

RAO BULLETIN

1 October 2021

PDF Edition



THIS RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE BULLETIN CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING
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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/VA Shutdown

Officials Prep for Possibility 2 OCT

In anticipation of a possible government shutdown later this week, leaders from the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have begun warning employees of possible office closures, program interruptions and potential furloughs that will result from a budget lapse. The moves won't mean any work stoppage for active-duty service members, but it could mean a disruption in their pay until the federal financial issues are resolved.

On 27 SEP, Senate Republicans blocked a bid by Democrats to push through legislation to extend the current federal budget past 1 OCT and raise the country's borrowing limit. Unless lawmakers can find a compromise plan on the issues by the end of the week, many government agencies will run out of funding and be forced to shutter temporarily. Last week, Veterans Affairs officials released their shutdown contingency plan, which will be less severe than other department's because of advance appropriations approved by Congress in last year's budget agreement. As a result,:

- 96 percent of VA employees will not have to worry about furloughs if a shutdown occurs, and most VA programs — including medical care, benefits processing and burials at department cemeteries — will continue uninterrupted.
- Some staff in the office of the VA Secretary could face work stoppages, and some department call centers and job assistance programs would temporarily close.

The effects at the Defense Department would be more severe. In a memo to defense employees and troops on 27 SEP, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks said even in the event of a shutdown:

- The military “must continue operations necessary for the safety of human life or the protection of property.” That includes continuing operations overseas and efforts related to the evacuation and resettlement of individuals from Afghanistan.
- Active-duty troops will continue working. Reserve personnel performing active duty functions will also continue, but inactive duty functions will be cancelled.
- Only civilian personnel who are “necessary to carry out or support excepted activities” will be able to work after Sept. 30. That means about 357,000 civilian workers, while another 429,000 would be furloughed.
- Active-duty troops will see permanent change of station orders delayed until after a shutdown is complete. Temporary duty travel and conference participation would be cancelled.
- Military medical and dental care would continue, as would child care services and certain other family support activities. But many of those offices could see their hours curtailed. Defense Department schools would remain open.

In October 2013, during the government shutdown which lasted 17 days, military death gratuities were halted by the political fight. But in 2018 lawmakers passed legislation to allow those benefits to be paid out even if the budget situation is unsettled. In addition, Coast Guard service members — whose pay comes through the Department of Homeland Security, not the Pentagon — could also face paycheck delays, but will remain on duty.

In her memo, Hicks said defense officials are hopeful “Congress will quickly pass the annual appropriations bill” before the Thursday night deadline. The full military memo is available on the DOD web site <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Sep/27/2002862464/-1/-1/1/GUIDANCE-FOR-CONTINUATION-OF-OPERATIONS-DURING-A-LAPSE-OF-APPROPRIATIONS.PDF>.

[Source: Military Times | Leo Shane III | September 27, 2021 ++]

Afghan Withdrawal

Update 18: Austin Gives Senate Hard Truths



Secretary of Defense Defense Lloyd J. Austin III told the Senate Armed Services Committee 28 SEP his context of U.S. decisions in Afghanistan and also detailed U.S. actions during its fall. The United States spent billions outfitting and training Afghan security forces over the 20 year conflict. "The fact that the Afghan army [that] we and our partners trained simply melted away — in many cases without firing a shot — took us all by surprise," Austin said. "It would be dishonest to claim otherwise."

The secretary said American leaders need to consider some uncomfortable truths in regards to the Afghan military. The United States underestimated the damage that corruption in the Afghan military's senior ranks played in building the security forces. "We did not grasp the damaging effect of frequent and unexplained rotations by [former Afghan] President [Ashraf] Ghani of his commanders," Austin said.

In addition, the Doha Agreement — negotiated between the United States and the Taliban — had a negative effect on Afghan government forces, he said. "We did not anticipate the snowball effect caused by the deals that Taliban commanders struck with local leaders in the wake of the Doha Agreement, that the Doha Agreement itself had a demoralizing effect on Afghan soldiers, and that we failed to fully grasp that there was only so much for which — and for whom — many of the Afghan forces would fight," Austin said.

Over 20 years, tens of thousands of Afghan soldiers and police died in battle. Many fought bravely, he said. "But, in the end, we couldn't provide them with the will to win. At least not all of them," the secretary said. He addressed questions that arose following the most successful mass, non-combatant airlift evacuation in history. Questions raised in interviews on some 24-hour news channels that questioned why the U.S. didn't use Bagram Airfield in the evacuation, why planning for the NEO effort didn't start earlier, and why the U.S. forces didn't stay longer to ensure all U.S. citizens were evacuated.

Austin said planning for a non-combatant evacuation began early. The fact that U.S. troops were able to get to Kabul so quickly as the Taliban approached the capital is proof that planning had been done. "By late April, two weeks after the president's decision, military planners had crafted a number of evacuation scenarios," Austin said. "In mid-May, I ordered Central Command to make preparations for a potential non-combatant evacuation operation. Two weeks later, I began pre-positioning forces in the region, to include three infantry battalions." By the time the State Department called for the NEO, forces from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit and the 82nd Airborne were in the pipeline for deployment.

The first days at Hamid Karzai International Airport were chaotic with civilians storming onto the flightline trying to get aboard aircraft. But within 48 hours, our troops restored order, and the process began to take hold," Austin said. "Our soldiers, airmen and Marines — in partnership with our allies, our partners and our State Department colleagues — secured the gates, took control of airport operations and set up a processing system for the tens of thousands of people they would be manifesting onto airplanes," he said.

They exceeded all expectations. At the beginning, plans called for evacuating between 70,000-80,000 people. They evacuated more than 124,000 people. "On military aircraft alone, we flew more than 387 sorties, averaging nearly 23 per day," Austin said. "At the height of this operation, an aircraft was taking off every 45 minutes. And not a single sortie was missed for maintenance, fuel or logistical problems. It was the largest airlift conducted in U.S. history, and it was executed in just 17 days."

Austin said the circumstances in mid-August were particularly challenging with U.S. forces and the evacuees facing extreme heat, evacuating from a land-locked country without a functioning government, and an "active, credible and lethal terrorist threat." "In the span of just two days — from August 13th to 15th — we went from working alongside a democratically elected, long-time partner government to coordinating warily with a long-time enemy," he said. "We operated in a deeply dangerous environment. It proved a lesson in pragmatism and professionalism."

Retaining Bagram airfield as an evacuation point would not work. It would have required about 5,000 American service members to run and defend the base. In addition, it's 30 miles from Kabul, — the main population center, so it wouldn't have been an easy place for evacuees to reach. Austin also spoke about over-the-horizon operations in Afghanistan. This refers to assets and target analysis that come from outside the country in which the operation occurs. "These are effective and fairly common operations," he said, noting that just days ago the United States conducted an over-the-horizon strike against a senior al-Qaida figure in Syria.

"As for when we started evacuations, we offered input to the State Department's decision, mindful of their concerns that moving too soon might actually cause the very collapse of the Afghan government that we all wanted to avoid and that moving too late would put our people and our operations at greater risk," Austin said. The same judgments apply for ending the NEO mission on August 31. "Extending beyond the end of August would have greatly imperiled our people and our mission," he said. "The Taliban made clear that their cooperation would end on the first of September, and as you know, we faced grave and growing threats from ISIS-K. Staying longer than we did would have made it even more dangerous for our people and would not have significantly changed the number of evacuees who we could get out."

[Source: DOD News | Jim Garamone | September 28, 2021 ++]

Basic Allowance for Housing

Update 10: DOD Authorizes a Temporary Increase

The Department of Defense has temporarily authorized increases in the 2021 Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rates for 56 housing markets (commonly referred to as Military Housing Areas, MHAs) across the U.S. Uniformed service members who have incurred increased housing costs

above their current BAH may be eligible to apply and receive BAH at the temporarily higher rate. The increased BAH rates for affected active duty (and full-time National Guard duty) Service members in these MHAs will take effect October 1, 2021 and expire on December 31, 2021.

Rental housing market data collected by the Department of Defense from March-August 2021 indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on rental housing costs in the 56 affected markets. Notably, low availability and turnover of rental housing stock during the spring and summer months led to rental cost increases in many locations. To help ease the financial burden of rising housing costs facing Service members moving to new duty stations or signing new leases, the Department moved quickly to assess market changes across the U.S., develop a list of the most affected markets, and evaluate and implement potential solutions.

Service members who are receiving BAH in **one of the affected 56 MHAs** and have **verifiable housing cost increases** may be eligible for the temporary BAH rate increase, subject to Service specific implementation guidelines and approval of individual applications. Members who may be eligible for the higher BAH rates will receive an email in the coming days with additional information on how to apply for the higher rates with their Service. Additionally, each Service will publish information related to how to apply in administrative messages and other media channels. These higher BAH rates will be replaced by 2022 BAH rates on January 1, 2022.

Because not all segments of a housing market increase or decrease at the same rate, the BAH rates for calendar year 2022 (effective as of the first of January) may differ from the temporarily increased 2021 rates. In some cases, 2022 BAH rates may be more than the temporarily increased 2021 BAH rates. In other cases, the 2022 BAH rates may be the same or may be less. BAH rate protection, which normally protects members from decreases in housing market costs, does not apply to temporary rate increases. Therefore, members should not assume these rate increases will continue into 2022.

The Department is committed to the preservation of a compensation and benefit structure that provides members with a suitable and secure standard of living to sustain a trained, experienced, and ready force now and in the future. The temporary BAH increase is a reflection of this commitment. The temporary BAH rates that will be in effect October 1 through December 31, 2021 for active duty, and full-time National Guard duty, members are located at https://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/Docs/BAH_Temporary_Increase_Rates_Changes_Only.pdf?source=GovDelivery . They are shown for members with and without dependents. Visit https://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/site/bah.cfm?agent=Veranstalter_HERM. for additional BAH information.

[Source: U.S. Department of Defense Daily Digest Bulletin | September 24, 2021 ++]

NDAA 2022

Update 04: Additional Vet Support Amendments to H.R. 4350

The Committee on Rules, Chaired by Congressman James P. McGovern (D-MA) and Ranking Member Tom Cole (R-OK) are expected to meet the week of September 20, 2021 to vote on amendments submitted by the House of Representatives for inclusion in H.R. 4350, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022. There were 794 amendments submitted. The amendments listed below were submitted supporting veterans.

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#015 Garamendi (CA), Turner (OH), Posey (FL) **Bi-Partisan** - Prohibits the Defense Finance and Accounting Services (DFAS) from clawing back the final *retirement benefit* paid to a veteran the month they pass away, which overdrafts the veteran family's joint bank account while in mourning.

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#024 Brownley (CA) **Democrat** - Revises the reporting requirement for the VA Advisory Committee on *Women Veterans* to make the report annual instead of every other year.

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#050 Payne, Jr. (NJ), Brown (MD) **Democrat** - Prevents any veteran convicted of a felony related to the January 6 insurrection from receiving *veteran funerary honors*.

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#087 Newman (IL) **Democrat** - Requires the involvement of accredited service officers from military and veteran service organizations in the *Transition Assistance Program*.

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#095 Van Drew (NJ) **Republican** receive - Amend titles 36 and 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out actions for certain *surviving family members* of veterans deceased as the result of suicide and creating counseling programs through the VA for said families.

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#106 Bergman (MI) **Republican** - Prohibits the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from providing or paying for surgical treatment related to *gender transition*.

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#107 Clark, Katherine (MA) **Democrat** - Prohibits the VA from using the fact that a veteran's income derives from a State legalized marijuana industry as a factor in determining whether to issue a *VA home loan*.

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#131 Salazar (FL), Newman (IL), Evans (PA) **Bi-Partisan** - Raises sole source contracting thresholds for certain small business concerns (8(a), HUBZone, *service-disabled veteran-owned, and women-owned*) from current levels to \$10,000,000 for manufacturing contracts and \$8,000,000 for other types. Aligns sole-source thresholds in Title 38 (VA) with Title 15 (Small Business).

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#150 Lynch (MA), Green, Mark (TN) **Bi-Partisan** - Establishes a presumption of service connection for veterans with diseases associated with *toxic exposure*, during deployments for support missions into Afghanistan between 2001 to 2005, to substances found at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Air Base in Uzbekistan.

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#153 Moore (WI) **Democrat** - Authorizes the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to provide assistance o states that have created dedicated green alerts or are considering creating such alerts to help locate *missing active duty servicemembers or veterans*, including to connect located individuals to any VA or DOD benefits they have earned through their military service.

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#198 Meng (NY) **Democrat** - Requires that all infertility specialists in the Department of Veterans Affairs receive a mandatory training on the specific needs of veterans who have experienced *sexual trauma* and requires a report to Congress on how the VA is implementing medically-informed best practices for infertility specialists in the Department.

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#200 Perry (PA) **Republican** - Makes Stellate Ganglion Block (SGB) therapy treatment available for active duty servicemembers and veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

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#202 Meng (NY) **Democrat** - Includes veterans who participated in the cleanup of Enewetak Atoll between January 1, 1977 and December 31, 1980 as radiation-exposed under the Department of Veterans Affairs presumption of service-connection for specified cancers, which would allow these veterans to be awarded *health care benefits and disability compensation* for conditions that are presumed to be caused by circumstances of military service in the Enewetak Atoll.

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#221 Pascrell (NJ), McHenry (NC) **Bi-Partisan** - Extends the Berry Amendment to require the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Veterans Affairs to purchase items such as specified *medical supplies* (including disinfecting wipes), personal protective equipment, and fabric products (including clothing, bags, and tents) from products that are 100% grown, reprocessed, reused, or produced in the United States.

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#226 Spanberger (VA), McGovern (MA), Taylor (TX), Davis, Rodney (IL) **Bi-Partisan** - Recognizes the service and sacrifice of *Atomic Veterans* by requiring the President to issue a proclamation every year calling on the people of the United States to observe Atomic Veterans Day.

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#247 Correa (CA) **Democrat** - Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to submit an annual report on *women veterans* access to gender specific services under arrangements entered into by the VA with non-VA medical provides for the provision of hospital care or medical services.

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#248 Correa (CA) **Democrat** -Authorizes the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs to collect overpayments of *specially adapted housing* assistance.

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#250 Correa (CA) – **Democrat** - Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct a clinical trial of the effects of *medical grade cannabis* on the health outcomes of covered veterans diagnosed with chronic pain and also those diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Covered veterans are those who are enrolled in the VA patient enrollment system for hospital care and medical services.

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#252 Correa (CA) – **Democrat** - Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide *child care assistance* to an eligible veteran for any period that the veteran receives VA training or vocational rehabilitation.

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#274 Pocan (WI), Takano (CA) **Democrat** - Expands outreach to veterans dishonorably discharged for their sexual orientation in order to update their *discharge characterization* to honorable. Allows veterans who would have been eligible for enrolling in time-sensitive veterans benefits to do so if they have their records upgraded to honorable.

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#302 Katko (NY), Allred (TX) **Bi-Partisan** - Reinstates *tax benefits* for veterans who were impacted by the IRS's ruling regarding the deductibility of flight training expenses under section 162(a) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

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#320 McHenry (NC), Auchincloss (MA) **Bi-Partisan** - Requires the Secretary of the Treasury to mint a commemorative coin series honoring *military working dogs*, and those who act as service animals for veterans.

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#321 Gohmert (TX) **Republican** - Ensures retroactively that members of the Armed Forces are not dishonorably *discharged for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine*.

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#334 Gottheimer (NJ) **Democrat** - Establishes a credit reporting ombudsman at the CFPB to assist servicemen and veterans in resolving *credit reporting errors* not resolved in a timely manner by a credit reporting agency as well as to enhance oversight of consumer reporting agencies and reporting any violations of the law in relation to servicemen and veterans.

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#336 Bustos (IL), Axne (IA), Balderson (OH), Schakowsky (IL), Fitzpatrick (PA), Lofgren (CA), Joyce, David (OH), Courtney (CT), Houlahan (PA), Luria (VA), Norton (DC), Hartzler (MO) **Bi-Partisan** - Amends Section 106 of Title 38 USC recognizing the service of the *U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps* and allows applicable discharge from service by the DoD and provision of service medal and grave marker, while not providing other Veteran benefits or burial rights at Arlington National Cemetery.

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#374 Stauber (MN), Golden (ME) **Bi-Partisan** - Requires the status of a company be updated in the System for Award Management when a final decision is made pursuant to such concern's small business or socioeconomic (i.e. HUBZone, *service-disabled veteran-owned, women-owned*, 8(a)) status. Requires such companies notify contracting officers for which they have pending bids on contracts in which they lost such status.

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#383 Lamb (PA) **Democrat** - Directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a two-year pilot program to *employ veterans* for Departments of the Interior and Agriculture conservation and resource management projects.

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#390 Lamb (PA), González-Colón, Jenniffer (PR) **Bi-Partisan** - Ensures veterans' service-connected medical qualifications and expertise are utilized by the VA and civilian healthcare facilities to meet the challenges during *public health emergencies*.

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#401 Gonzalez, Vicente (TX), Young (AK) **Bi-Partisan** - Allows special veterans, as defined in the text, to apply for *citizenship overseas* as if they were active service members.

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#431 Lieu (CA) **Democrat** – Authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) to use any funds collected pursuant to easements, or other use-agreements at the West LA VA for the development of supportive housing and services on campus for *homeless veterans*.

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#447 Sánchez (CA) **Democrat** - Revised Requests a report from the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, in conjunction with the Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, to be sent within one year to Congress reporting on the *veterans obstacles* experience related to receiving benefits under Federal housing programs, including obstacles relating to women veterans, LGBTQ+ veterans face, and multi-generational family types, and obstacles relating to eligibility requirements (including local Area Median Income limits, chronicity and disability requirements, and required

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#460 Cammack, Kat (FL) **Republican** - Authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to treat digitized records (e.g. photographs or files) as original documents for purposes of *claims* under laws of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

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#473 Costa (CA), Tiffany, Thomas (WI), Perlmutter (CO), Young (AK) **Bi-Partisan** - Expands eligibility for burial in US national cemeteries for *Hmong and Lao veterans* from the Vietnam war to include individuals naturalized before 2000.

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#475 Green, Al (TX) **Democrat** - Requires public housing agencies to consider the *housing needs* of veterans when creating their annual plans and housing strategies, the latter in consultation with agencies that serve veterans. Similarly, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) must revise its regulations to require jurisdictions that receive funding from HUD to include information relating to veterans in their consolidated plans.

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#507 Green, Al (TX) **Democrat** - Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to distribute a payment of \$25,000 to U.S. *merchant marines who engaged in qualified* service during World War II. To be eligible, an individual must apply for the benefit and must not have received benefits under the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. Sets forth what constitutes qualified service, including time frame of service and licensing requirements.

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#537 Schiff (CA) **Democrat** - Requires the Secretary of Defense to order the names of the 74 sailors who died in the USS Frank E. Evans disaster in 1969 be added to the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall*.

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#558 Bilirakis (FL), Ruiz (CA), Tlaib (MI), Kelly, Trent (MS), Bacon (NE), McKinley (WV), McMorris Rodgers (WA), Garbarino (NY), Dunn (FL), Posey (FL), Omar (MN), Grijalva (AZ), O'Halleran (AZ), Williams (GA), Budd (NC), Ryan (OH), Van Drew (NJ), Lawson (FL), Suozzi (NY), Davis, Rodney (IL), Luria (VA), Neguse (CO), Fitzpatrick (PA), Brownley (CA), Blunt

Rochester (DE), Katko (NY), Hudson (NC) **Bi-Partisan** - Expands eligibility to certain military retirees for *concurrent receipt* of veterans' disability compensation and retired pay or combat-related special compensation

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#582 Neguse (CO), Porter (CA), Brownley (CA) **Democrat** - Establishes a *housing stipend* for federal wildland firefighters, many of whom are veterans, hired at a location more than 50 miles from their primary residence with the allowance being determined by the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture and be based on the cost of living in the area of deployment.

-o-o-O-o-o-

#583 Gomez (CA), Fitzpatrick (PA), Kim, Young (CA), Meng (NY) **Bi-Partisan** - Expresses the Sense of Congress that *Korean-American and Korean veterans* who fought alongside United States Armed Forces in the Vietnam war served with distinction and honor.

-o-o-O-o-o-

#590 Neguse (CO), Porter (CA), Brownley (CA) **Democrat** - Establishes a mental health program for federal wildland firefighters, many of whom are veterans, including a *mental health* awareness campaign, peer-to-peer support network, expansion of the Critical Incident Stress Management Program, mental health leave, and ensuring trauma-informed mental health professionals are readily available to provide services.

-o-o-O-o-o-

#649 Houlahan (PA), Gonzalez, Anthony (OH) **Bi-Partisan** - Creates a cybersecurity training pilot program at the Department of Veterans Affairs for veterans and members of the Armed Forces *transitioning from service* to civilian life. Creates a registered apprenticeship program at the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) focused on cybersecurity and infrastructure security. Both programs are established in coordination with the Department of Defense.

-o-o-O-o-o-

#663 Keller (PA) **Republican** - Directs the National Archives and Records Administration to (1) increase on-site staffing at the *National Personnel Records Center*, (2) report to Congress monthly and (3) consult with the DOD and VA in order to eliminate the estimated 500,000 backlog of requests for Veteran service records, discharge documents, official military personnel files and others.

-o-o-O-o-o-

#686 Miller-Meeks (IA), Westerman (AR), Grijalva (AZ) **Bi-Partisan** - Provides free annual *America the Beautiful Passes* to current military service members and also provides free lifetime America the Beautiful Passes to veterans and members of Gold Star Families so they can always access our National Parks and public lands at no cost.

-o-o-O-o-o-

#794 Aguilar (CA) **Democrat** - **Late** Designates the Department of Veterans Affairs community-based outpatient clinic in Redlands, California as the “Jerry Lewis VA Clinic”.

[Source: VVA <https://rules.house.gov/bill/117/hr-4350> | September 15, 2021 ++]

NDAA 2022

Update 05: White House Pushes Back On Efforts to Restore Program Cuts

The White House is hoping to press House lawmakers to eliminate certain tech and personnel provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act, which is being debated this week. In a policy statement issued 21 SEP:

- The administration declared its opposition to the legislative restoration of funding to systems, "that limit DOD's ability to divest or retire lower priority platforms not relevant to tomorrow's battlefield."
- The administration also pushed back on a provision that establishes a minimum wage for Defense Department contractors because it is out of sync with an executive order that resets the minimum wage at \$15. The administration noted that the legislative provision, "would lead to significant confusion by applying different requirements to many of the same contractors," who have contracts with DOD and civilian agencies.
- A proposal to create a Space National Guard was rebuffed. "Establishing a Space National Guard would not deliver new capabilities -- it would instead create new government bureaucracy, which the Congressional Budget Office estimates could increase costs by up to \$500 million annually." The administration feels the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve units that are tasked with space missions can fulfill the roles envisioned for the Space National Guard.
- The administration also balked at several measures designed to support service members who don't wish to comply with the COVID-19 vaccination mandate.

[Source: ROA Smart Brief | Adam Mazmanian | September 22, 2021++]

NDAA 2022

Update 06: Requires 'Forever Chemical' Testing At Military Sites



The National Defense Act Authorization (NDAA) passed by the House on Thursday night of 21 SEP would require the Pentagon to factor in extreme weather risks and publish studies on a class of toxic “forever chemicals.” The NDAA would create a two-year deadline for the Pentagon to finish testing at Defense Department and National Guard installations for the chemicals known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). In cases where state PFAS cleanup standards are stricter than federal rules, the Pentagon would be required to follow the tougher rules.

The annual defense policy bill also requires the Defense Department to publish all PFAS testing results for drinking and groundwater on or near former and current military installations and report on the cleanup status at 50 PFAS sites. Earlier this month, the Environmental Protection Agency announced its first proposed limits on the amounts of PFAS that can be discharged from facilities where they are manufactured. The chemicals have been linked to a number of health problems, including immunodeficiencies and certain cancers.

The NDAA for 2022 was passed in a 316-113 vote, with 38 Democrats and 75 Republicans opposing the \$778 billion measure. The measure will next need to undergo reconciliation with the Senate-passed NDAA, which extends funding for the study of PFAS effects on drinking water in addition to mandating testing at military sites. Climate provisions in the House-passed NDAA would mandate that the Pentagon factor extreme weather risks into Defense Department planning and allow the use of certain Pentagon funds to be used toward improving defense infrastructure’s resilience. In the past year, the U.S. has experienced massive heatwaves across Western states over the summer and winter weather in Texas that knocked out the state’s self-contained grid.

The Biden administration has emphasized the national security and defense implications of climate change. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on 23 SEP said that “climate change is making things less peaceful, less secure, and rendering our response even more challenging,” citing its role in conflicts in nations such as Ethiopia, Mali and Syria. The United Nations issued a similar warning in 2020. [Source: The Hill | Zack Budryk | September 24, 2021 ++]

DOD ID Cards

Time to Renew Extended ID Cards

The Defense Department is asking as many as a half-million ID card holders to go online now and make appointments to renew their IDs — many of which are past the expiration dates printed on them. DOD extended the expiration dates electronically to account for the challenges of renewing them in a COVID-19 environment.

Last year when it became apparent that COVID-19 was going to dramatically affect the ability of individuals to congregate or wait in line at ID card offices, the Defense Department electronically extended the expiration dates for many ID cards for several months to allow cardholders a greater amount of time to get those cards renewed. The extensions primarily

benefited the dependents of active-duty service members, Reserve and National Guard service members and their dependents, as well as retirees and their dependents.

Currently, there's a backlog of more than a half-million people who have ID cards that are past the expiration dates printed on them, and it's time to go online and schedule an appointment to get those cards renewed, said Stephen Wellock with the Defense Manpower Data Center. Right now, the previously extended ID cards for dependents of active duty service members, as well as Reserve and National Guard service members and their dependents, can be used until Oct. 31, 2021. The cards of retirees and their dependents can be used until Jan. 31, 2022.

But Wellock also said some might not have the time they think they have. For those service members and their dependents and retirees and their dependents whose ID cards expired after July 31, 2021 — there is no extension. "You have no extension, your ID card is expired," he said. "You need to get it replaced, for both active duty, Guard and Reserve dependents, and for retirees. So, if a service member's dependent is out there, and their ID card expired on Sept. 7, they don't have until October to get it replaced; their ID card has expired, and they need to make an appointment as soon as possible."

While some family members may have an expired ID card, Wellock said that just because an ID card expires doesn't mean health benefits expire. Those benefits are managed by a different system, he said. "Their health care is managed by the fact that they're enrolled in DEERS, in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System. That's what determines their eligibility for health care. So if somebody's ID card expires on Aug. 7, they don't automatically lose their health care because their card is expired." An additional change is that while currently cards were previously issued to dependents as young as 10 years old, going forward, cards will only be issued to those dependents who are 14 or older.

Wellock said the department is not planning any further extensions on the renewal of expired ID cards. He said cardholders should begin scheduling appointments now to get their cards renewed. Appointments can be made online to renew ID cards, he said, and cardholders don't need to limit their appointment to the card office they typically visit — there are many locations that can handle renewals, and many provide a "walk-in" service capability. The DOD ID card facilities are managed and operated by the local installations, so if service members are having difficulty making appointments, they should inform their chain of command. For more information, go to <https://idco.dmdc.osd.mil/idco>. [Source: DOD News | C. Todd Lopez | September 24, 2021 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials

Reported SEP 16 thru 30, 2021 | Six

“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 1st Lt. Anthony R. Mazzulla, 26**, of Bronx, New York, was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, after a fighting withdrawal near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Mazzulla will be buried in Cranston, Rhode Island. The date has yet to be determined. Read about Mazzulla at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2203287/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-mazzulla-a>.

-- **Army 1st Lt. James E. Wright, 25**, of Parkton, North Carolina, was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry Regiment, 5th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action

on Sept. 11, 1944, after a fighting withdrawal at the Moselle River near Dornot, France. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Wright will be buried on Oct. 12, 2021, in Lumber Bridge, North Carolina. Read about Wright at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2700537/soldier-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-wright-j> .

-- **Army Pvt. Donald A. Fabrize, 17**, of Chayuga, New York, was assigned to Company B, 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. He was reported killed in action on July 16, 1950, after a fighting withdrawal along the Kum River in South Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Fabrize will be buried in May 2022 at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. Read about Fabrize at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2359500/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-fabrize-d>.

-- **Army Sgt. Stanley L. DeWitt**, of Royal City, Indiana, was assigned to Medical Detachment, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. DeWitt will be buried in his hometown. The date has yet to be determined. Read about DeWitt at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2211393/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-dewitt-s>.

-- **Navy Fireman 2nd Class Benjiman C. Terhune, 19**, of Watervliet, Michigan, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Terhune. Interment services are pending. Read about Terhune at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2781830/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-terhune-b>.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Buford H. Dyer, 19**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Dyer. Interment services are pending. Read about Dyer at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2781860/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-dyer-b>.

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



VA COLA 2022

Passed Congress | Awaiting Signature

Veterans may be in line for a big cost-of-living boost in their benefits payouts starting in December thanks to legislation finalized by Congress on 20 SEP. The Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act passed unanimously in the House on Monday and without objection in the Senate earlier in the summer. It now heads to the White House, where President Joe Biden is expected to sign it into law in coming days. The legislation ties the cost-of-living boost for veterans benefits to the planned increase in Social Security benefits. Although the Social Security boost is automatic each year, lawmakers must approve the veterans benefits increase annually.

How much that boost will be next year is still not certain. The Social Security Administration is expected to announce the COLA rate for 2022 next month, based on economic trends over the last few months. That increase will go into effect for benefits checks sent out starting this December. The cost-of-living bump hasn't been above 3.0 percent since 2011, and has averaged less than 1.3 percent over the last six years. But last month, officials from the Senior Citizens League predicted that next year's rise could top 6.2 percent, based on recent inflation and wage data released by federal economists. If so, it would be the largest increase since 1983 for Social Security and VA benefits recipients.

Lawmakers praised Monday's bill passage as needed support for American veterans. "The cost-of-living adjustment to veterans' benefits is so much more than a rate adjustment tied to inflation," said Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA) in a statement. "It is a quality-of-life guarantee in the retirement years for veterans suffering with service-connected disabilities and ailments." Committee ranking member Mike Bost (R-IL) said the increase is critical for veterans and families who rely on disability benefits as a primary source of income. "Many veterans rely on disability compensation payments to make ends meet; this was especially true during the pandemic," he said in a statement. "For millions of veterans and their families, this adjustment is more important now than ever before."

The VA COLA increase applies to payouts for disability compensation, clothing allowance, dependency and indemnity benefits, and other VA assistance programs. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | September 21, 2021 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims

Update 87: VA OIG Reports Many ‘Inaccurate Decisions’

A sampling of thousands of VA claims filed primarily by veterans who served in the waters off Vietnam showed about 46% were inaccurate, resulting in over- or underpayments to a group familiarly known as Blue Water Navy veterans. Of the 4,600-claim sample highlighted in a 43-page report by the VA’s Office of Inspector General 2,100 veterans “had inaccurate decisions,” the report states. This resulted in \$25.2 million in overpayments and \$12 million in underpayments. The bulk of the errors – 95% – “involved [Veterans Benefits Administration] employees not following general rating policies, such as inaccurately assigning retroactive effective dates for evaluations.”

The report’s authors recommended the VA clarify portions of its Blue Water Navy claims process, including how staffers should address potential discrepancies in data generated by the department’s Ship Locator Tool, which uses digitized deck logs to help determine a veteran’s benefit eligibility. Servicemembers aboard vessels operating as far as 12 nautical miles from the Vietnam coast, as well as those who served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides and may be eligible for benefits connected to conditions related to that exposure.

VA officials also said staffers underwent additional training on the claims process. That training wrapped up in the spring of 2021, after the report’s authors analyzed the sample cases. Veterans with improperly processed claims will receive notification from the VA. Underpaid veterans can expect a letter stating they’ll receive retroactive payments via the same method they receive their regular VA compensation. Overpaid veterans will get a letter explaining the error and giving them 60 days to reach out to the VA’s Debt Management Center to arrange a repayment plan. If the center doesn’t hear from the veteran in 60 days, it will send a letter notifying the veteran of plans to recoup the funds.

The report also found the VA had “met the outreach requirements” of the 2019 law, doing so via radio and television ads, letters, social media messaging, and other lines of communication. The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 was signed into law in June 2019 after failing to clear Congress in previous sessions. A January 2019 Federal Circuit court ruling granted presumptive exposure to Blue Water Navy veterans; the bill further codified and expanded the presumption.

For more information about claiming benefits under the 2019 law, go to <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2019-news-articles/heres-how-blue-water-navy-veterans,-survivors-can-claim-benefits-under-new-law>. For a general overview of the VA claims process go to <https://www.moaa.org/content/benefits-and-discounts/pay-and-benefits/va-claims-and-benefits/claims-process>. [Source: Military Officers Assn of America Newsletter | Kevin Lilley | September 20, 2021 ++]

VA Caregiver Program

Update 73: Thousands May Lose Stipends under New VA Review



Thousands of veterans caregivers could see their Veterans Affairs stipends reduced or taken away completely under a series of case reviews planned over the next year to ensure long-time participants still qualify for the benefit. Veterans Affairs officials said that no families currently in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) will see reductions in stipends before fall of next year, and families being removed from the program won't have the financial support cut off until early 2023. But the move still means the looming loss of thousands of dollars a month for some families of veterans with serious, lingering service injuries.

