any objections like the ones Risch mentioned. "I have not heard from any ally in any of my engagements, directly with heads of state or foreign ministers, or at a staff level — I have not heard that," said Menendez (D-NJ). Neither was he personally troubled. "We're going to be looking at [the administration's] posture review to see what their ultimate decision is, but I'm not going to prejudge something before they say that this is what they're going to do," he said.

Under the Obama administration in 2016, an internal "no first use" proposal died amid opposition from the Cabinet as well as allies in Europe and Asia, the Wall Street Journal reported at the time. Reportedly, Secretary of State John Kerry cited concerns raised by U.S. allies that rely on the American nuclear triad for their security and Defense Secretary Ash Carter said it would risk provoking insecurity about the U.S. deterrent among allies. While on the campaign

trail, Biden expressed a desire to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. strategy, and his website says their “sole purpose” is to deter and, if needed, retaliate against a nuclear attack. However, since Biden took office and in the run up to the Nuclear Posture Review, there have been competing cross-currents both inside the administration and politically.

At Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks’ confirmation hearing in February, she reiterated her past position that, “I don’t believe that no-first-use policy is necessarily in the interests of the United States,” but also said, “those will be decisions ultimately made by the president.” More recently, the Biden administration’s removal of the Pentagon official who had been leading the Nuclear Posture Review has prompted non-proliferation advocates to publicly ask whether the move was aimed at stifling views that challenge the status quo on nuclear arms. Pentagon officials say it was part of a routine reorganization. “We’re going to continue to consider and include a wide range of viewpoints in the Nuclear Posture Review, including those from administration officials, military leaders, academics and all others,” chief Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby told reporters at the time.

A number of Republicans in Congress, like Risch and Cruz, have pushed back on the idea of adopting a declaratory nuclear weapons policy, but lawmakers to their left are split. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith and Sen. Elizabeth Warren reintroduced a measure to codify “no first use” policy in law, but Sen. Angus King — a Maine independent who caucuses with Democrats — has come out publicly against any change to a declaratory policy. “I don’t support it myself. To me the whole idea of deterrence is to make our adversaries nervous,” King, who chairs the Senate’s strategic forces subcommittee, told Defense News. “I’m also concerned our allies will feel it’s an abdication of the nuclear umbrella [of protection the U.S. provides non-nuclear armed allies], and then they’ll feel they have to develop their own nuclear capacity — which I feel would be very problematic.” [Source: Defense News | Joe Gould | October 6, 2021 ++]

Military Marijuana Use

Update 01: What Will Be the Impact When It Becomes Federally Legal

You might have read recent comments by Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas regarding the legalization of marijuana. His comments were likely an indication of what justices might be thinking regarding this hotly debated issue. Currently, as many as 38 states have legalized marijuana for one purpose or another. The federal government, despite their inaction in enforcing federal law, has refused to legalize marijuana, which makes this issue confusing and difficult for any gun owner, service member, or security clearance holder to know if and when they can use marijuana or invest in marijuana companies.

Some assume that the legalization of marijuana will mean that everybody holding a clearance or serving in the military would be permitted to use. This might be true, but it is possible that the federal government still limits use under certain circumstances. It's reasonable to assume that the federal government will continue to stand by their position that marijuana is mind-altering and that an individual under the influence of marijuana is less trustworthy with a firearm. Similarly, the federal government will almost definitely have concerns about individuals in possession of classified information being under the influence of marijuana.

As many military and clearance holders are always on call, the federal government will need to figure out what rules to put into place to limit use and to ensure that people are not under the influence of marijuana in the workplace and while possessing a firearm or working in a classified setting. The next big hurdle will be figuring out how to test whether an individual is under the influence of marijuana at any given time.

There is a reasonable expectation that security clearance adjudications will change if marijuana is legalized. While most applications ask about illegal drug use in the past seven years, admitting to marijuana use will not result in a definite denial. Agencies consider frequency of use and recency. If marijuana is legalized, the drug could be dropped from the application. It is more likely that there will still be a marijuana question, just as there are questions related to alcohol. The adjudicator will likely still consider frequency and recency, but the standard will be much friendlier than it currently is.

It should be significant to any military or security clearance attorney to hear a Supreme Court Justice use the word piecemeal when describing the policy of the federal government. Often, a security clearance attorney will argue on appeal that the lower decision in a security clearance matter was reached using a piecemeal approach. Given the use of the "whole-person" concept, a finding that the process was piecemeal is a finding that the decision was arbitrary and capricious and will often result in a reversal. A Supreme Court Justice does not use such a word without meaning behind it.

There are a number of reasons why marijuana is still illegal. When considering gun rights and marijuana, the government is likely concerned that the drug is mind-altering. They are of the well-supported position that nobody should be in possession of a firearm while under the influence of a mind-altering drug of any type. If this is their position, then it is logical to believe that the federal government will never allow marijuana use within the military ranks.

Legalizing marijuana does not necessarily mean they have to allow service members to use it. There would likely still be a strictly enforced ban given the difficulty in tracking use and the effects that use might have on a service member. Of course, there is a possibility that medicinal use becomes permissible if studies continue to show positive effects.

It will be interesting to see if marijuana use remains an issue for individuals applying for or holding approved access to classified information. While it is unclear if and when the federal government will allow security clearance holders to use recreational marijuana in the future, it is

entirely possible that security clearance holders might soon be permitted to be involved in the sale and distribution of marijuana. There is also a good possibility that prescription medicinal use might be permissible in the not-to-distant future, assuming the applicant clears all Guideline I (Psychological Conditions) concerns during the application process and beyond. Marijuana might be as effective as and safer than some current prescription medications being used by a security clearance holder.

Maybe money is driving the delay. The federal government is likely searching for a way to profit from the legalization. Much like cigarettes and arguably-more-dangerous alcohol, the federal government will heavily regulate and tax marijuana when it is eventually legalized. This point alone almost guarantees its legalization. They will use this money for a series of efforts, including drug and alcohol prevention and training. As you might know, the federal government still considers marijuana to be a Schedule 1 highly addictive drug.

Whatever the federal government is considering, Justice Thomas might have given us a brief look into the window of the Supreme Court. While the Supreme Court does not create laws, they will occasionally determine the constitutionality of laws that make it to their court. It is certainly not a secret that the Supreme Court attempts to avoid difficult and highly controversial topics if they are able to do so. No single person or small body of judges wants to appear to be dictating laws for the nation. That said, the recent comments and the use of the word piecemeal certainly lead me to believe that the Supreme Court is asking the federal government to figure out what side of the marijuana issue they want to be on.

The federal government cannot continue to say marijuana is illegal while taking no action against the wide-scale marijuana manufacturing and distribution that has recently occurred across the country. Considering that no fewer than 38 states have legalized marijuana in some capacity, it should be easy to determine what side of the issue the federal government will likely end up on, but what is taking so long? [Source: MilitaryTimes | Anthony Kuhn, Esq (Opinion) | July 23, 2021++]

Basic Allowance for Housing

Update 11: Details On Extra BAH for 200,000 Troops

For the approximately 200,000 service members who may be eligible for extra cash in their housing allowance through the end of the year, military officials have provided more details on eligibility and how to apply. Defense officials announced 24 SEP that the temporary higher rates for Basic Allowance for Housing will take effect 1 OCT in 56 housing areas across the country. The increase **will be retroactive** to that start date, so don't worry if you haven't yet applied or been approved.

The extra money is designed to ease the financial burden on service members and their families who have been affected by higher costs of rental housing and a shortage of housing in these designated military housing areas. It applies to troops with and without dependents. Defense officials have estimated that about 200,000 troops DoD-wide could be eligible for the extra money, according to Army officials. If the maximum number of service members qualify for the extra money, it would cost the Defense Department about \$159 million, according to DoD officials.

The increases range from 10 percent to 20 percent, and apply to eligible active-duty troops and full-time National Guard members in these 56 areas. For example, one of the five military housing areas that will get the maximum 20 percent increase is Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base, Calif. An E-5 with dependents in that area who qualifies for the increase would receive an extra \$240 a month, with the BAH increasing from \$1,206 a month to \$1,446 a month. The temporary increases end 31 DEC, because the new 2022 BAH rates take effect 1 JAN.

The 56 areas represent about 18 percent of the 306 military housing areas in the country. Military housing areas geographically group individual ZIP codes, and include rental markets surrounding a duty station or a metropolitan area. The individual MHAs are named for the installation or nearest city. Of the military housing areas with temporary BAH hikes, five will get a 20 percent increase; 11 will get a 15 percent increase; and 40 will get a 10 percent increase. In addition to Twentynine Palms, the other areas with a 20 percent increase are: Eglin Air Force Base, Florida; Boise, Idaho; Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho; and Spokane, Washington. In general, it applies to:

- Service members who have relocated after March 13, 2020, and are paying higher housing costs at their new permanent duty station that exceed their regular BAH rate at their new duty station;
- Service members who have renewed a lease after March 13, 2020, and are paying higher housing costs exceeding their regular BAH; and
- Service members who have relocated within their military housing area and are paying higher housing costs.

All of these must be within the 56 designated military housing areas, and documentation must accompany the request. Documentation and application requirements are outlined in service guidelines. The March 13, 2020, date is important because that's the date the president declared a national emergency due to the ongoing pandemic. DoD contends this allows officials to authorize a temporary BAH increase because of the pandemic's impact on rental housing costs. Service members who signed long-term leases before March 13, 2020, or mortgage payments established before that date, aren't eligible for the increased payments. Homeowners who are paying higher costs as a result of refinanced mortgages, adjustable-rate mortgages or home equity loans aren't eligible. Each of the services has provided information on how to apply for the rate increase:

- Army: Check with your supporting S1/personnel office for further guidance and application procedures.
- Navy: <https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/References/Pay-Benefits/N130C>
- Air Force: <https://usaf.dps.mil/teams/RMSO/rmportal/rmf/SitePages/FunctionalAreaPage.aspx>
- Marine Corps: <https://www.manpower.usmc.mil>
- Space Force: <https://usaf.dps.mil/teams/RMSO/rmportal/rmf/SitePages/FunctionalAreaPage.aspx>

Based on information pulled from DoD and the military services, here's how it will work:

- You must apply for the increase. It's not automatic; follow your service's guidelines for applying.
- It's retroactive. Eligibility for payment is retroactive to the first month when the service member had the qualifying extra costs — but no earlier than 1 OCT. The service member's application must be approved by their commander or other approving official, and finance officials must get notification of the approval. The earliest any service member could receive the increase would be in the 15 OCT paycheck. But those who do not get the extra money by 15 OCT will get a payment retroactive to 1 OCT, or the date they incurred the extra housing costs, whichever is later.
- Check with your service about deadlines for applying. For example, Marines must submit their request for the temporary increase no later than March 1, 2022.
- There are qualifying time frames. The increased rates apply to service members with extra housing expenses from March 13, 2020, through Dec. 31, 2021. For example, a service member who signed a lease during that time for an apartment, where the monthly rent exceeds the current BAH rate, may use that lease agreement to document eligibility, although the increases only apply starting Oct. 1, for three months.
- It applies to all ranks and all types of housing within those 56 designated housing areas.
- It doesn't apply to service members living in privatized housing.
- Increased utility costs or property taxes included in mortgage payments, as a direct result of the pandemic, might qualify in some cases. Officials advise troops to refer to service-specific guidance or contact their chain of command for more information. Those claiming increased utility costs or increased property taxes must provide documentation justifying how the increases are a result of the COVID pandemic.
- No need to reapply each month. Eligibility and payments will continue through 31 DEC for those approved, unless there's a BAH status change.
- The temporary BAH increases end 31 DEC, or the date when a service member is no longer authorized BAH for that location. New BAH rates take effect 1 JAN, and service members shouldn't assume the rate increases will continue into 2022.

In July, Military Times reported on the difficulty troops and families have been facing as they move to new duty stations because of surging housing costs. Some are paying hundreds of dollars more per month for rentals than their housing allowance covers, if they can even find a rental. Some families delayed making their permanent change of station move, while others set up house in expanded RV campgrounds on base. Some told Military Times they had to live far from base just to find a rental or had to rent housing in unsafe neighborhoods or in less-than-satisfactory condition, and even then some had to pay more than their BAH covered.

Typically, BAH rates are adjusted once a year and the new rates take effect 1 JAN. But realizing the severe impact housing costs and availability were having on many military members, DoD assessed the market changes, developed a list of the most affected markets and evaluated potential solutions.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | September 29, 2021 ++]

PCS Moves

Update 15: The ‘Trail Of Misery’ Continues With Long Delays



Military moves this year have become a “trail of misery,” as one service member describes it, and the pain continues for some who thought they would be settled in with their belongings long ago at their new duty station. Typically the busy military move season is through the end of August, but this year is anything but typical. Families have waited longer to get their household goods picked up, and they’re waiting longer to get their belongings delivered. One dual military couple who moved from Hawaii to their duty station on the East Coast June 12 still haven’t received their household goods.

Military families are frustrated, and it’s costing them money. “We’re both officers,” said the wife, who asked to remain anonymous because of their military jobs. “I can’t imagine what people who are making less money do if they have to wait four or five months for their stuff.” Widespread shipping disruptions around the world are affecting all types of industries, to include the moving industry. The lack of laborers, drivers, trucks, railways, vessels and longshoreman has

been wreaking havoc on military moves all summer, and the problem isn't going away any time soon.

“We are still seeing a higher-than-average shipment level in the fall and anticipate the same for the winter,” said U.S. Transportation Command spokesman Andre Kok. “We are continuing to hear from the moving and storage industry that competition for labor is fierce, just like many other industry sectors,” Kok said. TRANSCOM has received very few complaints from military families about delivery delays, he said, but noted that, in most cases, complaints are sent through other avenues. Moving companies “can't get stuff onto a ship, off a ship, out of a port, into a port, onto a rail, off the rail. It's craziness everywhere,” said Dan Bradley, director of government and military relations for the International Association of Movers. There's strained capacity across the shipping industry.

After months of trying to get answers, the dual military couple received a delivery date of 20 OCT, which is 71 days after their required delivery date of 10 AUG — and more than four months after they arrived at their new duty station. Although they have received information about filing an inconvenience claim, haven't yet filed it. But the couple has spent thousands of dollars out of pocket, mostly because they extended their stay in a furnished residence after their household goods were delayed, resulting in double rent payments in August, when the lease for their new residence began. Meanwhile, they've had to buy warm clothes for their children, and other duplicates of items they already own, such as pots and pans and utensils. They've borrowed numerous items from co-workers.

Families have also been frustrated with the lack of information from their moving companies. Military household goods offices try to help, but it's not a problem they can usually solve. Moving companies share the families' frustration, Bradley said. “Our industry guys are paying inconvenience claims” to troops and families because of the late deliveries, he said, “but the frustration on their side is, there's literally nothing they can do about this. They can't change it in any way, shape or form. It's the nature of what's going on.” Household goods shipments “are stuck on a vessel, stuck in port, stuck on a rail. There's frustration everywhere,” he said.

According to U.S. Transportation Command officials, the percentages of late deliveries fluctuates weekly. “For the month of September, we had an average of 44 percent on-time direct deliveries,” Kok said. That means about 56 percent were delivered late. For calendar year 2021 to date, an average of 60 percent of direct deliveries have been on time. Those direct deliveries are known as “door-to-door” deliveries, without the items being put into storage. Further information was unavailable on overall percentages for all deliveries, nor were there comparisons to previous years. But according to a January 2020 DoD Inspector General report, about 57 percent of household shipments delivered within the continental U.S. in 2018 were delivered on time, which means about 43 percent were delivered late in 2018. That moving season lives in the memory of some military families as one of the worst, with broken and lost household goods, delayed deliveries and other problems.

Jessica Perdew, a Marine Corps civilian employee, moved from Iwakuni, Japan, to Georgia in April. She and her husband, a retired Marine, waited until 23 AUG for their household goods to get to Georgia, two months past the 24 JUN required delivery date. There's a separate shipment that's also delayed, already a month past its required delivery date. Perdew's daughter, a Marine lieutenant, also moved this summer, from Hawaii to North Carolina in July, and hasn't yet received her household goods.

"The inconvenience claim is a joke ... \$350 is not even close to what it takes to purchase the stuff you need when you have to live five months with what you could carry or check on your flight," Perdew said. "Our winter clothes are in our still-undelivered shipment. We have to go to Colorado for my mother-in-law's memorial service. We have no coats, gloves. ... We also don't have suits for our son and my husband. Those are in the shipment. We never imagined we would still be waiting in October when we decided what to carry and what to ship." The Perdews and the dual military couple experienced frustration in getting information about where their household goods were. A heads up about potential problems could help families figure out a plan for their situations, said the wife in the dual military couple.

Even before COVID, those in the military moving industry had advocated for the government to increase the expected transit times to more accurately reflect the time it takes to ship household goods by vessel, trucks and rail. This could result in more realistic delivery dates and would provide better information to military families for their planning. TRANSCOM's Kok said the government "will continue to assess and address areas where we have the ability to take action, such as instituting increased transit times for shipments."

Perdew said their problems haven't been limited to delays. When they moved to Japan three years ago, they decided to protect some fragile items, including her grandmother's china, from breakage during the overseas move by leaving them behind in storage. "The boxes arrived [in Georgia this year] filthy and crushed," she said. "Nearly everything was broken and one box is still missing. The condition is shameful. "It's a circus. They have to fix this. We had international moves, and there was no option for [personally procured moves]," she said. Since that 2018 moving season, U.S. Transportation Command has been working on a new Global Household Goods contract that will change how DoD manages household goods moves. That is expected to be awarded no earlier than the end of October.

As thousands of military families know, it's not just about the money when it comes to their personal belongings. The wife in the military couple said her brother got married while she was in Hawaii, but they couldn't return for the wedding because of the pandemic. Upon their return to the East Coast, they were especially looking forward to a one-year anniversary celebration. "My new sis-in-law wore her wedding dress, my daughter was going to wear a blue dress that matched the bridesmaids' dresses and was sewed by my mother, and I was going to wear my bridesmaid's dress," she said. "But, of course, the two dresses are in the shipment because I assumed there was no way they wouldn't arrive by Labor Day," she said. "I was wrong. It's not a big deal in the

grand scheme of things, but it meant something to me.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | October 8, 2021 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse **Reported OCT 01 thru 15, 2021**

A Navy nuclear engineer with access to military secrets has been charged with trying to pass information about the design of American nuclear-powered submarines to someone he thought was a representative of a foreign government but who turned out to be an undercover FBI agent, the Justice Department said Sunday. In a [criminal complaint](#) detailing espionage-related charges against **Jonathan Toebbe**, the government said he sold information for nearly the past year to a contact he believed represented a foreign power. That country was not named in the court documents.

Toebbe, 42, was arrested in West Virginia on 9 OCT along with his 45-year-old wife, Diana, after he had placed a removable memory card at a prearranged “dead drop” in Jefferson County, according to the department. It wasn’t immediately clear whether either Toebbe had a lawyer. The Toebbes are from Annapolis, Maryland.

The FBI says the scheme began in April 2020 when Jonathan Toebbe — a U.S. government employee since 2012 — sent a package of Navy documents to a foreign government and said he was interested in selling operations manuals, performance reports and other sensitive information. Authorities say he also provided instructions for how to continue to the furtive relationship, with a letter that said: “I apologize for this poor translation into your language. Please forward this letter to your military intelligence agency. I believe this information will be of great value to your nation. This is not a hoax.”

The FBI’s legal office in the foreign country received the package, which had a return address of Pittsburgh, last December. That led to a months-long undercover operation in which an agent posing as a representative of the foreign government offered to pay thousands of dollars in cryptocurrency for the information Toebbe was offering. In June, the FBI says, the undercover agent sent \$10,000 in cryptocurrency to Toebbe, describing it as a “sign of good faith and trust.” As part of the operation, authorities say, the FBI observed the Toebbes arrive on multiple occasions at agreed-upon locations for the exchange, concealing an SD card between two slices of bread on a half of a peanut butter sandwich in one instance and in a chewing gum package in another.

The complaint alleges violations of the [Atomic Energy Act](#), which makes it a crime to disclose information about atomic weapons or nuclear materials with the intent of harming the United States.

Jonathan and Diana Toebbe each made brief appearances in federal court in Martinsburg, West Virginia. Magistrate Judge Robert Trumble ordered them to remain detained pending a detention hearing on 1 OCT at which more extensive arguments are expected to be made. [Source: The Associated Press| Eric Tucker | October 10 & 12, 2021 ++]

Military Exchange Sales

Update 01: Do Not Wait To Buy. If You See It, Buy It before Holidays



Like stores around the country, military exchanges are wrestling with COVID-related supply chain problems and rising prices. The problems are affecting everything from the manufacturing process to the entire shipping chain. “We continue to fight for our ‘unfair share’ of inventory to provide ongoing merchandise availability to service members and their families around the world,” said Chris Ward, spokesman for the Army and Air Force Exchange Service. Products affected include electronics, athletic footwear, men’s and women’s clothing, appliances, furniture, and more, he said.

Shortages of raw materials are especially affecting certain products, such as those that contain microchips, aluminum, glass and textiles, said Courtney Williams, spokeswoman for the Navy Exchange Service Command. Some of the brands that have been affected include Dyson, Whirlpool, Samsung, Charbroil and a number of beverage companies, she said. Among other problems are shipping container shortages, COVID-related factory shutdowns, ongoing port congestion, port container capacity limitations, driver availability, and limited truck and rail capacity, Ward said. These shipping problems have also been plaguing the moving industry, affecting military families’ moves.

These are not short-term problems. No one knows when the shortage of products will ease, Williams said, “but in the area of shipping, the hope is some relief will occur by late 2022.” The exchanges and commissaries compete with other retailers outside the gate for products and contend industry should give some preferential treatment to military stores, allotting an “unfair share” of inventory for the military community — considering the nature of the military lifestyle and the sacrifices service members and their families make. Many vendors have prioritized

military resale over other outlets, particularly with certain COVID-related products, Williams said.

Costs for labor, materials and transportation have skyrocketed. Williams said NEXCOM has worked to try to mitigate the increases to make sure they can continue to provide savings to their customers. In addition, across the military resale organizations, their Joint Buying Alliance, formed in 2019, has helped save customers more than \$75 million, Williams said. The advice from exchange officials? “Do not wait to buy. If you see it, buy it!” said Williams. NEXCOM officials decided to move up the start of their “We Believe” holiday shopping campaign to start the week of 4 OCT to allow customers to get a head start, she said.

Army and Air Force Exchange Service officials launched their holiday shopping sales in early September, offering “Black Friday prices” through 24 NOV, both in-store and online at ShopMyExchange.com, on electronics, clothing, jewelry, sporting goods and more. New deals and specials are rolling out each Friday. Many holiday deliveries are either on their way to Navy Exchange stores or just arriving, Williams said. But stores may not have been able to get the full quantity they originally ordered. And, she said, “NEXCOM is experiencing some product delays that will create out-of-stock or shortage situations throughout the holiday season.”

Except for items scheduled for their “Navy Blue Weekend” sales events, they’re putting all merchandise out on the sales floors. As the weeks wear on, there may be less likelihood that customers will find what they want for their holiday buying. “That said, NEXCOM buyers are still looking for and purchasing new products for the holiday season,” she said. “So there will be products on our shelves, just maybe not the gift a customer had originally wanted to purchase.” Navy Exchanges and AAFES stores have also started offering their fee-free layaway this holiday season.

Most of the current product shortages and labor shortages are due to the recent increase in COVID-19 infections at civilian manufacturing plants, which has caused temporary shutdowns as well as changes in production lines, Williams said. This can cause longer manufacturing times and some are having to prioritize or shift resources to manufacture only certain products. Shortages of raw materials and packaging also affect the products themselves. “If just one element or ingredient needed to make an item is not available, it has a huge impact,” Williams said.

All authorized exchange shoppers, regardless of service branch, can shop at any of the services’ exchange stores, both in the brick-and-mortar stores and online. All Department of Veterans Affairs service-connected disabled veterans, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war and primary veteran caregivers are eligible to shop at military exchanges on base. All veterans are eligible to shop at the online exchanges — mynavyexchange.com; shopmyexchange.com, mymcx.com and shopcgx.com. Military exchanges in the U.S. are also now open to all DoD and Coast Guard civilians. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | October 11, 2021 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials

Reported OCT 01 thru 15, 2021 | Eighteen

“Keeping the Promise“, “Fulfill their Trust” and “No one left behind” are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century as of FEB 2019 are: World War II 73,025 of which over 41,000 are presumed to be lost at sea, Korean War 7665, Vietnam War 1589 (i. e. VN-1,246, Laos-288, Cambodia-48, & Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7), Cold War 111, Iraq and other conflicts 5. Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home.

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

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

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



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

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

LOOK FOR

-- **Army Air Forces Sgt. Francis W. Wiemerslage, 20**, of River Grove, Illinois, was assigned to the 549th Bombardment Squadron, 385th Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force, serving in Germany. He was the ball turret gunner on a B-17G Flying Fortress bomber that was shot down during a mission over Dresden on March 2, 1945. Two of the nine crew members survived the incident, while the rest, including Wiemerslage, were killed. He will be buried in his hometown on Oct. 23, 2021. [Read about Wiemerslage](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2759363/airman-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-wiemerslage-f) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2759363/airman-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-wiemerslage-f>.

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Jack K. Wood, 24**, of Wichita Falls, Texas, was assigned to 344th Bombardment Squadron, 98th Bombardment Group, 9th Air Force. On Aug. 1, 1943, the B-24 Liberator aircraft on which Wood was serving as a navigator crashed as a result of enemy anti-aircraft fire. Following the war, his remains could not be identified. He will be buried Oct. 23, 2021, in Madill, Oklahoma. [Read about Wood](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2663094/airman-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-wood-j) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2663094/airman-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-wood-j>.

-- **Navy Machinist's Mate 1st Class Harold F. Carney, 23**, of New Diggings, Wisconsin, 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 Carney. He will be buried on Nov. 6, 2021, in Benton, Wisconsin. [Read about Carney](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2728880/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-carney-h) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2728880/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-carney-h>.

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Charles L. Saunders, 18**, of Winnie, Texas, 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 Saunders. He will be buried on Dec. 7, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Saunders](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2587765/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-saunders-c) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2587765/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-saunders-c>.

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Denis H. Hiskett, 20**, of Nebraska City, Nebraska, 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 Hiskett. He will be buried on Dec. 11, 2021, in Mission Hills, California. [Read about Hiskett](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2538203/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-hiskett-d) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2538203/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-hiskett-d>.

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Gabriel J. Eggud, 25**, of New York, was assigned to 110th

Reconnaissance Squadron, 71st Reconnaissance Group. He was piloting a P-39 Airacobra fighter over Wewak, New Guinea, on July 6, 1944, when a released bomb exploded and destroyed his aircraft. Following the war, Eggud's remains were declared non-recoverable. He will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia, on a date yet to be determined. [Read about Eggud](#) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2356203/pilot-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-eggud-g>.

-- **Army Pvt. Robert J. Herynk, 27**, was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division. His unit participated in a coordinated attack against Japanese defenses on Nov. 26, 1942. Early casualty reports listed Herynk as killed in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Herynk](#) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2795870/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-herynk-r>.

-- **Army Cpl. Marvin D. Actkinson, 18**, was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action Dec. 2, 1950, after a fighting withdrawal near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Actkinson](#) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2800232/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-actkinson-m>.

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Joseph M. Robertson, 18**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Robertson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Robertson](#) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2800246/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-robertson-j>.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Billy Turner, 20**, 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 Turner. Interment services are pending. [Read about Turner](#) at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2805387/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-turner-b>.

-- **Navy Hospital Apprentice 1st Class Keefe R. Connolly, 19**, of Markesan, Wisconsin, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Connolly. He will be buried Nov. 8, 2021, in his hometown. You can Yopu can read about Connolly at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2762666/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from->

[world-war-ii-connolly-k.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Richard G. Salsbury, 19**, 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 serving as a gunner crashed as a result of enemy anti-aircraft fire. Following the war, his remains could not be identified. Interment services are pending. You can read about Salsbury at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2794610/airman-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-salsbury-r>.

-- **Army Pvt. Archie V. Fleeman, 19**, was assigned to Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 11, 1944, after his unit was part of the Hürtgen Forest offensive, near Hürtgen, Germany. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. You can read about Fleeman at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2791189/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-fleeman-a>.

-- **Army Staff Sgt. William R. Linder, 30**, was assigned to Company E, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 16, 1944, after his unit was part of the Hürtgen Forest offensive, near Hürtgen, Germany. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. You can read about Linden at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2791119/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-linder-w>.

-- **Army Pfc. Don D. Dowler, 18**, was assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. You can read about Dowler at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/2791090/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-dowler-d>.

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Laverne A. Nigg, 23**, 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 Nigg. Interment services are pending. You can read about Nigg at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2790826/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-nigg-l>.

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class James O. McDonald, 25**, 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 McDonald. Interment services are pending. You can read about McDonald at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News->

[Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2790843/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-mcdonald-j](https://www.dcaa.mil/Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2790843/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-mcdonald-j).

[Source: <http://www.dcaa.mil> | October 2021 ++]

* VA *



VA Community Care Program

Update 01: To Be Phased Out by MAR 2022

Veterans Affairs leaders are phasing out the department’s office in charge of community care programs, a move that some advocates are decrying as unfairly limiting veterans’ medical options but officials insist is only about efficiency and not sweeping policy changes. Last week, VA officials said they would begin a multi-month process of “designing a new integrated access and care coordination model to better deliver seamless care.” Connected to that, lawmakers on Capitol Hill received letters from VA Secretary Denis McDonough announcing that the Office of Community Care would be decommissioned in coming months, with its responsibilities shifted to a yet-to-be-established Office for Integrated Veterans Care.

“Implementation of these changes allows the Veterans Health Administration to continue its modernization journey and transformation to operate as a high reliability, veteran-centric organization,” the letter stated. The issue of community care — where veterans can see private-sector doctors paid for by department funds — has been a contentious one within VA for years. Former President Donald Trump made expanding outside medical access a key point of his 2016 campaign and presidency, pushing for more “choice” for veterans in where they received their health care.

But Democratic lawmakers — including President Joe Biden — have cautioned that too much use of private-sector doctors for core VA medical responsibilities could drain finances from the VA health care system and lead to “privatization” of the department. In a statement to Military Times, Donald Koenig, special advisor to VA’s acting Under Secretary for Health for Integrated Veteran Care, said the goal of the new changes is not to hamper or dismantle the community care program. “Nothing we are doing will change any appointments scheduled now or in the future,” he said. “We’re working to simplify, coordinate better, and make scheduling faster for veterans,

whether for a VA provider or a community care provider. Our goal is to deliver the right care at the right time that best meets our veteran’s health needs.”

Officials at Concerned Veterans of America — longtime advocates of increased community care programs and critics of the VA health care system — see it differently. They noted that VA also recently took down a web page devoted to explaining veterans’ options under the community care program, effectively limiting public information about how to enroll or schedule outside appointments. “The administration does not like community care,” said Darin Selnick, senior advisor to the group and former Veterans Affairs advisor for the Trump White House. “If they are renaming and neutering offices and moving around access to the revenue, it feels like it is part of a campaign to get rid of it completely.”

Koenig said the Office of Community Care won’t be fully shut down until next spring, with a target now of March 2022. About 3,600 employees will be transferred to the new integrated care office, while another 4,300 will be reassigned to the Veterans Health Administration’s finance office. No jobs will be terminated or physically relocated. But Selnick said CVA has heard from numerous veterans and congressional offices about increased problems accessing the program and getting outside medical appointments. He said the decision to separate the financial and operational functions of the program could cause even more delays and confusion.

VA officials say that’s not true, noting that community care referrals were up about 12 percent last month compared to 2019 levels (September 2020 levels were down about 6 percent, but VA leaders say that’s because of reduced demand related to the coronavirus pandemic.) Lawmakers received a briefing on the looming changes this week. House Veterans’ Affairs Committee ranking member Mike Bost, R-Ill., said he supports efforts to improve the community care program, but said he is leery of the moves so far.

“I am hearing more and more often from veterans who are not being given the choices they are entitled to under the law,” he told Military Times. “I am very concerned that this will divert much-needed focus from community care and make it that much easier for wait times to creep back up and veterans to suffer for it, just like they did in 2014. “It’s on Secretary McDonough to make sure that doesn’t happen, and I will be keeping very close watch.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | October 13, 2021 ++]

VA Health Care Priority Groups Enrollment Number Assignment Criteria

The number of veterans who can be enrolled in the health care program is determined by the amount of money Congress gives VA each year. Since funds are limited, VA set up Priority Groups to make sure that certain groups of veterans are able to be enrolled before others. Once you apply for enrollment, your eligibility will be verified. Based on your specific eligibility

status, you will be assigned a Priority Group. The Priority Groups range from 1-8 with 1 being the highest priority. Based on eligibility and income, some veterans may have to pay copay for treatment and some may not be eligible for enrollment.

You may be eligible for more than one Priority Group. In that case, VA will always place you in the highest Priority Group that you are eligible for. Depending on your Priority Group, the VA may reimburse you for your travel costs from your home to a medical facility. Following are the criteria for assignment to a group number:

Priority Group 1

- Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 50% or higher
- Veterans determined by VA to be unemployable due to service-connected conditions

Priority Group 2 - Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 30% - 40%

Priority Group 3

- Veterans who are former Prisoners of War (POWs)
- Veterans awarded a Purple Heart
- Veterans whose were discharged for a disability
- Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 10% - 20%
- Veterans awarded special eligibility classification under Title 38, U.S.C., § 1151, “benefits for individuals disabled by treatment or vocational rehabilitation”
- Veterans awarded the Medal of Honor

Priority Group 4

- Veterans who are receiving aid and attendance or housebound benefits
- Veterans who have been determined by VA to be catastrophically disabled

Priority Group 5

- Nonservice-connected veterans and non-compensable service-connected Veterans rated 0% disabled by VA with annual income below the VA’s and geographically (based on your resident zip code) adjusted income limits.
- Veterans receiving VA pension benefits
- Veterans eligible for Medicaid programs

Priority Group 6

- Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 0%
- Veterans exposed to Ionizing radiation during atmospheric testing or during the occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- Project 112/SHAD participants
- Veterans who served in Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975
- Persian Gulf War veterans who served between Aug. 2, 1990 and Nov. 11, 1998
- Veterans who served on active duty at Camp Lejeune for not fewer than 30 days beginning Aug. 1, 1953 and ending Dec. 31, 1987
- Combat veterans who were discharged on or after Jan. 28, 2003, are eligible for enhanced benefits for 5 years after discharge.

Priority Group 7 - Veterans with gross household income below certain limits and who agree to pay copays

Priority Group 8 - Veterans with gross household income above certain limits and who agree to pay copays

[Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | September 21, 2021 ++]

Post-911 GI Bill

New Monthly Check in Requirement

A new rule took effect in August requiring many Post-9/11 GI Bill users to verify their school attendance with the Department of Veterans Affairs each month before receiving any payments. Starting this December 2021, that requirement will be expanded to all Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients. Users of all other GI Bill programs, such as the Montgomery GI Bill, long have been required to verify their school attendance each month. And if you don't verify your attendance, you don't get any money.

Beginning immediately, GI Bill users who are attending a technical school, also known as a "non-college degree" or NCD school, must verify their school attendance with the VA each month in order to receive their Monthly Housing Allowance, according to a VA press release. For most students, this will be done via text message. After enrolling in courses, students will receive a text message from the VA inviting them to enroll in text message verification. They can reply "Yes" to opt in.

