RAO BULLETIN
1 July 2016

PDF Edition

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* DoD *

**DoD Whistleblowers** ▶ Retaliation is Alive and Well

A bipartisan group of lawmakers is urging a government watchdog to tackle what it describes as “persistent, systemic” problems with the handling of defense and intelligence whistleblowers. Needless delays and “reprisal and misconduct”
were cited within the inspector general’s office, the five lawmakers said in a letter sent last week to the Pentagon inspector general’s office. The letter was obtained by McClatchy, which has in its reporting detailed allegations of mishandling by the inspector general’s office. The lawmakers noted improvements since acting inspector general Glenn Fine took over in January. “We believe, however, that there are ongoing challenges,” the lawmakers wrote. “We write to express our concerns regarding what appear to be persistent, systemic issues.” The Pentagon inspector general’s office did not respond to requests for comment.

- Claire McCaskill (left), a Democratic senator from Missouri, joined a bi-partisan group demanding better handling of whistleblowers in the areas of defense and intelligence.
- Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, (center) says that “whistleblowers deserve fair treatment, free from reprisal, as the law provides.” Retaliation against whistleblowers is alive and well at the defense department.
- Michael Sandknop right) last November filed a lawsuit in Cole County, Mo., Circuit Court against his supervisors in the Missouri National Guard. His claims in the lawsuit include that his supervisors made comments “to discredit, damage and smear” him, and that he was wrongfully terminated.

The lawmakers who signed the letter were: Sens. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa; Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y.; and Reps. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah; and Elijah Cummings, D-Md. The lawmakers cited several stories by McClatchy that outlined allegations of problems and delays by the Pentagon inspector general’s office. The inspector general has, for example, agreed to reopen its investigation into a former Missouri National Guard contractor’s claims of wrongful termination. Michael Sandknop, a videographer who retired in 2009 as a master sergeant in the U.S. Army Reserve, claims in a lawsuit his supervisors knowingly made false statements about him “to discredit, damage and smear” him, and that he was wrongfully terminated.

Sandknop said he was not given the proper equipment to do his job and was publicly berated by his supervisors. When he sought assistance from the Missouri National Guard’s inspector general, he said, he was fired. An investigation “determined there was an unhealthy work environment in the Missouri National Guard PAO (Public Affairs Office),” an investigator wrote in a letter to Sandknop in June 2014. “Appropriate action will be taken to address these issues.” A year later, however, after receiving no assistance, Sandknop last November filed suit. “I got fired, I got mad, and now I’m getting even,” Sandknop told the Kansas City Star. The inspector general’s office has reopened Sandknop’s case and has admitted that it made a mistake in first declining to investigate. Nanci Gonder, spokeswoman for the Missouri Attorney General’s office, reached by email, said, “We decline to comment on pending litigation.” The office has also started an inquiry into other alleged cases of reprisal.

In May of 2015, the Government Accountability Office said it also found long delays when it analyzed about 124 military whistleblower reprisal cases overseen by the Pentagon inspector general’s office. The lawmakers asked Fine’s office to explain what reforms have been undertaken since. “Retaliation against whistleblowers is alive and well at the Defense Department,” Grassley, chairman of the Judiciary committee, said by email. “Whistleblowers deserve fair treatment, free from reprisal, as the law provides. They should be encouraged to come forward, not be treated like skunks at a picnic.” [Source: McClatchy Washington Bureau & Kansas City Star | Marisa Taylor & Will Schmitt | June 13, 2016 ++]
TRICARE Dental Program Update 12  ► New Contractor

United Concordia will be the next TRICARE Dental contractor for active-duty families, National Guard and Reserve members and their families beginning May 1, 2017. The contract is worth $2.9 billion and will last for five years. Under the new contract, the annual maximum benefit for users will expand from $1,300 to $1,500, according to contract documents. Sealants, which currently carry a 20 percent cost share, will be completely covered at zero out-of-pocket cost. Beneficiaries, who must pay monthly premiums to use TRICARE’s dental program, will continue to receive two free cleanings a year, while pregnant users will be able to receive three. Some beneficiaries may have to find a new dentist after the change, since individual dental practices determine which programs they accept. Details regarding in-network dentist options are likely to be released before the contract start date next year. About 1.8 million beneficiaries are enrolled in the dental program. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update | June 24, 2016 ++]

DoD IT Update 01  ► Hack The Pentagon Program Results

Hackers screened for their good intentions found 138 “vulnerabilities” in the Defense Department’s cyber defenses in a “bug bounty” awards program that will end up saving the Pentagon money, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said Friday. Under the “Hack The Pentagon” program, the first ever conducted by the federal government, more than 1,400 “white hat” hackers were vetted and invited to challenge Pentagon’s defenses to compete for cash awards. Of the 1,400 who entered, about 250 submitted reports on vulnerability and 138 of those “were determined to be legitimate, unique and eligible for bounty,” Carter said at a Pentagon news conference. The lessons learned from the “Hack The Pentagon” challenge, an initiative of the Defense Digital Services started by Carter, came at a fraction of the cost of bringing in an outside firm to conduct an audit of the Pentagon’s cyber security, he said.

The awards going out total $150,000 while a full-blown cyber audit would have cost at least $1 million, he said. In addition, “we’ve fixed all those vulnerabilities,” Carter said. No federal agency had ever offered a bug bounty, he noted. “Through this pilot we found a cost effective way to supplement and support what our dedicated people do every day,” Carter said. “It’s lot better than either hiring somebody to do that for you or finding out the hard way,” he said. “What we didn’t fully appreciate before this pilot was how many white-hat hackers there are.” Carter said the Pentagon had plans to encourage defense contractors to submit their programs and products for independent security reviews and bug bounty programs before they deliver them to the government. [Source: Military.com | Ash Carter | June 17, 2016 ++]

Commissary Generics Use  ► Private Label Program to Begin 1 OCT

Commissary officials plan to start a new comprehensive private label program 1 OCT, according to documents obtained by Military Times. Information was not immediately available from commissary officials about whether products will be in the stores by that date or if there is a timeline for those products. But "the new merchandising program" is scheduled to begin 1 OCT, according to a notice to members of the grocery industry from the Defense Commissary Agency, expected to be released 20 JUN. The commissary agency, which operates commissaries worldwide, is seeking a company — or companies — to implement a private label program that will include all commissaries, all departments and categories of products currently stocked, according to a “Notice to the Trade”
Private label products are sometimes referred to as “generic” products, usually costing less than national name brands. Commissaries have long sold brands that are similar to private label brands, the same as are sold in some civilian stores, and offered a cost savings, but they were not developed by the commissary agency. DeCA’s notice states that the private label requirements may include the adoption of an already existing trademarked brand; the development of a DeCA brand; or a combination of both. The company chosen will be responsible for finding sources for the products, developing the program, and implementing it.

The fiscal 2016 National Defense Authorization Act allows commissaries to sell private label products. The idea is to mark up prices of these lower-cost items so that commissaries can make money off the sale. Commissary items currently must be sold at cost plus a 5 percent surcharge, but a provision is making its way through the legislative process that allows the commissary agency to start a “variable pricing” program to sell at prices different than the cost from the manufacturer or distributor. Thus they could mark up the private label items to make a profit. But the savings to the commissary agency gained by a private label program would be less than $500,000 over the 10-year period from 2017 to 2026, according to an estimate from the Congressional Budget Office. That estimate was included in a report accompanying the House-proposed version of the fiscal 2017 defense policy bill. The annual commissary budget is $1.4 billion. Defense officials have said it’s not possible to entirely eliminate the taxpayer funding, but they are looking at ways to decrease the annual spending.

The private label discussion started to gain traction as a way to help DeCA save taxpayer dollars in the ever-present budget constraints in May 2014, when then-Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Navy Adm. James Winnefeld testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that if DeCA could carry generic products, it would be more efficient and could offset at least a portion of that subsidy. He used the example of ibuprofen, saying that DeCA only carried name brands. However, the commissary also carried — and does carry — a value brand option that was cheaper, but it didn’t carry a “DeCA” brand label. Within 30 days after the industry presentations to DeCA are finished July 22, DeCA will send letters announcing the selection of one or more companies. The notice to the industry is not a formal solicitation that will result in a contract but a “merchandising agreement,” which is not governed by the Federal Acquisition Regulation. [Source: Military Times | Karen | June 17, 2016 ++]
we are unable to specify a date when the department will make a decision on the proposal. As these recommendations are pre-decisional, it would be inappropriate to say anything more."

The proposal, originally submitted to the DoD by AAFES in spring 2014, also has the support of the Marine Corps and Navy Exchange services. It would allow all honorably discharged veterans to make purchases on the exchanges websites. It would not grant access to brick-and-mortar exchange stores, gas stations or Class Six locations. Exchange officials have said there is a strong business case for opening online shopping to the about 18 million honorably discharged U.S. veterans. Giving them online shopping access could produce between $226 million to $1.13 billion in annual sales, the 2014 proposal says. The result could be as much as $108 million annually in support for MWR programs, which rely on exchange dividends for the bulk of their funding across the services, it says.

A Defense Department report released early this month says that to implement the plan, the Defense Department needs to change its exchange patronage rules. That effort is currently being spearheaded by the Defense Resale Business Optimization Board. Opening commissary shopping to honorably discharged veterans is not included in the proposal. Unlike the exchanges, the Defense Commissary Agency relies on a $1.4 billion annual taxpayer subsidy to operate. Because goods there are sold at cost plus a five percent surcharge, increasing the customer base to all veterans would result in higher taxpayer costs under the current operating system, not lower. [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | June 21, 2016 ++]

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DoD Retirement Update 02 ► Civilian Phased Retirement Program

The Defense Department on Tuesday announced it will now allow eligible civilian employees to partially retire while remaining on the job part-time to help better manage its workforce needs. The decision by the government’s largest department to implement phased retirement – nearly four years after Congress passed a law allowing the practice – could spur other agencies to roll out their own programs to take advantage of the flexibility. As of mid-January, less than 50 people across government had applied for the benefit, according to the Office of Personnel Management. That’s because many agencies either haven’t finalized phased retirement plans yet that meet the needs of their missions as well as collective bargaining agreements, or aren't offering the benefit to eligible employees. It’s also possible some federal employees don’t know what their options are, or just aren’t interested/eligible.

“Participation in the Phased Retirement Program is voluntary and requires the mutual consent of both the employee and an authorized DoD component official,” said the June 21 memorandum from Peter Levine, acting undersecretary of Defense for personnel and readiness. “DoD components may limit the number of employees included in the Phased Retirement Program, as appropriate.” It’s the latest personnel-related change that the Pentagon has unveiled in recent months, as part of the department’s broader effort to recruit and retain civilian employees and service members. Agencies have broad discretion in deciding how to implement. [Source: GovExec.com | By Kellie Lunney | June 21, 2016 ++]

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SBP Beneficiary Benefits ► What They Should Know

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) pays more than 2.5 million retired service members. A large portion of their customers have elected to cover one or more of their loved ones with the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP).
Although they are willing to pay to cover their loved ones, many retirees neglect to educate their loved ones about the benefits they have provided for them. Unfortunately, this can complicate or slow down the application process to receive benefits when they are eventually requested by the family member. Every member should consider educating their beneficiaries to help them better understand how SBP works. Here are a few guidelines you can cover with your beneficiaries. Suggest you print this article, share it with your designated beneficiary, and store it with other important documents.

**The Nature and Extent of the SBP Benefit**
SBP provides your eligible beneficiaries with a monthly payment known as an annuity. The amount of the benefit is a percentage of your retired pay and it depends upon whether you choose full or reduced coverage. The recipient of your SBP annuity is referred to as the annuitant.

**The Benefit's Duration**
The SBP entitlement begins upon your death and ends either when your elected beneficiary becomes ineligible to receive the annuity or when your beneficiary dies.

**Reasons Payments May Be Temporarily Stopped**
Each year, DFAS mails annuitants a Certificate of Eligibility (COE). DFAS uses the information on that form to determine an annuitant's continued eligibility for monthly payments. If DFAS does not receive the COE by the deadline on the form, they will stop all payments until they receive a properly completed COE. If you have not received a COE from DFAS recently and feel you should have, please call their customer care center to request one at (800) 321-1080.

**Reasons Payments Can Be Stopped**
Annuity payments stop when a beneficiary dies or becomes ineligible to receive the annuity. For example, payments to children normally stop when they reach age 18. Payments stop for spouses if they remarry before age 55.

**Continuing Children's Benefits after Age 18**
Payments typically stop for children covered under SBP when they reach age 18. If an unmarried child attends school in a full time status at an accredited college or university, the payments will continue until they reach age 22. Each semester, DFAS mails a Child Annuitant's School Certification form to verify the child is still enrolled. If DFAS does not receive the form by the deadline listed, they will stop all payments until they receive a properly completed form. The SBP annuity will terminate at any time if the child marries. If you have not received a School Certification recently and feel you should have, please call the DFAS customer care center to request one at (800) 321-1080. Children who became incapacitated while still eligible SBP beneficiaries could receive payments for life if the conditions are permanent.

**Effects of Remarriage on an Annuity**
If the annuitant remarries before age 55, annuity payments will stop. However, if the annuitant's marriage later ends, for any reason, the annuity payment will restart from the date the marriage ends. The annuitant is responsible for notifying DFAS of any changes to their marital status.

**Benefits from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA)**
Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is an award benefit offered by the VA. Federal law prevents annuitants from receiving both SBP and DIC concurrently. When DFAS is informed that an annuitant is eligible to receive DIC from the VA, DFAS will deduct the amount of DIC received from the amount of SBP. For example, a surviving spouse is eligible for a monthly annuity of $1500 from DFAS and a monthly DIC award of $1254.19 from the VA, DFAS will deduct the $1254.19 DIC from the $1500 SBP and pay the remaining $245.81 to the annuitant. If the SBP is greater than the DIC award, DFAS will partially refund the premiums paid into the program during the service member's retirement for the portion of the SBP that is offset. If the DIC is greater than the SBP payment, SBP will be completely offset and DFAS will refund all basic spouse premiums paid into the program during the service member's retirement.
What initiates the SBP benefit and what will my beneficiary have to do?
Your designated beneficiary becomes eligible to receive SBP benefits on the day after your death. The first step a beneficiary must take to receive benefits is to report your death to DFAS. See page 20 for DFAS contact information.

What happens if there is a delay in reporting a retiree's death?
Late notification of a retiree's death may result in burdensome consequences, including delays in finalizing a member's account, payment of arrears of pay and the establishment of an SBP annuity. A retiree's entitlement to retired pay ends on the date he or she dies. Therefore, delayed reporting of a retiree's death may result in an overpayment of retired pay that will be collected from a financial institution, the member's estate, or from the annuitant if the annuitant is receiving retired pay.

[Source: Army Echoes | JUN - SEP 2016 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 16 thru 30 JUN 2016 | Twelve

"Keeping the Promise", "Fulfill their Trust" and "No one left behind" are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II (73,515) Korean War (7,841), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,627), 1991 Gulf War (5), and Libya (1). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home. For a listing of all personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to http://www.dpaa.mil/ and click on ‘Our Missing’. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

- Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420

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 remains of the following MIA/POW’s have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:

Korea

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial updates of four U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:
Army Master Sgt. Richard Davis, 30, of Black Lick, Pennsylvania, will be buried June 24 in Blairsville, Pennsylvania. In early November 1950, Davis was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, near Unsan, North Korea, when Chinese People’s Volunteer Forces attacked the regiment, and forced the unit to withdraw. Many soldiers became surrounded and attempted to escape and evade the enemy, but were captured and marched to POW camps. Davis was declared missing in action as a result of the battle that occurred between Nov. 1 and 2, 1950. In 1953, during the prisoner of war exchange historically known as “Operation Big Switch,” nine repatriated American soldiers reported that Davis was held at POW Camp 5 and died in February or March 1951. Additionally, Davis’ name appeared on a POW list compiled by the Chinese, dated April 8, 1951. Based on this information, a military review board amended Davis’ status to deceased in 1951.