About 33,000 individuals are currently enrolled in the program, which provides support services and monthly stipends to caregivers of veterans unable to perform basic self-care activities. Program Executive Director Colleen Richardson said the reviews will cover about 19,800 "legacy" participants, all of whom entered the program before October 2020. Before then, only veterans who left the ranks after September 2001 were eligible to apply for the program. Officials expect about one-third of that group — around 6,700 families — to be completely dropped from the program after the review, based on preliminary work. It's unclear how many more could see reductions in the amount of financial support they receive each month. In addition, some veterans could see increases in the amount of payouts they receive, if reviews find they are eligible for more support.

Department officials hope to complete the reviews in the next six months, but Richardson said no stipend reductions will take place before October 2022, to ensure that families are given time to deal with the financial impact of the moves. Caregivers being dropped from the program will get an additional five months of payments as they transition out, Richardson said. "And even though they may not qualify for the stipend, they will still qualify for services within the caregiver support program" such as counseling and training offerings, she said. The reviews will include medical exams and in-home visits (or virtual, if pandemic concerns linger) to determine veterans' independence and ongoing assistance needs. Veterans involved will not need to reapply; instead, program officials will contact them about the reassessments.

About 107,000 caregivers applied to the program in the past year, mostly connected to veterans who served during the Vietnam War or in earlier eras. That group wasn't eligible for the program

until last fall. The approximately 13,000 individuals approved from that group in the last year will not be part of the new reviews. Richardson said the new move also is not expected to disrupt plans scheduled for next fall to expand the caregiver program to veterans of any era. Benefits under PCAFC include education and training, enhanced respite care, counseling, a monthly stipend, CHAMPVA (if eligible) and certain travel expenses, among others.

Stipend calculations are based on the severity of veterans' injuries and the cost of living in the area where they live. For example, a caregiver tending to a severely injured veteran living in the Washington, D.C. area could receive up to \$3,100 a month in financial support. Individuals in a less costly area with less severe medical complications could see half that amount. The new reviews are separate from potential changes linked to a U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims ruling earlier this year requiring a new appeal process for individuals rejected for the caregiver stipend program. Richardson said officials expect to have additional announcements on that issue in coming days. Questions about PCAFC should be directed to local VA facility Caregiver Support Program staff or the Caregiver Support Line, at 855-260-3274. Go to <https://www.caregiver.va.gov> for more information on the reviews. Find your Caregiver Support team or Caregiver Support coordinator using the facility locator at https://www.caregiver.va.gov/support/New_CSC_Page.asp. [Source: AirForceTimes |& VA Press Release Leo Shane III | September 22, 2021 ++]

VA Claims Backlog

Update 169: Expected To Grow In Coming Months

Veterans Affairs officials don't know how bad the backlog of veteran disability claims will get this fall, but they know it's getting worse. The backlog — defined as the number of first-time disability and pension claims that have been awaiting decisions for more than four months — topped 215,000 this week, up 16 percent since July and nearly triple what it was in early 2020 before the coronavirus pandemic in America. In a press conference with reporters on 15 SEP, VA Secretary Denis McDonough acknowledged that the problem is going to get worse before it gets better.

- “We anticipate the backlog to further increase this fall as we process claims for new presumptive conditions from the Vietnam and Gulf wars,” he said.
- “We’re in the field fulfilling those claims now. But we want to keep warning our veterans about what to expect, so they see what’s coming in the same way that we do.”

Before the coronavirus pandemic, the claims backlog hadn't been above 200,000 cases since 2015. In the years before that, the delayed cases swelled to more than 600,000, drawing national criticism from advocates and lawmakers who said the slow pace of work was delaying needed financial support for injured veterans. After the department digitized most of its medical records and hired more claims processors, officials had been able to keep the backlog under 100,000 cases up until early 2020. Office closings due to the pandemic and new claims files for blue water veterans

from the Vietnam war — individuals who served in coastal waters but were given presumptive disability benefits status by Congress because of possible exposure to chemical defoliants — led to the recent spike in delayed processing.

Past VA leaders have said that reaching zero backlogged cases is impractical, because in many cases the complexity of claims or concerns about incomplete medical records require staff to take extra time to ensure veterans are getting all of the payouts they are owed. Officials could close out those cases quicker to meet the backlog deadline, but then the files would end up in the appeals process, which can take years to resolve.

But McDonough said he is committed to driving the backlog claims number back down. VA officials plan to hire about 2,000 new personnel to help sort through the existing files and anticipated surge new ones coming this fall, as the department begins to offer presumptive benefit status for certain burn pit related illnesses for the first time. “We think that we’re staying ahead of this so that we don’t fall into some of the big backlogs we’ve seen in the past,” he said. “But any individual who is impacted matters very much to me, so I want to make sure we’re communicating about that and preparing for it.”

Despite the recent surge in caseload, VA officials have not seen a corresponding decrease in claims processing accuracy. According to internal department data, about 95 percent of cases are correctly completed, a figure that has remained steady over the last three years. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | September 16, 2021 ++]

Disability Indemnity Compensation

Update 13: Effort to Achieve Widow(er) Parity

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is a tax-free monetary benefit administered by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This benefit is paid monthly, primarily to survivors of service members who died in the line of duty or as a result of service-connected causes.

- DIC is an indemnity payment with the purpose of replacing a portion of the family income lost as a result of the service member/veteran’s death.
- DIC has been paid in some form to survivors since the Revolutionary War.
- There are two types of DIC for survivors:
 - Flat Rate DIC: A DIC recipient whose service member/veteran’s death was on or after January 1, 1993, currently receives a flat rate of \$1357.56 per month (as of December 1, 2020).
 - Rank-Based DIC: A DIC recipient whose service member/veteran’s death was before January 1, 1993, receives DIC based on the rank (pay grade) of the service member. A DIC recipient whose service member/veteran’s rank was E1-E6

currently receives \$1357.56. A DIC recipient whose veteran's rank was E7 or above receives a higher amount based on rank.

- DIC has only been increased by Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) since 1993.
- The latest statistics from the Veterans Benefits Administration Annual Benefits Report of Fiscal Year 2018, updated as of September 30, 2019, indicates that 416,438 surviving spouses receive DIC.

In March 2021, Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) and Senator John Boozman (R-AR) introduced the Caring for Survivors Act of 2021 Bill # S. 976. This bill will ensure that those who receive DIC payments would have their compensation raised from 43% to equal 55% of a single 100% disabled veteran's compensation and would bring parity with other Federal survivor programs.

In May 2021, Representative Jahana Hayes (D-CT), along with Representative Lois Frankel (D-FL) and Representative Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), introduced the companion bill H.R. 3402. This bill will ensure that those who receive DIC payments would have their compensation raised from 43% to equal 55% of a single 100% disabled veteran's compensation and would bring parity with other Federal survivor programs.

If you would like to see the payment raised, Gold Star Wives of America (GSWA) is asking everyone to contact their congressional representatives to get S.976 & H.R.3402 passed. Editable Form letters are available for download on their website at <https://www.goldstarwives.org/Legislative-News>. They basically read:

-o-o-O-o-o-

_____, 2021

The Honorable (Insert Name of Representative)

Address _____

Dear Senator/Representative _____,

My name is _____ and I am one of your constituents. The Gold Star Wives of America (GSWA), a national organization which represents those who have lost a spouse through military service to our country, has asked me to aid them in seeking parity.

I want to bring to your attention and seek your support for H.R. 3402, which is the companion bill to S. 976 The Caring for Survivors Act of 2021. This bill addresses two issues: The rate of compensation to all Surviving Spouses; and compensation for Surviving Spouses of disabled Veterans, who have not reached the 10 year mark for minimum eligibility.

This bill is critical to Surviving Spouses because it:

- Will increase the Dependent Indemnity Compensation (DIC), which was earned by the death of their spouses. This will bring the amount of the DIC payment to equal the compensation paid to other Federal employee spouses and will give the military widow(er)s parity.

- Totally disabled Veterans may die of causes which cannot always be directly linked to their service-connected condition. If this happens before the minimum eligibility of 10 years, no compensation is paid. This bill would begin compensation at the 5 year mark.

Thank you so much for your support. If you, or your Veterans Affairs staff would like more information, GSWA's advocate in Washington, D.C. would be happy to speak with you. His name is Lars Anderson, and he can be reached at lars.goldstarwives@gmail.com.

Respectfully,

[Source: Together We Served Newsletter | Patricia Barbee | September 2021 ++]

VA Geriatric Care

Update 04: Emergency Care for Older Veterans Initiative

The Department of Veterans Affairs launched a Geriatric Emergency Department initiative within all of VA's 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN) through a standardized, comprehensive care model, becoming the nation's largest integrated health network with specialized geriatric emergency care. This initiative equips VA emergency departments with the ability to treat older Veterans with complex conditions, catch unmet care needs and develop teamwork strategies throughout VA to better coordinate ED and follow-up care. VA has partnered with the American College of Emergency Physicians, The John A. Hartford Foundation and the West Health Institute to ensure elderly Veterans continue to be afforded the best possible emergency care and person-centered health services. .

The evidence-based approach to caring for older adults includes screenings to identify seniors at risk for cognitive impairment, delirium, fall risk, functional decline, and caregiver burden. "Nearly half of the nation's 19.5 million Veterans are over 65 years old and account for more than 45% of ED visits at VA hospitals— more than double the rate for seniors nationwide," said VA Acting Under Secretary for Health Steven L. Lieberman, M.D. "Our goal is to lower this number by ensuring VA's elderly population receives age-friendly emergency care, while improving care coordination in communities across the nation."

VA continues to promote and augment transitions of care through an interdisciplinary team approach from various services throughout facilities. This is achieved through connecting with social work and VA home/community resources, geriatric education for emergency department staff and supporting geriatric Veterans in the community to prevent avoidable admissions. The partnership aims to establish 70 VA emergency departments as geriatric EDs eligible for accreditation in alignment with ACEP's GED Accreditation by December 2022.

Accreditation includes three levels that each have specific education criteria for clinicians and nurses, creating EDs that are more expertly equipped to treat older Veterans with complex conditions and social needs through interdisciplinary service coordination across a hospital. To date, there are 16 VA sites between levels 1 and 3, with level 1 accreditation being the highest achievable and most rigorous level:

- Atlanta, Ga. (2)
- Buffalo, N.Y. (2)
- Charleston, S. C. (3)
- Cleveland, Ohio (1)
- Durham, N.C. (2)
- Grand Junction, Colo. (3)
- Greater Los Angeles, Calif. (3)
- Long Beach, Calif. (3)
- Louisville, Ky. (2)
- Madison, Wis. (3)
- New Orleans, La. (3)
- Palo Alto, Calif. (3)
- Salt Lake City, Utah (3)
- San Diego, Calif. (3)
- Syracuse, N.Y. (2)
- West Haven, Conn. (3)

Accredited emergency departments have proven to lower costs, reduce the rate of unnecessary hospital admissions, and prevent the risk of inpatient complications. Best practices and lessons learned from this collaboration will be shared with EDs outside the VA. ACEP has accredited more than 200 emergency departments since the program's inception in 2018 [Source: VA News Release | September 8, 2021 ++]

VA Transgender Care

Update 03: LGBT OTH Discharged Could Get Benefits under New Plan

Tens of thousands of LGBT veterans forced from the military for their sexual orientation and given other-than-honorable discharges will be able to receive full Veterans Affairs benefits despite their dismissal status under a new move set to be announced 20 SEP. The change comes as the country approaches the 10th anniversary of repeal of the controversial “don’t ask, don’t tell” law which forced nearly 14,000 service members out of the ranks for admitting their sexual orientation. But the impact of the new VA announcement goes further than just those individuals, to potentially

include troops who served before and after the law who may have been given bad performance reviews or intimidated into leaving the military because of their LGBT status.

Outside advocates estimate as many as 100,000 over the last 70 years may have been involuntarily separated from the military based on their sexual orientation. Data on how many received other-than-honorable discharges is not available. According to sources familiar with the announcement, VA officials plan a series of reviews of those veterans' cases, with a presumption in favor of granting them benefits unless records give a clear reason to oppose that. The announcement to be released on the anniversary of the DADT repeal includes VA Secretary Denis McDonough asserting that department officials have the authority to award those individuals full VA benefits if their case warrants, regardless of the discharge status. Individuals with dishonorable discharges or clear criminal history documented in their service records will still not be granted benefits under the new plan.

The military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy was in place from 1993 to 2011. It prohibited LGBT service members from publicly discussing or acknowledging their sexual orientation, with a penalty of dismissal from the ranks if the truth was discovered. Before that, all LGBT individuals were barred completely from serving. Gay rights advocates for years have noted that both before and while the DADT policy was in place, many military commanders biased against LGBT troops often issued bad conduct dismissals to those individuals — citing issues like substandard fitness reports or poor performance — to cover up bigotry or frustration related to issues of sexual orientation. That later prompted VA staff to deny benefits to those veterans, since their paperwork did not show honorable discharge status.

The new move will extend VA medical care, disability payouts, employment assistance and other benefits individuals previously blocked because of other-than-honorable discharges. Department legal officials believe the change will not require any new legislative action or policy statements, because the department already has broad authority to interpret which veterans are eligible for department services. Exact timing on the VA announcement is unclear. VA officials declined comment on the pending news. Veterans with other than honorable discharges can apply to have their status upgraded, but that process often takes years and has been criticized by outside groups for being overly cumbersome. The new move by VA effectively goes around that process, awarding benefits to individuals quickly even if their review process remains unresolved.

Joe Biden was vice president when then President Barack Obama signed the DADT repeal into law. As president, Biden has vowed to make all government agencies more inclusive to minority and underrepresented groups. When McDonough took over as secretary in February, he pledged to make the department a place that "welcomes all veterans, including women, veterans of color, and LGBTQ veterans." In June, officials announced plans to offer transgender surgeries at department hospitals for the first time. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Leo Shane III | September17, 2021 ++]

VA Manila OPC

Announcements & Reminders 21 SEP 2021

VA MANILA ENDING COVID-19 VACCINATION CLINICS EFFECTIVE 9/21/21. VA Manila recently received guidance from VA's Office of General Counsel regarding the interpretation of the SAVES LIVES Act and VA's ability to provide COVID-19 vaccinations to individuals outside of the United States. Based on this guidance, going forward VA Manila will not be able to provide any further COVID-19 vaccines to individuals other than enrolled Veterans after September 21, 2021.

The SAVE LIVES Act authorized VA Manila to provide COVID-19 vaccines to Veterans eligible for medical benefits at the Clinic under 38 USC 1724, which includes Veterans with service-connected disabilities. In enacting the SAVES LIVES Act, Congress did not amend 38 USC 1724 to authorize VA to provide services to non-enrolled Veterans, spouses, and caregivers outside of the United States. On that basis, VA's Office of General Counsel has advised that VA remains limited to providing medical benefits only to service-connected Veterans outside of the United States. Therefore, VA Manila will cease providing vaccines to spouses, widows, and CHAMP-VA beneficiaries after September 21, 2021. Also based on this guidance, VA Manila will not be able to provide COVID-19 vaccines to caregivers, dependents, or non-VA Manila-enrolled Veterans.

Caregivers, spouses, and dependents of Veterans, as well as Veterans not eligible for medical benefits who reside in the Philippines and who still wish to receive a COVID-19 vaccine should work with local government units and provincial health authorities to obtain vaccines through available sources locally. Based on recent news stories, the availability of COVID-19 vaccines in the Philippines is reported to increase over the next 60 days. Receiving your vaccine from local sources may also help to ensure your vaccine is recognized by local authorities.

As additional details on the need for booster vaccines from VA and the US CDC becomes available, VA Manila will continue to provide updates to the Veteran community. Based on the latest information and guidance, VA Manila does not anticipate receiving additional supplies of COVID-19 vaccines until January 2022, which is eight months after the Clinic began providing Pfizer vaccinations to enrolled Veterans in April 2021.

Please feel free to email ManilaCOVIDVaccine@va.gov if you have further questions regarding vaccinations,. Veterans who received vaccinations from non-VA sources in the United States or the Philippines should send their COVID-19 Vaccination Administration Record to VA Manila so that your record can be properly updated. Veterans can use MyHealtheVet to send a scan or photograph of their COVID-19 Vaccine Card to the Clinic or send it through the email provided above.

In closing, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on how much the Clinic has accomplished to date. VA Manila Outpatient Clinic has provided nearly 6,500 COVID-19 vaccine doses to Veterans, spouses, widows, and CHAMP-VA beneficiaries. As the Clinic Manager, I am proud of the tireless work that our dedicated Clinic staff have shown in administering vaccines – working weekends and holidays to offer more appointments and more convenient times for those to get their jabs. I'm also thankful for the Veterans who have chosen to receive their vaccines from VA Manila – keeping themselves and those closest to them safe from the possible impacts of the pandemic. I also want to express my deepest gratitude to the Veterans Service Groups who have assisted VA Manila in reaching Veterans, provided transportation to the Clinic, supported Veterans with transportation subsidies, and helped VA Manila communicate with Veterans throughout the Philippines. We could not have done so much without everyone working together for the common good.

Please continue to stay healthy and well. Best, Dan

Daniel Gutkoski, MHA

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Gulf War Presumptives

Update 09: Extended to September 13, 2026

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) issued an interim final rule to amend its adjudication regulations regarding compensation for disabilities resulting from undiagnosed illnesses suffered by Veterans who served in the Persian Gulf War. The amendment was necessary to extend the presumptive period for qualifying chronic disabilities resulting from undiagnosed illnesses that must manifest to a compensable degree in order to establish entitlement to disability compensation benefits. The intended effect of the amendment was to provide consistency in VA adjudication policy, preserve certain rights afforded to Persian Gulf War Veterans and ensure fairness for current and future Persian Gulf War Veterans.

This interim final rule was effective September 14, 2021. The provisions of this interim final rule shall apply to all applications for benefits that are received by VA on or after the effective date of this interim final rule or that are pending before VA, the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, or the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit on the effective date of this interim final rule. [Source: Federal Register | September 14, 2021 ++]

VA Loans

Update 01: Pros & Cons in New York



Georganne Hassell and her husband both did tours in Afghanistan, and are considering forgoing the V.A. loan on their next home purchase in hopes of making their offer more competitive.

The search for affordable housing has long been an accepted part of the job for American soldiers and their families. And since the Covid-19 pandemic set the real estate market on fire, it has never been harder. America's military families move homes 10 times more frequently than civilians, often relocating every two or three years. That burden is somewhat eased by the Veterans Affairs loan, a privately-funded mortgage backed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs that is best known for allowing veterans to purchase a home with no down payment. About 25 million soldiers have used the loan since 1944. The loan comes with other benefits, too: competitive interest rates, no prepayment penalties, shorter waiting periods for approval following foreclosure or bankruptcy, and no requirement for private mortgage insurance. But in the hottest housing market in decades, many military families are now finding the loan can be more albatross than asset.

V.A. loans, which were created in 1944 as part of the G.I. Bill of Rights, are often regarded with suspicion. Many sellers think the loans are either risky or hard to close. And in a market where nearly 90 percent of properties sell within a month, and more than 20 percent of buyers are paying all in cash, veterans and soldiers shopping with a V.A. loan are finding they can't compete. "We just couldn't get anybody to accept our offer," said Shawn O'Farrell, who tried for more than 50 homes this summer before eventually closing on a three-bedroom, three-bath house in Appleton, Wis.

Shawn O'Farrell served in the U.S. Army for seven years, deploying to Iraq three times. When shopping for a home for his family this summer, he and his wife, Bekah, were surprised that in multiple instances, sellers passed on their offer in favor of a lower bid from another buyer. Mr. O'Farrell served in the U.S. Army for seven years, deploying to Iraq three times. But getting an offer accepted on a home while moving his family from Illinois to Wisconsin turned out to be another battle. He and his wife, Bekah, were surprised to find that in several instances when they made an offer, despite bidding above asking price and waiving contingencies, the sellers accepted a lower bid from a different buyer.

- "If we bid \$285,000, they would accept a different bid for \$260,000," he said. "It seems there's still a myth about V.A. loans, and sellers are being told that V.A. loans are horrible

and they should never take them.” The O’Farrells paid \$290,000 for their current home, more than \$40,000 above the original listing price. Mr. O’Farrell believes he overpaid, but had no other choice.

- “A lot of veterans are being left out of the process, because they can’t compete,” said Deonte Cole, a retired Marine Corps veteran who now works as a broker in Tampa, Fla. “We’ve got a surplus of ready and willing veterans who aren’t able to find homes right now. Sellers are trying to get the best offers they can and they don’t see the V.A. loan as competitive.”
- There is a growing civilian-military divide in the United States. According to a Pew Research Center survey, only 33 percent of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 have an immediate family member who served in the military, compared to 79 percent of Americans aged 50 to 64.

And when armed service members are required to relocate during active duty, the divide can be economically devastating. “This market is an absolute nightmare for military families,” said Georganne Hassell, a veteran whose husband is currently in the Air Force. Both did tours in Afghanistan, and they currently live in Ogden, Utah. “Many people don’t have a close connection with a military family, and more understanding from Americans about these challenges would be helpful for our country,” she said. Ms. Hassell and her husband bought a home in Ogden in June 2020, and are gearing up for another cross-country move in a few months. This time around, in hopes it might make them more competitive, they are considering a conventional loan. “A huge percentage of the American population has not been in service,” she said. “The V.A. loan is just another unknown, and people tend to gravitate toward what they know. But ultimately the military decides where we live. The military is not just a job, it’s a lifestyle, and moving is part of that.”

The stigma that V.A. loans often carry isn’t entirely unearned. Years ago, the loans were much harder to close — they were complicated transactions that often would fall apart in the final days of the deal; and home appraisers, who were also once paid less for mortgages with V.A. loans than for conventional properties, were said to drag their feet or even lowball their appraisals when working on a property with a V.A. loan.

- Those headaches are legitimate concerns, said Chris Birk, vice president of mortgage insight at Veterans United, a V.A. lender, and they’re rooted in sellers’ fears that going with a V.A. loan could scuttle their closing. But those concerns are also outdated. The loan process has been significantly streamlined in the past two decades.
- “There’s a lot of mythmaking and stereotyping with V.A. loans, and it is rooted in misconceptions,” Mr. Birk said, although he acknowledged, “Some of them have kernels of truth.” “We do see reticence among some home sellers and some real estate agents, because of old stereotypes about bureaucracy and red tape.”

Today, V.A. loans actually close at a higher rate than conventional mortgages. For all home purchases in June 2021, 70 percent of V.A. loans successfully closed, compared with 51 percent

of all mortgages, according to Ellie Mae, a mortgage application software company. And they're being utilized more often, as well: data from the Department of Veterans shows that the number of V.A. loans went up 8 percent year over year in 2021, marking the 10th consecutive year of growth. But despite the loan process being simplified over the past 20 years, they haven't entirely been able to shake the spool of extra red tape. And in some markets, the barrier made by that tape is extra thick.

"The challenges that veterans face in purchasing a home vary by region," said Yuchen Duan, a veteran who recently bought a condo in Long Island City thanks to help from the building's developer, a fellow veteran who stepped in to help push her loan process forward. "And veterans in New York City face some very unique challenges." Ms. Duan said that in her home-buying process, she was at particular disadvantage because of a widespread unfamiliarity with the V.A. loan among New Yorkers. New York State has the lowest percentage of veterans in the United States, at 4.4 percent.

"The amount of information and requirements that the V.A. requires for a loan are different and above what normal conventionally underwritten mortgages require," said John McInerney, managing director of iCross Capital, a real estate financing fund in New York that served as developer for the Bond. Mr. McInerney is a veteran of the U.S. Army, and he suspected Ms. Duan would face additional challenges by using a V.A. loan. He was right: the documents that the V.A. required in Ms. Duan's case were significantly more involved than those for a conventional loan: including a spreadsheet on the Bond's sales activities, documented evidence of the building's recreational facilities; even the minutes from their homeowners' association meetings.

"Anything dealing with veterans is a government entity, so it's going to require a kitchen-sink kind of approach," Mr. McInerney said. "A lot of people are reluctant to go through so much effort just to close a sale." Mr. McInerney and his team worked directly with Wells Fargo Home Mortgage Loans to draw up a contract contingent on their ability to secure V.A. financing, and Ms. Duan was able to close her mortgage within 60 days. "It required additional work on the part of the bank, it required additional work on the part of my associates, and it required some additional work from the brokers. But I think it was well-served," Mr. McInerney said.

Educating brokers and lenders about the realities of V.A. loans, and the changes they have undergone in the past few decades, would help bridge that gap, said T.J. Powell, an executive vice president at the American Armed Forces Mutual Aid Association, a military nonprofit that provides financial services for veterans. "A lot of people come our way because they had a bad experience with a lender who just didn't know the ins and outs of a V.A. loan," Mr. Powell said. "Knowledge is power. The more we can partner up and give education about the loan, it will help the borrower in the long run." [Source: New York Times | Kevin Miyazaki & Gabriela Bhaskar | September 14, 2021 ++]

VA Satellite Phones

DVA Missing More Than \$700,000 in Emergency Devices

The Veterans Affairs Department is missing more than \$700,000 in emergency satellite phone devices while a bureaucratic quagmire prevents IT officials from fixing the situation. When disasters strike, VA employees move swiftly to ensure the safety of veterans in their care, as well as the communities in which they operate. Part of their preparations included reaching out to the Office of Emergency Management to secure satellite phones for use when the terrestrial networks go down. This year was no different. As the 2021 hurricane season approached, VA staff began preparing.

But of the 549 Iridium satellite phones owned by VA, the agency can only account for 110. And a mess of bureaucratic finger pointing has prevented VA staff from clearing the missing devices from their inventories and restocking the necessary equipment. “Where are the phones? We don’t know,” a VA IT official told Nextgov on the condition of anonymity, as they were not cleared to speak with the press. And while VA leadership has since established policies that would prevent this from happening again, the problem remains in limbo, with no one willing to take the responsibility required to move on. “But nobody wants to put their name on it,” they said.

Without that closure—either finding the phones or acknowledging that they are lost—OEM can’t move forward. “And, since no one wants to take responsibility, we don’t have our communication tools,” the IT official added. The current set of events began in September 2019, when then-VA Chief Information Officer James Gfrerer ordered all emergency communications equipment consolidated under OEM. That would include the satellite phones, as well as satellite services and high-frequency radios. At that time, the phones were kept by the Office of Operations, Security and Preparedness, which manages the security of VA facilities, including ensuring personnel have secure communications devices.

An inventory list—obtained by Nextgov—shows the office owned 549 Iridium satellite phone devices. However, when OEM went to take over management of the assets, OSP officials were unable to physically locate 439 of those devices. That list was checked annually as part of a partial inventory, during which a randomized 10% of the list was verified. But the old process only included checking the documentation associated with the device, not locating the device physically. “They would go through their stack of paperwork and say, ‘If I have the paperwork associated with that phone then that counts as inventory,’” the official said. “They inventoried the paperwork, not the phone.” That process has since been updated but that doesn’t help locate the missing phones. At a cost of \$1,615 per phone, the total missing inventory is valued at over \$708,985.

Officials have been trying to locate the missing phones since December, with 110 located, and 52 of those transferred to OEM, according to a May 2021 white paper—an internal document obtained by Nextgov. But OEM officials are declining to take ownership of the full inventory list

until the missing phones are either found or written off as a loss. The likelihood that the phones will be found and fully accounted for is slim, the official said. Before the missing phones can be cleared, someone within the VA must conduct a Report of Survey—an official report that documents what was lost, what went wrong and who might be liable. Emails obtained by Nextgov show OIT divisions tasked with this investigation continue to look for the phones but have yet to conduct a Report of Survey.

VA's Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs declined multiple interview requests but told Nextgov in a statement: "VA's Office of Operations, Security and Preparedness is working with VA's Office of Information and Technology to properly account for satellite phones, remediate the situation and improve inventory and management processes of these phones for the future. Some of the phones have been accounted for and we continue to investigate this matter." While no one is certain where those phones are today, the IT official said there is little to no chance they were stolen or otherwise misappropriated. "They're like a cellphone: you need a SIM card to make them work," the official said. If the phones are turned on at any point, they would ping Iridium's network, which has not happened, the official said.

Without a clear chain of possession, a device would be given to an employee who then, maybe, puts it in a drawer until needed. But when that person changes roles or leaves government altogether, the devices get lost in the shuffle. The lack of awareness of where these phones are creates other problems for the OEM team, which tests all of its equipment monthly to ensure it is ready to go in case of an emergency. Even if the phones are with the right people who could use them in an emergency situation, without a way to track them the central office has no means of ensuring those devices will be working properly when needed.

The official said this is not a rampant problem within VA IT—laptops and other devices don't regularly go missing, for instance. "They learned their lesson a long time ago about tracking equipment. They're pretty good at it now," they said. "But this is something that nobody wanted to dive into—one of those things you don't want to touch because it's so big." But the lack of a reliable means for tracking these phones has been causing problems for years—even decades. While the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001 were not directed at VA facilities or personnel, the agency—like most others—moved quickly to support the federal and local response. That day was the first time the official noticed this issue.

"We were looking for satellite phones," they told Nextgov. "We were calling ... trying to get the satellite phones ... but we couldn't get any. Couldn't even get a list of who had them." That scenario played out when Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico in 2017 and again last month when Ida crashed into the Gulf Coast, during which, "satellite phone availability ... was difficult at best," the IT manager said. They "begged and borrowed" to meet the needs of those on the ground. "It's been a mismanaged program for many, many years," the official said. [Source: Nextgov | Aaron Boyd | September 17, 2021 ++]

VAMC Atlanta GA

Update 05: Investigation Uncovers 10 pallets of Unprocessed Mail



Thousands of pieces of mail were moved to a basement at the Atlanta Veterans Affairs Medical Center and left there for months. A joint Atlanta Journal-Constitution/Channel 2 Action News investigation uncovered the problem. The photos of the mail were first reported by AJC. VA employees who saw the 10 pallets of mail said there were postmarks dating back at least 10 months and mail stacked 10 feet into the air. Based on the codes employees saw, that mail contains things critical to veteran care, including medical records waiting to be scanned into the system.

“I was walking in the basement and saw all this mail,” a VA employee told Channel 2 investigative reporter Justin Gray. That whistleblower is also a disabled veteran. She says she saw the mail in the basement warehouse at the logistics department of the Atlanta VA Medical Center. “This was pallets upon pallets, just staged. Sitting in the basement. Just sitting there. Nobody touched it,” said the VA employee. The Atlanta VA confirmed it happened and said it has now moved six of the 10 pallets for processing. The VA says the mail is predominantly documentation of services provided by community partners, which is also submitted electronically for processing.

In July, reporter Gray reported on veterans not being able to get through on the phone to the Atlanta VA because of glitches with a new phone system. Fulton County Marine Corps veteran Robert Mullins had that issue himself. Mullins said he’s disappointed, but not surprised, about all that unopened mail. “We have a saying that says, delay, deny and hope that you die,” Mullins said. The VA says mail processing responsibilities were recently shifted to local hospitals from a central facility, telling us in a statement: “We are working diligently to process the four remaining pallets of mail as quickly as possible. We are also hiring additional staff to ensure the medical center’s mail room functions efficiently.”

Pete Sepp from the National Taxpayers Union said this is more than just a case of a slow mailroom. “These are not just pieces of mail with postage on them, these are peoples’ lives. Every piece of mail represents a person,” Sepp said. And that VA employee who tipped us off to the mail has also been waiting for medical records from VA she first requested back in March 2020. “It could be my own records there, and I work for the VA. This is very disappointing to me as a

veteran, very disappointing. It tells me that from the director on down, that they don't give a damn," she said.

The Atlanta VA told Atlanta Journal-Constitution/Channel 2 Action News nobody has been disciplined for this but said in a statement it is "reviewing our internal processes to prevent a similar situation in the future, we are also retraining current mailroom employees and hiring additional staff to ensure the medical center's mail room functions efficiently." [Source: WSB-TV 2 | Justin Gray | September 20, 2021 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse

Reported 16 thru 30 SEP 2021

Prosthetic Device Overspending — Thanks to a lack of internal oversight, the Veterans Health Administration's Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service (PSAS) paid "about \$10 million more than reasonable rates" for prosthetic devices in a six-month ending in March 2020, according to a new report from the Department of Veterans Affairs' Office of the Inspector General at <https://www.va.gov/oig/pubs/VAOIG-20-01802-234.pdf> . The report estimates that the VHA could save up to \$20 million each year if such spending is better managed.

An audit found that over \$300 million, accounting for 9 percent of total prosthetic spending in 2019, went toward prosthetic-related equipment provided to veterans by vendors outside the VHA. The VHA then reimburses these vendors based on Medicare rates, because the administration doesn't have its own pricing guidelines for such prosthetic and orthotic items provided to veterans through third-party vendors. The report found that this lack of an established pricing structure paired with a lack of oversight means that the office missed opportunities for cost savings on things like artificial limbs, shoes, and other related items.