At the end of each month, students will receive a text from the VA asking whether they are still enrolled in classes. If they respond affirmatively, their Monthly Housing Allowance will be

sent to their bank at the beginning of the following month, the release says. Those who fail to verify their attendance with the VA for two months in a row will have their housing allowance payments withheld until they do so, it adds. If students don't receive the text message, don't opt into the service or don't have a mobile phone, they will be required to contact the VA by calling the GI Bill hotline at 888-442-4551 to receive payment.

Currently, this change applies only to technical school students; however, the VA is planning to roll out the verification process to all Post-9/11 GI Bill students by 17 DEC. All affected students should be notified by the VA before this requirement begins. [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | September 15, 2021 ++]

VA Covid-19 Vaccines

Update 08: How to Get Your Shot Card Online



If you got your COVID-19 shot from the Department of Veterans Affairs and have lost your shot record card, you may now be able to access your vaccination verification on your phone. While everyone's best course of action when they get their COVID-19 shot is to take a photo of the front and back of the COVID-19 vaccination card and keep it accessible on their mobile device, that option doesn't help if you have misplaced your card.

Having a verified record of your COVID-19 vaccination is becoming more important as many employers require proof of vaccination for employees, many major sports leagues and entertainers require proof of vaccination to attend events, and local jurisdictions and places of business are enacting more restrictions on the unvaccinated. While many Americans can access their medical records using websites and applications run by insurance companies or medical providers, those who got their vaccinations from the VA or the military haven't had access to any easily available online proof of vaccination.

But now the VA now says that if you got your shot from them, you can get your vaccination record on your smartphone through two recommended phone apps. All you need is a premium [My HealththeVet](#) account with the VA. If you have an iPhone, you can use the Apple Health app. For those with an Android phone, you can use the CommonHealth app. All you have to do is

download the app onto your phone, choose the VA as your health-care provider and sign in to your MyHealthVet account when prompted. The app will download your selected medical information to your device, where you can provide proof of vaccination when necessary.

You can also download a copy of your vaccination record using the Blue Button section of MyHealthVet on your smartphone or computer. If you got your COVID-19 shot from a civilian doctor or local vaccination event, you should check with your doctor, state or county health department for information on how to obtain a copy of your shot record if you have lost your card. If you got your COVID-19 shot from a military provider, check with either the provider or your command on how to receive a copy of your vaccination record. [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | September 7, 2021 ++]

Covid-19 Victims

Update 06: VA Tops 15,000 Deaths since Pandemic Start



More than 15,000 Veterans Affairs patients have died from coronavirus-related conditions in the 19 months since the pandemic began in America, with more than 2,200 of those fatalities coming since the start of August. The grim milestone equates to roughly 26 deaths a day among VA patients since the start of the pandemic comes just a few days after the country passed 700,000 deaths from the virus. Nearly 44 million Americans have contracted COVID-19 since early 2020, with about 1.5 percent losing their lives because of respiratory and circulation problems resulting from the infection.

The death rate among VA patients is much higher: about 4.4 percent. But department officials have noted that their patients are much more likely to be older and have existing health problems than the general population, making them more vulnerable to the virus than the average American. In comparison, the Defense Department has reported 58 deaths among service members since the start of the pandemic, for a mortality rate of about 0.02 percent. Only about 35 percent of the VA coronavirus deaths were among inpatients at department medical centers. The rest were veterans with connections to the VA health care system who died at home or in private medical settings, and were reported to department officials.

VA officials have cautioned that their death totals do not represent all of the veteran fatalities in America, but instead only a portion of that group with connections to VA medical care. September was among the deadliest months since the start of the pandemic, with more than 1,200 deaths reported. The only other times that VA officials reported more than 1,000 coronavirus deaths in a month were in December 2020 and January and February 2021, during the second major wave of the pandemic in America. A third wave of coronavirus cases came this summer, as the delta variant of the virus swept across the country. VA officials saw active cases of the virus swell from around 1,500 a day in June to more than 14,000 a day in late August.

Those numbers have dropped in recent weeks, but still remain more than five times higher than they were at the start of the summer. The VA death total does not include 203 department employees who have died from COVID-19. Department leaders in recent months have moved to require all VA staff to get vaccinated against coronavirus, in an effort to ensure safety for individuals visiting VA medical facilities. More than 3.5 million veterans have received vaccines through department medical facilities in the last 10 months. About 100,000 have received a booster shot in recent weeks. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | October 4, 2021 ++]

SBP DIC Offset

Update 66: Second Phase of Offset Phased Elimination

This coming January marks the start of the second phase of the SBP-DIC Offset Phased Elimination, in accordance with the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, which modified the law that requires an offset of Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) payments for surviving spouses who are also entitled to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In Phase Two of the SBP-DIC Offset Phased Elimination, which begins January 1, 2022, the amount that is offset (deducted) from the spouse's SBP annuity payment will be one-third of the amount of the DIC payment. January 2022 benefits will be paid on February 1, 2022.

To help surviving spouses who are eligible for both SBP and DIC in 2022 understand the effect of this 2022 change, DFAS will mail you a letter in December of 2021 with an individual estimates of your 2022 SBP payment. As a reminder, the SBP-DIC Offset Phased Elimination only affects SBP payments issued by DFAS. The changes do NOT affect Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments from the VA. Eligible surviving spouses will continue to receive the full amount of DIC from the VA. You should also be aware that Annuitant Account Statements for spouses now show their current gross SBP benefit at the bottom of the statement.

You can estimate your net SBP payment for 2022 using the current gross SBP benefit amount that is on your statement. Subtract an amount that is equal to 1/3 of your current DIC payment FROM the amount of your current gross SBP benefit. The result is approximately what your SBP payment will be in the second phase. Keep in mind that if there is a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for 2022, it will increase the amount of your DIC payment and your gross SBP payment. Annuitant Account Statements are available in your myPay account: <https://mypay.dfas.mil>

You will also receive a January 2022 Annuitant Account Statement (AAS) near the time of your February 1, 2022 payment that will show changes to your SBP and/or SSIA payment because of the second phase of the SBP-DIC Offset Phased Elimination. Watch for your pre-estimate letter in the mail in December of 2021. [Source: DFAS Retiree Newsletter | September 2021 ++]

Veterans Legacy Memorial

Update 01: Website Expansion



The Department of Veterans Affairs has announced the expansion of their Veterans Legacy Memorial (VLM) website <https://www.vlm.cem.va.gov>, which now contains individual webpages for nearly 4.5 million veterans interred in national, state, territorial and tribal veterans cemeteries. The just-announced expansion added individual webpages for nearly 500,000 veterans interred in 93 state, territorial and tribal veterans cemeteries to the existing four million webpages for veterans interred in VA's 155 national cemeteries.

The Veterans Legacy Memorial website lets anyone look up veterans interred in these cemeteries and see their service information, a map of the gravesite and, in many cases, a photograph of the gravestone. It also gives friends and family members the ability to contribute photos, stories, historical documents and pay respects. "VLM offers families a meaningful way to pay tribute to our veterans," Matthew Quinn, VA under secretary for memorial affairs, said in a press release. "Because of the expansion of VLM to VA grant-funded State, Territorial and Tribal

Veterans cemeteries, many families -- including my own -- will have the opportunity to memorialize their veterans online."

The free site offers those researching family history a wealth of information and is a way that those who are physically distant can pay tribute to lost friends, family and loved ones. More than 22,000 virtual submissions have been made to veterans' profile pages in VLM since the site launched in 2019. All content uploaded or submitted to a veteran's personal memorial webpage is reviewed by moderators before being posted. [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | October 5, 2021 ++]

GI Bill Schools

Update 23: For Profit's Threatened with Big Fines for Duping Vets



Federal Trade Commission officials are vowing to crack down on “shady” recruiting tactics used on service members and veterans by for-profit colleges with harsh new financial penalties for offenders. On 6 OCT, the commission sent notices to 70 of the largest for-profit colleges alerting them of the potential for fines of more than \$43,000 per offense for unfair or misleading recruiting tactics. Officials said the move comes in response to a 70 percent increase in complaints around education and recruiting issues between 2018 and 2020.

“For too long, unscrupulous for-profit schools have preyed on students with impunity, facing no penalties when they defraud their students and drive them into debt,” said FTC Chair Lina Khan said in a statement. “The FTC is resurrecting a dormant authority to deter wrongdoing and hold accountable bad actors who abuse students and taxpayers.” Industry representatives decried the move as a baseless attack on their business model. “The FTC announcement includes no findings of wrongdoing at any for-profit institution,” said Jason Altmire, president and CEO of Career Education Colleges and Universities. “Publicly announcing that it is sending warning letters to 70 of the largest for-profit institutions arbitrarily impugns the integrity of institutions that are in full compliance with FTC regulations.”

But commission officials in their announcement noted several recent high-profile settlements related to false claims of job placement and employment opportunities connected to for-profit

degree programs. They insist the action is needed to rein in the industry and protect students, particularly service members and veterans. “For-profit schools have had a strong incentive to enroll veterans because of the education benefits service members can use to pay for college,” the commission’s announcement stated. “This has led to aggressive targeting of servicemembers, veterans, and their families.”

Earlier this year, lawmakers included in an emergency COVID relief package an overhaul of the so-called 90/10 rule, which requires colleges and universities to have at least 10 percent of their revenues derived from non-federal sources. The idea behind the regulation is to ensure that for-profit institutions aren’t funded solely by federal monies, but instead also include significant investment by students interested in furthering their education. However, under a loophole in federal statute, GI Bill benefits and Defense Department Tuition Assistance programs were not counted as federal dollars, despite being taxpayer-funded benefits. That incentivized schools to target those groups and their stable, reliable tuition money.

The changes approved last spring undid that loophole, but FTC officials said that troops and veterans remain heavily targeted by the schools. Industry officials say that’s because those groups are more likely to seek out non-traditional college classes, to better match with their family and work schedules. Altmire said he was “surprised that only for-profit institutions will be subjected to these [new] enhanced civil monetary penalties, while other bad actors under the FTC’s jurisdiction will not be held to the same standard.” But veterans advocates hailed the move.

“Up until today, veterans and service members have been seen as a gravy train for some of the worst schools in America, exploiting grandiose marketing schemes and even outright lies to keep investors happy,” said William Hubbard, vice president at Veterans Education Success. “This changes all of that,” he added. “This is the FTC declaring war on some of the worst schools in higher education. Students will have a greater chance of going to better schools without all the tricks up the sleeves of so many fly-by-night programs.”

FTC officials said the fines will be based on misleading claims related to “the career outcomes of their graduates, including whether a particular career field is in demand, the percentage of graduates who get jobs in their chosen field, whether the institution can help a graduate get a job, and the amount of money a graduate can expect to earn.” Institutions that received warnings from the commission is available on its web site https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/attachments/penalty-offenses-concerning-education/higher_ed_notice_recipient_list.pdf. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III |

October 7, 2021 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse

Reported 01 thru 15 OCT 2021

Federal Advisory Committee Act Violation — A congressional investigation determined three members of former President Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort *pursued personal interests, exerted dominance over White House staff and violated federal law* while acting as advisers for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The House Oversight and Veterans’ Affairs committees released results 27 SEP of a 19-month investigation into Marvel Entertainment Chairman **Ike Perlmutter**, lawyer **Marc Sherman** and **Bruce Moskowitz**, a Palm Beach doctor, who were empowered by Trump to serve as advisers and organizers at the VA from 2016 to 2018 despite not having experience in the U.S. military or government.

“Our joint investigation found that Ike Perlmutter, Marc Sherman and Dr. Bruce Moskowitz, bolstered by their connection to President Trump’s private Mar-a-Lago club, violated the law and sought to exert improper influence over government officials to further their own personal interests,” said Reps. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., and Mark Takano, D-Calif., who led the investigation. Maloney and Takano claimed the men violated the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which is an open government law that requires transparency of outside advisory groups. VoteVets, a liberal-leaning advocacy group, filed a lawsuit in 2018 that claimed the “Mar-a-Lago Three” broke the law. In response, the government has argued the men didn’t constitute an advisory committee and weren’t subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

Maloney, who is the chairwoman of the House Oversight Committee, argued 27 SEP that the situation calls for bolstering the Federal Advisory Committee Act to close loopholes in the law. She introduced a bill this year that would apply the law to more groups, including subcommittees and committees established by contractors. “The committees’ investigation demonstrates the need for Congress to pass the Federal Advisory Committee Transparency Act, which would ensure the American people know who is providing advice to federal policymakers and would require agencies to disclose whether individuals on advisory committees have conflicts of interest,” Maloney and Takano said in a statement issued Monday.

Perlmutter, Sherman and Moskowitz were involved in hundreds of email exchanges with VA officials, frequent phone calls and at least five in-person meetings from 2016 to 2018, according to the Government Accountability Office, which also investigated the situation. Three top VA officials — none of whom still work at the department — communicated with the men through private email accounts. After being introduced to the leaders of Johnson & Johnson, Apple and CVS Health by Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump — members of Trump’s family who worked in the White House — the three men met with the companies on behalf of the federal government. They engaged with the companies about developing a platform for veterans’ medical records, creating a joint public awareness campaign against veteran suicides and expanding care for veterans at CVS clinics.

According to the committee’s findings, Moskowitz discussed the possibility of monetizing the VA patient database, suggesting that Johnson & Johnson, Apple and CVS could profit from

access to the VA’s electronic medical records. Moskowitz worked with then-VA Secretary David Shulkin to award a consulting contract to the former president of Moskowitz’s nonprofit foundation to explore the idea. “It is unclear what steps, if any, the VA took to implement this initiative,” according to the committees’ findings. The committees also found the Mar-a-Lago members exerted dominance over the White House staff members who were tasked with implementing policies for veterans. In one instance, Perlmutter directed White House employees to stop working on projects that overlapped with what he, Sherman and Moskowitz were doing, according to the House committees.

The lawsuit against the three men is ongoing. The US. District Court of the District of Columbia dismissed the case in 2019, saying the group didn’t meet the qualifications for an advisory committee under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. However, the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned the ruling in March, stating VoteVets laid out “sufficient facts” to continue the case.

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Detroit Mi. — Two defendants were charged via criminal complaint²⁹ for their roles in separate *frauds related to Covid-19 Vaccination Record Cards*, announced Acting United States Attorney Saima S. Mohsin. The first complaint charges registered nurse **Bethann Kierczak**, 37, of Southgate with theft of government property and theft or embezzlement related to a healthcare benefit program. Kierczak, was arrested 29 SEP and will be appearing in federal court this afternoon on the charges. According to the complaint, Kierczak is responsible for stealing or embezzling authentic Covid-19 Vaccination Record Cards from the VA hospital—along with vaccine lot numbers necessary to make the cards appear legitimate—and then reselling those cards and information to individuals within the metro Detroit community. The complaint alleges that Kierczak’s theft of Covid-19 Vaccination Record Cards began at least as early as May of this year and continued until the present. It is further alleged that Kierczak sold the cards for \$150-\$200 each and communicated with buyers primarily via Facebook Messenger.

The second complaint charges **Rapheal Jarrell Smiley**, 32, of Detroit with fraud involving department or agency seals, identity document fraud, and trafficking in counterfeit goods. Smiley was arrested earlier today and will also be making his initial appearance in federal court as well. According to the complaint, Smiley is responsible for conducting an ongoing scheme to import and sell or otherwise distribute fraudulent Covid-19 Vaccination Record Cards. It is alleged that Smiley ordered the cards from two shippers in China, both of which have been previously identified by law enforcement as importers of fraudulent Covid-19 Vaccination Record Cards. Further, the complaint alleges that Smiley advertised the cards for sale via his Facebook and Instagram accounts. [Source: DoJ Eastern District of Michigan | U.S. Attorney’s Office | September 29, 2021 ++]

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New Orleans — U.S. Attorney Duane A. Evans announced **Donald Peter Auzine** (“Auzine”) and **Bonnie Jean Lawless Diaz** (“Diaz”) have each pled guilty in federal court relating to their roles in a *health care fraud conspiracy*. Auzine, age 51, a resident of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, pled guilty on September 23, 2021 before U.S. District Judge Jay C. Zainey to Count One of an Indictment charging him with conspiracy to commit health care fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1347 and 1349. Diaz, age 46, a resident of Slidell, Louisiana, pled guilty on September 23, 2021 before U.S. District Judge Jay C. Zainey to Count One of a Superseding Bill of Information charging her with misprision (or knowing concealment) of the commission of a felony, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 4.

According to the Indictment, in or around March 2014, continuing through in or around October 2016, Auzine, conspired to knowingly and willfully execute a scheme and artifice to defraud TRICARE, a federal health care benefit program affecting commerce, and other health care benefit programs. Auzine was the marketing manager of Prime Pharmacy Solutions (“Prime”), which was located in Slidell, Louisiana. Prime Pharmacy was primarily a closed-door pharmacy whose primary business focus was the production of compounded medication, which, when created properly, were drugs combined, mixed, or altered by licensed pharmacists or other practitioners to meet the specialized needs of individual patients. The Pharmacist-in-Charge (“PIC”) was responsible for supervision, management, and compliance with all federal and state pharmacy laws and regulations pertaining to Prime Pharmacy’s pharmacy practice.

The owner, on behalf of Prime Pharmacy, contracted with various entities, including Pharmacy Benefit Managers (“PBMs”), obligating Prime Pharmacy to collect copayments from beneficiaries in order to be reimbursed by various health care benefit programs, including TRICARE. Additionally, the owner of Prime worked with Auzine to market the compounded medications produced by Prime Pharmacy. Auzine found other marketers outside of the state to find beneficiaries that were willing to receive medically unnecessary compounds and doctors willing to prescribe compounds without medical necessity.

Auzine would pressure the pharmacists to fill prescriptions for beneficiaries where no doctor-patient relationship existed. He also aided in the creation of the prescription pads that had the highest value prescription Beginning in or around March 2014, and continuing through in or around April 2016, Prime Pharmacy dispensed prescriptions for High-Yield Compounded Medications to beneficiaries of TRICARE and other health care benefit programs that were not medically necessary, induced by kickback payments, or where copayments were either waived or credited by Prime Pharmacy, and accordingly, submitted or caused to be submitted false and fraudulent claims for reimbursement to TRICARE, other health care benefit programs, and PBMs. Auzine received a percentage of Prime Pharmacy’s profits, including a percentage of the reimbursements paid by TRICARE and other health care benefit programs procured through fraud.

According to the Superseding Bill of Information, Diaz had knowledge of the commission of the health care fraud. Diaz concealed the fraud by knowingly submitting or caused to be submitted compounded medications for which there was no medical necessity and did not as soon as possible make known the same to some judge or other person in civil or military authority under the United States. The Court set sentencing of AUZINE and DIAZ for January 4, 2022. Auzine faces a maximum term of imprisonment of ten years, a \$250,000 fine, three (3) years supervised release, a \$100 special assessment fee, and restitution in the amount of \$1.2 million. Diaz faces a maximum term of imprisonment of three years, a \$250,000 fine, up to one (1) year of supervised release following any term of imprisonment, a \$100 special assessment fee, and restitution in the amount of \$180,000.

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Ayetteville, Ark. — A former executive with a Rogers medical supply and billing company pleaded guilty today to one count of conspiracy to commit *mail fraud, wire fraud, health care fraud, fraud* to obtain federal employees' compensation, and illegal remunerations (paying kickbacks), in connection with a scheme to defraud the U.S. government and private insurance companies by over-billing for unnecessary medications provided to workers' compensation patients. U.S. District Judge Timothy L. Brooks presided over the plea hearing, in which **Amanda Dawn Rains**, 39, waived indictment by a grand jury and pleaded guilty to a criminal information charging her with conspiracy to violate five different federal statutes. According to court documents, Rains, who in 2013 was hired as the Billing Director of an unidentified Rogers corporation, joined in a fraud scheme that ran from 2011 until 2017 and defrauded both federal and private workers' compensation insurers.

Court documents allege that the basic premise of the scheme was that individuals associated with the Rogers corporation recruited physicians to dispense pain creams and patches to their workers' compensation patients by offering them a split of the profits collected from successfully billing insurers, typically 50 percent. One such physician was **Robert Dale Bernauer**, Sr., who ran a clinic in Lake Charles, La. Bernauer pleaded guilty to his role in the same conspiracy on July 30, 2021.

After signing contracts with physicians, the company supplied them with pain creams and patches, and acted as the billing agent for the physicians, handling all of the paperwork and submitting the allegedly fraudulent claims to both the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Workers' Compensation Programs, which covers all federal employees, and to private insurers as well. The company billed insurers at markups of anywhere from 15 to 20 times what the medications actually cost, and then paid the physicians kickbacks on amounts collected.

According to court documents, Rains' role in the conspiracy included: managing the billing system for the Rogers corporation and electronically submitting allegedly fraudulent claims to the Department of Labor and private insurers; maintaining a "do not dispense" list of insurers that refused to pay the company's claims; advising doctors and clinics how to respond to

insurance companies that questioned the charges; shipping the company's medications to doctors and clinics; preparing presentations used by the company's sales representatives to recruit doctors that falsely stated the business arrangement did not violate anti-kickback laws; and continuing to ship medications to Bernauer and bill insurers for his prescriptions despite knowing he did not have the required Louisiana license to dispense medications.

In her plea agreement, Rains promises to pay restitution to the Department of Labor and to other insurers victimized by the conspiracy, in amounts to be determined. The charging document for her case alleges that the total losses include more than \$3.9 million paid by the Department of Labor, and amounts paid by private insurers that are still to be calculated but include almost \$2 million in payments related to medication dispensed by Bernauer alone. According to court documents in the related case, Bernauer has already paid \$664,176.30 in restitution to the Department of Labor, and \$361,096.70 to the court clerk's office, to go to other victims of the fraud, for a total of \$1,025,273 restitution paid to date.

As a result of her guilty plea to the single conspiracy count, Rains may be sentenced to a maximum of five years in prison. The court will determine her sentence at a later date, after reviewing a pre-sentence investigation report prepared by the U.S. Probation Office and considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors. [Source: DoJ Western District of Arkansas | U.S. Attorney's Office| October 6, 2021 ++]

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Albany, NY — **Robert Seifert**, age 63, of Utica, New York, was sentenced 6 OT to serve 24 months in prison for making *telephonic threats* to three employees of the Albany Stratton Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC). As part of his guilty plea on July 8, 2021, Seifert admitted that on January 14, 2021, he made successive calls to three separate employees at the Albany VAMC and left each of them threatening voicemails in which he used demeaning and offensive language that caused each of the employees to fear for their own safety and property. United States Magistrate Judge Daniel J. Stewart also sentenced Seifert to serve 1 year of post-imprisonment supervised release. [Source: DoJ Northern District of New York | U.S. Attorney's Office | September 13, 2021 ++]

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Tampa, Fla. — **Patsy Truglia** (53, Parkland) has pleaded guilty to two counts of conspiracy to commit *health care fraud* and one count of making a *false statement* in a matter involving a health care benefit program. He faces a maximum penalty of 15 years in federal prison. A sentencing date has not yet been set.

According to the plea agreement and other court documents, beginning in January 2018 and continuing into April 2019, Truglia and other conspirators, including co-defendant **Ruth Bianca Fernandez** (who worked under Truglia's supervision), generated medically unnecessary physicians' orders via their telemarketing operation for certain orthotic devices—i.e., knee

braces, back braces, wrist braces, and other braces—referred to as durable medical equipment (“DME”). Through the telemarketing operation, federal health care program beneficiaries’ (i.e., Medicare beneficiaries’) personal and medical information was harvested to create the unnecessary DME brace orders.

The brace orders were then forwarded to purported “telemedicine” vendors that, in exchange for a fee, paid illegal bribes to physicians to sign the orders, often without ever contacting the beneficiaries to conduct the required telehealth consultations. The fraudulent, illegal brace orders were then returned to Truglia’s telemarketing operation, which used the orders as support for millions of dollars in false and fraudulent claims that were submitted to the Medicare program. To avoid Medicare scrutiny, Truglia and Fernandez spread the fraudulent claims across five DME storefronts operated under Truglia’s ownership and control, and Fernandez’s day-to-day management. In all, through their five storefronts, Truglia, Fernandez, and other conspirators caused approximately \$25 million in fraudulent DME claims to be submitted to Medicare, resulting in approximately \$12 million in payments.

On April 9, 2019, multiple federal law enforcement agencies participated in a nationwide action referred to as “Operation Brace Yourself.” The Operation targeted ongoing schemes, such as Truglia’s, in which companies were paying illegal bribes to secure signed physicians’ DME brace orders for use as support for fraudulent claims that were submitted to the federal programs. In the Middle District of Florida, the Operation included, among other efforts, the execution of search warrants at several of Truglia’s DME storefronts and a civil action which, among other ramifications, enjoined Truglia and (by extension) his five storefronts from engaging in any further health care fraud conduct. Undeterred by this action, beginning in or around April 2019, and continuing into July 2020, Truglia and other conspirators—some who had worked with Truglia in the earlier conspiracy, as well as some new conspirators—carried out a similar conspiracy using three new DME storefronts and different “telemedicine” vendors. Through this conspiracy, Truglia and his conspirators caused an additional approximately \$12 million in fraudulent DME claims to be submitted to Medicare, resulting in approximately \$6.3 million in payments. [Source: DoJ Middle District of Florida | U.S. Attorney’s Office | October 7, 2021 ++]

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Miami, Florida – On 8 OCT, federal district judge Kenneth A. Marra sentenced **Larry Ray Bon**, 62, a former West Palm Beach resident who shot a firearm inside the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in West Palm Beach to a federal prison term of 198 months.

According to court records, Bon brought the firearm and ammunition to the emergency room of the VA Medical Center in West Palm Beach. When he became frustrated with medical staff, Bon retrieved the firearm from his wheelchair and fired several shots. He placed VA Medical Center employees in fear for their lives, including two employees who were near Bon. An emergency room doctor attempted to disarm Bon, who fired the gun again, hitting the doctor in

the neck. Despite being injured, the doctor was still able to disarm Bon. VA Medical Center staff then subdued Bon. The doctor survived the gunshot wound.

On March 13, 2020, Bon pleaded guilty to three counts of Assaulting, Resisting, or Impeding Federal Employees, and one count of Possession of a Firearm in a Federal Facility with Intent to Commit a Crime. Judge Marra originally committed Bon to the custody of the U.S. Attorney General for 25 years of mental health care and treatment at a suitable medical facility. This was a provisional sentence allowable under federal law where a judge “finds by a preponderance of the evidence that the defendant is presently suffering from a mental disease or defect and that he should, in lieu of being sentenced to imprisonment, be committed to a suitable facility...” 18 U.S.C. §4244 (d). Bon was determined to no longer need psychiatric hospitalization, and was sentenced today.

* Vets *



Vet Unemployment 2021

Update 06: Held Steady in September as National Outlook Improved

Veterans unemployment rates held steady in September even as the outlook across America improved for most other job seekers. Bureau of Labor Statistics officials on 8 OCT announced the unemployment rate for all veterans last month was 3.6 percent, the same as in August. It’s only the second time since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in America in March 2020 that the rate has been below 4.0 percent.

The rate among younger veterans — individuals who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars era — rose slightly from August (3.1 percent) to September (3.5 percent). However, economists have warned that because of smaller sample sizes with that specific population, monthly changes can be more dramatic than with the overall veterans figures. Both numbers continue a positive trend of economic recovery for veterans since the early days of the pandemic, when veterans unemployment more than tripled in just two months. In April 2020, overall veterans unemployment spiked to 11.7 percent and the national unemployment rate hit 14.7 percent, both the highest marks seen in decades.

BLS officials said the national unemployment estimate for September was 4.8 percent, down significantly from 5.2 percent in August. The nationwide jobless estimate has not been below 5.0

percent since March 2020. The bureau also reported that the national economy added about 194,000 new jobs last month. The 3.6 percent mark for veterans translates into about 300,000 individuals actively looking for work. About half of the country's 18 million veterans are currently employed or looking for work, while the other half are unable to hold a full-time job or already retired.

Just 194,000 jobs were created in September, a significantly slower pace than the 366,000 number a month earlier. Economists had been hoping and expecting to reach at least 500,000 this time around. After two successive disappointing months of job growth, economists are now pinning hopes on the October job report to show what the economy is capable of as the Delta variant recedes. Earlier this year, the Department of Veterans Affairs launched a new Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program for individuals who lost their jobs for pandemic-related reasons. The initiative provides a year of tuition money for retraining as well as monthly housing allowances. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | October 8, 2021 ++]

Massachusetts Vet Homes

Families of Dead Vets Call for Changes in Oversight



Families of veterans who died in one of the deadliest COVID-19 outbreaks in a U.S. nursing home called 29 SEP for changes in how Massachusetts oversees its veterans homes. Members of the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition said in a virtual hearing held by state lawmakers that Massachusetts' two state-run facilities — the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke and the Soldiers' Home in Chelsea — should be overseen by the state Department of Public Health, not the state Department of Veterans Services.

The group said the board of trustees for the homes should also include appointments from the veterans community. And they want medical experts put in charge of day-to-day operations. Group members, who include former leaders of the Holyoke home and family members of veterans who died in last year's outbreak, said legislation proposed in response to last year's outbreak is insufficient. "We are all here because of a tragedy that occurred because too many people were asleep at the wheel," the group wrote in testimony submitted to the legislature's Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs. "It gives our Coalition no pleasure to say this and

pains us a great deal, but this legislation is not the answer in building up our trust and confidence.”

Nearly 80 residents died and many more residents and staffers were sickened in spring 2020 at the Holyoke home. The home’s former top officials face abuse, neglect and other criminal charges, and an independent report commissioned by the state concluded administrators made “utterly baffling” decisions that allowed the virus to spread unchecked. Holyoke home workers have also filed a class-action suit alleging they were forced to care for sick and dying veterans in “inhumane conditions.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | September 29, 2021 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs

Scheduled As of OCT 16, 2021

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown on the Hiring Our Heroes website <https://www.hiringourheroes.org> for the next month. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date Listings of upcoming Vet Job Fairs nationwide providing location, times, events, and registration info if required can be found at the following websites. Note that some of the scheduled events for the next 2 to 6 weeks have been postponed and are awaiting reschedule dates due to the current COVID-19 outbreak. You will need to review each site below to locate Job Fairs in your location:

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

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

U.S. Capitol Riot

Update 17: Retired Special Forces Soldier Arrested 30 SEP



Brown (left) on JAN 5th. On 6 JAN Trump supporters (right) clash with police and security forces as they try to storm the US Capitol in. Demonstrators breached security and entered the Capitol as Congress debated the 2020 presidential election Electoral Vote Certification.

Retired Special Forces soldier named **Jeremy Brown** was arrested in late SEP for his alleged involvement in the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol building that resulted in the injury of hundreds of police officers. On 28 SEP, Brown was charged with knowingly entering a restricted building or grounds without lawful authority and knowingly disrupting the orderly conduct of government business or official functions, according to the Justice Department. Court records say that he organized a trip to Washington, D.C., days before supporters of President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol building.

Brown is one of more than two dozen current and former military service members to have been charged over their alleged involvement in the Jan. 6 riots. While there are service members and veterans who were charged for taking part in the riot, others like Brian Sicknick, a veteran of the New Jersey Air National Guard, tried to prevent the situation from escalating further. Sicknick was serving as a Capitol Police officer and later died after sustaining injuries during the riot.

Brown joined the Army in October 1992, according to military service records, and retired as a master sergeant in October 2012. He served as an infantryman, a Special Forces communications sergeant, and a Special Forces senior sergeant during his career. Brown deployed to combat four times during his career, including stints in Iraq from October 2007 to May 2008 and from January to July 2009, and deployments to Afghanistan from January to March 2005 and May to August 2011. Brown had also run as a Republican in a Florida district in 2020, but dropped out before the general election.

The FBI began investigating Brown after a witness who said they'd known him for "multiple years" made a complaint. The witness provided the FBI with publicly available photos of Brown wearing tactical gear on Jan. 5, but said they were unsure if Brown actually entered the Capitol on Jan. 6. The FBI was able to match the photo provided of Brown to photos and videos taken on Jan. 6, eventually finding a photo which showed Brown "standing just before the steps of the East side steps of the Capitol" during the riots, according to prosecutors. "Brown wore full military gear," say court records, which include photos of Brown wearing tactical gear outside the Capitol with other protesters. "Including a helmet, radio, a tactical vest, and prominently displayed large surgical trauma shears tucking into a pack sitting on the vest."

Another person who was charged with involvement in the Capitol riots told authorities that they came to Washington, D.C., with Brown, who “coordinated travel plans and rendezvous points,” according to court records. In a message on Signal, an encrypted messaging app, Brown allegedly told others in the chat that they could come to his home any time on Saturday, Jan. 2, before they left early on Sunday morning. He referred to his RV as “GROUND FORCE ONE” in the chat, offering to pick people up as there were “[p]lenty of Gun Ports left to fill.”

Brown said he wanted to be in D.C. by Jan. 4th in order to take that day and the next to “set up, conduct route recons, CTR (Close Target Reconnaissance) and any link ups needed with DC elements,” according to a copy of the message in court records. “I am willing to make adjustments all the way up until we pass your ass headed north,” Brown said. “But it is now time to shit or get on someone else’s pot. READY? GO!!!” By looking at body camera footage on Jan. 6, authorities found that Brown was allegedly well inside the barriers law enforcement had created to protect the building. Court records say that as authorities worked to push people back and secure the building that afternoon, Brown “only retreated when pushed with police baton sticks.”

Court records say law enforcement agents called Brown on Jan. 6 to ask about his whereabouts, but “could not hear him well due to apparent crowd noise.” The next day, Brown told agents he was in D.C. and was providing security for “VIPs at the ‘Stop the Steal’ rally,” court records say. After the riots, Brown allegedly messaged on Signal: “Everything you are watching on the Media and House of Congress is a LIE! I was shot in the neck with pepper balls and beating [sic] in the forearm with a night stick trying to shield unprotected civilians from being hit in the head,” Brown said, according to court records. “This was an exercise in the unrestrained addiction to power.” Brown was arrested in Tampa, Florida, on 30 SEP.

The retired master sergeant is not the first Special Forces veteran arrested for their role in the Jan. 6 riots. Jeffrey McKellop, also a former Special Forces communications sergeant, was charged with a series of crimes after allegedly throwing a flagpole at a police officer during the riot, the Washington Post reported in March. McKellop served for 22 years and did two tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the Post. In all, roughly 20% of people charged in connection with the Jan. 6 riots served in the military, according to NPR. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told CBS News’ “60 Minutes” he was “very disappointed” in how many veterans were involved. “This is an issue that I think can erode the great respect that our American citizens have for our military,” he said. [Source: Task & Purpose | Haley Britzky | October 4, 2021 ++]

U.S. Capitol Riot

Update 18: Former Presidential Helicopter Squad Marine Charged



Federal prosecutors on 5 OCT defended their decision to file a felony "obstruction" charge for actions during the 6 JAN Capitol riot against a former U.S. Marine who served in a presidential helicopter squad when George W. Bush and Barack Obama were in the White House. At a hearing before U.S. District Judge Rudolph Contreras, Assistant U.S. Attorney Elizabeth Kelley said that video found on the cellphone of former Marine **John Andries** "was central" to a decision by prosecutors to add a felony charge to misdemeanor riot-related charges they had initially filed against him.

Andries' phone video "certainly showed the defendant's intent that day," Kelley said. But she added that prosecutors had not "closed off all hope" of a plea deal in the case. Public defender Maria Jacob, representing Andries, said the felony for which her client was charged was vague and that "many" riot defendants only faced misdemeanor charges for the same Jan. 6 behavior. Jacob said that while Andries was "captured on video saying certain phrases," these phrases did not show his intent to "obstruct the vote" by Congress confirming Joe Biden as the next U.S. president.