Between 1990 and 1994, North Korea returned to the United States 208 boxes of commingled human remains, which when combined with remains recovered during joint recovery operations in North Korea between 1996 and 2005, included the remains of at least 600 U.S. servicemen who fought during the war. North Korean documents included in the repatriation indicated that some of the remains were recovered from the vicinity where Davis was believed to have die. To identify Davis’ remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched a niece and great niece, Y-Short Tandem Release DNA analysis, which matched a nephew and a sister; dental comparison analysis, which matched Davis’ records; and circumstantial evidence.

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Army Cpl. Charles B. Crofts, is scheduled to be buried July 9 in Shelley, Idaho. In late November 1950, Crofts was a member of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, deployed east of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea when it was engaged by an overwhelming number of Chinese forces. Crofts was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950.

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Army Sgt. Harold L. Curtis, died fighting in North Korea on Dec. 12, 1950. He was assigned to Company I, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. Burial details to come.

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The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial updates of one U.S. serviceman who had been previously listed as missing in action from Vietnam. Returning home for burial with full military honors is:

Army Sgt. 1st Class Alan L. Boyer, 22, of Chicago, will be buried June 22 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. On March 28, 1968, Boyer was a member of Spike Team Asp, an 11-man reconnaissance team assigned to Military Assistance Command, Vietnam - Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG), conducting a classified reconnaissance mission in Savannakhet Province, Laos, when they were attacked by enemy forces and...
requested extraction. Due to the rugged terrain, the U.S. Air Force CH-3 extraction helicopter was forced to use a ladder in an attempt to recover the team. The helicopter came under heavy fire, and after recovering seven of the Vietnamese team members, began pulling away. Reports indicated that Boyer began climbing the ladder, which broke as the helicopter pulled away, sending him falling to the ground. The other two Americans on the team and the remaining Vietnamese commando, while at one point were last seen on the ground, may also have started climbing the ladder when it broke. On April 1, 1968, a search team was inserted into the area, but found no evidence of the missing team members.

On Oct. 30, 1992, a joint U.S./Lao People’s Democratic Republic team traveled to Savannakhet Province to investigate the case. Two local Laotians reported seeing three men fall from a helicopter in 1968 when the rope ladder broke as they were climbing. The Laotians reported that local militia buried the bodies in graves near where they were found, but the men were unable to pinpoint a specific location. Multiple subsequent investigations and three excavations of reported burial areas failed to yield the remains of Boyer. The Defense POW/Missing Personnel office received remains from an American citizen who claimed to have received them from several unnamed Lao emigres. One of the remains was determined to be that of Boyer. To identify Boyer’s remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA analysis, which matched his mother and sister.

World War II

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial updates of none U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- Marine Pvt. Palmer S. Haraldson, 31, of Lincoln, Nebraska, will be buried June 22, in Ft. Dodge, Iowa. In November 1943, Haraldson was assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and Sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, but the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Haraldson died sometime on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. The battle of Tarawa was a huge victory for the U.S. military because the Gilbert Islands provided the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet a platform from which to launch assaults on the Marshall and Caroline Islands to advance their Central Pacific Campaign against Japan.

Marine Pfc. John F. Prince, 19, of New York, will be buried June 17 in Calverton, New York. In November 1943, Prince was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against
stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and Sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, but the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Prince died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Despite the heavy casualties suffered by U.S. forces, military success in the battle of Tarawa was a huge victory for the U.S. military because the Gilbert Islands provided the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet a platform from which to launch assaults on the Marshall and Caroline Islands to advance their Central Pacific Campaign against Japan.

In the immediate aftermath of the fighting on Tarawa, U.S. service members who died in the battle were buried in a number of battlefield cemeteries on the island. In 1946 and 1947, the 604th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company conducted remains recovery operations on Betio Island, but Haraldson’s and Prince’s remains were not recovered. On Feb. 28, 1949, a military review board declared Haraldson’s and Prince’s remains non-recoverable. In June 2015, a nongovernmental organization, History Flight, Inc., notified DPAA that they discovered a burial site on Betio Island and recovered the remains of what they believed were 35 U.S. Marines who fought during the battle in November 1943. The remains were turned over to DPAA in July 2015. To identify Haraldson’s remains, scientists from DPAA used laboratory analysis, including dental and anthropological comparison analysis, which matched Haraldson’s and Prince’s records, as well as circumstantial and material evidence. DPAA is grateful to History Flight, Inc. for this recovery mission.

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-- Army Cpl. Frederick G. Collins Jr., from California, died in a Japanese POW camp in the Philippines on Nov. 19, 1942. He was assigned to the 263rd Quartermaster Company, Quartermaster Corps. Burial details to come.

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-- Army Cpl. George G. Simmons, 25, of Hamilton, Montana, will be buried June 18 in Corvallis, Montana. On Dec. 8, 1941 while Simmons was assigned to Battery H, 60th Coast Artillery Regiment on the Philippine Island of Corregidor, Japanese forces invaded the Philippines. Simmons and his unit engaged in intense fighting until May 6, 1942, when the U.S. fortress of Corregidor fell. Thousands of American and Filipino service members were taken prisoner, including Simmons, who was taken by ship to Manila, then by train and eventually on foot to the Cabanatuan POW camp. More than 2,800 POWs perished in this camp during the remaining years of the war. On Nov. 19, 1942, 14 Americans, including Simmons, were reported to have died and were buried by their fellow prisoners in Common Grave 717 in Cabanatuan Camp #3 Cemetery.

Following the war, American Graves Registration Service (AGRS) personnel exhumed those buried at the Cabanatuan cemetery and relocated the remains to a temporary U.S. military cemetery near Manila. In late 1947, the
AGRS again exhumed the remains at the Manila cemetery in an attempt to identify them. Due to the circumstances of the POW deaths and burials, the extensive commingling, and the limited identification technologies of the time, all of the remains could not be individually identified. The unidentified remains were reburied as unknowns in the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial, a permanent American Battle Monuments Commission cemetery in the Philippines. In 2014, the Secretary of the Army granted permission to exhume the ten graves associated with Cabanatuan Common Grave 717, where Simmons was believed to have been buried. The remains were accessioned into the DPAA laboratory on Aug. 28, 2014. To identify Simmons’ remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used forensic identification tools, including mitochondrial DNA and Y-chromosome Short Tandem Repeat DNA analysis, which matched the DNA samples provided by two cousins; anthropological analysis; as well as historical and circumstantial evidence.

-- Army Cpl. **George P. Grifford**, 18, of Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich., will be buried June 27 in Arlington National Cemetery. On Nov. 30, 1950, Grifford was a member of the 37th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near Kunu-ri, North Korea. He was reported missing in action after the battle. In 1953, the Chinese reported that Grifford died Feb. 6, 1951, while being held prisoner in North Korea. Based on this information, a military review board amended his status to deceased. In 1954, United Nations and communist forces exchanged the remains of war dead in what came to be called “Operation Glory.” All remains recovered in Operation Glory were turned over to the Army’s Central Identification Unit for analysis. The remains they were unable to identify were interred as unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, known as the “Punchbowl.” In 1999, due to advances in technology, the Department of Defense began to re-examine records and concluded that the possibility for identification of some of these unknowns now existed. The remains designated X-14029 were exhumed on Feb. 25, 2015, so further analysis could be conducted. To identify Grifford’s remains, scientists from DPAA used circumstantial evidence, dental analysis, and chest radiographs, which matched Grifford’s records.


-- Marine Pvt. **Harry K. Tye** 20, of Gallagher, W.Va., was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. He reportedly died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Burial details to come.

-- Army Air Forces Flight Officer **Judson B. Baskett**, 26, of Harris County, Texas, went missing on Nov. 28, 1946, while piloting a C-47B Dakota aircraft with two other crewmen over Malaysia. He was assigned to the 1305th Army Air Base Unit. Burial details to come.
VA Cemeteries Update 14 ► Funding Bill’s Confederate Flag Ban Removed

A measure to bar confederate flags from cemeteries run by the Department of Veterans Affairs was removed from legislation passed by the House early 23 JUN. The flag ban was added to the VA funding bill in May by a vote of 265-159, with most Republicans voting against the ban. But Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) and Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) both supported the measure. Ryan was commended for allowing a vote on the controversial measure, but has since limited what amendments can be offered on the floor. In negotiations to reconcile the House funding measure with the Senate bill, the confederate flag provision was dropped. The bill passed the House 239-171. Of the eight House Republicans Ryan appointed to the conference committee that ultimately stripped the measure, four had voted against the ban on the floor. A GOP aide declined to comment on the internal deliberations that led to the removal of the ban. [Source: Politico | Matthew Nussbaum | June 23, 2016 ++]

VA Suicide Prevention Update 32 ► Hotline Unanswered Texts

Almost 30 percent of text messages sent as a test to a crisis hotline for suicidal veterans went unanswered, according to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report released 27 JUN. “Our tests of text messages revealed a
potential area of concern,” the report reads. The GAO report follows a scathing inspector general report from February that found some calls to the hotline were going to voicemail or didn’t receive immediate attention. The inspector general report prompted backlash in Congress, and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in turn promised to fix issues in answering calls to the hotline. The GAO report also addressed the wait time for callers and noted that the VA is working on its response times to those calling the hotline. But no similar attention has been placed on responding to text messages, it added.

The hotline received about 13,000 texts in 2014 and 16,000 in 2015, and VA officials told the GAO that 87 percent received a response within two minutes in both years. As part of its report, the agency sent 14 test text messages to the hotline. Of those, four went unanswered, for a rate of 28.6 percent of texts unanswered, though the GAO specified its sample is “nongeneralizable.” Of the rest of the texts, eight got responses within two minutes, and two got responses within five minutes. The texts sent by the agency were simple greetings such as “Hi” or “Hello.” That might have contributed to the slow responses, the GAO said, because hotline workers try to respond first to ones that indicate a crisis.

As to why some weren’t answered at all, the hotline’s text messaging service provider offered five possible reasons: incompatibilities between devices sending the texts messages and the software the VA uses to process the messages; software malfunctions that freeze the hotline’s text messaging interface; inaudible audio prompts used to alert responders of incoming texts; attempts to overload the system with a large number of texts; and incompatibilities between the web browsers used by the call center and the text messaging software. The VA told the GAO it relies on its text messaging service provider to monitor and test the text messaging system, the report says. But the provider said it doesn’t conduct any routine testing. “Without routinely testing its text messaging system, or ensuring that its provider tests the system, VA cannot ensure that it is identifying limitations with its text messaging service and resolving them to provide consistent, reliable service to veterans,” the GAO said.

The GAO recommended the VA test the hotline text messaging system, and the VA agreed. In a written response to the report, the VA said it plans to have a system to test the text messaging service in place by July. “The ability to proactively identify and correct errors with the Veterans Crisis Line (VLC) text messaging system will provide greater assurance that veterans in crisis are able to reach a trained VCL response in a timely fashion,” Gina Farrisee, deputy chief of staff at the VA, wrote in a response included in the report. “VCL appreciates GAO’s identifying areas of concern in our text messaging system and intends on utilizing these findings to make improvements.” In an emailed statement Monday, the VA reiterated that it is working to improve the hotline. “It is important for veterans and our key stakeholders to know that VA has already progressed forward in several improvements to VCL operations over the past two years” the statement said. “The goal of that progress is to make the VCL nothing short of a world class crisis response center.”

The statement later added: “The GAO report found, and we concur, that we have areas that we can improve in, and we are doing that now.” The VA also encouraged veterans in crisis or having thoughts of suicide or those who know a veteran who is to call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, or text to 838255, or chat online at https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/ChatTermsOfService.aspx. [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | June 27, 2016 ++]
VA VISTA Update 10 ➤ Commercial EHR System Will be Replacement

At a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing last week officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that they intend to purchase a commercial electronic health record system, rather than building one themselves, to replace the 40-year-old VistA system that they currently use. The head of the Veterans' Health Administration (VHA), VA Under Secretary for Health David Shulkin testified that VA officials have reached a consensus that “looking at a commercial product is probably the way to go,” and he added, “But we need to do this in a way that incorporates our ability to integrate with community providers and unique needs of veterans,” according to healthcare-informatics.com.

"The digital health platform will be a system of systems," Dr. David Shulkin wrote in his June 22 testimony. "It is not dependent on any particular [electronic health record], and VA can integrate new or existing resources into the system without sacrificing data interoperability. One of the digital health platform's defining features will be system-wide cloud integration, a marked improvement over the more than 130 instances of VistA that we have today."

Congress remains concerned about the status of efforts underway at the Department of Veterans Affairs to modernize their electronic health record system, the Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA). The hearing focused on examining progress and challenges with modernizing IT at the VA. Apparently many of the the IT systems the VA uses are 40 to 50 years old, and VA CIO LaVerne Council acknowledged that with regard to software development lifecycle, “40 to 50 years is ancient in the world of IT.” On the issue of interoperability with DoD's Electronic Health Record (EHR) initiative, Shulkin pointed out the VA’s joint legacy viewer currently has 138,000 VA users with more than 4.6 million veteran records available through it.

Shulkin stressed in his testimony that the $510 million in IT development funds given to VistA since 2014 will not have gone to waste since it has not yet been spent, "regardless of whether our path forward is to continue with VistA, a shift to a commercial EHR platform as DoD is doing, or some combination of both. He added, "We are looking at a transition plan that brings VA into a future state of where all of healthcare is going to need to be and that’s this issue of interoperability with community providers, the VA and DOD.” [Source: TREA Update | June 2, 2016 ++]

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VA Modernization ➤ Can It Be done? | Absolutely, Yes.

Secretary Bob McDonald spoke at the Brookings Institute on 20 JUN. The question headlining the event was “Can the Department of Veterans Affairs be modernized?” McDonald’s first comment was “Absolutely, yes.” McDonald’s message reiterated VA’s priorities and described the department’s pathway to success. He reminded the in-person and online audience of VA’s expansion and growth. Since he took office, VA has added four million square feet of physical space, 1200 new doctors, 2300 new nurses, extended evening hours and more weekend hours. “Not only can it be modernized—it’s already being modernized, and we’re already seeing the results,” he said. The transformation is happening in various ways. Some of the notable improvements include:

- A mobile app allowing Veterans to schedule, reschedule, or cancel appointments on their smartphone. It is currently being field tested and is expected to be fully available later this year.
- Veterans will be able to enroll for health care online or over the phone beginning this summer.
- VA is training employees on advanced business techniques like Lean Six Sigma, reducing waste within the organization.
- Employees are invited to identify and submit ideas for best practices to be evaluated and implemented where they’re needed most.
- Automated kiosks gathering feedback from the Veterans regarding their experience.
The modernization seems to be working. This past March, VA set a new record for completed appointments for one month: 5.3 million inside VA. That’s 730,000 more appointments than in March 2014. Last fiscal year, VA completed almost 57 million appointments inside VA and over 21 million in the community, which is nearly 5 million more appointments than in the previous fiscal year. In addition, recent surveys taken at our facilities have shown nearly 90 percent of Veterans are “satisfied or completely unsatisfied.” “So the idea that VA can’t be fixed, or that we’re not fixing it, is just nonsense. We are fixing it. We’re just not finished yet.” To hear his response refer to https://youtu.be/mX7Rx0lhTc1 [Source: VAntage Point | June 21, 2016 ++]

VA Disability Rating Update 01  ➤  1 + 1 Does Not Equal 2 With the VA

When it comes to service connected compensation claims, the VA takes the view that it should not add whole numbers together to get your rating but, instead, the VA takes percentages of percentages. It is as if the VA says if you are 10% disabled then you are 90% healthy. Therefore, the next rating is not added but is used to take a percentage of the ‘healthy’ 90%. So for a veteran with two 10 ratings the first ten percent rating would be 10% of 100, which is 10%. The second ten percent rating would be 10% of the 90% (again the ‘healthy’ percent of the veteran), which is 9%. So the combined rating would be 19%. The percentages are all rounded up or down to the nearest ten percent. Here, the rating would be rounded to 20%.