In some cases, VAOIG found that facilities were reimbursing third-party vendors at rates that even exceeded those Medicare rates. Looking at a random sample, the audit identified approximately 41,300 out of 112,600 transactions that went beyond what was considered a reasonable rate of reimbursement. In some cases, facilities even overpaid vendors by different amounts for the same items, or recorded incorrect transaction data.

The report states that the audit team went so far as to ask VA and VHA officials which pricing methods might apply to these transactions, and officials said "it was not their responsibility to monitor laws and regulations." Instead officials told the OIG that they operate under the assumption that the VA's Office of Regulatory and Administration Affairs or the Office of General Counsel will advise when relevant laws or regulations go into effect. However, the report notes that those officers provided any such advisement.

To address the challenges leading to overspending in this sector of care, VAOIG issued a list of recommendations that included establishing clear pricing guidelines in accordance with relevant laws and regulations, and establishing a formal oversight structure that includes monitoring spending data more closely. VHA officials concurred with all of the recommendations, and laid out an action plan to address them with targeted completion dates spanning 2022. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leila Barghouty | September 24, 2021 ++]

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OIG AUG Investigative Update

- A New Jersey man pleaded guilty to stealing HIV medication. The defendant conspired with a former pharmacy technician at the East Orange VA Medical Center to steal and sell \$8.2 million of medication.
- An Ohio veteran pleaded guilty to influencing, impeding, or retaliating against a federal employee by threatening a family member. The VA OIG found the defendant sent a threatening text message to his VA social worker after he was discharged from a housing program due to misconduct. The defendant threatened to kill the social worker's family members because he blamed the social worker for his removal from the program.
- In a case of stolen valor, a veteran was sentenced in the Southern District of Florida to six months' imprisonment, three years' supervised release with nine months' home confinement, and ordered to pay restitution of approximately \$318,000. The VA OIG investigation revealed that the defendant lied about his military service history, to include lying about receiving a Combat Infantryman Badge earned during a deployment to Panama. By lying, it enabled the defendant to receive VA compensation benefits and healthcare benefits.
- An ex-daughter-in-law of a deceased VA beneficiary was sentenced in the District of Arizona to five years' supervised probation and ordered to pay approximately \$232,000 for unlawfully using compensation benefits intended for the deceased VA beneficiary from August 2003 until September 2019.
- A former pharmacy technician at the Kerrville VA Medical Center in Texas and two accomplices were indicted on numerous charges in connection with a drug diversion and distribution scheme. The VA Office of Inspector General technician allegedly stole in excess of 40 packages containing controlled substances intended for veterans from the mail, then sold the narcotics to his co-conspirators for further distribution.
- In New York, a veteran was arrested for making threats to various VA call center employees, including threatening to blow up the VA Medical Center in Buffalo, New York.

- A Florida veteran was indicted on theft of government funds and making false statements. Allegedly, he lied about his physical disabilities and made up combat stories that he told to VA in order to obtain a 100 percent VA disability rating.
- Two individuals were indicted on charges of kidnapping and extortion. It's alleged they kidnapped an elderly female with dementia from a parking lot at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center and then withdrew about \$17,000 from her checking account without her consent. Within hours of beginning its investigation, the FBI located the victim's phone at a nearby hotel and rescued the victim.

Anyone can report fraud, waste, abuse, or possible criminal activity to OIG online or call the hotline at 1-800-488-8244. [Source: VA OIG August 2021 Monthly Highlights | September 21, 2021 ++]

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Voyeurism -- A former employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs was sentenced to four months in jail for using a hidden camera to record his co-workers as they used the bathroom at the Pensacola VA Joint Ambulatory Care Center. Acting United States Attorney for the Northern District of Florida, said in a release. "The defendant's actions were a direct affront to his co-workers' expectation of privacy.

On 24 SEP, the Department of Justice announced that , 52, of Gulf Breeze, Florida, was sentenced to four months in jail, plus an additional year of supervised release for the charges of video voyeurism and disorderly conduct. Additionally, Sampson is ordered to pay \$1,200 in fines and restitution to his victims. Evidence presented at the sentencing hearing stated that while employed at the VA, Sampson placed a hidden camera disguised as a cellular phone charger power adapter in a restroom at the Pensacola VA Joint Ambulatory Care Center.

Between May 2020 and June 2020, Sampson recorded eight VA employees on approximately 17 different occasions on the hidden camera, according to prosecutors. When Sampson's co-workers discovered the recording device and notified VA Police, Sampson attempted to wrestle his co-workers for the device. Sampson later admitted that he had placed the device in the restroom to record individuals in the bathroom, and that he would watch the footage later. Following his four-month jail sentence, Sampson will serve a one-year term of supervised release. As a condition of this supervised release, Sampson will have a "limitation" placed on his ability to use computers and the internet. [Source: MilitaryTimes | James R. Webb | September 27, 2021 ++]

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Kansas City, Mo. — A Parkville, Missouri, man who was charged in two federal cases pleaded guilty in federal court 13 SEP to his role in a \$335 million scheme to defraud federal programs that award contracts to firms owned by minorities, veterans, and service-disabled veterans, and in a separate case to filing false tax returns that cheated the government out of more than \$615,000 in taxes owed. **Patrick Michael Dingle**, 50, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Roseann

Ketchmark to the charges contained in both federal cases. Dingle pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire and major program fraud. Dingle also pleaded guilty, in a separate case, to one count of filing a false tax return. By pleading guilty today, Dingle admitted that he conspired with **Matthew C. McPherson**, 45, of Olathe, Kansas, to fraudulently obtain contracts set aside by the federal government for award to small businesses owned and controlled by veterans, service-disabled veterans and certified minorities.

Dingle was the operations manager for Zieson Construction Company located in North Kansas City, Mo. Dingle and his co-conspirators controlled and operated Zieson, which was originally formed in 2009 with Stephon Ziegler – an African-American service-disabled veteran – as the nominal owner. Zieson’s primary business was obtaining federal construction contracts set aside for award to small businesses owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans or certified minorities. However, Ziegler did not control the day-to-day operations or the long-term decision making of Zieson. Dingle and his co-conspirators actually controlled and operated Zieson, and received most of the profits from Zieson.

Ziegler signed Zieson checks when requested to do so, signed bids for government jobs when requested to do so and served as a courier of checks and invoices when requested to do so. Ziegler did not participate in any way in the management and control of either day-to-day operations or long-term decision-making for Zieson. Dingle and McPherson were not eligible for these set-aside contracts because they were not certified minorities or veterans. Although Zieson was not eligible, the firm received approximately 199 federal contracts set aside for award to minority-owned small businesses and veteran-owned small businesses between 2009 and 2018. The government paid Zieson approximately \$335 million for those contracts. Several of the set-aside contracts awarded to Zieson were valued in excess of \$1 million, including a contract at Topeka, Kan., awarded on July 13, 2012, valued at approximately \$4,125,800.

Dingle, McPherson, and others submitted false and fraudulent Past Performance Questionnaires in support of Zieson bids for set aside contracts. McPherson pleaded guilty on June 3, 2019, to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and major program fraud and awaits sentencing. Dingle also pleaded guilty, in a separate case, to filing a false tax return. Dingle admitted that he claimed \$799,425 in fraudulent business expenses on his tax return for 2016. As a result of the false and fraudulent expenses offset on Dingle’s 2016 tax return, the government suffered a loss of approximately \$349,784. Dingle also admitted that he filed false tax returns over a four-year period from 2013 to 2016, which resulted in a total loss to the government of \$615,847. Under the terms of today’s plea agreement, Dingle must pay restitution to the government in the total amount of federal tax loss as determined by the court at sentencing. Under federal statutes, Dingle is subject to a sentence of up to eight years in federal prison without parole. [Source: DoJ Western District of Missouri| U.S. Attorney’s Office | September 13, 2021 ++]

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Fort Worth, Tx. — The owner of a for-profit trade school has been sentenced to more than 19 years in federal prison for bilking the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs of \$72 million and of misleading student veterans, announced Acting U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Texas Prerak Shah. In April, a federal jury convicted **Jonathan Dean Davis**, the 43 year-old owner of Retail Ready Career Center, of seven counts of wire fraud and four counts of money laundering. He was sentenced 22 SEP by U.S. District Judge Brantley Starr, who also ordered him to pay \$65.2 million in restitution. In addition to paying restitution, Mr. Davis will be required to forfeit \$72.5 million to the federal government.

The defendant had been remanded into custody immediately following conviction, and was remanded back into custody after his sentencing hearing. “A jury found that Mr. Davis lied to multiple government agencies, lining his pockets with veterans’ GI Bill benefits even as they were struggling to scrape by,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Prerak Shah. “Mr. Davis’ crimes were a slap in the face to the sacrifices made by our servicemembers, and we are proud to put him behind bars for such a significant period of time.”

According to evidence presented at trial, Mr. Davis marketed Retail Ready’s six-week HVAC training course to veterans whose tuition and fees would be covered by the Veteran’s Educational Assistance Act of 2008, also known as the post-9/11 GI Bill. The defendant, who was essentially broke at the time of the crime, realized that he could charge \$18,000 to \$21,000 per student for the six-week course, if only he could get approval from the VA to accept GI Bill payments for tuition – which required prior approvals from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC). These agencies required applicants to certify that they were not personally facing any criminal or civil actions, and to prove that their schools were established educational institutions in stable financial condition. Knowing he could not meet these requirements, Mr. Davis repeatedly lied and concealed information from these agencies.

“Several decisions lie ahead that will ultimately make the difference if I succeed or if I fail. More gut-wrenching conversations, more humiliating experiences, more lying is in order,” Mr. Davis wrote in an electronic journal he kept on his computer, which was recovered by federal agents during a search of Retail Ready. The journal became a key piece of evidence at trial. Mr. Davis assured the TWC that he was not subject to any civil actions, when, in fact, he was facing numerous civil judgments over unpaid debts. He also told the TWC that he was not facing any criminal charges, when, in fact, he had a pending felony charge for theft of services. Mr. Davis told the TVC that Retail Ready had been operating as a school for two years, when, in fact, the company had only existed for a few months and had never trained any students. He claimed that Retail Ready was fully prepared to train veterans, when, in fact, the company lacked a building and basic supplies. He even lied to an independent accountant about the school’s financial condition, and then submitted false financial statements to both the TWC and the TVC.

Eventually, based upon Mr. Davis’ lies to the TWC and TVC, the VA accepted Retail Ready’s application, allowing Mr. Davis to charge veterans’ tuition and fees to the VA under the GI Bill.

In 2014, he began recruiting student veterans, promising to prepare them for lucrative careers in the heating and air conditioning industry. Upon entering the workforce, however, many of these veterans discovered that Retail Ready had failed to teach them many of the basic skills necessary for entry-level technician jobs. Several veterans testified at trial that they had relied on the Retail Ready's fraudulently obtained VA endorsement and were sorely disappointed about their post-Retail Ready career prospects and pay. They were also shocked to learn of the rate at which Retail Ready's six-week course had drained their GI Bill benefits, testifying that they felt "used," "taken advantage of," "deceived," and "bamboozled."

Even as his veteran graduates struggled to make ends meet, Retail Ready collected more than \$72 million in GI Bill benefits from the VA. Using the proceeds of his fraud, Mr. Davis purchased a \$2.2 million home in Dallas, a \$428,000 Lamborghini, a \$280,000 Ferrari, and a \$260,000 Bentley, among other things. [Source: DoJ Northern District of Texas | U.S. Attorney's Office | September 22, 2021 ++]

*** Vets ***



Vet Service Dogs

Update 30: VA Changed VAMC Admission Policies after Vet Suicide

In the wake of a veteran's death by suicide, a tragedy preceded by missed appointments due to the veteran's service dog being denied entry to the VA hospital, the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General issued recommendations to two VA facilities to improve care for mental health patients. One of those recommendations was to nix prohibitive service dog policies. Previously, the VA Palo Alto Healthcare System required service dogs to complete a health screening, be trained in three assistance tasks, and wear identification. But VHA's policy does not permit facility staff to require health screenings or identification, according to the VAOIG's report.

The report, published 23 SEP, details a case of an unidentified veteran's death by suicide after receiving services through VA facilities in Portland, Oregon and Palo Alto, California. Though the report notes that staff made a reasonable effort to provide most aspects of mental health care to the patient, who was showing signs of suicidal ideation, it states that the facilities in question failed to meet some of the policies required by the Veterans Health Administration. The policies that staff fell short on included providing various suicide-prevention care and mental health treatment options, and not allowing the patient's service dog to enter the facility.

The patient was assessed as being at high risk for suicide, and objected to attending certain appointments without the service dog. The Palo Alto VA facility imposed service dog requirements that were stricter than VHA's official service dog policy, VAOIG found. The VAOIG report states that "failure to comply with VHA animal access policy may contribute to barriers in accessing VHA services for patients with service animals." The patient had told the facility that the 11-year-old service dog was their only support system.

Following the investigation, VAOIG issued seven recommendations to improve training, coordination, policy, and procedures related to mental health care at both facilities. Officials at both facilities concurred on all applicable recommendations, which included developing procedures consistent with the VHA's behavioral report procedures, improving and expediting communication of key information with both patients and leadership, and monitoring staff for compliance to VHA policies, among others. A final recommendation pushed the Palo Alto facility to update its service dog policy to match the VHA's, which the facility concurred with and provided a completion date of May 2021. [Source: Military.com | Leila Barghouty | September 24, 2021 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs

Scheduled As of OCT 01, 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 1, 2021 ++]

Vet Treatment Courts

Update 33: Working but VA Improvement Needed to Increase Access



The growing Veterans Justice Outreach program, which has helped ease criminal justice problems for veterans' across the U.S., is working, but the Department of Veterans Affairs needs to make some improvements for more veterans to participate, according to a new watchdog report. The VA needs to improve training, outreach, and planning, among other actions, according to a new report from the Government Accountability Office.

The report names four key barriers identified by both VA and GAO that justice-involved veterans face in accessing the specialized services through the Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act of 2018. According to GAO's report, these barriers included Veterans Justice Outreach specialists failing to identify veterans eligible for their services, lack of awareness of the program within jurisdictions, workforce capacity constraints among specialists, and confusion within the veteran community on eligibility. In the jurisdictions where they work, these specialists assist justice-involved-veterans in navigating the courts in order to decrease subsequent risks of recidivism and homelessness. "VJO officials have said that additional research will help them to identify how VA can improve access to the program and VA services," Elizabeth Curda, Director, Education, Workforce and Income Security Issues for GAO said in an email to Military Times. "However, VA hasn't fully demonstrated through its research or other efforts what or where the needs are."

Over 50 percent of veterans involved in the justice system live with mental health or substance-abuse issues, according to VA research. GAO notes that arrest and detention can further increase veterans' risk of mental health conditions and homelessness. This increased risk is, in part, why Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC) were first established in 2008. These courts operate parallel to state and local criminal courts, modeled after drug courts, with staff specifically trained to address needs that veterans facing charges might have. Between 2009 and 2016, the number of these courts in the U.S. grew from 25 to 461. From 2017 to 2019, over 40,000 justice-involved veterans were assisted by the program, according to the Sept. 14 report (that number dropped to just over 36,000 in 2020, but the VA attributes the drop to COVID-19 restrictions).

Retired Army Colonel D.J. Reyes, a senior mentor program coordinator for the 13th Judicial Circuit's Veterans Treatment Court in Tampa, Florida, said improvement to the program comes down to resources. "The VJO program is a vital and critical requirement for the [Veterans Treatment Courts] to continue to be successful," Reyes told Military Times. "Having said that, there are challenges."

In 2018, Congress mandated that VA hire at least 50 additional Veterans Justice Outreach specialists to help execute this veteran-focused avenue of criminal justice. Since the passage of the bill, GAO found VA hired 51 such personnel, bringing the total number of specialists to almost 400 nationwide. However, VTC courts and VJO specialists are not evenly distributed across the country. Data mapped by GAO showed that the number of jails where veterans might be detained was far higher than the number of VJO specialists available per state. In many cases, the report notes, large distances between VA facility locations where VJO specialists work and justice jurisdictions limited their ability to provide services.

While VA concurred with the findings, GAO said the agency did inadequate planning to address them. "Absent a comprehensive risk assessment, VA is not well-positioned to develop appropriate strategies to mitigate the greatest risks, which may limit its ability to help justice-involved veterans receive assistance and avoid re-incarceration," the report reads. Ultimately, Reyes said he hopes these services continue to grow in availability, particularly in communities where substance use and mental illness may be elevated. While the recommendations from GAO may seek to improve the system, Reyes says execution of a better program is actually hinged around funds rather than organization. "Our problem, which is the problem of 99.9 percent of all jurisdictions," he said, "is money." [Source: AirForceTimes | Leila Barghouty | September 15, 2021 ++]

Tricare Cost Increases

Users to Pay More in 2022 in All Areas

Military families and retirees who use retail pharmacies or the Tricare mail-order (TMOP) delivery system for their medications will see an increase in copayments in 2022, according to a notice to be published 21 SEP in the Federal Register. Likewise, military retirees still considered to be working age -- those under age 65 who are not old enough for Medicare and Tricare for Life -- can expect to pay more in health care enrollment fees, although the exact amount of the bump has yet to be determined.

Prescriptions for all Tricare beneficiaries at retail pharmacies will cost \$14 for a 30-day supply for a generic drug, up from \$11; \$38 for a brand-name medication, up from \$33; and \$68 for a non-formulary drug not listed in Tricare's list of covered medications, up from \$60. Eligible patients can save money by using military pharmacies, which charge no copayments, or they can trim costs

of regularly prescribed medications by using Tricare's mail-order pharmacy, managed by Express Scripts.

Copayments for the mail-order pharmacy also will see an increase. The cost of a generic prescription will rise from \$10 to \$12 for a 90-day supply, and from \$29 to \$34 for a brand-name drug for a 90-day script. Non-formulary drugs will cost \$68. Annual enrollment fees for Tricare Prime and Select also are expected to rise for career retired service members and their families, but the amount of the increase has yet to be determined because it is based on the calculated cost-of-living adjustment for retired military pay, which is usually published in mid-October.

The enrollment fee increase is expected to be significant this year as military retirees could see the largest jump in their retirement pay in nearly 40 years. As of June, the projected cost-of-living, or COLA, increase was 5.1%, meaning that both retirement pay and Tricare Prime enrollment fees could rise by that percent as well, give or take a few tenths. Currently, military personnel who retired before Jan. 1, 2018, known as Group A retirees, pay \$303 per year for an individual and \$606 per year for a family. Those designated as Group B retirees entered service on or after Jan. 1, 2018, and have left military service, mainly medical retirees and their family members. This group currently pays annual enrollment fees for Tricare Prime of \$366 per individual and \$732 per family.

- Retirees in Group A who use Tricare Select began paying annual enrollment fees this year, \$150 for an individual and \$300 for a family, while Group B retirees' enrollment fees for Select are \$471 for an individual or \$942 for a family. Both groups are subject to the COLA adjustment and will see increases to their fees.
- Surviving family members of sponsors who died on active duty or service members who medically retired before Jan. 1, 2018, and their families who are enrolled in Tricare Prime are exempt from the increases as long as they remain in that health program.
- Tricare for Life beneficiaries don't pay anything for that program, which acts as a secondary payer to Medicare. But they are likely to see increased cost in their health care as well, since they are required to have Medicare Part B, which carries monthly premiums based on income. Medicare Part B premiums are expected to increase based on the COLA.
- In addition to pharmacy copay increases and enrollment fee hikes, some specialty populations within the Tricare system also will pay more, including reservists, young adults and transitioning service members.

Open Season this year is scheduled to begin Nov. 8 and end Dec. 13. During this period, eligible beneficiaries can enroll in Tricare Prime or Select if they have other insurance or change plans. If they are satisfied with their current Tricare health plan, they can do nothing and remain enrolled. If they don't make a change during Open Season, beneficiaries must wait until a "qualifying life event," such as losing health insurance provided by another insurer, retiring, getting married or divorced, having a baby or adopting, moving or aging out of Tricare.

More than 4.7 million beneficiaries are enrolled in Tricare Prime, and nearly 1.7 million patients use Tricare Select. An additional 2.1 million beneficiaries use Tricare for Life. Have more questions

about Tricare? Phone numbers and more information can be found on Tricare's website. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | September 20, 2021 ++]

America's Oldest Vet

Lawrence Brooks Turns 112



Every birthday is a milestone after 100 — especially for the oldest World War II veteran in the United States. Lawrence Brooks turned 112 on Sept. 12 with a boisterous party outside his New Orleans home, including a vehicle parade, two brass bands and, of course, his favorite chocolate cake. At one point during the hour-long celebration, Brooks confidently rose from his wheelchair. He danced, he smiled and he waved. This is his third year as a supercentenarian — meaning age 110 and older. “We like to tell him, ‘Mr. Brooks, as long as you keep having birthdays, we’re going to keep throwing your birthday party,’ ” said Peter Crean, a vice president at the National WWII Museum in New Orleans.

The event was orchestrated by the museum, which has thrown Brooks a birthday celebration for the past eight years. “He is a fixture here at the museum, but also in the community,” Crean said. “He is a wonderful human being who is inspiring to everyone he meets.” Brooks, born in Norwood, La., in 1909, was one of 15 children. He was drafted in 1940 and served until 1945 as a private in the predominantly Black 91st Engineer Battalion, which was stationed in New Guinea and the Philippines. “We was building roads, bridges and airstrips for planes to land,” Brooks recalled in a four minute 2018 Black History Month Spotlight video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjirBEFB0A0>.

After the war, Brooks — who was unable to participate in an interview with The Washington Post because of recent health challenges — worked as a forklift operator until retiring in his 70s. Brooks is the beloved patriarch of his family: He has five children, 13 grandchildren and 22 great-grandchildren. His wife, Leona B. Brooks, died in 2008. As a child, she wrote to a WWII vet. He carried the letter everywhere, and 12 years later, they finally met.

The National World War II Museum first connected with Brooks in 2013, after a volunteer introduced him to staff. “He was coming up on his 105th birthday. It was pretty remarkable, and we thought we should have some sort of celebration,” Crean said. Plus, he added, “Mr. Brooks represents a generation that saved the world that we know. He was one of 16 million Americans

who did his part for his country and the world to make it a better place.” For that reason, Crean continued, “he is important to this museum, this city, and he is also important to our country.” So staff began organizing yearly birthday parties for Brooks, all of which — aside from the past two — were at the museum. Each year, the museum hosts a special ceremony honoring Brooks, followed by several musical performances and sweet treats.

Last year, the pandemic forced the museum to put Brooks’s traditional birthday festivities on pause, but it refused to cancel the event entirely. Instead, it brought the party to his doorstep and organized a drive-by parade outside his home, where he lives with his daughter. The museum also campaigned to collect birthday cards, and more than 21,000 notes poured in from around the world. In the aftermath of Hurricane Ida, and amid the ongoing pandemic, the museum mobilized to throw Brooks another socially distanced, outdoor birthday party to mark his 112th.

This year’s celebration was the first time Brooks had used a wheelchair. Every other year he walked with a cane. “He’s beginning to slow down,” Crean said, adding that Brooks stayed in the Veteran Affairs Hospital during the hurricane to ensure he would have proper electricity and air conditioning. Still, “he is in remarkably good shape for 112. He is vibrant.” The party featured musical performances from the museum’s vocal trio, the Victory Belles, as well as several other local musicians. Neighbors, community members and fellow veterans danced on their front porches and on Brooks’s lawn, as dozens of cars lined up with decorated signs that read: “Happy birthday Mr. Brooks.”

In honor of Brooks’s birthday, Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards tweeted: “Happy 112th birthday to Mr. Lawrence Brooks, America’s oldest living World War II veteran and a proud Louisianan,” along with a photo of them together. Brooks is recognized by his community not just for his military service, but also for his kindness. “My mother and father always raised me to love people, and I don’t care what kind of people they are,” Brooks said in a 2020 interview with National Geographic. According to Crean, the supercentenarian says the secret to his long life is simple: “Be nice to people.” [Source: Washington Post | Sydney Page | September 15, 2021 ++]

National Mall Memorials

Bill Allowing GWOT Memorial There Could Set Bad Precedent

An effort to pass legislation that would allow for the construction of a Global War on Terrorism Memorial on the National Mall was blocked 20 SEP out of concern that its passage would be unfair and create a bad precedent for any future memorials. Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA) asked on the Senate floor Monday evening that her colleagues approve the bill under unanimous consent, meaning the chamber could pass the legislation unless someone stood to object. Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) blocked the vote.



The bill seeks to exempt the Global War on Terrorism Memorial from a 2003 law that prohibits any more development on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. “This legislation would override this provision,” Manchin said. “This precedent would reopen fights to locate other memorials on the National Mall, create conflict, and ultimately delay the construction of this memorial.” Organizers behind the effort to establish the memorial are renewing their push for it to be located on the National Mall following the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in August.

They held a news conference 21 SEP in front of the U.S. Capitol, urging Congress to consider the bill. “We’re at a significant moment in the history of the Global War on Terrorism,” said Marina Jackman, an Army veteran and the president of the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation. “Service members and their families are asking themselves what their service means. Now more than ever, the service member and veteran community needs a place to gather, reflect and heal.” Ernst, along with Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH) introduced the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Location Act last year, but it failed to make it through Congress. They reintroduced the bill earlier this year and expressed frustration 21 SEP about its slow progress in the Senate.

The Senate subcommittee on national parks, which is part of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, held a hearing on the issue in June. The bill has not yet been considered by the full committee. Manchin, who is chairman of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, promised on the Senate floor 20 SEP to schedule a hearing to discuss the bill. “We’re holding him to that,” Ernst said Tuesday. “We’d love to see that progress made.” She said she would continue to go to the Senate floor and call for unanimous consent on the bill until Manchin moves forward with the bill in his committee.

The Commemorative Works Act, which prohibits more development on the National Mall, was approved in 2003 because of the concern over a loss of open space. Between 1980 and 2000, seven new memorials were established in the area. “Little did we know in 2003 that these wars would go on for decades,” Hassan said. “This is America’s longest war. The notion that a memorial to it wouldn’t be built on the National Mall is just mind-boggling.” In the time since the law was passed, organizers behind the World War I Memorial and the National Desert Storm and Desert Shield War Memorial have sought locations on the National Mall. The World War I Memorial, which opened earlier this year, was instead placed in Pershing Park, east of the White House.

Construction has not yet begun on the Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial. It was approved for a location north of the Lincoln Memorial. Though it's near the other war memorials on the National Mall, it's outside of the border that's restricted by the Commemorative Works Act. "There have been several proposals to waive the prohibition for new memorials and museums, including the World War I and Desert Storm/Desert Shield memorials," Manchin said. "Ultimately, these were located in other high-profile areas in compliance with the Commemorative Works Act."

Jane Horton, whose husband was killed in Afghanistan, said she and other Gold Star family members would "accept no less than the National Mall" for the Global War on Terrorism Memorial. Horton spoke Tuesday about the urgency she and other families feel about the creation of a memorial that would honor their deceased loved ones. Horton's husband, Spc. Christopher Horton, deployed to Afghanistan with the Oklahoma National Guard in 2011. He was killed by small arms fire on Sept. 9, 2011. "There is no better place, no more appropriate place, than the National Mall to honor them," Horton said of her husband and other service members killed during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. "This is where school children will go and future generations will learn about those who gave their lives for our country. This is where we'll teach the history of America's longest war and an all-volunteer force." [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | September 21, 2021 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule

As of OCT 01, 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\veternans related websites and resources.

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

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

Note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date\time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. Please report broken links,

comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and/or other military retiree/veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, Milton.Bell126@gmail.com.

[Source: Retiree/Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | October 1, 2021 ++]

WWII VETS 280

Frank Grasberger (95) & Former 3rd Grader Pen Pals Meet

Dashauna Priest still recalls sitting in her third-grade classroom 12 years ago in Lorain, Ohio, writing a heartfelt thank-you letter to a World War II veteran whom she did not know. At the time, and in the years that followed, she had no idea that the recipient of her letter would carry the note with him everywhere he went, carefully folded in an envelope. "I'm never without it," said Frank Grasberger, now 95. Grasberger, who lives in Strongsville, Ohio, was drafted into the military when he was 18 and spent nearly three years in Germany. He received Priest's letter, which was part of a class project, while he was on an Honor Flight home from Washington D.C. in 2009. Ever since, the letter has either been folded neatly in his pocket or tucked away beneath the seat of his wheelchair. Wherever Grasberger goes, the letter goes.



The handwritten note, printed on a sheet of lined paper, imparts a simple message of gratitude: "Thank you for saving us from Hitler. If it wasn't for you, we would never have freedom. You made freedom for us. You sacrificed your own life." Reading the letter for the first time more than a decade ago, Grasberger was moved to tears. "It really tore my heart up when I saw it," he recalled. "I just couldn't believe a child could write a letter about a war." The message, plus the pencil and crayon drawing of an American flag and Army helmet that accompanied it, resonated deeply.

Although Priest, now 21, knew little about the war or the veteran to whom she wrote the letter, "I always looked up to people in uniform, so I took it really seriously," she recalled. She didn't realize, though, that the recipient would take her letter very seriously, too. Grasberger was eager to connect with the kind girl and decided to draft his own note to her in response. "You really made me feel very good about fighting the war," he wrote. "War is a terrible thing but if it helped to keep you and many others 'free' it was well worth it." Grasberger's wife, Delores, mailed the letter to Priest's school, though the couple never got confirmation that she actually received it.

As years passed and they still hadn't heard anything, "I was determined to find the girl that wrote that letter," Grasberger said. "We looked all over on the computer and asked friends to keep their eyes open," echoed his wife, adding that they called the school several times, but staff members were unwilling to provide the student's contact information. Eventually, the school - Irving Elementary - closed down. Despite

failed attempts to find her, Grasberger continued to keep the letter close to him at all times. He prayed with it at night. "I look at it very often, and I show it to other people," he said.

Over the summer, Grasberger presented his cherished letter to Jill Pawloski, the resident services director at Vitalia Senior Residents at Strongsville. The Grasbergers - who have been married for nearly 75 years and have two daughters, two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren - reside there. "He told me the story about how he received the letter in 2009," Pawloski said. Even 12 years later, "he was just so touched that his service meant something to someone." Grasberger also expressed his unrelenting wish to find the letter writer. Knowing how much it meant to him, Pawloski resolved to track her down. "I was just so moved that he was holding onto something so small that other people might have crumpled up and thrown away," she said. "If anybody deserves this little moment, it's definitely him."

She surfed on social media, and after a few quick searches, she found a profile on Instagram that seemed like a possible match, given the name and that the person looked to be about 21 years old. Pawloski was unsure if she had the right woman, but "I decided to give it a shot and send her a private message," she said. "I hit the nail on the head." Priest was stunned to see the message in her inbox. She knew exactly what letter - and veteran - the stranger was referring to. "I was so excited," said Priest, who went on to join the Army National Guard. She, too, had reflected on the letter over the years, and she did, in fact, receive the reply from Grasberger. She keeps his letter safely stowed in a memory box, filled with other sentimental tokens from her childhood. "I read it from time to time and think about him," Priest said. "I always wanted to have a conversation with him because of everything he wrote in the letter."

Pawloski invited Priest, who lives in Sandusky, Ohio, to come surprise Grasberger at his home. She was on board right away. Only three days later, on 23 JUL, Priest showed up at the retirement community dressed in her military uniform with a dozen red roses in hand. Grasberger was told someone was coming to interview him about the letter, but he had no idea Priest had finally been found - or that she was there to meet him in person. When she walked in the room, Grasberger immediately exclaimed: "You're not the girl?!" The emotional surprise was captured on video and featured in a now-viral TikTok by [@arrowseniorliving](#). When Grasberger finally grasped that he was with the young woman he had long been searching for, he turned to her, grabbed her hand and said: "I love you so much. I really do." "It seemed like she was my third daughter," Grasberger explained. "That's the feeling I had."

They both broke down in tears. Grasberger showed her the letter she wrote 12 years ago, and likewise, she showed him the letter he wrote in response. "This is a godsend," Grasberger said, as they sat across from one another, clutching tissues. "I never thought I'd see you." Over the course of their nearly three-hour meeting, "I went through two boxes of Kleenex," said Grasberger, who was an engineer for 32 years after leaving the military. While he reminisced about his time in the war and his treacherous experience in the Battle of the Bulge - the final major German military attack in Western Europe - Priest, who is now a mother, told him about her 6-month-old son, Kyro. "He is so full of life," Priest said of Grasberger. "He is just an amazing person."

Since meeting for the first time in late July, their friendship has blossomed over regular phone calls, and Priest is planning to visit the Grasbergers again with her son in the coming weeks. "She is one of our daughters. We looked 12 years for her, so we have to enjoy her now," said Delores Grasberger, 93. For Frank Grasberger, meeting Priest has been one of many miracles in his life, he said. At 95 years old, it was the one thing that was still missing. When asked if he now feels complete having found his long-lost pen

pal, Grasberger nodded, grinned widely, and said: "Oh yes. Very much so." [Source: The Washington Post | Sydney Page | September 14, 2021 ++]

State Veterans' Benefits

Missouri 2021

The state of Missouri 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 – MO**" 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 & www.mvc.dps.mo.gov:

- 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/missouri-state-veterans-benefits.html> | September 2021 ++]

* Vet Legislation *



House Vet Bill Progress

16 thru 30 SEP 2021

H.R. 4350, the \$778 billion appropriations bill for FY2022 National Defense Authorization Act, passed the House by a 316-113 vote.