The riot by supporters of then-President Donald Trump broke out as Congress met to certify Biden's November presidential election victory. Prosecutors have said that more than 600 defendants had been arrested on riot-related charges. More than 50 individuals have pleaded guilty to a variety of federal charges - over 40 to misdemeanors and nine to felonies - many of whom will face incarceration at sentencing, prosecutors said in a news release. At least 260 defendants have been charged with corruptly obstructing, influencing, or impeding an official proceeding, or attempting to do so.

In court documents, prosecutors cited YouTube video they said showed Andries on Capitol Building steps in a crowd that was "attempting to break down the metal barriers to the buildings, as police officers try to hold them back." Once inside the Capitol, prosecutors allege Andries entered the building's crypt, that "he waved in more rioters" and that "within minutes, the crypt was full of rioters." They said "officers had to physically drag" Andries from an outside ledge to get him to leave the Capitol grounds. [Source: Reuters | Mark Hosenball | October 6, 2021 ++]

Vet Indictments

Reported OCT 01 thru 15, 2021



A former U.S. Army soldier and a former Canadian Armed Forces reservist who allegedly plotted an assassination of a Virginia lawmaker and conspired to break racist mass-murderer Dylann Roof out of prison could face several decades in prison. The two men are awaiting prison sentences after pleading guilty to multiple firearm charges, according to the Associated Press. The best pocket knives for your everyday carry

U.S. Army veteran **Brian Mark Lemley** Jr., 35, and former Canadian Armed Forces reservist Patrik Jordan Mathews, 29, are due to face a sentencing hearing on 28 OCT, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maryland. A third co-defendant, William Garfield Bilbrough IV, 21, was sentenced to five years in prison in December after helping Mathews enter the United States illegally. All three men are members of the violent white supremacist group "**The Base**," which is attempting to recruit military veterans as foot soldiers for a planned race war that it hopes will result in the collapse of society, Task & Purpose reported in October 2020. The group looks for members with military experience so it will have an army of vigilante soldiers ready to seize power in the anticipated chaos, experts said.

The FBI said Lemley, Mathews and Bilbrough were working to set that chaos into motion, the Associated Press reported. The FBI planted a camera and microphone in Mathews and Lemley's apartment in Delaware and heard them discuss plans to attack a gun rights rally in Richmond, Va., destroy rail and power lines and assassinate a Virginia lawmaker, according to the Associated Press. Though the lawmaker was not named in prosecutors' court filing, the politician was described as the speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates, the AP reported. A Jewish woman named Eileen Filler-Corn took that post on Jan. 8, 2020. Prosecutors wrote that Mathews hoped the Speaker's murder would lead to tighter gun control laws and then a violent reaction to those laws, according to the AP.

"This is extremely disturbing, and it should disturb all Americans," Filler-Corn told the AP. "This pattern of using violence to intimidate the leaders and symbols of our democracy undermines the core values of our democracy itself." Lemley's attorney, Ned Smock, described his client as an Iraq War veteran and former cavalry scout who "lost his way during a difficult time in his life," and that, despite his discussions with Mathews, the pair never engaged in actual violence, the AP reported. Instead, the charges to which Lemley pleaded guilty were: "conspiracy to transport certain aliens, to transporting certain aliens, to disposing of a firearm and ammunition to an illegal alien, and to transporting a firearm and ammunition in interstate commerce with intent to commit a felony; and to the Delaware charges of harboring certain

aliens, aiding and abetting an alien in possession of a firearm, and obstruction of justice,” according to the release.

The “alien” in question was Mathews, who Lemley and Bilbrough worked together to help illegally enter the U.S. in November 2019. Lemley also had an illegal unregistered “machine gun,” according to a Department of Justice press release, though it did not specify the kind of firearm involved. Lemley and Mathews were also charged with intent to obstruct justice because they destroyed their cell phones before the FBI could get a hold of them, the department wrote. The AP reported that Lemley and Mathews hoped that springing Roof out of his maximum-security prison in Terre Haute, Indiana would also win notoriety for The Base. A white supremacist, Roof killed nine African Americans during a Bible study at their church in South Carolina on June 17, 2015 in hopes of starting a race war. “The Base would be known as the guys who broke out Dylann Roof,” Mathews said, according to the AP.

Before bringing Mathews into the U.S., Lemley and Bilbrough also attended a training camp conducted by members of The Base in Georgia from Aug. 2-4, 2019, which included participating in tactical training and firearms drills, according to the Department of Justice. The pair went to another Base training camp in a different state later that month. In November 2019, Lemley and Bilbrough allegedly bought about 1,550 rounds of 5.56 ammunition in Georgia, according to prosecutors. In December, Mathews and Lemley also built a rifle out of various weapons parts, and in January 2020, Lemley bought another 1,500 rounds of 5.56 mm and 6.5 mm ammunition, which fit two rifles that he and Mathews owned. “I may be going to jail upon discovery of the propaganda in my cell phone,” Lemley told Mathews in January 2020, according to prosecutors.

Lemley and Mathews each face a maximum of 10 years in federal prison for their firearm charges and 20 years for obstruction of justice. Lemley faces an additional 15 years for bringing Mathews into the country illegally and giving him a firearm, while Mathews faces another 20 years for “being an alien in possession of a firearm and ammunition,” according to prosecutors. Though actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalty, they noted.

Lemley and Mathews are only the latest members of The Base to be arrested. Six other members of the group were arrested in 2020 for violent offenses including conspiracy to commit murder, and a seventh member was arrested in 2020 for allegedly vandalizing a synagogue. The Base portrays itself as a group of survivalists who are defending the “European race” from society, which has become infected by Jewish values, Joanna Mendelson, associate director of the Anti-Defamation League’s Center on Extremism, told Task & Purpose last year. Mendelson told the AP in June that The Base has faded amid the arrest of its members, but that does not mean its former members are any less dangerous. “We’re talking about adherents who are deeply steeped in an ideology,” Mendelson told the AP. “They oftentimes direct their deeply embedded beliefs into other neo-Nazi organizations.”

The Base is one of several extremist groups seeking to recruit veterans and service members into its ranks. There are also the “**Boogaloo Boys**,” an umbrella of far-right, anti-government extremists who seek to spark a second Civil War by, among other acts, murdering police officers; and the “Oath Keepers,” another far-right anti-government group which claims tens of thousands of current and former police and service members in its ranks, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Federal prosecutors emphasized their commitment to stopping extremists before they have a chance to hurt the rest of society. “Detecting, disrupting and deterring the threat of domestic terrorism and violent extremism in all of its forms is a top priority for this office,” United States Attorney for the District of Delaware David C. Weiss said in June. “When extremists like defendants Mathews and Lemley take action in furtherance of their twisted agenda and commit firearms offenses, obstruct justice and illegally transport aliens — law enforcement will respond swiftly and decisively.” [Source: Task & Purpose | David Roza | October 4, 2021 ++]

Veteran Extremists

Experts Warn Small Numbers Can Still Pose a Large Threat



Experts studying violent, extremist organizations warned that even if the number of veterans and military members who participate in such groups is small, they can still be very dangerous to the country. “Extremist ideas and groups cannot be left to operate unchecked within the very organizations charged with protecting the population, including its most vulnerable citizens,” said Cynthia Miller-Idriss, director of the Polarization and Extremism Research & Innovation Lab at American University. “The future of multicultural democracy from extremism in the military and the veterans communities must be treated like the threat to national security that it is.”

The comments came at a House Veterans’ Affairs Committee hearing on 13 OCT on the targeting of veterans by extremist groups, an issue that drew national headlines after a significant percentage of rioters involved in the 6 JAN attack on the Capitol Building were found to have military experience. Experts in homegrown extremism have warned for years about efforts by far-

right militants and white-supremacist groups to radicalize and recruit people with military and law enforcement training.

Democratic organizers said the goal of the hearing (originally scheduled for earlier this summer) was to look at long-standing problems within the veterans community with violent or anti-government ideologies, not to focus on the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election. But Republican lawmakers questioned that intent, accusing Democrats of trying to paint all veterans as radicals and criminalize certain political views. “Free speech must be protected,” said committee ranking member Mike Bost, R-Ill. “It is every veteran’s right to have an opinion – even one I find radical. However, if that opinion is acted on with violence, it is another thing altogether. “Violence cannot be tolerated, it is undemocratic and anti-American.”

Witnesses at the hearing said the only way to settle the distinction between unpopular views and violent intentions is to focus more closely on the problem. A recent survey by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America officials found that about one-third of their members personally witnessed extremism in the military ranks. A separate report from the Anti-Defamation League found that at least 133 individuals used military email accounts to participate in events with the Oath Keepers, an anti-government group.

“The question is not whether domestic violent extremist groups are recruiting and organizing veterans to commit violence. We already know this to be true,” said retired Marine Corps Lt. Col. Joe Plenzler, who has researched the issue of extremism for years. “The questions are how extensive the problem is, and what we are going to do about it.” He referenced individuals such as Marine Corps veteran Lee Harvey Oswald, who assassinated President John F. Kennedy, and Army veteran Timothy McVeigh, who killed 168 people in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, as veterans who used their military skills to cause harm to the entire nation.

Several lawmakers pushed for more data on the pervasiveness of the problem. Defense Department officials have already begun investigations into the issue within the military ranks, but Veterans Affairs officials have not announced similar initiatives. Witnesses said combating the extremist views will require involvement not just from federal resources, but from veterans service groups and community organizations as well. “These extremist groups recruit veterans because they believe their combat experience, weapons training and leadership skills add credibility and authenticity to their operation,” said. Rep. Raul Ruiz, D-Calif. “We need to understand that these factors are some of the reasons that extremist groups recruit veterans.”

Over Republican objections, the committee is planning follow-up hearings on the issue of extremism in coming months. Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) said those events will focus on specific recruiting methods and resources for veterans to avoid being victimized by the groups.

- “We are not here to condemn or vilify any veterans engaged with these groups, but rather to draw attention to what these groups actually represent and to highlight the lurking threat posed by these groups,” he said.

- “Only by understanding who these groups are, what they believe, and what violent or illegal activities they encourage from their members, can we begin to assess our ability to intervene and to help these veterans and their families reclaim their lives.”

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | October 13, 2021 ++]

Obit: Martin Aherwin

OCT 6, 2021 | Navy Vet & Atomic Weapons Scholar

Martin J. Sherwin, a leading scholar of atomic weapons who in “A World Destroyed” challenged support for the U.S. bombing of Japan and spent more than two decades researching the pioneering physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer for the Pulitzer Prize-winning “American Prometheus,” has died. Sherwin died 6 OCT at his home in Washington, D.C., according to his friend Andrew Hartman, a professor of history at Illinois State University. He was 84 and had been battling lung cancer. Kai Bird, a close friend and the co-author of “American Prometheus,” called him “probably the preeminent historian of the nuclear age.”



“When we started working on ‘American Prometheus’ he told me he had lots of research, but a few gaps,” Bird told The Associated Press on 9 OCT. “When I began going through all the materials I couldn’t find any gaps.” Sherwin was a New York City native whose interest in nuclear research dated back to his undergraduate years at Dartmouth College, when he spent a summer working at a uranium mine out West. Sherwin’s ties to the arms race between the U.S. and the Soviet Union became frighteningly personal during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, He was a junior officer in the Navy and was told of plans to evacuate from their base in San Diego to a remote location in Baja California, Mexico.

“The rationale was to disperse military aircraft beyond the reach of Soviet missiles,” he wrote in “Gambling With Armageddon: Nuclear Roulette from Hiroshima to the Cuban Missile Crisis,” which came out last year. “Some junior officers — all of us bachelors — joked that the beaches of Baja ‘would be a delightful place to die.’” He was best known for “American

Prometheus,” published in 2005 and winner of the Pulitzer for biography. The book was widely praised as a comprehensive and invaluable study of the so-called “father of the atomic bomb” who later had his telephones tapped and his security clearance revoked during the McCarthy era of the 1950s as he advocated nuclear containment and opposed the development of the hydrogen bomb.

Sherwin began working on the book in the late 1970s with an hours-long horseback ride to the mountainside ranch in New Mexico where Oppenheimer once lived. He continued over the next two decades as he accumulated tens of thousands of pages of research, from FBI files to private correspondence to interviews with those who knew Oppenheimer. Bird, whom he had befriended in the 1990s and eventually brought in to help, joked that Sherwin had come down with “biographer’s disease,” the inability to know when it was time to stop researching and begin writing.

Pulitzer judges cited Sherwin and Bird for their “rich evocation of America at midcentury” and called “American Prometheus” a “new and compelling portrait of a brilliant, ambitious, complex and flawed man profoundly connected to its major events — the Depression, World War II and the Cold War.” Sherwin was also a popular teacher and lecturer who taught at Princeton University, George Mason University and, for much of his career, Tufts University, where he founded the Nuclear Age History Center. At Princeton, he was an adviser to the author-journalist Eric Schlosser and mentored Katrina vanden Heuvel, now editorial director and publisher of the liberal weekly *The Nation*, for which Sherwin was a contributor.

Sherwin’s first book, “A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and Its Legacies,” came out in 1975 and was a Pulitzer finalist. The *New York Times* praised the book for its unprecedented scholarship on such questions as whether the U.S. needed nuclear weapons to defeat Japan in World War II (Sherwin contended President Truman’s decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki was based more on intimidating the Russians) and why the U.S. chose not to share its nuclear development with the Soviet Union when they were World War II allies.

In the mid-1990s, Sherwin was among the advisers for a planned Smithsonian exhibit about the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Japan that was canceled after veterans organizations and dozens of members of Congress objected to what they considered an anti-U.S. bias. Instead, the Smithsonian only displayed the *Enola Gay*, the plane from which the U.S. dropped a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima. “In the United States, the collective memory of World War II sees the war as ‘our finest hour,’” he wrote in a 2003 edition of ‘A World Destroyed.’ “America without that image is unimaginable to most members of the generation that fought the war and to those in subsequent generations who have defined their view of the world and their political lives as a reflections of this image.”

According to Kai Bird, he and Sherwin had been working on a proposal for a new book even though he was badly weakened by his cancer treatment. Sherwin wanted to tell the extraordinary but true story of a crew of B-29 bombers who were captured off the coast of Japan at the end of

World War II and saved from execution by an English-speaking Japanese commander who brought them to Hiroshima so they could see for themselves the devastation from the recently dropped atom bomb.

“He had been sitting on his story for a very long time, back to 1975 when he interviewed one of the B-29 crew members,” Bird said. “He was really excited about this, and I’m trying to see if I can turn this into a book proposal. On the day he died he was editing that proposal. Even as his body was giving out, he was still interested and his mind was alert.” [Source: Associated Press | Hillel Italie | October 10, 2021 ++]

Last of the First Salute

Old Corps Gathering to Honor Guadalcanal WWII Vets

Marines across the country are set to gather for the 246th birthday of the Marine Corps in a few weeks. But for a group of Camp Pendleton veterans, the celebration will be especially poignant. Their “Old Corps” gathering will include a “Last of the First” salute. The celebration will pay tribute to surviving World War II combat veterans of the 1st Marine Division based at Camp Pendleton. Most are in their mid to late 90s. The veterans will toast with a bottle of 1920s-era Joseph Etournaud & Company Extra Grand Fine Champagne 1st Grand Cru Cognac.



The bottle was set aside in 1944 by 14 Marine survivors of the 1942 Battle of Guadalcanal fought in the South Pacific during World War II, a battle that earned the 1st Marine Division a Presidential Unit Citation. The “Last of the First” bottle, as it is called, was intended to be opened by the last survivor among the Marines and sailors who served in combat with the 1st Marine Division during World War II. The salute honors “absent comrades” and surviving World War II combat veterans of the 1st Marine Division. The bottle of cognac was donated in 1944, on the second anniversary of the 1st Marine Division’s landing on Guadalcanal during a gathering of veterans of that battle at the Piedmont Hotel in Atlanta, Ga. It was donated by Ralph McGill, a World War I Marine Corps veteran and editor and publisher of the Atlanta Constitution.

By the end of World War II, thousands of veterans were eligible to open the bottle eventually. But with the passing of time, fewer and fewer were left to claim that honor. “For those who continue to march while friends from their youth pass on, it can be an emotional, heartbreaking

journey. We cannot stop time, but we can retire the bottle while some survivors of the 1st Marine Division's Greatest Generation can still be publicly honored," said retired Marine Col. Richard Rothwell, president of the Camp Pendleton Historical Society, which is cohosting the gathering with the 1st Marine Division Association.

For the last 11 years, the cognac has been on display at the Marines' Memorial Club in San Francisco and will be brought out for the Last of the First salute on 6 NOV. So far, seven WWII Marine Corps veterans from the 1st Marine Division have been located across the country and have been invited to the Last of the First salute. "In their presence we will open the Last of the First Bottle and they will toast their comrades — heroes who are no longer with us," Rothwell said. The World War II combat veterans will be guests of the 1st Marine Division Association and the Camp Pendleton Historical Society.

The Marine Corps Birthday celebration and Last of the First salute will be from 5 to 9 p.m. Nov. 6 at the Omni La Costa Resort & Spa, 2199 Costa Del Mar Road, Carlsbad. All active and retired Marines, their spouses and friends of the Marine Corps are welcome. The event includes social and cocktail hour 5 to 6 p.m.; a traditional Marine Corps Birthday ceremony from 6 to 6:30 p.m.; dinner 6:45 to 8 p.m.; and Last of the First salute 8 to 8:45 p.m. The nonprofit hosting groups are collecting donations to pay for the travel expenses of the WWII veteran honorees and their family or escorts. For or information about attending or donating, email Lt. Col. Charles Kershaw, (retired USMC) at cphs.events@gmail.com or call (760) 402-8638. [Source: San Diego Union Tribune | Linda McIntosh | October 12, 2021 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule

As of OCT 16, 2021

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

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

- TML: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html.
- DF: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf.
- ord: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc.

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

[Source: Retiree\veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | October 15, 2021 ++]

State Veterans' Benefits

Minnesota 2021

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

- Housing
- Healthcare
- Financial Assistance
- Employment
- Education
- Recreation
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing
- Burial
- Taxation
- Women Veteran Program
- Homeless Vet Programs
- Other

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

*** Vet Legislation ***



DoD Housing Program

Update 02: H.R.5152 | VET RENT Act

On 28 SEP Rep. Sherrill, Mikie [D-NJ-11] introduced the **Veteran’s Electronic Transcript of Residency for Entering New Tenancies Act**. The bill directs the Secretary of Defense to establish and implement by 30 SEP 2022 a standard record of housing history for members of the Armed Forces who reside in covered housing. The record would include, with regards to each period during which the member concerned resided in covered housing the assessment of the commander of the military installation in which such housing is located, of the condition of such covered housing prior to the beginning of such period; and in which the member concerned left such covered housing upon vacating such covered housing. The Secretary concerned shall maintain a website through which a member of the Armed Forces under the jurisdiction of such Secretary may access the record under this section of such member.

[Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | October 4, 2021 ++]

Vet Employer Tax Credits

Update 01: H.R.2963 | VOW to Hire Heroes Extension Act

On 4 MAY, Representative Julia Brownley (CA) reintroduced H.R. 2963, the VOW to Hire Heroes Extension Act. Originally introduced by Brownley in October of 2013, H.R. 2963 would provide businesses a tax credit for hiring unemployed and service-connected disabled veterans. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a federal tax credit available to employers who hire and retain individuals from certain targeted groups who have consistently faced significant barriers to employment—including unemployed and service-connected disabled veterans.

Improving and extending the WOTC incentivizes workplace diversity, facilitates access to good jobs for veterans, helps veterans move towards self-sufficiency, and allows participating employers to reduce their income tax liability. Under the existing WOTC, employers claim about \$1 billion in tax credits each year, making the tax credit a win-win for both businesses and veterans. In support of this the DAV is requesting readers use the prepared letter below or draft their own letter to ask their Representative to cosponsor the VOW to Hire Heroes Extension Act of 2021 which currently has no cosponsors.

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Subj: Please Support HR 2963, the VOW to Hire Heroes Extension Act of 2021

Dear Rep. _____,

As your constituent and a DAV supporter, I urge you to support H.R. 2963, the VOW to Hire Heroes Extension Act of 2021, which would improve and extend existing business tax credits for hiring unemployed and service-connected disabled veterans.

The work opportunity tax credit (WOTC) is a federal tax credit available to employers who hire and retain individuals from certain targeted groups who have consistently faced significant barriers to employment—including unemployed and service-connected disabled veterans.

Improving and extending the WOTC incentivizes workplace diversity, facilitates access to good jobs for veterans, helps veterans move towards self-sufficiency, and allows participating employers to reduce their income tax liability. Under the existing WOTC, employers claim about \$1 billion in tax credits each year, making the tax credit a win-win for both businesses and service-disabled veterans.

As your constituent, I ask that you support H.R. 2963 and use your voice to help pass this legislation to help get our nation's disabled veterans back to work. Please let me know of your intentions on supporting this bill.

Sincerely,
Your Name
Your Address

[Source: DAV National Commander | Andrew Marshall | October 8, 2021 ++]

Note:

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

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

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

*** Military ***



U.S. Space Force

Update 29: Non-USAF Transferees on Hold

The Space Force on 30 SEP announced a cohort of nearly 700 soldiers, sailors and Marines who will join the fledgling service in the next year, marking its largest batch of transfers from outside the Department of the Air Force so far. But those 670 troops — plus 259 additional civilian employees — face an immediate roadblock to becoming guardians: they can't change jobs until Congress passes, and President Joe Biden signs, a fiscal 2022 defense spending bill. The stopgap funding measure Congress passed 30 SEP doesn't allow the Space Force to take on new personnel or missions, like Army communications payloads that ride on satellites flown by guardians.

“All those systems on orbit, plus the ground stations that operate those capabilities and integrate those capabilities, that all transfers over to the Space Force beginning 1 OCT if there isn't a continuing resolution,” Chief of Space Operations Gen. John “Jay” Raymond said during a Defense One event on 27 SEP. “If there's a continuing resolution, we'll have to wait until that is resolved.” The Space Force did not immediately answer questions on whether any inter-service transfers will be able to move forward until defense appropriations are signed into law. It has never received on-time annual funding since its creation in December 2019, slowing the new service's efforts to grow.

The Army will send the most uniformed transferees to the Space Force at 603 soldiers, followed by 49 sailors and 18 Marines. They'll jump into jobs like cyber defense, satellite operations, intelligence analysis and acquisition. Service officials outlined the jobs they anticipate will be available during a Jan. 28 online town hall. About 450 of the troops chosen had previously applied in a pool of more than 3,700 active-duty officers and enlisted volunteers. The Space Force picked 50 of them for its first cohort of transfers that started arriving in July, after more than 2,400 airmen who were already assigned to the Space Force — largely as satellite operators — began formally moving over in September 2020.

Another 215 uniformed members, plus the approximately 260 civilians, will come over as part of 15 satellite communications units that are transferring from the Army and Navy. The Army plans to send over about 500 jobs and \$78 million worth of operations, maintenance and personnel resources, including five wideband SATCOM operations centers and four regional SATCOM support centers that allow troops to send data in combat. The Navy's narrowband

satellite enterprise will transfer 13 satellites and 76 jobs to the Space Force as well. Other units will follow in later years.

“To officially transfer from one military service to another, a military member separates from the current service and commissions or enlists into the new service in their current rank,” the Space Force said last year. “On the official date of transfer, enlisted members will be administered the oath of enlistment and sign enlistment contracts into the Space Force. Officers will be administered the oath of office and sign official Space Force commissioning documents.” Officers and enlisted must spend up to four years on active duty once they join the Space Force, depending on their previous career. Service officials have said troops who transfer in will keep their same grade.

Together, this round of 929 personnel comprises about 7 percent of the newest military branch, which is on track to have more than 13,600 employees once the latest batch arrives. It plans to grow to around 16,000 members overall. Matt Jobe, a senior policy analyst in the service’s personnel branch, said in January that they hope to have a firm plan in 2023 to open the Space Force to anyone who wants to join — not just those with prior space experience. The Space Force is not currently accepting more transfer applications.

“Successfully integrating the units, capabilities and people from sister services into the Space Force is critical to our mission and was one of the driving forces in creating the new service,” Vice Chief of Space Operations Gen. David Thompson said in a release Thursday. “We look forward to welcoming these soldiers, sailors, Marines and civilians into our force and encourage them to apply their experiences and perspectives to help us meet the needs of the joint force and shape a unique service culture.”

Nearly 2,000 people from across the military and the American public are expected to join the Space Force next year, growing from 6,434 active-duty troops to 8,400. Its civilian corps is also slated to grow from 3,545 to 4,364 employees, according to the service’s fiscal 2022 budget request. To prepare soldiers, sailors and Marines to become guardians, the service is launching a welcome course at Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado, in mid-October. The “Guardian Orientation Course” will run 12 times a year at Peterson’s National Security Space Institute, and as many as three times a year in other locations as needed, Space Force spokesman Mike Pierson said on Wednesday. The first class will take place Oct. 18-22.

“Each unclassified Guardian Orientation Course provides 50 students with 29 hours of instructor contact over 40 hours in one week. Students will hear from senior leader mentors, take tours of Space Force facilities and receive briefings and lectures on a wide variety of topics including Space Force culture, organization, promotion systems and history,” Pierson said in an email. “NSSI expects to offer this course to all current and future transferees within a year of their transfer.”

Crafting an introduction for newcomers with significant prior military experience is a challenge that no service has had to think through since the Air Force became a separate branch

of the military in 1947. “We knew that when the Army, Navy, Marine counterparts started coming over, we had to do something more,” Air National Guard Brig. Gen. Shawn Bratton, who runs the Space Training and Readiness Command, told reporters at the Air Force Association’s annual Air, Space and Cyber Conference at National Harbor, Maryland, on Sept. 22. “We don’t want it to be a ‘figure it out for yourself’ kind of environment.”

Once an incoming guardian completes that welcome course, the Space Force expects to send them to classes tailored for the amount of space knowledge they need in their new job. The education and training enterprise is one piece of a broader effort to establish a unique culture within the Space Force as it brings together people from across the Pentagon. It hopes to offer more personalized and flexible careers for guardians than is typical in the other armed services, and to adopt certain best practices from the private sector. That entails letting troops vie for future jobs in a “talent marketplace” that resembles the civilian hiring process, and the ability to toggle between full- and part-time work in military and industry, according to the Space Force’s new human capital plan published 21 SEP.

“Instead of saying, ‘I’m looking for a major that has 10 years of orbital warfare experience and maybe four years of electronic warfare experience as a prior enlisted’ ... that person may be qualified for the position, but may not be the best guardian available for where we need them to go,” Brig. Gen. Shawn Campbell, the Space Force’s deputy human capital officer, told reporters last week. The service won’t move a guardian simply because it’s time for them to leave a job or pick up another skill set to climb the ladder. It wants to place a higher premium on where people want to live for family or professional purposes, as well as the kind of career path they’d like to pursue.

“I’m looking at the position to recognize what level of mastery I need, and then I can go into the talent marketplace and I can pull out all of the guardians that have those requisite competencies at that level, and then make decisions about who to place into that position,” Campbell added. “We don’t want to have a pyramid. That’s not, we think, the best way for us to neither develop nor employ our guardians.” [Source: AirForceTimes| Rachel S. Cohen | September 30, 2021 ++]

Army Separation Policy

Misconduct Reduced Rank Retirement

Enlisted soldiers with 20 or more years of service who are facing administrative separation for misconduct might be able to breathe a little easier thanks to a new Army policy. Army Directive 2021-29 updated the service’s separation policy for enlisted personnel. The change gives leaders more flexibility when meting out punishments that impact a soldier after their Army career has ended. Officers could already retire at a reduced rank. The new policy for enlisted troops, which

was released 30 SEP, “gives soldiers more options,” said Gerald Conway, an Army G-1 policy official, in a recent announcement. The directive ends the “all or nothing determination” used previously, he added.

Before, there were only a few options available when making the final decision on administrative separations for misconduct by retirement-eligible enlisted personnel, the Army announcement stated. Soldiers could either be separated with or without suspension of the separation for up to one year, or retired at their current grade, Conway explained in the announcement. Rank reductions, in lieu of a discharge for misconduct, could help soldiers’ post-military employment opportunities, the announcement stated.

The decision to seek a reduction in grade may be voluntary or involuntary, according to the announcement, and the reduction can go down to any grade equal to — or higher — than the last one at which a soldier served satisfactorily. Any reduction made, however, will be final and is not available for appeal. Soldiers facing involuntary grade reductions will be given written notice and afforded the right to legal counsel, Conway said in the announcement. Active duty soldiers will have no fewer than 10 days and all other soldiers will have no fewer than 30 calendar days to respond to the rank reduction notice, the announcement added. The new policy applies to the active-duty Army, the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard. [Source: ArmyTimes | Rachel Nostrant | October 1, 2021 ++]

Navy Tuition Assistance

Changes to Credit Hour Cap, Funding, & Eligibility Restrictions

The Navy is adjusting its tuition assistance policy for FY2022 so sailors may rack up 18 semester credit hours each year — up from 12 credit hours. But, the service is also imposing new restrictions on who is eligible to tap into tuition assistance benefits, and is reducing overall funding by more than \$20 million.



“We are committed to ensuring fully qualified Sailors can take advantage of this increased educational opportunity in a manner that reinforces our commitment to professionalism, warfighting, and retention,” Vice Adm. John B. Nowell, Jr., the chief of naval personnel, wrote in a new naval administrative message. “Operational readiness remains our top priority,” Nowell

wrote. “As always, commanding officers may establish benchmark qualifications for Sailors and officers under their command, and manage off-duty education pursuit, based on current or anticipated operational commitments.” The following changes apply under the new policy effective 1 OCT:

- Sailors are limited to only using tuition assistance to cover two classes per quarter of the fiscal year, per guidance from the secretary of the Navy. “The two courses per fiscal quarter limit was added to ensure Sailors’ pursuit of off-duty education does not detract from their professional development and duties,” Lt. Travis Callaghan, a spokesperson for the chief of naval personnel, said in an email to Navy Times. “Courses with labs are typically four semester hours,” Callaghan said. “The two courses per fiscal quarter policy offered greater flexibility than a six semester hour per fiscal quarter limit, which would not allow a Sailor to take a four semester hour lab course and another three semester hour course at the same time.”
- Sailors must have three years of service under their belt to become eligible for tuition assistance benefits, rather than two years of service. That means that those who started taking advantage of tuition assistance benefits after two years of service — but have yet to reach the three year mark — must pause their education. Likewise, officers qualify for tuition assistance benefits upon promotion to lieutenant.
- Both active duty enlisted sailors with less than 16 years of service and reservists on active duty order must have at least 12 months left of service on their current enlistment or extension at the time courses start to qualify for the tuition assistance benefits. “The 12 month policy is intended to foster continued service in the Navy, while recognizing the long-term career investment of Sailors approaching retirement eligibility,” the Navy said in a news release.
- Reservists on one-year orders also lose eligibility for tuition assistance under the new policy.
- The Navy is tightening eligibility for those with non-judicial punishment or a court martial. Whereas sailors previously couldn’t have either within the past six months to become eligible for tuition assistance, that’s now been changed to 12 months.
- All sailors are required to have at least a 3.0 or greater individual trait marks on their most recent observed evaluation of fitness report to qualify as well.
- Sailors are limited to spending \$250 per semester hour and \$4,500 annually each fiscal year toward tuition assistance benefits — an increase from previous years. For example, sailors were limited to \$3,000 in tuition assistance annually in FY20 after funds prematurely dried up in FY19.

The Navy has programmed \$67.37 million for tuition assistance in FY22 — a drop from the \$88.54 million allocated for tuition assistance in FY21. But according to Callaghan, the Navy

only spent \$72.717 million to fund eligible tuition assistance requests in FY21 and the remaining funding was ultimately diverted to other “high priority programs.”

More than 37,000 sailors used tuition assistance benefits in FY21, and the Navy anticipates that between 33,000 and 36,000 sailors will use tuition assistance benefits in FY22. In comparison, 36,704 sailors used tuition assistance benefits in FY20, while 38,853 sailors did so in FY19. That’s fewer sailors than previous years. Between FY15 and FY18, the yearly average number of sailors who used tuition assistance was 44,000. [Source: NavyTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | October 1, 2021 ++]

Navy College Offices

Update 01: Closing | Program Moved Online 1 OCT



The Navy is shuttering its brick-and-mortar Navy College offices and moving the entire enterprise online as of 1 OCT. The transition to the Navy College Virtual Education Center for sailors looking to get some extra education proved itself in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the shuttering of physical offices at overseas locations, according to a Navy release announcing the change. The online education center allows sailors to receive counseling and tuition assistance support, while offering call-in and live chat with counselors during certain hours, according to the Navy. Civilian schools with offices onboard Navy bases in the United States and overseas will remain in place.

The Navy closed its stateside Navy College offices in recent years, and Friday’s change will affect overseas locations at Rota, Spain, Sigonella and Naples, Italy, Misawa, Yokosuka, Atsugi, Sasebo and Okinawa, Japan, Guam, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. “Sailors interested in pursuing off-duty educational opportunities will continue to have a wide array of virtual services available to them,” Navy Voluntary Education (VOLED) director Lt. Cmdr. Adam Walski said in the release. “More importantly, services will not be interrupted for those in need of education assistance or counseling in any location worldwide.” For more information on the Navy College Program, go to www.navycollege.navy.mil. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | October 1, 2021 ++]

Military Fraud & Abuse

Update 06: US Navy Hit By another International Bribery Scandal



Federal agents are investigating a new U.S. Navy corruption case that has strong echoes of the [Fat Leonard scandal](#), with a defense contractor facing accusations that he delivered cash bribes and bilked the Navy out of at least \$50 million to service its ships in foreign ports, according to recently unsealed court records. The Justice Department is trying to extradite the contractor — **Frank Rafaraci**, chief executive of Multinational Logistics Services, or MLS — from Malta, the Mediterranean island where he was arrested last week after an international manhunt. Multinational Logistics Services, or MLS, is a company that has received more than \$100 million in contracts to service U.S. ships in port since 2013.

Rafaraci, 68, is a dual U.S.-Italian citizen who splits his time between the United Arab Emirates and Sicily. According to an arrest warrant unsealed last week in U.S. District Court in Washington, Rafaraci and MLS defrauded the Navy of at least \$50 million by inflating invoices for port services between 2011 and 2018. In one instance, when the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson visited Manama, capital of the Persian Gulf kingdom of Bahrain, in January 2015, MLS billed the Navy for more than \$231,000 in "port authority fees," even though the Manama port authority charged only \$12,686, the court documents show.

Federal authorities are also seeking Rafaraci's extradition on suspicion of money laundering and bribery. The arrest warrant alleges that he met with an unnamed U.S. Navy official at the Diplomat Hotel in Manama in August 2015, handed over an envelope stuffed with \$20,000 in cash and told the official to "keep up the good work." Three years later, at a Miami hotel, Rafaraci passed another envelope to the same U.S. official that contained \$13,500, according to the arrest warrant. The unnamed U.S. Navy official served for several years as a liaison officer in Bahrain before taking a job with the U.S. Army. Court papers show that the official pleaded guilty in June to a bribery charge in U.S. District Court in Washington and agreed to become a cooperating witness for the government. His identity and his criminal case file remain under seal.