The combined rating system starts to work against a veteran when he gets closer to 100%. It gets harder and harder to get that higher rating, especially once a veteran is over 50%. For instance, if a veteran has two ratings of 50% and two of 20% the combined rating is 80%. So even though 50+50+20+20 equals 140 in real math; it is only 80 in VA math. The difference that it leads to in compensation is huge. According to the VA compensation rating table, a veteran, with no dependents, rated at 80% would receive $1,551.48 per month. A single veteran rated at 100%, on the other hand, would receive $2,903.83 per month. This veteran receiving a rating of 100%, which is only 20% greater than the 80% rating, gets almost 100% more money a month!

There are other factors that make the ratings change too. For example, if a veteran has a rating on each leg or each arm then those ratings are combined together and give the overall combined rating an extra boost. Also, if a veteran has too many ratings on one arm or leg then VA stops counting those ratings. Further, a veteran can step up to 100% through total disability due to individual unemployability. That veteran must show that he cannot work and that he meets a certain rating. [Source: Veteran News Now | Matt Hill | June 17, 2016 ++]

VA Privatization Update 05  ➤  Mouthpiece Lobbying Efforts Opposed

Some of the country's leading veterans' service organizations are pressing lawmakers to defy lobbying efforts and legislation that they say will damage veterans' health care. In a letter to Congress 20 JUN, The American Legion urged lawmakers not to listen to veterans' groups that are merely "mouthpieces" for organizations intent on privatizing
Department of Veterans Affairs health care, a move that it says will spawn "a host of billion-dollar federal contractors, private medical enterprises and cottage-industry opportunists."

Though the Legion does not identify the "mouthpieces," it appears to be taking aim at Concerned Veterans for America, a Koch brothers-linked group that would have the VA overseen by a non-profit government organization while moving more veterans' health care to the private sector. Those recommendations, pitched by CVA last year, are included in draft legislation that prompted the Veterans of Foreign Wars to issue an action alert last week warning members that "Politicians, pundits and politically-motivated organizations are using the national crisis in access to care at the Department of Veterans Affairs as justification to dismantle and privatize the VA health care system, with some even proposing that veterans be charged for their service-connected care. The VFW says no!"

The alert drew more than 6,000 responses over the weekend, according to the VFW, which joined with four other veterans groups on 20 JUN to request a meeting with Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), sponsor of the draft bill, the Caring for Our Heroes in the 21st Century Act. "We would like the opportunity to explain why we believe enactment of the legislation would have significant negative consequences for millions of veterans who choose, need or rely on VA for most or all of their health care," representatives of the VFW; The American Legion; Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America; and Paralyzed Veterans of America said in the letter to Rodgers.

In an email to Military.com, Concerned Veterans for America defended its positions on VA health care. "Concerned Veterans for America has developed a bipartisan and comprehensive set of reforms to the VA that would offer all eligible veterans the ability to choose where they get their health care, and which would give the existing VA health care system the tools to better respond to the changing needs of the veteran community in order to better serve those who have sacrificed for our country," CVA Vice President Dan Caldwell said. We have a made robust effort to work with all major veteran organizations in advancing meaningful reform to the VA -- including ones that are now smearing us and others who support meaningful reforms to the VA with false and debunked accusations," he said.

Veterans groups are loathe to criticize each other publicly regardless of what they disagree on, as evidenced by the Legion's letter, which never names CVA but makes clear it is criticizing a veterans organization that endorsed increasing the role of the private sector in VA health care, has political and industry ties and has accused other veterans' groups of being 'insiders.' Earlier this month, CVA went after the Paralyzed Veterans of America, accusing it of mischaracterizing Rodgers' proposed bill. "[PVA's] D.C. insider-leadership has made clear that not only will it defend the VA, and its own place in the Washington establishment, at all costs, but also that it is willing to lie and mislead veterans about the solutions being proposed to deliver more timely care to veterans," CVA said in a press statement.

The Legion, in its letter on Monday, said that "to suggest that the nation's largest veterans service organization, or any other major VSO, supports a strong and robust VA because we are somehow 'insiders' or uninformed is insulting and counterproductive." Garry Augustine, executive director of Disabled American Veterans, said he is in agreement with the Legion's letter. "We've been very vocal along with our fellow major VSOs in supporting and fixing the VA," he said. "We've made it very clear we need to fix the VA, but we are supportive of the VA health care system." The VFW at http://capwiz.com/vfw/issues/alert/?alertid=72925626 has provided a preformatted editable message for vets to send to their legislators on the subject. It is an easy and simple way for vets to contact their Members of Congress and let them know that VA health care reform must be based on the needs and preferences of veterans, not political rhetoric. [Source: Military.com | Bryant Jordan | June 20, 2016 ++]

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VA Privatization Update 06 ➤ Helena Vets Oppose Proposal

Protesters on 20 JUN stood along Euclid Avenue in Helena to demonstrate their anger and frustration over a federal proposal to privatize health care within the Veterans Affairs system. Standing near the roadway and clutching signs that read “Veterans for a Strong VA” and “Staff the VA,” nearly a dozen protesters in the event organized by the
American Federation of Government Employees heard a steady chorus of car horns honking in support. Gerry Swanke, AFGE national vice president for District 11, said the protest was in response to the Commission on Care Report, which is looking at altering the current structure of the VA and privatizing.

Swanke said presumptive GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump has called for closing down VA facilities altogether and allowing veterans to be treated through other medical services. However, VA hospitals specialize in providing care unique to veterans. “It’s the only place where they can go to talk to each other,” he said. In April, some members of the VA Commission on Care proposed drastic changes to the VA system, including privatizing some services. Swanke said it divided not only the committee, but the entire veterans’ community.

The Commission on Care was established after the 2014 Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act. It is examining veterans’ access to Department of Veterans Affairs health care and how best to organize the Veterans Health Administration, find health resources and deliver health care to veterans during the next 20 years. It reports to the president through the secretary of Veterans Affairs. Swanke said veterans groups oppose proposals to privatize health care, and he said businesses that surround VA facilities will also notice a downturn in businesses should VA facilities be closed. “It’s wrong to say ‘shut it down’ just because it’s broken,” Swanke said, adding efforts should be made to fix it.

Shawn “Mike” Garcia, public affairs officer with the VA at Fort Harrison, said officials there are communicating with union leadership and will continue to do so. “There is no higher priority for the VA Montana Health Care System than ensuring that veterans access the high quality care they have earned and deserve,” Garcia said via email. “VA Montana respects the union and shares their commitment to federal workers.” He added it is their constitutional right to protest as long they do so in public spaces. Al Ekblad, executive secretary of the Montana State AFL-CIO, was among those exercising that right. “I think every veteran in the country should be alarmed,” he said. Pat Collins, a veteran with 26 years in the service, called it “a travesty to say privatization is the answer.” Collins, 68, who served in the Marines and then the Navy said he was “appalled” the congressional delegation would even consider privatizing these services. “When I enlisted part of the message was ‘We’ll provide you with health care.’” [Source: Great Falls Tribune | Phil Drake | June 20, 2016 ++]

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**VA VOSB ► Veterans First Program Rule of Two Violation**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) promotes the maximum utilization of Veteran Owned Small Business (VOSB) as practicable. Under the Veterans First program, VA contract specialists conduct market research in an effort to seek out VOSB firms to meet their needs. VA is the only agency which sets a goal and which tracks participation of VOSBs. Additional information may be found at [www.VetBiz.gov](http://www.VetBiz.gov) and [www.va.gov/osdbu](http://www.va.gov/osdbu).
Last week the Supreme Court handed down a unanimous decision that said the Department of Veterans Affairs was violating the plain language of the law which said that the VA must set aside more contracts to be filled by veteran-owned small businesses. The law stated that competition for contracts should be limited to veteran-owned small businesses when the contracting officer concludes that at least two such businesses would bid on the contract and “the award can be made at a fair and reasonable price that offers best value to the United States.” This is known as the “Rule of Two.”

In Kingdomware v. United States, a small veteran-owned business called Kingdomware Technologies was denied the ability to bid on a contract to provide a service that sent emergency information to personnel at four VA medical centers. The Court of Federal Claims dismissed the suit, and a divided panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit affirmed the decision. Both courts felt that VA simply had to meet its goal of awarding 12 percent of all contracts to veteran-owned businesses, and that after that they were free to ignore the “Rule of Two.”

The Supreme Court was unanimous that the department has not fulfilled its obligation to steer more business to small companies owned by veterans or service-disabled veterans simply by meeting its annual goal – it was required by law to use the “Rule of Two” at all times. Justice Clarence Thomas wrote that the law says the department shall award contracts to the veteran businesses under the Rule of Two process. “Unlike the word ‘may,’ which implies discretion, the word ‘shall’ usually connotes a requirement,” he wrote. The decision is likely to help more veteran-owned businesses compete for the billions of dollars in contracts the department awards. [Source: TREA Washington Update | June 22, 2016 ++]

Gulf War Syndrome Update 39  ► Finding Evidence of Physical Disease

A single cause for Gulf War illnesses may never be found, but research is finding evidence of physical disease that could lead to better treatments, medical experts said during a forum in Washington on Operation Desert Storm exposures 16 JUN. Roughly a quarter of the nearly 700,000 troops who deployed for the 1990-91 Iraq conflict have ill-defined chronic symptoms such as joint pain, gastrointestinal disorders, fatigue, headaches, insomnia and memory problems.

Dr. James Baraniuk, an associate professor at Georgetown University who conducts imaging research on veterans with Gulf War illnesses, said his work and other studies are zeroing in on biological evidence, or biomarkers, in the brain that provide proof of damage and could lead to improved treatment. “What is going on with the brains of the Gulf War veterans, our neurotoxic exposed veterans? This research has the possibility to bring closure,” Baraniuk said during a symposium hosted by the Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence at Brookings and Georgetown University. According to Baraniuk, the research could have applications for understanding non-combat-related diseases like Alzheimer’s, chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia.

In many cases, the causes of Gulf War illnesses are unknown. An indeterminate number of troops were exposed to chemical weapons when coalition forces destroyed a storage facility at Khamisiya, Iraq, in March 1991. Other troops were given anthrax vaccines containing an additive, squalene that may have caused a reaction. Some research indicates that some troops had bad reactions to the anti-nerve agent pyridostigmine bromide or the antibiotic ciprofloxacin, which also was administered.

At the forum, researchers, veterans and Veterans Affairs medical leadership discussed how ill veterans are faring and what is being done to help them. Dr. Carolyn Clancy, VA deputy undersecretary for health for organizational excellence, said VA, which maintains a registry of Gulf War veterans, continues to support research on unexplained chronic multisymptom illnesses, focusing on specialized care for veterans. According to Clancy, VA provides comprehensive physical exams to all Persian Gulf War veterans on request and is conducting research on diagnosis and treatment. She said the VA, which spent $14 million on Gulf War illnesses research in 2015, must strike a balance
between finding a cause and researching treatments. “It’s clearly not a psychological condition, which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t have psychological impact,” Clancy said. “We are committed to ensuring our clinical research efforts take into account physical, psychological and social health factors.”

Recent discoveries at VA have led to improved treatment for insomnia, yielding better overall health outcomes for these veterans and improved understanding of the gastrointestinal symptoms, she added. Baraniuk said VA needed to ensure that its medical personnel understood Gulf War illnesses as a physical disease and also needed to improve its tracking of these veterans as they age. “Some of these veterans have lung cancers, brain cancers and yet there are no statistics on deaths. It seems like with a group that is in a registry, there should be a way of tracking people,” he said.

Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Colo., a Desert Storm veteran who served with a Marine Corps light armored reconnaissance unit and now sits on the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, said he believes Gulf War veterans are a forgotten group that deserves continued attention. “The research has been inappropriately directed to psychosomatic causes and it’s been of questionable quality … and there have been questionable decisions on disability claims at VA,” Coffman said. “We have a long ways to go. The fact that 25 years have elapsed and we are having this discussion today is not good.” [Source: Military Times | Patricia Kime | June 17, 2016++]

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**VA Medical Staff Update 01** ► **AMA Opposed to APRN Utilization Plan**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should solve its access-to-care crisis by taking steps to get more physicians to practice in the VA, rather than giving more authority to its advance-practice nurses, the American Medical Association said 15 JUN. "One thing I do think we need to do is make it a more viable choice for doctors to enter practice in the VA system," said American Academy of Pediatricians delegate Melissa J. Garretson, MD, of Fort Worth, Texas, at the AMA’s annual meeting here. "My answer to scope expansion [for VA nurses] is 'Hell no,' but the second answer is here's how we can make it so more physicians are leading the care teams and giving veterans the best care they can. That's what this resolution was really about." The resolution asks

- The AMA to work with the VA to "enhance its loan forgiveness efforts to further incentivize physician recruiting and retention, and improve patient access in VA facilities."
- The AMA to "call for an immediate change in the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program to allow physicians to receive immediate loan forgiveness when they practice in a VA facility."
- An additional part of the resolution -- proposed by Cyndi Yag-Howard, MD, of Naples, Fla., a dermatologist and delegate from the American Academy of Dermatology, and approved by the House of Delegates -- called on the AMA to work with the VA to minimize administrative barriers that "discourage or prevent non-VA physicians without compensation from volunteering their time to care for our veterans." Howard detailed her
own difficulties trying to volunteer her time in an advanced plastic surgery clinic for the VA. "I had to take two tests, get fingerprinted, have a physical exam, get bloodwork, go through a final vetting process and travel [2 1/2 hours each way] back and forth multiple times before -- 1 year later -- I could see my first patient," Howard said, noting that the clinic has since been closed for various reasons.

- The AMA to "advocate that the VA be funded to pay physicians at or above the prevailing rate in their communities" This was was referred to the AMA Board of Trustees for a report back.

The VA has proposed giving advanced-practice VA nurses independent practices to address problems with access to care in the VA system. That proposal has drawn a lot of criticism from physicians, and an AMA proposed resolution denouncing the VA's move was the subject of heated discussion at an AMA reference committee meeting on 12 JUN. "With the possible exception of maintenance of certification, there is no more important resolution before this house," said Michael Greene, MD, a family physician in Macon, Ga., and a member of the Georgia delegation. "It would completely change the landscape of medicine going forward if they institute it. If they do, I can guarantee you there will be people with pitchforks at the doors of statehouses saying, 'If it's good enough for the VA, it's good enough for you; we want independent practice.' This has got to have a stake driven into its heart." [Source: OPIA News Release | May 29, 2016 ++]

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Deputy Under Secretary for Health  ►  How To build A Better VA

Dr. Richard Stone knows a thing or two about massive reorganizations of government health care systems. As former Director of the Health Care Operations at the Department of Defense, Stone helped oversee the transition from the Military Health System to the new Defense Health Agency, which manages the medical care for the nation’s entire military. Now as the Department of Veterans Affairs’ new Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, Stone is again in a position of overseeing an organization experiencing massive changes. Stone talked to Senior Reporter Carten Cordell about the challenge of building a health system that can meet the need of the nation’s veterans.

Q. You've obviously been part of big government transitions in setting up DHA. Coming into this position, what challenges did you see that made it attractive?