S.189, The Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2021 has passed the house. This requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to increase, as of November 30, 2021,

wartime disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, clothing allowances, and dependency and indemnity compensation to surviving spouses and children by the same percentage as Social Security benefits are increased. The bill is headed to the President's level desk for enactment.

H.R. 5293, which extends several expiring authorities within the VA, also passed the House. The bill now goes to the Senate for further action.

H.R. 5305, Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act, a bill making continuing appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2022, and for providing emergency assistance, and for other purposes. The bill before the Senate which passed the House on September 21, 2021 by 220-211 vote provides continuing FY2022 appropriations for federal agencies through December 3, 2021, suspends the debt limit, provides supplemental appropriations, and extends several expiring programs and authorities.

In addition, the bill provides supplemental appropriations to several federal agencies for activities related to natural disasters and the evacuees from Afghanistan and the bill suspends the public debt limit through December 16, 2022. On December 17, 2022, the limit will be increased to accommodate obligations issued during the suspension period. The bill also extends several expiring programs and authorities, including:

- the National Flood Insurance Program,
- the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program,
- National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity,
- United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy,
- the temporary scheduling order issued by the Drug Enforcement Administration to place fentanyl-related substances in Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act, and
- The authority for the Department of Agriculture to waive certain requirements for the school meal programs.
- President's level

The Senate is expected to vote on the H.R. 5305 *Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act* when the Senate reconvenes on September 27, 2021.

[Source: Vietnam Veterans of America Update | September 25, 2021 ++]

Veterans Crisis Hotline

Update 38: S.2283 | REACH for Veterans Act

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (MT) and Ranking Member Jerry Moran (KS) introduced S. 2283, the **Revising and Expediting Actions for the Crisis Hotline (REACH) for Veterans Act**. A companion bill, H.R. 5073, which currently has 20 cosponsors and was referred to the

Subcommittee on Health, was introduced in the House by a bipartisan coalition including Representatives Antonio Delgado, Tracey Mann, Mikie Sherrill, and Mariannette Miller-Meeks.

Over the past decade, Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense have been steadily working to improve prevention efforts to address the epidemic of suicide among service members and veterans. The Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) has proven to be effective and a true lifeline to hundreds of thousands of veterans at risk of self-directed violence. The crisis line takes approximately 650,000 calls a year, but after the expected deployment of the new national 9-8-8 hotline in July 2022, it anticipates doubling or even tripling its call volume. In addition, there have been lapses in quality that led to adverse events for veterans.

In response to these events, the REACH for Veterans Act would implement or enhance quality management by: improving staff training; issuing re-training guidelines for call responders who have experienced an adverse event or low performance ratings; establishing monitoring and performance benchmarks for quality review management; ensuring adverse events and close calls are reported; and requiring adequate investigations into VCL callers who die by suicide. The Act would also require enhanced guidance for managing callers with substance use disorders at risk of overdosing, review of VCL standards for emergency dispatch, and consideration of adapting safety planning for VCL call responders' use.

DAV strongly supports these companion bills—S. 2283 and H.R. 5073. The VCL has helped hundreds of thousands of veterans access mental health services and mitigate suicide risk and is an incredibly important tool for veterans who are struggling. DAV Resolution 118 calls for supporting improvement of and enhanced resources for mental health and suicide prevention programs for veterans. In support of this they are requesting readers to help ensure passage of this important bipartisan legislation by communicating with their Senators and Representative and ask them to for their support these bills. Below is an editable letter that could be used in this effort.

o-o-O-o-o-

Subj: Support the Crisis Hotline REACH for Veterans Act

Dear Sen. _____,

Over the past decade, Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense have been steadily working to improve prevention efforts to address the epidemic of suicide among service members and veterans. The Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) has proven to be effective and a true lifeline to hundreds of thousands of at-risk veterans taking approximately 650,000 calls a year, but after the expected deployment of the new national 9-8-8 hotline in July 2022, it anticipates doubling or even tripling its call volume. In addition, there have been lapses in quality that led to adverse events for veterans.

S. 2283, the Revising and Expediting Actions for the Crisis Hotline (REACH) for Veterans Act, would implement or enhance quality management by improving staff training; issuing re-training guidelines for call responders who have experienced an adverse event or low performance ratings; establishing monitoring and performance benchmarks for quality review management; ensuring reports of adverse events and close calls; and requiring adequate investigations into VCL callers who die by suicide. The Act would also require enhanced guidance for managing callers with substance use disorders at risk of overdosing, review of VCL standards for emergency dispatch, and consideration of adapting safety planning for VCL call responders' use.

Veterans need and deserve a safe, accessible means of seeking immediate help in times of crisis, and I hope that you will make a steadfast commitment in the fight against veteran suicide by supporting this important legislation.

Please let me know of your intentions to cosponsor S. 2283, the Crisis Hotline (REACH) for Veterans Act.

Sincerely,
Your Name
Your Address

[Source: DAV National Commander | Andrew Marshall | September 23, 2021 ++]

VA Maternity Care

S.1937 | DOULA for Veterans Act of 2021

On May 27, 2021, Senator Corey Booker (NJ) introduced the **Delivering Optimally Urgent Labor Access (DOULA) for Veterans Act of 2021**. This bill would establish a pilot program within VA to provide pregnant and post-partum women veterans access to doula services in an effort to foster better child and maternal health outcomes. Pregnancy, labor and delivery, and the early days of motherhood can be difficult in the best of circumstances, but for women veterans, they can be further complicated by physical and mental health conditions related to military service—this includes anxiety, depression, PTSD due to combat or military sexual trauma, musculoskeletal problems and neurological issues.

Doulas act as advocates before, during and after pregnancy, helping expectant and new mothers navigate their birth experience and empowering them to self-advocate for their care, which can be especially important in instances where health care needs are profound or where veterans do not have strong, established support networks. This legislation would enhance support services for pregnant women veterans by providing access to doula care within pilot facilities, which is vital as the demand for maternity care services continues to trend upward within VA. By establishing Doula Service Coordinators, this legislation would also help aid in the effort to coordinate care between VA and community providers. In addition, with a focus on health equity, the establishment of the pilot program would be important to addressing poorer maternal health outcomes among minority veteran groups.

Consistent with DAV Resolution No. 015, to support enhanced medical services and benefits for women veterans, we support S. 1937. DAV asks readers to contact their Senators and urge them to co-sponsor and support this important bill. Towards this they have provided the following editable letter to use in urging your Senator to support passage of this bill:

o-o-O-o-o-

Subj: Please Support S. 1937, Delivering Optimally Urgent Labor Access (DOULA) for Veterans Affairs Act of 2021
Dear Sen. _____,

On May 27, 2021, Senator Booker introduced S. 1937, the Delivering Optimally Urgent Labor Access (DOULA) for Veterans Affairs Act of 2021.

This bill would establish a pilot program within VA to provide pregnant and post-partum veterans access to doula services in an effort to foster better child and maternal health outcomes. Pregnancy, labor and delivery, and the early days of motherhood can be difficult in the best of circumstances, but for women veterans, they can be further complicated by physical and mental health conditions related to military service.

Doulas act as advocates before, during and after pregnancy, helping expectant and new mothers navigate their birth experience and empowering them to self-advocate for their care, which can be especially important in instances where health care needs are profound or where veterans do not have strong, established support networks.

I ask that you support S. 1937, and consider being a co-sponsor of this important legislation. Please advise me of your intentions with respect to this bill.

*Sincerely,
Your Name
Your Address*

[Source: DAV National Commander | Andrew Marshall | September 16, 2021 ++]

VA Maternity Care

Update 01: S.796/H.R.958 | Protecting Moms Who Served Act

On March 17, 2021, Senators Tammy Duckworth (IL) and Susan Collins (ME) introduced S.796—the **Protecting Moms Who Served Act**. The House of Representatives has already approved a companion bill, H.R. 958. Women using VA health care have a number of factors that may put them at higher risk of adverse birth and health outcomes such as physical disabilities, advanced age, mental health conditions including PTSD, depression, anxiety and substance abuse. Because maternity services for women veterans are provided through VA’s Community Care Network, VA has instituted a maternity care coordination policy in order to ensure that women are receiving high quality care. However, many VA facilities lack a dedicated full-time maternity care coordinator.

S. 796 would require the VA to increase support for its maternity care coordination activities and identify any adverse effects military service has on maternal mortality and morbidity among women veterans and certain subgroups of women who utilize VA health care services. This legislation is consistent with DAV Resolution No. 015 to support enhanced medical services and benefits for women veterans. DAV asks readers to contact their Senators and urge them to co-sponsor and support this important bill. Towards this they have provided the following editable letter to use in urging your Representative to support passage of this bill:

o-o-O-o-o-

*Subj: Please Support S. 796, Protecting Moms Who Served Act
Dear Sen. _____,*

On March 17, 2021, Senators Tammy Duckworth and Susan Collins introduced S. 796—Protecting Moms Who Served Act.

Women using VA health care have a number of factors that may put them at higher risk of adverse birth and health outcomes. Because maternity services for women veterans are provided through VA’s Community Care Network, VA has instituted a maternity care coordination policy in order to ensure that women veterans are receiving high quality care. However, many VA facilities lack a dedicated full-time maternity care coordinator.

This bill would require the VA to increase support for its maternity care coordination activities and identify any adverse effects military service has on maternal mortality and morbidity among women veterans and certain subgroups of women who utilize VA health care services.

I ask that you support S. 796 and consider being a co-sponsor of this important legislation. Please advise me of your intentions with respect to this bill.

*Sincerely,
Your Name
Your Address*

[Source: DAV National Commander | Andrew Marshall | September 14, 2021 ++]

VA “IU” Compensation

Update 01: H.R. 4732: Protect Individual Unemployability Benefit for All Disabled Vets

When a veteran’s disability is rated less than a total 100% evaluation, but he or she is unable to obtain or maintain substantial gainful employment, VA regulations allow the veteran to apply for Total Disability Based on Individual Unemployability (IU). Eligibility for IU is based on the severity of the individual veteran’s unique disability picture and its impact on the veteran’s ability to obtain and maintain substantial gainful employment. Generally, the veteran must have a single disability rated at 60% or a combined evaluation of 70% to be eligible for IU.

In recent years, proposals for reducing or limiting IU has been the focus of many Congressional Budget Office and Government Accountability Office reports—as a deficit reducing measure. In December 2018, it was suggested to terminate and cutoff IU benefits at the age of 65 and in December 2020, it was recommended to restrict IU once a veteran reaches the age of 67. **H.R. 4732, the Protecting Benefits for Disabled Veterans Act**, would provide additional protections for IU and prohibit the VA from considering the age of the veteran or their eligibility to any retirement benefits, including Social Security, in making such determinations. This bill would protect IU benefits from any ill-conceived cost-saving measures in the future.

DAV strongly supports H.R. 4732, as it would protect IU for approximately 200,000 veterans over the age of 65 currently receiving this benefit. This bill would ensure the availability of IU for all veterans regardless of age or receipt of any other earned federal benefits. Consistent with DAV Resolution No. 153, DAV supports the protection of IU as it is not a retirement or pension program. DAV urges readers to contact their Representatives and request them to co-sponsor and support H.R. 4732 to protect veterans and their families now and in the future from these harmful proposals. Towards this they have provided the following editable letter to use in urging your Senator to support passage of this bill:

o-o-O-o-o-

*Subj: Please Support H.R. 4732, Protect Individual Unemployability Benefit for All Disabled Veterans
Dear Rep. _____*

As your constituent and a supporter of our nation's disabled veterans, I write to ask for your support of an important bill that will affect the quality of life of injured and ill veterans, their dependents and survivors.

On July 27, 2021, Representative Maxine Waters (CA) introduced H.R. 4732, the Protecting Benefits for Disabled Veterans Act. This bill would codify regulations on Individual Unemployability (IU) benefits into federal law.

When a veteran's disability is rated less than a total 100% evaluation, but he or she is unable to obtain or maintain substantial gainful employment, VA regulations allow the veteran to apply for Total Disability Based on Individual Unemployability (IU). Eligibility for this benefit is based on the severity of the individual veteran's unique disability picture and its impact on the veteran's ability to obtain and maintain substantial gainful employment. Generally, the veteran must have a single disability rated at 60% or a combined evaluation of 70% to be eligible for IU.

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H.R. 4732, the Protecting Benefits for Disabled Veterans Act, would provide additional protections for IU and prohibit the VA from considering the age of the veteran or their eligibility to any retirement benefits, including Social Security, in making such determinations. This bill would protect IU benefits from any ill-conceived cost-saving measures in the future.

I ask that you support this H.R. 4732 and consider being a cosponsor. Please advise me of your intentions with respect to this bill.

*Sincerely,
Your Name
Your Address*

[Source: DAV National Commander | Andrew Marshall | September 21, 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> – **House**

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

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 ***



Military Myths

Update 01: Saltpeter Use for Libido Manipulation

Learning to stand at attention for extended periods during basic training is key, yet after reporting for duty many new military recruits discover that their membrum virile is unable to do the same. Decades ago a rumor began circulating that the U.S. military was adding saltpeter to the chow of young service members to keep libidos in check. The urban legend, according to one Quora user, has been rumored to have started during the Navy's colonial days before carrying on well into the 20th century. "There was a belief long ago that eating saltpeter would drive down a man's sex drive, which was seen as beneficial for military personnel when their wives and girlfriends were far away," wrote user Stephen Merkel. "The story went that saltpeter was added to the breakfast eggs for this purpose."

Formerly "saltpetre," the chemical has, among other uses, previously been employed to prevent people from dying a painful death courtesy of the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum* — more commonly known as the rare poisoning botulism. "Up until the 1980s, corned beef was prepared using saltpeter as a curing agent ... until such time as better nitrates for food preservation were discovered," Merkel added. "Since cured meat was often used in military rations, this might also [lend] credence" to the saltpeter myth. The compound is also "a common term for potassium nitrate," according to Culinary Lore. "It is used to preserve meat, temper steel, and to make gunpowder and fireworks." But there's no chemical proof that saltpeter has ever had any impact on the male sex drive. Instead, any loss of interest in the pursuit of hanky panky during boot camp or otherwise is likely from the sort of mental and physical exhaustion that accompany rigorous training.

The military, meanwhile, remains adamant that no amount of saltpeter comes in contact with any of the food consumed by service members. "According to Army Natick Combat Capabilities Development Command Soldier Center, items procured for military rations are under the guidance of the Food and Drug Administration and the United States Department of Agriculture," a Defense Logistics Agency spokesperson told Military Times. "In 1999, the FDA no longer allowed the use of saltpeter, sodium or potassium nitrate in curing smoked and cooked meats, non-smoked and cooked meats, or sausages." So, your sausage is safe — at least from saltpeter. [Source: AirForceTimes| Sarah Sicard | September 22, 2021 ++]

Army Sniper Rifle

MK-22 Takes On ‘Final Hurdle’ Before Fielding



Troops recently tested the MK-22 Modular Precision Sniper Rifle (PSR), the Army’s newest sniper rifle, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina according to an Army release. The MK-22 replaces the Army’s existing M107 sniper rifle and the M2010 Enhanced Sniper Rifle. It also replaces all bolt-action sniper rifles for the Marines. The recent tests are the “final hurdle” before fielding, the Army release stated. It has a folding stock, removable suppression system, and can be changed out to fire the standard 7.62mm or .300 Norma Magnum and .338 Norma Magnum.three caliber options.

“The modular nature of the PSR allows it to be tailored to meet mission requirements and is appealing to airborne Snipers who are typically armed with long-barreled precision rifles of a single caliber offering,” Sgt. 1st Class Marcus Love said in the release. Love works as a test NCO with the Airborne and Special Operations Test Directorate under the Army’s Operational Test Command. “With a folding stock and removable suppression system, the PSR will provide airborne Snipers a more compact load during airborne infiltration operations without reducing their lethality while providing a precision rifle platform more conducive to their combat environment,” said MK-22 project NCO Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Copley.

The test team used the mobile weapons boresight collimator after an airborne jump to ensure that the weapon’s zero had not degraded. That way a sniper can put rounds on target with the first trigger squeeze after hitting the ground from high above. “The increased engagement range will keep Snipers safer and increase the options for the local commander employing these combat multipliers,” said Sgt. Austin Stevens, a sniper assigned to the 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.

The rifle is made by the Barrett Firearms Manufacturing company, which calls their weapon the Multi-Role Adaptive Design rifle, or MRAD. SOCOM has called the PSR the “Advanced Sniper Rifle” in the past. The search for a new sniper rifle began in 2016 following a SOCOM request, Army Times previously reported. Originally, the Army was going to buy 536 MRAD rifles. New plans call for 2,800 rifles for the service over the next five years. [Source: ArmyTimes | Todd South | September 23, 2021 ++]

Military Spouse Preference

What You Need to Know About It



Moving your career each time your spouse gets orders can be exhausting. But what if you could make that process easier? You do have a unique hiring path opportunity to take advantage of at each duty station. As a military spouse, you may be eligible for something called military spouse employment preference or MSP, for short. This program allows you the opportunity to apply for federal jobs -- which means you aren't limited to positions that may be temporary like seasonal hiring. The Military Spouse Preference program is designed to help military spouses gain employment during a military spouse's relocations.

Military Spouse Preference (MSP) is a Department of Defense (DoD) program created to lessen career interruption for spouses who have to relocate via PCS. It's not just for any job, either. It's a program that allows spouses to be noncompetitively considered for well-paid government positions. It's important to note that eligibility doesn't entitle you to a job with the federal government. You'll still need to apply and meet qualifications and additional requirements like a background investigation. You're eligible if you're a:

- Spouse of a service member with a 100% service-related disability
- Widow/widower of a service member who was killed on active duty
- Active duty spouse (including Coast Guard or full-time National Guard)

Last April, the DoD stopped using Program S, also known as the Priority Placement Program (PPP) as a way to register military spouses for federal hiring preferences. With the former program, military spouses had to go in person to an office to register for MSP. Then a spouse had to stick to jobs that best matched their educational experience and professional backgrounds. Now, you can use the application process on USAjobs.gov instead of applying in person for the MSP program. This allows spouses to get a head start on job hunting before PCSing into a new duty station. Under the new program, you also don't have to stick to one particular occupational series. As long as the posting offers MSP (you'll see a green icon with a wedding ring), then you may apply.

This Department of Defense program is intended to help spouses get employment both in the United States and overseas duty stations. These jobs can be found at <https://www.usajobs.gov>. To

get started, you'll need to create an account. You may also need some specific documents. You may need:

- Marriage documentation
- Your spouse's active military orders (copy)
- DD-214 (only if discharged under certain conditions)
- DD 1300 (widows/widowers only)

These documents should be uploaded and submitted through USAJOBS.gov. The forms may be required with certain job applications. To get started:

- When applying on USAjobs.gov, confirm your identity Look for jobs with a green circle icon with wedding rings Jobs may be temporary or permanent and in a variety of disciplines
- You can apply for as many jobs as you wish through the program, but MSP may be used only once at each duty station unless used for temporary and term positions.
- It's important to note that if a job is offered and declined by you, then you can't use MSP at that same duty station again.
- Remember: Agencies aren't required to use this hiring method. For more details, contact your local Department of Defense civilian personnel office.

Use Your Benefit

While MSP doesn't guarantee you a job, it offers another avenue to pursue when it comes to maintaining your momentum in a career. Plus, once you get a government position, if you're good at what you do, it makes it easier to transfer and work in another federal job at your next duty station. Not to mention, the benefits of a federal government job can be enticing. As a federal employee, you may receive benefits like:

- Competitive salary
- Health insurance
- Dental and vision insurance
- Life insurance
- Long-term care insurance
- Flexible spending accounts

When it comes time to start looking for your next job before you PCS, consider adding a federal government job search into the mix, too. Some of the highest in-demand positions right now include computer science, nursing, mathematical statistics, civil engineering, chemistry, auditing and more. Above all, when it comes to job hunting as a military spouse, don't forget to utilize all of your career resources. You have access to career coaches and computers at most military installations. Don't forget to check in with your military installation's career center for help with job searches, resume writing, interviewing practice, career workshops and more! [Source: Mil.com | Seraine Page | September 20, 2021 ++]

USSF Uniforms

Enlisted Rank Insignia & Service Dress Uniform



Some people call them futuristic; others say they're a new take on the classic double-breasted tunic. But it seems everyone has a reaction to the new Space Force uniforms that the chief of space operations, Gen. John Raymond, unveiled at a conference this week. To many, the uniforms resemble those worn by officers in the sci-fi TV series *Battlestar Galactica* from the 2000s. Similar design elements include the jacket's high collar and its asymmetrical, angled row of buttons.

The Space Force uniform combines a dark blue jacket with gray pants. Its buttons prominently feature the delta shape that the service adopted soon after its creation — and which has frequently been compared to the Starfleet emblem from the venerable Star Trek franchise. The six buttons symbolize the Space Force's status as the sixth branch of the U.S. military, Raymond said 21 SEP, as two guardians — the name for Space Force service members — modeled the uniform at the Air Force Association's Air, Space & Cyber Conference at National Harbor, Md. "Every winning team needs a uniform!" the general [stated on Twitter](#).

The uniforms are still in the prototype stage, Raymond said, predicting that they will be tweaked a bit before going into "wear testing" in the coming months. After that, he added, they'll be rolled out to the force's guardians. "We started with the female design and then created the male prototype" for the uniforms, Raymond added. The newly unveiled uniforms are "service dress" — the military equivalent to a coat and tie and a notch below full, formal or dinner dress. But a commenter on the (www.reddit.com/r/SpaceForce) says that for that purpose, "this is way over the top," suggesting that the uniforms seem too formal and constricting. Other commenters took exception to the pants being a different color. And many seemed to agree with a commenter on the Space Force's Facebook

page who posted an image from *Battlestar Galactica*, saying the new uniform echoes the series. The person also added one of the show's taglines: "So say we all."

Raymond also gave an update on how the nascent Space Force is developing. For example, the force is taking over a number of Army and Navy satellite communications operations, including their funding and ongoing missions. "All told, 15 global units with 319 military and 259 civilian billets [job slots] from the Army and Navy combined will transfer to the Space Force," the Defense Department stated.

Describing the urgency with which the service is being created, Raymond said that the U.S. "can no longer take space for granted.... Space is clearly a warfighting domain, and we're convinced that if deterrence were to fail, we're going to have to fight and win the battle for space superiority" He added, "Let me be clear: We don't want to fight in space. We want to deter that from happening." [Source: AirForceTimesTimes & NPR | Rachel S. Cohen | September 20 & 22, 2021]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang

‘XO’ thru ‘Watch’

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

XO - Executive Officer. Second-in-command of a vessel.

WAA - Wide Aperture Array. An advanced passive ranging sonar.

Wafuu, Wafu - (RN) Naval aviator; Fleet Air Arm personnel. Aka 'AIRY-FAIRY'. Originally an abbreviation for "Weapons And Fuel Users." May also mean "Wet and Fucking Useless."

Wakeup – The cry of the short-timer, often intensely annoying to those around him. If a sailor will be leaving the service in ten days, he is said to have "nine days and a wakeup."

Walter – Walter One-Way, the guy who always does for himself, and never helps you. See CHECK VALVE.

Wardroom – (1) A compartment aboard ship where the officers eat. May also be used for meetings, briefings, etc. (2) The complement of officers aboard ship.

Warning Red (Yellow, White) – Reports the threat status. ‘Red’ signifies attack imminent, or ongoing. ‘Yellow’ means attack is likely. "White" signifies attack unlikely.

Waste Heat Boiler – A boiler which uses the waste (otherwise nonfunctional) heat of an engine system to make steam for hotel or other usage. Often associated with a gas turbine or diesel propulsion plant.

Watch – The standing of duty shifts. The practice varies, but in the US Navy, the watch rotation is as follows:

- 0000-0400 – Midwatch
- 0400-0800 – Morning Watch
- 0800-1200 – Forenoon Watch
- 1200-1600 – Afternoon Watch
- 1600-1800 – First Dogwatch The purpose of the dogwatches is to permit the watchstanders to eat the evening meal. These watches are said to be "dogged."
- 1800-2000 – Second Dogwatch
- 2000-2400 – Evening Watch (aka First Watch)

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

* Military History *



Juno Mayru Sinking

Largest Maritime Disaster of World War II

The Japanese cargo ship Junyo Maru left Tanjong Priok Harbor in Batavia on the 16th of September 1944 with the destination of Padang, Indonesia. There were 6,500 people on board consisting of 2,300 Dutch, British, American and Australian Prisoners of War (POWs) and 4,200 Javanese slave laborers. On 18th of September 1944, the Junyo Maru was torpedoed in the Indian Ocean, by the British Submarine H.M.S. Tradewind. The submarine commander had not known what Junyo Maru was carrying. Two survivors said of their experience:

- **Hans Lüning** – “At about half past five we were roused from a light snooze by a dull and the trembling of the entire ship, my first thought was: an explosion of one of the boilers. We all jumped up which caused an enormous scramble for the only steps leading to the deck. A few seconds after the first explosion there was another bang..., and gun-powder smoke came into our hold...The ship’s sirens started blaring and then we realized that we had been torpedoed. A panic followed... Our ship was still high up in the water, but without further thinking, I went to the railing jumped into the sea”.
- **Willem Wanrooy** -- “...Then, a second jolt and a thundering blast deep beneath my feet... “Torpedoes!!!”... Men jumped overboard. Others threw life rafts over the side. I helped some climbing out of the hold. A mob of panic-stricken men crawled, trudged and wormed onto the one single iron ladder. Scratched, beaten and bloodied, some reached the deck. The bowels of the ship were belching up... I was a 19-year-old P.O.W. when I saw more than 5,000 men perish before my eyes...”

It is now 77 years on. However, this largest maritime disaster is nearly forgotten by people in the world, even in Indonesian history. From the monuments that commemorate about war victims both civilian and military, war disasters, and the suffering civilization all over the world, the monuments warn us that the war perished everything, a zero sum game! To learn more about the Juno Mayru disaster refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**WWII Juno Mayru Sinking**”.

[Source: <https://www.historynet.com/juno-mayru-torpedoed-by-british-submarine-hms-tradewind.htm> | Robert Barr Smith | March 2002/September 2021 ++]

WWI Polar Bear Expedition

U.S. Invasion of Russia



As World War I raged on in 1917, a victory for the Entente Powers was far from guaranteed, even with the United States entering the war on the side of France, Britain, and Russia. In the Russian Empire, conditions both on and off the battlefield were steadily getting worse. The year got off to a bad start on the war's Eastern Front, as a revolution in Russia forced Tsar Nicholas II to abdicate his throne in February. A republic was briefly established but didn't last long. Soon, Bolshevik

forces led by Vladimir Lenin took over the provisional government, and by October 1917, they were in power.

By March 1918, the newly-established Soviet Union made a separate peace with Germany and the other Central Powers with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, taking Russia out of the war. But even the Soviet Union was far from guaranteed. The Bolshevik forces formed the Red Army to counter a coalition of Tsarists and Republicans, the White Armies. As the White Armies fought to unseat the Soviet government, the Entente Allies decided to intervene in the Civil War. Foreign troops landed on Russian soil across the country. The United Kingdom, France, Japan, Greece, Italy, Estonia, and the United States all joined the effort to support the Whites.

On Sept. 4, 1918, the U.S. landed three infantry battalions and three engineer companies at Arkhangelsk in northern Russia to join British forces fighting there. A small number was also sent to Vladivostok to reinforce Czech and Slovak troops in the Russian Far East. Their goal was to smash the Bolshevik armies and get Russia back into the war. The U.S. troops who fought there would come to call it "The Polar Bear Expedition."

In Arkhangelsk, the American mission was simple: prevent war supplies and other material provided by Entente forces from aiding the Bolshevik war effort. But by the time the Polar Bears arrived, that material was already gone, shipped up the Dvina River with the retreating Red Army. A force of Czechs and Slovaks are known as the "Czech Legion," were tied up fighting Bolsheviks along the Trans-Siberian Railway. This front defended by the legionnaires was hundreds of miles long and wouldn't stay defensible for very long, so the American Expeditionary Forces were sent to help relieve the Czech Legion.

A combined British and American force fought the Bolsheviks in a massive breakout from Arkhangelsk along the Dvina and the Vologda Railroad for six weeks. But their own front soon became hundreds of miles long. It was too long to maintain indefinitely, and the allied offensive soon came to a halt. To top it all off, the Russian winter was beginning to set in. The British and Americans took a defensive posture and tried to raise an army of anti-Bolshevik volunteers from the civilian population. The effort came to nothing, and the allies had to abandon any hopes of linking up with the Czechoslovakians.

When winter started in full, the Red Army went on the offensive and pushed the combined forces back to Arkhangelsk. In November of 1918, the armistice ending World War I was signed in Versailles, but the fighting in Russia continued. Americans at home and in Russia began to question why they were still fighting. But getting home would be impossible as the port of Arkhangelsk had frozen up for the winter. Americans were no longer fighting for Russia; they were fighting for their own survival. They fought on for months before the U.S. Army could arrive in the port. The icebreaker Canada finally steamed into Arkhangelsk on April 17, 1919, to begin the withdrawal.

The first Americans to arrive home wouldn't get there until June 1919, almost eight months after the end of World War I. The Soviet Union eventually defeated the White Army and established itself as the new governing power in what used to be called Russia. Remains of 125 American troops left behind in Russia would eventually be repatriated with the diplomatic and logistical support of a veterans organization that was just 20 years old: the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). [Source: Together We Served Newsletter | September 2021 ++]

761st Tank Battalion

WWII Distinguished Military Unit



Entry of the United States into World War II quickly revealed how woefully ill-prepared the armed forces were to contend with a major conflict. Apart from the peacetime draft instituted in 1940 and lend-lease support to Great Britain, few actions had been taken to address escalating global tensions. Now racing to enlist, train, arm, and deploy resources necessary across multiple theatres of war, the Army and other branches of service were forced to again face long-held racial discrimination and related practices.

Responding to arguments raised by General McNair, Commander of Army Ground Forces, the US began to experiment with segregated combat units in 1941, and as one outcome, the 761st Tank Battalion was activated April 1, 1942. Rated Superior during training by Lt. General Lear, Commander Second Army, the unit fought with distinction across the European Theatre of Operations (ETO) as the first Black tank battalion to enter combat, eventually adopting the nickname Black Panthers, and is celebrated as one of the most effective armored battalions in WWII.

Constituted at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, the 761st was overwhelmingly comprised of inductees from deep southern states. Having experienced a lifetime of racism and institutional segregation, these recruits carried with them attitudes and personal values familiar only to other racially segregated units, at times leading to physical and then lawless confrontation. Perhaps the most well-known action was the refusal by a young second lieutenant and morale officer, Jackie Robinson, to move to the back of a bus while on base, causing his immediate court-martial and eventual acquittal following WWII. In the face of extreme scrutiny both as soldiers and tankers, the Battalion's success is credited in large measure to the command of Lt. Colonel Paul Bates, who

closely guided and challenged the men to strive for excellence, and in doing so, realize their potential.

Following twenty-four months of training involving light-duty Stuart tanks (Camp Claiborne) and the iconic medium-duty M4 Sherman (Fort Hood, Texas), the 761st was said to exhibit exceptional morale as they embarked for the ETO from New York on August 27, 1944. The Battalion arrived in England and underwent final training before entering the ETO through Omaha Beach on October 10, 1944. Then totaling 712 (36 officers and 676 enlisted men) and organized into five companies, the Battalion was transported to bivouac at Les Pieux, France, and immediately assigned to General Patton's 3rd Army, at his request.

Characteristically, Patton addressed the men from the back of a half-track. "Men, you're the first Negro tankers to ever fight in the American Army. I would never have asked for you if you weren't good. I have nothing but the best in my Army. I don't care what color you are as long as you go up there and kill those Kraut sonsofbitches. Everyone has their eyes on you and is expecting great things from you. Most of all your race is looking forward to your success. Don't let them down, and damn you, don't let me down! They say it is patriotic to die for your country. Well, let's see how many patriots we can make out of those German sonsofbitches."

Attached to the 26th Infantry Division, the 761st Tank Battalion would need to catch the 3rd Army in a race across Europe that began August 1944, following Operation Cobra. On November 7, 1944, the Battalion moved on the towns of Moyenvic and Vic-Sur-Seille that would prove to be their baptism in combat, and following two days of savage fighting, Moyenvic, Bezange-la-Petite, and Hill 253 fell. To continue the advance, the 26th Division formed a Provisional Task Force with the 761st as spearhead, heading northward toward Morville, France, under heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire. Morville was taken on November 9th and Wuisse on the 11th, Kerpriche and Dreuze fell November 20th, with Bossing, Bidestroff, Inswiller, Torcheville, Nebing, and Neufvillage taken by tank-infantry teams by November 25th. Then entering Honskirch, France, on November 25th, the 761st was forced to withdraw and instead advance through Sarre Union that fell on December 2nd.