In many ways, the allegations against Rafaraci and MLS mirror the "Fat Leonard" corruption scandal that has rocked the Navy since 2013. In that case, a rotund Malaysian defense contractor, Leonard Glenn Francis, pleaded guilty to bribing scores of Navy officials with cash, prostitutes, extravagant meals and other favors so he could overcharge the Navy for port services in Asia. Several hundred Navy officials came under investigation, and 27 people have pleaded guilty in federal court to corruption-related charges. Seven more defendants - all current or retired Navy officers — are scheduled to go on trial in San Diego in February.

Navy officials pledged to clean up their contracting processes in response to the Fat Leonard scandal, but the case against Rafaraci alleges that corruption persists. MLS took over numerous U.S. government contracts that had been handled by Francis's Singapore-based firm, Glenn Defense Marine Asia, and became the largest provider of port services to the Navy in the world. It operates throughout Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. The Navy relies on private contractors to supply fresh water, fuel, food, security, tugboats, barges and other equipment and services in foreign ports. The Navy suspended MLS and Rafaraci on Friday from doing future business with any federal agency, though they will be allowed to fulfill their current contracts with the Navy, according to Cmdr. Courtney Hillson, a spokeswoman for the branch.

The Navy "expects all individuals and companies with whom it conducts business to act with the highest degree of integrity and to have effective standards of conduct," she said. Hillson said agents from the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) and the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS) uncovered the alleged wrongdoing and "have been actively coordinating with other law-enforcement authorities around the globe." An investigator from the Fat Leonard case — DCIS agent Cordell "Trey" DeLaPena — is also a lead agent in the MLS matter, court records show.

It can be difficult to extradite international defense contractors to the United States. Francis, a Malaysian citizen, was arrested in a sting operation in 2013 after NCIS and DCIS agents lured him to San Diego on the pretense of meeting with Navy admirals to discuss expanded business opportunities. He had been under criminal investigation for several years, and federal authorities at one point considered capturing him aboard a U.S. Navy warship in Singapore and bringing him to the United States against his will. Rafaraci lives primarily in Dubai, but the United States does not have an extradition treaty with the United Arab Emirates.

Federal agents had been tracking his movements and learned last month that he was planning a brief visit to Malta, where MLS is headquartered. He arrived in Malta on 26 SEP and was arrested hours later by local authorities at a hotel in St. Julian's, a town on the east coast near the capital, Valletta. Since then, efforts by Maltese and U.S. officials to keep him in custody have gone awry. At Rafaraci's initial court appearance, on 27 SEP, a Maltese magistrate ruled that the businessman could remain free while his extradition proceedings unfold. Prosecutors had argued that he should remain in detention because he posed a flight risk. But Rafaraci's attorneys successfully challenged the legitimacy of the arrest warrant, saying that U.S. and Maltese officials had not

followed proper legal procedures, according to news reports in the Times of Malta and other local publications.

Rafaraci is scheduled to have another court hearing Monday. One of his attorneys, Stefano Filletti, did not respond to emails Sunday seeking comment. Unlike Francis, a flamboyant figure who flaunted his wealth and loved to entertain Navy admirals at parties and Michelin-starred restaurants, Rafaraci maintains a low public profile. He is scarcely mentioned on his company's website except for a page detailing MLS's code of business ethics. Under the code, Rafaraci pledges that he and his company will follow "individual conscience, common sense, good judgment and compliance with governmental laws and regulations."

In an affidavit filed in support of the arrest warrant, DeLaPena accused Rafaraci of using a network of shell companies to launder money obtained illicitly so he could evade U.S. income taxes. Rafaraci code-named the scheme "Keep Going" and used it to transfer funds from corporate accounts in Malta and Britain to a shell company in the United Arab Emirates, court records show.

The affidavit also accused Rafaraci of conspiring with MLS's chairman to commit bribery. Though the individual was not identified by name, the chairman of the company is listed publicly as Thomas Rafaraci, Frank's brother. [Source: The Washington Post | Craig Whitlock | October 4, 2021 ++]

Army Uniform Policy

Women Dress Uniform Use Post Birth

Women in the Army now will be excused from wearing dress uniforms for up to a year after giving birth, according to a new service policy reviewed by Military.com. There had been no specific guidance before on how long female soldiers had after a pregnancy to squeeze into a dress uniform. Now, they can wear Army combat and maternity uniforms in lieu of dress uniforms -- and they can't be penalized for appearing in those uniforms at promotion boards, Army policy says. "This gives a reasonable amount of time to get [Army service uniforms] back on and not have to buy a different uniform," Sgt. Maj. Ashleigh Sykes, the Army's G-1 Uniform Policy Branch sergeant major, told Military.com.

The move follows a change in March that extended the timeline for new mothers to meet the Army's strict weight standards from 180 days to a full year, Sykes said. At the time, Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Grinston called it a "common sense" decision. Female officers and enlisted members may choose to wear a dress uniform sooner than 365 days after giving birth, but "no favorable or unfavorable action" is allowed to be taken on the woman's decision to wear or not wear a dress uniform, according to the policy. That includes allowing postpartum women

to appear before enlisted promotion boards in combat or maternity uniforms. The boards typically are conducted in dress uniforms.

"Normally when you go to a promotion board, you wear your service uniform, but if you're coming from maternity leave and three months in, a leader can't say you cannot go to your promotion board," Sykes said. "We are not going to hinder soldiers from going to a promotion board." Maj. Sam Winkler, an adjutant general officer serving in the 4th Cavalry Brigade, First Army Division East, said that women, especially junior enlisted soldiers, were pressured to spend enormous amounts of money on buying or altering dress uniforms they could fit into after giving birth. "It was junior soldiers telling us they had to buy multiple uniforms or have them drastically altered for arbitrary reasons," said Winkler, who helped propose the new policy changes and is an administrator for the Army Mom Life Facebook group, which advocates for women-friendly policies in the force.

The Army Mom Life group surveyed nearly 3,000 female service members and found the policy change was a top request among troops. Respondents said the Army put a lot of pressure on women to fit into dress uniforms right after pregnancy, especially for promotion boards, and for other occasions such as random inspections or ceremonies. In some cases, leaders on promotion boards were allowing women to bring their dress uniform in on a hanger for inspection. But Winkler said other leaders said they needed a rule written down.

Female soldiers on active duty are issued three sets of maternity uniforms, while National Guard and Reserve units are required to issue two sets of uniforms, according to Army rules. Giving new and expecting mothers more flexibility to meet weight standards is one of several new Army policies aimed at making rules more reasonable for women, who make up about 15% of the force. For example, the Army recently has allowed women to wear their hair in ponytails and braids so combat gear such as helmets fit better.

Also, soldiers who have undergone medical procedures, such as having to wear a cast, cannot be ordered to wear the combat or dress uniform if doing so is difficult or impossible. Instead, they may wear a physical training uniform for as long as a medical provider allows. [Source: Military.com | Steve Beynon | October 5, 2021 ++]

USSF Uniforms

Update 01: Pants Debacle



The U.S. Space Force has some of the brightest minds in the military working to keep American satellites safe overhead, but it needs a little more time to work out something closer to home: pants. Ever since the newest branch of the armed forces unveiled its prototype service dress uniform last month, onlookers have been lambasting the Space Force for taking too many cues from science fiction franchises like Star Trek and Battlestar Galactica. “The Battlestar uniforms were so much better than this shit,” wrote one commenter on the Air Force subreddit. “Star Trek did it better,” wrote another.

Even more alarming, the pants of the uniforms unveiled last month were “saggy and baggy and in serious need of tailoring,” wrote New York Times style writer Steven Kurutz. He wasn’t alone in his critique. “The fit for pants and jacket is ridiculous. It looks like they put both on backwards,” wrote a Reddit commenter. If you are a Space Force Guardian not feeling great about having to wear this outfit at a formal occasion, there may be some hope. On 1 OCT, the service posted a picture on social media of tailoring scissors and measuring tape placed atop grey fabric resembling that used in the dress pants. “We heard your feedback,” the branch wrote in the post. “New pants, new fit coming soon.”

When asked about the post, Space Force spokesperson Lynn Kirby emphasized that the service dress uniform unveiled on 21 SEP “is only a prototype that is still undergoing Guardian feedback,” she told Task & Purpose. “We released an image of the pants material at the tailor shop to show we are still working to get the fit right and create a service dress uniform that appropriately reflects the identity of Guardians,” she said. In the coming months, there will also be a “roadshow” where Guardians will get to see the prototype uniform up close and give their feedback, Kirby said. The Space Force will then use that feedback to decide by the end of the year if any tweaks should be made. Next, the service will start a design and alteration process, followed by fit and wear testing in the field, Kirby added. “We are not able to convey a timeline for when fit and wear testing would begin as that is dependent on production timelines,” she said.

No matter how you feel about the prototype uniform, it is nice to hear that The Space Force is open to feedback from Guardians on how it looks. Other branches like the Army could have used some of that rank and file input before adopting uniform disasters like:

- The Army’s Universal Camouflage Pattern — a set of grey pixelated utilities that tried to blend in with everything and, as a result, blended in with nothing.

- The Navy’s wardrobe malfunction when it realized its blue Navy Working Uniform (nicknamed “blueberries”) lights up like a candle when put in contact with fire, which made it unsuitable for shipboard use.
- The Air Force’s buyer’s remorse with the tiger-striped patterned airman battle uniform, which one airman described as heavy, thick, hot and stuffy, and another said was “about as stylish as a fat collar and polyester bell-bottoms.”

These past examples show that the government doesn’t need your opinion when selecting a uniform you’ll be forced to wear every day of your life, but the Space Force seems to be doing just that with its service dress. Of course, only time will tell how much of that feedback the service actually applies to its dress uniforms.

A prominent lawmaker who helps oversee the Space Force’s budget is tired of hearing about the service’s new dress uniforms and wants its leadership to focus more on developing cutting-edge satellites and rockets. Rep. Jim Cooper, who chairs the House Armed Services Committee’s strategic forces subcommittee, admonished the service to “step up its game” during the Politico Defense Forum on 8 OCT.

“I wish we were reading in the papers more about killer new satellite systems instead of killer uniforms or big bold headquarters,” said Cooper, a Tennessee Democrat. “We’ve got to make sure that our technology is state of the art. In fact, we need to be a couple of decades ahead of our near peer adversaries.” Cooper said he believes the Space Force has the budget it needs to succeed but is still moving too sluggishly. Meanwhile, Russia and China continue to make “extraordinary” advances in space technology while spending “pennies on the dollar” compared to the US, he said. [Source: Task & Purpose / Breaking Defense | David Roza & Valerie Insinna | October 5 & 7, 2021 ++]

Military Holiday Mailing

2021 Deadlines

If your packages and letters will be among the estimated 12.6 million pounds of [mail heading overseas](#) to military destinations this holiday season, the U.S. Postal Service has suggested mailing dates to get them there by Christmas. But be aware: There’s a Grinch at work. Postal service price increases have affected military mail, too.



For example, the cost for sending the largest priority mail flat rate box to a military destination has increased by \$1.55 compared to the same time in 2020 — from [\\$19.60 in 2020](#) to \$21.15, as of 3 OCT. A permanent price increase was implemented in January; and an additional temporary price increase went into effect 3 OCT and ends 25 DEC 2021. The temporary increase affects a number of popular mailing options, including the military mailing options. And don't forget, it's already costing more to mail your holiday cards. On 29 AUG, the price of a first-class Forever stamp went up by 3 cents, to 58 cents.

The postal service's suggested deadlines for various methods of shipping are the same for most APO/FPO/DPO (Air/Army Post Office/Fleet Post Office/Diplomatic Post Office) ZIP codes. The exception is mail going to ZIP code 093, which covers overseas contingency areas. Although you can send mail later than these dates, these are the suggestions if you want to get your goodies to their destination by 25 DEC. Subtract 28 days from the dates if you want them there for the beginning of Hanukkah.

- USPS retail ground mail (the slowest way to go, formerly known as standard post): Nov. 6.
- Space available mail (SAM): Nov. 27.
- Parcel airlift mail (PAL): Dec. 4.
- First-class and priority mail (letters, cards and packages): Dec. 11, except for ZIP 093, which is Dec. 9.
- Priority mail express military services: Dec. 18. This service is not available for ZIP 093.

Across the board, the cost for sending the priority mail and priority mail express flat rate boxes and envelopes has gone up by 75 cents in the temporary increase. That's in addition to the permanent increases that took effect in January. According to the U.S. Postal Service, these temporary increases for some of the more popular shipping products for retail and business customers, to include military shipping, are necessary "to cover extra costs in anticipation of [peak-season volume surges](#) similar to levels experienced in 2020."

Given the current supply chain problems, there may be a question of whether you can find the gift to ship. Shipping issues haven't yet affected military mail sent using the retail ground option — going overseas by ship, officials said. "The Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA) is unaware of any issues impacting mail flow to or from overseas military post offices at this time," said MPSA officials in a statement to Military Times. One source outside the MPSA said that

agency was putting some of that seagoing mail on planes, but that couldn't be immediately confirmed. There are other options for sending mail by air to military destinations overseas through the postal service.

MPSA officials urge mailers to pay close attention to the holiday mailing deadlines, and to check the U.S. Postal Service website for domestic and international shipping prohibitions and restrictions before mailing to or from an overseas military location. Follow the requirements for addressing the package; making sure you write the service member's full name, and include the unit and APO/FPO/DPO address with the nine-digit ZIP code, if one is assigned. *Don't* include the country name where the service member is stationed. Using only those unit and APO/FPO/DPO addresses will help make sure it stays within the mail system and isn't rerouted into the international mail system. Include a return address. Also, add an index card with the service member's name and address, and a return address, in case the label or box gets damaged in shipping.

Priority mail flat rate boxes themselves are free; you can stuff whatever you can fit into them, and they cost one flat fee to ship your goodies, regardless of weight. The boxes come in various shapes and sizes; you can get them for free at post offices and at www.usps.com/freeboxes. The U.S. Postal Service has created a free Military Care Kit based on the items most frequently requested by military families. To order, call 800-610-8734

There's also a \$1.50 discount per box to mail those flat rate boxes to APO/FPO/DPO addresses. So with the discount, that largest priority mail flat rate box going to an APO/FPO/DPO address is \$21.15. As always, check with your local post office for the shipping option that best meets your needs. You may find there's not much difference in cost to ship your package the fastest way. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | October 6, 2021 ++]

Red Cross Assistance

Update 01: What Military Spouses Need to Know About Emergency Messages



The American Red Cross has been helping military families deal with the challenges of military life for more than 140 years. One of the ways the Red Cross helps military families specifically is through emergency communications, which they began facilitating in 1905. In 2020, the Red

Cross sent 344,000 emergency communications messages, said Yolanda Gainwell, a programs division director for the Red Cross. In addition, 200,000 critical community service cases were created, she said. Gainwell said emergency communications messages deal with life expectancy, a birth, a death or an impending death. "I would say the number one and number two [reasons] are death and illness," she said.

Critical community service cases are when a veteran -- retiree or not -- has an immediate urgent need. This could be food insecurity, pending homelessness or an extenuating medical circumstance, and the Red Cross connects them to another aid society or provides community referrals. With social media and cell phones, it seems like sending a Red Cross message may not be important. However, Gainwell said it only makes them more important; in fact, they've seen an increase in the number of messages sent. "We are congressionally chartered to provide emergency communication messages for all of our branches of services, 24 hours a day, seven days a week," she said. "The commands rely on us to verify every emergency that we get."

Spouse Samantha Hamilton sent two emergency messages, both announcing the birth of a child. The first time, she sent one after an emergency cesarean section, and her husband, who was in the field, didn't get the message until three days later. Hamilton said she learned how to send a message through a spouses' meeting where they made a deployment binder, which included the information about the Red Cross. "The second time I sent it with my second child. It was much easier to get through and he was notified within the day to give me a call," Hamilton said. "It was much easier, because I was informed and prepared from the last time I did it."

In order to be eligible for assistance, one must be:

- An active duty member of the Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard
- An active member of the Guard and Reserve of all military branches
- A civilian employed by or under contract to the Dept. of Defense and stationed outside the continental United States
- A cadet or midshipman at a service academy; ROTC cadet on orders for training
- A Merchant Marine aboard a U.S. Naval Ship

How Do You Send an Emergency Message?

Gainwell says the most important thing military spouses and family members need to know about sending emergency messages through the Red Cross is that preparedness is key. "Anyone with the pertinent information can initiate a Red Cross message," she said. "So that could be my neighbor. That could be my family member. That could be my girlfriend in another state that understands the situation and what's going on." Gainwell suggests downloading the Hero Care app (<https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/mobile-apps.html>) and loading in the key pieces of information below.

Gainwell also said that if you think something warrants an emergency message, contact the Red Cross, either online, on the phone or in person. "If you ever have a question or a doubt in your mind, call us. If it is truly not an emergency, we will let you know," she said. For those who

don't want to use the app, emergency communications specialists are available 24/7 at 1-877-272-7337. Gainwell suggests putting the Red Cross information somewhere that a friend or family member could find easily, in case they need to make the phone call. Make sure to have the following available on the member when making your request:

- Full legal name, Rank/Rating, and Branch of Service
- Last four digits of Social Security Number or Date of Birth
- Military Unit Address
- For deployed service members: information about the deployed unit and home base unit
- Name and contact of the immediate family member experiencing the emergency
- Nature of the emergency
- Where the emergency can be confirmed, such as a hospital, funeral home, etc.

For those who don't want to use the free Hero Care app, emergency communications specialists are available 24/7 at 1-877-272-7337. To request assistance online, visit: <http://www.redcross.org/get-help/military-families/emergency-communication>, or text to 90999 "GETHEROCARE".

What Happens When You Contact the Red Cross?

After the information is received at the Hero Care Center, the verification process begins. This may mean contacting medical authorities, the funeral home or the police department. Gainwell says this is why providing as much information to the Red Cross is helpful, as it shortens the verification process timelines. The goal is to get it verified as quickly as possible, but if key information -- such as the service member's unit -- is missing, it will take longer.

"We have access to DoD directories, where we can find that information, but that's going to take time. So the more information the client can share with us when they initially contact us, [the better]," Gainwell said. Once the emergency message is verified, it is sent to the service member's command. Gainwell was very clear that any decision made after the message is sent is by the command. Sometimes that means nothing happens. "Emergency leave, even with a Red Cross message, it's at the discretion of command," Gainwell said. [Source: Military.com | Rebecca Alwine | October 2021 ++]

USAF A-10 Warthog

Why Nothing (Even the Air Force) Can Kill It

Will no one rid us of this troublesome A-10 'Warthog'? The United States Air Force (USAF) has spent almost two-thirds of its existence as an independent service trying to get rid of the A-10, one of its most well-known aircraft. But has the Air Force finally given up? It is odd to think that

a fifty-year-old aircraft might have more job security now than at any time in its long history, but it does seem that the Warthog now has a relatively secure space in the USAF fleet.



The USAF has operated the A-10 Thunderbolt II, known affectionately as the “Warthog,” since 1976. The attack aircraft was designed on the one hand as an update to piston-engined planes such as the A-1 Skyraider, and on the other as a hedge against the development of advanced attack helicopters by the US Army. The USAF worried that technologically advanced Army helicopters could take over the close air support mission that its aircraft had (grudgingly) performed in Korea and Vietnam, thus undercutting the argument that the Air Force needed multi-use jets to perform that task.

It is only a mild exaggeration to say that factions of the Air Force have been trying to eliminate the A-10 since the day it first flew. Indeed, some in the Air Force sought to strangle the project in utero (before birth) after the cancellation of the Army’s Cheyenne attack helicopter. While the A-10 was expected to be more at home on the battlefields of Central Europe than the aircraft it replaced, the Air Force still believed it would suffer from high rates of attrition against well-protected Warsaw Pact forces. This was an acceptable sacrifice in the context of a war that was expected to last days or weeks rather than years, although the aircraft was unpopular with a service more interested in advanced fighter aircraft. Thus, the A-10 remained controversial throughout the 1980s.

With the end of the Cold War and the end of the threat of the Red Army, the logic of retaining the Warthog seemed to lose its edge. The immense and unexpected success of the Warthog in Operation Desert Storm helped validate the plane’s concept and win it a degree of public acclaim. Nevertheless, the Air Force undertook a study to retire the A-10 as part of the general drawdown of Cold War aircraft in the 1990s, and similar studies in the 2000s and 2010s. In both cases Congressional pressure, along with the quiet influence of the US Army, helped save the aircraft. Similar pressure seems to have convinced the USAF that there’s no good prospect for eliminating the plane in the foreseeable future.

The arguments for retiring the A-10 are sound, as far as they go. The Air Force does not believe that the A-10 is any more survivable in hostile air space now than it was in 1976. While maintenance and operational costs for the A-10 are low, it still takes up a cadre of pilots and aircrew who could more profitably be allocated to other aircraft. A half-serious proposal to shift

the A-10 to the Army ran aground on a host of bureaucratic and logistical difficulties. Efforts to protect the A-10 have typically come from Congress, which has repeatedly demonstrated a reluctance to give up on the attack plane. This in itself is somewhat unusual, as the A-10 no longer offers any particularly useful “pork” to more than a very few members of Congress who represent districts with basing, maintenance, and upgrade contracts.

There are also sensible arguments in the Warthog’s favor. While it is true that the A-10 will not fare well against modern air defenses, the same can largely be said of other legacy platforms such as the F-15, F-16, and B-52. In any imaginable conflict scenario against a peer opponent, US aircraft will need to put themselves in harm’s way. There will undoubtedly be instances in which the A-10 could effectively be used in relatively safe ways; for example, an isolated conflict zone in which enemy resistance persisted but the main air defense assets had been destroyed. The A-10 has also demonstrated its utility in expeditionary conflicts against enemies without advanced air defenses, and the United States may still feel the need to fight these kinds of conflicts, even in the era of renewed Great Power Competition.

Still, it is awfully strange from the perspective of 1970s to imagine the USAF fleet full of aircraft it had expected to eliminate in the 1960s (the B-52), and that it never really wanted in the first place. Indeed, the decision to restart the acquisition of the F-15, while quite sensible in its own terms, speaks to the strange and unpredictable relationship between military procurement and geostrategic influences. The A-10 has already flown longer than anyone expected, and the end is no longer in sight. [Source: www.19fortyfive.com | Robert Farley | October 6, 2021 ++]

Russian Flamethrowers

Unmanned Flame-Throwing Systems in Development



TOS-1A flamethrower, the predecessor of TOS-2 “Tosochka”

The Russian army will soon receive unmanned flame-throwing systems for its nuclear, biological, and chemical protection (NBCP) troops, Izvestia reported, citing sources. According to the Moscow-based news outlet, the flame-throwers are part of the new weapon systems accepted by the Russian Ministry of Defense for deployment with NBCP troops. The outlet cited experts as saying that the flame-throwing kits, to be fitted on unmanned aircraft or quadcopters,

will be particularly effective in urban combat and to destroy enemy fortifications. “They will help save the lives of civilians and soldiers in street battles,” the outlet added.

Russia has a range of flame throwers such as the hand-held Bumblebee, Buratino, Solntsepek, and Tosochka. These systems use thermobaric ammunition — or aerosol bombs — which use oxygen from the air to produce high-temperature explosions. NBCP head Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov revealed that a new drone-based flame-thrower kit is in the design phase. He added that the system will feature a sighting tool for greater efficacy.

The outlet cited expert Viktor Murakhovsky as saying, “Drones will allow you to quickly destroy targets in urban areas, as well as hidden in the folds of the relief or located in engineering structures. They are needed to hit important targets in the tactical rear of the enemy — for example, ammunition and fuel depots, communications centers, and unarmored equipment on which command posts are based.” He added that the use of flame-throwing drones will reduce collateral damage, as strikes will be precise. “They will avoid the destruction of buildings that are not related to military infrastructure, as well as reduce losses among civilians and military personnel. It is better to lose two drones or robots than one soldier.”

Meanwhile, Russia’s upcoming TOS-2 “Tosochka” heavy flamethrower was reportedly due for its final trial in AUG 2021. Tests will reportedly last until the end of the year, after which officials will decide on deployment. The mobile weapon can cover hundreds of kilometers, burning large tracts of land “in minutes” utilizing thermobaric ammunition. The TOS-2 has a firing range of 18 kilometers (11 miles) — three times greater than its predecessor — and its upgraded system is also equipped with a better guidance and fire control system. Vehicle speed remains the same at 60 kilometers (37 miles) per hour. [Source: The Defense Post www.thedefensepost.com | Inder Singh Bisht | October 6, 2021 ++]

Russian Camouflage

Military Combat Vehicles to Receive ‘Chameleon’ Paint



A T-14 Armata tank

The Russian Army plans to coat its combat vehicles with a color-changing material that blends in with the surrounding environment, RIA Novosti revealed, citing a source. According to the Moscow-based news agency, the camouflage developed by Ruselectronics consists of several small plates of electrochromic coating, “which allows it to create various visual images that not only copy the color of the surrounding landscape, but also its structure.” The state-backed outlet explained that the system consists of video cameras that collect information from outside and pass it on to a computer. Based on the information received, the computer changes the color and image on the exterior of the vehicle.

The unnamed source told the outlet that “the speed of camouflage reaction to changes in the environment is fractions of a second. If, for example, a tank was standing in a field and the coating had a painting of one type, and then it changed its position and found itself against the background of a different type of landscape, then the coating will change the color and structure of camouflage throughout the entire area.” He added that the camouflage helps the vehicle merge with the landscape, thus avoiding enemy tracking by satellites, drones, and manned aircraft. The coating will be applied to a range of army vehicles such as tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and armored personnel carriers. [Source: The Defense Post www.thedefensepost.com | Inder Singh Bisht | October 7, 2021 ++]

MacDill AFB

Channel Catfish Released On Base



MacDill Air Force Base is best known as the home of two of the U.S. military’s most important headquarters, U.S. Central Command and U.S. Special Operations Command. But to the folks stationed at or visiting the Tampa, Florida, installation, MacDill is also a paradise for fishing enthusiasts, with a marina, miles of shoreline and several freshwater ponds. So, just as the base’s Eisenhower-era KC-135 Stratotanker aerial refueling fleet requires upkeep, so too do the waterways.

To that end, on 1 OCT, personnel from the 6th Civil Engineer Squadron partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Welaka National Fish Hatchery to release approximately 3,000

channel catfish into several lakes and ponds on base, according to MacDill’s homepage. (Video at <https://youtu.be/Ku9U69nV59M>). These catfish, which are roughly 2 years old, were acclimated to Lewis Lake before being released by Welaka National Fish Hatchery, the only federal fish hatchery in Florida. The move comes as part of a greater effort to preserve and protect “delicate ecosystems” all over MacDill.

“We are pulling a couple of missions together here for the 6th Air Refueling Wing,” said Kevin Kish, the 6th CES Installation Management flight chief. “We have the flying mission going on overhead, and here, on the ground we are bringing in some natural resources as part of the [squadron’s] contribution to our local environment.” The channel catfish, meanwhile, took a circuitous route to MacDill. The hatchery spawns various fish on-site, according to the homepage, but it also has an ongoing partnership with the state of Florida specifically for channel catfish. The fish stocked at MacDill are initially spawned at Richloam State Fish Hatchery, north of Tampa, then transported to the Welaka Hatchery in Welaka, Florida, where they are raised for nearly a year until they reach a catchable size. Before releasing the fish into the waters at MacDill, hatchery personnel were responsible for keeping the water temperature in the tank truck comfortable for the new habitants.

After mitigating land erosion and overgrown aquatic vegetation, personnel have worked to increase the fish population, “which gives the MacDill community more opportunity to land a big one,” the MacDill homepage says. Fishing is just one of many recreational opportunities at MacDill, which also boasts two golf courses, a long running track along the water and rental boats. “There’s a lot of research supporting the mental and physical benefits of spending time outdoors, whether fishing, hiking, biking, or just hanging out with family and friends,” Lykens told MacDill officials. “I strongly encourage everyone to get outdoors and find an activity to participate in that feels right for them!” [Source: MilitaryTimes Observation Post | Howard Altman | October 6, 2021 ++]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang

‘Water Buffalo’ thru ‘Whitehat’

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

Water Buffalo - (1) A water tank on wheels used by SeaBees and/or other ground forces to carry drinking water. (2) Someone who uses excessive water, such as by taking HOLLYWOOD SHOWERS (submarines).

Water Wings - Warfare qualification pin for a Surface Warfare Officer (SWO), or Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist (ESWS). Represented as the bow of a ship superimposed on crossed swords (SWO) or cutlasses (ESWS).

Wave – (Aviation) The actions of an LSO when he directs and monitors the landing operations aboard a carrier. Also seen as "Wave Aboard."

Waveoff - A call by the LSO directing a go-around. Unlike most radio calls to a pilot, a waveoff is not advisory in nature.

Weather Deck – Literally, any deck of a ship which is exposed to the weather, i.e. outside the skin of the ship.

WEPS - The weapons officer.

WestPac Widow – The spouse of a deployed sailor, if he or she strays from the marital bed in their absence.

Wets - (RN) Drinks.

WETSU – We Eat This Shit Up. A derisive statement, usually regarding working or living conditions.

WFW - "Waaah Fucking Waaah". Used to tell someone to quit whining.

Wheel Book – A small notebook, usually used by Division Officers to keep track of daily events and reminders.

Whifferdil – (Aviation) Random or uncontrolled maneuvers.

Whinge – (UK) To whine with extreme overtones of self-pity.

Whitehat – Enlisted personnel (E-1 through E-6).

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

*** Military History ***



Liberation of Stalag VIIA

Germany's Largest Prisoner Of War Camp

On 30 April, 1945 the *New York Times* reported: "Huge Prison Camp Liberated...27,000 American and British prisoners of war at a large camp at Moosburg, Germany." The report was correct, the camp was huge, but it was also wrong. The following day, the *Times* printed a correction: "The Fourteenth Armored Division liberated 110,000 Allied prisoners of war at Stalag VIIA at Moosburg, instead of the 27,000 prisoners previously reported. This was Germany's largest prisoner of war camp."

The day before the 14th Armored Division, commanded by MG Albert C. Smith, crossed the Danube River at Ingolstadt, and passed through the 86th Infantry Division, which had established a bridgehead on the previous day, with the mission of securing crossings of the Isar River at Moosburg and Landshut. Combat Command A (CCA) was on the right of the division's line of advance, Combat Command R (CCR) was on the left, and Combat Command B (CCB) was in reserve. Large numbers of German troops were falling back on Moosburg to cross the river. Among them were the remnants of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier and 719th Infantry Divisions.

It was, as it had been for much of the way across France and Germany, a race to capture a crucial bridge before retreating German units got safely to the other side and blew it up in the faces of the oncoming Americans. The combat command advanced nearly fifty miles on 28 April, against sporadic resistance. During the early morning hours of the 29 April, a car approached a roadblock on the southeast side of Mauern from the direction of Moosburg. The car was not fired on as it was seen to be flying a white flag. In the car were four men who asked to speak with a senior officer. What followed is covered in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Liberation of Stalag VIIA**". [Source: <https://armyhistory.org> | Jim Lankford | October 2021 ++]

Battle of Fort Driant

Gen. Patton's Unsuccessful Attempt to Dislodge the Germans

Third Army's intelligence section had already determined that the Germans intended to make the most of the ring of forts around the French city of Metz, the ancient gateway city through which so many invading armies had passed. Metz was to be the linchpin in the Germans' defensive strategy. An army had not directly taken the city since 1552. It had been captured after a 54-day siege during the Franco-Prussian War and had been fortified by the Germans in World War I. However, the string of fortresses were left in ruins. Among them was Fort Driant.

Originally built in 1902 by the Germans and renamed in 1919 after Colonel Émile Driant, the fort was continually reinforced by both the French and German armies. It was made from steel reinforced concrete and surrounded by a deep dry moat and barbed wire. It housed five main gun

batteries of 150mm guns, infantry trenches, and armored machine gun and observation posts. From its commanding position, it could direct heavy fire in the Moselle Valley.

When the U.S. Third army arrived at Metz, they were quickly drawn into a stalemate with the German defenders for weeks over control of the city and its perimeter. Upon sustaining heavy losses attacking the fortifications, it was clear to the Americans that Fort Driant would have to be taken to establish effective control of the fortifications around the city. Patton declared the fort an easy target, and committed elements of the 5th Infantry Division to the attack.

At 14:15 on September 27, 1944 P-47 Thunderbolts equipped with thousand-pound bombs and napalm from the XIX Tactical Air Command began bombing Fort Driant. Companies E and B of the 11th Infantry Regiment, and the attached Company C, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion began their attack on Fort Driant. Small arms fire, machine guns and mortars immediately began firing upon the advancing troops. Most of the fort was below ground, causing the tank destroyers to be ineffective against the heavily armored pillboxes. After the initial attack faltered, the Americans withdrew to the original position at 18:30.

The attack resumed on the 29th with bulldozers to fill in the fort's trench line and the support of Company C, 735th Tank Battalion, pushing explosive-filled pipes called "snakes" in front of their tanks. The bulldozers and snakes proved to be of little help as during the second attack the bulldozers experienced mechanical difficulties and the snakes were either damaged (bent) or would not work as intended. Despite the failed attempt to breach the perimeter, General Irwin ordered the attack to commence on schedule at 1200 hours.

Upon reaching the perimeter, the German defenders were ready. B Company, 11th Infantry Regiment managed to breach the wire in the southwestern corner of the complex, owing to the attached tanks leading the assault. B Company blew past pillboxes to be mopped up later on the way to its initial objective, and, under the cover of the tanks, their engineers attempted to blast their way into the two concrete barracks buildings, barracks 3 and 4. By 1400, B Company was on its objective, attempting to destroy the barracks. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting with grenades and bayonets broke out between the two sides. E Company, under heavy fire and with its bulldozer-equipped tanks non-functioning, failed to breach the perimeter and dug in outside the wire for four days, losing 35 out of its 140 personnel.

The commander of B Company, a Captain Anderson, discovered after repeatedly throwing grenades into a bunker that its occupants had withdrawn to the main fort through an underground tunnel. Captain Anderson then used a phosphorus grenade and two fragmentation grenades to assault a concrete structure, prompting its occupants to emerge and surrender. One of the surrendering German troops was identified as a member of the Officer Candidate Regiment that most of the fort's defenders belonged to. Growing desperate to keep the attack's momentum, a self-propelled gun was brought to the front and fired at the barracks from a mere 30 yards away, to no avail.

By then, neighboring forts had begun to bombard the U.S. attackers, and artillery fire from batteries hidden in the surrounding forest caused the attackers' casualties to mount. Their momentum was regained as a Private Holmlund from B Company climbed on top of barracks 3 to find several ventilator shafts. Kicking off the shafts' covers, he began shoving bangalore torpedoes into them, forcing its occupants to flee via underground tunnel to barracks 4. In response, the defenders leveled their guns at the roof of barracks 4 to prevent it from being destroyed in the same manner as barracks 3. However, one of the self-propelled guns managed to blast in the door to barracks 4 at close range, allowing the four surviving members of the platoon to enter and begin clearing the bunker. B Company established its command post in the remains of barracks 3, inside of a perimeter of tanks and infantry.

At 1700 hours, G Company, 11th Infantry, which was previously being held in reserve, was ordered to destroy the two northern artillery batteries. Due to low visibility and continued small-arms fire by the defenders, G Company failed to reach its objective. During the night, the Germans were likely reinforced, as they still held the Mance ravine and the road from Aurs-sur-Moselle. G Company, stumbling through the maze of pillboxes in search of its objective, trenches, and tunnels, was almost routed by German counterattacks during the night, before being reinforced by K Company of the 2nd Infantry Regiment.