A. So when I retired from the Department of Defense, we had just finished all the business process, reengineering and the business case analysis that drove the stand-up of the Defense Health Agency. And as we stood up the Defense Health Agency, it was clear to me at that point that very large, complex organizations can move forward in a very systematic manner in driving toward unified processes. Shared services is what we call them. The opportunity here at VA is this is a really very good system from a quality standpoint, but it's highly decentralized in its operation. There are 140 separate operating sites that do a great job, but they're operating independently. Therefore, there is tremendous variance in what we're delivering. And the opportunity here is to really drive toward single standardization. It's what we call the operating company model, moving from this very decentralized to a more centralized approach. Now that doesn't mean there's not creativity and innovation in the workplace, you still have those. You need that in medicine to
move forward. But the real opportunity, the real challenge here is can you bring this together as a fully integrated health care system delivering high-quality services and meeting the needs of our veteran population.

The other challenge here is sheer growth. This is one of the few health care systems that's growing amazingly rapidly, partly because of the aging of our veteran population. Our Vietnam veterans are getting older. Because of the war that's been going on for all these years, we've had a tremendous increase, more than two and a half million additional veterans that are now seeking care from us. And those veterans have really complex health care problems. The average veteran who is on disability has nine to 13 disabling conditions. So these are very complex patients, an increasing number of patients, challenging a system.

Q. With VistA, the VA’s electronic health records system, what is the challenge of designing it to meet users’ needs?

A. So the VistA system was one of the original, if not the original, electronic medical record. The visionaries back in the 1980s and late 1970s that stood up the VistA system really were ahead of the rest of American medicine and developed this electronic medical records system that really has served us so well for these 40 years. But as you are aware from your own computer, the changes are happening so quickly that we really are beginning to outgrow the VistA system. And it is taking a fair amount of assets to keep that old system running and to really update it to the level we need. It needs to be updated in cybersecurity. It needs to be updated in our ability to schedule appointments for patients.

It’s one of the struggles we're having because we do 160,000 patients and visits a day. We have just released, or are actively releasing, the VistA scheduling enhancement or VSE. That enhancement will help our 25,000 schedulers work more efficiently in scheduling veterans’ needs. Now there's been lots of discussion upon whether that platform, the VistA platform, could lead us into the future. That's a decision that we have not made yet, but is one that we are taking a very serious look at: What does this look like? What really intrigues us is should medical care be moving to a platform in which we can download apps? And maybe instead of 140 or a thousand different fieldings of a medical record system, we could have an app that is downloaded. Frankly, industry is not there yet. If you look at most of the major vendors of electronic medical records, they’re in more of a traditional viewpoint.

We are actively in discussions, strategically here, as well as looking out at industry, trying to see where this is going. And I think within the next few months you'll begin to see some decisions and dialogue occurring. I think some of that dialogue occurred in testimony [on April 14] before the [House Veterans Affairs health subcommittee] where the honorable LaVerne Council actually had some discussion of the fact that we continue to look to try and make the right decision.

Q. Speaking of Ms. Council, she mentioned that VistA had achieved interoperability with DoD’s Defense Healthcare Management Systems Modernization (DHMSM) in April, which was a big goal. Given that the information is read-only, but it is shareable, what are the next steps for the development of the two systems?

A. So look, we need to celebrate just a bit and be very proud of the fact that for the first time in American medicine, we've been able to get major organizations to show their data to each other. And that's to the benefit of our active-duty service members as well as our veterans. As we go through that process, the ability to see each other's data is accelerating at an extraordinary rate. Well over a million records between the two departments have been accessed and people are working through, but that's passive seeing of data. So I can look back at your last five visits in Department of Defense. I can see what was done. It helps me not repeat things, helps me understand what your history is, but it's not live interoperability.

We have a lifetime commitment to our veterans. They move. So whether they're being cared for in Long Island or in Phoenix or San Diego or Florida, our ability to see those records is one of the challenges that we've had, even within our own system. So the next thing we would like to do is you might be traveling in Phoenix and need health care. Wouldn't it be great if you could call your provider or interact, in some manner, with your provider back in Long Island? And they could then interact with the records system in this other site. You ask about what's the next phase of
interoperability? It's a live interaction to facilitate health care. It's not just passive viewing. True interoperability means that wherever you're at, you can get care from your provider remotely.

**Q.** You mentioned the next steps, the Senate appropriations committee just approved funding [on April 13] for services not only related to EHR, but then also telehealth services as well. This is obviously something that's going to be a big benefit in the development of those procedures.

**A.** It is because there are areas of the country where we have trouble recruiting various professionals. Let me give you the example of Hepatitis C. Hepatitis C is a highly complex disease to treat, and there's too few hepatitis experts in this country. Therefore our ability to use telemedicine — teleconsultation with a primary care doctor in one part of the country with a Hepatitis expert or another — is something we need to be able to do.

Today we're doing over 2 million telemedicine consultations a year. And so it's an extraordinary advance and brings you the ability that if your optometrist is seeing something in the retina of your eye, the ability to transmit the image of the retina to a retina specialist in another part of the country is the advantage of a system like ours. That we can get you a consultation while you're sitting right in the chair with the optometrist. So tele-ophthalmology, tele-ICU services where we can consult with the various pulmonary and critical care specialists — even when you're in a small hospital remotely — are things that we can do that frankly is one of the reasons I came to the VA. We have the ability to do things that no one else can do.

**Q.** Interoperability with the DoD is a big hurdle to have jumped. Is interoperability with private networks the next challenge?

**A.** It is and there's a there's a project called the Sequoia Project that has brought hundreds of hospitals together. We today have access to about 25 percent of America’s commercial hospitals, and we will raise that to about 50 percent, so that if you get a portion of your care out in the commercial space and a portion of your care inside the VA, [you have] the ability to integrate and see that in real time and not wait for reports.

You know in my 30-plus years of medical practice, I would send somebody to a specialist but then I'd have to wait sometimes weeks to get a report back. Or I would have to get on the phone and call and say, “Well what did you see?” And then it was simply telephonic. There was no lab reports with it and no sort of formal report that I could really work from. The ability to see in real time is something that we have to be able to reach into the commercial space to do. And we think that they'll be a balance between the Department of Defense, our academic partners in the commercial hospitals, the rural hospitals in America as well as our 140 hospitals and 1,000 outpatient clinics.

**Q.** Can you talk about why the two systems are better than one, and what advantages the VistA system working with DHMSM system provide?

**A.** So I can't tell you why they're better than one. And I would say to you that what we try to do is overcome the shortcomings of having one organization going one road and another organization going another. But that's not dissimilar to the fact that we deal with eight or 10 different medical record systems out in the commercial space. And we don't expect there to be a single federal system that everybody has to be on the same.

The [Joint Legacy Viewer], that's what we're able to see all these different record systems in. Commercial space, DoD's system and our VistA system are on a single viewer. Now we're actually enhancing that, we have an advanced system called the [Enterprise Health Management Program] system. And that enhanced viewer will begin to allow us to move to that interaction I talked about earlier. What our thought is is that we'll never bring everybody together in America into a single system. We must overlay that with a viewer that makes it easy for our providers. Our providers happen to be very happy with the VistA system. They've grown up with that, they've been using it. Our schedulers are not so excited. But our ability to use that system is good, but we're trying to overlay it with the type of viewer that we think may be the model for the rest of America so that it's almost transparent to our providers whatever electronic record system we're on.
Now, the electronic record system from a technical standpoint has to be cyber-secure. It has to operate in the manner that I talked about earlier with our ability to download apps and really move to a platform-based model. But I think if we make it transparent to our providers, we'll continue to improve their satisfaction with using these tools.

Q. Obviously, there’s a lot of cooperation between [VA and DoD] and also the Department of Health and Human Services in defining that interoperability and working those pieces together.

A. There is, but you know this whole entire industry, the health care industry, is a long way from what you and I are used to in like the banking industry. You know, the banking industry agreed on common ways of storing data. So you can now walk into your gas station, walk up to a little portal, and type in a few numbers with your card and actually connect to your bank. So for many of us, we never end up going into a bank anymore because we do it electronically.

Health care in America has not reached the point of even a common patient identifier. And so we're a long way from where some other industries are in common data storage and utilization of data. And as long as you have that, you're going to have to overlay it was something else. Now a lot of people would like to think that DoD and VA will solve all of their problems by being on a common platform. But I said to you earlier that we buy 60,000 visits a day out in the commercial space for the benefit of our veterans. We have to be able to see that data. It won't be overcome even if DoD and we agree, and we may in the future. We have not made that decision yet.

[Source: Federal Times | Carten Cordell | June 17, 2016 ++]

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**VA Hospitals Update 11** ► Play Spaces for Kids Planned Nationwide

The VA has partnered with the nonprofit organization "KaBOOM!" in an effort to create play spaces for young children visiting family members at VA hospitals. The initiative will have KaBOOM! provide play spaces to hospitals across the country. "When veterans are dealing with a serious illness or injury, it can be incredibly stressful for their families, especially those with young children," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald. "Our partnership with KaBOOM! will enable us to use the simple art of play to help keep the children and families of veterans happy and healthy."

The VA has been the center of several controversial issues over the last two years, including the manipulation of data showing how long veterans are waiting for care, the inability to fire corrupt and negligent officials and hundreds of millions of dollars on construction contracts. However, the VA said the playground initiative is being sponsored by CarMax, which has made a "multi-million dollar commitment" to build four full-scale playgrounds and provide 30 grants for KaBOOM!'s "Imagination Playgrounds" across the country. Together, the groups will determine which VA sites have the greatest need for play areas, and they have already identified VA Medical Centers and VA Fisher Houses as ideal potential locations. "Through our partnership VA, together we are honoring and showing commitment to
Veterans and military families by encouraging play, particularly for kids who need it most,” said KaBOOM! CEO James Siegal. [Source: Washington Examiner | Gabriella Ciuffetelli | 6/14/16 ++]

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**Vet Service Dogs Update 18** ➤ VA Will Not Furnish for PTSD Cases

Despite such anecdotal evidence - and research that shows how dogs help veterans cope with post-traumatic stress - the Veterans Health Administration does not cover the thousands of dollars it costs to get and train a service dog. Critics blame the agency’s bureaucracy and a bungled study. As a result, help is unaffordable to many, despite government estimates that 22 veterans kill themselves every day and research that connects thoughts of suicide with the post-traumatic stress suffered by nearly a third of veterans who've served since Sept. 11, 2001.

In a 2010 budget bill, Congress directed the Department of Veterans Affairs to study the use of service dogs. The study was supposed to have been finished in 2014, but it was suspended when dogs the agency got from a contractor had behavior problems and bit two children. The agency redesigned the $12 million study, which is not expected to be finished until next year, Dr. Michael Fallon, the VA’s chief veterinarian, told a House committee in April. A decision on covering costs of dogs for veterans with mental disorders won't be made until at least the following year. The VA now helps pay for some service dogs, but only those used by veterans with vision and other physical problems.

Critics of the agency, including Rep. Ron DeSantis (R-FL), chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform’s national security subcommittee, say it's wasting time. “Veterans cannot wait until 2018. The problem of veteran suicides is too urgent,” DeSantis, a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Naval Reserve, said during the April hearing. DeSantis has introduced the Puppies Assisting Wounded Service Members Act, the "PAWS Act," to create a $10 million project setting aside up to $27,000 per dog for veterans diagnosed with the most severe forms of PTSD. Money would come out of a Veterans Affairs budget for things like convention planning and office decor. The House Veterans Affairs committee is scheduled to hear the bill next week. The project will “ensure our veterans have access to the potentially life-saving treatment of a service dog, as well as commissioning a study to evaluate the effectiveness of service dogs in treating post-traumatic stress,” said Kate Rosario, a spokeswoman for Rep. Keith Rothfus (R-PA) in an email. Rothfus is co-sponsoring the bill.

Rory Diamond, executive director of K9s for Warriors, a Florida nonprofit that provides 192 veterans a year with service dogs, said his group has helped veterans reduce medications, handle anxiety and face fewer night terrors or thoughts of suicide. “Right now is the time to act - not after the VA gets its act together but right now,” Diamond said. Research also shows the dogs’ usefulness. Early findings of a study by the Center for the Human-Animal Bond at Purdue University show service dogs reduce the severity of PTSD among veterans, including the frequency of night terrors and anxiety attacks. Emmanuel Bernadin said the dog “Bronze” he got through K9s for Warriors doesn't make PTSD go away but helps him cope. Bernadin has had suicidal thoughts five or six times, once while still serving in
Afghanistan, and the rest as he’s tried to deal with what he went through there. Bronze - as in Bronze medal - goes with the El Paso, Texas, man wherever he goes. He said the French mastiff is so essential to his coping with feelings of guilt and anger, at times he's chosen to be homeless in order to afford its food.

The memory of one incident from 2011 makes him break down. Bernadin, who'd enlisted in the U.S. Navy but volunteered to serve in the Army under a program to bolster forces in Afghanistan, was assigned to relieve an officer at another camp who was going on leave. He caught a transport earlier than scheduled to get there early and learn how the other unit did things. His original ride - the truck he was supposed to be on - was blown up. Everyone on it was killed. Bernadin said he still wonders about the soldier was given his seat. Once buoyed by a sense of purpose and "fighting for freedom" in Afghanistan, Bernadin, who is African American, returned home to unemployment and racial strife over the killings of Trayvon Martin by a neighborhood watch volunteer in Florida and Eric Garner by police in Staten Island, New York. His marriage ended. Co-workers mocked him for hitting the ground when air conditioners made loud noises.

Bernadin said he recalled videos shown to service members before their discharge, warning of opioid abuse and homelessness. They seemed like visions of his future. Rather than finding a VA medical system that honored his service, he encountered long waits and some staff who didn’t seem to care. In a phone interview, his voice rose amid the sound of his pounding in the background as he described VA staff who tried to take away his dog during one appointment because the doctor was allergic. Telling the story, he eventually broke down in tears. Bernadin said Bronze helps him get out of the house and function. Like other dogs trained by K9s for Warriors, it responds to a command to sit facing behind him -- “We say, 'He's got my six,'” -- while he uses an ATM. Bronze saves him the anxiety of having someone walk up from behind. Without Bronze, Bernadin said he would have killed himself. So would a lot of other veterans without their dogs. “There’d be a lot more veterans on their backs,” he said. [Source: CNHI Washington Reporter | Kery Murakami | Jun 15, 2016 ++]

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VA Accountability Update 33  ►  Removal Authority Rules to Reset

Veterans Affairs officials will stop using streamlined disciplinary powers to punish senior department executives after another legal challenge to the congressionally backed process, Capitol Hill officials said 17 JUN. The move all but resets VA accountability rules to two years ago, when the expedited removal authority was approved by lawmakers in the wake of the department’s wait times scandal. It also provides new urgency for a series of VA-related accountability bills stalled in Congress, given elected officials’ belief that department leaders have not been aggressive enough in dealing with misbehavior and possible criminal activity among VA employees. But critics see the move as a betrayal by VA officials of their promise to clean up the department.

- Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson, R-GA) called the department’s decision infuriating. “It is outrageous and unconscionable that the VA is choosing to blatantly ignore all of the accountability reforms set in place by the Veterans Choice Act,” he said. “Two years ago, veterans were forced to wait far too long for care because of incompetent executives. Since then, we’ve seen scandal after scandal emerge at the department. “While some progress has been made to hold bad actors accountable, there is still a long way to go and choosing to ignore these key reforms is a slap in the face to our veterans.”
- “Everyone knows VA isn’t very good at disciplining employees, but this decision calls into question whether department leaders are even interested in doing so,” House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller, R-Fla., said in a statement. “VA is a place where egregious employee behavior, such as armed robbery participation and wait-time manipulation, is routinely tolerated. This decision underscores the urgent need for civil-service reform across the federal government.”
- Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, attacked VA leaders for “unilaterally refusing to enforce key elements” of congressionally backed reforms.
VA leaders have long complained about the value of the new disciplinary powers, noting that as written they apply only to a small segment of department employees — senior executives — and create problematic legal questions about appeals. Only a few individuals have been disciplined under the rules, and the Merit Systems Protection Board has overturned proposed punishment in several other cases. Earlier this month, U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch said the new law speeding up executive firings is unconstitutional because it does not afford those workers proper appeals. The VA decision to dump the entire accountability process passed in 2014 comes as a direct result of that Justice Department stance. Isakson said the announcement should be seen as a call for Congress to act quickly on new legislation. “I am not going to stand by and watch the VA continue to look the other way while another one of its own gets away with egregious misconduct at the expense of veterans’ access to quality care and services,” he said.