In less than one month, the 761st Tank Battalion entered combat and performed brilliantly in liberating over fifteen towns. Moreover, for his leadership and "extraordinary heroism in action" during this advance, Sargent Rubin Rivers posthumously received the Congressional Medal of Honor. However, the price paid for this success during November 1944 alone included 22 killed in action, 125 casualties, 14 tanks of the original 54 lost, and 20 severely damaged. As December unfolded, the 3rd Army was poised to cross the border from France into Germany. But no one could conceive of what was in store for the 761st.

On December 14, 1944, the 761st Battalion spearheaded 3rd Army's advance past the Maginot Line and crossed into Germany between Saarbrücken and Strasbourg, steeling themselves for an assault on the Siegfried Line. However, these plans would wait as the Germans launched the Ardennes counteroffensive between Belgium and Luxembourg on December 16th, later

popularized as the Battle of the Bulge. In response, the 761st moved immediately to Offagne, Belgium, only thirty miles southwest of Bastogne. Supporting the 345th Infantry Regiment, the towns of Rondu and Nimbermont, Belgium fell, and following two days of intensive fighting; Tillet was taken from the 113th Panzer Brigade on December 31st. Critical to the Allie's success, Tillet was an epic assault conducted with eleven tanks, but only two surviving the battle. The Battalion then seized and held roads leading to and from Bastogne, captured six more towns in conjunction with the 17th Airborne Division, engaged and defeated an enemy column near Emmerscheid, and once again crossed into Germany on January 31, 1945.

The Battle of the Bulge was now over and battle lines reestablished, priority once again became infiltration into Germany. Now February 1945, the 761st Battalion was reassigned to US 9th Army, supporting the 314th Regiment in capturing two more cities, clearing pockets of resistance, and supporting the 79th Division in attacks conducted along the Roer River. In March, the Battalion was again reassigned to the 7th Army (103rd Infantry Division), replacing the 48th Tank Battalion and spearheading Task Force Cactus in assaulting and breaching the Siegfried Line, opening the way for the U.S. 4th Armored Division into Germany.

Leveraging earlier rapid advancement of the 761st, the unit was assigned to Task Force Rhine organized on March 21st and composed of the 761st Tank Battalion, 409th Infantry Regiment, and an Engineer Detachment. Assembling in Reisdorf, two columns proceeded north, clearing pillboxes and capturing five towns before seizing the mission objective of Klingen-Munster on March 23rd. The way now open for the 14th Armored Division into Germany, the 761st was reassigned to 3rd Army and crossed the Rhine themselves at Oppenheim on March 30th. During ensuing months, the 761st supported the US 71st Division in the capture of the entire 6th SS Mountain Division, smashed through dozens of German cities and towns, and in the final days of the war in Europe was one of the first American units to reach Steyr, Austria, at the Enns River. There they met with the 1st Ukrainian Front of the Soviet Red Army.

In combat operations in World War II, front-line troops rarely spent more than a few weeks on the front lines; however, much to the contrary, the 761st had been in combat since their arrival in the ETO- over 183 days straight. On May 4th, 1945, the 761st Tank Battalion and 71st Infantry Division unexpectedly encountered something that would haunt the men for the rest of their lives, the Gunskirchen Concentration Camp. A subcamp of the infamous Mauthausen network, the guards had fled several days earlier and left over 15,000 souls behind. The 761st was deactivated on June 1, 1946, in Germany.

Presidential unit Citation	1
Congressional Medal of Honor	1
Silver Star	11
Bronze Star	69
Legion of Honor	5
Purple Heart	296
Purple Heart w/ Clusters	8

The 761st Tank Battalion bore a weight that few can understand, performing brilliantly throughout the war in Europe and credited with inflicting over 130,000 enemy casualties. In tribute to the men of the 761st Tank Battalion, on January 24, 1978, President Jimmy Carter belatedly awarded the Presidential Unit Citation that had earlier eluded them. In further tribute, on November 7, 2015, the American Veterans Center in Washington DC conferred the Audie Murphy Award for "...men of valor on and off the battlefield". In truth, we owe these men a debt that can never be repaid. [Source: Together We Served Newsletter | September 2021 ++]

WWII Wehrmacht War Crimes

Update 01: Soviet Union Criminal Orders

During the planning for the invasion of the Soviet Union a number of orders were devised by the Wehrmacht leadership. The orders contravened international law and established codes of conduct and became known collectively as "Criminal Orders". The orders were a declaration of war against the civilian population.

In November 1935, the psychological war laboratory of the War Ministry submitted a study about how best to undermine Red Army morale should a German-Soviet war break out. Working closely with the émigré Russian Fascist Party based in Harbin, the German psychological warfare unit created a series of pamphlets written in Russian for distribution in the Soviet Union. Much of it was designed to play on Russian anti-Semitism, with one pamphlet calling the "Gentlemen commissars and party functionaries" a group of "mostly filthy Jews". The pamphlet ended with the call for "brother soldiers" of the Red Army to rise up and kill all of the "Jewish commissars".

Although this material was not used at the time, later in 1941 the material the psychological war laboratory had developed in 1935 was dusted off, and served as the basis not only for propaganda in the Soviet Union but also for propaganda within the German Army. Before Barbarossa, German troops were exposed to violent anti-Semitic and anti-Slavic indoctrination via movies, radio, lectures, books and leaflets. The lectures were delivered by "National Socialist Leadership Officers", who were created for that purpose, and by their junior officers. German

Army propaganda portrayed the Soviet enemy in the most dehumanized terms, depicting the Red Army as a force of Slavic Untermenschen (sub-humans) and "Asiatic" savages engaging in "barbaric Asiatic fighting methods" commanded by evil Jewish commissars to whom German troops were to grant no mercy.

As a result of these views, the majority of the German Army worked enthusiastically with the SS in murdering Jews in the Soviet Union. British historian Richard J. Evans wrote that junior officers tended to be especially zealous National Socialists with a third of them being Nazi Party members in 1941. The Wehrmacht did not just obey Hitler's criminal orders for Barbarossa because of obedience, but rather because they shared Hitler's belief that the Soviet Union was run by Jews, and that it was necessary for Germany to completely destroy "Judeo-Bolshevism".

Commissar Order

The order cast the war against the Soviet Union as one of ideological and racial differences, and it provided for the immediate liquidation of political commissars in the Red Army. The order was formulated in 1941 with the participation of the Army High Command (the OKH) and issued by the Wehrmacht High Command (the OKW). General Franz Halder, welcomed it writing that "Troops must participate in the ideological battle in the Eastern campaign to the end". On 17 July 1941, the OKW declared that the Wehrmacht was to:

Free itself from all elements among the prisoners of war considered Bolshevik driving forces. The special situation of the Eastern Campaign therefore demands special measures [an euphemism for killing] which are to be carried out free from bureaucratic and administrative influence and with a willingness to accept responsibility. While so far the regulations and orders concerning prisoners of war were based solely on military considerations, now the political objective must be attained, which is to protect the German nation from Bolshevik inciters and forthwith take the occupied territory strictly in hand.

As such, all Soviet POWs considered to be commissars together with all Jewish POWs were to be handed over to the Einsatzgruppen to be shot. The OKW attached great importance to the killings of POWs believed to be commissars as it was believed that if the captured commissars reached POW camps in Germany that they would stage another German Stab-in-the-back like that believed to have caused Germany's defeat in World War I. Between July–October 1941, between 580,000 and 600,000 POWs in Wehrmacht custody were turned over to the SS to be killed. In September 1941, both Helmuth James von Moltke and Admiral Wilhelm Canaris wrote memos pointing out to the OKW that the order of July 17, 1941 was illegal under international law.

In particular, both Moltke and Admiral Canaris noted that the German claim that Soviet POWs had no rights because the Soviet Union had not ratified the Geneva Convention was invalid as Germany had ratified the Geneva Convention and thus under international law was obliged to provide humane treatment for the POWs in its care. In response, Field-Marshal Wilhelm Keitel wrote: "These scruples accord with the soldierly concepts of a chivalrous war! Here we are concerned with the extermination of an ideology. That is why I approve and defend this measure".

In the summer of 1942, there was an illusory liberalization of the treatment of captured political officers. On 10 JUN the Gestapo chief Heinrich Müller issued an order on the segregation of prisoners and ordered that commissars be isolated from the rest of the prisoners and sent to Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp. However, this did not change the plight of commissars much, as Mauthausen was one of the worst Nazi concentration camps where they usually waited for a slow death. On 20 October 1942, Müller again ordered commissars captured in battle to be shot on the spot. Only those commissars who were identified as deserters were sent to Mauthausen. In the following months, reports continued to be filed regarding the executions of Soviet commissars. The last known account of the liquidation of a political officer came from units of Army Group South in July 1943.

The historian Jürgen Förster wrote that the majority of Wehrmacht officers sincerely believed that most Red Army commissars were Jews and that the best way to defeat the Soviet Union was to kill all of the commissars so as to deprive the Soviet soldiers of their Jewish leaders. [Source: https://wiki2.org/en/War_crimes_of_the_Wehrmacht August 2021 ++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

Louis H. Wilson| WWII



The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the

MEDAL OF HONOR

To

Louis H. Wilson

Ranks and organizations: U.S. Marine Captain, Company F, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines,
3d Marine Division

Places and dates: Fonte Hill, Guam, Mariana Islands, July 25 - 26, 1944

Entered service: May 1941

Born: Feb. 11, 1920, in Brandon, Mississippi

Gen. Louis H. Wilson Jr. retired as the commandant of the Marine Corps in the late 1970s, but he made a name for himself long before that. During World War II, his heroics were vital to the U.S. recapture of Guam. His efforts earned him the Medal of Honor.



Wilson was born on Feb. 11, 1920, in Brandon, Mississippi, to parents Louis and Bertha Wilson. He had an older sister named Elizabeth. According to the Boston Globe, Wilson's father was a farmer who died when he was 5. So, as a young man, he sold vegetables from a cart to help his family earn money. Wilson studied economics at Millsap College in Jackson, Mississippi, where he also played football and was on the track team. When he graduated in May 1941, a recruiter talked him into enlisting in the Marine Corps Reserve. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant that November, just weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor launched the U.S. into World War II.

Wilson was stationed in San Diego with the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, 3rd Marine Division, until February 1943, when his unit was sent to the Pacific front. He was quickly promoted to captain and served at Guadalcanal, Efate and Bougainville, but his rise to prominence began during the battle to recapture Guam. He was in command of Company F on July 25, 1944, when his unit was ordered to take a portion of Fonte Ridge back from Japanese forces. That afternoon, despite heavy machine gun and rifle fire, they pushed up 300 yards of rugged hillside. At that point, Wilson took command of other disorganized units, a reinforcing platoon and motorized equipment that were already there as they prepared to defend the position for the night.

Over the next five hours, Wilson was wounded three times while leading attacks against the enemy above them. At one point, he stopped fighting to go to the company command post for medical attention. But when the enemy launched a counterattack soon thereafter, he volunteered to rejoin his units in the fight. The counterattacks came in waves all night. In that time, Wilson repeatedly ran into the hail of grenades and gunfire, fighting the enemy in hand-to-hand combat to keep them from pushing his units back. One time, he sprinted 50 yards through open territory to rescue a wounded Marine who was lying just beyond the front lines.

After 10 hours of fighting, Wilson's units had finally managed to fend off the Japanese attacks. He then organized a 17-man patrol to head further up the ridge to seize vital ground. Intense enemy fire slowed them and struck down 13 members of the patrol, but the remaining men drove forward and were able to successfully capture and secure the high ground of the ridge. Wilson's daring tactics and leadership were crucial to the regimental mission's success. His units were credited with eliminating about 350 Japanese troops. After the battle, Wilson went to the U.S. Naval Hospital in San Diego to recover from his injuries. He was released in October 1944 and, soon after, married his longtime sweetheart, Jane Clark. They had a daughter named Janet.

Wilson then returned to his duties, this time commanding a company at the Marine Barracks at Camp Pendleton, California. He was eventually transferred to the Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C., and by March 1945, he had been promoted to major. Wilson received the Medal of Honor for his actions in Guam on Oct. 5, 1945, when President Harry S. Truman placed the medal around his neck during a White House ceremony. Ten other Marines and three sailors also received the medal that day. In January 1946, Wilson's alma mater held a "Louis Wilson Day" in his honor. During a dinner held for him, Wilson said, "The real heroes of the war are not able to receive the medals; they lie buried on the beaches of Tarawa and Salerno, of Guam and Normandy."

Wilson continued to work his way up the ranks through the years. He commanded the 1st Marine Division's 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, during the Korean War, and in early 1965, the then-colonel was deployed to Vietnam with the 1st Marine Division as an assistant chief of staff. By July 1975, Wilson had reached the rank of general and was named the 26th commandant of the Marine Corps. During his tenure, he stressed modernization of the post-Vietnam Corps. According to the Marine Corps University, he "insisted on force readiness, responsiveness and mobility by maintaining fast-moving, hard-hitting expeditionary units, each consisting of a single integrated system of modern ground and air-delivered firepower, tactical mobility and electronic countermeasures."

Wilson retired from the Marine Corps in June 1979 after 38 years of service. He and his wife moved to a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama, where their daughter lived. Wilson died on June 21, 2005, after suffering from a degenerative disorder of the nervous system. He was 85. The general was buried at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors. Over the years, a gate and a boulevard were named for Wilson at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The headquarters building for Marine Corps Officer Candidates School in Quantico, Virginia, also bears his name. Lastly, the USS Louis H. Wilson Jr., a new guided missile destroyer, was named for Wilson in 2016. It's currently still being built. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | July 26, 2021 ++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

Joel T. Boone | WWI



The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the

MEDAL OF HONOR

To

Joel T. Boone

Ranks and organizations: U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander, 6th Regiment,
U.S. Marines

Places and dates: Vicinity of Vierzy, France July 19, 1918

Entered service: Spring 1914

Born: St. Clair, Pennsylvania Aug. 29, 1889



Navy Vice Adm. Joel T. Boone treated injured service members through the horrors of both world wars and everything in between. He served as the personal physician for three presidents and put his mark on military medicine over the span of nearly four decades. Before earning many of his high-ranking accomplishments, though, he received one of the most memorable — the Medal of Honor.

Boone was born August 1889 in the small town of St. Clair, Pennsylvania to William and Annie Boone. He had a brother and two sisters. As a teen, he went to Pottsville High School before attending prep school at Mercersburg Academy. Boone was smart, so he chose to attend medical school at Hahnemann Medical College in Philadelphia, graduating in 1913. The following spring, he was appointed as a Medical Corps junior grade lieutenant in the U.S. Naval Reserve and spent the next year doing graduate studies at the Navy Medical School (now the Navy Medicine Professional Development Center) in Washington, D.C. By the summer of 1915, Boone had transferred to the regular Navy and was assigned to the Artillery Battalion of the Marine Corps Expeditionary Force. He spent roughly the next year in Haiti, where U.S. Marines and sailors were helping quell anarchy and unrest after a government coup.

In April 1917, Boone received orders to the USS Wyoming. Soon after, he was temporarily promoted to lieutenant and shipped out to France to support the 6th Marine Regiment during World War I. Boone spent 17 months at war, participating in major campaigns like the Battle of Verdun, the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and the Battle of Belleau Wood — which, at the time, was considered the bloodiest Marine conflict in American history. According to the Library of Congress, Boone worked 12-hour days during Belleau Wood to treat the injured near the fighting. He also helped set up a field dressing station on a nearby farm. According to the Library of Congress, Boone's journal said that he and other corpsmen suffered through three gas attacks and

artillery barrages that caused their housing to shake and the ground to "pulsate." Boone's actions during the conflict later earned him the Medal of Honor.

On July 19, 1918, then-Lt. Boone was in the thick of a firefight with the Germans near Vierzy, France, about a half-hour north of the town of Belleau. Boone knew his men were falling left and right on the battlefield, so, despite the intense enemy gunfire and gassings, he left the relative safety of a ravine and ran onto the open field to give first aid to wounded Marines. When he ran out of field dressing and supplies, Boone again dodged his way through heavy shelling to replenish them. He returned as quickly as he could with a sidecar full of supplies and continued to help the wounded. Later that day, he made another resupply run under the same conditions.

Later that year, Boone received a temporary promotion to lieutenant commander. He returned to the U.S. in 1919 and was awarded the Medal of Honor, which was pinned to his uniform by Assistant Navy Secretary Franklin D. Roosevelt. Boone remained in the Navy after the war and made a name for himself. He and his wife, Helen, had a daughter in early 1920 while Boone was detailed to the Surgeon General's Office in Washington, D.C. At the same time, he was chosen to be the director of the Bureau of Navy Affairs at American Red Cross headquarters.

In June 1922, Boone was permanently promoted to lieutenant commander and assigned as the medical officer on the presidential yacht, the USS Mayflower. The ship was where many diplomatic and social events occurred for presidents Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge. Boone remained in that position for several years until 1929, when newly elected President Herbert Hoover decommissioned the yacht as a money-saving measure. At that point, Boone was assigned to the White House to continue his services as Hoover's personal physician. Over the next 15 years, Boone furthered his studies in medicine and worked his way up the ranks. During World War II, he served on ships and at naval bases on the West Coast.

According to his obituary in The Pottsville (Pennsylvania) Republican, Boone was the fleet medical officer on famed Adm. William Halsey's staff and was aboard the USS Missouri during the Japanese surrender ceremonies on Sept. 2, 1945. Boone was also one of three officers chosen to liberate Allied prisoners of war in Japan before the U.S. military's post-war occupation began. According to Boone's obituary, he was promoted to rear admiral in 1946 and served on the Hoover Commission, which made post-war recommendations to the president regarding potential changes to the federal government. In March 1950, Boone became inspector general of the Navy Medical Department. Later that year, he advanced to the rank of vice admiral and retired after more than 35 years of service.

Boone's work with the military wasn't done, though. For four years, he served as the chief medical director of the Veterans Administration. Boone died on April 2, 1974, at Bethesda Naval Hospital (now Walter Reed National Military Medical Center) in Maryland. He was 84. The doctor's name and legacy lives on. The guided missile frigate USS Boone that was commissioned in 1982 was named in his honor. A health care treatment facility on Joint Expeditionary Base Little

Creek-Fort Story in Hampton Roads, Virginia, also bears his name. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | July 19, 2021 ++]

WWII Bomber Nose Art

[83] Executive Sweet 2



Every Picture Tells A Story

French Dewoitine D.520 Fighter Plane



A peaceful silhouetted shot of a Dewoitine D.520 fighter aircraft of the Vichy French government flying over the coast of Tunisia that belies the turbulence of the French Air Force at the time—the summer of 1940. The beautiful Dewoitine, designed and built by Société Nationale des Constructions Aéronautiques du Midi (SNCAM) was a contemporary of the Spitfire and Messerschmitt Bf 109, but failed to take its place in that pantheon of the great aircraft of the Second

World War, due in large part to the capitulation of France. With its cockpit sitting far aft, behind the trailing edge of the wing, it offered great downward visibility to its pilots. Note the foldable ventral antenna mast protruding downward far beyond the length of the extended landing gear. One wonders if it was slaved to the landing gear sequence—the gear goes down, the mast comes up? The lower antenna was for reception while adjustable length antenna on the top was for transmission. The D.520 was used by both the Free French and the Vichy government.

Military History Anniversaries

01 thru 15 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 01 thru 15 OCT**”. [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | September 2021 ++]

*** Health Care ***



Hospital Charges

Update 06: Transparency Noncompliance Fee Insufficient

Federal price transparency rules are doing an insufficient job at maximizing savings related to healthcare costs, according to a [research](#) released 14 SEP by Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Many hospitals are not yet compliant with CMS' price transparency rule, which took effect 1 JAN. It requires hospitals to post a machine-readable file with the negotiated rates for all items and services and display the prices of 300 shoppable services in a consumer-friendly format.

The rule aims to save Americans money by allowing them to price shop for healthcare services. In many cases, hospitals that have posted the data hide it from web search engines or provide it in a format that makes analysis difficult, according to the report. The researchers provided the following three suggestions to improve price transparency compliance:

1. Increase the maximum noncompliance fee from \$300 per day to \$5,500 per day.
2. Require hospitals to present data uniformly through a machine-readable template that complies with CMS' regulations.
3. Ask hospitals to display their commercial and Medicare rates side-by-side.

Medicare Benefits

Senate Haggles over How to Pay for Adding Popular Ones

Senate Democrats have committed to adding dental, vision, and hearing care to Medicare, in addition to expanding long term care benefits to help people receive home and community - based services. But the ambitious plan is forcing some tough discussions with colleagues from both parties over how to pay for the estimated \$358 billion in proposed new Medicare spending over the next decade. The gap in coverage for these benefits has existed since the program began in 1965, but this can come as a surprise for new Medicare beneficiaries and, all too often, catches people short.

Dental, vision and hearing services come with some hefty out – of – pocket costs as people age. In addition, everyday eyeglasses, contact lenses and hearing aids aren't covered by Medicare either. To get that type of coverage, retirees and those with disabilities often enroll in Medicare Advantage plans, many of which offer some options for these benefits. But not all Medicare recipients have access to Medicare Advantage Plans with these options, and even those who do sometimes learn the benefits that are offered can be skimpy. In addition, some of you have reported that the extra benefits offered by the Medicare Advantage Plans in your area, aren't available to all beneficiaries, but rather only to folks whose incomes are low enough to also qualify for Medicaid.

According to TSCL's Senior Surveys, more than half of older households have no dental insurance coverage, and 34% had not received routine dental care in two years or more. It's little wonder that 81% of survey participants support adding a dental benefit to Medicare. Members of Congress are discussing paying for the new benefits by including a provision that would allow Medicare to directly negotiate lower prices for drugs. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that would save the government an estimated \$345 billion over the first ten years. Medicare beneficiaries would save too, in lower out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs. Eighty - eight percent of participants in TSCL's Senior Survey support allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices.

TSCL strongly supports provisions that would add dental, vision and hearing benefits to Medicare, while lowering costs for prescription drugs. They encourage you to contact Members of Congress and to ask your lawmakers to add these important benefits to Medicare. If in doubt as to your legislator's online contact info or who they are, following are websites that provide ALL legislator's names with contact info to facilitate communicating with them:

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

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

[Source: The Senior Citizens League | Shannon Benton | September 2021 ++]

Covid-19 Victims

Update 05: What Happens To COVID Long-Haulers in the Army



“I had a slight headache.” That’s how the senior field artillery NCO’s bout with COVID-19 began during his deployment to the Middle East last year. Soon he was in the intensive care unit at a U.S. military hospital, where he would stay for about a month. “On about day seven, that’s when everything took a turn for the worse,” said the NCO, who requested anonymity to speak freely about his experience to Army Times. “I sat in the shower for about three hours — about 2:00 a.m. until 5:00 a.m., a low point in my life — vomiting all over myself, urinating on myself, defecating on myself.” Things haven’t gotten much better since.

He’s one of the so-called “COVID long-haulers” who is still experiencing life altering symptoms of the disease nearly a year later. He says his enduring shortness of breath, brain fog, fatigue, dizziness and short term memory loss keep him from being able to do his job as a soldier. “I’m currently working about two, three hours a day and will max out at about 10 hours a week,” he said. “I don’t believe I am an asset to my organization...I cannot get on a plane and deploy after a year [of recovery]. That should be a no-brainer that I am separated...I don’t see the benefit of maintaining myself as an active-duty soldier.” Army Times spoke with the senior NCO and two additional soldiers experiencing enduring COVID-19 symptoms of varying severity, in addition to asking Army and Veterans Affairs officials about medical support for long-haulers.

Simply put: death isn’t the only COVID-19 outcome that can take a soldier out of the fight for good. If a soldier “believes they have a chronic condition attributed to an in-service event, injury or diagnosis (to include COVID-19), they are highly encouraged to file a claim [for disability benefits,” VA spokesperson Gina Jackson told Army Times. Jackson also pointed to a law signed earlier this year that directed the VA to presume that COVID-19 diagnoses are service-connected

for all active-duty troops or reserve component personnel serving on federal active duty. According to the CDC's website, an unknown number of people who survive the disease experience "post-COVID conditions," which it describes as "a wide range of new, returning, or ongoing health problems people can experience four or more weeks after being first infected with the virus."

The Long COVID Alliance, a collective working to inform policymakers about the disease and accelerate research into the condition, estimates that 3.2 million Americans are experiencing at least one post-infection symptom. Scientists aren't sure how common long COVID is, or many people experience physically-disabling symptoms like that of the field artillery NCO. One expert told the Wall Street Journal in June that as many as 5 percent of people could have long-term issues with the disease. Many symptoms of long COVID can affect a soldier's ability to perform their job. According to the CDC, the symptoms can include:

- Difficulty breathing
- Tiredness or fatigue
- Symptoms that get worse after physical or mental activities
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating ("brain fog")
- Cough
- Chest or stomach pain
- Headache
- Fast-beating or pounding heart (also known as heart palpitations)
- Sleep problems
- Dizziness on standing (lightheadedness)
- Mood changes
- Change in smell or taste

Despite the potential impact, the Army doesn't know how many soldiers are suffering with long COVID, service spokesperson Lt. Col. Gabriel Ramirez told Army Times. "Currently the number of Soldiers receiving treatment for long-haul COVID is not tracked by the Army," Ramirez said. "The Army provides the same accommodations and treatment for all Soldiers with medical issues." But some soldiers who still have residual symptoms are worried they won't be able to continue serving or get the medical care they need. The field artillery NCO will leave the Army next year, he said, though he was already eligible for retirement when he became sick.

"Military doctors don't take me seriously," a second soldier told Army Times. He says he contracted the disease while in training early last year, but there wasn't testing available at the time. "I had severe flu-like symptoms, plus the signature [ones like] no taste, no smell, cough, fever [and] congestion," despite only being in his late twenties, he said. Today, more than a year-and-a-half after he got sick, he is still experiencing heart palpitations and extreme shortness of breath during exercise. The second soldier says that medical professionals don't take him seriously because he never had a positive COVID-19 test — or any test for that matter. He's worried he's

going to fall through the cracks as a result and lose his Army career, which he described as a second chance in life.

“I was planning to do the full 20 [years to earn a retirement], but I am very concerned about whether I will be able to stay in if doctors don’t start taking me seriously,” he said. Army doctors, he added, have not yet ordered him to get a chest CT scan, which medical researchers have used to identify lasting lung damage in a significant subset of COVID survivors and long COVID patients. “I don’t know what else to do because I am genuinely terrified that something is happening to my heart and body, and we can’t seem to figure it out,” the soldier said. “I keep getting told I’m fine but I can physically feel something is not right with my body...I considered finding a doctor off-posts but the costs are very expensive and I can’t afford it.” While his job isn’t physically demanding, he said, he can no longer run two miles fast enough to pass the new Army Combat Fitness Test. The ACFT has a much slower passing run time — 21 minutes — than the old PT test.

The Army has processes to ensure soldiers medically unable to do their jobs aren’t immediately forced out of the military empty-handed, though. There are MOS Administrative Retention Review boards, or MAR2, to see if soldiers can cut it in another role. And then there’s the Integrated Disability Evaluation System to determine VA disability for troops who medically can’t stay in the service, Army spokesperson Ramirez explained. To date, “no Soldiers have been moved into process to remove based on COVID-19 conditions,” Ramirez said. The medical separation process can only begin when a soldier has reached a “medical retention determination point” where an Army doctor has determined that a soldier’s medical condition is roughly stable and the service member likely isn’t capable of performing their duties anymore, Ramirez added. This usually doesn’t happen until 12 months after injury or illness, according to Ramirez.

The senior field artillery NCO has an approved retirement date and was already going to receive 100 percent VA disability, so he said he’s not worried about going through the MAR2 and IDES process. The second soldier — who can do his job but will soon no longer meet physical fitness standards when the Army’s moratorium on old PT test scores expires — the MAR2 and IDES process may not be what happens. He’s more likely to be involuntarily separated for fitness issues before the end of his current contract, which could result in a less-than-honorable discharge and cost him his GI Bill benefits.

A third soldier reached by Army Times falls into another category — troops with enduring COVID symptoms who can meet standards for continued service. The soldier, who is in his mid-twenties, was in basic training last fall when he got sick, he explained, but he and the other trainees didn’t report their illness or get tested. “The company I was assigned to had just come off quarantine as a few members had had COVID,” he said. “None of us were going to delay our time in [training] by getting tested and [getting] the entire company quarantined [again].” He had a mild bout of the disease, he added, with loss of taste and smell and light shortness of breath being his

primary symptoms — they were easy to conceal, and he admitted he “was very selective about who [he] told.”

“After we graduated, a bunch of us met up and admitted that we had all gotten symptoms [of COVID] around the same time, but there was no way we were going to stay in [basic training] any longer than we had to,” he said. His sense of smell hasn’t returned in the year since then. It “usually” doesn’t affect his job, he said. “I can’t smell diesel fumes or smoke. In a job like the military that can actually be a danger,” he said before noting one unexpected bonus — “I don’t have to smell the barracks.” His chain of command has supported him seeking medical attention for the enduring symptom, but he’s not optimistic it will help. “I’m not very hopeful there’s much they can do based off the experiences I’ve heard,” he said. Medical researchers are still trying to find ways to combat long COVID and other similar post-viral syndromes.

He may face an uphill battle trying to secure VA care when he someday leaves the Army since he never took a COVID test. Loss of smell is a recognized compensable disability for the VA even independent of other conditions — if he can prove the service connection without a test result. “I just want to smell again,” he said. “I used to love smelling my morning coffee, cooking, my home — I’m definitely missing a really basic part of how I used to experience life.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Davis Winkie | September 17, 2021 ++]

Covid-19 Health Care

Update 01: The Days of Full Insurance Coverage Are Over



Insurers are restoring deductibles and co-pays, leaving patients with big bills. Jamie Azar left a Tennessee rehab hospital in mid-SEP with the help of a walker after spending the entire month of August in the ICU and on a ventilator. She had received a shot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in mid-July but tested positive for the coronavirus within 11 days and nearly died. Now Azar, who earns about \$36,000 a year as the director of a preschool at a Baptist church in Georgia, is facing thousands of dollars in medical expenses that she can't afford. "I'm very thankful to be home. I am still weak. And I'm just waiting for the bills to come in to know what to do with them," she said 15 SEP, after returning home.

In 2020, as the pandemic took hold, U.S. health insurance companies declared they would cover 100% of the costs for Covid treatment, waiving co-pays and expensive deductibles for hospital stays that frequently range into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. But this year, most insurers have reinstated co-pays and deductibles for covid patients, in many cases even before vaccines became widely available. The companies imposed the costs as industry profits remained strong or grew in 2020, with insurers paying out less to cover elective procedures that hospitals suspended during the crisis. Now the financial burden of covid is falling unevenly on patients across the country, varying widely by health-care plan and geography, according to a survey of the two largest health plans in every state by the nonprofit and nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

If you're fortunate enough to live in Vermont or New Mexico, for instance, state mandates require insurance companies to cover 100% of treatment. But most Americans with Covid are now exposed to the uncertainty, confusion and expense of business-as-usual medical billing and insurance practices - joining those with cancer, diabetes and other serious, costly illnesses. (Insurers continue to waive costs associated with vaccinations and testing, a pandemic benefit the federal government requires.)

A widow with no children, Azar, 57, is part of the unlucky majority. Her experience is a sign of what to expect if Covid, as most scientists fear, becomes endemic: a permanent, regular health threat. The carrier for her employee health insurance, UnitedHealthcare, reinstated patient cost-sharing 31 JAN. That means, because she got sick months later, she could be on the hook for \$5,500 in deductibles, co-pays and out-of-network charges this year for her care in a Georgia hospital near her home, including her ICU stay, according to estimates by her family. They anticipate she could face another \$5,500 in uncovered expenses next year as her recovery continues.

Bills related to her stay at the out-of-network rehab hospital in Tennessee could climb as high as \$10,000 more, her relatives have estimated, but they acknowledged they were uncertain this month what exactly to expect, even after asking UnitedHealthcare and the providers. "We still don't know where the numbers will land because the system makes the family wait for the bills," said Azar's sister, Rebecca Straub. UnitedHealthcare declined to comment specifically about Azar's situation unless she signed a blanket waiver allowing release of all her health records - which she declined. In general, a person with Azar's type of plan would have an in-network deductible of \$1,500 and an in-network out-of-pocket maximum of \$4,000, said UnitedHealthcare spokeswoman Tracey Lempner in an email. Lempner declined to say what a patient's out-of-network, out-of-state share would be at the Tennessee rehab hospital.

"The cost-share waivers were just one piece of our overall response to the covid-19 pandemic," Lempner said. "We have focused our efforts around helping our members get access to covid-19-related tests, vaccines and treatment, while providing additional support to our clients, care providers and local communities." UnitedHealthGroup, UnitedHealthcare's parent company, reported \$15.4 billion in profits in 2020, up from \$13.8 billion in 2019.