Facing mounting casualties, the 11th Infantry was ordered to continue the attack. Patton refused to accept that the attack might stall and was quoted as saying "if it took every man in the XX Corps, [he] could not allow an attack by this Army to fail." As the second day of the attack began, B and E Companies of the 11th Infantry has suffered 110 casualties, or about 50%. The only objectives that had been achieved were not vital to the capture of the fort.

During the following days, further attempts were made to enter the artillery batteries and main barracks, but none were successful. In the daytime, German artillery fire from all surrounding areas focused on defending the fort and it became impossible to sustain the attackers who were already narrowly hanging on to the positions they had seized. The attackers only resort was to transport supplies in the tanks allocated to the attached artillery forward observers. During the night time, the artillery barrages ceased and German troops emerged from the maze of concrete tunnels and viciously counterattacked the Americans' toehold on the fort, and completely isolating the attackers from any support.

On October 5th, the commanding officer of G Company sent a desperate message to the Battalion Commander detailing the dire state of the attack; the Company Commander was revered in the battalion as a gallant and competent leader, and his message was not disregarded. Given the desperate reports from the front and mounting casualties, General Irwin decided that a task force of fresh troops commanded by the Assistant Division Commander of the 5th Infantry Division would need to be brought in by 1st Battalion, 10th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Infantry, as well as the entire 7th Combat Engineer Battalion to relieve the battered 2nd Battalion of the 11th Infantry. It was decided that the attack would restart on 7 October.

Preliminary bombardment of the fort by US 240mm and 8-inch howitzers, the largest guns in US Army inventory, failed to yield any effects on the German artillery batteries in the fort. The artillery batteries were covered with steel domes, with only the end of the breach visible, and were found to be impervious to indirect fire. In response, US 155mm self-propelled howitzers would engage in direct-fire skirmishes with the batteries, and through quick and accurate direct fire force the batteries to retract into safer non-firing positions. None of these fortified batteries were destroyed by these engagements, but they were effectively suppressed completely using this method.

The task force commander received a set of detailed plans of the fort, and decided the attack should consist of a subterranean assault on a tunnel that connected the barracks held by US troops to the main barracks by way of the artillery batteries, with an attack on the surface to prevent the defenders from focusing their efforts on preventing the underground assault. The combined efforts of 1st Battalion, 10th Infantry and 3rd Battalion, 2nd Infantry, managed to retake most of the southern area of the fort, but lost two platoons, and the commander of B Company of the 1st Battalion, 10th Infantry was captured along with two forward observers. After this, no further meaningful gains were made on the surface.

The subterranean attack continued although the attached French advisor who was the expert on the fort advised against it. An iron door blocked C Company, 10th Infantry's way into the three foot wide, seven foot high tunnel. After the engineers successfully blew a hole in it, it was discovered that the door was backed by more than 20 feet of scrap metal, concrete, and wrecked equipment, which had been stacked to the ceiling. Welding equipment was brought into the tunnel to cut away the debris, which was finally removed by the morning of 8 OCT, revealing another iron door which was believed to be the last barrier blocking the tunnel. The presence of fumes created by the constant welding and detonation of charges forced the besiegers to constantly evacuate the tunnel, and the use of ventilators and the construction of ventilation shafts proved ineffective.

Due to the constant sound of digging on the German side of the tunnel, the Americans feared they would be counter-charged, and placed a 60-pound beehive charge against the door. Its detonation required the tunnel to be evacuated for two hours to allow the intense carbide fumes to subside as fumes wafted back into the barracks where the US wounded were being tended to, and men rushed to gulp air through rifle slits in the barracks above, with some even running into the open where artillery shells exploded all around. Finally, an engineer officer crawled back into the tunnel only to discover a small hole. Before more explosives could be brought in, the Germans opened fire along the tunnel, forcing the Americans to build a sandbag parapet with a machinegun mounted on it. On the surface, another futile attack was launched on the southern artillery batteries, but the bloodied attackers were still beaten back by swarms of German infantry emerging at night. Between October 3rd and 8th, 21 officers and 485 American troops were killed, wounded, or went missing.

On the morning of October 9th, Patton convened a meeting with Generals Irwin, Walker, and Warnock, sending General Gay to represent himself. General Warnock suggested surrounding the fort and attacking it via tunnels, but Gay declined as the XX Corps lacked the manpower to do so. The men of the 5th Infantry Division were thought to be becoming battle fatigued, and other line connecting operations were taking place around Metz with much greater success. With Patton's agreement, General Gay gave the order to abandon the attack on Fort Driant.

At approximately 1650 hours, a massive explosion ripped through the tunnel, killing four and almost fatally gassing another 23 US troops. It was unknown if the explosion was an accident or intentionally caused by the Germans. The stalemate continued for another three days, until the night of October 12th. The evacuation proceeded with almost no intervention by the Germans. Six tanks were abandoned to be destroyed by American artillery. Engineer detachments with the rear guard placed over 6,000 combined pounds of explosives on any concrete fortifications they could find. The last troops left the fort at 2330 hours, and the last explosions detonated on the inside of the fort around an hour later. The Germans had lost roughly a quarter of the fort before the Americans withdrew having lost 734 troops.

[Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Fort_Driant | October 2021 ++]

Third Battle of Winchester

Bloodiest Battle Ever Fought In the Shenandoah Valley

Virginia's Shenandoah Valley formed a natural travel corridor for the Union and Confederate armies in the Civil War. In an effort to seize the initiative, Confederate General Robert E. Lee sent Lieutenant General Jubal A. Early and his Army of the Valley on a campaign through the Shenandoah Valley — with the option of a possible raid on Washington, DC. Lee hoped General Ulysses S. Grant would divide his Union army to meet the new threat. Grant had had enough of Confederates using the Valley to their advantage so he made Philip Sheridan commander of the Army of the Shenandoah and set him the task of rendering the Shenandoah Valley useless to Confederates.

Sheridan's Army consisted of three infantry corps and three powerful cavalry divisions for a total of 39,000 officers and men. General Early's smaller Army of the Valley at Winchester, Virginia consisted of four infantry divisions and two divisions of cavalry for a total of 14,000 soldiers. Both armies had ample artillery in the field but, as usual, the Yankees had more cannon, more horses, and more artillerymen. On September 19, 1864, Early and Sheridan clashed at the Third Battle of Winchester, also called the Battle of Opequon. Believing that Sheridan would act like other cautious Union commanders, General Early spread his smaller army over a wide front. As dawn broke on 19 SEP, his forces were arrayed north from Winchester.

Sheridan moved to bring his army against Major General Stephen D. Ramseur's division (that portion of Early's force at Winchester). When Early got word of the impending attack, he raced to concentrate the rest of his army at the city of Winchester. At 1 a.m. reveille sounded throughout the Army of the Shenandoah. By 4:30 a.m., Sheridan's forces, advancing on the Berryville Pike through a narrow canyon, encountered their first hurdle of the day. Formed west of the canyon's exit, Ramseur's Confederates engaged the lead elements of Sheridan's army, slowing the passage of the rest of the Union troops. Clogged with soldiers, wagon trains, and Union wounded, the canyon soon became a choke point for Sheridan's advance.

Ramseur's men fought hard and by the time they fell back, Early's army was well on the way to concentrating at Winchester. It was nearly midday before Sheridan was ready for his assault. At first, he threw his Sixth and Nineteenth Corps against the Confederate position and kept his Eighth Corps, also known as the Army of West Virginia, in reserve. He used his cavalry to probe around the flanks of the Rebels. The Confederates were ready. By late morning, divisions under Major Generals Robert E. Rodes and John B. Gordon joined Ramseur's men. While many of Sheridan's troops were untested and under inexperienced commanders, Early's were seasoned veterans from Alabama, North Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, and Virginia. The veterans took position in woodlots and ample slight ridges, guarding their flanks with artillery and cavalry.

At 11:40 a.m., the Sixth Corps, under Major General Horatio G. Wright, and the Nineteenth Corps, under Brigadier General William Emory, advanced from a woodlot now known as the First Woods. Union Brigadier General Cuvier Grover's Second Division, Nineteenth Corps was to move across the field in two lines of battle, advancing with the Sixth Corps to their left. The Sixth Corps was ordered to follow the Berryville Pike. However, unknown to Sheridan, the road veered southward taking Grover's men away from the Confederate flank and out of position. This movement, along with difficult terrain, disconnected the brigades of the Sixth and Nineteenth Corps and rendered them vulnerable to counterattack. Furthermore, the Union advance was subject to intense artillery fire the entire way.

Recognizing the danger, Grover tried in vain to halt and realign his troops, but the advance would not stop until it penetrated the Confederate position. A part of Ramseur's flank caved in as well. Union jubilation did not last long, however, as Confederate Generals Gordon and Rodes organized a swift and powerful counterattack into the disjointed Union commands. Instantly after reportedly shouting, "Charge them boys! Charge them," Rodes was killed by an exploding shell. But the attack continued, spearheaded by Brigadier General Cullen A. Battle's Alabama brigade, which plunged into a particularly weak point in the Union line. Gordon's reformed men and the rest of Rodes's division joined the Alabamians and pushed the Union troops out of the woods and across the Middle Field.

The Confederates pushed on, determined to split Sheridan's army in two, and they might have done so but for Union reserve divisions of the Sixth and Nineteenth Corps moving up to blunt the Confederate attack. Realizing the armies were in a stalemate, Sheridan called for his reserves

— Brigadier General George Crook's Army of West Virginia. After a hurried march, Crook's men arrived on the battlefield at roughly 1:30 p.m. and moved to attack on both sides of Red Bud Run. Crook's First Division, under Colonel Joseph Thoburn, moved into position in the First Woods. Crook's other division, under Colonel Isaac Duval, moved on the north side of Red Bud Run around the Confederate left flank. Crook sent word to Sheridan that he would attack immediately, and requested that the entire Union line advance in support.

Moving forward at roughly 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Duval's men charged down the steep northern bank of Red Bud Run. Duval was shot in the thigh during the charge and future President Rutherford B. Hayes assumed command of the division. The Yankees immediately came under fire from Confederate soldiers near the stately Hackwood House. As they trudged through the waist-deep water, Union troops sank into the marshy flood plain. Hayes wrote, "to stop was death. To go on was probably the same; but on we started again ... the rear and front lines and different regiments of the same line mingled together and reached the rebel side of the creek with lines and organizations broken; but all seemed inspired by the right spirit, and charged the rebel works pell-mell in the most determined manner."

As Hayes' men crossed Red Bud Run, Crook's other division, under Thoburn, advanced along with elements of the Nineteenth and Sixth Corps in support. "For thirty minutes the battle that ensued was perfectly terrific," recalled one participant, "but then the forces in our front gave way, and in an instant we were over their works, and after them with yells and shouts of victory." The combined thrust was too much for the outnumbered Southerners. The divisions of Gordon, Rodes, and Ramseur all fell back to positions closer to Winchester.

After the successful attack of Crook's Eighth Corps, it was only a matter of time before the Confederates lost the battle. As Early consolidated his lines closer and closer to Winchester, his men faced coordinated infantry attacks. Worse still, powerful Union cavalry forces fought their way south up the Valley Pike, threatening to surround Early. Although the Southerners offered stubborn resistance at Fort Collier, Star Fort, and from every fence line and barricade they could find, Early had to choose between retreat or the destruction of his army. By nightfall, the city of Winchester was in Union hands.

The Third Battle of Winchester was the bloodiest battle ever fought in the Shenandoah Valley, producing more casualties than the entire 1862 Valley Campaign. Sheridan lost 12 percent of his army with 5,000 of 39,000 soldiers killed, wounded and missing. Early suffered fewer casualties but he lost 25 percent of his army. The dead and wounded were everywhere. One soldier of the 12th Connecticut recalled, "the Rebel dead lay thickly in the fields beyond, and were piled upon each other in the yard of a large stone mansion [Hackwood] ... A ghastly row of gray-clad corpses lay along a wall, behind which some Rebel brigade had evidently found shelter; and the fields and hillsides as far as Winchester were dotted with the fallen."

The wounded were treated in a variety of field hospitals until better facilities were established. The dead were buried where they fell. Many were later moved to the nearby Winchester National Cemetery or the Stonewall Cemetery. Some 8,000 Union and Confederate soldiers from the many battles around Winchester rest in these cemeteries today. [Source: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/third-battle-winchester> | Garry Adelman | September 9, 2021 ++]

WWII Wehrmacht War Crimes

Update 02: Soviet Union Criminal Orders

Barbarossa Decree

The background behind the Barbarossa Decree was laid out by Hitler during a high-level meeting with military officials on 30 March 1941, where he declared that war against Soviet Russia would be a war of extermination, in which both the political and intellectual elites of Russia would be eradicated by German forces, in order to ensure a long-lasting German victory. Hitler underlined that executions would not be a matter for military courts, but for the organized action of the military. The decree, issued by Field Marshal Keitel a few weeks before Operation Barbarossa, exempted punishable offenses committed by enemy civilians (in Russia) from the jurisdiction of military justice. Suspects were to be brought before an officer who would decide if they were to be shot. The order specified:

- "The partisans are to be ruthlessly eliminated in battle or during attempts to escape", and all attacks by the civilian population against Wehrmacht soldiers are to be "suppressed by the army on the spot by using extreme measures, till [the] annihilation of the attackers;"
- "Every officer in the German occupation in the East of the future will be entitled to perform execution(s) without trial, without any formalities, on any person suspected of having a hostile attitude towards the Germans", (the same applied to prisoners of war);
- "If you have not managed to identify and punish the perpetrators of anti-German acts, you are allowed to apply the principle of collective responsibility. 'Collective measures' against residents of the area where the attack occurred can then be applied after approval by the battalion commander or higher level of command";
- German soldiers who commit crimes against humanity, the USSR and prisoners of war are to be exempted from criminal responsibility, even if they commit acts punishable according to German law.

Contrary to what was claimed after the war, the Wehrmacht generals such as Heinz Guderian, did not intend to mitigate the records of the jurisdiction of an order, or in any way violate Hitler's intentions. His command was intended solely to prevent individual excesses which could damage discipline within army ranks, without changing the extermination intentions of the order. As part of the policy of harshness towards Slavic "sub-humans" and to prevent any tendency towards seeing the enemy as human, German troops were ordered to go out of their way to mistreat women and children in Russia.

Guidelines for the Conduct of the Troops in Russia

These guidelines issued by the OKW on 19 May 1941 declared "Judeo-Bolshevism" to be the most deadly enemy of the German nation, and that "It is against this destructive ideology and its adherents that Germany is waging war". The guidelines went on to demand "ruthless and vigorous measures against Bolshevik inciters, guerrillas, saboteurs, Jews, and the complete elimination of all active and passive resistance." Influenced by the guidelines, in a directive sent out to the troops under his command, General Erich Hoepner of the Panzer Group 4 stated:

The war against Russia is an important chapter in the German nation's struggle for existence. It is the old battle of the Germanic against the Slavic people, of the defense of European culture against Muscovite-Asiatic inundation and of the repulse of Jewish Bolshevism. The objective of this battle must be the demolition of present-day Russia and must therefore be conducted with unprecedented severity. Every military action must be guided in planning and execution by an iron resolution to exterminate the enemy remorselessly and totally. In particular, no adherents of the contemporary Russian Bolshevik system are to be spared.

Other orders

In the same spirit, General Müller, who was the Wehrmacht's senior liaison officer for legal matters, in a lecture to military judges on June 11, 1941 advised the judges present that "...in the operation to come, feelings of justice must in certain situations give way to military exigencies and then revert to old habits of warfare ... One of the two adversaries must be finished off. Adherents of the hostile attitude are not to be conserved, but liquidated". General Müller declared that, in the war against the Soviet Union, any Soviet civilian who was felt to be hindering the German war effort was to be regarded as a "guerrilla" and shot on the spot. The Army's Chief of Staff, General Franz Halder, declared in a directive that in the event of guerrilla attacks, German troops were to impose "collective measures of force" by massacring villages.[26]

Typical of the German Army propaganda was the following passage from a pamphlet issued in June 1941:

Anyone who has ever looked into the face of a Red commissar knows what the Bolsheviks are. There is no need here for theoretical reflections. It would be an insult to animals if one were to call the features of these, largely Jewish, tormentors of people

beasts. They are the embodiment of the infernal, of the personified insane hatred of everything that is noble in humanity. In the shape of these commissars we witness the revolt of the subhuman against noble blood. The masses whom they are driving to their deaths with every means of icy terror and lunatic incitement would have brought about an end of all meaningful life, had the incursion not been prevented at the last moment;" [the last statement is a reference to the "preventive war" that Barbarossa was alleged to be].

German Army propaganda often gave extracts in newsletters concerning the missions for German troops in the East: "It is necessary to eliminate the red sub-humans, along with their Kremlin dictators. German people will have a great task to perform the most in its history, and the world will hear more about that this task will be completed till the end. As a result of this sort of propaganda, the majority of the Wehrmacht Heer officers and soldiers tended to regard the war in Nazi terms, seeing their Soviet opponents as so much sub-human trash deserving to be trampled upon. One German soldier wrote home to his father on 4 August 1941 that:

The pitiful hordes on the other side are nothing but felons who are driven by alcohol and the [commissars'] threat of pistols at their heads ... They are nothing but a bunch of assholes! ... Having encountered these Bolshevik hordes and having seen how they live has made a lasting impression on me. Everyone, even the last doubter, knows today that the battle against these sub-humans, who've been whipped into a frenzy by the Jews, was not only necessary but came in the nick of time. Our Führer has saved Europe from certain chaos.

The order was in line with the interests of the Wehrmacht command, which was eager to secure logistical facilities and routes behind the front line for the divisions on the Eastern Front. In October 1941, the commander of the 12th Infantry Division sent out a directive saying "the carrying of information is mostly done by youngsters in the ages of 11–14" and that "as the Russian is more afraid of the truncheon than of weapons, flogging is the most advisable measure for interrogation". The Nazis at the beginning of the war banned sexual relations between Germans and foreign slave workers. In accordance to these new racial laws issued by the Nazis; in November 1941, the commander of the 18th Panzer Division warned his soldiers not to have sex with "sub-human" Russian women, and ordered that any Russian women found having sex with a German soldier was to be handed over to the SS to be executed at once.

A decree ordered on 20 February 1942 declared that sexual intercourse between a German woman and a Russian worker or prisoner of war would result in the latter being punished by the death penalty. During the war, hundreds of Polish and Russian men were found guilty of "race defilement" for their relations with German women and were executed.

The Night and Fog Decree, issued by Hitler in 1941 and disseminated along with a directive from Keitel, was operated within the conquered territories in the West (Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands). The decree allowed those "endangering

German security" to be seized and made to disappear without trace. Keitel's directive stated that "efficient intimidation can only be achieved either by capital punishment or by measures by which the relatives of the criminal and the population do not know his fate." [Source: https://wiki2.org/en/War_crimes_of_the_Wehrmacht August 2021 ++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

John Jerstad | WWII



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

MEDAL OF HONOR

To

Army Maj. John Louis Jerstad

Ranks and organizations: U.S. Army Air Corps Major, 201st Provisional Combat Wing,
9th Air Force

Places and dates: Ploesti, Rumania, August 1, 1943

Entered service: July 1941

Born: Feb. 12, 1918, in Racine, Wisconsin



Army Maj. John Jerstad spent nearly a year flying over Europe during World War II. By the summer of 1943, he'd completed all of his required missions, but he decided to volunteer for one more. He never returned from that mission, but his bravery during its execution earned him the Medal of Honor.

Jerstad was born Feb. 12, 1918, in Racine, Wisconsin, to Arthur and Alice Jerstad. He was active in the Boy Scouts when he was young and had a sister named Mary. After high school, Jerstad went to Northwestern University. During his years of study, he also ran a summer camp for kids in his hometown, according to the Racine Journal Times. His sister told the newspaper in 2008 that Jerstad had taught school in Missouri for a year before enlisting in the Army as an aviation cadet in July 1941. After training in California and Arizona, Jerstad was commissioned as a pilot on Feb. 6, 1942, and began his flying career with the 98th and 93rd Bomb Groups at Barksdale Air Field near Shreveport, Louisiana. In October 1942, Jerstad was deployed with the 93rd to Europe, where he flew B-24 Liberators with the 328th Bomb Squadron. He took part in more than two dozen missions over the next few months and was promoted to major in April 1943.

A month later, he was reassigned to the headquarters of the 2nd Bomb Wing as a wing operations officer. He was involved in planning Operation Tidal Wave, a daring raid over Ploesti, Romania, to take out oil refineries and installations that supplied about two-thirds of Germany's petroleum production at that stage of the war. Jerstad wasn't required to fly this mission because he was no longer directly connected to the 93rd Bomb Group that would carry it out, but he volunteered for it. On Aug. 1, 1943, the 25-year-old Jerstad served as co-pilot of the lead aircraft, called Hell's Wench, for the low-level raid. More than 175 bombers took off on the more than 1,000-mile journey from Benghazi, Libya. According to the National Museum of the Air Force, clouds caused the formation to break into two groups, and a wrong turn also caused confusion. The bombers arrived near the target site disorganized and without the element of surprise. The area ended up being heavily defended, and they immediately faced heavy anti-aircraft guns.

The bombers needed two pilots each to control the planes since the B-24s were hard to manage at low altitudes. That day, Jerstad was flying with Lt. Col. Addison Baker, who was the squadron's commander. Three miles from the target, Jerstad and Baker's bomber was hit and caught fire. The pair knew they were flying over a field where they could force a landing, but they wouldn't complete their mission if they did. Instead, they kept flying to the target and successfully released their bombs. By then, the fire that continued to burn in their plane became overwhelming, and they crashed into the target. However, according to the National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force, prior to the crash, both pilots tried to climb out of their dive in a vain attempt to give other crew members a chance to bail out. Unfortunately, no one survived.

The raid destroyed 42 percent of the refining facility, striking a heavy blow to the Germans for several weeks. However, it took a heavy toll on the Allies, too. Fifty-four bombers were lost, and 532 of the 1,726 personnel involved had died, were missing or were taken prisoner. Jerstad's

bravery during the raid was quickly honored. On Nov. 21, 1943, Gen. Uzal Ent, the leader of the Ploesti mission, gave Jerstad's Medal of Honor to his parents in a ceremony at Holy Communion Church in Racine. Baker and three other men — Lt. Lloyd Hughes, Col. Leon Johnson and Col. John Kane — also received the nation's highest honor for the mission.

Jerstad was listed as missing in action for a long time. According to the Racine Journal Times, the Army called his parents seven years after his death to say they had finally found his remains. The fallen pilot was buried at the Ardennes American Cemetery in Belgium alongside more than 5,100 other fallen Americans from World War II. In Jerstad's hometown, his legacy lives on. A duplicate of his Medal of Honor is on display at the Racine Veterans Legacy Museum. An elementary school was also named for Jerstad and Marine Corps Pfc. Harold Agerholm, another local World War II Medal of Honor recipient. Jerstad Avenue on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska is also named in his honor. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | August 2, 2021 ++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

Claud A. Jones | WWI & II



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

MEDAL OF HONOR

To

Rear Adm. Claud A. Jones

Ranks and organizations: USN Lt. U.S.S. Memphis

Places and dates: Off Santo Domingo City, Santo Domingo, August 29, 1916

Entered service: 1907

Born: Oct. 7, 1885 in Fire Creek, West Virginia

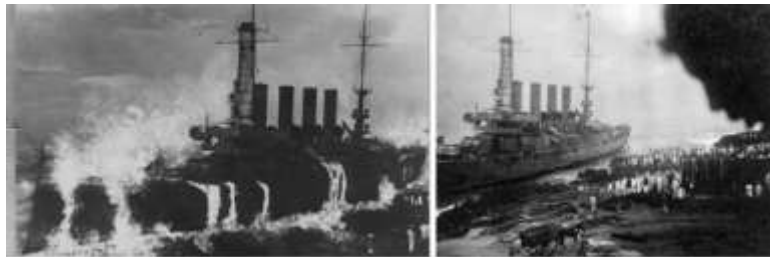


Most of the more than 3,500 men who received the Medal of Honor earned it for actions taken during a conflict. Navy Rear Adm. Claud A. Jones, however, is one of the few who received it for his heroics during a mysterious natural disaster. Jones was born on Oct. 7, 1885, in an area once called Fire Creek, West Virginia. He had a sister named Ida and attended school in Fayetteville and Charleston, both in West Virginia. After high school, Jones earned an appointment to the Naval Academy, graduating in 1906. He received his commission as an ensign two years later after serving on the battleships *Indiana* and *New Jersey*.

From 1909 to 1915, he was assigned to several different ships; he also received post-graduate education at the Naval Academy and at Harvard University, where he earned a Master of Science degree. By late 1915, Jones was a lieutenant and senior engineering officer on the armored cruiser *Tennessee*, which was renamed the *USS Memphis* in May 1916. The *Memphis* spent that summer at anchor not far off the coast of Santo Domingo City, Santo Domingo, now called the Dominican Republic. If dangerous weather approached, its crew was prepared to get underway quickly to move to deeper waters. But on Aug. 29, there simply wasn't enough time. At about 3:45 p.m., the ship's commanding officer thought the swell was increasing, according to an account from Navy Lt. Cmdr. Thomas Withers Jr., who was on the ship at the time. So, the 31-year-old Jones and his fellow sailors in the engine room began readying the ship's boilers and engines to get underway.

But before the engines had time to get the ship moving further out to sea, enormous waves — unaccompanied by wind — began smashing into the ship without warning. "Wave followed wave at intervals of perhaps 30-40 seconds," Withers recounted in a journal. "These waves were so large and their faces became so steep that they simply flowed over the ship." The waves, which reportedly reached up to 75 feet high, began to drag the ship toward the beach. Quickly, anything below deck became a death trap. In the engine room, boilers and steam pipes burst open around Jones, scalding him in steam. Thousands of tons of water came down on him as he remained in the room in near darkness. Jones refused to leave his post because he thought he'd heard the engines turning, even though Withers' later said what he'd heard was "the engines breaking up under the pounding they were getting from the bottom of the ship."

When the boilers exploded, Jones and two other men rushed into the rooms where the boilers were kept, dragging and carrying the men trapped there into rooms where the air was breathable. Over the next several hours, lifelines to shore were painstakingly established, and they were able to get many of the men to the beachhead safely. However, 43 men lost their lives during the crisis, and many more were seriously injured, including Jones. When he finally made it to the deck of the ship, Jones requested that those who were injured get to shore before him. His bravery and selflessness inspired his men, who refused to go unless he went, too.



The ship didn't appear to be damaged above the waterline, but below deck was a different story. The hull was crushed by rocks and coral, and the lower decks were flooded, leaving the ship stranded in shallow water. That's where the wreck remained until 1937, when ship-breaking capabilities became available to salvage it. An investigation later revealed that a tropical disturbance had passed south of the area the night before, but it didn't cause any other markers of severe weather except the heavy swells that caused the tragedy. Jones eventually recovered from his injuries. Soon afterward, he married Margaret Cox. They had a son named Frank and a daughter named Peggy.

Jones remained in the Navy, serving ashore in industrial positions through the end of World War I. He continued to work his way up the ranks, mostly serving in engineering billets. By the early 1930s, he had completed a few Navy Department tours with the Bureau of Engineering, served in London as an assistant naval attaché, and was the senior engineering officer with the battle fleet. It took years for Jones to be recognized for his heroics during the Memphis wreck. On Aug. 24, 1932, the now-commander received the Medal of Honor from President Herbert Hoover during a White House ceremony. Two of his shipmates also received the high honor: Machinist Charles H. Willey, as well as Chief Machinist's Mate George William Rud, who died during the incident.

By the early 1940s, Jones was based in Washington, D.C., and had attained the rank of rear admiral when World War II started. Throughout most of the war, he served as an assistant chief for the Navy's Bureau of Ships and earned the Legion of Merit for his work during that time. One of Jones' last roles in the Navy was as director of the Naval Experiment Station in Annapolis, Maryland, a position he held until the end of 1945. He retired in June of 1946. Unfortunately, on Aug. 8, 1948, Jones died at his home in Charleston, West Virginia, after suffering a stroke. He was 62. Jones was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

His legacy lives on. Jones' son, Frank, followed in his father's footsteps by also becoming a rear admiral in the Navy and commanding the Naval Ship Engineering Center in the 1970s. The escort ship USS Claud Jones, which was in service between 1959 and 1974, was named for his father. And, since 1987, the Claud A. Jones Award has been awarded to a fleet or field engineer who's made significant contributions to improving operational engineering or material readiness. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | August 9, 2021 ++]

WWII Bomber Nose Art **[84] Back Seat Betty**



Every Picture Tells a Story **USS Intrepid Burial at Sea**



This shot of a burial at sea on the USS Intrepid was taken after a kamikaze attack in November 1944, just over a year after it went to sea. While in the Philippines, the Intrepid was embroiled in brutal warfare with Japanese fighter pilots who did their best to crash in the middle of the ship's flight deck whenever they were hit. Across the Intrepid men fought fires, tried to get rid of smoke, and they still had fighter pilots to worry about. The crew managed to save the ship but the damage was terrible. There were two gaping holes in the flight deck leading down into a burnt out hangar. Two of three aircraft elevators were out of operation, twenty-two planes were destroyed, and the ship was out of commission for the foreseeable future. On top of it all, many men lost their lives in an attack and were buried deep in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Military History Anniversaries

16 thru 31 OCT

Significant events in U. S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 OCT**". [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | October 2021 ++]

*** Health Care ***



VA Manila OPC

Announcements & Reminders 8 OCT 2021

UPDATES ON VA MANILA OPERATIONS – OCTOBER 2021

VA Manila continues to press forward with expanding our face-to-face appointment availability at the Clinic. With this, we continue to see an increasing number of Veterans scheduled for and coming to in-person appointments, and I must admit, it's great to see so many familiar faces again after the long absence due to the pandemic. We had a nice crowd in our lobby today, and if this keeps up, I will plan to resume my Friday Town Halls with Veterans soon.

I am also happy to report that we have placed an order for delivery of additional COVID-19 Pfizer vaccines, and are anticipating delivery over the next few weeks. This supply of vaccine will be targeted to Veterans who received their Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines at the Clinic during April/May 2021. We are planning to administer booster doses for eligible Veterans starting in November. Only those Veterans who received both doses of their Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at VA Manila will be contacted for booster doses. VA is following CDC guidelines with administering booster doses. Please note, at this time, CDC has only authorized booster doses for individuals who received the 2-dose Pfizer vaccine more than 6 months ago. Booster doses for recipients of the Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, or who were locally vaccinated in the Philippines with Sinovac, Astra-Zeneca, or Gameyla have not yet been approved by the US CDC or FDA to receive booster doses at this time. We are closely following approvals and guidance as it is made available to healthcare providers, and we will continue to keep the Veteran community apprised. Veterans with questions about COVID-19 vaccines can continue to email us at: ManilaCOVIDVaccine@va.gov.

I wanted to take a moment also to remind all Veterans that VA Manila is not a COVID-19 treatment facility. We do not offer COVID-19 testing capabilities and have very limited capabilities to provide urgent medical care. We have been strictly enforcing health and screening protocols for the safety of our staff and visitors to the Clinic. If you are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms (including fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, loss of taste/smell, body/headache, and/or nausea/vomiting), please do not come to the VA Manila Clinic. Also, if you have had close contact with a known or suspected individual with COVID-19, please follow Philippine guidelines and isolate yourself. In the event you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or are a close contact, VA Manila can try to reschedule your appointment to one of our virtual care options (such as telephone or Virtual Video Connect – VVC), or we can reschedule your appointment to a later date.

We are redoubling our screening efforts for all Veterans and visitors who are coming to the Clinic. I know many of us have become fatigued from the constant temperature checks and health status questions when going anywhere in public in the Philippines, but I would please ask for your help ensure the continued health and safety of our staff and visitors to the Clinic. We are counting on you to please do your part to help keep our frontline workers and your fellow Veterans healthy.

ACCESSING YOUR OWN MEDICAL RECORDS VIA MY HEALTHEVET

At https://connectedcare.va.gov/sites/default/files/MHV_Trifold-Brochure.pdf an online informational brochure on MHV is available.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Veterans have reported it can be difficult to get copies of their medical records from the Outpatient Clinic. Our Release of Information department has been working diligently to turn around requests for medical records as quickly as possible. For many Veterans, accessing their health records online is a faster and more secure method, and can provide all your needed information with just a few clicks of a mouse or taps of your finger on your smartphone.

MANAGE YOUR HEALTH RECORDS

Forgot the name of a prescription medicine? Can't remember the date of a surgery? Use My HealtheVet to access your VA medical records and organize your personal health information. Members registered in My HealtheVet can manage their health by using My HealtheVet's Blue Button feature to customize a report or access their VA Health Summary. The VA Blue Button feature helps you better manage your health care needs and communicate with your health care team. With the VA Blue Button feature, you can:

- C
customize and download a report (as a PDF or text file) to share with your VA and non-VA providers
- P
print a report or summary to take a copy to your next appointment
- S
send an electronic version of your self-entered information in Secure Message to your VA health care team
- B
build your Personal Health Record (PHR) by self-entering your personal information or data that you have tracked

Start building your PHR by self-entering your personal information, such as your health history, emergency contacts and medications. You can monitor your vital signs and use the

journals to track your diet and physical activity. Even if you are not a Veteran, you can take advantage of this convenient way to organize your information.

If you are a Veteran who receives care from VA, you can access your VA medical records and create a customized report that can also include your self-entered data. Many Veterans can also include a copy of their military service information from the Department of Defense (DoD). Several smartphone apps are also available through a variety of non-VA sources. While VA does not endorse specific apps, there are now creative, secure and easy-to-use ways of viewing Blue Button data. Search for Blue Button in your smartphone apps library to learn more.

The VA Health Summary:

- I
s a Continuity of Care Document (CCD) that contains specific information?
- P
rovides a summary of your health information that can be used to review your medical record and to share essential information with your health care providers
- A
llows health information that is in one health care system to be electronically exchanged with another health care system that is providing care

You can get your VA Health Summary information in two file formats: An easy to read and print PDF and an XML format that can be read by computer systems. To use the VA Blue Button feature and access the VA Health Summary, you must be registered on My HealtheVet as a VA Patient and have a Premium account. A Premium account can be obtained by a My HealtheVet member who has an Advanced account. Learn more about upgrading your My HealtheVet account through [Upgrading to a Premium My HealtheVet Account at https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/web/myhealthevet/upgrading-your-my-healthevet-account-through-in-person-or-online-authentication](https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/web/myhealthevet/upgrading-your-my-healthevet-account-through-in-person-or-online-authentication). If you do not have a My HealtheVet account, take time and register today.

Look for the VA Blue Button icon on the My HealtheVet home page after you log in to customize a report or health summary.