Earlier this year Isakson introduced a sweeping veterans reform measure which includes new disciplinary rules, including a provision to requiring all appeals by executives to be heard by the VA secretary, and not an outside arbiter. It would also grant other expedited firing and hiring authorities for more VA employees, and shorten the appeals process for every VA worker. VA leaders have voiced support for the bill. Federal union officials have objected to the provisions as too harsh, while congressional critics have labeled the plan too lenient. Isakson had hoped to move the measure through his chamber last month, but the legislation has remained stalled.

House lawmakers last summer passed a new VA accountability act along party lines, with revised whistleblower protections and different appeals provisions. That legislation has yet to move in the Senate. VA leaders have repeatedly stated that they take disciplinary issues seriously, but also don’t see demotions and dismissals as the only way to improve service throughout the department. Earlier this year, VA Secretary Bob McDonald told lawmakers that more than 2,600 department employees have been dismissed since he assumed office in August 2014, but lawmakers have questioned whether that figure shows an increase in accountability or normal turnover for the 300,000-plus-person bureaucracy. [Source: Military Times | Leo Shane | June 17, 2016++]

VA Accountability Update 34 ➤ Why Leadership Removal Rules Decision

Veterans Affairs officials insist their decision to dump fast-track firing powers over concerns about their constitutionality won’t hurt department accountability, but critics see it as a major misstep. Last week, VA leaders informed Congress they will no longer use new procedures put in place by lawmakers in August 2014 to handle discipline for senior executives, after the Department of Justice called them unconstitutional. In a statement 17 JUN, VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson said moving ahead with the process would be “irresponsible” given those legal questions, and “would only hinder VA’s ability to hold senior officials accountable who have engaged in wrongdoing.”

On 20 JUN, VA Secretary Bob McDonald told audience members at a Brookings Institution event that the process had only been used for nine executives in the last two years. “What we don’t want to do is have a disciplinary process
go on and then have it overturned later for a technicality, because the law is overturned,” he said. “We’re using the old procedure. The old procedure is fine. Frankly, the new procedure just affects the amount of time for appeals. It really didn’t affect the process all that much.”

The long-term solution to VA’s accountability problems, McDonald said, is Isakson’s Veterans First Act, a sweeping measure that includes new employment rules for a host of VA employees. Among other provisions, the bill would require all appeals by executives to be heard by the VA secretary instead of an outside arbiter, grant expedited firing and hiring authorities, and shorten the appeals process for every VA worker. “The provisions that [the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee] have put in the bill, VA supports,” McDonald said. “That’s the ultimate answer. So I’m hoping that will be passed soon.” That measure has been stalled in the Senate for the last month. House lawmakers have offered their own revised accountability measures, but several of them rely on the same basic framework as the now-challenged 2014 bill. [Source: Military Times | Leo Shane | June 20, 2016 ++]

VA In Vitro Fertilization Update 09 ► Family Research Council Against

A prominent conservative group hopes to derail a congressional effort to give wounded veterans access to fertility services through the VA, saying it could lead to human cloning and three-parent embryos. The Washington, D.C. based Family Research Council sent an email last week to congressional staff working on the final Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill, voicing opposition to a provision that would require the Veterans Affairs Department to cover fertility services for former troops with injuries that cause infertility. In the email, an FRC representative called the language in the Senate bill, penned by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) “terrible,” adding that it was “broad enough to cover reproductive technologies from IVF to human cloning to 3-parent embryos.” “It does not have any restrictions on whether treatment would include the creation of human embryos, the storage of or freezing of human embryos or whether and how embryos that are left over would be destroyed,” according to the correspondence.

Family Research Council President Tony Perkins

Roughly 1,800 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans received injuries to their groins, genitalia or spinal cords that make it difficult to have children without medical assistance, and while the Defense Department provides some advanced fertility treatments to these service members while they are on active duty, the VA is barred by law from doing so. Since 2012, Murray has pressed her fellow lawmakers to cover fertility services for these veterans, most recently in a rider to the fiscal 2017 VA funding bill. In the email, the FRC said the Murray provision “violates principles … which pro-lifers have fought to maintain for years.”

As an alternative, the organization voiced support for a bill offered by Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee that would provide $20,000 in two separate payments for injured troops to use for any need, including to starting a family. "We are not opposed to fertility treatments, generally. Our concern is how the language is in the Murray bill that could lead to destroying embryos, and we have concerns about this," said David Christensen. FRC vice president for government relations. "The Miller language is saying they could use the money for adoption or however they want to spend it." Critics, including Murray, say $20,000 would barely cover one round of in vitro fertilization for a couple.
Veterans and affected family members have been on Capitol Hill since May meeting with lawmakers in support of Murray's legislation. Some, like retired Army Staff Sgt. Matt Keil and his wife Tracy, spent more than $30,000 out of pocket to have children. Matt Keil was paralyzed by an Iraqi sniper's bullet in 2007. Tracy Keil said she understands why some oppose fertility services for religious reasons. But, she added, the individual decision should be left to a family. "We had to have our own coming-to-Jesus moment," Tracy Keil said. "For us, our desire to have a family was stronger than concern for what would happen to the embryos. That’s not anyone else’s business,” Keil said. Crystal Black and her fiance, Army Cpl. Tyler Wilson, said they decided they would donate any embryos that they didn't use. But after starting with 19 eggs, they are down to their last few after an attempt to get pregnant. "You just never know how it will work out," Black said. [Source: Military Times | Patricia Kime, | June 20, 2016 ++]

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VA Claims Backlog Update 154 ► Appeals Tsunami Looming

In the fast-track effort to reduce the nation’s backlog of veterans disability claims, Nevada Rep. Dina Titus predicted in August that the Department of Veterans Affairs would “soon be facing an appeals tsunami.” On 23 JUN, as the flood of appeals loomed with an estimated 460,000 cases stuck in the backlog, the House Veterans Affairs Committee held a hearing on Titus’ proposal to fix the problem with a bill she has sponsored, the VA Appeals Modernization Act of 2016. The bill aims to reform how Veterans Affairs processes appeals on rejected claims for service-connected disabilities, saving the VA more than $2.6 billion while decreasing the average wait time of more than two years. “We must not miss this opportunity to reform an outdated and over-complicated system that’s only had one major update since it was first developed in 1933,” Titus, D-Nev., a committee member since 2013, said in a statement after the hearing.

As the VA chipped away at the initial claims backlog that stood at 75,000 almost a year ago — a significant reduction since the peak of more than 600,000 in 2013 — the number of claims that were denied went up, causing an increase in the number of veterans appealing those denials. “As we focused our efforts on the claims, I pointed out that the appeals backlog would likely grow. Since 2012, we’ve seen just that,” she said Thursday. “The appeals backlog has skyrocketed to almost 500,000, causing significant wait times for veterans.” She said the current system offers no clear pathway for resolving an appeal, but if her bill is enacted there will be three different routes for veterans to pursue under a format that leads to conclusions in their cases. Under her proposal, a veteran could either go directly to the Board of Veterans Appeals; select an option to present new evidence to the Veterans Benefits Administration; or use the same evidence from the initial claim for the administration to review. The committee has yet to determine when it will schedule a vote on the bill. [Source: Las Vegas Review-Journal | Keith Rogers | June 23, 2016 ++]
Guam — A businessman has agreed to repay the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for bogus enrollments of several military veterans with disabilities in computer classes, court documents show. Manoucher Sabeti, the owner of New Horizons, a computer learning business, and computer store ComPacific, has made an initial repayment of $90,000, according to a motion filed by Assistant U.S. Attorney Mikel Schwab. Schwab filed a request in federal court 10 JUN to “unseal,” or open, the case for public view. The complaint against Sabeti was filed 9 JUN, but the defendant initially asked for the court documents to be kept confidential until he finalized arrangements for funds with a financial institution to repay the VA, court documents state. The VA “lost $73,578.55 for fictitious enrollments in computer classes” that were attributed to eight veterans.

The veterans did enroll in certain classes, but the VA was billed for additional classes and class materials that the former service members didn’t actually enroll in, according to the complaint. The veterans have military service-related disabilities and the VA program paid for their information technology classes and class materials to help them land jobs. A VA Office of Inspector General Investigation found that ComPacific charged the VA for textbooks that were not received by veterans and New Horizons charged Baker University for classes that were not taken by veterans, the complaint alleges. New Horizons had a contract with Baker University to provide veterans with college credits for successfully completed computer courses. The complaint states 85 percent of the payments from the VA to Baker University were paid out to New Horizons. [Source: Pacific Daily News | Gaynor Dumatol Daleno | June 14, 2016 ++]

Auburn, ME — A woman pleaded guilty to stealing prescription medications being sent to veterans during a hearing 7 JUN in U.S. District Court. Jennifer Leighton, 37, was employed by United Parcel Service as a customer care representative in the company’s Auburn sorting facility between July and September 2015, according to court documents. During that period, Leighton stole at least six packages containing prescription narcotic medications that had been shipped via UPS from the Veterans Administration medical facility in Togus to outpatient veteran clients. Leighton, who was charged with theft from interstate shipments of goods, faces up to three years in prison and a fine of up to $250,000. She will be sentenced after the completion of a presentence investigation report by the U.S. Probation Office. The investigation that led to the guilty plea was conducted by the Criminal Investigations Division of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General. [Source: Bangor Daily News | Dawn Gagnon | June 14, 2016 ++]

Chelmsford, Mass — David Gorski who won $100 million in federal construction contracts by saying that his construction company was owned by disabled veterans was found guilty of fraud by a federal jury in Boston 15 JUN. Prosecutors said he recruited two veterans to stand in as the majority owners and top executives of his construction firm so it could win federal contracts that give preference to veteran-owned companies. In reality, prosecutors said, Gorski controlled Legion Construction as it won numerous Army, Navy and US Department of Veterans Affairs contracts from 2006 to 2010. Gorski paid himself salaries as high as $356,000, according to court documents, and also
paid his wife — who worked full-time for the town of Chelmsford — $400 a week. Gorski was convicted of four counts of wire fraud and one count of conspiracy to defraud the government. He is scheduled to be sentenced in September, and could face up to 25 years in prison.

Tracy Miner, a defense attorney who represented Gorski, said her client was let down by others’ bad advice. “This is one of the rare times when the jury got it wrong,” Miner said in a statement. “The undisputed evidence showed that he consulted outside accountants and lawyers throughout and that nobody ever advised him to do anything differently.”

The figurehead president of Legion was Joseph Steen, an infirm Korean War veteran whom prosecutors said spent most of his time sleeping or watching television. Another disabled veteran, Peter Ianuzzi, who served as a Marine in the 1990s was brought aboard later and worked for the company but did not run it. Government regulations mandate that a “Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business” must be majority-owned and managed by veterans who became disabled while serving in the military to receive preferential awards of federal contracts.

Increased federal oversight of the program prompted Gorski to restructure his company twice, eventually handing over 51 percent of its stock to Ianuzzi. But he sought to retain his control over the firm and his high pay, prosecutors alleged, and wrote to his personal attorney Elizabeth Schwartz seeking advice on how to do so. “As the founder and financial backer of this company as well as the primary managing partner, I would like to maintain executive rights to daily decision making which is somewhat [tricky] under the new requirements,” Gorski wrote in an e-mail to Schwartz, which was submitted as evidence after an appeals court panel ruled that his communications with various lawyers was part of his fraudulent scheme and therefore not privileged. A spokeswoman for Mintz Levin emphasized that the court found no wrongdoing by the firm. “Lawyers, as other outside professionals, must rely on the veracity of the information provided to them by their clients in preparing legal documents regarding the client’s own past actions.”

[Source: Boston Globe | Dan Adams | June 17, 2016 ++]

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**Washington Cnty, OR** — Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum today announced 25 MAY that Lisa Bayer Day, a Washington County resident and nationally certified professional fiduciary, was convicted of five counts of Criminal Mistreatment in the First Degree, four counts of Aggravated Theft in the First Degree, one count of Theft in the First Degree, one count of Money Laundering and one count of Personal Income Tax Evasion. Washington County Circuit Court Judge Charles Bailey sentenced Bayer Day to 48 months in prison and ordered her to pay more than $117,000 in restitution to the victims. Between November 2009 and March 2015, 26 Oregonians—including many disabled veterans—fell victim to Bayer Day. Professional fiduciaries are appointed to make legal and financial decisions for another person who is unable to make those decisions on their own. These professionals assume important duties and responsibilities required by the laws of the state, including where the individual lives, how his or her money is spent, etc. Often these individuals have become incapacitated through age or disability. “We rely on professional fiduciaries to provide care for Oregon’s most vulnerable citizens, and to be trustworthy, honest, and act in good faith. Oregon DOJ’s Medicaid Fraud Unit and newly created Elder Abuse Unit will continue to aggressively prosecute fiduciaries who victimize vulnerable elder and disabled Oregonians," said Attorney General Rosenblum.

Here’s how she victimized the 26 Oregonians before a watchful Adult Protective Service worker called the Oregon Attorney General’s Medicaid Fraud Unit:

- Checks made out to Bayer Day’s clients and third parties — like long-term care facilities and ambulance companies — were repeatedly intercepted by Bayer Day and deposited into her own personal bank account;
- Client funds were repeatedly used by Bayer Day to pay the bills of others;
• Bayer Day used $30,000 of client funds to pay court-ordered restitution to the estates of two aging clients that Bayer Day defrauded in Grant County;
• When clients died, Bayer Day did not give the money to the next of kin as required by law, but instead diverted those funds to her own personal bank account;
• Bayer Day repeatedly paid her husband’s company thousands of dollars to clean out the homes of clients who had moved to long-term care facilities, but no such service was ever provided;
• Despite accruing significant sums of money, Bayer Day failed to pay any of her Oregon taxes.

In addition to prison and restitution, Bayer Day was stripped of her guardianship certifications. [Source: http://www.doj.state.or.us/releases/Pages/2016/rel052516.aspx | May 25, 2016 ++

Ashville, NC — Federal court proceedings began 20 JUN for a Buncombe County woman who allegedly defrauded the Charles George Veteran Affairs Medical Center of more than $5,000, according to an indictment. Pamela Smith claimed reimbursements for travel costs she did not incur in 2011 and 2012, according to the indictment filed June 7 in United States District Court. Veterans with service-connect disabilities may claim reimbursements for mileage driven between their residence and the VA medical facility, according to the indictment. However, Smith said she was traveling from Lenoir when she was actually traveling from Asheville and Black Mountain, and by fictitiously increasing the mileage she drove, she obtained $5,318.96 in reimbursements, according to the indictment. The maximum sentence for this charge is five years in prison and a fine. The Monday court date was Smith's initial appearance.