The charges Azar anticipates would be budget-crushers, Straub said. Her relatives are seeking help from the public on a nonprofit patient-fundraising website called Help Hope Live, which says it verifies the circumstances of each patient's condition with medical providers. In a Facebook video call from her hospital bed in Chattanooga, Azar cited prayer from family and friends for helping her maintain a positive attitude. Although she considers the change in insurance practices unjust for people who get sick this year, she said she harbors no personal animosity toward UnitedHealthcare. "I got here a year late, huh?" she quipped. "Even though it may not seem fair or seem right, it's where we are." She said her doctors surmised she may have already been exposed to the coronavirus when she received her Johnson & Johnson shot in July.

The lack of uniformity in Covid insurance practices across the country this year is striking. In some places, because of differences in health plan policies, Covid patients in the same hospitals and in the same ICU units could be facing completely different financial burdens. "There was no federal mandate for insurers to cover all the costs for Covid treatment. Insurers were doing it voluntarily," said Krutika Amin, a Kaiser Family Foundation associate director who researches health insurance practices. Last year, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 88% of people covered by private insurance had their co-pays and deductibles for covid treatment waived. By August 2021, only 28% of the two largest plans in each state and the District of Columbia still had the waivers in place, and another 10% planned to phase them out by the end of October, the Kaiser survey found. Its survey this year of employer-sponsored plans reflected similar patterns. "For some people, deductibles can be over \$8,000 for a hospital stay," Amin said. "It will really depend on what plan they have."

America's Health Insurance Plans, the industry's lobbying and trade group, said insurance companies began to reinstate cost-sharing for Covid treatment as vaccines became available and in recognition that the coronavirus will be an ongoing health challenge. "After a year and a half, it's pretty clear that Covid is here to stay, that this is a continuing health condition," AHIP spokesman David Allen said. "When it comes to treatment, we're looking at it like we would treat any other health condition." The industry says it is not using the return of deductibles as financial incentive for people to get vaccines. To encourage vaccinations, the industry is focused on "carrots, not sticks," Allen said, with programs targeting education and making sure no one is billed for receiving vaccines.

The reintroduction of cost-sharing mainly affects people with private or employer-based insurance. Patients with no insurance can have 100% of their expenses covered by the federal government, under a special program set up by the government for the pandemic, with hospitals reimbursed for care at Medicare rates. Covid patients with Medicaid, the government plan for lower-income people that is paid for by states and the federal government, continue to be protected from cost-sharing, insurance specialists said. Patients on Medicare, the federal plan for the elderly, could face out-of-pocket costs if they do not have supplemental insurance.

For large commercial plans, the pandemic created an unusual dynamic in 2020. Hospitals stopped performing elective procedures, because of the risk of infection and because they were overwhelmed in many communities, so insurance companies had to pay out fewer claims. "Insurers may have also wanted to be sympathetic toward patients pains, and some may have also feared the possibility of a federal mandate to provide care free-of-charge to COVID-19 patients, so they voluntarily waived these costs for at least some period of time during the pandemic," the Kaiser Family Foundation report said. Nationally, Covid hospitalizations under insurance contracts on average cost \$29,000, or \$156,000 for a patient with oxygen levels so low that they require a ventilator and ICU treatment, according to data gathered by the national independent nonprofit FAIR Health.

"Insurers wanted to encourage people to get treatment. And this was something that, almost more than any illnesses and health conditions, was something that you have no control over," said Jack Hoadley, research professor emeritus at the Georgetown University Center on Health Insurance Reforms. "The insurers probably had a sense that there was a moral obligation to not put patients on the spot for this kind of thing." Insurance companies participating in Affordable Care Act marketplaces also faced the prospect of having to pay rebates to the government if their profit ratios exceeded certain levels. The calculus in place in 2020 changed with the advent of vaccines, which now makes most hospitalizations preventable, Hoadley said.

In some cases, the patchwork of policies and plans is creating stark differences in circumstances for individual patients in the same facility. Hospitals along the Connecticut River, the border between Vermont and New Hampshire, draw patients from both states. Vermont health plans are waiving deductibles and co-pays into 2022. In New Hampshire, where Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield has a dominant presence, insurance companies have reinstated cost-sharing. Marvin Mallek, a doctor who treats Covid patients from both sides of the river at Springfield Hospital in Vermont, said New Hampshire covid patients are now facing business as usual from insurers, suffering the same sort of financial stress that routinely affects patients with cancer, heart disease and other serious ailments. "The inhumanity of our health-care system and the tragedies it creates will now resume and will now cover this one group that was exempted," he said. "The U.S. health-care system is sort of like a game of musical chairs where there are not enough chairs, and some people are going to get hurt and devastated financially."

Hospitals also are in the position of having to resume billings and collections for individuals who may have been laid off because of the pandemic or been too sick to work, experts said. If you ever wanted a study in differential treatment, this is it," said Ray Berry, chief executive officer of his own company, Health Business Solutions, in Cooper City, Fla., and a member of the North Broward Hospital board. "You can have people in beds right next to each other, and one can pay \$3,000 and one can pay nothing. . . . The folks who do pay it are going to get sticker shock." [Source: The Washington Post | Christopher Rowland | September 20, 2021 ++]

Belching-Gas-Bloating

Tips for Reducing Them

Belching: Getting rid of excess air

Belching or passing gas (flatus) is natural and common. Excessive belching or flatus, accompanied by bloating, pain or swelling of the abdomen (distention), can occasionally interfere with daily activities or cause embarrassment. But these signs and symptoms usually don't point to a serious underlying condition and are often reduced with simple lifestyle changes. When belching, gas or bloating interferes with your daily activities, there may be something wrong. Find out how to reduce or avoid gas and gas pains, and when you may need to see your doctor.

Belching is commonly known as burping. It's your body's way of expelling excess air from your upper digestive tract. Most belching is caused by swallowing excess air. This air most often never even reaches the stomach but accumulates in the esophagus. You may swallow excess air if you eat or drink too fast, talk while you eat, chew gum, suck on hard candies, drink carbonated beverages, or smoke. Some people swallow air as a nervous habit even when they're not eating or drinking. Acid reflux or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) can sometimes cause excessive belching by promoting increased swallowing. Chronic belching may also be related to inflammation of the stomach lining or to an infection with *Helicobacter pylori*, the bacterium responsible for some stomach ulcers. In these cases, the belching is accompanied by other symptoms, such as heartburn or abdominal pain.

You can reduce belching if you:

- Eat and drink slowly. Taking your time can help you swallow less air. Try to make meals relaxed occasions; eating when you're stressed or on the run increases the air you swallow.
- Avoid carbonated drinks and beer. They release carbon dioxide gas.
- Skip the gum and hard candy. When you chew gum or suck on hard candy, you swallow more often than normal. Part of what you're swallowing is air.
- Don't smoke. When you inhale smoke, you also inhale and swallow air.
- Check your dentures. Poorly fitting dentures can cause you to swallow excess air when you eat and drink.
- Get moving. It may help to take a short walk after eating.
- Treat heartburn. For occasional, mild heartburn, over-the-counter antacids or other remedies may be helpful. GERD may require prescription-strength medication or other treatments.

Flatulence: Gas buildup in the intestines

Gas in the small intestine or colon is typically caused by the digestion or fermentation of undigested food by bacteria found in the bowel. Gas can also form when your digestive system doesn't completely break down certain components in foods, such as gluten, found in most grains, or the sugar in dairy products and fruit. Other sources of intestinal gas may include:

- Food residue in your colon

- A change in the bacteria in the small intestine
- Poor absorption of carbohydrates, which can upset the balance of helpful bacteria in your digestive system
- Constipation, since the longer food waste remains in your colon, the more time it has to ferment
- A digestive disorder, such as lactose or fructose intolerance or celiac disease

To prevent excess gas, it may help to:

- **Eliminate certain foods.** Common gas-causing offenders include beans, peas, lentils, cabbage, onions, broccoli, cauliflower, whole-grain foods, mushrooms, certain fruits, and beer and other carbonated drinks. Try removing one food at a time to see if your gas improves.
- **Read labels.** If dairy products seem to be a problem, you may have some degree of lactose intolerance. Pay attention to what you eat and try low-lactose or lactose-free varieties. Certain indigestible carbohydrates found in sugar-free foods (sorbitol, mannitol and xylitol) also may result in increased gas.
- **Eat fewer fatty foods.** Fat slows digestion, giving food more time to ferment.
- **Temporarily cut back on high-fiber foods.** Fiber has many benefits, but many high-fiber foods are also great gas producers. After a break, slowly add fiber back to your diet.
- **Try an over-the-counter remedy.** Some products such as Lactaid or Dairy Ease can help digest lactose. Products containing simethicone (Gas-X, Mylanta Gas, others) haven't been proved to be helpful, but many people feel that these products work. Products such as Beano, particularly the liquid form, may decrease the gas produced during the breakdown of certain types of beans.

Bloating: Common but incompletely understood

Bloating is a sensation of having a full stomach. Distension is a visible or measurable increase in abdominal size. People often describe abdominal symptoms as bloating, especially if those symptoms don't seem to be relieved by belching, passing gas or having a bowel movement. The exact connection between intestinal gas and bloating is not fully understood. Many people with bloating symptoms don't have any more gas in the intestine than do other people. Many people, particularly those with irritable bowel syndrome or anxiety, may have a greater sensitivity to abdominal symptoms and intestinal gas, rather than an excess amount. Nonetheless, bloating may be relieved by the behavioral changes that reduce belching, or the dietary changes that reduce flatus.

Most often bloating is linked to eating habits or certain foods and beverages that cause the build-up of gasses in the digestive system—among them, carbon dioxide, oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen, and sometimes methane or sulfur (which is responsible for the unpleasant odor when gas is released). Food-related causes of bloating include:

- *Eating too much:* Stomach tissue is stretchy: If you put more into it than it can easily accommodate it will stretch enough to protrude.
- *Eating too fast:* Consuming food without taking a break doesn't give your belly and your brain time to acknowledge the signs of (satiety) fullness. By the time your body catches

up, 15 or 20 minutes after you've eaten, you may feel as if you've downed two or three meals rather than one.

- *High-fiber foods*: Whole grains and other foods that are rich in fiber can cause bloating, especially if you aren't used to eating them.
- *Constipation*. Stool backed up in the bowels can cause distention of the lower abdomen.
- *Swallowing air*: When you chew gum or drink carbonated beverages, you're essentially consuming air. The same holds for drinking from a straw.
- *Drinking*: Alcohol of any type may cause temporary puffiness by irritating the lining of the stomach. Bubbly beverages (beer, champagne, cocktails mixed with soda) can be especially problematic.² People who abuse alcohol may develop a condition called alcoholic gastritis—inflammation that tends to flare after a binge, causing bloating and other symptoms.³
- *Lactose intolerance*: People who are lactose intolerant do not have lactase, the enzyme needed to digest the sugar in dairy products, and as a result experience nausea and bloating within 30 minutes to 2 hours after consuming foods such as milk or cheese.
- *Gluten*: Some people who are sensitive to gluten (a protein found in wheat and other grains) or who have celiac disease may experience gas and bloating after eating foods with gluten.
- *Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)*: Some foods, such as artificial sweeteners, certain fruits and vegetables, and or dairy products may produce uncomfortable gas and discomfort in some people.

When to see your doctor

Excessive belching, passing gas and bloating often resolve on their own or with simple changes. If these are the only symptoms you have, they rarely represent any serious underlying condition. Consult your doctor if your symptoms don't improve with simple changes, particularly if you also notice:

- Diarrhea
- Persistent or severe abdominal pain
- Bloody stools
- Changes in the color or frequency of stools
- Unintended weight loss
- Chest discomfort
- Loss of appetite or feeling full quickly

These signs and symptoms could signal an underlying digestive condition. Intestinal symptoms can be embarrassing — but don't let embarrassment keep you from seeking help. [Source: Mayo Clinic | <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-condition> | September 2021 ++]

Cervical Cancer

Update 06: Stay Healthy by Getting Screened

Did you know that cervical cancer was once one of the most common causes of cancer death for American women? However, the cervical cancer death rate dropped significantly with the increased use of the Pap test. Cervical cancer can often be found early, and sometimes even prevented with regular Pap tests and screenings. The Pap test is recommended for all women between the ages of 21 and 65.

The human papillomavirus (HPV) test is another screening test for cervical cancer. This test screens for types of HPV that can cause pre-cancers and cancers of the cervix. Despite the recognized benefits of cervical cancer screening, not all American women get screened. In fact, most cervical cancers are found in women who have never had a Pap test or who have not had one recently. In 2021, the American Cancer Society predicts there will be 14,480 new cases of invasive cervical cancer and 4,290 deaths from cervical cancer

Screening can prevent most cervical cancers by finding abnormal cell changes (pre-cancers) so they can be treated before turning into a cervical cancer. Cervical pre-cancers are diagnosed far more often than invasive cervical cancer. Don't wait to make your appointment. TRICARE covers screening Pap tests for female beneficiaries beginning at age 21. The frequency may be up to you and your provider; however, screening Pap tests should be performed at least once every three years. If you're over age 30 and have had normal Pap test results, talk with your doctor about how often you should get screened. Learn more about TRICARE coverage of cancer screenings at www.tricare.mil/cancerscreenings. [Source: TRICARE Newsletter | September 2021 ++]

Chiropractic Care

Availability Options | Does it Work



Tricare doesn't always cover chiropractic care for active duty service members or their families, and access at military hospitals is limited. Tricare's website lists only chiropractic services at only 60 of 422 military health facilities, and the wait for an appointment is often long. But, veterans and

service members have some affordable options like military appreciation programs, memberships and a chain of new clinics that that will open on military bases. Military service can be tough on your body Deployments, battle loads and physical fitness training can lead to lower back pain and other chronic issues. So if you're a military member who wants chiropractic care, you might have to pay out of pocket. Luckily, there are some affordable options.

AAFES: In February 2021, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service announced that more wellness services would be arriving in 2021, including the addition of chiropractic offices at select shopping centers. An AAFES agreement with The Joint Corp., a national provider of chiropractic care, opened the door for locations at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, and Luke Air Force Base in Phoenix, Arizona, among others. AAFES said it plans to eventually add chiropractic offices to all its Exchange shopping centers in the United States over the next few years. The Joint Chiropractic walk-in offices offer special military discounts to service members and their families.

- Your first appointment, including a consultation, exam and an adjustment will cost \$19.
- Military members also receive a discount on monthly wellness packages. At the military rate, a wellness plan that includes four monthly visits costs \$59 per month.
- Military members, veterans and families who live far from military bases can still take advantage of the special pricing at one of their 650 locations.

Chiropractic memberships: like Chiro Health USA or Chiropractic Lifecare of America can help offset the cost for some. You pay an annual fee to join and are then eligible for discounts with chiropractors in their network. Chiropractic care can help relieve pain and increase motion in joints, including your back and neck, and keep your body feeling good, without the use of opioids or other medications.

VA: If you're a veteran, then you may be able access services either at a VA facility or through a community provider, if you have a referral from your regular doctor.

Tricare: Tricare doesn't cover chiropractic care for most active-duty service members or their families. Some active-duty members, including activated members of the National Guard or Reserve, may qualify for Tricare's chiropractic health care program. There are some significant limitations to the Tricare program. You must be referred by your primary care manager, who also decides how long and how often you can receive treatments. In addition, the chiropractor must practice at a designated military hospital or clinic – and only 60 of 422 military health services facilities in the U.S. (49 hospitals and 373 clinics) have chiropractic care available.

Does Chiropractic Care Work?

Whether or not chiropractic care works has been a multimillion-dollar question, and the Department of Defense has been trying to answer it for decades. According to the final report to Congressional Defense Committees: Chiropractic Clinical Trials, the DOD has authorized several studies since 1985 to determine whether chiropractic care is effective and whether providing it as a benefit to service members is feasible. The findings have generally been positive.

The results of a recent \$7.5 million study, completed by RAND Corporation, were released in September 2019. The study examined how service members with lower back pain performed on several fitness measures after chiropractic care. Researchers found a significant difference between those who received chiropractic treatments and the control group, which did not. Those receiving chiropractic care had a 5% increase in isometric strength, compared with a 6% decrease in the control group. Endurance increased by 14%, while it decreased by 10% in the control group. Balance increased 28%, while the control group had no change.

[Source: The Military Wallet | Laura LaRocca | September 14, 2021 ++]

Dehydration

Update 01: Foods That Help Replenish Your Body's Lost Fluids

Dehydration is a common ailment that many people suffer from. It can be caused by a number of things, including illness and excessive heat or exercise. If you are suffering from dehydration, it is important to know what foods will help replenish your body's lost fluids. When you a person is hydrated they will feel better, have better brain function, and food digestion is more efficient. The following foods contain about 85% to 95% water content along with other important nutrients which can help rehydrate our bodies both inside and out

Pineapple

This is a fruit that is high in water content and a wonderful choice for anyone suffering from dehydration! It has about 83% water so it makes sense as to why pineapples are one of our best fruits for rehydrating your body. In addition, they also contain electrolytes which help with muscle recovery after exercise or play! Along with that, they have been shown to be beneficial in preventing kidney stones as well as protecting against cancer cell growths due to their enzyme Bromelain. Pineapple can be eaten on its own but you can use it over yogurt, oatmeal, or cereal if desired too.

Watermelon

This one might be obvious because it has water in the name. Watermelon is a delicious and hydrating summertime favorite. It doesn't just taste great, it is also one of the best sources of water you can get from any food. The great thing about watermelon is that it not only helps to hydrate you but also helps with muscle recovery! Along with that, it also has the added benefit of being a great source of Vitamin A.

Lettuce

Keep things light and green with the best leafy vegetable for rehydration, lettuce! There are many types of lettuces that you can choose from but there is one thing they all have in common which makes them great. They are full of water, making them a wonderful choice to drink if you feel dehydrated or ill. Some good examples include romaine, Boston, and red leaf among others.

Carrots

Carrots are a great vegetable for adding some flavor and color back into your life when you feel dehydrated. They have about 87% water content making them an excellent choice to eat if you want something healthy on the go or at work! Along with that, they contain many other important nutrients such as Vitamin A. Vitamin A helps protect against infection and illness along with providing necessary protein for muscle repair among other things too. You can enjoy carrots raw or even toss them into salads too!

Coconut

If you prefer something a bit more exotic for your rehydration purposes, coconut is a perfect choice! The thing that makes this wonderful fruit great isn't just its taste but also all of its hydrating benefits. Coconut water has been shown to be an effective replacement for lost fluids due to exercising or other activities. It contains not only electrolytes but sugar too. Most people often confuse coconut milk with coconut oil which is actually two very different things. They both have many health benefits in their own way so do not let anyone tell you otherwise if you enjoy them!

Oranges

Another citrus fruit comes onto our list and it helps make up one part of what we call "The Big Three" when talking about fruits. It is especially good at helping to rehydrate your body. They are very tasty whether you're eating them or enjoying a glass of orange juice. Oranges are high in water and also contain potassium which is an essential electrolyte for our bodies. This fruit is all-around amazing for your health!

Papaya

Another great fruit that you can add to smoothies or even enjoy by itself if desired. Papayas make a wonderful addition to any food list when it comes to hydrating the body naturally! They have about 85% water content and help provide many different vitamins and minerals including Vitamin C too. In fact, they were actually named after their resemblance of the human anatomy due to their heart shape along with other parts such as seeds or leaves! Papaya trees originally came from South America but now grow throughout Mexico and Central America among other places too so try one out today.

Cucumber

This is another vegetable that you may not think of when it comes to rehydration but they are actually an excellent choice too! Cucumbers contain about 96% water content which makes them perfect for hydrating your body after exercise or other activities. Eating cucumbers can also help protect against heart disease and weight gain due to their rich source of Vitamin B among other things too.

Cantaloupe

Cantaloupes make a surprising appearance on our list as the final fruit in "The Big Three" along with Oranges and Papayas. They have about 92% water making them ideal for hydration purposes. This fruit is especially effective if eaten raw rather than cooked beforehand since cooking destroys

some important nutrients such as Vitamin C. Strawberries also contain many different minerals and antioxidants which can help lower the risk of heart disease, cancer, and other diseases too. Do not be afraid to add some cantaloupe into your daily routine!

Strawberries

Strawberries are a wonderful choice to help rehydrate the body especially if you prefer them over other berries or fruits. A great food choice for many reasons and they have about 90% water which makes them great for hydrating. They also contain many different nutrients including Vitamin C and fiber too! You can eat them alone or add them to your other meals, either way, they are delicious with great benefits.

Kiwis

Kiwi fruit is another tasty fruit containing about 89% water content. Most people may be surprised to learn that kiwis actually come from China rather than New Zealand due to their name which was given by British colonists who brought the seeds back after visiting there. They have been shown to contain even more Vitamin C per serving size than oranges or strawberries making them a highly nutritious choice not only for rehydration but overall health as well!

[Source: The Outdoor Wear Team | September 23, 2021 ++]

Consumer Health

16 thru 30 SEP 2021

Nebulized Hydrogen Peroxide Warning -- The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) is warning that breathing nebulized hydrogen peroxide to treat or prevent COVID-19 is useless. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, says it can cause [respiratory and eye irritation](#). Businessman and osteopathic doctor [Joseph Mercola](#) promoted the practice in an April 2020 video. The Center for Inquiry's Dubious COVID-19 Treatments and Preventives page currently lists 29 businesses that have been warned by the Federal Trade Commission for making unsubstantiated COVID-19 claims for hydrogen peroxide and other oxygenation treatments.

Sport & Exercise Claims -- Researcher Nick Tiller, author of *The Skeptic's Guide to Sports Science: Confronting Myths of the Health and Fitness Industry*, exposed pitfalls for consumers navigating the \$4 trillion health and fitness industry, including the lack of evidence supporting overblown claims made for K-Tape, barefoot running shoes, high-protein diets and supplements, yoga, and "energy medicine" such as cupping. In 2012, a systematic study of advertised sports-performance products found that more than half of the more than 400 performance-enhancing claims made for over 100 products were unsupported and 85% of the references used to support the claims were found to have a high risk of bias.

[Source: Consumer Health Digest #21-38, September 26, 2021 ++]



Grocery Prices

Pandemic Price Pain

Last year, grocery prices rose by 3.5%, the most they had in a decade, thanks to the pandemic. Kroger, the nation's largest grocer, recently warned that things aren't looking any better this year. We compared current prices on 35 Kroger items with prices obtained on the very same products from the same Ohio store in September 2019. The result? Yes, we're paying more: 8.4% more, to be exact. While prices dropped or stayed the same on 12 items, they rose on the 23 other products. The price of one staple is up a staggering 88.6%. Total for 35 Items 2019: \$75.26 vs. 2020: \$81.57

Following in percentage of increase order are the current non-sale prices on those 23 that do not reflect any discounts that may be available with a Kroger Plus card. Items are store brand unless otherwise noted.

- Frozen Pepperoni Pizza (28 oz.) 2019: \$2.97 vs. 2021: \$2.99 -- Increase: 0.7%
- Oven-Roasted Deli Turkey Breast (9 oz) 2019: \$2.69 vs. 2021: \$2.79 -- Increase: 3.7%
- Frozen Mixed Vegetables (12 oz.) 2019: 96 cents vs. 2021: \$1 -- Increase: 4.2%
- Stouffer's Frozen Lasagna (38 oz.) 2019: \$6.99 vs. 2021: \$7.29 -- Increase: 4.3%
- Lettuce (1 head) 2019: \$1.49 vs. 2021: \$1.59 -- Increase: 6.7%
- Vanilla Ice Cream (48 oz.) 2019: \$2.79 vs. 2021: \$2.99 Increase: 7.2%
- Boneless Pork Chops (1 lb.) 2019: \$4.99 vs. 2021: \$5.49 Increase: 10%
- Ranch Dressing (16 oz.) 2019: \$1.50 vs. 2021: \$1.67 Increase: 11.3%
- Bananas (1 lb.) 2019: 49 cents vs. 2021: 55 cents -- Increase: 12.3%
- Tyson Chicken Breasts (1 lb.) 2019: \$3.49 vs. 2021: \$3.99 -- Increase: 14.3%
- Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup (10.5 oz.) 2019: 59 cents vs. 2021: 69 cents -- Increase: 16.9%
- White Bread (1 loaf) 2019: \$1.25 vs. 2021: \$1.49 -- Increase: 19.2%
- Hamburger Buns (8 ct.) 2019: \$1.25 vs. 2021: \$1.49 -- Increase: 19.2%
- Strawberries (16 oz.) 2019: \$2.50 -- 2021: \$2.99 -- Increase: 19.6%
- Toasted Oats Cereal (12 oz.) 2019: \$1.49 vs. 2021: \$1.79 -- Increase: 20.1%
- Ground Beef (1 lb. 80/20) 2019: \$4.49 vs. 2021: \$5.49 -- Increase: 22.3%

- 2% Milk (1 gal.) 2019: \$2.19 vs. 2021: \$2.69 -- Increase: 22.8%
- Gala Apples (1 lb.) 2019: \$1.29 vs. 2021: \$1.59 -- Increase: 23.3%
- Ketchup (24 oz.) 2019: \$1 vs. 2021: \$1.25 -- Increase: 25%
- Sugar Smidge & Spoon (4 lbs.) 2019: \$1.59 vs. 2021: \$1.99 -- Increase: 25.2%
- Chocolate Chip Cookies (13 oz.) 2019: \$1.49 vs. 2021: \$1.89 -- Increase: 26.8%
- Diced Tomatoes (14.5 oz.) 2019: 50 cents vs. 2021: 69 cents -- Increase: 38%
- Large Eggs (1 dozen) 2019: 79 cents vs. 2021: \$1.49 -- Increase: 88.6%

[Source: TSCL Weekly Update August 28, 2021 ++]

SSA COLA 2021

Estimated to Be 6% to 6.1% For 2022

The Social Security cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for next year is likely to be the highest seen by retirees since 1982. Based on the most recent CPI data through August, I estimate that the COLA will increase Social Security benefits by 6%-6.1% in 2022. This would be the highest increase that I've forecast in more than 26 years of working as TSCL's point person on COLAs. There's a 15% chance that the COLA could go lower than 6%.

A 6% COLA would raise an average monthly benefit of \$1,554 by about \$93.20. That's a huge difference from the \$20 per month that the 1.3% COLA raised the same amount in 2021. But the 2022 increase is sorely needed after retired consumers have been faced with soaring costs this year, coming right as the COVID-19 caused recession severely impacted the savings of many retired households. Despite the prospect of getting a high COLA in 2022, many of you still feel you're in bathtub with a drain that's stuck open — money goes out as quick as it comes in.

TSCL has been getting plenty of comments about soaring costs and what that's doing to your standard of living, your health, and your peace of mind. For anyone retired prior to 2010, a 6% COLA will not make up for 12 years of stagnant growth in Social Security income due to an average COLA growth rate of just 1.4%. Twelve years is half of a typical retirement period. The extra benefits are needed, and badly, just to cover essentials like food, healthcare and housing costs. TSCL's new Retirement Survey recently asked "Which of the following financial actions have you taken during the COVID-19 pandemic? Following is the results from that survey:

- Spent emergency savings -- 35%
- Made changes to retirement savings investments -- 19%
- Drew down retirement savings more than usual -- 19%
- Visited a food pantry or applied for SNAP benefits -- 20%

- Provided room and board, childcare or other assistance for adult children and grandchildren -- 14%
- Applied for assistance with heating and cooling costs -- 9%
- Went back to work or took a new job -- 10%
- Applied for Medicare Savings Program or Extra Help to assist with medical or prescription drug expenses -- 9%
- Refinanced a home mortgage -- 10%
- Applied for pharmacy assistance program for one or more expensive prescription drugs -- 8%
- Applied for rental assistance -- 4%

There is still one more month of consumer price data to come in before the COLA increase for 2022 will be announced by the Social Security Administration in mid-October. Stay tuned to the news to see how close our 6% - 6.1% estimate comes to the actual increase. [Source: The Senior Citizens League | Mary Johnson | September 2021 ++]

Coronavirus Financial Planning

Update 26: National Average Charges for Hospital Stay

The average billed charge for a complex COVID-19 hospitalization in the United States is \$317,810, according to new cost estimates from FAIR Health. The average estimated allowed amount (the total amount paid to an in-network provider, including payments from both the plan and the patient) is \$98,139. Launched in November 2020, FH Total Treatment Cost COVID-19 benchmarks provide cost estimates for beginning-to-end treatment pathways for COVID-19, illuminating typical total costs for diagnosis and for professional and facility services associated with treating the disease.

The product includes estimates of typical costs for three different designations of severity of COVID-19 care: hospitalization with complexities (such as intensive care unit [ICU] or ventilator), general hospitalization and non-hospitalization. For each, the median and average charge amount and estimated allowed (in-network) amount are given. The chart below provides the latest national numbers on estimated costs for COVID-19, updated in FH Total Treatment Cost in September 2021. The data comes from FAIR Health's database, the largest repository of private healthcare claims in the nation.

	Median Charge Amount	Average Charge Amount	Median Estimated Allowed Amount	Average Estimated Allowed Amount
COVID-19 Hospitalization with Complexities	\$208,136	\$317,810	\$70,098	\$98,139
General COVID-19 Hospitalization	\$54,262	\$74,591	\$25,188	\$33,525
COVID-19 Non- Hospitalization	\$2,289	\$2,557	\$893	\$1,008

COVID-19 hospitalization with complexities includes, but is not limited to, hospital inpatient services such as laboratory tests, durable medical equipment (such as ventilators), blood and blood components, treatments and specialty drugs, radiology and ICU room and board, as well as outpatient and provider services such as follow-up office visits, lab tests, radiology services, echocardiography procedures, immunology procedures and transfusions. The second category, general COVID-19 hospitalization, includes, but is not limited to, hospital inpatient services such as lab tests, radiology, room and board, treatments and specialty drugs, as well as outpatient and provider services such as follow-up office visits, lab tests, immunology procedures, radiology services, echocardiography procedures, and oxygen and respiratory equipment. Lastly, the COVID-19 non-hospitalization category includes labs, radiology, office visits and cardiology procedures. [Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Alia Paavola | September 21, 2021 ++]

Coronavirus Financial Planning

Update 27: Medicare and Medicaid Will Pay for Booster Shots

Late last week it was announced that Medicare and Medicaid will pay the full cost of Covid-19 booster shots with no co-pays for everyone on their rolls. In addition, Walgreens has started to give booster shots for Covid-19 at their stores across the U.S. If you use Walgreens, here's what to expect to register for the booster.

- Walgreens will use its online scheduler to screen for qualifications, including asking people which vaccine they received
- For those who got the Pfizer-BioNTech shots, they'll be asked when they received their second dose
- People will be encouraged to bring their vaccination cards to their booster appointment but the cards won't be required
- The scheduler will also ask about booking other shots, like the flu shot, when you book your appointment. The guidance from the Director of the National Institutes of Health is that you can receive a flu shot and Covid booster on the same day.

Separately, Walmart and CVS drug stores have announced that their pharmacies have also begun offering booster shots for qualified individuals although we have seen no information regarding their procedures for registering for the shots. If you do not use a computer we recommend you call your local Walgreens, Walmart or CVS and ask how to register for the booster shot. [Source: The Senior Citizen League | September 27, 2021 ++]

Medicare Part B Premiums

Update10: Alzheimer's Drug Could Increase Premiums for Everyone

A newly approved drug to slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease is drawing criticism for its \$56,000 price tag, especially given its lack of proven effectiveness. Aduhelm stirred controversy when the Food and Drug Administration's own expert advisory panel was nearly unanimous in opposing the drug's approval due to mixed results in studies of effectiveness. Now Medicare has launched a formal process to determine whether Aduhelm will be covered, after a widespread uproar spurred a Congressional investigation. The final decision isn't expected until next spring, although an initial ruling could come around January.

Medicare's coverage process came on the same day that two House committees asked drug maker Biogen to turn over documents on how the drug was developed and priced, and on its dealings with government officials at the US Food and Drug Administration. Patients and their families want to know if the medication will help slow the progression of cognitive decline, especially in view of the serious side effects it can cause, but doctors have no definitive answer yet. The rate and progression of cognitive decline varies widely among people who have started experiencing memory and thinking problems. Thus, it is difficult to quantify how much of a difference the drug would make for a given patient.

Senior advocates are concerned that all of Medicare's 60 million beneficiaries will likely see their premiums for Medicare Part B, and Medigap supplements, rise significantly to cover this one new medication. Because the drug is administered in a physician's office, it would be covered under Medicare Part B, not part D plans which pay for drugs purchased from pharmacies. Medicare typically reimburses doctors 103% of the list price of drugs administered in their office.

The non - partisan Kaiser Family Foundation estimated that, if 500,000 of the roughly 6 million Americans with Alzheimer's are prescribed Aduhelm, total Medicare spending on this one drug, for one year, would be nearly \$29 billion. This would far exceed the spending on any other drug covered by Medicare Part B, or Part D, in 2019. Medicare spending for all Part B drugs was \$37 billion in 2019. What's more the estimated \$29 billion does not include the cost of any associated care. The drug can cause some people temporary brain swelling or small bleeding spots on the brain and requires pricey magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans to monitor treatment.