OTHER VA MANILA OUTPATIENT CLINIC UPDATES

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

- U
S Columbus Day Monday, October 11, 2021
- P
H All Saints Day Monday, November 1, 2021

- H All Souls Day Tuesday, November 2, 2021 P
- S Veterans Day Thursday, November 11, 2021 U
- S Thanksgiving Day Thursday, November 25, 2021 U

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

2. Virtual Veterans Day Event Planned For 11/11/2021

VA Manila is working with our colleagues at the US Embassy to finalize plans for our annual Veterans Day Commemoration to honor the service of all Veterans. While COVID-19 will again keep us from gathering, this virtual program will be available through a variety of social media accounts and streaming services. We will share the final details of the event in the next few weeks. However, you may want to consider being connected with the US Embassy on social media now to stay up-to-date on information for American Citizens in the Philippines. Here are a few recommended adds/follows:

- USEmbassyPH US Embassy in the Philippines (Twitter) @
- USAmbPH Charge d’Affaires, a.i. Heather Variava (Twitter) @
- SEmbassyPH US Embassy in the Philippines (Facebook) U

3. Foreign Medical Program Updates

VA’s Foreign Medical Program has been making progress at improving the timeliness of claims processing. As of today, FMP is processing claims received on July 15, 2021, and opening mail received on October 4, 2021. Veterans with questions about their claims’ status are welcomed to contact FMP directly: VHA Office of Community Care, Foreign Medical Program (FMP), PO Box 469061 Denver, CO 80246-9061 USA Toll-free phone: +1 (877) 345-8179 Fax: +1 (303) 331-7803 Email: Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS) Email: hac.fmp@va.gov

Veterans in the Philippines can also contact VA Manila’s local telephone numbers and transfer to FMP phone numbers in the United States without international long-distance charges. VA Manila Main Telephone Number: +63 (02) 8550-3888b or VA Manila Toll Free Number: #MyVA (#6982) – any mobile in the PH. FMP can be reached by selecting option 4. Their hours

of operation in Denver, Colorado when converted to Philippine Standard Time are 8:05 pm to 6:45AM Monday evening to Saturday Morning.

4. **Planning To Travel To the United States?** -- Veterans planning to travel to the United States and want to continue medical treatment should call the clinic's traveling coordinator +63-02-8550-3888, and press option 2. VA Manila has a traveling Veteran coordinator, and we can facilitate your care with her counterpart at the VA Medical Center of your choice in the United States. Your VA Manila provider will recommend coordination when needed care with an alternate VA facility near you is required. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks lead time to ensure appointments are prearranged upon your arrival.

5. **Veterans Crisis Line** -- The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified and caring Department of Veteran Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat or text. Veterans and their loved ones can call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1. To learn more about the Veterans Crisis Line or to chat online, go to <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/> and click on the appropriate link.

REMINDERS ABOUT CLINIC POLICIES / PROCEDURES

1. **NO VALID GOVERNMENT ID/NO ENTRY/NO EXCEPTIONS:**

The U.S. Embassy Regional Security Office no longer permit employees, Veterans, attendants, and family members to enter a U.S. Embassy facility to include the VA Manila Regional Office and Outpatient Clinic without a valid government picture ID. Family members and attendants over the age of 14 will also need to provide a valid government ID.

2. **COMPUTER LAPTOPS PROHIBITED:**

The U.S. Embassy including VA Manila no longer permit Veterans, attendants and family members to enter a U.S. Embassy facility with a computer laptop. Do not bring any large electronic device as the U.S. Embassy guards nor VA staff are permitted to accept or store the device.

3. **OTHER PROHIBITED ITEMS:**

Visitors, attendants and family members are prohibited from bringing into a U.S. Embassy facility including VA Manila weapons of any kind to include pocket knives, cameras, recording devices, and large electronic devices. Veterans, attendants, family members and visitors are prohibited from taking photos inside the facility and are prohibited from leaving their personal belongings in the reception lobby.

4. **LIMITING COMPANIONS:**

VA Manila continues to request that Veterans with appointments only bring companions / spouses to the Clinic when it is necessary, and that this is limited to one companion per Veteran. As our Clinic sees more Veterans in person, we are finding some extremely busy times when our

lobby seating area may be at capacity. To follow physical distancing recommendations from the US CDC, we have reduced our seating in the lobby by close to 40%. We greatly appreciate your cooperation.

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FLU Prevention

Update 09: High Dose Vaccine for People 65 Years and Older

People 65 years and older are at higher risk of developing serious flu complications compared with young, healthy adults. This increased risk is due in part to changes in immune defenses with increasing age. While flu seasons vary in severity, during most seasons, people 65 years and older bear the greatest burden of severe flu disease. In recent years, for example, it's estimated that between 70 percent and 85 percent of seasonal flu-related deaths have occurred in people 65 years and older, and between 50 percent and 70 percent of seasonal flu-related hospitalizations have occurred among people in this age group.

Flu symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than in adults. People may be infected with flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

The best way to protect against flu and its potentially serious complications is with a flu vaccine. CDC recommends that almost everyone 6 months and older get a seasonal flu vaccine each year, ideally by the end of October. However, as long as flu viruses are circulating, vaccination should continue throughout flu season, even into January or later. Flu vaccination is especially important for people 65 years and older because they are at higher risk of developing serious flu complications. Flu vaccines are updated each season to keep up with changing viruses. Also, immunity wanes over a year so annual vaccination is needed to ensure the best possible protection against flu. Because immunity may decrease more quickly in older people, it is especially important that this group is not vaccinated too early (in July or August). September and October are generally good times to be vaccinated for people 65 years and older.

A flu vaccine protects against the flu viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season. Flu vaccines for 2021-2022 have been updated from last season's vaccine to better match circulating viruses. Immunity from vaccination fully sets in after about two weeks. Because of age-related changes in their immune systems, people 65 years and older may not respond as well to vaccination as younger people. Although immune responses may be lower in older people, studies external icon have consistently found that flu vaccine has been effective in reducing the risk of medical visits and hospitalizations associated with flu.

Types of Flu Shots for People 65 and Older

People 65 years and older should get a flu shot, not a nasal spray vaccine. They can get any flu vaccine approved for use in their age group with no preference for any one vaccine over another. There are regular flu shots that are approved for use in people 65 years and older and there also are two vaccines designed specifically for this age group:

- ***High Dose Flu Vaccine*** -- The high dose vaccine (brand name Fluzone High-Dose) contains four times the amount of antigen (the inactivated virus that promotes a protective immune response) as a regular flu shot. It is associated with a stronger immune response following vaccination (higher antibody production). Results from a clinical trial of more than 30,000 participants showed that adults 65 years and older who received the high dose vaccine had 24% fewer influenza illnesses as compared with those who received the standard dose flu vaccine. The high dose vaccine has been approved for use in people 65 years and older in the United States since 2009. Learn more about high dose flu vaccine at https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/qa_fluzone.htm.
- ***Adjuvanted Flu Vaccine*** -- The adjuvanted flu vaccine (brand name Fluvad Quadrivalent) is made with MF59 adjuvant, an additive that helps create a stronger immune response.. In a recent review of multiple vaccine trials, older adults who received a MF59-adjuvanted vaccine had a significantly higher immune response than those who received a standard flu vaccine. The adjuvanted vaccine was available for the first time in the United States during the 2016-2017 flu season. Learn more about adjuvanted flu vaccine at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/adjuvant.htm>.

The high dose and adjuvanted flu vaccines may result in more of the temporary, mild side effects that can occur with standard-dose seasonal flu shots. Side effects can include pain, redness or swelling at the injection site, headache, muscle ache and malaise, and typically resolve with 1 to 3 days. The weakened immune system in older adults can also mean that this group doesn't respond as well to flu vaccination. Given the higher risk of severe flu illness and lower protective immune response after vaccination among older adults, substantial research and development have led to the production of new flu vaccines, including recombinant vaccines, intended to provide better immunity in this age group.

People who are 65 years and older also should be up to date with pneumococcal vaccination to protect against pneumococcal disease, such as pneumonia, meningitis, and bloodstream infections. Talk to your health care provider to find out which pneumococcal vaccines are recommended for you. Pneumococcal pneumonia is an example of a serious flu-related complication that can cause death. You can get the pneumococcal vaccine your provider recommends when you get a flu vaccine. [Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/65over.htm> | October 2021 ++]

FEDVIP

Update 04: 2022 Price Schedule Released



The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) announced and posted the 2022 Federal Employee Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) plans and premiums 29 SEP. OPM manages the health, dental and vision insurance programs for federal civilian employees. Military retirees, and their beneficiaries, enrolled in TRICARE have been eligible to utilize FEDVIP programs since 2019.

The overall average dental premium will increase by 0.81% and vision will increase by 0.95%. FEDVIP features 23 dental plan options and 10 vision plan options. Plan premium rates are locality based. You can find your region and plan premiums by downloading the Microsoft Excel files at <https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/dental-vision/plan-information/plan-premiums>. OPM has promised that the Benefeds Comparison Tool will have 2022 pricing by the start of the FEDVIP open season on Nov. 8, 2021. The 2022 TRICARE and FEDVIP open season will conclude at midnight on Dec 13, 2021.

It is strongly recommended FEDVIP users compare next year's pricing to this year's premium to ensure they are satisfied with their dental and/or vision plan. If you take no action during the open season, you will be automatically "rolled over" to the same plan with new pricing on Jan. 1, 2022. MOAA financial and benefits educators will conduct an open season webinar next month, in time to help inform your choice. You can register for the 2 NOV event at <https://www.moaa.org/content/events/healthcare-and-benefits/tricare,-medicare,-and-fedvip-open-season-are-you-satisfied-with-your-current-plans>. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Paul Frost | October 5, 2021 ++]

Heart Disease

Update 08: Daily Aspirin Use New Guidelines



After years of recommending that middle-aged and older Americans consider taking low-dose aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke, an influential medical task force is planning to overhaul its guidelines, based on new studies that show that the risks may greatly reduce or cancel out the benefits. "Our message . . . is if you don't have a history of heart attack and stroke, you shouldn't be starting on aspirin just because you reach a certain age," said Chien-Wen Tseng, a member of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), an independent panel composed of experts in disease prevention and evidence-based medicine whose recommendations can influence medical practices and insurance coverage related to preventive measures.

The change in recommendations could potentially affect millions of people nationwide. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, killing roughly 659,000 people each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Separately, strokes rank fifth among other causes of death in the U.S., with about 150,000 fatalities yearly. "Every year, an estimated 1.2 million people experience a first heart attack or stroke, so we're talking about something pretty serious," Tseng said.

According to the task force's draft recommendation, a review of the latest scientific evidence found that starting to regularly take low-dose aspirin - 81 milligrams to 100 milligrams - to prevent a first heart attack or stroke may have only a "small net benefit" for people ages 40 to 59 who are at risk for cardiovascular disease. The task force emphasized that patients should make decisions about taking aspirin only in consultation with their health-care provider. Aspirin is a blood thinner and can help head off heart attacks and strokes by preventing clots from forming in the blood vessels that lead to the heart or brain.

But taking aspirin also can cause major bleeding that can be fatal, especially in older people, said Tseng, a professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University Of Hawai'i John A. Burns School Of Medicine. That's why, in another noteworthy change, the task force is now saying adults 60 or older shouldn't start taking aspirin daily to lower the chances of a first heart attack or stroke, concluding that there is "no net benefit" in doing so. "At that point, the higher risk of bleeding with age actually cancels out the potential benefit of aspirin," Tseng said. The draft recommendations do not apply to people who have had a heart attack or stroke in the past and are now taking daily aspirin. And Tseng said people without a history of heart attack or stroke who are already taking preventive doses should not stop without consulting with their doctor.

One of the main goals of the task force's proposed recommendations, Tseng said, is "to get people to talk with their clinicians instead of just buying a bottle off the shelf and saying, 'I should be on aspirin.'" The draft recommendation statement, which is open for public comment until 8 NOV, marks a significant change from the last update to the guidelines in 2016, which also included recommendations for using low-dose aspirin to prevent colorectal cancer. (Task force recommendations are typically revisited every five years.)

The panel previously recommended starting low-dose aspirin for the primary prevention of cardiovascular disease and colorectal cancer in people ages 50 to 59 who had an elevated chance of heart attack and stroke, as long as they weren't at increased risk of bleeding. For older people, the task force said, the decision to start an aspirin regimen "should be an individual one." But after reviewing data from recent randomized, controlled trials as well as conducting simulation modeling, Tseng said the task force determined that while there is still a benefit to taking aspirin if you are at increased risk for heart attack and stroke, the benefit "is smaller than what we've seen before."

"Before, when the benefit was greater, we could recommend it for people just within their age group who have high risk," she said. "But now, because the benefit is smaller, it's become even more clear that it's got to be matched to the right person, and somebody's personal values and preferences also become much more important." The task force also reviewed data on low-dose aspirin and colorectal cancer, but found that the latest evidence was unclear about whether the medication can have preventive benefits, and called for more research. In the meantime, the panel encourages people concerned about their colorectal cancer risk to talk with their doctors about aspirin and being screened.

If finalized, the draft recommendations on cardiovascular disease would bring the USPSTF guidelines in line with those of the American College of Cardiology (ACC) and the American Heart Association (AHA), which were updated in 2019. The ACC/AHA guidelines say that low-dose aspirin "might be considered" for primary prevention in "select" adults between the ages of 40 and 70 who aren't at increased risk of bleeding. The guidelines also recommend against regular aspirin use in people who are older than 70.

The widely established practice of using aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke stemmed from trials first done in the 1980s and 1990s, president of the American Heart Association Lloyd-Jones said. "That was a time when we weren't really focused on or doing a particularly good job of controlling things like blood pressure and cholesterol, so aspirin had room to add value in preventing heart attacks and strokes." But in more recent years, as the ability to reduce or manage risk factors has improved along with a greater emphasis placed on healthier living, newer studies have shown that the added value of aspirin as a primary prevention method appears to be "at best marginal and sometimes nonexistent," Lloyd-Jones said. "We just don't really need aspirin so much anymore."

Adopting a more conservative approach to using aspirin also would reinforce the message that taking the over-the-counter medicine is not without risk, experts said. Amit Khera director of the Preventive Cardiology Program at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center said, "Many people think of aspirin almost like a vitamin and that it's benign, but that's not true. When we talk about major bleeding, we're talking about bleeding in the brain, bleeding that needs transfusions, so not like nosebleed-type stuff."

Experts also want the public to remember that taking aspirin is just one way to help prevent a heart attack or stroke. Other proven strategies for lowering risk include common lifestyle adjustments, such as quitting smoking, maintaining a healthy diet and getting at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise regularly. "All those things add value together . . . and they work together synergistically," Lloyd-Jones said. "Those are really the secrets here, and you won't need aspirin if you're doing those other things successfully." [Source: The Washington Post | Allyson Chiu | October 13, 2021 ++]

Covid-19 Treatment

Update 12: Merck Says Research Shows Its Molnupiravir Pill Works against Variants

Laboratory studies show that Merck & Co's experimental oral COVID-19 antiviral drug, molnupiravir, is likely to be effective against known variants of the coronavirus, including the dominant, highly transmissible Delta, the company said on 29 SEP. Since molnupiravir does not target the spike protein of the virus - the target of all current COVID-19 vaccines - which defines the differences between the variants, the drug should be equally effective as the virus continues to evolve, said Jay Grobler, head of infectious disease and vaccines at Merck.



Molnupiravir instead targets the viral polymerase, an enzyme needed for the virus to make copies of itself. It is designed to work by introducing errors into the genetic code of the virus. Data shows that the drug is most effective when given early in the course of infection, Merck said. The U.S. drugmaker tested its antiviral against nasal swab samples taken from participants in early trials of the drug. Delta was not in wide circulation at the time of those trials, but molnupiravir was tested against lab samples of the variant behind the latest surge in COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths.

Merck said earlier this year that a small, mid-stage trial found that after five days of molnupiravir treatment, none of the patients taking various doses of the drug tested positive for infectious virus, while 24% of placebo patients did have detectable levels. Merck is currently conducting two Phase III trials of the antiviral it is developing with Ridgeback Biotherapeutics - one for treatment of COVID-19 and another as a preventive. Merck anticipates that the Phase III treatment study will finish in early November, Grobler said. The trial enrolled nonhospitalized COVID-19 patients who have had symptoms for no more than five days and are at risk for severe disease.

The latest analysis was presented during IDWeek, the annual meeting of infectious disease organizations, including the Infectious Diseases Society of America. Robert Davis, president and CEO of Merck, said in a news release the company will do "everything we can" to bring the drug to patients as quickly as possible. Merck said it expects to produce 10 million courses of treatment of molnupiravir by the end of this year.

"With the virus continuing to circulate widely, and because therapeutic options currently available are infused and/or require access to a healthcare facility, antiviral treatments that can be taken at home to keep people with COVID-19 out of the hospital are critically needed," Wendy Holman, CEO of Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, said in the news release. The U.S. government signed a deal with Merck in June to purchase 1.7 million courses of molnupiravir for \$1.2 billion if it's authorized by the FDA. [Source: Reuters & Beckers hospital Review | Deena Beasley & Maia Anderson | SEP 29 & OCT 1, 2021 ++]

Covid-19 Misinformation

Update 06: Pfizer Vaccine Does Not Contain Antifreeze Ingredient Ethylene Glycol

In support of a lawsuit brought by a conservative political organization against the Pentagon, an Army officer purported false claims about the COVID-19 vaccine – including that the vaccine has antifreeze in it. America's Frontline Doctors (AFLDS), a group that has spread disinformation about vaccines and the COVID-19 pandemic, is suing the Pentagon to stop its vaccine mandate. Lt. Col. Theresa M. Long, who serves as the brigade surgeon for the Army's 1st Aviation Brigade, falsely wrote in an affidavit last week that the Pfizer vaccine is made of antifreeze. "I cannot discern what form of alchemy Pfizer and the FDA have discovered that would make antifreeze into a healthful cure to the human body," Long wrote.

The vaccines do not contain antifreeze. Long, like many vaccine skeptics and users on social media, claim the vaccines contain polyethylene glycol and that it is an active ingredient in antifreeze. But, Ethylene glycol is actually the active ingredient in antifreeze. Polyethylene glycol is present in the COVID-19 vaccines. The ingredient is found in many commonly used products such as laxatives and pharmaceutical and cosmetic products. The lawsuit attempts to overturn Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's order that active-duty service members are required to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. AFLDS has also pushed ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine as treatments for COVID-19. The Food and Drug Administration has not recommended either drug to treat COVID-19. [Source: The Hill Changing America | Christian Spencer | September 30, 2021 ++]

COVID-19 Analytics

Update 02: Overall Things Are Moving In the Right Direction

Deaths from COVID-19 infections in the United States are dropping after a summer surge of the Delta variant. Axios reported that COVID deaths are down about 13% over 2 weeks, with the virus claiming about 1,800 American lives daily. Infections are also down, to about 102,000 per day, a 22% drop from 2 weeks ago, Axios said. But the virus is still deadliest among older people. The COVID death rate among Americans 75 and up was 2.09 per 100,000 as of Sept. 25, Fox News reported. For people 65 to 74, it was .97 per 100,000, and for people 50 to 64, it was .44 per 100,000. The U.S. has had the most COVID cases and deaths of any nation: 44.1 million and 710,000, respectively. Brazil has had the second-most deaths, with nearly 600,000. Deaths had been rising for the past few weeks even as infections declined. That's to be expected — deaths are the last number to go up when a new wave sets in, and the last to go down when that wave ebbs.

A year ago, when no one was vaccinated and the worst wave of the pandemic was just getting started, experts were sounding the alarm because new cases had crept up above 50,000. To be sitting above 100,000 daily new cases now, even after millions of Americans have been vaccinated or have some level of immunity from a previous infection, is a sign of just how transmissible the Delta variant is and how poorly the U.S. has contained it. And while some vaccinated people do get infected, almost none will die from those infections. But six months after every American adult became eligible for a vaccine, the virus' death toll in the U.S. is still roughly equivalent to a 9/11 every two days. **The bottom line:** The number of Americans contracting and dying from COVID-19 remains quite high, but things are moving in the right direction.

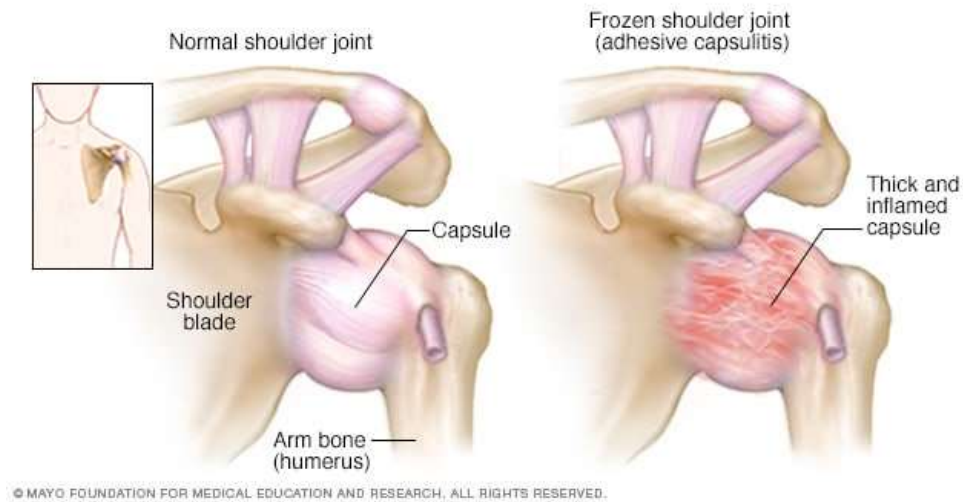
Though the Delta surge appears to be waning, the upcoming flu season poses a new health risk to the U.S., CDC Director Rochelle Walensky says. "Last year, there were very few flu cases, largely because of masking and physical distancing and other prevention measures put in place for the COVID-19 pandemic," she said at a White House news briefing 6 OCT. "With modest flu virus activity since March of 2020, CDC's flu experts are concerned that reduced population-level immunity to the seasonal flu could place us at risk for a potentially severe flu season this year." The flu kills between 12,000 and 52,000 Americans yearly, she said. [Source: WebMD Health News | Ralph Ellis | October 08, 2021 ++]

Frozen Shoulder

Symptoms, Causes, Risk Factors & Prevention

Frozen shoulder, also known as adhesive capsulitis, is a condition characterized by stiffness and pain in your shoulder joint. Signs and symptoms typically begin gradually, worsen over time and then resolve, usually within one to three years. Your risk of developing frozen shoulder increases

if you're recovering from a medical condition or procedure that prevents you from moving your arm — such as a stroke or a mastectomy.



Frozen shoulder occurs when the connective tissue enclosing the joint becomes thickened and tight

Treatment for frozen shoulder involves range-of-motion exercises and, sometimes, corticosteroids and numbing medications injected into the joint capsule. In a small percentage of cases, arthroscopic surgery may be indicated to loosen the joint capsule so that it can move more freely. It's unusual for frozen shoulder to recur in the same shoulder, but some people can develop it in the opposite shoulder.

Symptoms & Causes

Frozen shoulder typically develops slowly. For some people, the pain worsens at night, sometimes disrupting sleep. It normally occurs in three stages. Each stage can last a number of months.

- Freezing stage. Any movement of your shoulder causes pain, and your shoulder's range of motion starts to become limited.
- Frozen stage. Pain may begin to diminish during this stage. However, your shoulder becomes stiffer, and using it becomes more difficult.
- Thawing stage. The range of motion in your shoulder begins to improve.

The bones, ligaments and tendons that make up your shoulder joint are encased in a capsule of connective tissue. Frozen shoulder occurs when this capsule thickens and tightens around the shoulder joint, restricting its movement. Doctors aren't sure why this happens to some people, although it's more likely to occur in people who have diabetes or those who recently had to immobilize their shoulder for a long period, such as after surgery or an arm fracture.

Risk factors & Prevention

Certain factors may increase your risk of developing frozen shoulder.

- Age and sex -- People 40 and older, particularly women, are more likely to have frozen shoulder.
- Immobility or reduced mobility -- People who've had prolonged immobility or reduced mobility of the shoulder are at higher risk of developing frozen shoulder. Immobility may be the result of many factors, including rotator cuff injury, broken arm, stroke, and recovery from surgery
- Systemic diseases -- People who have certain diseases appear more likely to develop frozen shoulder. Diseases that might increase risk include:
 - Diabetes
 - Overactive thyroid (hyperthyroidism)
 - Underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism)
 - Cardiovascular disease
 - Tuberculosis
 - Parkinson's disease

One of the most common causes of frozen shoulder is the immobility that may result during recovery from a shoulder injury, broken arm or a stroke. If you've had an injury that makes it difficult to move your shoulder, talk to your doctor about exercises you can do to maintain the range of motion in your shoulder joint.

[Source: Mayo Clinic | <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-condition> | October 2021 ++]

Medicare Pharmacy/Prescriptions

Update 02: Proposal to Tie VA Prices to Medicare Part D

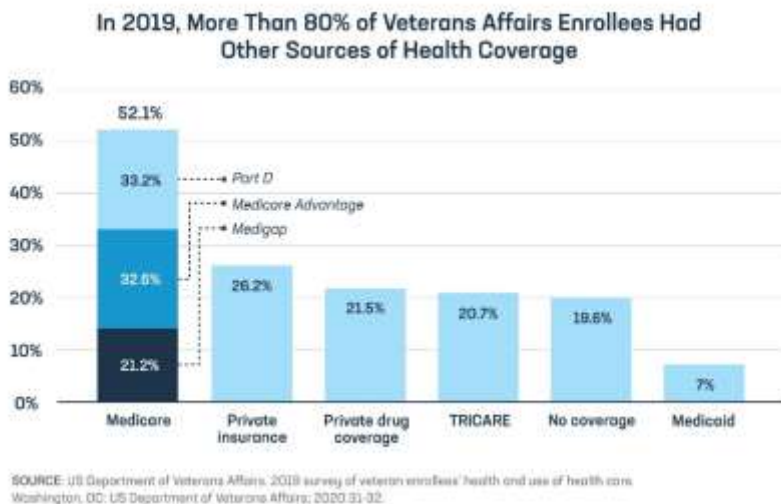
Some members of Congress are considering a government “negotiation” plan that would tie medicine prices in Medicare to those in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This misguided approach is just the latest in a series of government price-setting proposals that threaten patients’ access to medicines and future innovation. Here are five reasons why the VA is a wrong model for Medicare.

1. Unlike Medicare Part D, the VA uses a one-size-fits-all system that restricts access to medicines.

The VA employs a narrow, exclusionary formulary to generate savings, and comparisons of coverage between the VA and Medicare demonstrate that the **VA offers fewer choices**, particularly of the most cutting-edge and innovative medicines. Of the top 200 Part D brand medicines, approximately 74% were covered by Medicare, compared with just 52% that could be covered by the VA formulary. Similarly, the VA National Formulary covers just 40% of first-in-class Part D medicines, compared with more than 62% in Medicare Part D.

According to the GAO, “the VA can steer utilization toward a limited number of drugs within a given therapeutic class. Medicare Part D plans, on the other hand, generally have broad networks of pharmacies and as such may have broader formularies than VA’s.” Similar access restrictions are likely to appear in Medicare if Part D prices reference VA prices.

2. The majority of VA beneficiaries rely on other sources to help supplement their drug coverage, including Medicare Part D.



To gain access to the medicines they need, more than half of all veterans supplement their VA benefits with other sources of health coverage, including Part D. According to a 2019 VA survey, more than 80% of VA enrollees had other health coverage in addition to their VA coverage; among those enrollees, more than half supplement their coverage with Medicare. The VA approach is clearly not sufficient for many veterans. The suggestion of tying these same restrictions to patients with Part D could leave seniors and people with disabilities struggling to get their medicines.

3. The VA relies on quality-adjusted life year (QALY)-based assessments to set prices for medicines.

QALYs involve assigning a value to a person’s life based on their health status. Examples provided by Value Our Health illustrates this: a QALY for a patient with multiple sclerosis is worth half as much as a healthy, young individual, and a person over the age of 70 is worth approximately 30% less simply because of their age. It is widely acknowledged by patients, caregivers and experts alike that QALYs discriminate against the disabled, seniors, the chronically ill and communities of color. Despite this, the VA still uses this metric to determine prices. This is not the way patients should be treated, and it’s not the way medicines should be priced.

4. Imposing the VA system on Medicare is wildly unpopular with seniors.

83% of seniors do not favor making Part D more like the VA system if it means some medicines currently available under Medicare were no longer covered. In fact, this policy proposal would upend a Medicare Part D program that nearly nine of every 10 beneficiaries say they are satisfied with.

5. Comparisons between Medicare Part D and the VA fail to acknowledge inherent structural distinctions between the two programs.

The VA health system is unique, using a closed system of providers and a centralized coverage, drug acquisition and distribution system. Because the VA directly purchases medicines from pharmaceutical manufacturers, its prices do not include retail distribution costs, such as dispensing fees to compensate pharmacists. Moreover, because the VA distributes medicines through their own closed military health care system, financed separately, the VA prices for medicines do not include costs for storage, overhead or dispensing.

Medicare Part D, on the other hand, is administered by nearly 1,000 different health plans, across 34 prescription drug plan regions nationwide, using local retail pharmacies. Medicare beneficiaries can choose among a number of local plans to find one that best meets their health care needs. It is unclear how medicines would be distributed or how retail pharmacies would be compensated in a system where the Secretary of Health and Human Services has to procure medicines directly through the VA procurement process.

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Medicare needs to be modernized to work better for seniors and people with disabilities. However, changes to the program need to be measured and focused to address beneficiary concerns with high out-of-pocket costs. We are committed to working with policymakers to strengthen the program and improve affordability for people in Medicare. There's a better way to lower costs for patients, but arbitrarily tying medicine prices to restrictive government programs like the VA isn't it. Learn more at PhRMA.org/BetterWay (<https://phrma.org/betterway>).

[Source: PhRMA | Nicole Longo (Opinion) | September 22, 2021 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs

Update 75: Democrats Still Unable To Agree On How to Lower Them

Because of unanimous Republican opposition to any current legislation being considered to lower prescription drug prices, all eyes are on the Democrats in both the House and the Senate. In particular, the two Senators receiving the most attention are Joe Manchin (D-WV) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ).

- According to a report in *Politico*, last week Sinema “told the White House that she’s opposed to the drug pricing proposals drafted by House Democrats, which could raise

hundreds of billions of dollars to help finance Biden’s party-line bill. A number of House moderates — most of whom have received substantial donations from the pharmaceutical industry and represent districts where drug companies employ thousands of people — also say they’re concerned about the bill’s impact on the development of new cures and therapies, echoing arguments the industry itself is pushing in ad campaigns.”

- Manchin has expressed support for drug pricing reform, but he has repeatedly said he’ll only accept a price tag of \$1.5 trillion for the bill, or \$2 trillion less than the figure House and Senate Democrats have worked with for months.

Many lawmakers say they’re confident they can still find a middle ground between the legislation favored by progressives that would empower Medicare to bargain directly with drug companies, and the version pushed by House centrists that would negotiate lower prices for a far narrower set of drugs. The members argue a watered-down drug negotiation bill may be the best they can hope for given Democrats’ narrow voting margins and an onslaught of opposition from the pharmaceutical industry.

And with just a few weeks left to come to an agreement, the list of unresolved questions around the bill remains long. How many and what kind of drugs will be subject to negotiation? Will the government use an international or domestic benchmark for those negotiations, and how will they penalize drug companies that refuse to comply? How much can the government claw back from companies that raise their prices faster than inflation? [Source: The Senior Citizens League Weekly Update | October 12, 2021 ++]

Consumer Health

OCT 01 thru 15, 2021

Stem Cell Therapy – This is the use of stem cells to treat or prevent a disease or condition. As of 2016, the only established therapy using stem cells is hematopoietic stem cell transplantation. This usually takes the form of a bone-marrow transplantation, but the cells can also be derived from umbilical cord blood. Research is underway to develop various sources for stem cells as well as to apply stem-cell treatments for neurodegenerative diseases and conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.

Stem-cell therapy has become controversial following developments such as the ability of scientists to isolate and culture embryonic stem cells, to create stem cells using somatic cell nuclear transfer and their use of techniques to create induced pluripotent stem cells. This controversy is often related to abortion politics and to human cloning. Additionally, efforts to market treatments based on transplant of stored umbilical cord blood have been controversial.

Paul Knoepfler, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Cell Biology and Human Anatomy at UC Davis, has summarized reports about the harms from unproven stem-cell treatments. He notes: “Many clinics have said over the years to potential customers that ‘the worst that can happen is that the stem cells won’t work.’ We know this isn’t true and it’s irresponsible.” The reported harms include: (a) complete blindness; (b) infection originating in the injected products or from unsafe injection practices; (c) tumors, lesions, or other growths; (d) paralysis; (e) blood clots in the lungs; (f) organ damage or failure; and (g) unusual immune reactions. Professor Knoepfler cited these reports:

- Harms linked to unapproved stem cell interventions highlight need for greater FDA enforcement. Pew Charitable Trusts Issue Brief, June 1, 2021.
- Marks PW, Hahn S. Identifying the risks of unproven regenerative medicine therapies. JAMA, 324(3):241-242, 2020.
- Bauer G and others. Concise review: a comprehensive analysis of reported adverse events in patients receiving unproven stem cell-based interventions. Stem Cells Translational Medicine, 9:676-685, 2018.
- Kuriyan AE and others. Vision loss after intravitreal injection of autologous “stem cells” for AMD. New England Journal of Medicine, 376:1047-1053, 2017.

Clinics offering unproven stem-cell treatments have proliferated since 2017 when the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave clinics a three-year grace period to show that their treatments were safe and effective before there would be a regulatory crackdown. The grace period was extended six months due to the pandemic and ended in May 2021. Whether the FDA will take effective action remains to be seen. [Source: Consumer Health Digest #21-39 | October 3, 2021 ++]

*** Finances ***



Government 2022 Budget

2021 Funding Levels Extended to 3 DEC

Lawmakers avoided triggering a government shutdown on 30 SEP with an emergency budget extension approved just a few hours before federal funding would have lapsed. The move prevents worker furloughs and program shutdowns at the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs and other government agencies set to begin on 1 OCT, the start of fiscal 2022. Service

members would have been required to keep working in the event of a shutdown, but their paychecks could have been delayed without the funding fix.

Federal officials had spent the last few days preparing workers for the possibility of a shutdown, issuing notices about which offices would close and which ones would stay open under emergency authorization. The budget extension runs through 3 DEC, giving Congress nine more weeks to pass a full budget plan for the military, VA and other departments. It continues spending at fiscal 2021 funding levels for that stretch, meaning that some new programs and initiatives will not be able to start until after a full budget deal is reached.

Defense officials have complained about those kinds of delays in recent years, as continuing budget resolutions to start the new fiscal year have become the norm. For example, the military has planned \$120.6 million in new housing construction projects worldwide. But because those specific plans weren't included in the fiscal 2021 budget, officials can't start most of that work until the fiscal 2022 budget is finalized. Plans for a defense budget of about \$740 billion for fiscal 2022 have advanced in both chambers, but still will take weeks of negotiation to finalize.

Similarly, lawmakers have already offered support for a \$270 billion VA budget bill for next fiscal year but will need to finalize details before the plans can become law. On 30 SEP before his chamber's approval of the budget extension, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) praised the move as a "good outcome" for the country. "With so many things happening here in Washington, the last thing the American people need is for the government to grind to a halt," he said.

The budget extension includes \$6.3 billion in supplemental money to support Afghan evacuees, including covering the costs of housing and security screenings for evacuees at American facilities in the United States and in foreign countries. It also contains another \$565 million for repairs to Navy facilities which were damaged by natural disasters in 2020 and 2021, and \$330 million more Air Force locations with similar repair needs. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | September 30, 2021 ++]

Tricare Pharmacy Copay

Update 21: Costs Increasing 1 JAN 2022



Active-duty military families, retirees and their families and others will pay more for their medicine, starting 1 JAN. After holding the line on pharmacy costs for 2021, Tricare officials are increasing co-payments for 2022, with increases ranging from \$1 to \$8. The increase, however, doesn't affect active-duty service members themselves, who pay nothing for their covered medications through military pharmacies, retail network pharmacies and through the home delivery benefit. The increase also doesn't apply to survivors of active-duty service members, or to medically retired service members and their family members, according to an announcement by Tricare officials.