VAMC Dayton, OH — The former director of the Cleveland and Dayton VA Medical Center was sentenced to 57 months in prison for working as a consultant for and taking money and other things of value from a design firm bidding on VA jobs and sharing confidential information about construction projects while still employed by the VA, law enforcement officials said. William D. Montague, 63, of Brecksville, previously pleaded guilty to 64 counts, including Hobbs Act conspiracy, conspiracy to commit honest services mail fraud, violating the Hobbs Act, money laundering, multiple counts of wire fraud, mail fraud, disclosing public contract information, and other charges. Montague has paid approximately $390,000 in restitution and forfeiture. [Source: DoJ Northern District of Ohio | U.S. Attorney’s Office | June 10, 2016 ++]

VAMC’s, CA — On 14 JUN, Justin Tolentino, a former VA contractor became the last of seven defendants involved in a Veterans Affairs (VA) contracting officer bribery scandal to be sentenced. The sentence brings to a close the five-year investigation into a bribery scandal pursuant to which former VA contacting officer, Tracy Marasco, accepted cash, trips, and gifts in exchange for steering million-dollar contracts to particular contractors. In 2011, the VA OIG and the FBI began their probe into alleged corrupt contracting activities at the VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) in Palo Alto, Calif. and Sacramento, Calif. Since then, the multi-year investigation resulted in the charging of seven individuals including one VA contracting officer, three VA contracting officer’s representatives, and three construction contractors. With this sentence, all of the defendants have been convicted and sentenced. The individuals charged and convicted in connection with the scheme include the following:
• Xerxes “Ike” Zapata, a former Palo Alto VAMC contracting officer’s representative.
• Russell Allgire, a former Palo Alto VAMC contracting officer’s representative engineer.
• Conrad Alfaro, a former Palo Alto VAMC contracting officer’s representative.
• Jack Stringer, a former VA contractor.
• Jacobo Herrera, a former VA contractor.
• Justin Tolentino a former VA contractor.
[Source: DoJ Northern District of California | U.S. Attorney’s Office | June 14, 2016 ++]
Chelmsford, Mass. — On 13 JUN, a federal jury found David E. Gorski, of guilty of conspiracy to defraud the United States and wire fraud. The jury found that Gorski conspired to defraud the United States by impairing the lawful governmental function of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the General Services Administration, the Army, and the Navy in the implementation and administration of the Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (“SDVOSB”) Program. Gorski established a company, Legion Construction, Inc., in 2006 after recruiting a disabled veteran of the Korean War to act as the company’s straw owner for the sole purpose of obtaining federal construction contracts set aside under the SDVOSB Program. The purpose of the SDVOSB program is to provide federal contracting assistance to service-disabled veterans who own small businesses by creating set-aside and sole source acquisitions for such businesses. When the veteran’s absence from the business became too conspicuous, Gorski hired a second disabled veteran, Peter Ianuzzi, to serve as the figurehead owner of Legion. Legion acquired more than $110 million in federal contracts between 2006 and November 2010, after Gorski falsely represented to federal contracting officers that the company was owned and operated by service-disabled veterans.

In March 2010, a different SDVOBS registered a bid protest against Legion, alleging that Legion should not have been awarded a contract with the VA at its medical center in White River Junction, VT. The company specifically challenged Legion’s SDVOSB status, noting that it appeared that Gorski, not one of the veterans, was the person really running Legion. After retaining the services of a large Boston law firm to assist him, Gorski filed an opposition to the bid protest that contained false information. The Small Business Administration denied the bid protest based on Legion’s submission. Gorski then began exploring ways to siphon money from Legion that would not appear as compensation exceeding the pay of the nominal veteran owner, Ianuzzi, in violation of federal regulations, including Ianuzzi “gifting” him $900,000 and establishing private bank accounts into which the company would deposit $2.5 million for Gorski’s benefit. Before the bank accounts could be opened, however, a federal grand jury issued subpoenas to Legion and several witnesses. Gorski faces up to 25 years in prison and $500,000 in fines if convicted. [Source: DoJ District of Massachusetts | U.S. Attorney’s Office | June 14, 2016 ++]

Albany, NY — Nathan Baum, age 31, of East Greenbush, New York, was sentenced 22 JUN to serve 82 months in prison after admitting to stealing pain medication intended for dying hospice patients. Senior United States District Judge Lawrence E. Kahn also imposed a three-year term of supervised release, to begin after Baum’s release from prison, and a $2,000 fine. Baum pled guilty in February to tampering with a consumer product and obtaining controlled substances by deception and subterfuge. Baum, a licensed practical nurse who worked at the hospice ward of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, in Albany, improperly accessed syringes that contained oxycodone hydrochloride. These syringes were stored in locked containers that Baum was able to access using his individually assigned password. Between April 8, 2014 and May 16, 2014, Baum removed the oxycodone hydrochloride from at least 25 syringes and replaced it with haloperidol. Oxycodone hydrochloride, a Schedule II controlled substance, is a highly addictive narcotic analgesic used to treat moderate to severe pain. Haloperidol, often marketed as Haldol, is an anti-psychotic medication used to treat certain mental/mood disorders and to treat uncontrolled movements or agitation. [Source: DoJ, Northern District of New York | U.S. Attorney’s Office | June 22, 2016 ++]

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Traumatic Brain Injury Update 53 ➔ Idle Waco Mobile MRI System

The $3.6 million machine was supposed to revolutionize our understanding of traumatic brain injury and other war injuries by studying the brains of Fort Hood troops before and after deployments to Iraq. But that never happened. Nearly a decade after the Department of Veterans Affairs bought the once cutting-edge, internal investigators have concluded that research efforts at the VA Waco Center of Excellence represented “a waste of taxpayers’ funds” and
were an example of “poor stewardship.” In a report released 23 JUN, the VA’s Office of Inspector General detailed years of research inactivity at the Waco center, where officials spent more than $200,000 in annual maintenance while the MRI machine largely sat unused.

The Center of Excellence mobile MRI machine (left) and displayed brain scans (right) at the Olin E. Teague Veterans’ Center in Temple in 2014.

The internal inspectors’ report confirmed the findings of a 2014 American-Statesman investigation, which found the VA had squandered a historic opportunity for combat-related research by purchasing the mobile scanner without a clear plan for success, failing to recruit enough brain imaging experts to make it work and allowing internal squabbles to paralyze the project. VA inspectors found the agency spent about $1.1 million on maintenance for the nearly five and a half years that the machine went unused between 2008 and 2015. Inspectors confirmed that the scanner had not contributed to any published research studies as of 2015. The report, however, didn’t assign blame to any specific VA employees for the debacle. The VA has since hired new leadership at the center and in April 2015 restarted brain scanning research with the machine.

In a response to the inspectors’ findings, VA Undersecretary of Health David Shulkin conceded that the machine was “underutilized” in the past, but that the department was “proud that our efforts have been successful in turning this program around in a relatively short period of time.” Shulkin said the VA has started a redesign of the entire VA supply chain and changed how it manages such high-tech medical equipment as the Waco MRI system. “Although this device has had a troubled history, I view this overall as a success story, in that new leadership has revitalized this program and put the Center on a productive pathway,” Shulkin wrote.

The Statesman investigation, published in September 2014, found that six years after the brain scanner’s debut not a single study based on the machine’s scans had been published. By 2013, center officials suggested that the machine be returned because the VA didn’t know how to properly use or fix it. One suggestion from staffers for the MRI’s support vehicle: housing for lab rats. After the Statesman investigation was published, the U.S. House Veterans’ Affairs Committee launched its own inquiry into the VA’s overall mental health research effort. Committee officials said Thursday afternoon that investigation into overall research is ongoing. Former committee member Rep. Bill Flores, R-Bryan, who previously suggested that research should be moved out of the Center of Excellence, told the Statesman last year he had changed his view after visiting the revitalized center.

The Waco MRI system is currently being used to research neurological disorders and collect data for treatment studies, VA spokeswoman Jessica Jacobsen said Thursday. The Waco center has also started collaborating with the University of Texas to evaluate patients and provide them with real-time feedback on their neurological activity, Jacobsen said. [Source: American-Statesman | Jeremy Schwartz | June 23, 2016 ++]

VA Performance Update 08 ► Areas That Engender Broad Agreement

Veterans, like the country they’ve defended and served, are an increasingly diverse group; they don’t march in lockstep when it comes to politics and policy. But there are a few areas that engender broad agreement among vets: Those who haven’t served can never truly understand their experiences, and by and large, they like the health care provided by
the Veterans Affairs Department. That was the take-away from a panel featuring several representatives from veterans’ groups, most of whom are vets, earlier this week at a Washington, D.C. conference co-hosted by the Roosevelt Institute and the Union Veterans Council, part of the AFL-CIO.

Moderator Jackie Maffucci, research director of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, asked the seven panelists what they would tell the presidential candidates about the VA from the vets’ perspective, if they found themselves alone in an elevator with the presumptive Republican and Democratic nominees.

The VA, which has more than 300,000 employees, has never been a streamlined, efficient operation. But the last few years have really laid bare the department’s seemingly intractable management problems, outdated technology systems, and poor decision-making on a range of issues. Those problems led to the 2014 Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act, several pending legislative proposals, and calls for privatizing the VA’s massive health care system. The Commission on Care, created by the 2014 law, will issue its final recommendations June 30 on reforming the VA health care system, which some fear could lead to the massive outsourcing of veterans’ health care. As for the presumptive presidential nominees, Democrat Hillary Clinton opposes the wholesale privatization of the VA’s health care system. Donald Trump and his campaign have made pro-privatization comments, but the candidate has not said he would eliminate the department, or even fully privatize VA health care.

Here are edited excerpts of what the seven panelists at Tuesday’s conference would say about vets and the VA if they got a little face time with the next commander-in-chief:

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**Lauren Augustine, legislative associate, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America:** “It’s critical that you understand that veterans are more than a political chew toy. They are more than the two dominating narratives that we hear in the media of heroic hero or PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] injured veteran. We need you as the national spokesperson to speak our voice, and speak our voice for the nation’s stage and the world’s stage to say these veterans served the country with honor, and we’re going to continue to honor them with the way we talk about them and treat them.”

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**Joshua Ulibarri, partner, Lake Research Partners:** “Veterans like the VA. They appreciate the VA [and] they believe the VA does a good job. They believe that the VA nearer to them does a better job than VA [facilities] far away – of course that’s true of almost everything. That doesn’t mean that they don’t have criticism, or things that they would improve. They [vets] have real concerns about for-profit, private medical care. They do not want to be pushed into a system that is voucher-based. They don’t want to be pushed into a system that doesn’t adequately understand their struggles and their concerns, and hasn’t researched how to care for them.” (Lake Research Partners is a public opinion research firm founded by Democratic political strategist Celinda Lake. Ulibarri has done research and polling among vets on health care issues.)

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**Garry Augustine, executive director of Disabled American Veterans:** “Ironically, I just had a conversation recently with a senior adviser for one of the presidential candidates. As I started to explain to him some concerns that our organization had with some comments that his candidate had made, he told me that I’m the first veteran he’s heard from that had anything good to say about the VA. It made me realize that the perception out there, the perception war, is being lost. I went on to explain to him that we do not think the VA is broken beyond repair as some have said, that many of the stories that are out there are dated stories, that the VA is doing very positive things. I gotta tell you, I don’t think I won that discussion with him. It makes me realize that we’re in a very nice environment here today, hearing very positive stories about the VA. I don’t know that those are resonating out there in America. The DAV, along with the major VSOs [Veterans Service Organizations] in the country think very differently about what’s going on in today’s VA than what is being perceived out there, or what is being pushed out there by the news.”

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**Ruth Browne, VA nurse practitioner in Gainesville, Fla., and American Federation of Government Employees member:** “I was mobilized into Iraq in ’08. I took care of an acute care clinic, and I was also the sexual response coordinator, which was a very difficult job because there are a lot of atrocities that go on with that. About eight months into my tour, my husband died suddenly at home. The Army was great -- [in] two hours I was on a plane heading home. But after I got home, that was it. And there I was very, very depressed, and whatever. I didn’t realize I was so depressed. I didn’t even realize I was sick. So I decided to go back to work because I didn’t know what to do with myself, and I got back to work taking care of the veterans. It was the veterans who came to see me, and it was the veterans who are providers there that told me and let me know just what I needed and directed me into place. And so, the veterans aren’t just there to get their basic care -- they network with other veterans. They find out what and where their resources are at the various places.”

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**Sherman Gillums Jr., executive director, Paralyzed Veterans of America:** “Secretary Clinton, Mr. Trump, there are people in your inner circle who are going to tell you that privatizing the VA is the answer. And all I ask is that you ask them two questions: Have you ever received care, or recently received care in a VA medical center in the last five years? Or is your opinion informed by a second-hand perspective? Second question: Who will be responsible for monitoring health care access and quality in the private sector when it goes wrong without Title 38 protections to include investigation of wait lists and other access issues, medical malpractice cases, erroneous billing? Cause that’s going to happen with a fragmented system in instances where the care falls below the standard set by VA, particularly when we are talking about specialized care services. And lastly. I would like to take this issue out of the abstract for you by [having you accompany] me to a VA medical center of your choosing. Walk with me through the process of the experience. Then, I’ll take you through my experience of using TRICARE coverage, or being left to rely on the private sector for the exact same services. I’ll let that inform your decision.”

[Image of Sherman Gillums Jr., executive director of Paralyzed Veterans of America, said he would like to take the candidates through the experience of receiving care at a VA medical facility.]

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**Dr. Tom Berger, chair of the Veterans Health Council with Vietnam Veterans of America:** “The VA has been promoting the whole business of military history -- where did you serve, when did you serve, and what was your MOS [military occupational speciality]? If we had that information in our electronic health records, do you realize how much epidemiological information would be available to not only the VA, but to the research community and academia? Dr. [David] Shulkin [VA Undersecretary for Health] has indicated that they’ve started this at 10 or 11 institutes this summer, so as not to overwhelm the system. The involvement of the VA in the criminal justice system for our veterans who have lost their way, that’s really important…what’s known as the veterans’ treatment courts. We’re kicking ideas around with the White House for relative to when the vets get out, and how to work with them at that point. That’s what I would do if I were trapped on an elevator with one of the candidates, and hopefully one of them I would keep away from using my mental health credentials on.” (Berger also cited suicide prevention and Hepatitis C treatments as areas that should continue to get support and funding.)
Bill Rausch, executive director, Got Your 6: “All too often, especially in Washington, D.C., we spend an enormous amount of time having false arguments. And the VA, I think, is the subject of probably the biggest false argument I’ve ever heard which is, the answer is: privatization, or the VA. Both are wrong. It’s more nuanced than that. And most presidential candidates, frankly, don’t know that. Because ultimately what we need is a system that supports the veteran and their family, which involves both [VA and private health care]. And it [the system] already does. That would lead me to my second point: If you are the commander-in-chief, would you hold Congress accountable? Because ultimately in order for the VA to become the organization that we know it can be, Congress has to act, Congress has to fully fund VA, Congress has to get out of VA’s way, in many instances. I mean, right now, if you look at the VA omnibus, it’s gone nowhere. [Also] I’d ask them [the presidential candidates] to commit to keeping the current leadership team at VA into the next administration because in order for us to really make these strides and really transform the VA into the organization we know it can and should be, it’s going to take people. It’s not a process, it’s not a system. It’s leadership.”

[Source: GovExec.com | Kellie Lunney | June 23, 2016 ++]

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VA HCS Phoenix Update 22 ➤ Emergency Room Troubles

A federal watchdog found that the Phoenix VA Health Care System's emergency department has no system in place to ensure patients get timely medical care on busy days when wait times swell and frustrated patients leave before receiving care. The VA Office of Inspector General's investigation was triggered by a man who complained that he waited more than six hours at the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center emergency department before he was seen by a doctor. A report on the probe was released 23 JUN. The inspector general confirmed the man waited nearly seven hours, concluding the Phoenix VA did not have an "effective mechanism" for emergency department staff to "quickly recognize episodic, increased demand events and to adjust processes."

The Phoenix VA Health Care System's emergency department has no system in place to ensure patients get timely medical care on busy days, a new audit by the Office of Inspector General says.