Many enrollees in traditional Medicare have purchased a supplemental Medigap policy that covers the out - of - pocket expenses of Part B. Premiums for those policies could also rise as insurers anticipate higher outlays for costs associated with Aduhelm. On the other hand, out - of - pocket costs would be the big cost issue for enrollees in Medicare Advantage plans. According to experts at Kaiser Family Foundation, 500 thousand patients taking Aduhelm could add about \$8 per month to the Medicare Part B premium, which in 2021 is \$148.50 for most beneficiaries, to as much as \$505 a month for higher income beneficiaries who pay a surtax on their premium.

When the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services establish the Part B premium for 2022, they could potentially factor in the expected costs for Aduhelm. Part B premiums were already on track to be higher. The Medicare Trustees recently estimated that Part B premiums would increase to \$158.50 in 2022. [Source: The Senior Citizens League | The Advisor | September 2021 ++]

Military Pay & Benefits

Update 11: CSIS 2021 Report Grossly Misleading

A recently published report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a nonpartisan think tank, has repackaged old, outdated stats to argue military personnel costs are too high and “unsustainable.” The author’s suggestions include cutting annual pay raises, putting more money into skill-targeted bonuses, shifting more health costs to military beneficiaries, and considering further housing allowance reductions, among others (Note that their report was addressed as written in the 15 SEP RAO Bulletin as “Update 10” and is on the website at https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/210909_Daniels_Trends_MilitaryPersonnelCosts.pdf?zXrLt.OPBj6cJZchUs8WjsEstNDeqzXP). .

The report may have a 2021 date on it, but it’s a bald-faced rehash of statistics from almost a decade ago, comparing personnel cost changes between 2000 and 2012. And its recommendations are the same wrongheaded suggestions MOAA has been fighting for decades by presenting Congress with more relevant figures and highlighting the true costs of service. The figures used in the CSIS report were grossly misleading in 2012 and are even more so now.

First: Using the year 2000 is hardly a reasonable baseline for any personnel cost comparison, because a compilation of repeated pay and compensation cutbacks had gutted retention and readiness at that point. Congress had capped military pay raises below private sector pay growth for almost two decades, leaving military raises a cumulative 14-plus percent below those of their civilian counterparts. A 1986 retirement change had cut retired pay value almost 20% for subsequent entrants who served 20 years; those exiting service at the time cited this as a top reason for leaving. Housing allowances had been eroded to the point of having no relationship to housing

costs. And military health coverage had been virtually eliminated for retirees, family members, and survivors over age 65.

In 2001 – the year after the baseline used in the report – compound effects of these cutbacks prompted the Joint Chiefs of Staff to urge Congress to upgrade military compensation and benefits, and to restore faith among current and future career servicemembers and families. Congress responded by restoring general pay comparability through a series of annual pay raise plus-ups, repealing the blanket retirement cutback for post-1986 entrants, upgrading housing allowances to match housing expenses by locality, and authorizing TRICARE as a second payer to Medicare for older beneficiaries, among other needed changes. Those actions proved vital to restoring retention and readiness through the next two decades of repeated wartime deployments. So, to be clear as to rationale, Congress acted on readiness-based imperatives by increasing pay raises thus increasing personnel budgets over the 2000s – to restore compensation and benefits necessary for our nation’s all-volunteer force.

Second: Budget analysts have been calling personnel costs “unsustainable” since the 1970s. Those arguments led Congress to make years of cutbacks in the 1970s, as well as in the 1980s and 1990s, as discussed above. In each case, the cuts proved shortsighted, causing retention and readiness problems that had to be redressed to be able to fight the next war. But the “unsustainable” argument also crumbles under objective scrutiny. MOAA’s research shows the percentage of the defense budget made up of personnel and health care costs remains stable – 30% to 32%, or lower – and has remained so over many decades. In other words, they’ve been the exact opposite of “unsustainable.”

MOAA also researched personnel and health care costs reported by the largest, hardware-heavy corporations and found they comprised a larger budget share than the military’s:

- UPS: 61%
- FedEx: 43%
- Southwest Airlines: 31% of operating revenue (which includes profit, so net budget share is higher)

As for allegations of unsustainably high DoD health care costs, which comprise less than 7% of the defense budget, this appears a major bargain compared with the health care share of the federal budget (23%), the average state budget (22%), household discretionary spending (16%), and U.S. gross domestic product (16%).

Finally: Every post-war period has seen a rush to cut the defense budget. Unfortunately, personnel and compensation programs affecting those who sacrificed most in the war are a vulnerable target, because that’s where immediate budget savings can be found. Although the war in Afghanistan ended just weeks ago, the above trend has been underway for years. Congress recently passed new, significant cuts to military retirement benefits for 2018 and subsequent entrants to fund new benefits for those who leave service short of a career. In addition, Congress

enacted new health care fees for younger retirees and significant pharmacy copay hikes for the vast majority of retired beneficiaries. For active duty personnel, Congress imposed a 5% cut in housing allowances.

MOAA's Bottom Line: Decades of dire predictions about “unsustainable” or “unaffordable” personnel costs have proven consistently wrong.

- The only threats jeopardizing the all-volunteer force have come from budget-driven pay and benefit cuts – moves leaving the military compensation package inadequate to offset the extraordinary demands and sacrifices inherent in a multidecade career in uniform.
- In each of those circumstances, Congress found itself compelled to plus-up the personnel budget to redress that imbalance.
- If our nation persists in again going down the well-trodden route of successive, incremental cuts to military compensation, none of us should be surprised when crises of the past reemerge as the next war or next crisis only to find our uniformed services unready.

Note: Military Pay and Compensation falls under the purview of DoD but applies to all eight uniformed services, which include the Coast Guard, U.S. Public Health Service, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

[Source: Military Officers Assn of America Newsletter | September 15, 2021 ++]

VA Travel Allowance

Update 18: Reimbursement for Travel to VA Medical Appointments

Did you know the Department of Veterans Affairs will pay your travel expenses to medical appointments? To be eligible for travel reimbursement, you must meet at least one of the following requirements:

- Traveling for treatment of a service-connected condition;
- A disabled veteran rated at least 30%;
- Traveling for a scheduled compensation or pension examination;
- Receiving a VA pension;
- Have limited income;
- Traveling to receive a VA-authorized service dog.

How Much Travel Will the VA Pay?

The VA will pay you a flat rate of 41.5 cents per mile to use your vehicle. If you take a rideshare, taxi or public transportation, they will reimburse you for the actual cost of travel. They also will reimburse you for tolls, parking and other travel costs. For anything other than mileage

reimbursement, you usually are required to submit copies of receipts. You either can scan these or take a picture with your phone.

Those who get reimbursed for qualifying travel normally also have a deductible amount of \$3 for a one-way trip or \$6 for a round trip, with a maximum of \$18 per calendar month. That means if you travel a round trip of 20 miles to reach your VA appointments, you would be reimbursed \$2.30 (\$8.30 for a 20-mile round trip, minus the \$6 deductible). However, these deductibles can be waived for financial hardship. The VA also will pay travel reimbursement for an authorized family caregiver, under the VA Family Caregiver Program, or other medically required attendants.

In certain situations, the VA will reimburse you for specialized medically necessary transportation services like an ambulance, if required. For this type of transportation, you need VA pre-approval. Contact your provider for more details. The VA will also pay for lodging in certain situations if required. The mileage rates and deductibles can change annually, depending on economic factors.

Filing a Travel Claim

The VA is trying to get everyone to file their travel claims online via its new Beneficiary Travel Self Service System, or BTSSS at <https://eauth.va.gov/accessva/?cspSelectFor=bts>. If you have problems filing online, you can file a travel claim at kiosks located in VA medical centers, help desks or patient services offices at many VA hospitals or local clinics. You also can file a hard-copy claim via postal mail using VA Form 10-3542 which can be filled out online and downloaded at <https://www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/vha-10-3542-fill.pdf>

On their YouTube channel, the Veterans Health Administration says in a video explaining the online filing system that those who file a claim online should see payment in 3-5 business days, while those who file other ways may have to wait up to 45 days for any reimbursement. This video can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7INUiyQT4gM>. Accessing the BTSSS is done using your MyHealtheVet, DSLogin or by creating a verified account with the ID.me system. Once logged into the system, your VA appointments are prefilled, allowing you to submit a claim in just a few clicks.

Commenters on Reddit (<https://www.reddit.com/r/Veterans/comments>) said that the new online system has been difficult to use. Curious, the writer of this article checked it out for himself, only to see that none of his past or future VA or civilian care appointments showed up in the system, and he still was listed as attached to a VA hospital on the other side of the country, where he hadn't lived for years. To correct this situation he recommended stopping by your local clinic or calling the VA-411 line at 800-698-2411 which probably would at least point you a way to get things fixed. And to be fair (for many) most VA and civilian medical appointments during the pandemic have pretty much been over the phone or computer for the last year and a half.

Is it worth it to spend three hours filing a claim for \$2.30? Everyone's situation is different. But if you're regularly dropping \$20-\$50 on an Uber or parking and spending three hours of your day

in medical appointments, it may make things a bit less painful. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | September 22, 2021 ++]

Text Message Scams

Watch Out for Those with Tempting Offers

Everyone loves a deal – including scammers. Con artists often offer too good to be true discounts in the hope that price-conscious consumers will jump on these “deals” without doing their research. Recently, BBB Scam Tracker has seen numerous reports of scammers impersonating well-known companies and offering COVID-19 themed discounts.

How the Scam Works:

- You receive a text message from a large, reputable company. The message claims that, due to the pandemic, the company would like to help people out by offering them an amazing deal. These range from free or discounted services to gift cards and cash. For example, consumers reported receiving the following text messages using this ploy:
 - “COVID-19 REFUND. VERIZON COMPANY is giving out \$950 to all users of our Verizon service, If yes kindly text your Verizon”
 - “Due to the pandemic, Hulu is giving everyone a free 1-year subscription to help you stay at home. Get yours here [link].”
- Of course, these messages don’t really originate with that company. They come from impersonators who hope to steal your personal information. If you click the link, you may be prompted to log into a lookalike website that scammers use to get hold of your login ID and password. With that information, scammers can access your accounts and even make purchases using your saved payment methods.
- While the latest BBB Scam Tracker reports mention Hulu, Netflix, and Verizon, watch out for scammers impersonating other companies too. If one name stops being effective, they’ll quickly switch to another company.

How to avoid text message scams:

- Treat messages from unknown senders with caution. If you receive a message from a number you don’t recognize, be careful. Many companies engage in SMS marketing, but keep in mind that consumers must opt in to receive messages. If you haven’t given a company permission to text you, it’s probably a scam.
- Don’t click on links from strangers. Scammers often send shortened links that don’t let you see where they really lead in the body of their text message. If you click the link, you could be directed to a dangerous website, or you could download malware onto your device.

- Confirm deals directly with the company before you accept. If you are really hoping the deal is legitimate, go to the company's official website and send them an email, or call to inquire. The company can let you know if the deal is real or not.
- Install antivirus software on your computer and mobile devices. This kind of scam can come from text messages or emails, so make sure all your electronics are protected. Antivirus software can scan for malware and alert you before you open a malicious website link

For More Information

Learn more about this kind of scam by reading the BBB Tip on phishing scams at <https://www.bbb.org/article/news-releases/16758-bbb-tip-phishing-scams>. If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to BBB 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 | September 17, 2021 ++]

Emergency Scams

Update 02: How to Spot Them

In emergency scams, con artists impersonate their targets' loved ones, make up an urgent situation, and plead for help... and money. Thanks to social media, scammers can look up information and offer plausible stories, even incorporating nicknames and real travel details.

How the Scam Works:

- Emergency scams are about a family member or friend in a dire situation. You get a call, email, or social media message from someone claiming to be a family member in distress. They may say they've been arrested while traveling overseas, or there was an accident, medical emergency, or other calamity. They provide convincing details, such as family names, school details, etc.
- A common version is the "grandparent scam," where the con artist contacts a grandparent claiming to be their grandchild and asking for money. The plea is so persuasive that the grandparent wires money to the scammer, only to find out later their family member was safe and sound all along. This scam can also work in reverse, where the "grandparent" calls their grandchild pleading for help.

How to avoid emergency scams:

- Resist the urge to act immediately, no matter how dramatic the story is. Check out the story with other family and friends, but hang up or close the message and call your loved one

directly. Don't call the phone number provided by the caller or caller ID. Ask questions that would be hard for an impostor to answer correctly.

- Know what your family members are sharing online. You may not have control over your family's social media accounts, but familiarize yourself with what they are sharing online.
- Don't wire any money if there is any doubt about the call. If a person does wire money and later realizes it is a fraud, the police need to be alerted.

For More Information

Learn more about all types of impostor scams at <https://www.bbb.org/article/news-releases/21686>. If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to <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 <https://www.bbb.org/article/scams/8767>.

[Source: BBB Scam Alerts | September 10, 2021 ++]

Tax Burden on Ohio Vets

As of SEP 2021

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

Sales Taxes

The state sales tax rate is 5.75%, and the average OH sales tax after local surtaxes is 7.157% which is lower than 63.5% of states

- All non-prepared groceries, prescription drugs, newspapers, magazine subscriptions, and telephone service is exempt from the Ohio sales tax.
- Ohio treats candy as a grocery, and does treat soda as a grocery.
- Counties and cities can charge an additional local sales tax of up to 2.25%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 8%
- Ohio has 1424 special sales tax jurisdictions with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax. Refer to <http://www.tax-rates.org/ohio/sales-tax-by-county>.

Excise Taxes

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

Even though excise taxes are collected from businesses, virtually all merchants pass on the excise tax to the customer through higher prices for the taxed goods. The state collects an average of \$438 in yearly excise taxes per capita, lower than 52% of the other 50 states.

- **Alcohol:** Beer: \$0.18 per gal | Wine: \$0.32 per gal | Liquor \$9.34 per gal. The excise tax on beer lower than 64% of the other 50 states and is ranked #32 out of the 50 states. The excise tax on wine is lower than 76% of the other 50 states and is ranked #38 out of the 50 states. The excise tax on liquor is higher than 76% of the other 50 states and is ranked #12 out 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:** None yet.
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans is \$7.95 per phone service plan, lower than 66% of the other 50 states and is ranked #33 out of the 50 states. The cellphone tax is already included in the service plan price you pay to your service provider, and may be listed as "Misc. taxes and Fees" or "Other" on your
- **Cigarettes:** The excise tax on cigarettes is \$1.60 per 20 cigarettes, lower than 56% of the other 50 states and is ranked #28 out of the 50 states. The tax is applied to every 20 cigarettes sold (the size of an average pack of cigarettes). If a pack contains more than 20 cigarettes, a higher excise tax will be collected.
- **Fuel:** The excise tax on gasoline and diesel fuel is 38.51¢ & 47.01¢ per gallon, higher than 58% of the other 50 states and is ranked #21 out of the 50 states. The gas tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations in the state and is in addition to the federal excise tax of 18.4¢ per gallon on gasoline and 24.4¢ per gallon, on diesel. The federal tax was last raised in OCT 1993 and is not indexed to inflation, which has increased a total of 77% from 1993 to 2020. For all state and federal taxes by type of fuel refer to <https://www.salestaxhandbook.com/maine/gasoline-fuel>.
- **Vehicle:** 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 \$1,200.00 in state income taxes which is ranked 32nd out of 51 states.

Tax Rate Range: Low – .285%; High – 4.8%.

Income Brackets: Six. Lowest – 0 to \$21,750; Highest – \$221,300+. The state income tax does not provide couples filing jointly with expanded income tax brackets.

Personal/Dependent Exemptions: Either \$1900, \$2150, or \$2400 per eligible dependent inclusive of filer & spouse. Amount allowed per individual based on total modified adjusted gross income

Standard Deduction: None. Joint filing credit of 5% to 20% of adjusted gross income based on \$25,000 increments Total credit cannot exceed \$650. Each return is also limited to a \$50 senior citizen credit for those filers who are 65 or older who earn less than \$100,000 and have not previously taken the Ohio lump sum distribution credit

Itemized Deductions Allowed: Yes, subject to limitations

Medical/Dental Deduction: Unreimbursed medical or dental expenses, premiums for long-term care insurance and unsubsidized health insurance premiums are deductible. You can't deduct expenses you paid for using a health savings account (HSA) or other medical savings account.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Generally, retirement income included in federal adjusted gross income is subject to Ohio income tax. Ohio then provides a credit based on the taxpayer's retirement income. However, some types of retirement income are deductible in determining Ohio adjusted gross income, and thus are not subject to tax. Retirement income of less than \$100,000 is eligible for tax credit of up to \$200.

Retired Military Pay: Exempt from the Ohio income tax since 2008.

Military Disability Retired Pay: Not taxed. 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.

Social Security Benefit: Not taxed

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

Website: Ohio Department of Taxation <https://tax.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/tax/individual>

Frequently Asked Questions: <https://tax.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/tax/help-center/faqs#page=1>

Tax Forms:

- https://tax.ohio.gov/static/forms/ohio_individual/individual/2020/pit-it1040-booklet.pdf
Ohio Instructions for Filing
- https://tax.ohio.gov/static/forms/ohio_individual/individual/2020/pit-it1040-bundle.pdf
Form IT-1040, Individual Income Tax Return
- <https://tax.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/tax/individual/get-a-form> All Tax forms

Penalties. Any taxpayer that fails to file a return or pay the full amount of the tax due within the period prescribed therefor under this chapter shall pay a penalty in an amount not exceeding the

greater of fifty dollars or ten per cent of the tax required to be paid for the tax period. If any additional tax is found to be due, the tax commissioner may impose an additional penalty of up to fifteen per cent on the additional tax found to be due.

Property Taxes

The taxable base is the assessed value of land and buildings. Assessed value is 35% of market value, except for certain agricultural land. County auditors must reappraise all real estate every six years. A homestead exemption is available to the homesteads of qualified homeowners who are either at least 65 years old, permanently and totally disabled, or at least 59 years of age and the surviving spouse of a deceased taxpayer who had previously received the exemption. For more details refer to http://www.tax.ohio.gov/ohio_taxes.aspx. The Homestead Exemption is limited to the homestead, which Ohio law defines as an owner's dwelling and up to one acre of land. Ohio Revised Code set a maximum Ohio Adjusted Gross Income (OAGI) of an applicant and the applicant's spouse. The value of the exemption may not exceed the value of the homestead. The 2021 OAGI income threshold is \$34,200.

Disabled Veterans/Surviving Spouse: Up to \$50,000 of appraised value exempt if 100% disabled. No income requirements. For more info refer to <https://tax.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/tax/help-center/faqs/real-property-tax-homestead-means-testing>.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

Ohio does not have an estate tax or an inheritance tax.

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 Ohio Department of Taxation site <https://ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/site/government/state-agencies/departments-of-taxation> [Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#Ohio> | September 2021 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest

SEP 16 thru 30, 2021

- **Income.** The U.S. Census Bureau announced 14 SEP that median household income in 2020 decreased 2.9% between 2019 and 2020, and the official poverty rate increased 1.0 percentage point to 11.4% of the population.
- **CPO.** The Navy has released quotas for active-duty E-7 promotions for fiscal 2022, and more than 4,600 or 25% of eligible sailors are expected to be promoted to chief petty officer.
- **Winston Churchill.** Check out https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMuw_BsfmV4 to view his 1945 visit to the Rhine while fighting was still ongoing and how close he came to being a casualty.
- **Covid-19 Deadline.** Active duty Army troops have until Dec. 15 to receive one of the vaccines authorized by either the Food and Drug Administration or the World Health Organization. Soldiers who refuse to receive the vaccine will face “administrative or non-judicial punishment [under UCMJ] – to include relief of duties or discharge.”
- **RP Pandemic.** U.S. Embassy Manila advised that the Philippine government is piloting a new framework which establishes a “granular lockdown” and alert level system. The new framework places the National Capital Region (NCR) under Alert Level 4 beginning 16 SEP. For more information on the new framework, visit websites:
 - <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2021/09sep/20210906-IATF-RESO-RRD.pdf> Philippine Presidential Communication Operations Office
 - <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2021/09sep/20210913-Certified-Guidelines-for-Pilot-Areas.pdf> Guidelines on the Pilot Implementation of Alert Levels System.
- **Afganistan.** According to new poll released by Quinnipiac University, 62% of Americans think U.S. forces will have to return to Afghanistan to fight terrorism.
- **Afghan Planes.** The U.S. Air Force spent \$549 million on aircraft for the Afghan Air Force, most of which were junked a few years later at a scrap value of \$40,257 — a project that involved officials at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. This is according to a recent report from a federal watchdog agency which concluded that no one has been held accountable for that waste.
- **Baseball.** In 2019, the last season that fans were allowed to attend games, a Baltimore Orioles fan at Oriole Park had to pay \$16.50 for a beer and a hotdog vs. a Arizona Diamondbacks fan at Chase Field who paid \$6.00.

- **Life Expectancy.** The COVID-19 pandemic sparked life expectancy losses not seen since World War II, with the life expectancy for U.S. men falling 2.2 years since 2019's 76.3 years, researchers from Oxford University found.
- **Russia.** Russian fighter jets were scrambled to escort a US Air Force B-52 bomber that reportedly approached Russian airspace over the Pacific Ocean, Russian state news agency TASS said 26 SEP/
- **Military Base Listing.** At <http://installationguide.militarytimes.com/bases> can be found the latest MilitaryTimes Installation Guide 2021 including location, phone numbers, schools, housing, and more.
- **Robot Warfare.** Russia has employed unmanned ground vehicles in combat formations for the first time, a significant step in the country's quest to develop an effective all-robot military unit, experts say.



[Source: Various | September 30, 2021 ++]

U.S. Syria Operations

Update 01: US Drone Strike 20 SEP Kills Al-Qaida Leader



U.S. forces carried out a strike on a “senior al-Qaida leader” in Syria 20 SEP, a U.S. Central Command spokesman said. “Initial indications are that we struck the individual we were aiming for, and there are no indications of civilian casualties as a result of the strike,” said Navy Lt. Josie Lynne Lenny, a CENTCOM spokeswoman Lenny declined comment on the name of the senior al-Qaida leader or the method of the strike. Rescue workers and a war monitor described it as a drone strike that hit a vehicle traveling on a rural road in rebel-controlled northwestern Syria, killing at least one person. The Civil Defense team, known as White Helmets, said the unidentified

body was lifted from the car along the Idlib-Binnish road east of Idlib province. The totally charred vehicle, split in the middle, lay on the side of the rural road in an orchid.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, based in Britain, said the U.S.-led coalition was believed to be behind the strike on the vehicle, which carried a militant from one of the radical groups operating in the province. The Observatory didn't identify the group but said it was linked to al-Qaida. The U.S. has carried out attacks in Idlib before, targeting al-Qaida militants and the leader of the Islamic State group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi who was hiding in the province after fleeing from eastern Syria.

Large parts of Idlib and neighboring Aleppo provinces remain in the hands of Syrian armed opposition, dominated by radical groups including the once al-Qaida-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham,. There are also over 4 million civilians living in the area, most of them displaced from previous bouts of violence in Syria's 10-year conflict. The Syrian government has vowed to restore control of all of territories outside of its control, but a cease-fire negotiated last year in Idlib has tenaciously held.

The strike came hours before Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters that an Air Force general officer would conduct an investigation into the errant 29 AUG drone strike in Afghanistan that killed 10 people, including seven children. That strike mistakenly targeted an Afghan aid worker thought to be an ISIS-K operative. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has tasked the Air Force with designating a general who will conduct a review of the investigation into the Aug. 29 Hellfire missile strike in Kabul that reportedly killed 10 people, Kirby told reporters 20 SEP. [Source: and Associated Press | Howard Altman September 20, 2021 ++]

U.S. Syria Operations

Update 02: Syria Tells U.N. it Wants U.S. Troops to Leave



Syria's foreign minister on 27 SEP vowed to drive U.S. troops out of his country if they do not leave voluntarily. Speaking to the United Nations General Assembly in New York, Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad called the presence of Turkish and U.S. troops in northern Syria illegal and a flagrant violation of international law. Hundreds of U.S. troops are stationed in eastern Syria and working with Kurdish-led fighters to combat the Islamic State militant group. Turkish forces are present in northern Syria, where Turkey has supported and funded Syrian opposition fighters against Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces.

Mekdad called for the troops to withdraw voluntarily from Syria, threatening to push them out if they did not go. He did not say how the Syrian government planned to do that. "Just as we managed to wipe out terrorists from most of Syria, we will work to end the occupation with the same resolve and determination, using all possible means under international law," he said. Mekdad said Syria's doors are open for the safe return of refugees, accusing Western countries of taking advantage of the suffering of Syrians while pretending to care for their well-being. He also said Syrian armed forces would continue fighting "terrorists"—the Syrian government's catch-all word for its opponents—until every part of Syria is once again under government control. "We will not succumb, no matter the pressure and lies and accusations against us," he said.

Syria's conflict started amid Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 and eventually devolved into an insurgency and civil war following a brutal military crackdown, resulting in one of the largest humanitarian catastrophes in the past century. The United Nations human rights chief said last week that her office has documented the deaths of more than 350,200 people—civilians and combatants—in the war over the past decade, while admitting the real number for those killed in the conflict is almost certainly far higher. The war has also displaced half the country's prewar population of 23 million, including 5 million who are refugees outside the country.

"We have made it clear that Syria's doors are wide open for the safe and voluntary return of all refugees to their country," Mekdad said, adding that the government was putting the necessary procedures in place to facilitate the return of people and meet their basic needs. He said while the Syrian government and its allies are making honest efforts on this humanitarian issue, "some continue to take advantage of the suffering of Syrians to serve an agenda that has nothing to do with humanitarian objectives or the interests of Syrians."

His words sharply contradicted with the view of Syria experts, human rights organizations and some foreign governments who say that forced conscription, indiscriminate detentions and forced disappearances continue. In a report published earlier this month, Amnesty International said that a number of Syrian refugees who returned home have been subjected to detention, disappearance and torture at the hands of Syrian security forces, proving that it still isn't safe to return to any part of the country.

In government-controlled areas—including in the suburbs of Damascus and many parts of central Syria previously held by opposition rebels—the security situation has stabilized, but entire

neighborhoods are destroyed and many people have no houses to return to. Access to basic services such as water and electricity is poor to nonexistent.

Mekdad was addressing the United Nations General Assembly for the first time. He was appointed foreign minister in November, after the death of longtime diplomat Walid Moallem, who traveled to New York every year to address the General Assembly. [Source: Newsweek | Rebecca Klapper | September 27, 2021 ++]

Taiwan-China Dispute

Update 11: Exercises Use Highways vice Runways for Landings & Takeoffs



An American-made E-2K early warning aircraft takes off from a motorway in Pingtung

In southwestern Taiwan a F-16 screeched across the sky 15 SEP before landing on a highway cut through pineapple fields to refuel quickly and take off again. The Taiwanese military exercise envisioned a Chinese attack taking out the island’s main airfields, necessitating the use of rural roads as runways to carry on the fight. War is not imminent, but as China has grown increasingly assertive in both the East China and South China Seas, Taiwan is stepping up its defense. Across the region, the United States and its allies are deepening military cooperation and strategizing over an effective response.

China, which claims Taiwan as part of its territory, flies fighter jets toward Taiwan on a regular basis in an effort to warn and intimidate the island’s air force. Last month, Chinese fighter jets, anti-submarine aircraft and combat ships conducted joint assault drills near Taiwan with China saying the exercise was necessary to safeguard its sovereignty. U.S. President Joe Biden on 14 SEP announced an upcoming meeting in a week with key regional players that form the so-called “Quad” — India, Australia and Japan together with the U.S. — for in-person talks the White House said are meant to show the administration’s commitment to “promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian slammed the U.S. for “forming exclusive cliques” after the meeting was announced and countered that China was a “firm defender of regional peace and stability.” “China’s development is a growing force for peace in the world and

a boon to the prosperity and development of the region,” he said. “The countries concerned should abandon the outdated zero-sum mentality and narrow-minded geopolitical thinking.”

Japan, a U.S. ally that hosts the U.S. Navy’s 7th Fleet, has long moved cautiously with regard to China, an important trading partner. But it has recently become less reserved in the face of Beijing’s growing military activity and broad territorial claims in the western Pacific, including to a group of islands near Taiwan that Japan controls. Masahisa Sato, a senior lawmaker of the governing Liberal Democratic Party and an expert on defense, told a recent forum on security in Asia that right now the U.S.-Japan alliance is focused largely on a response to a possible conflict stemming from the Korean Peninsula, and it needs to be broadened to consider what to do if there is a Chinese attack on Taiwan. He noted that the Sakishima island group, which includes some of Okinawa’s remote islands, “is right next to Taiwan and is part of a same theater.” “We should consider a Taiwan contingency as nearly equal to a Japan contingency,” Sato said.

All three candidates running on 29 JAN to become Japan’s new leader are proposing hawkish policies toward China, though still acknowledging its importance as a trading partner. Taro Kono, the minister in charge of vaccinations who is seen as a front runner, has said he will seek to establish a regional framework that adds to Japan’s alliance with the United States in countering China’s growing military activity. In a joint statement after they met in April, outgoing Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and Biden said they “recognize the importance of deterrence to maintain peace and stability in the region” and added that they “oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea” and reiterated their “objections to China’s unlawful maritime claims and activities in the South China Sea.”

Underscoring its concerns, Japan’s Defense Ministry added a new section on Taiwan in its annual report released in July, saying the situation requires a “sense of crisis.” It says China’s military capability has become far greater than that of Taiwan and that Japan must pay attention to further increases on both sides. Suga announced he will not run in the Sept. 29 Liberal Democratic Party leadership vote, which chooses a new party leader who will become Japan’s next prime minister. Taiwan has stepped up purchases from the U.S. of weapons including missiles and aircraft over the past two years. Taiwan’s defense ministry submitted a budget of \$16.8 billion for the next year, a modest increase from last year’s \$16.2 billion. Some of the funds would purchase 66 F-16V fighter jets, according to the semiofficial Central News Agency.

Many believe, however, that despite the bellicose rhetoric and drills like the Han Guang exercise on 15 SEP, as well as the Chinese posturing, that open conflict is not on the horizon. “This is a type of gray zone tactic — military intimidation,” said Ou Xifu, a researcher at the Institute for National Defense and Security Research in Taiwan. “This shouldn’t lead to war.” [Source: AP | Johnson Lai, Huizhong Wu & Mari Yamaguchi | September 15, 2021 ++]

Afghan Withdrawal

Update 16: Pentagon Reverses Itself, Calls Deadly Kabul Strike an Error



The Pentagon retreated from its [defense of a drone strike](#) that killed multiple civilians in Afghanistan last month, announcing 17 SEP that an internal review revealed that only civilians were killed in the attack, not an Islamic State extremist as first believed. “[The strike](#) was a tragic mistake,” Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command, told a Pentagon news conference. For days after the 29 AUG strike, Pentagon officials asserted that it had been conducted correctly, despite numerous civilians being killed, including children. News organizations later raised doubts about that version of events, reporting that the driver of the targeted vehicle was a longtime employee at an American humanitarian organization and citing an absence of evidence to support the Pentagon’s assertion that the vehicle contained explosives.

McKenzie said the vehicle was struck “in the earnest belief” that the targeted vehicle posed an imminent threat. “I am now convinced that as many as 10 civilians, including up to seven children, were tragically killed in that strike,” McKenzie said. “Moreover, we now assess that it is unlikely that the vehicle and those who died were associated with ISIS-K, or a direct threat to U.S. forces,” he added, referring to the Islamic State group’s Afghanistan affiliate. McKenzie apologized for the mistake and said the United States is considering making reparation payments to the family of the victims.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters two days after the attack that it appeared to have been a “righteous” strike and that at least one of the people killed was a “facilitator” for the Islamic State group’s Afghanistan affiliate, which had killed 169 Afghan civilians and 13 American service members in a suicide bombing on 26 AUG at the Kabul airport. After McKenzie’s remarks, Milley expressed regret. “This is a horrible tragedy of war and it’s heart wrenching,” Milley told reporters traveling with him in Europe. “We are committed to being fully transparent about this incident.” “In a dynamic high-threat environment, the commanders on the ground had appropriate authority and had reasonable certainty that the target was valid, but after deeper post-strike analysis our conclusion is that innocent civilians were killed,” Milley added.

Accounts from the family, documents from colleagues seen by The Associated Press, and the scene at the family home — where Zemerai Ahmadi’s car was struck by a Hellfire missile just as he pulled into the driveway — all painted a picture of a family that had worked for Americans and

were trying to gain visas to the United States, fearing for their lives under the Taliban. The family said that when the 37-year-old Zemerai, alone in his car, pulled up to the house, he honked his horn. His 11-year-old son ran out and Zemerai let the boy get in and drive the car into the driveway. The other kids ran out to watch, and the Hellfire missile incinerated the car, killing seven children and an adult son and nephew of Zemerai.

The airstrike was the last of a U.S. war that ended as it had begun in 2001 — with the Taliban in power in Kabul. The speed with which the Taliban overran the country took the U.S. government by surprise and forced it to send several thousand troops to the Kabul airport for a hurried evacuation of Americans, Afghans and others. The evacuation, which began 14 AUG, unfolded under a near-constant threat of attack by the Islamic State group’s Afghanistan affiliate. McKenzie briefed Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin 17 SEP about the findings of his investigation.