The military pharmacy is still the lowest cost option for military beneficiaries; as always, there's no cost for covered generic and brand-name drugs at these pharmacies. The increases will apply to all categories of drugs: generic formulary drugs, brand-name formulary drugs and non-formulary drugs, and costs will depend on the type of pharmacy used. Tricare formulary drugs are generic and brand-name prescription drugs that are covered by Tricare. You can search the list of formulary drugs at <https://www.express-scripts.com/frontend/open-enrollment/tricare/fst/#>.

Tricare covers most prescription drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Prescription drugs may be covered under the pharmacy benefit or the medical benefit. The changes in co-pays taking effect Jan. 1:

Tricare Pharmacy Home Delivery (up to 90-day supply)

- Generic formulary drugs co-pays increase from \$10 to \$12
 - Brand-name formulary drugs increase from \$29 to \$34
 - Non-formulary drugs increase from \$60 to \$68
- Tricare retail network pharmacies (up to 30-day supply)
- Generic formulary drugs increase from \$13 to \$14
 - Brand-name formulary drugs increase from \$33 to \$38
 - Non-formulary drugs increase from \$60 to \$68

Non-network pharmacies (up to 30-day supply)

- Generic formulary drugs and brand-name formulary drugs will increase from \$33 to \$38, or the co-pay will be 20 percent of the total cost of the drug, whichever is greater, after meeting the annual deductible.
- Non-formulary drugs will increase from \$60 to \$68, or the co-pay will be 20 percent of the total cost of the drug, whichever is greater, after meeting the annual deductible.

Non-network pharmacy costs stay the same for those who use a Tricare Prime plan, where you pay a 50-percent cost-share after meeting your point-of-service deductible for covered drugs. Some brand-name maintenance drugs — taken for long-term conditions — can only be filled twice at retail network pharmacies. After the second refill, beneficiaries must use the home delivery option or a military pharmacy. If you have other health insurance that includes a pharmacy benefit, you can't use the Tricare pharmacy home delivery option unless your other

health insurance doesn't cover that prescription, or you've reached the dollar limit of your other plan. [Source: MilitarTimes | Karen Jowers| October 1, 2021 ++]

VA Debt

Update 13: Post-COVID Collection Plan

The Department of Veterans Affairs officials announced in a 4 OCT release announced it will resume collecting debts from overpaid veterans, ending the nearly 18-month-long suspension of debt collection put into place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. All debt collection by the VA has been suspended since April 6, 2020, as a result of an executive order by then-President Donald Trump. That suspension was extended by President Joe Biden until Sept. 30, 2021. Veterans also have been exempt from medical-care copayments for medications and services provided by the VA from April 6, 2020, until Sept. 30, 2021, as a result of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

However, the moratorium on debt collection and the exemption of medical-care copayments have expired. This means that any medical debts incurred by veterans before April 6, 2020, will now be subject to collection. Also, any debts for benefits such as compensation, or GI Bill payments, are now subject to collection. VA officials did not say how many veterans are impacted. The VA has begun sending out debt notification letters to affected veterans and will withhold debts from benefit payments beginning Jan. 1, 2022, if veterans do not make payment arrangements before that date, according to the release.

Debt notification letters will include options to request debt relief for those who continue to need financial relief because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Options could include a repayment plan, compromise offer or waiver, according to the VA. Veterans with more questions about medical or pharmacy debts should contact the Health Resource Center at 1-866-400-1238. Those with benefit-related debt can call the Debt Management Center at 1-800-827-0648 or visit <https://www.va.gov/manage-va-debt>. [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | October 4, 2021 ++]

Navy Ship Sales

Aircraft Carriers CVN-79 & CV-69 Sold for One Cent Each



USS John F. Kennedy (CVN-79) & USS Kitty Hawk (CV-69)

The US Navy sold two aircraft carriers to a ship-breaking company for 1 cent each after decades of service. The cut-price fee reflects the fact the company will profit from selling the ship metal for scrap, officials said. USA Today reported Naval Sea Systems Command, a US Navy suborganization, said it had agreed to sell the USS Kitty Hawk and the USS John F. Kennedy to International Shipbreaking Limited, which is based in Brownsville, Texas. Towing and ship-breaking is a costly process, and the Navy has previously paid ISL large sums of money to recycle its ships, the Brownsville Herald reported.

"The contract values reflect that the contracted company will benefit from the subsequent sale of scrap steel, iron, and non-ferrous metal ores," said Alan Baribeau, a spokesman for the Naval Sea Systems Command. Both ships were launched in the 1960s and were capable of carrying dozens of aircraft. The Kitty Hawk was deployed in the Vietnam War, and the John F. Kennedy featured in the Gulf War. The Kitty Hawk was decommissioned in 2009 and the John F. Kennedy in 2017. Both have spent their time since being maintained in naval yards. The ships are due to be towed to Brownsville for scrapping in the coming months, an ISL spokesperson told the Brownsville Herald. [Source: Business Insider | Thomas Colson | October 6, 2021 ++]

College Costs

Update 2: Net Price Calculators Help Gauge Affordability

Fall is the time when many high school seniors narrow their college lists and start applying to colleges. One question that is often front and center on the minds of families is "how much will it cost?" To help answer that question, you can use a net price calculator, which is available on every college website.

How a net price calculator works.

A net price calculator can help families measure a specific college's true cost by providing an estimate of how much grant aid a student might expect based on his or her financial information and academic profile. A college's sticker price minus grant aid equals a student's net price, or out-

of-pocket cost. The numbers quoted by a college net price calculator are not a *guarantee* of grant aid, but the estimates are meant to be close. By completing a net price calculator for several colleges before officially submitting an application, students can get an idea of what their out-of-pocket cost would be at specific schools and rank colleges based on affordability.

What information it asks for.

A net price calculator typically asks for the following information:

- Parent income and assets,
- Student income and assets,
- A student's general academic record, and
- Family size, including number of dependents.

A net price calculator might also ask more detailed questions; for example, a student's class rank and test scores, the amount parents contributed to their employer retirement plans in the last year, current home equity, or how much parents expect to pay in health-care costs in the coming year. Every college has its own net price calculator, so there may be slight variations in the questions that are asked. A net price calculator takes about 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Typing "net price calculator" in the search bar of a college's website should direct you to it.

Results can vary. Keep in mind that colleges have different sticker prices and criteria for determining how much grant aid they offer, so calculator results can vary, even when the same financial information is being entered. For example, after entering identical financial information on three different calculators, families might find that College A has a net price of \$25,000 per year, College B a net price of \$30,000, and College C a net price of \$40,000. Running a net price calculator for colleges that are similar in terms of selectivity and sticker price can help families compare the generosity of colleges in a similar peer group.

Consider filing the FAFSA. The U.S. Department of Education's office of Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) provides more than \$120 billion in financial aid to help pay for college or career school each year. The FAFSA for the 2022-2023 school year opened on October 1, 2021. Families should consider submitting it even if they don't expect their child to qualify for need-based federal aid, because some colleges may require the FAFSA as a prerequisite for college-provided need-based and/or merit-based grants and scholarships.

To file is free. Just go to <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>. It can be completed by the student, his parent, or anyone who wants to help the student prepare it. Many states and colleges set priority deadlines by which you must submit the FAFSA form to be considered for the aid programs they administer. There is also a federal deadline each academic year. Deadlines can be determined on the same website.

[Source: Navy Federal Credit Union | David Hammond | October 2021 ++]

Federal Loan Forgiveness

Troops Benefit From New PSLF Rules

Tens of thousands of troops, veterans and civilian defense workers will see large federal loan debts reduced or erased under changes to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program announced 6 OCT. The move comes amid criticism of the program — designed to provide financial relief to federal workers who make regular payments on their federal loans — for being too cumbersome and unforgiving instead of being a benefit of public service. In response, the Department of Education announced changes to “restore the promise” of the program and “make it easier for members of the military to get credit toward forgiveness while they serve.”

While the loan forgiveness program is not solely focused on service members, they make up a significant portion of program recipients. Officials said at least 17,000 current troops will benefit from the new rules, but the number could be much higher as staff combs through various loan accounts to see how many of the estimated 550,000 borrowers expected to benefit had some military service. Under current rules, loan forgiveness recipients must either work full-time at a government job — federal, state, local and military posts are all included — or a not-for-profit, non-partisan organization such as the Peace Corps. It covers individuals who have direct loans or previously consolidated federal student loans and have been paying down the debt for the last 10 years.

The rationale behind the program is to give those public servants financial relief, rather than force them to leave those public service jobs in an effort to erase their debts. But in the past, rules surrounding those repayments required strict monthly guidelines and only covered certain types of loans. Earlier this week, 60 Minutes profiled multiple service members who paid back tens of thousands of dollars over a decade, only to discover at the end that their loan forgiveness applications had been rejected on technicalities.

Education Department officials 6 OCT announcement is designed to prevent that from happening again. “These changes are important steps toward a better and stronger PSLF program, one that will move away from the current situation in which too few borrowers receive forgiveness, and too many do not receive credit for years of payments they made because of complicated eligibility rules, servicing errors or other technicalities,” they said in a statement. Department leaders also promised to devote extra attention to members of the military.

Starting in 2022, staff will match department data with other federal databases to ensure that all federal workers (including troops) automatically qualify for the debt relief. That means those individuals could see their debts suddenly erased, without any work on their part. “Military service members and other federal employees devote themselves to serving the United States, and we should make it as easy as possible for them to get [financial relief],” the department announcement stated.

The changes also include broadening the types of federal loans previously eligible for forgiveness and relaxing strict monthly repayment rules. Until now, roughly 16,000 individuals have qualified for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program since it was launched in 2007. Education Department officials said about 22,000 individuals are expected to benefit from the changes immediately, erasing about \$1.74 billion in debt. Another 27,000 will need to certify their employment to get immediate relief. The new rules will be in effect through October 2022, under emergency provisions. However, officials are expected to codify many of the changes over the coming year. More information is available on the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program web site <https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | October 6, 2021 ++]

Lottery Winnings

How Taxes on Them Work

Winning the lottery is a fantasy for most people, but that doesn't stop Americans from spending close to \$70 billion a year on tickets and wasting most of it. The biggest haul ever recorded for a Mega Millions jackpot is a whopping \$656 million, which was split by three winners in Illinois, Kansas, and Maryland back in 2012. The largest Powerball jackpot came a year later, when a single Florida winner took home \$590 million.

Federal Government

The IRS considers net lottery winnings ordinary taxable income. So after subtracting the cost of your ticket, you will owe federal income taxes on what remains. How much exactly depends on your tax bracket, which is based on your winnings and other sources of income, so the IRS withholds only 25%. You'll owe the rest when you file your taxes in April.

The Trump Tax Plan dropped the highest tax bracket rate from 39% to 37%, so recent winners (and high earners) have caught a small break. You can find your bracket on the table below.

2018 – 2019 TAX BRACKETS		
Single Filers	Married Filing Jointly	Tax Rate
\$0 – \$9,525	\$0 – \$19,050	10%
\$9,526 – \$38,700	\$19,051 – \$77,400	12%
\$38,701 – \$82,500	\$77,401 – \$165,000	22%
\$82,501 – \$157,500	\$165,001 – \$315,000	24%
\$157,501 – \$200,000	\$315,001 – \$400,000	32%
\$200,001 – \$500,000	\$400,001 – \$600,000	35%
\$500,001+	\$600,001+	37%

On the bright side, if you're in the top bracket, you don't actually pay 37% on all your income. Federal income tax is progressive. As a single filer and after deductions, you pay:

- 10% on the first \$9,700 you earn
- 12% on the next \$29,775
- 22% on the next \$44,725
- 24% on the next \$76,525
- 32% on the next \$43,375
- 35% on the next \$306,200
- 37% on any amount more than \$510,300

In other words, say you make \$40,000 a year and you won \$100,000 in the lottery. That raises your total ordinary taxable income to \$140,000, with \$25,000 withheld from your winnings for federal taxes. As you can see from the table above, your winning lottery ticket bumped you up from the 22% marginal tax rate to the 24% rate (assuming you are a single filer and, for simplicity's sake here, had no deductions).

But that doesn't mean you pay a 24% tax on the entire \$140,000. You pay that rate on only the portion of your income that surpasses \$84,200. In this case, that's on \$55,800. Your total tax bill would be \$970 (10% of \$9,700) + \$3,573 (12% of \$29,775) + \$9,839.50 (22% of \$44,725) + \$13,392 (24% of 55,800) = \$27,774.50. Usually, your employer would have withheld federal taxes from your paycheck, but if for some reason your employer didn't, you would still owe \$2,774.50 in federal taxes (\$27,774.50 – \$25,000). Of course, if you were already in the 37% tax bracket when you win the lottery, you would have to pay the top marginal rate on all your prize money. But these rules apply only to federal income tax. Your city and state may want a cut, too.

State Governments

Come tax time, some states will also take a piece of your lottery winnings. How large a piece depends on where you live. The Big Apple takes the biggest bite, at up to 13%. That's because

New York State's income tax can be as high as 8.82%, and New York City levies one up to 3.876%. Yonkers taxes a leaner 1.477%. If you live almost anywhere else in New York State, though, you'd be looking at only 8.82% in state taxes, tops. Of states that have an income tax, rates can span from about 2.9% to 8.82%. Nine states, however, don't levy a state income tax. They are: Alaska, Florida, Nevada, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming.

If you live in one state and buy a ticket in another, typically the state where the ticket was bought (and the prize paid) will withhold its taxes at its rate. You will have to sort out how much you actually owe to your state at tax time (you will receive a credit for the amount already withheld—and the states will sort out who gets what between them). These examples reflect possible outcomes from taking your winnings as a lump sum. In most cases, however, your options include taking your earnings as a series of monthly payments.

Should You Take a Lump Sum or Annuity Lottery Payments?

The answer depends on your preferences. Most financial advisors recommend you take a lump sum, because it allows you to receive a larger return if you invest it in growth-oriented assets such as stocks. You may also want all the money to be able to buy a big-ticket item like a car, house or island, if your winnings are large enough. Winners of small jackpots, though, may want to receive their winnings in annual or monthly payments, especially if it means they'll owe less in taxes. Or they may prefer the steady stream of cash to ensure they don't make the common mistake of blowing through all or most of their winnings.

Rules differ across various lottery programs, but for the Powerball and Mega Millions lotteries, here's how it works:

- The winner can choose to take his or her prize over 30 graduated payments, with the first paid immediately and the rest paid annually over the next 29 years. Each payment is 5% larger than the previous one. For every \$100 million in the prize pool, the first-year payment is around \$1.5 million and eventually grows to almost \$6.2 million by the last payout.
- Instead, the winner can choose to receive a smaller cash amount all upfront in a lump sum. The lump sum amount is calculated based on what the lottery program would need to invest in U.S. government securities in order to fund the annual payouts under the annuity option. Currently, lottery winners have to take a discount of between \$37 million and \$38 million per \$100 million in jackpot amount to get the lump sum.

If you do take the annual or monthly payments, you should still work with an advisor on how to best use that money stream. For example, you'd probably want to prioritize contributing to your retirement savings account. If you don't have one, winning the lottery may be a golden opportunity to open an individual retirement account (IRA) or Roth IRA. In any event, you'd want to stash some cash for emergencies, taxes and other expenses down the road.

[Source: <https://smartasset.com> | Javier Simon | October 31, 2019 ++]

Inflation

Monitoring and Competing Viewpoints



During the 12 months ending in June 2021, consumer prices shot up 5.4%, the highest inflation rate since 2008. The annual increase in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) — often called headline inflation — was due in part to the "base effect." This statistical term means the 12-month comparison was based on an unusual low point for prices in the second quarter of 2020, when consumer demand and inflation dropped after the onset of the pandemic.

However, some obvious inflationary pressures entered the picture in the first half of 2021. As vaccination rates climbed, pent-up consumer demand for goods and services was unleashed, fueled by stimulus payments and healthy savings accounts built by those with little opportunity to spend their earnings. Many businesses that shut down or cut back when the economy was closed could not ramp up quickly enough to meet surging demand. Supply-chain bottlenecks, along with higher costs for raw materials, fuel, and labor, resulted in some troubling price spikes.

In monitoring the extent of inflation two measures can be used, CPI-U and PCE. The first measures the price of a fixed market basket of goods and services. As such, it is a good measure of the prices consumers pay if they buy the same items over time, but it does not reflect changes in consumer behavior and can be unduly influenced by extreme increases in one or more categories. In June 2021, for example, used-car prices increased 10.5% from the previous month and 45.2% year-over-year, accounting for more than one-third of the increase in CPI. Core CPI, which strips out volatile food and energy prices, rose 4.5% year-over-year.

In setting economic policy, the Federal Reserve prefers the second inflation measure called the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) Price Index, which is even broader than the CPI and adjusts for changes in consumer behavior — i.e., when consumers shift to purchase a different item because the preferred item is too expensive. More specifically, the Fed looks at core PCE, which rose 3.5% through the 12 months ending in June 2021.

The perspective held by many economic policymakers, including Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, was that the spring rise in inflation was due primarily to base effects and temporary supply-and-demand mismatches, so the impact would be

mostly "transitory." Regardless, some prices won't fall back to their former levels once they have risen, and even short-lived bursts of inflation can be painful for consumers.

Some economists fear that inflation may last longer, with more serious consequences, and could become difficult to control. This camp believes that loose monetary policies by the central bank and trillions of dollars in government stimulus have pumped an excess supply of money into the economy. In this scenario, a booming economy and persistent and/or substantial inflation could result in a self-reinforcing feedback loop in which businesses, faced with less competition and expecting higher costs in the future, raise their prices preemptively, prompting workers to demand higher wages.

Until recently, inflation had consistently lagged the Fed's 2% target, which it considers a healthy rate for a growing economy, for more than a decade. In August 2020, the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) announced that it would allow inflation to rise moderately above 2% for some time in order to create a 2% average rate over the longer term. This signaled that economists anticipated short-term price swings and assured investors that Fed officials would not overreact by raising interest rates before the economy has fully healed.

In mid-June 2021, the FOMC projected core PCE inflation to be 3.0% in 2021 and 2.1% in 2022. The benchmark federal funds range was expected to remain at 0.0% to 0.25% until 2023. However, Fed officials have also said they are watching the data closely and could raise interest rates sooner, if needed, to cool the economy and curb inflation. [Source: Navy Federal Credit Union | David Hammond | October 2021 ++]

Romance Scam

Update 03: Dating App User Blackmail

Are you using a dating app? Think twice before sending revealing photos or videos. Some con artists are taking a sinister approach to romance scams by blackmailing their victims.

How the scam works

- You meet someone you are interested in on a dating app. The person sends you explicit photos of themselves and asks you to reply with your own revealing pictures. The FTC reports that this particular scam is especially common on LGBTQ+ dating apps, such as Grindr and Feeld.
- If you send the images or videos, the scammer then begins to blackmail you. Scammers use your phone number or social media profile to look up names of your friends, family members, and even your workmates or boss. Then, they threaten to send those pictures to your contacts.

- According to one BBB Scam Tracker report, after a compromising video call, a woman began “blackmailing me, [threatening] to release the video footage on social media and send it to my friends and family. [Then] a guy took over blackmailing. They were demanding a sum of \$3000.”
- Scammers often ask for payment via gift card or wired funds – methods that can’t be traced to them and make it impossible for you to recuperate your funds. If you cooperate, you’ll lose your money, and there’s no guarantee the scammers will delete the images and videos. In fact, scammers will likely continue contacting you, asking for more money periodically.

How to avoid dating app scams:

- Never share your personal information with someone you just met. Don’t give your cell phone number, home address, email address, or even your social media profile to a stranger. Wait until you know and trust a person, preferably when you’ve already met them in person.
- Research your love interest. One telltale sign you’re dealing with a scammer is a stolen profile picture. Do a reverse image search of the person’s profile picture to make sure it isn’t being used under a different name or on multiple profiles.
- Think before you send photos or videos. Once you send a photo or video, you cannot get it back. Keep in mind that even video calls can be recorded, and use good judgement to protect your reputation.
- Don’t pay money to scammers. Even if you pay them, you have no guarantee that scammers won’t use the photos or videos anyway. Plus, your money could be funding criminal activity.

For More Information

Protect yourself by reading the BBB Tip: Romance Scams and visiting 10 steps to avoid scams. To learn more about the legitimacy of different dating apps, read the BBB Scam Alert on fake dating services. Go to:

- <https://t.e2ma.net/click/3crpae/3cbhhbb/nwv1ol>
- <https://t.e2ma.net/click/3crpae/3cbhhbb/3owlol>
- <https://t.e2ma.net/click/3crpae/3cbhhbb/jhx1ol>

If you’ve spotted a scam (whether or not you’ve lost money), report it to BBB.org/ScamTracker at <https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker>. Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at BBB’s website <https://www.bbb.org/article/scams/8767-bbb-tips-10-steps-to-avoid-scams>. [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | October 8, 2021 ++]

Tax Burden on Oklahoma Vets

As of OCT 2021

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

Sales Taxes

The state sales tax rate is 4.5%, and the average OK sales tax after local surtaxes is 8.77% which is lower than 88.5% of states

- Oklahoma does not exempt any types of purchase from the state sales tax. In most states, necessities such as groceries, clothes, and drugs are exempted from the sales tax or charged at a lower sales tax rate.
- Counties and cities can charge an additional local sales tax of up to 6.5%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 11%. The Oklahoma local sales tax is generally between 3% and 4%, based on the municipality. Refer to <http://www.tax-rates.org/oklahoma/sales-tax-by-county>.
- Oklahoma has one sales tax holidays, during which certain items can be purchased sales-tax free. Refer to <http://www.tax-rates.org/oklahoma/sales-tax-holidays>.

Excise Taxes

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

Even though excise taxes are collected from businesses, virtually all merchants pass on the excise tax to the customer through higher prices for the taxed goods. The state collects an average of \$317 in yearly excise taxes per capita, one of the lowest average per capita excise taxes in the country.

- **Alcohol:** Beer: \$0.40 per gal | Wine: \$0.72 per gal | Liquor \$55.56 per gal. The excise tax on beer is higher than 70% of the other 50 states and is ranked 15th highest of the 50

states. The excise tax on wine is lower than 54% of the other 50 states and is ranked 27th highest of the 50 states. The excise tax on liquor is higher than 50% of the other 50 states and is ranked 25th highest of the 50 states. Note that the IRS also collects a federal excise taxes on alcoholic beverages, which are included separately from your alcohol taxes in the final purchase price.

- **Cannabis:** Medical – 7% excise tax. Recreational marijuana is illegal in Oklahoma
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans is \$10.74 per phone service plan, higher than 66% of the other 50 states and is ranked 17th highest of the 50 states. The cellphone tax is already included in the service plan price you pay to your service provider, and may be listed as "Misc. taxes and Fees" or "Other" on your
- **Cigarettes:** The excise tax on cigarettes is \$1.03 per 20 cigarettes, lower than 60% of the other 50 states and is ranked 17th highest of the 50 states. The tax is applied to every 20 cigarettes sold (the size of an average pack of cigarettes). If a pack contains more than 20 cigarettes, a higher excise tax will be collected.
- **Fuel:** The excise tax on gasoline is 20 ¢ per gallon and diesel fuel is 16¢ per gallon, one of the lowest gas taxes in the country and is ranked #47 out of the 50 states. The gas tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations in the state and is in addition to the federal excise tax of 18.4¢ per gallon on gasoline and 24.4¢ per gallon, on diesel. The federal tax was last raised in OCT 1993 and is not indexed to inflation, which has increased a total of 77% from 1993 to 2020. Refer to <https://www.salestaxhandbook.com/maine/gasoline-fuel> for all state and federal taxes by type of fuel
- **Vehicle:** The state 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 Ohio Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid.

Personal Income Taxes

The average family pays \$1,633 in state income taxes which is ranked 20th out of 51 states.

Tax Rate Range: Low – 0.5%; High – 5%.

Income Brackets: Lowest – \$999; Highest – \$7,200+

Number of Brackets: 6

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$1,000; Married – \$2,000; Dependents – \$1,000. The first \$1,500 received, as salary for service in the United States Armed Forces shall be deducted from taxable income. State provides a state-defined personal exemption amount for each exemption available and/or deductible under the Internal Revenue Code. Under the new federal tax law, the personal exemption is set at \$0 until 2026, but not eliminated. Because it is still available.

Additional Exemptions: 65 or older – \$1,000

Standard Deduction: Single – \$6,350; Married filing jointly – \$12,700; Head of Household \$9,350

Itemized Deductions Allowed: Yes but limited to \$17,000. Charitable contributions and medical expenses are not subject to the \$17,000 limit.

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: none

Retirement Income Taxes: Each individual may exclude their retirement benefits, up to \$10,000, but not to exceed the amount included in the federal adjusted gross income. For any individual who claims the exclusions for government retirees on Schedule 511-A, lines 4 and 5, the amount of the exclusion cannot exceed \$10,000 minus the amounts already claimed on Schedule 511-A, 4 and 5 (if less than zero, enter zero). The retirement benefits must be received from an employee pension benefit plan, an eligible deferred compensation plan, an individual retirement account, annuity or trust, or simplified employee pension under IRC section 408, an employee annuity (a) or (b), United States Retirement bonds under IRC section 86, or lump-sum distributions from a retirement plan under IRC section 402 (e). There is no longer a modified AGI limit.

Retired Military Pay: An individual may exclude the greater of 75% of their retirement benefits or \$10,000, but not to exceed the amount included in the Federal Adjusted Gross Income. The retirement benefits must be from any component of the Armed Forces of the U.S.

Military Pay: Active Duty, Reserve and National Guard non-retirement income not taxed

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

Social Security Benefit: Social Security benefits that are included in the Federal AGI shall be subtracted.

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

Military SBP/SSBP/RCSBP/RSFPP: Exempt to the extent included in federal AGI.

Website: Oklahoma Tax Commission <https://oklahoma.gov/tax.html>

Frequently Asked Questions: <https://oklahoma.gov/tax/helpcenter.html>

Tax Forms:

- <https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/tax/documents/forms/individuals/current/511-Pkt.pdf> Oklahoma Instructions for Filing
- <https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/tax/documents/forms/individuals/current/511-Pkt.pdf> Form 511, Individual Income Tax Return
- <https://oklahoma.gov/tax/forms.html> All Tax forms

Penalties. Delinquent payments 5% plus 1.25% per month.

Property Taxes

The average effective property tax rate in Oklahoma is 0.90%, with a median annual tax assessment of around \$1,177 on a \$130,900 property.

- Oklahoma offers a homestead exemption to reduce the property's assessed value by \$1,000. The exemption results in tax savings from \$87 to \$134. Taxpayers qualify for an additional \$1,000 exemption if annual gross household income is under \$20,000, and they meet all Homestead Exemption requirements.
- A \$200 Oklahoma property tax rebate is available if you are 65 or older or totally disabled and have an income of \$12,000 or less.
- Disabled veterans are 100% exempt from property tax. Veterans and the surviving spouse of a veteran may also qualify for a property tax exemption.
- Senior citizens with a household income inclusive of pensions, annuities, federal social security, unemployment payments, public assistance payments, alimony, support money, workmen's compensation, loss of time insurance payments, capital gains and any other type of income received; excluding gifts of \$74,400 or less may qualify for a valuation freeze on their primary residence. A valuation freeze means property tax will not increase based on the value of other homes in the neighborhood. The amount of qualifying income depends on the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development's estimate of median family income. Call 405-713-1235 or email janmoo@okcounty.org for additional details.

For more information on Oklahoma property taxes, read Taxpayers' Rights, Remedies and Responsibilities at <https://assessor.oklahomacounty.org/DocumentCenter/View/101/Taxpayers-Rights-Remedies-and-Responsibilities-PDF?bidId=>.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax, and the estate tax was repealed on Jan. 1, 2010. For further information, visit the Oklahoma Tax Commission site or call 405-521-3160.

Other State Tax Rates

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

- Sales Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/sales-tax-by-state>.
- Excise Taxes (i.e. gasoline, cigarettes, cellphones, automobiles, beer, wine, and liquor: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/excise-tax-by-state>.
- Personal Income Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/income-tax-by-state>.
- Property Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/property-tax-by-state>.

- Income Tax: <https://taxfoundation.org/state-individual-income-tax-rates-brackets-2019>
- State Tax Comparisons <https://www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard>

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For further information visit the Oklahoma Tax Commission <https://oklahoma.gov/tax.html> or call (405) 521-3160. [Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#Oklahoma> | October 2021 ++]

* General Interest *



Notes of Interest

OCT 01 thru 15, 2021

- **Dance.** Check out the kizomba at <https://www.dancelifemap.com/suculento-kizomba-dance-demo-from-sara-lopez>.
- **Aussie Pilot Training.** At <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/42637/these-images-of-aussie-c-17s-flying-among-skyscrapers-in-brisbane> & <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/30084/this-cockpit-video-of-an-aussie-c-17-dodging-skyscrapers-is-a-must-watch> can be seen pictured low level flying images.
- **Military Covid Shots.** Active-duty troops who have been vaccinated reached 92% as mandatory deadlines near. Roughly 103,000 service members haven't even gotten their first shot despite deadlines for being fully immunized.
- **Gun Toting Robot Dogs.** Check out the video at <https://youtu.be/coPX3nRngEc> to view this quadrupedal unmanned ground vehicle in operation.
- **North Korean Video.** At <https://twitter.com/i/status/1448296740856205321> can be viewed a soldier display awe-inspiring/skeletal-crunching moments of blunt force trauma.
- **Rand Sino-Russian Report.** Forecasts that “aggregate Chinese and Russian power” will “continue to approach, but not exceed” U.S power through 2022. Describe the growing relationship between Beijing and Moscow as one of pragmatism and based on “balancing” against “U.S. hard and soft power.”
- **B-1B Bomber.** You can view some takeoffs, landings, and maneuvering at <https://youtu.be/JR-xW19V76M>, <https://youtu.be/tMQH5NjhSJU>, & <https://youtu.be/Kfp-G4NWyJs>.

[Source: Various | October 15, 2021 ++]

RP~China Dispute

Update 28: RP ‘Angels of the Sea’ Used To Repel Chinese Ships

The foreign fishing boats were deep in Philippine waters near a speck of coral reef known as Sabina Shoal. They bore no official markings, but their blue hulls of reinforced steel — used to ram other vessels — were the telltale signs of Chinese maritime militia. They had not come to fish, but to stake a claim to the sea. A white patrol ship approached. A woman’s voice lifted through the crackle of a radio: “This is Philippine coast guard. You are within Philippine exclusive economic zone. You are requested to provide the following: name of vessel, intention, last and next port of call.”



Philippine coast guard ship 9(left) and Chinese maritime militia moored at Whitsun Reef (right)

The stand-off quietly ended as all seven Chinese boats pulled up anchor and sailed to other waters. The radio operator, Ensign Gretch Mary Acuario, was hailed a hero on social media and lauded in local news reports as “the woman who made the Chinese ships go away.” “She’s got more balls than the Philippine President!” wrote a reader responding to an interview with Acuario in the Philippine Daily Inquirer. The 27 APR incident, which was captured on video, made public the Philippines’ newest ploy: dispatching an all-female unit of coast guard radio operators to counter Chinese aggression in the hotly contested South China Sea. China’s actions in the region, including violating the territorial waters of other nations and building military installations on man-made islands, have become a dangerous tinderbox for Beijing and Washington.

Dubbed the Angels of the Sea, the group of 81 women will soon patrol the country’s so-called exclusive economic zone, which extends 200 nautical miles off the Philippine shoreline in an area speckled with rocks and reefs claimed by China. The women were recruited under the belief they’d be better suited for repelling unwelcome foreign vessels and de-escalating a potential geopolitical crisis because their voices would remind opposing crews of their “wives or mothers,” officials have said. The Angels of the Sea will become the “voice of [a] peaceful and rules-based order at sea, especially in our country’s sensitive maritime frontiers,” said Vice Adm. Leopoldo Laroya, the coast guard’s recently appointed chief.

The program has been criticized as sexist and for reinforcing gender stereotypes in a country whose president has a history of misogynistic remarks. It “trivializes” the long-running sea

dispute with China, according to the women's advocacy political organization Gabriela. The coast guard defends the task force, citing *Acuario's* encounter in Sabina Shoal — as well as another incident two months later when she peacefully drove away a pair of Vietnamese fishing vessels from Philippine waters — as proof of its success. “This is not sexist,” said Rear Adm. Ronnie Gil Gavan, who came up with the idea for the unit in 2018 after leading anti-piracy operations in the Celebes Sea. “This is optimal utilization of their strength. There are things that only women can do. Crisis management is one of them.”

Anadale Dela Cruz, who was recruited for the Angels unit, agrees. The daughter of a policewoman, Dela Cruz said: “Women have more patience. We can send a strong message in a calm tone.” Whether gender makes a difference when it comes to enforcing maritime sovereignty is debatable. But the Angels program, which has drawn skepticism from scholars of international relations and gender studies alike, highlights the Philippines' sudden willingness to stand up to Chinese provocations after years of inaction. The 1.4 million square miles of water in the heart of Southeast Asia is one of the most disputed regions in the world — with overlapping claims from seven countries, all vying for greater access to vast offshore energy resources and control of a waterway responsible for one-third of annual global shipping.

No country has behaved more aggressively than China, claiming historical rights over virtually the entire sea. It has built dozens of outposts on disputed reefs and tiny sand banks, some that now boast airstrips. A maritime Chinese militia serves as an irregular naval force, using civilian vessels to menace boats from other countries. China has also given its coast guard the authority to fire weapons, and demands that foreign vessels, including submarines and oil tankers, report their presence to Chinese authorities. Few countries have taken the brunt of Chinese encroachment harder than the Philippines. For years, the dispute has festered as a source of national shame with the loss of territory to the Chinese, such as the Manhattan-sized coral reef known as Scarborough Shoal in 2012. Meanwhile, Filipino fishermen have seen their livelihoods slip away as Chinese vessels block them from venturing farther out to sea.

Since taking office five years ago, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has refused to challenge Beijing, hoping that a friendlier relationship would attract billions in Chinese loans and investments. He argued that confronting the militarily superior Chinese was foolhardy. He dismissed as just “a piece of paper” a 2016 landmark ruling at The Hague that rejected Chinese claims to waters in the Philippine exclusive economic zone. But when the financial largesse never materialized and criticism mounted that Duterte was “groveling before China,” his administration started to change tack, fearing political repercussions with an election looming in 2022, experts said.

The arrival in March of a massive flotilla of Chinese militia vessels near a streak of land shaped like a boomerang called Whitsun Reef offered an opportunity to fight back. The incursion prompted a surge in Philippine coast guard and naval patrols and a flurry of diplomatic protests. Duterte threatened to send warships to stake the Philippines' claim to natural resources. Then in

early May, only days after Acuario repelled the Chinese boats in Sabina Shoal, Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. lashed out in a tweet telling China to “GET THE F— OUT” of the South China Sea. The famously provocative diplomat, who likened China to an “ugly oaf,” later apologized and deleted the post.

The uncharacteristic show of defiance against Beijing set the tone for different branches of the Philippine government to take the initiative in what Filipinos call the West Philippine Sea. The media-savvy coast guard posted video of Acuario’s radio challenge on the service’s Facebook page, which has hundreds of thousands of followers and serves as a recruitment tool.