The report also found that more than one in three patients in the emergency department that day — the hospital's busiest over a 13-month period — left before a doctor examined them, the report said. The report also substantiated other parts of the man's complaint. For example, exam areas separated by curtains did not ensure patient confidentiality; patients lacked supervision in the radiology area; thermometer covers were improperly handled; workers failed to get timely drug prescriptions to discharged patients; and debris was found in parts of the emergency department. But the Inspector General Office's report concluded that despite the man's long wait in the emergency department that day, records suggested the long wait was "due to an unforeseeable episode of increased demand which resulted in overcrowding."
The report examined hospital records between March 1, 2014, and March 31, 2015, and also conducted an on-site inspection from June 29 to July 1 last year. The inspector general reported that the emergency department's median length of stay in 2014 was 191 minutes, which met the VA's threshold for the amount of time a patient could expect to stay at the hospital when seeking emergency care. The Phoenix VA also was within range of the three closest private-sector hospitals, the report said, citing data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Hospital Compare database. However, 7.6 percent of Phoenix VA patients left the emergency department before they were seen by a doctor or other practitioner, a rate that exceeded the VA's threshold and was more than three times higher than private-sector hospitals. The man who lodged the complaint was in his mid-60s and split his time between Minneapolis and Phoenix.

Last year, he visited the Phoenix VA's allergy clinic and complained of a headache, dizziness and elevated blood pressure. The clinic's staff told him to go to the hospital's emergency department, which he did. He registered at the hospital's emergency room, and a hospital worker confirmed during triage that he had elevated blood pressure. He was told to wait for a doctor. The hospital's electronic health records show a doctor first saw the patient six hours and 13 minutes after he arrived. The doctor examined the patient and confirmed high blood pressure. He was prescribed a medication and told to follow up with his doctor in one week. In all, the patient spent nearly seven hours in the emergency department. The patient complained he had to wait another two hours after he was discharged from the hospital to get his prescription filled. The report found there was a "system weakness related to the timeliness of prescription delivery practices for discharged ED patients."

The inspector general issued nine recommendations for the Phoenix VA, including developing a plan to improve emergency department access during busy times and assessing emergency department prescription-delivery practices. Phoenix VA Health Care System spokesman Paul Coupaud said that the local VA already has taken steps to address some concerns such as patient confidentiality, prescription services and contracting with a vendor to ensure a clean hospital. He said other steps should be complete by the end of September. News of the Phoenix VA's emergency department troubles come more than two years after whistleblowers and the media exposed a huge backlog in medical appointments and data manipulation that covered up delays in care. Audits and investigations later revealed that the wait-time scandal plagued the entire VA system. The controversy prompted reform legislation and an effort to overhaul the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The inspector general's findings drew harsh responses from U.S. Sens. John McCain and Jeff Flake. “I am deeply disturbed and disappointed in the conditions at the Phoenix VA that the (inspector general) confirmed today. Cleanliness, timeliness, and confidentiality are not lofty goals but bare minimums,” said Flake (R-AZ) “The failures of the Phoenix VA are worrisome and I will continue to provide oversight of the location.” McCain added, "We have a long way to go to change the culture that led to this scandal in care at the Phoenix VA that failed our state and nation's veterans.” [Source: The Republic | Ken Alltucker | June 23, 2016 ++]

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VA Budget Plan of Action Update 01 ► Clinton/Trump Proposals

Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have both proposed increasing spending on the Veterans Affairs Department by at least tens of billions of dollars over 10 years, according to an analysis of each of their plans. Trump’s proposals would come with a much heftier price tag, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonpartisan group advocating fiscal responsibility. The presumptive Republican nominee would add between $500 billion and $1 trillion to the deficit with his VA reforms, CRFB said, in large part due to his plan to give all veterans immediate care from any doctor who accepts Medicare.

Like Trump, Clinton has proposed boosting certain VA services, though her reforms would cost an estimated $50 billion. She has proposed making permanent a tax credit to boost veteran hiring and overhauling vets’ benefits, among other changes. Unlike Trump, Clinton has said she would roll back the spending caps set by the 2011 Budget Control
Act, boosting funding at all non-defense federal agencies. CRFB said that plan would cost $300 billion over 10 years, though Clinton has left the door open for leaving some caps in place, emphasizing instead her administration would target the Defense Department and civilian agencies in a “balanced way.” Trump has made little specific reference to the spending caps often referred to as sequestration, but has often discussed building up the “depleted military” and making it “bigger, better, stronger than ever before.” Rolling back just the defense portion of the budget caps would cost $450 billion over 10 years, CRFB said. Clinton’s plan could come with a similar price tag, as she too has discussed “permanently ending the damaging sequester.”

All told, when factoring tax and spending policies, the think tank estimated Trump would add $11.5 billion to the debt over 10 years, while Clinton would add $250 billion. In his previously released VA reform plan, Trump said the department had excused “corruption and incompetence.” He proposed giving veterans an identification card they could take to any hospital that accepts Medicare to receive care “immediately.” He accused the VA of lacking “the right leadership and management.” The businessman said the changes would improve the department by boosting competition. “The power to choose will stop the wait time backlogs and force the VA to improve and compete if the department wants to keep receiving veterans’ health care dollars,” Trump wrote in his plan.

Trump’s proposal also contained a variation on a familiar refrain, altered to apply to holding employees accountable: Trump vowed to “make the VA great again by firing the corrupt and incompetent VA executives who let our veterans down.” He added that underperforming VA supervisors would have “no job security,” modifying another of his most well-known catchphrases: “They’re fired.”

Clinton has advocated “reorganizing and streamlining” the Veterans Health Administration, ending the disability compensation backlog, increasing jobs for vets, and revamping the department’s employee performance evaluation system. The former State Department secretary also called for personnel management reform to “create a culture of accountability, service and excellence.” “From the top leadership to mid-level managers to entry-level employees, everyone at the VA must embody the highest workplace standards,” Clinton’s wrote in her VA platform. “Supervisors must be empowered to suspend or remove underperforming employees in accordance with due process not only for the good of the organization, but in service of our nation’s veterans.”

Congress in recent years has regularly boosted VA’s appropriations, though it has started to receive some pushback for failing to eradicate some longstanding problems while continuing to ask for more money. [Source: GovExec.com | Eric Katz | June 27, 2016 ++]

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* Vets *

**Vet Charity Watch Update 61 ➤ WWP Gets New Leader**

The head of the military agency that searches for and identifies the remains of missing servicemen is resigning after just one year to take over a troubled nonprofit that cares for wounded troops. Michael Linnington became the director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency last summer. He plans to leave next month to become the CEO of the
Wounded Warrior Project. Linnington became the leader of the POW/MIA mission at the Pentagon after Congress and groups that advocate for families of the missing had criticized the way the military was handling identifications. Since Linnington took the helm, the agency's laboratories have nearly doubled the identifications of missing servicemen.

Retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael S. Linnington, director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), receives a tour of an excavation site during a DPAA recovery mission near Riechelsdorf, Germany, on Sept. 1, 2015. Linnington is leaving the agency to become the CEO of the Wounded Warrior Project.

At the Wounded Warrior Project, Linnington will lead a nonprofit that has been criticized for lavish spending. The New York Times and CBS News in January reported employees, veterans and charity watchdogs were complaining the organization was profiteering off veterans. Linnington said in a phone interview he hadn't planned on leaving the POW/MIA agency so soon and wasn't looking for a new job. But he said the opportunity at the Wounded Warrior Project was for "incredibly noble work." "I'm very proud of the things we've done at the DPAA over the past year but I was approached by a group that needed some leadership in caring for our wounded warriors. I'm a 35-year soldier. I brought soldiers to combat and welcomed many of them home that were grievously wounded," Linnington said in a phone interview.

Reports on the Wounded Warrior Project by CBS News and The Times described extravagant parties and last-minute, business-class air travel at the nonprofit. One former employee compared it to "what the military calls fraud, waste and abuse." The Jacksonville, Florida-based organization's directors fired two executives after hiring outside legal counsel and forensic accounting consultants to conduct an independent review of its records and interview current and former employees. The military's efforts to find and identify missing remains have suffered from many problems over many decades. In 2014, the AP disclosed an internal Pentagon report that said a DPAA predecessor organization — the Hawaii-based Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command — was wasteful, acutely dysfunctional and often mismanaged. Shortly afterward, the Government Accountability Office issued a report saying the MIA accounting effort was hampered by weak leadership, infighting and a fragmented approach to planning. The Pentagon later streamlined the change of command and made other organizational changes.

Linnington, who retired from the Army as a lieutenant general before assuming a civilian role at the Pentagon, said consolidating the Defense Department agencies responsible for identifying missing servicemen has helped Ann Mills-Griffiths, chairwoman of the board at the National League of POW/MIA Families, said she was surprised by Linnington's announcement. She said he had told her group last year he was at the agency for the long haul, meaning the next 10 years. "I can only say it was a total shock. Just stunning and unexpected," Mills-Griffiths said. Linnington said his successor should have compassion, integrity, teamwork, respect and innovation. "If we continue to focus on
our families and providing families the fullest possible accounting of their loved ones, based on those values, I think we'll be fine,” he said.  [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | June 3, 2016 ++]

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**Don’t Ask, Don't Tell Update 14 ► Discharged Vets Encouraged to Appeal**

Navy Department officials are urging the thousands of sailors and Marines forced out of the military because of their sexuality in previous decades to come forward and appeal their discharge — in a step to restore benefits and right a historical wrong. The Board for Correction of Naval Records (BCNR) can overturn a wide range of records, from counseling letters to detachments for cause, but recently they have been putting the word out to veterans who were separated because of the military's "Don't ask, don't tell” policy — and its previous across-the-board ban — that they can have their discharges upgraded and their reenlistment codes or reason codes changed to reflect a post-DADT world.

"If you were discharged under 'Don't ask, don't tell,' come in," Navy Secretary Ray Mabus said in a 8 JUN speech at a Pentagon event for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Month. "The Board of Corrections for Naval Records will take a look at changing that discharge characterization ... If you have colleagues that were discharged under that, ask them to come in — if it’s under the regulations, get that discharge characterization changed."

Less than 8 percent of veterans expelled from the military under the "don't ask, don't tell" policy have applied to upgrade their discharges to honorable, or strip references to their sexual orientation from their record. Since opening the service to gays and lesbians in 2011, the Navy has granted 123 discharge upgrades out of 413 requests, according to Defense Department data. That includes relief from both BCNR and the Navy Discharge Review Board (NDRB) — 107 and 183 requests granted, respectively. That's out of more than 4,300 sailors and 1,300 Marines who were kicked out during DADT, from 1993 to 2011, according to Navy Department statistics.

NDRB should be the first stop, said BCNR's executive director, because the simpler process gives the case two reviews — and if the request is still rejected, BCNR is the next step. "In the case of 'Don't ask, don't tell,' as the department has recognized a change in societal norms, and we recognize that where the discharge was based only on homosexuality that it would be appropriate to consider a higher discharge," Scott Thompson, whose organization's charter is to correct errors and expunge injustices, said in a May interview at the Pentagon. Those who've won their cases have restored access to veteran education and health benefits, he said.

In general, BCNR can consider requests to upgrade discharges all the way down to dishonorable, but Thompson said most sexuality-related discharges were honorable or general under honorable conditions, which entitle veterans to all or most benefits. The easiest cases to overturn are those where a veteran was discharged simply for being gay. If misconduct also came into play, it would be more complicated, but still worth pursuing. Out of those discharged between 1993 and 2011, 54 percent of the sailors and 46 percent of the Marines were fully honorable or general under honorable conditions. But in a more complicated case, like for someone discharged for fraternization and homosexuality, upgrading a discharge is more work but still worth pursuing, Thompson said. "They should absolutely apply," he said. "They just need to explain the circumstances that led to the fraternization, or if they contend it wasn’t a valid claim. It’s important to put it into context."

Veteran organizations have long advocated for service members kicked out because of their sexuality, and since the repeal of DADT, they've worked with DoD to upgrade records. "We value the open communication and dialogue with the boards of corrections and strongly feel that the increase in our relationships will help to both encourage individuals to apply for their upgrades and understand the process," Matt Thor, the executive director of the military LGBT advocacy group Outserve-SLDN, said in a statement. "The boards have made a very concerted effort to address LGBT service members in their processes; we applaud them for those efforts and look forward to our continued working relationship with them."
1. The first step is to determine whether to start with NDRB, an active-duty panel for discharges less than 15 years old. It's recommended to start there, Thompson said, because it gives a veteran two extra chances to review their case, before taking it to BCNR's civilian panel, whose decision is final. For cases older than 15 years, the appeal process begins at BCNR's official website http://www.secnav.navy.mil/mra/bcnr/Pages/home.aspx, where you can start an application to have your case reviewed. Technically, the board's statute of limitations is three years, but the board regularly grants waivers. They did just that in 2011 for a former hospital corpsman, who'd been dishonorably discharged as "undesirable" in 1944, as The New York Times reported in his recent obituary. "It meant an awful lot to me because I know I never did anything disgraceful or dishonest," Melvin Dwork told the newspaper, recalling the ignominy of being jailed and then kicked out for a consensual relationship. Dwork worked for decades to overturn the Navy's ruling.

2. Thomas recommends that a veteran who is appealing should submit a letter explaining why, in the interest of justice, the limit should be waived. It's important to provide as much evidence as possible with the packet, he added, on top of the required DD-149 form. "I always encourage veterans and their representatives — really build your case, spend time," he said. "Tell the board in plain English what it is you're looking for." Include as much paperwork as you can gather: service records, awards, evaluations, medical diagnoses, investigations — anything relevant to your case.

3. Once an application is submitted, one of BCNR's 16 examiners will pull an official service record from Navy Personnel Command and review anything the applicant includes. The examiner prepares a brief, and a panel of three senior Navy Department civilians meets once a month to hear cases. It takes about a year on average to close a case, Thompson said, because like many federal agencies, there is a backlog. But recent changes, like boosting manpower by 13 percent and allowing email applications for the first time, are designed to move things along. Another reason cases take so long, Thompson added, is a lack of available evidence. Investigators don't go searching for every tidbit on a service member, so it's crucial to include all relevant documentation with an application.

4. This is particularly important for veterans seeking to overturn more subjective records. As post-traumatic stress awareness has grown, for example, many veterans have had their discharges upgraded after the board found their misconduct was related to untreated trauma. "Had we known that about that veteran at that time, would that have mitigated their misconduct?" Thompson said. "Obviously, a premeditated misconduct is probably not going to be mitigated by PTSD." However, that kind of determination needs a doctor's diagnosis, which applicants should but don't always include, Thompson said.

5. BCNR can also review a range of black marks, like denied promotions and letters of instruction. "I would encourage veterans who feel like they have some mitigating evidence that wasn’t presented the first time, to present that to BCNR," he said.

6. In cases where a sailor or Marine feels there's been retaliation for whistle-blowing, Thompson recommended going through inspector general channels before BCNR. Former Lt. Cmdr. Sy'needa Penland, who claims she was erroneously prosecuted for adultery for trying to suss out waste and fraud in her command, is getting a second try at BCNR, thanks to a federal judge's ruling in April. She claims that her court-martial conviction led to her early separation, just months before her 20-year retirement date. In that type of case, Thompson said, it's possible that the
BCNR could recommend that the Navy secretary launch an investigation into the perpetrator if they confirm retaliation.

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It's still important to note, though, that BCNR's overturn rate is very low, Thompson said, though he couldn't provide an exact statistic. "That would make sense if others have looked at these beforehand and relief has been denied," he said. Still, the organization is working on outreach to make sure all sailors, Marines and veterans, and particularly those who were affected by policies the Navy has since abandoned, know they have recourse. "I would just say that we're eager to meet with veterans groups," Thompson said. "We want the feedback. We want veterans to know that the board's available." [Source: Navy Times | Meghann Myers | June 24, 2016 ++]

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Vet Parking ► Apology Given for Erroneous Slam

The veteran who got an anonymous note slamming her for parking in a "veterans only" parking space in North Carolina said she finally received a note of apology, and posted it online. "It was an error in judgment, and again, I'm sorry for that," the unidentified person wrote in a letter to Rebecca Landis Hayes, which she posted on her Facebook account Monday. "Thank you for all that you've done. God bless." The dustup began when Landis parked in a vets-only parking spot 13 JUN at a grocery store in Concord. After she went in the store, a person who apparently saw her park – and believed she was not a veteran – placed a note on her car: "This parking is for veterans, lady. Learn to read & have some respect."