- “On behalf of the men and women of the Department of Defense, I offer my deepest condolences to surviving family members of those who were killed, including Mr. Ahmadi, and to the staff of Nutrition and Education International, Mr. Ahmadi’s employer,” he said in a statement.
- “We now know that there was no connection between Mr. Ahmadi and ISIS-Khorasan, that his activities on that day were completely harmless and not at all related to the imminent threat we believed we faced, and that Mr. Ahmadi was just as innocent a victim as were the others tragically killed.
- “We apologize, and we will endeavor to learn from this horrible mistake.”

That, he said, is why he “directed a thorough review of the investigation just completed by U.S. Central Command. I have asked for this review to consider the degree to which the investigation considered all available context and information, the degree to which accountability measures need be taken and at what level, and the degree to which strike authorities, procedures and processes need to be altered in the future.”

No military, said Austin “works harder than ours to avoid civilian casualties. When we have reason to believe we have taken innocent life, we investigate it and, if true, we admit it. But we also must work just as hard to prevent recurrence — no matter the circumstances, the intelligence stream or the operational pressures under which we labor.” [Source: The Associated Press | Robert Burns | September 17, 2021 ++]

Afghanistan Post War

No Shooting or Checkpoints in Rural Wardak Province

Sixty bone-rattling miles southwest of Kabul, remnants of America’s longest war are abundant. Pillaged outposts scatter the hilltops, and skeletons of burned-out police pickup trucks and Humvees litter the road that weaves through the valleys in between. The walls of an American-

constructed local government building in Chak-e Wardak, a district in Wardak province, are pockmarked by the impacts of recently fired bullets and rockets. Holes have been carved out of the walls for shooting positions, and only a few of the glass windows remain intact. But the once-constant volley of rifle fire is no more.

In recent years, driving out of Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, would evoke fear of pop-up Taliban checkpoints at which young fighters pulled passengers out of cars, looking for government workers or members of the security forces. Getting caught up in an impromptu shootout between the two warring sides was always a risk. But since the Taliban takeover in mid-August, the majority of Afghanistan's countryside has seen a substantial drop in violence. Where airstrikes and pitched battles would be commonplace, the guns have fallen silent. The checkpoints have mostly disappeared. In their place is a developing humanitarian crisis and a new Taliban government that at times seems just as unaccustomed to governing as many Afghans are to living in a period without fighting.

Millions of Afghans are facing a winter of food shortages, with up to 1 million children at risk of starvation in the absence of an immediate international relief effort, United Nations officials say. Adding to the misery, prices for basic foodstuffs have risen sharply, and many Afghan families are being forced to make do with rice and beans instead of chicken and other meats. For now, though, in the Chak-e Wardak district, a patchwork of apple orchards and villages, as in many other areas of the country, there is widespread relief at the end of the fighting and the return to something like normal life.

On a recent Thursday on the second floor of the ransacked district administrative center, the newly appointed Taliban police chief, Qari Assad, sat in an old chair. On his desk, rested an even older Kalashnikov and a makeshift Taliban flag with a hand-drawn "Kalima Shahada," the text of the Islamic oath, at its center. The black-bearded and turbaned Assad had just started on his second glass of green tea when two brothers from the neighboring Sayedabad district arrived with a complaint. "The man who married my daughter didn't tell us he already had a wife," said Talab Din, his fingers brushing through his graying beard. "My daughter told me to let it be, she said she was happy with him. But now he has beat her and stabbed her in the leg. We have come here to settle this dispute!" He showed no fear of the new police chief, having interacted with the Taliban in the past. "We will be dealing with this issue immediately," Assad assured the father.

Long before their full takeover, the Taliban were already governing and delivering swift justice in many areas, often through their own court system. Chak-e Wardak, along with many parts of rural Afghanistan, has been under their de facto control for two years. But the question remains whether the movement, which has brutally put down protests in urban areas against its rule, can pivot to a solid governance structure soon enough to cope with the problems underlying the country's gathering humanitarian crisis.

Outside the local government building, resident Fazl Ur-Rahman, 55 said, "Before, security here was very bad, we were suffering at the hands of the military," referring to the Afghan army.

“They were beating people, they were asking people to take water and food to their checkpoints.” The situation had improved under the Taliban in recent weeks, he said, and people could safely return to work. “Before, people could not go anywhere at night, they would be at risk of being shot,” he said. “It has been a long time now since a bullet hit our homes.”

Further west up the valley, another Taliban flag waved atop the oldest hydroelectric dam in the country. Built in 1938, its turbines once provided electricity for surrounding parts of Wardak, plus Ghazni province and even parts of Kabul province, but poor maintenance had rendered it defunct. As a nomadic woman guided her sheep across the dam, Afghan boys took turns jumping into the water below, a welcome relief from the scorching sun. Up the hill from the dam’s basin is the home of the Ayoubi family, who had been displaced to another village two years ago as the fighting intensified. In early August, the family returned after the fighting ended to a house flanked by a lush garden filled with pumpkins planted by a caretaker.

Over a lunch of rice, tomatoes and corn the oldest son Abdullah Ayoubi spoke about the atrocities that had occurred in the valley. “There is no doubt that the Taliban are also corrupt, but it doesn’t compare to what the military was like,” he said. “Not only did they take money from the vans and trucks, if someone had a big beard, they would say they are Taliban and hurt them.” Ayoubi said his brother Assad was in the ninth grade when the Afghan and U.S. armies came to the district, looking for a Taliban commander who went by the same name. They grabbed his brother Assad instead, he said, and took him to Bagram prison, notorious for its harsh treatment of prisoners, where he was tortured. “It took us four months before we found him,” Abdullah Ayoubi said. “When we went to visit him in Bagram, he shouted at me with chains on his legs and handcuffs around his wrists.”

After 18 months, Assad was released. Because of how angry he was, Ayoubi said, he joined a local Taliban commander named Ghulam Ali. He became an expert in shooting Kalashnikovs and rocket-propelled grenades. On his phone, Ayoubi has a grainy image taken from a video. It showed an unrecognizable man enveloped by fire, smoke and dust. “In this moment, my brother shot a tank with a rocket,” he said, though the vehicle appeared to be an Afghan army Humvee. In 2019, Assad was killed during a battle with Afghan soldiers not far from the family home. He had been a fighter for five years. “We buried him near the house,” Ayoubi said.

In this now-sleepy valley, the main landmark is a hospital founded in 1989 by a German woman, Karla Schefter. Today, the hospital is supported by the Committee for Medical and Humanitarian Aid in Afghanistan, which relies on private donations. Faridullah Rahimi, a doctor at the facility, said that in his 22 years there, this was the first time there were no patients with conflict-related injuries. “People from way beyond Chak come here for treatment,” said Rahimi, standing in the hospital’s verdant courtyard. “We used to treat civilians, government soldiers and Taliban fighters, and never had an issue.” For now, the doctor said, the hospital had enough medical supplies, but with most banks closed, it had no money to purchase more or to pay them

their salaries. Still, Rahimi said, the hospital would continue operating as best it could. “We have seen regimes come and go, but the hospital will remain.”

Of the 65 employees at the hospital, 14 are women. The Taliban have said they would allow women to continue working in health care in order to treat female patients. Malalai, 28, a midwife who works at the hospital and uses only one name, said members of the Taliban had visited the facility and spoken to her. “I have been working here for eight years,” she said. “For us, there is no threat from the Islamic Emirate.” Near the hospital entrance, a Russian tank from a previous war was almost completely submerged in the sand — a stark reminder of just how long this area has seen war.

Back at the Ayoubi home, Abdullah spoke softly as his son, 2, napped in the corner, tucked underneath a scarf. Perhaps he would be part of a generation in Afghanistan that grew up without ever knowing war. “Assad, named after my brother,” Ayoubi said, pointing at the child. “It didn’t have to be this way.” [Source: New York Times | Jim Huylebroek | September 15, 2021 ++]

Afghan Taliban

Update 06: Leading a Harsher-Than-Promised Crackdown



The Taliban swept across Afghanistan claiming to be the honest and legitimate voice of the people, presenting themselves as a changed outfit and offering amnesty to opponents and vague promises of inclusivity and a commitment to allow women to study and work. And in an effort to win international legitimacy, the hard-line Islamic movement this week nominated a new permanent representative to the United Nations. But in the weeks since the Taliban once again took control, growing evidence points to a broad and sometimes brutal crackdown as they settle old scores, stamp out opposition and try to force many Afghans to adhere to their strict interpretation of Islam.

In a report released 20 SEP, Amnesty International warned that while the Taliban "have attempted to portray to the world that they will respect human rights ... the ground reality is far from this." "The current situation in Afghanistan is a moment of reckoning — a moment when the human rights gains that the Afghan people have built over two decades is at risk of collapse," the report says. The welts on journalist Taqi Daryabi's skin below tell the story of this war for the soul

of Afghanistan. Daryabi, 22, says he was covering a women's rights protest in Kabul this month when he was taken to a police station by Taliban fighters and severely beaten.

"They were beating me by the whip, electric rod and whatever they had in their hand," he said via Twitter message, adding that he believes he was targeted because he is a journalist and a member of Afghanistan's ethnic minority Hazara community, which was persecuted under the previous Taliban government. "They beat me [for] about 10 minutes until I lost my energy and I swoon[ed]," he said, describing how he lost consciousness. Daryabi is one in a growing list of people who in some way threaten the Taliban's vision for the future — to have felt the militants' wrath since they seized control.

Images of Taliban fighters beating Afghans who rushed toward the Kabul airport in the weeks before the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan shined a light on the new government's approach to crowd control. They also revealed the public mood: Many people will have been terrified of once again living under a Taliban government. From 1996 to 2001, when the government was toppled by U.S.-backed forces, the Taliban enforced a brutal rule, targeting minorities and stripping women of almost all of their rights. Alongside pictures of bloodied Afghans came reports of the militants' cracking down on nascent protests across the country. An intelligence report submitted to the U.N. found that the Taliban were going door to door hunting for people who worked with U.S.-led forces or the government of former President Ashraf Ghani.

The accounts are in stark contrast to the picture the Taliban have sought to present to the world — while it never supported democracy and elections, the group has cultivated an image as enforcers of justice and security. And besides, the Taliban say, they have learned and changed since they last held power 20 years ago. "When it comes to experience and maturity and vision, of course there is a huge difference between us in comparison to 20 years ago," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in his first news conference after the militants took the capital, according to a translation by the Al Jazeera media network. Earlier, a Taliban official had announced a general "amnesty" for everyone in Afghanistan.

Former officials who served under Ghani, who fled the country Aug. 15, tell a different story. They say they were hunted by the Taliban despite the promises of amnesty. Shukria Barakzai, a former Afghan ambassador to Norway, said she had been told that militants searched her house in Kabul. Unable to leave the country the day the city fell, she spent a white-knuckle week hiding from the Taliban as she tried to find a route out, she said. Now in Britain, she described the Taliban's claim of a general amnesty as "lip service." "What did I do wrong that I should seek their amnesty?" she asked. "Did I kill anyone?"

While the Taliban have repeatedly proclaimed that women and girls would be treated fairly according to Shariah, or Islamic law, it is a different story on the ground, where many of the gains made during the last 20 years are threatened, Afghans and international rights groups say. The Taliban have dismantled departments of women's affairs across Afghanistan and have accused women's civil society groups of lewdness and spreading anti-Islamic ideas, according to U.N.

human rights chief Michelle Bachelet. While the militant group has said it will establish a strong and effective administration for women under Shariah, it is still not clear what exactly that will look like. However, in some cases, women have already been instructed to stay at home because Taliban forces "were not trained to deal with women," Bachelet said (<https://www.nbcnews.com/video/female-protesters-whipped-by-taliban-fighter-in-kabul-120440901698>).

Such an order was issued in Kabul over the weekend, with interim Mayor Hamdullah Namony telling the city government's female employees not to come back to work. Only those whose work cannot be replaced by men can remain in their jobs, he said 19 SEP as he laid out the Taliban's latest restrictions on women. Waheedullah Hashimi, a senior Taliban leader, said that the group had fought for 40 years to impose Shariah in Afghanistan and that the Islamic law does not allow women to work alongside men. Women will be able to work in sectors where they are needed, but they cannot be ministers, he said. "If there is no need for women to work, we will not let them," he added. Last week, the Taliban prompted even more skepticism about their promises to respect the rights of women and girls when they said they would open schools for high school-age boys but not girls.

In recent weeks, women have held protests demanding equal rights under the Taliban, with some beaten in the process. Then, last week, the group announced that protests were banned unless they were approved ahead of time. Afghans who have taken to the streets, including women's rights protesters, have been met with an "increasingly violent response" by Taliban authorities in recent weeks, the U.N. human rights office said in a statement this month.

Then there are those the Taliban have deemed ineligible for amnesty. Human Rights Watch reported last month that Taliban forces advancing in Ghazni, Kandahar and other provinces had summarily executed detained soldiers, police and civilians alleged to have ties to the previous government. NBC News has not independently verified the findings. Daniel Balson, Amnesty International USA's advocacy director for Europe and Central Asia, said the "broad, sweeping" range of people who have been targeted is striking. "This is not just some sort of narrow settling of scores with political or armed enemies," he said in a phone interview Tuesday. "This is quite broad. Anybody who is seen to be potentially not entirely in accord with this new order has a target on their backs."

Hashimi of the Taliban pushed back, claiming that after the general pardon, the group has killed people only in a "very few" cases. Those targeted were Pashtuns and Hazaras, and they were involved in crimes that could not be forgiven, he added, without elaborating. The Taliban are overwhelmingly Pashtun. Separately, Taliban commanders in Kandahar and Helmand said no clear governance reached the provinces, meaning fighters could easily settle scores with former Afghan security forces on the ground. In Taliban ranks, there are people who were clearly going to want revenge, and the leadership is allowing it because they need those people and because they want to send a clear message to anyone who might defy them, said Patricia Gossman, an associate director of the Asia division at Human Rights Watch. "These weren't rogue elements that did these

things outside the knowledge of their superiors," she said. "I would say these were essentially condoned from the top." [Source: NBC News | Saphora Smith | September 23, 2021 ++]

Iran Nuclear Threat

Update 02: Top Nuclear Scientist Killed Remotely by Israel



Israeli agents killed Iran's top nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, late last year using a remote-controlled machine gun and artificial intelligence, according to a report from The New York Times. He was regarded as the chief of Iran's nuclear program and a former brigadier general in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Due to his affiliation with the Iranian nuclear program, both the United Nations Security Council and the United States ordered his assets frozen in the mid-2000s. In the early 2010s, he established and led the Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research, which conducted research on nuclear weapons.

The Iranian government labelled the killing of the scientist an act of "state terror." The killing raised tensions in the region and the Iranian legislature passed a bill to block inspections of its nuclear program. The killing occurred two weeks after President Trump was reportedly dissuaded from striking Iran's nuclear facilities. Iranian intelligence knew an attack was likely against Fakhri-zadeh, but major breaches of security protocols enabled the assassination, sources told the Times. On the day of the killing, Nov. 27, Fakhri-zadeh insisted he drive his wife from their vacation home near the Caspian Sea to a country home in Absard.

Though security measures were in place to protect him along the way, an Israeli assassin was able to identify and assassinate him from 1,000 miles away using a satellite-controlled machine gun capable of shooting up to 600 rounds per minute, the Times reported. It was equipped with a camera and utilized artificial intelligence and facial recognition to target Fakhri-zadeh. The gun was so accurate that not a single bullet struck his wife, who was seated next to him.

Fakhri-zadeh had been a top target of Israel for more than a decade, as the country viewed him as the leader of Iran's clandestine efforts to build a nuclear bomb. "Remember that name," former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said at a 2018 news conference, according to the report. "Fakhri-zadeh." A previous attempt to assassinate him was compromised and called off in

2009. Late last year Israeli agents rushed to carry out the assassination after then-President-elect Joe Biden promised to return to the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement. Israel worried the Biden administration would oppose the assassination, as it could further hamper negotiations with Iran. Israel has carried out various attacks on Iranian nuclear-related sites since 2004, and its agents have assassinated five of Fakhrizadeh's colleagues since 2007, the Times reported. [Source: The Hill & https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohsen_Fakhrizadeh | Monique Beals | September 19, 2021 ++]

Korean War End

Update 03: South Korean Leader Repeats Call for Declaration to End It



South Korea President Moon Jae-in on 21 SEP addressed the U.N. General Assembly and repeated a call for a declaration to formally end the 1950-1953 Korean War. "I once again urge the community of nations to mobilize its strengths for the end-of-war declaration on the Korean Peninsula," Moon said in a speech to the annual gathering of the world body. "I propose that three parties of the two Koreas and the U.S., or four parties of the two Koreas, the U.S. and China come together and declare that the War on the Korean Peninsula is over," he said. North Korea had long sought a formal end to the Korean War to replace the armistice that stopped the fighting but left it and the U.S.-led U.N. Command still technically at war.

Moon, who has been active in trying to engage with North Korea throughout his presidency, has argued that such a declaration would encourage North Korea to give up to denuclearize. Washington has said Pyongyang must give up its nuclear weapons first. Earlier on Tuesday, U.S. President Joe Biden addressed the U.N. assembly and said the United States sought "serious and sustained diplomacy to pursue the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." "We seek concrete progress toward an available plan with tangible commitments that would increase stability on the Peninsula and in the region, as well as improve the lives of the people in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," he said, using North Korea's official name.

North Korea has brushed off U.S. calls for a return to dialogue and the head of the U.N. atomic watchdog said this week that Pyongyang's nuclear program is going "full steam ahead. The United States has no hostile intent toward Pyongyang and is open to meeting any time and any place,

Washington's special envoy for North Korea said on 20 SEP during a visit to South Korea. Sung Kim arrived in Seoul on 18 SEP for a four-day visit. The visit comes as a brief thaw in inter-Korean relations in July gave way to a new standoff over U.S.-South Korean military exercises that North Korea has warned could trigger a security crisis.

"The United States does not have hostile intent toward (North Korea)," Kim told reporters after meeting with his South Korean counterpart, Noh Kyu-duk. "The ongoing (U.S.-South Korea) combined military exercises are longstanding, routine, and purely defensive in nature and support the security of both our countries." Noh said the two discussed possible humanitarian aid to North Korea, as well as ways to restart stalled denuclearization talks. "We agreed to work together to resume dialogue with North Korea as soon as possible," he said.

On 19 SEP Kim met with Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong at the minister's residence, where they discussed ways for a speedy resumption of the peace process on the Korean peninsula, a foreign ministry official said. In an interview with KBS, South Korea's national broadcaster, Kim urged Pyongyang to return to dialogue, saying Washington was ready to address its concerns. "We are willing to address the full range of issues and concerns including those that are of importance to DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)," Kim said. "Given the opportunity we will be able to make substantial progress." The U.S. envoy is expected to meet with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov on 21 SEP in Seoul.

The nine-day joint military exercise began on 16 AUG, with silence so far from North Korean state media despite fears that the country could conduct a missile test or take other actions to underscore its disapproval. North Korea has said it is open to diplomacy, but that the American overtures appear hollow while "hostile acts" such as the drills continue. U.S. President Joe Biden's administration has said it will explore diplomacy to achieve North Korean denuclearization, but shown no willingness to ease sanctions.

The United States supports efforts to improve ties between the two Koreas and remains open to direct talks with Pyongyang, Kim said. "I continue to stand ready to meet with my North Korean counterparts anywhere at any time," he said.

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North Korea on 27 SEP accused the United States of hostility and demanded the Biden administration permanently end joint military exercises with South Korea even as it continued its recent streak of weapons tests apparently aimed at pressuring Washington and Seoul over slow nuclear diplomacy. North Korean Ambassador Kim Song's comments on the last day of the U.N. General Assembly came shortly after South Korea's military said the North fired an unidentified projectile into its eastern waters. The North's latest test, which followed two previous rounds of missile tests this month, indicated the country is returning to its tried-and-true technique of mixing weapons demonstrations and peace offers to wrest concessions amid long-stalled negotiations

The United States keeps about 28,000 troops in South Korea to help deter potential aggression from North Korea. The allies say their drills are defensive in nature, but they have canceled or downsized them in recent years to create space for diplomacy or in pandemic response. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in recent political speeches has vowed to bolster his nuclear deterrent in face of U.S. pressure. His government has so far rejected the Biden administration's offer to resume talks without preconditions, saying that Washington must abandon its hostile policy first.

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North Korea said on 22 SEP it successfully tested a new hypersonic missile it implied was being developed as nuclear capable, as it continues to expand its military capabilities and pressure Washington and Seoul over long-stalled negotiations over its nuclear weapons. The missile test 21 SEP was North Korea's third round of launches this month and took place shortly before North Korea's U.N. envoy accused the United States of hostility and demanded the Biden administration permanently end joint military exercises with South Korea and the deployment of strategic assets in the region.

A photo published in North Korea's state media showed a missile mounted with a finned, cone-shaped payload soaring into the air amid bright orange flames. The official Korean Central News Agency said the missile during its first flight test met key technical requirements, including launch stability and the maneuverability and flight characteristics of the "detached hypersonic gliding warhead."

[Source: Reuters & AP | Michelle Nichols & Kim Tong-Hyung | August 23 & September 21 | 27 | 29, 2021 ++]

Vocabulary

Some Words to Enhance Yours | 210930

Which word best matches these example sentences?

1. (a) The _____ teenager was sent to etiquette classes to learn some manners.

- (b) *Triskaidekaphobia – Inimitable – Hamartia - Churlish*
2. (a) The culinary documentary has _____d my interest in cooking.
(b) *Docile – Pique – Modicum - Acronym*
3. (a) The _____ neighborhoods suffered the most in the aftermath of the hurricane.
(b) *Zeitgeist – Enumerate – Impecunious - Ichor*
4. (a) He made a _____ remark over dinner and everyone chuckled except his mother.
(b) *Onomatopoeia – Pique – Facetious - Mitzvah*
5. (a) The boy used a _____ when he was hungry, demanding "food!" when he was hungry.
(b) *Impetuous – Holophrase – Wanderjahr - Pseudonym*
6. (a) That guy was unbearable to be around due to his _____.
(b) *Bandersnatch – Circumspect – Flibbertigibbet - Hubris*
7. (a) The woman looked _____ in her bright red dress.
(b) *Panache –t – Legless - Sarcophagus*
8. (a) Molly was such a _____, always trying to earn the favor of the teacher to secure the scholarship.
(b) *Sycophant – Brouhaha – Gasconade - Hubris*
9. (a) Her failing grades could probably be explained by observing her _____ lifestyle.
(b) *Wanton – Dilatory – Bamboozle - Milquetoast*
10. (a) The children overheard the witch detailing her _____ plan to capture them.
(b) *Nefarious – Cumulative – Rove - Phlegm*

Answers

1. Churlish [chur-lish] - like a churl; boorish; rude.
2. Pique[[peek] - stimulate interest or curiosity.
3. Impecunious [im-pi-kyoo-nee-uhs] - having little or no money; penniless; poor.
4. Facetious [fuh-see-shuhs] - joking or jesting often inappropriately.
5. Holophrase [hol-uh-freyz] - a word functioning as a phrase or sentence, as the imperative "Go!".
6. Hubris [hyoo-bris, hoo-bris] - excessive pride or self-confidence; arrogance.
7. Resplendent [ri-splen-duhnt] - attractive and impressive through being richly colorful or sumptuous
8. Sycophant [sik-uh-fuhnt, sik-uh-fant] - a self-seeking, servile flatterer; fawning parasite
9. Dilatory [dil-uh-tawr-ee] - tending to delay or procrastinate; slow; tardy
10. Nefarious [ni-fair-ee-uhs] - extremely wicked or villainous; iniquitous

News of the Weird

SEP 16 thru 30, 2021

Weird Science – Animal behavioral scientists at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, responding to the critical problem of livestock waste, have trained calves to urinate in a MooLoo -- a special pen with an AstroTurf surface, the Associated Press reported. Perhaps you didn't know that urine mixed with feces makes ammonia, which is an issue for the environment, or that cows produce an impressive amount of urine in a day: about 8 gallons. About the potty-training endeavor, the study's senior author, Lindsay Matthews, said, "The cows are at least as good as children, age 2 to 4 years, at least as quick." Researchers lured the cows into the pen with a sweet treat and then rewarded them when they urinated. If, after training, they went outside the MooLoo, they got a squirt of cold water. Next up: No. 2. [Associated Press, 9/13/2021]

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Undignified Death – Timothy Satterlee, 71, of St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana, was attacked on 30 AUG by a 12-foot-long, 504-pound alligator during flooding following Hurricane Ida, the Daily Beast reported. His wife told police she was able to free him from the gator and pull him onto the front steps of their home, but while she went to get help, Satterlee disappeared. The parish sheriff's office said on 13 SEP that it had captured the gator with "what appears to be human remains" in its stomach. The coroner's office was confirming that the remains were Satterlee's. "This is a horrible tragedy and my sincere condolences and sympathy goes to the Satterlee family," Sheriff Randy Smith said. [Daily Beast, 9/14/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Least Competent Criminal – A 17-year-old driver in Youngstown, Ohio, was pulled over by police after he ran a stop sign and drove at high speeds on 15 SEP, WKBN-TV reported. When police spoke to the nervous young man, they smelled what they thought was marijuana, and in the car they found a device that is used to load ammunition into a semi-automatic firearm. They also noticed that his belt was unbuckled. The teenager explained to police that the device belonged to his sister, and regarding his belt, he said, "I ain't gonna lie, I was trying to take a s--t." But police also searched the area where he had been driving and found a 9mm handgun in a yard. Finally, the suspect admitted that the gun was his and, presumably, he had been trying to hide it in his waistband. He was charged with improper handling of a firearm in a motor vehicle. [WKBN, 9/16/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Irony – Philip Morris International, maker of Marlboro and Parliament cigarettes, has sealed a deal with Vectura, a U.K.-based company that makes medicines -- including inhalers for respiratory conditions -- with a \$1.1 billion bid. The BBC reported on 16 SEP that PMI's CEO,

Jacek Olczak, is "excited" to expand the company's product lines, but medical organizations and charities are less than thrilled about the purchase. "It creates perverse incentives for PMI to sell more of its harmful products so they might then profit again through treating smoking-related diseases," said Sarah Woolnough, CEO of Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation. The agreement is set to be final on 30 SEP. [BBC, 9/16/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Fine Points of the Law – On 13 SEP, a road rage incident in Amarillo, Texas, all started when Car No. 1 tried to pass Car Nos. 2 and 3. No. 1 got past the first car, but No. 3 sped up to prevent the pass. As Car No. 1 passed No. 3, someone in No. 1 fired shots into No. 3. "The victim in this case did have a handgun in their vehicle and returned fire at the suspect," Amarillo police Cpl. Jeb Hilton told KVII-TV. And here's where Texas' tricky law comes in: While it is against Texas law to shoot a firearm from a moving or stationary vehicle on a roadway, if you're shooting in self-defense, you're off the hook. The person in Car No. 3 will not face any charges. There were no injuries reported in the incident. [KVII, 9/14/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Ewwwwww! -- Shirley Wright-Johnson was shopping for pizza rolls in an Oklahoma City Crest Foods store on 2 SEP when she literally put her hand in it: As she reached into the frozen case to pick up the rolls, "I grabbed the bag, I felt something smushy on the bag, so I turned it over and there it was," Wright-Johnson told KFOR-TV. "It" was human feces. "I was so disgusted I was almost in tears," she said. Moore, Oklahoma, police investigated, checking store video cameras, where they saw a man in "the cooler section, where he proceeded to defecate inside one of the coolers before leaving the business," said Lt. Kyle Johnson. The suspect was apprehended and booked into the Cleveland County Detention Center on unrelated charges, police said. [KFOR, 9/15/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Fast food -- Estefany Benitez of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, visited her favorite burger chain, Hot Burger, on 12 SEP and got an extra topping with her sandwich: a rotting human finger. The Daily Mail reported that Benitez bit into the burger and felt something unfamiliar, then pulled the finger out of her mouth. While the restaurant "carried on serving customers like nothing had happened," Benitez said, a company representative told her the burgers arrive at the store pre-prepared. But later, Edson Claure, director of the National Police's Special Crime Fighting Force, confirmed that a company employee had lost part of his finger at work. It's not lost anymore! [Daily Mail, 9/16/2021]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/news-of-the-weird> | September 30, 2021 ++]

Have You Heard or Seen?

Survivors | Women-2 | Think Toons

Survivors

One day a man decided to retire, so he booked himself on a Caribbean cruise and proceeded to have the time of his life, that is, until the ship sank. He soon found himself on an island with no other people, no supplies, nothing, only bananas and coconuts. After about four months, he is lying on the beach one day when the most gorgeous woman he has ever seen rows up to the shore. In disbelief, he asks, "Where did you come from? How did you get here?"

She replies, "I rowed over from the other side of the island where I landed when my cruise ship sank." "Amazing," he notes. "You were really lucky to have a row boat wash up with you." "Oh, this thing?" explains the woman. "I made the boat out of some raw material I found on the island. The oars were whittled from gum tree branches. I wove the bottom from palm tree branches, and the sides and stern came from a Eucalyptus tree."

"But, where did you get the tools?" "Oh, that was no problem," replied the woman. "On the south side of the island, a very unusual stratum of alluvial rock is exposed. I found that if I fired it to a certain temperature in my kiln, it melted into ductile iron I used that to make tools and used the tools to make the hardware." The guy is stunned.

"Let's row over to my place," she says. So, after a short time rowing, she soon docks the boat at a small wharf. As the man looks to shore, he nearly falls off the boat. Before him is a long stone walk leading to a cabin and tree house. While the woman ties up the rowboat with an expertly woven hemp rope, the man can only stare ahead, dumb struck. As they walk into the house, she says casually, "It's not much, but I call it home. Sit down, please. Would you like a drink?" "No! No thank you," the man blurts out, still dazed. "I can't take another drop of coconut juice." "It's not coconut juice," winks the woman. "I have a still. How would you like a Tropical Spritz?"

Trying to hide his continued amazement, the man accepts, and they sit down on her couch to talk. After they exchange their individual survival stories, the woman announces, "I'm going to slip into something more comfortable. Would you like to take a shower and shave? There's a razor in the bathroom cabinet upstairs." No longer questioning anything, the man goes upstairs into the bathroom. There, in the cabinet is a razor made from a piece of tortoise bone. Two shells honed to a hollow ground edge are fastened on to its end inside a swivel mechanism. "This woman is amazing," he muses. "What's next?" When he returns, she greets him wearing nothing but some small flowers on tiny vines, each strategically positioned, she smelled faintly of gardenias. She then beckons for him to sit down next to her.

"Tell me," she begins suggestively, slithering closer to him, "We've both been out here for many months. You must have been lonely. There's something I'm certain you feel like doing right now, something you've been longing for, right?" She stares into his eyes. He can't believe what he's hearing.

"You mean..." he swallows excitedly as tears start to form in his eyes, "You've built a Golf Course?"

Women-2

A soldier serving overseas far from home was annoyed and upset when his girl wrote to break off their engagement and ask for her photograph back. He went out and collected from his friends all the unwanted photographs of women that he could find, bundled them all together, and sent them back with a note saying, "I regret that I cannot remember which one you are. Please keep your photo and return the others."

-o-o-O-o-o-

The man approached the very beautiful woman in the large supermarket and asked, "You know, I've lost my wife here in the supermarket. Can you talk to me for a couple of minutes?"

"Why?"

"Because every time I talk to a beautiful woman my wife appears out of nowhere."

-o-o-O-o-o-

Walking home after a girls' night out, two women pass a graveyard and stop to pee. The first woman has nothing to wipe with, so she uses her underwear and tosses it. Her friend, however, finds a ribbon on a wreath, so she uses that.

The next day, the first woman's husband phones the second woman's husband, furious: "My wife came home last night without her panties!" "That's nothing," says the other. "Mine came back with a card stuck between her butt cheeks that said, 'From all of us at the fire station, we'll never forget you.'"

o-o-O-o-o-

Two married girls meet and start talking

"Me & my husband are no longer together..."

"Why?"

"Well, could you live with a person who smokes weed, drinks, has no job and always cusses?"

"No, of course I couldn't!"

"Well he couldn't either!"

-o-o-O-o-o-

A woman and a man are involved in a car accident; it's a bad one. Both of their cars are totally demolished but amazingly neither of them are hurt. After they crawl out of their cars, the woman says, "So you're a man, that's interesting. I'm a woman. Wow, just look at our cars! There's nothing left, but fortunately we are unhurt. This must be a sign from God that we should meet and be friends and live together in peace for the rest of our days."

The man replied, "I agree with you completely. This must be a sign from God!"

The woman continued, "And look at this, here's another miracle. My car is completely demolished but this bottle of wine didn't break." "Surely God wants us to drink this wine and celebrate our good fortune." Then she hands the bottle to the man. The man nods his head in agreement, opens

it and drinks half the bottle and then hands it back to the woman. The woman takes the bottle, immediately puts the cork back in and hands it back to the man.

The man asks, "Aren't you having any?"

The woman replies, "No. I think I'll just wait for the police."

Think Toons



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