The coast guard has modernized and grown rapidly under the Duterte administration, more than tripling its personnel to 20,000 in the last five years. It’s favored by Duterte as a way to resolve confrontation diplomatically instead of deploying the country’s chronically weak navy armed with World War II- and Vietnam War-era ships. “There’s no reason to militarize the situation,” said Gavan of the coast guard. “The military comes in when diplomacy breaks down. And the coast guard is diplomacy-centric.” With China rapidly building-up its maritime forces and the United States reestablishing its commitment to the area, tensions are high. The USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier strike group was deployed in the South China Sea Friday at a time when Beijing is riled about a deal this month in which the U.S. and Britain would sell nuclear-powered submarine technology to Australia.

“This [Angels] program is meant to show the Filipino people that this administration is finally doing something,” said Jay Batongbacal, director of the University of the Philippines Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea. “Public opinion has been very clear that this administration’s policy of accommodating China is increasingly unpopular.” [Source: Los Angeles Times | David Pierson & Aie Balagtas See | September 29, 2021 ++]

Afghanistan Post War

Update 01: Burned Out Abandoned CIA Base Reoccupied by Taliban



Remains of cars, minibuses and armored vehicles (left) and abandoned compound (right) at the CIA secret base

Taliban Special Forces showed journalists around the abandoned compound. The cars, minibuses and armored vehicles that the CIA used to run its shadow war in Afghanistan had been lined up and incinerated beyond identification before the Americans left. Below their ashy grey remains, pools of molten metal had solidified into permanent shiny puddles as the blaze cooled. The faux Afghan village where they trained paramilitary forces linked to some of the worst human rights abuses of the war had been brought down on itself. Only a high concrete wall still loomed over the crumpled piles of mud and beams, once used to practice for the widely hated night raids on civilian homes.

The vast ammunition dump had been blown up. Double-height shipping containers laid out in three long rows containing guns, grenades, mortars, and heavy artillery were reduced to shards of twisted metal. The blast from the huge detonation, which came soon after the bloody bomb at Kabul airport, had shaken and terrified the Kabul capital city. All formed part of the CIA compound that for 20 years was the dark, secret heart of America's "war on terror", a place where some of the worst abuses to sour the mission in Afghanistan would fester.

The sprawling hillside compound, spread over two square miles north-east of the airport, became infamous early on in the conflict for torture and murder at its "Salt Pit" prison, codenamed Cobalt by the CIA. The men held there called it the "dark prison", because there was no light in their cells, the only occasional illumination coming from the headlamps of their guards. It was here that Gul Rahman died of hypothermia in 2002 after he was chained to a wall half-naked and left overnight in freezing temperatures. His death prompted the first formal CIA guidelines on interrogation under a new regime of torture, eviscerated in a 2014 report that found that the abuse did not provide useful intelligence.

The base has for two decades been a closely guarded secret, visible only in satellite photos, navigated by the testimony of survivors. Now the Taliban's Special Forces have moved in and recently, briefly, opened up the secret compound to journalists. "We want to show how they wasted all these things that could have been used to build our country," said Mullah Hassanain, a commander in the Taliban's elite 313 unit, who led the tour of destroyed and burnt-out compounds, "burn pits" and incinerated cars, buses and armored military vehicles. Taliban Special Forces include suicide attackers who recently marched through Kabul to celebrate seizing the capital. Vehicles now emblazoned with their official "suicide squadron" logo escorted journalists around the former CIA base.

It was a grimly ironic juxtaposition of the most cruel and ruthless units on both sides of this war, a reminder of the suffering inflicted on civilians by all combatants in the name of higher goals, over several decades. "They are martyrdom seekers who were responsible for the attacks on important locations of invaders and the regime. They now have control of important locations," said a Taliban official, when asked why suicide squads were escorting journalists, and if they would continue to operate. "It is a very big battalion. It is responsible for the security of important

locations. They will be expanded and further organized. Whenever there is a need, they will respond. They are always ready for sacrifices for our country and the defense of our people.”

They planned to use the CIA base for their own military training, Hassanain said, so this brief glimpse of the compound is likely to be both the first and last time the media is allowed in. The men guarding it had already changed into the tiger-stripe camouflage of the old Afghan National Directorate of Security, the spy agency once in charge of hunting them down. The paramilitary units that operated here, based in barracks just near the site of the former Salt Pit jail, included some that were among the most feared in the country, mired in allegations of abuse that included extrajudicial killings of children and other civilians. The barracks had been abandoned so fast that the men who lived there left food half-finished, and barracks floors were littered with possessions spilled out of emptied lockers, cleared in an apparent frenzy.

Mostly they had taken or destroyed anything with names, or ranks, but there were 01 patches, and one book that was filled with handwritten notes from weeks of training. Nearby, the site of the Salt Pit jail had apparently been razed a few months earlier. A New York Times satellite investigation found that, since spring, a cluster of buildings inside this part of the CIA compound had been levelled. Taliban officials said they did not have any details about the Salt Pit, or what had happened to the former jail. Rahman’s family are still searching for his body, which has never been returned to them. Other torture techniques recorded at the site included “rectal feeding”, shackling prisoners to bars overhead, and depriving inmates of toilet “privileges”, leaving them naked or wearing adult diapers.

Construction equipment was abandoned on the site, with concrete slabs half poured. Next door, a building that had once been fortified with high-tech doors and equipment had apparently been firebombed, its interior as totally destroyed and reduced to ash as the cars outside. Destroying sensitive equipment at the base would have been complex, and there was evidence of several burn pits where everything from medical kits and a manual on leadership was put to the flames, along with larger pieces of equipment. The Taliban officials were jumpy about letting journalists into areas that had not been officially cleared. They had found several booby trap bombs in the rubble of the camp, Hassanain said, and were worried that there might be more.

For days, helicopters ferried hundreds of people from the base to inside the airport, where men from the 01 force – aware they were likely to be prominent targets for reprisals – helped secure the perimeter in return for evacuation in the final hours, under a deal struck with the US. Untouched nearby was a recreation hall with snooker, ping-pong, darts and table football gathering dust. A box in the corner held brain teaser puzzles. It was unclear what the Taliban, once so austere that they even banned chess, would do with the trappings of western military downtime. [Source: The Observer | Emma Graham-Harrison | October 3, 2021 ++]

U.S. Taiwan Operations

US Special Forces Secretly Deployed to Taiwan

A U.S. special-operations unit and a contingent of Marines have been secretly operating in Taiwan to train military forces there, U.S. officials said, part of efforts to shore up the island's defenses as concern regarding potential Chinese aggression mounts. About two dozen members of U.S. special-operations and support troops are conducting training for small units of Taiwan's ground forces, the officials said. The U.S. Marines are working with local maritime forces on small-boat training. The American forces have been operating in Taiwan for at least a year, the officials said.

The U.S. special-operations deployment is a sign of concern within the Pentagon over Taiwan's tactical capabilities in light of Beijing's year's long military buildup and recent threatening moves against the island. Taiwan and U.S. officials have expressed alarm over nearly 150 flights entering Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the past week by Chinese military aircraft. The ADIZ is a buffer zone outside a country's airspace where it has the right to ask incoming aircraft to identify themselves. The Chinese aircraft have included J-16 jet fighters, H-6 strategic bombers and Y-8 submarine-spotting aircraft and have set a record for such sorties, according to the Taiwan government.

The Chinese flights, while not entering the area Taiwan defines as its airspace, have been a reminder of the Communist Party's view of Taiwan as a part of China. Beijing has vowed to take control of the island by force if necessary. Top U.S. military officials testified earlier this year that Beijing is likely to try to use force in its designs on Taiwan within the next six years. Other officials have said China's timeline could be sooner than that.

Taiwan's defense minister, Chiu Kuo-cheng, warned 6 OCT that China would be able to launch a full-scale attack on Taiwan with minimal losses by 2025. White House and Pentagon officials declined to comment on the deployment of the U.S. military force. There was no immediate response to requests for comment from Taipei. The deployment is rotational, the U.S. officials said, meaning that members of the U.S. units serve on a variable schedule. China's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it urged the U.S. to adhere to prior agreements and to cease military aid to Taiwan. "China will take all necessary steps to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity," it said.

Asian media reports last year suggesting a possible U.S. Marine deployment in Taiwan were never confirmed by U.S. officials. The presence of U.S. special operations forces hasn't been previously reported. The special-operations unit and the Marine contingent are a small but symbolic effort by the U.S. to increase Taipei's confidence in building its defenses against potential Chinese aggression. Current and former U.S. government officials and military experts believe that deepening ties between U.S. and Taiwan military units is better than simply selling Taiwan military equipment. The U.S. has sold Taiwan billions of dollars of military hardware in recent years, but current and former officials believe Taiwan must begin to invest in its defense

more heavily, and smartly. Taiwan plans to set aside an extra \$9 billion as a special budget for additional defense spending over the next five years as it prioritizes long-range and anti-ship weapons in the face of ongoing pressure from China.

“Taiwan badly neglected its national defense for the first 15 years or so of this century, buying too much expensive equipment that will get destroyed in the first hours of a conflict, and too little in the way of cheaper but lethal systems—antiship missiles, smart sea mines and well-trained reserve and auxiliary forces—that could seriously complicate Beijing’s war plans,” said Matt Pottinger, a distinguished visiting fellow at Stanford University’s conservative Hoover Institution who served as a deputy national security adviser during the Trump administration. Mr. Pottinger said Taiwan’s overall military spending was similar to that of Singapore, which has a quarter of Taiwan’s population and “doesn’t have China breathing down its neck.” Mr. Pottinger said he was unaware of any American troop deployment to Taiwan.

In May, Christopher Maier, who later became assistant secretary of defense for special operations, told the Senate Armed Services Committee during his confirmation hearing that the U.S. should be considering strongly such a deployment of forces to help Taiwan strengthen its capabilities. Mr. Maier, who worked at the Pentagon under the Trump administration, didn’t say that special-operations forces already were operating there. Mr. Maier told senators in May that American special-operations units could show forces in Taiwan how to defend against an amphibious landing or train for dozens of other operations needed to defend the island. “I do think that is something that we should be considering strongly as we think about competition across the span of different capabilities we can apply,” he said then, referring to special-operations units.

While some aspects of the U.S. deployment might be classified, it is also considered politically sensitive given the tense relations between the U.S. and China, according to U.S. officials. U.S.-China ties are strained over trade, the Covid-19 pandemic, human rights and regional security, including in the South China Sea. National-security adviser Jake Sullivan met in Zurich on Wednesday with Yang Jiechi, China’s top diplomat. China is likely to view the presence of the U.S. military forces as a violation of commitments made by Washington in past agreements. In one establishing formal relations between the U.S. and China in 1979, Washington agreed to sever formal ties with Taiwan, terminate a defense agreement and withdraw its forces from the island. The U.S. later said it would reduce arms sales to Taiwan.

A Pentagon spokesman pointed to the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act passed by Congress and said that law provides for assessments of Taiwan’s defense needs and the threat posed by the People’s Republic of China, or PRC. “I would note the PRC has stepped up efforts to intimidate and pressure Taiwan, including increasing military activities conducted in the vicinity of Taiwan, which we believe are destabilizing and increase the risk of miscalculation,” the spokesman, John Supple, said in a statement.

The Trump administration loosened rules that restricted contacts with Taiwan by U.S. officials, in a move that was applauded at the time by Taiwan officials. The restrictions limited U.S.-Taiwan exchanges to avoid provoking China. The Biden administration has continued with some of its predecessor's moves, sending a U.S. delegation to Taipei in April. Before leaving office, the Trump administration declassified the U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, a 10-page document broadly outlining objectives for the region.

A section on Taiwan says that China will take “increasingly assertive steps to compel unification with Taiwan” and recommends that the U.S. “enable Taiwan to develop an effective asymmetric defense strategy and capabilities that will help ensure its security, freedom from coercion, resilience and ability to engage China on its own terms.” The strategy also calls for a “combat-credible” U.S. military presence to prevent Chinese dominance in the area that includes Taiwan.

The document hasn't been supplanted by a new Biden administration strategy, nor is it technically being implemented. Biden administration officials have acknowledged that there are areas of continuity between the two administrations on China policies. [Source: Wall Street Journal | Gordon Lubold | October 8, 2021 ++]

Taiwan-China Dispute

Update 12: China Flies Record 52 Planes toward Self-Ruled Taiwan



J-16 fighter jet and 12 H-6 bomber

China flew 52 fighter planes toward Taiwan on 4 OCT in the largest show of force on record, continuing the three days of sustained military harassment against the self-ruled island. The sortie included 34 J-16 fighter jets and 12 H-6 bombers, among other aircraft, according to Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense. Taiwanese air force scrambled the jets and monitored the movement of the Chinese warplanes on its air defense system. Starting 1 OCT, on China's National Day, the People's Liberation Army sent 38 warplanes into the area and 39 aircraft on 2 OCT, previously the most in a single day since Taiwan began releasing reports on the flights in September 2020. China sent an additional 16 planes on 3 OCT.

The number of flights into Taiwan's air defense identification zone had prompted a statement from U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price over the weekend, who warned that China's military activity near Taiwan risks miscalculation and undermines regional peace and stability.

“We urge Beijing to cease its military, diplomatic, and economic pressure and coercion against Taiwan,” the statement said. [Source: AP | Huizhong Wu | October 4, 2021 ++]

China U.S. Relations

Update 05: U.S. Urged to Abide by Deal to Keep Troops Out of Taiwan

China called on the U.S. to abide by its agreement to withdraw troops from Taiwan, in a relatively muted response to reports that a small number of American military advisers have been deployed to the island. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian urged the U.S. to uphold the consensus that led Washington to sever ties with Taipei in favor of Beijing more than four decades ago, including ending its formal security pact. Zhao was responding Friday to reports that about two dozen American military advisers have been deployed on the island. “The One China principle is the political foundation of China and U.S. relations,” Zhao told a regular news briefing in Beijing. “The U.S. must sever diplomatic relations and abrogate its mutual defense treaty with Taiwan and U.S. forces must withdraw from Taiwan.”

The U.S. was training local forces to better defend the democratically ruled island from a future attack by China, a U.S. defense official told Bloomberg News in OCT. The official, who asked not to be identified, confirmed an earlier report by the Wall Street Journal that American service members, including Special Forces, have been in Taiwan for more than a year. The subdued response comes as the two sides make plans to hold a video summit between President Joe Biden and China’s Xi Jinping before the end of the year. The announcement of the meeting followed six hours of talks 5 OCT between White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and top Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi in Zurich, including discussions on Taiwan.

While the U.S. has stepped up diplomatic and military support for Taiwan in response to a pressure campaign by Xi, it was unclear whether the deployment was new or related to that effort. The U.S. has played down military interactions with the island since ending its alliance with Taipei and establishing ties with Beijing in 1979. “The U.S. has made its clear commitment to China,” Zhao said 8 OCT. “In his phone call with President Xi Jinping, President Biden emphasized that it has no intention to change the One China principle.”

The presence of small numbers of U.S. forces on the island wasn’t unprecedented. Still, the deployment of foreign forces on Taiwan is one of six conditions Chinese military commanders have set for launching a military strike, according to a state media report in April 2020 that cited a retired researcher with the People’s Liberation Army Rocket Force. Hu Xijin, the editor-in-chief of the Communist Party’s Global Times newspaper, earlier called on the U.S. to disclose the troops’ location, suggesting that would aid a Chinese attack. “See whether the PLA will launch a targeted air strike to eliminate those US invaders!” he said in a tweet.

In a separate situation China's Foreign Ministry expressed "serious concern" about what happened when the U.S. Navy nuclear-powered submarine Connecticut was damaged in a collision with an unknown underwater object in the South China Sea last weekend. "As the party involved, the U.S. should clarify in detail the situation of the accident, including the location, the intention of the sailing, details of the accident, such as what exactly it collided with, whether it caused a nuclear leak, and whether it damaged the local marine environment," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian told reporters 8 OCT.

When Navy disclosed the 2 OCT accident on 7 OCT, U.S. Pacific Fleet said that there had been no damage to the sub's nuclear propulsion system and that it had not yet determined what underwater object had been struck. It did not say where the collision happened, but other officials said it was in the South China Sea. China claims total sovereignty over the South China Sea, a stance that is not accepted by the United States and its allies. China protests the presence of the U.S. Navy in the area. The South China Sea is among many points of growing contention between Washington and Beijing.

Zhao, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said the accident exposed the "serious threat and significant risk to regional peace and stability" posed by U.S. naval operations in the South China Sea aimed at challenging China's claim to virtually the entire strategic waterway. He also accused the United States of delaying the release of information about the collision, and he reiterated China's objections to a deal announced last month to provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarines in what Beijing sees as part of a campaign to counter its rising military and economic power in Asia.

"The U.S. side should abandon its old cold war and zero-sum thinking and narrow geopolitical concepts and stop this wrong approach that undermines the peaceful and stable development of the region," Zhao said. [Source: Bloomberg News & Navy Times | October 8, 2021 ++]

Artificial Intelligence

Update 01: U.S. vs. China in Development



Autonomous delivery vehicle by Damo is displayed at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) in Shanghai, China

China has won the artificial intelligence battle with the United States and is heading towards global dominance because of its technological advances, the Pentagon's former software chief told the Financial Times. China, the world's second largest economy, is likely to dominate many of the key emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, synthetic biology and genetics within a decade or so, according to Western intelligence assessments. Nicolas Chaillan, the Pentagon's first chief software officer who resigned in protest against the slow pace of technological transformation in the U.S. military, said the failure to respond was putting the United States at risk.

"We have no competing fighting chance against China in 15 to 20 years. Right now, it's already a done deal; it is already over in my opinion," he told the newspaper. "Whether it takes a war or not is kind of anecdotal." China was set to dominate the future of the world, controlling everything from media narratives to geopolitics, he said. Chaillan blamed sluggish innovation, the reluctance of U.S. companies such as Google (GOOGL.O) to work with the state on AI and extensive ethical debates over the technology. Google was not immediately available for comment outside business hours.

Chinese companies, Chaillan said, were obliged to work with their government and were making "massive investment" in AI without regard to ethics. He said U.S. cyber defenses in some government departments were at "kindergarten level". Chaillan announced his resignation at the beginning of September, saying military officials were repeatedly put in charge of cyber initiatives for which they lacked experience. A spokesperson for the Department of the Air Force said Frank Kendall, secretary of the U.S. Air Force, had discussed with Chaillan his recommendations for the department's future software development following his resignation and thanked him for his contributions, the FT said. [Source: Reuters | October 11, 2021 ++]

North Korea Sanctions

Update 03: Kim Vows To Build 'Invincible' Military While Slamming U.S.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un reviewed powerful missiles developed to launch nuclear strikes on the U.S. mainland, as he vowed to build an “invincible” military to cope with what he called persistent U.S. hostility, state media reported Tuesday. In an apparent continued effort to drive a wedge between Washington and Seoul, Kim also used his speech at a rare exhibition of weapons systems Monday to stress that his military might isn’t targeted at South Korea and that there shouldn’t be another war pitting Korean people against each other.

“The U.S. has frequently signaled it’s not hostile to our state, but there is no action-based evidence to make us believe that they are not hostile,” Kim said 11 OCT, according to the official Korean Central News Agency. “The U.S. is continuing to create tensions in the region with its wrong judgments and actions.” Calling the United States a “source” of instability on the Korean Peninsula, Kim said his country’s most important objective is possessing an “invincible military capability” that no one can dare challenge. The exhibition, which KCNA says was meant to mark the 76th birthday of the ruling Workers’ Party on 10 OCT, was the first of its kind since Kim took power in late 2011, according to Seoul officials. North Korean photos showed Kim, clad in a dark suit, walking on a red carpet lined with big missiles mounted on trucks, passing by a multiple rocket launch system and watching jets flying in a formation.

The exhibition featured an array of newly developed weapons, including intercontinental ballistic missiles North Korea has already test-launched or displayed during military parades in recent years, experts say. Yang Wook, a military expert who teaches at South Korea’s Hannam University, said the weapons in the photos include what appears to be a new ICBM that North Korea disclosed during a military parade last year but hasn’t test-fired, Yang said. That missile mounted on an 11-axel launch vehicle during the parade is considered to be the North’s biggest-yet ICBM. Other weapons on display were another ICBM that North Korea tested in 2017; ballistic missiles that can be fired from submarines or a train; solid-fueled, short-range missiles; and a developmental hypersonic missile that had its first test-flight last month, said Lee Choon Geun, a missile expert at South Korea’s Science and Technology Policy Institute.

“Basically, North Korea wants to send this message: ‘We’ll continue to develop new weapons and arm ourselves with nuclear force, so don’t slap sanctions with these as we can’t agree on the double standards,’” Yang said. Seoul’s Defense Ministry said South Korean and U.S. intelligence authorities were analyzing the North Korean weapons displayed but didn’t elaborate. In recent weeks North Korea has sent mixed signals toward its rivals, as it resumed its missile tests after a six-month hiatus but offered conditional talks with South Korea.

During his exhibition speech, Kim accused South Korea of hypocrisy because it criticizes North Korea’s weapons development as provocations while spending heavily to increase its own military capabilities. But he still said his military doesn’t target South Korea. “I say once again that South Korea isn’t the one that our military forces have to fight against,” Kim said. “Surely, we aren’t strengthening our defense capability because of South Korea. We shouldn’t repeat a horrible history of compatriots using force against each other.” Some experts say North Korea is

attempting to use South Korea's desire to improve ties to pressure it to convince the United States to relax punishing economic sanctions on the North and make other concessions.

North Korea has long sought improved ties with the United States because it wants sanctions relief and a better security environment to focus on reviving its moribund economy. The high-stakes diplomacy between the countries fell apart in early 2019 after the Americans rejected North Korea's calls for extensive sanctions relief in return for partial disarmament steps. The United States has recently repeatedly offered talks with North Korea "anywhere and at any time" without preconditions. Kim has called such an offer "cunning" attempt to conceal U.S. hostility against North Korea, as he wants Washington to ease the sanctions or suspend its regular military drills with Seoul first before the talks can resume.

Despite its recent missile tests, Kim still maintains a 2018 self-imposed moratorium on long-range missile tests directly targeting the American homeland, a sign that he still wants to keep alive chances for future talks with Washington. In 2017, North Korea conducted three ICBM tests and claimed to have acquired an ability to attack the U.S. mainland with nuclear missiles. Lee, the expert, questioned the North's claim, saying it needs to conduct several more flight-tests to prove it has overcome the last remaining technological hurdles such as one on protecting a warhead from the extreme heat and pressure after re-entering the Earth's atmosphere. [Source: The Associated Press | Hyung-Jin Kim | October 13, 2021 ++]

Vocabulary

Some Words to Enhance Yours | 211015

Which word best matches these example sentences?

- (a) After Thanksgiving dinner, I went home _____ and ready for a good sleep.
(b) *Raconteur – Replete – Baumé - Innate*
- (a) Although traffic was getting worse, Mark still had a _____ outlook on making it to the airport in time for his flight.
(b) *Baksheesh – Propinquity – Sanguine - Scintillating*
- (a) Since we live in the country and our houses are not close in _____, it takes me 20 minutes to walk to my neighbor's house.
(b) *Farouche – Gasconade – Vitiate – Propinquity*
- (a) The construction of the _____s was taking longer than expected.
(b) *Plotz – Conundrum – Emollient - Pylon*
- (a) She squinted her eyes to _____ the street sign in the pouring rain.
(b) *Repugnant - Wanderjahr - Descry - Eucatastrophe*

6. (a) He turned angrily to _____ with Terry.
(b) *Exoneration – Heuristic – Remonstrate - Pontificate*
7. (a) The audience fell in love with the comedian's _____ humor.
(b) *Clinometer – Scintillating – Furtive - Abscond*
8. (a) The man across the room shot her an _____.
(B) *Voyeuristic – Peregrination – Cicerone - Oeillade*
9. (a) Detroit's offensive line was a _____ed mess of failing health and poor performance last year.
(b) *Discombobulate – Ingratiating – Maquillage - Obeisance*
10. (a) Ryan found his _____ when he lost his job and his wife left him in the same day.
(b) *Nadir – Donnybrook – Abnegate - Fractious*

Answers

1. Replete [*ri-pleet*] - very full of or sated by food; filled or well-supplied with something.
2. Sanguine [*sang-gwin*] - cheerfully optimistic, hopeful, or confident..
3. Propinquity [*proh-ping-kwi-tee*] - the state of being close to someone or something; proximity.
4. Pylon [*pay-lon*] - a marking post or tower for guiding aviators, frequently used in races
5. Descry [*dih-skrahy*] - to see (something unclear or distant) by looking carefully; discern; espy.
6. Remonstrate [*ri-mon-streyt*] - to say or plead in protest, objection, or disapproval.
7. Scintillating [*sin-tl-ey-ting*] - witty; brilliantly clever.
8. Oeillade [*oe-yad*] - stare, ie., eye intercourse.
9. Discombobulate [*dis-kuhm-bob-yuh-leyt*] - to confuse or disconcert; upset; frustrate
10. Nadir [*ney-der*] - the lowest point; point of greatest adversity or despair

News of the Weird

OCT 01 thru 15, 2021

Creme de la Weird – It's back-to-school time all across the country, and in Kentucky, one district has an unexpected challenge in one of its high schools. WLKY-TV reported that high school students in the Meade County school district are attending school dressed as and acting like ... cats. One grandmother is upset because her two grandchildren don't want to go to school anymore. "Apparently, from what I understand, they're called 'furries,'" she said. "They identify with animals. These people will hiss at you or scratch at you if they don't like something you're doing. The students are told they can't wear hats or Budweiser shirts in school, but they can wear

cat ears, cat tails, masks, leashes. It doesn't make sense." Superintendent Mark Martin says the problem is being handled on an individual basis, which he can't discuss. [WLKY, 8/25/2021]

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Long Live the King ... hair? – Elvis Presley's personal barber, Homer Gilleland, scooped up snippings of the King's hair over multiple haircuts and kept the baseball-sized ball of tresses in a plastic bag, which he then gifted to Thomas Morgan, a friend of both men. United Press International reported on Sept. 8 that the hair, now in a sealed jar and backed up by "extensive documentation," sold at auction for \$72,500. A Los Angeles auction house offered the hair alongside one of Presley's concert jumpsuits and other items. [UPI, 9/8/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Oddities – Doctors at Klaipeda University Hospital in Lithuania were shocked to discover the source of a man's abdominal pain through an X-ray, The Guardian reported on Oct. 1. Apparently as a response to giving up alcohol about a month ago, the man had swallowed more than a kilogram of metal objects: nuts, nails, bolts, screws and knives. It took surgeons three hours to remove the pieces and repair the inner walls of the stomach. The unnamed man is being kept under observation and has been offered psychological assistance. [Guardian, 10/1/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Mistaken Identity – Animal control officers were called to a home in San Mateo, California, on Oct. 3 to rescue a stranded tarantula on the roof, United Press International reported. But according to the Peninsula Humane Society, when the officer climbed up to capture it, she instead found an old Halloween decoration. "It looked like it had been up there for a while," said Buffy Tarbox, communications manager for the Humane Society. "Everyone thought it was real." The fake spider turned up for a few days on various desks at the Humane Society offices, then hit the circular file. [UPI, 10/5/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

It's a Mystery –Police in Japan have been working for months to figure out why a light pole in Suzuka suddenly snapped at its base on Feb. 18. Most light poles in the country last for 50 years or more, but this one was only 23 years old. NBC New York reported on Oct. 1 that forensic scientists found 40 times more urea at the pole's base than was found on nearby poles. Yep, dog pee killed the light pole: Urea and sodium in dog urine caused the pole to erode. The new pole is up, but dogs are already marking it with their caustic streams. [NBC New York, 10/1/2021] KVII, 9/14/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Precious -- Fargo, North Dakota, insurance agent Bill Fischer has a perennial battle with a certain red squirrel, Fox23-TV reported. Every fall, the animal squirrels away walnuts for the coming winter inside Fischer's pickup truck, then Fischer has to remove them so he can drive the truck. This year, Fischer has collected almost 350 pounds of walnuts from around the engine, the wheel wells, the front bumper and parts of the doors. Fischer said he tried spraying the truck with

a mixture of Tabasco sauce and cayenne pepper, but now he thinks the squirrel is attracted to the scent. "I have to have a sense of humor about this after so many years," he said. [Fox23, 10/4/2021] [KFOR, 9/15/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Wrong Place, Wrong Time -- Claire Vickers, 46, and Barry Douglas, 44, were enjoying a drunken night out when, at 2 a.m., they decided to head over to the Aldershot Lido in Hampshire, England, slip under a fence and speed down a waterslide in the closed park. Unfortunately, a barrier blocks the exit from the slide after hours, and Vickers and Douglas both slammed into it, the Sun reported. Vickers' shin snapped and broke her skin, and every bone in her left foot was broken. Douglas broke his left leg and both ankles. "I looked over at Barry. He was in the fetal position and silent," Vickers said. "That's when I thought we were both going to die." After two hours of screaming and banging on the slide, Vickers and Douglas were rescued. "We're idiots -- let that be a lesson," she said. "I'm still having nightmares one month on. The pain was unbearable." No charges were filed. [The Sun, 10/3/2021] [Daily Mail, 9/16/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

A Person Can Dream -- Kori Johnson of KSLA-TV was interviewing lottery ticket purchasers on Oct. 4 about what they'd do with the nearly \$700 million jackpot when she met "James," HuffPost reported, who went into a lot of detail: "Well, I'm definitely going to get a new supercharged Mustang with dual exhausts, and about 5 kilos of cocaine, and I'll be good to go," he said. Johnson rolled with the punches: "So you like cars?" she asked. [HuffPost, 10/5/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Sign of the Times -- The Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board is having to take drastic measures in response to a supply shortage of hooch in its state-run stores, The Morning Call reported. Starting on Sept. 17, liquor stores will have a two-bottles-per-day limit on a long list of specific products, including bourbons, tequilas and champagnes. The PLCB said the limit will remain "for the foreseeable future." [The Morning Call, 9/16/2021]

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

Have You Heard or Seen?

Pretending | Pun-ography 3 | Think Toons

Pretending

Sam signs up with the army and gets sent on basic training. When they are handing out rifles, he is at the back of the line and they run out just before they get to him. The Sergeant gives him a stick and tells him to just pretend it's a rifle. So our hero goes running through the mock battle pointing his stick and yelling, "Bangidy, bang, bang, bang. Bangidy, bang, bang, bang."

The next week, they start bayonet training. Again Sam is at the end of the line and again they run out just before they get to him. The Sergeant tells him to just pretend he has a bayonet at the end of his pretend rifle. So Sam goes running through the mock battle with his stick yelling, “Bangidy, bang, bang, bang. Stabidy, stab, stab,stab.”

Well the unit finished basic training and gets called up to go into real battle. Our hapless hero finds himself eventually on a landing craft, hitting the beach. Unfortunately, they have never given him a real rifle and he still has his stick. He is wondering what in the heck he is going to do. As the unit fights his way inland, Sam mindlessly points his stick at an enemy soldier standing on a hill and yells, “Bangidy, bang, bang, bang.” To his amazement, the enemy soldier falls over dead! So he aims his stick at another and yells, “Bangidy, bang, bang, bang.” And that enemy falls over dead!

Now our hero is running madly along, pointing his stick at any enemy soldier he sees, yelling “Bangidy, bang, bang, bang.” Enemy soldiers are dropping like flies! An enemy jumps out from a bush beside him. Sam points his stick and yells, “Stabidy, stab, stab, stab.” The other guy drops and writhes in pain.

All of a sudden an enemy soldier comes walking slowly along a path. Sam carefully aims his stick at the soldier and yells, “Bangidy, bang, bang, bang.” But the enemy soldier just keeps coming. Sam tries again, “Bangidy, bang, bang, bang!” Nothing. As the enemy soldier gets closer, Sam cries out, “Stabidy, stab, stab, stab.”

But the enemy soldier runs right over him, crushing him. As Sam lies dying, he hears the enemy soldier muttering, “Tankidy, tank, tank, tank.”

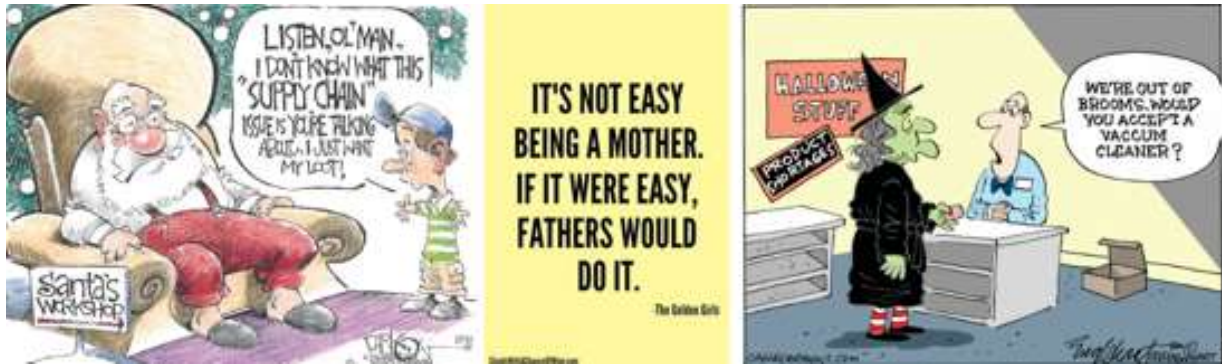
Pun-ography (3)

- I've been to the dentist many times so I know the drill.
- What did one plant say to another? What's stomata?
- The other day I held the door open for a clown. I thought it was a nice jester.
- A chicken crossing the road is truly poultry in motion.
- The politician is not one for Indian food. But he's good at currying favors.
- How do construction workers party? They raise the roof.
- A boiled egg every morning is hard to beat.
- When a woman returns new clothing, that's post-traumatic dress syndrome.

- After hours of waiting for the bowling alley to open, we finally got the ball rolling.
- Two antennas met on a roof, fell in love and got married. The ceremony wasn't much, but the reception was brilliant!
- Always trust a glue salesman. They tend to stick to their word.
- Guerrilla warfare is more than just throwing a banana.
- I thought Santa was going to be late, but he arrived in the Nick of time.
- Every calendar's days are numbered.
- A bicycle can't stand on its own because it is two-tired.
- No matter how much you push the envelope, it will still be stationery.
- A dog gave birth to puppies near the road and was cited for littering.
- If you don't pay your exorcist, you will get repossessed.
- A pessimist's blood type is always B-negative.
- I went to a seafood disco last week... and pulled a mussel.
- Two peanuts walk into a bar, and one was a-salted.
- Reading while sunbathing makes you well red.

Think Toons







Thought of the Week

“We simply cannot allow people to pour into the United States undetected, undocumented, unchecked, and circumventing the line of people who are waiting patiently diligently, and lawfully to become immigrants in this country”

— **Barack Obama - 2005**

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Notes:

1. **Subscription:** New subscribers and those who submit a change of address should receive a message that verifies their addition or address change being entered in the mailing list. If you do not receive a message within 3 days it indicates that either I never received your request, I made an error in processing your request, or your server will not allow me to send to the email addree you provided. Anyone who cannot reach me by email can call (858) 842-1111 to ask questions or confirm info needed to add them to the directory. This Bulletin Availability notice was sent to the 18,480 subscribers.

2. **Backup Email Addees:** If you have another email addree at work or home and would like to receive Bulletin notices there also, just provide the appropriate addree to raoemo@sbcglobal.net or raoemo77@gmail.com.

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 www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html before sending me an email asking if one was published. 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 addees.

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 why 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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