Landis posted the handwritten rebuke on her Facebook account along with a message of her own. "I'm sorry that you can't see my eight years of service in the United States (sic) Navy," she wrote. "I'm sorry that your narrow misogynistic world view can't conceive of the fact that there are female veterans. I'm sorry that I have to explain myself to people like you. "Which leads to one question, I served, did you?"" The posting quickly spread around the web, with nearly 13,000 shares as of Wednesday morning. Eventually, Landis said the letter writer realized her mistake and responded:

"To the lady whose car I left a note on, "I happened to come across your post on Facebook through a friend who shared your photo and status," the person, who still did not sign a name, wrote. "I would like to apologize to you. I know it's no excuse. But I've seen so many young people park in retired vets spaces, along with handicap lately, and I lost my cool. I'm sorry you were the one who got the result of that angry moment. I know it was a mistake and I'm glad I saw your post. I immediately felt horrible about a situation where I assumed I was standing up for someone. Clearly, this was not the case. You didn't deserve that, and I hope you can accept this apology. I appreciate your service to this country and I highly respect military men and women."

[Source: Fox News | Jun22, 2016 ++]
Veterans' Preference Update 11  ►  AL & VFW Opposed to Change

Senate lawmakers and even the Defense Department have picked a fight with a group they usually go out of their way not to offend: the nation's veterans. The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars have come out strong against a Senate bill that would make veterans preference in federal job hiring a one-time benefit, meaning the veteran gets to use it once and that's it.

The Legion slammed the change in the harshest terms, accusing the Defense Department -- which included the change in the National Defense Authorization Act -- of betraying the men and women who had served in uniform. "One would think the agency that produces veterans and service-disabled veterans would have the additional moral obligation to uphold the institution of Veterans Preference," Legion National Commander Dale Barnett said in letters to senators and representatives. "Instead, the [DoD] turned their backs on their former employees." In language less impassioned but no less determined, the VFW released a statement condemning the change. "Veterans preference is a hand up, not a handout, for those who honorably serve our nation in uniform," VFW National Commander John A. Biedrzycki Jr. said.

Under current law, veterans may use the preference in the federal job market whenever they apply for a job or promotion. The argument has long been that the years they spent away in uniform put them at a disadvantage to peers who entered federal service early on. Supporters of the Senate provision claim that once the veterans are hired, however, they are no longer at a disadvantage. That is disputed by the veterans' organizations. "Four years of military service plus four years of government service will never equal eight years of government service," Biedrzyci said. "Even after they are hired, veterans will always be behind their peers who didn't serve in uniform."

According to a 17 JUN report in The Washington Post, a senior Pentagon official went to Sen. John (R-AZ) asking for the change. The argument made to McCain is that the benefit results in too many qualified non-veterans losing jobs to unqualified veterans. One source, who spoke to Military.com on background about the provision, said the Pentagon is finding it difficult to bring in some specialists and even management people because a highly skilled and experienced person and a veteran with several years' experience will both, on paper, meet the minimal requirements cited in a job posting. And veterans preference means the job will go to the veteran even though the DoD may really want and need the skills brought to the table by the non-vet, the source told Military.com.

This is not the first time that veterans preference has been threatened. In 2014, the Merit Systems Protection Board released a report claiming that veterans preference was spurring resentment among non-veterans in the federal workforce and also decreased job opportunities for women applying for jobs. "To any civilian workers who have problems with veterans preference, The American Legion's message is simple: Become a veteran," said the Legion's then-national commander, Michael Helm. "Those who have served in uniform have earned such preference." Helm also pointed out that there are now more female veterans who could be hired. [Source: Military.com | Bryant Jordan | June 20, 201 ++]

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Vet Jobs Update 190  ►  Farming

The government is determined to grow the number of veterans who work in agricultural jobs as a means to help replenish the industry's labor force. To lower the barrier for them, the USDA provides loans and grants — some worth several thousand dollars — designed to help beginning veteran farmers and ranchers get the training and education
they need to get their operations off the ground. In turn, veterans who become experienced at farming and ranching are encouraged to train others.

"There's no doubt in my mind farming saved my life," says Marine veteran Robert Elliot, who teaches the trade to other vets who are just starting out. The USDA says that such work can instill vets with a sense of purpose akin to military service.

Robert Elliot has been mentoring fellow veterans for the last three years. After a difficult transition out of the Marine Corps, he decided to return home, here to Louisburg. With six chickens and more than 800 acres given to him as a wedding gift from his family, Elliot started Cypress Hall Farm in 2013, where today he raises chickens and hogs, and grows a variety of vegetables. He sells meat and produce at local's farmers markets, and has carved out a comfortable quality of life in this quiet community about 30 miles northeast of North Carolina's capital, Raleigh. As part of the veteran farm program he founded, Elliot teaches his techniques to other veterans interested in getting involved in the industry, offering them small plots of land on his 40-acre farm — the rest is leased to conventional farming, he said — to experiment.

Acquiring land, Elliot said, is one of the biggest challenges facing those new to the industry. The average cost of farm land and associated buildings was about $3,020 per acre last year, up 2.4 percent from 2014, according to the USDA. The property costs on the comparatively small plot that Cypress Hall sits upon would run $90,000 to $120,000.

This is why the USDA has been encouraging vets to take advantage of its programs. Seth Eure, an active duty Marine, is working with Elliot to learn the trade and, he hopes, realize his dream of becoming an organic peanut farmer. Eure has come to Cypress Hall on a "permissive temporary assignment detail" from Camp Lejeune, so he can develop his farming and business. He wants to become an agricultural entrepreneur upon transitioning out of the military.

Growing up on a large-scale conventional farm with more than 40,000 chickens, Eure wasn't sure at first about going into this line of work for his post-military career. He said he enjoys being outdoors, though, and made his decision after spending time at Cypress Hall. Eure said he plans to apply for a USDA loan after he completes his studies with Elliot. As a farmer, “I am nourishing life,” says Eure, who wears a black metal wristband in honor of a fallen comrade. “I got to see that baby chicken hatch from an egg, grow up to be a full-grown chicken, and lay its own egg. ... Walking outside with my cup of coffee in the morning, and a chicken comes to greet me at the door and say hi. It is a good feeling the animal trusts me with its life.”

There's other motivation, too. The veterans-helping-veterans approach to farming is seen as one means to help those who've experienced service-connected post-traumatic stress and, it is hoped, to reduce instances of suicide. Farming provides goals and a sense of mission. Elliot, who says he's lost Marine buddies to suicide, was laid off from a civilian contract job with the Marine Corps in 2011, a time when veterans’ unemployment stood at 8.3 percent, according to the Labor Department. He earned an associate degree from a community college and moved on to North

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Carolina State University where he majored in engineering. But Elliot struggled to fit in, he says, and soon left school for the sanctity of his family farm. Working with his chickens, he says, has been more rewarding. “I think it was more a cultural shock than anything that really messed me up,” he says. “I couldn’t relate to the way that civilians acted. … Out there is the civilian world, nobody cares about you, is the impression I get, whereas in the Marine Corps, and in the military, one of the first things you are taught is you take care of each other.”

As the USDA looks to boost the number of veterans who join this workforce, it relies on a nationwide network of grassroots organizations to help teach the requisite skills, connect individuals with rank-and-file employment opportunities and support more ambitious entrepreneurial endeavors. Rich Murphy, program director for Veterans to Farmers, a Colorado-based nonprofit, says the program provides classes about farming techniques. Inquiries, from veterans across the country, are on the rise, he said, adding that about 50 percent of those in the program are interested in learning about small-scale production and using farming as a form of therapy. In Colorado, the Food Cottage Act allows an individual to sell certain types of products from their home kitchens. So this provides incomes for modest producers. Those who want to test the waters should start small anyway, Murphy recommends.

Ultimately, the profession is well suited for young veterans, Elliot says. "The American veteran is the one who needs to be able to take over the farms of tomorrow," he says, "... simply because there is no other demographic of people that has a work ethic, gets dirty, gets up early, goes to bed late and is willing to put in whatever they have to do to accomplish the mission." [Source: Medill News Service | Jasmine Cen | June 19, 2016 ++]

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Vet Cemetery Arkansas Update 02 ➤ Birdseye | Shortage Of Customers.

Managers of carefully tended to cemetery nestled in the foothills of northeastern Arkansas are facing a dilemma: they have plenty of pristine land for burial plots but a shortage of customers. Four years after the Arkansas State Veterans Cemetery at Birdseye opened, operators of the site say the cemetery remains virtually undiscovered, located in a town that didn’t even make the last U.S Census count. Four years after opening, 240 veterans and their spouses or dependent children have been buried here. As a comparison, however, Birdseye’s counterpart in central Arkansas buried 580 people last year alone, while operating at less than a quarter of the cost to the state. Arkansas has about 247,900 veterans, according to the VA. The solution, say some cemetery operators at the Birdseye site, it to advertise, so to speak, The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette reported 18 JUN. (http://bit.ly/ItvnSm ).
“We do recognize that Birdeye is a remote location and many people are not aware that it’s there,” state VA spokesman Sarah Jones. “We are working on getting the word out.” Additionally, the cemetery manager interacts with the community by providing details on the history of the site. About 900 veterans are preregistered to rest at Birdeye, but even that pales in comparison with the 2,795 veterans eligible for burial in North Little Rock. The cemeteries in Birdeye and North Little Rock are the only ones under state control. The federal VA operates three others in the state. States started operating their own veterans cemeteries 38 years ago after the creation of the State Cemetery Grants Program, which was formed to target areas in need of veterans cemeteries, according to the VA. If current projections hold and a new cemetery isn’t built, Birdeye will be Arkansas’ only veterans cemetery with available graves in a few decades. For veterans and their families then, it may be a long drive, but the cemetery at Birdeye still will be beautiful.

[Source: - Associated Press | June 19, 2016 ++

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Vet Unclaimed Remains Update 01 ➤ 30 Honored in Denver

As 67-year-old Vietnam veteran José Gonzales sat in the audience after a final roll call service put on by his chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America, another veteran walked by and shook his hand: “Welcome home, brother.” Gonzales was one of several veterans at the Final Roll Call Honors Committal memorial service 28 JUN at Fort Logan National Cemetery, where families and supporters came together to honor the unclaimed remains of 30 veterans who served as far back as World War II. He had been home for a long time — but he didn’t feel welcome for decades. “They didn’t greet us, we got no greetings — nothing,” Gonzales said, describing how Vietnam veterans were received when they came home. “Some of us had to take our uniforms off, for fear of retaliation.”

Active military members (left) carry in the cremated remains of Veterans at a ceremony at Ft. Logan National Cemetery. Army Sgt. Nisha Ludwig, right, carries the remains of a Veteran to Navy Lt. Jessica Hunt to be interned during a ceremony June 25.

After a decades-long healing process, Gonzales started to go to memorial services for veterans. “I (hadn’t) attended before because it took some 40 years to break out of that shell and honor the vets,” Gonzales said. “It’s healing to the soul, you know.” But this was Gonzales’ first time at a memorial for unclaimed remains, the ashes of veterans who were never taken or buried by their families. Maj. Gen. H. Michael Edwards, the service’s guest speaker, said remains may go unclaimed because families forgot about them, or don’t know their relatives are eligible for a military burial. “In my mind, (they’re) almost MIA, because they just sat there,” Edwards said to about 80 in attendance. “Each of them has a story. I only wish we knew their full story.”

A crowd that came decked out in the shirts, hats and insignia of various armed forces branches sat silent during a dignified, slow reading of the 30 names. Each name was followed by the veteran’s rank, branch and war in which he served. After that, a service member on stage would locate the veteran’s urn on a table and declare them “present” — and a bell would ring. After a three-volley salute by Air Force members, various military branch members carefully
placed the first few urns in the columbarium just feet from the stage. Cemetery crew members placed engraved marble plates over each burial space. “This is just breaking the ice,” Gonzales said. “There are a lot more (veterans) in Denver and around the U.S. that need to be researched.”

Stan Paprocki, president of Chapter 1071 of the Vietnam Veterans Association, said he would never give up on honoring veterans. It took the chapter more than a year to assemble the remains for the service. “We finally got cleared by the (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs),” Paprocki said. Initially identifying 868 cremation certificates from Olinger Eastlawn Cemetery in Aurora, with the help of the VA’s National Cemetery Scheduling Office in St. Louis, the group narrowed the list to 90 possible veterans. Of those, 36 more will be honored at another service in about two months, said Paprocki.

The Missing In America Project, a national nonprofit that works with veterans groups to inter unclaimed veterans’ remains, helped to publicize the service. “Isn’t our country supposed to do something for veterans?” said Fred Solanti, project executive director and president. Solanti said most remains are left by families — sometimes due to the cost of cremation — but some are taken into government hands and incorrectly buried in civilian graves. For Gonzales, the service is part of the healing process. “I just hope this is closure for some Vietnam vets who were forgotten,” he said. [Source: The Denver Post | Ellis Arnold | June 25, 2016 ++]

WWII Vets 111 ► Henry Klein

World War II was high adventure for Henry Klein. He was a 17-year-old sailor who had learned how to cook at Luby’s Cafeteria in downtown Lubbock, and he was tall. He remembers that he was, in fact, the biggest sailor on LST 803. In retrospect — after 70 years has softened some of the sharp edges of war — Klein shares his memories with an ability to see lighter moments in the context of mortal conflict with a determined enemy. They are the memories of a wide-eyed sailor witnessing scenes that he can still see at age 90.

The LST — landing ship tank — had been a brand new flat-bottomed boat that was nine yards longer than a football field in length, and Klein said it was taken down the Ohio River from the shipyard, then along the Mississippi River to New Orleans and out to open waters. After a shakedown cruise off Florida, the LST that had been launched in October 1944, was taken through the Panama Canal to Hawaii to pick up ammunition for the troops on Saipan. Klein remembers, “They loaded the tank deck five feet deep with ammunition, and on top of that was concrete. As a crew, we didn’t know it was ammunition that was going to Saipan.” Klein’s primary duty was under the classification of ship’s cook-baker, 3rd class, but when general quarters were sounded, his battle station was at one of the 40mm antiaircraft guns on the stern. Guns also were in the bow, and others on each side of the ship.

He said the LST had a good crew, but recalls that the commander was the oldest at 26, and most of the others were 17 and 18 years of age. Klein remembers of one tense moment, “We were firing on a Japanese plane, and our gun jammed. The twin 40mm couldn’t shoot at it because it would swing around too far. We asked the gunner officer if we could leave our gun station, and he told the officer in charge to shoot the first person that left the gun station. “So, we stayed there.” Klein recalls that somebody from another ship shot the plane down and it landed about 40 yards from his vessel. He remembers that two of the LST sailors were hit in the arm during another confrontation with a Japanese plane. “It was our own fire. The twin 40mm he was firing was supposed to go around so far, then shut off. But it went around too far, and hit the lid of the ammunition ready box, and shrapnel from the box wounded the crewmen. “Nobody was hurt or shot by the enemy.”

According to Klein, the LST could go up to the beaches to off-load tanks and troops. “We were at all the islands except Iwo Jima. We took liberation troops in, and we went to Leyte in the Philippines, where the big hospital was, then came back, loaded up with troops and went to Guam and unloaded there. We had a lot of Air Force and Army,” he said. “We brought a bunch of wounded back to the Philippines, but our main base was in Saipan. We had a medicine
crew, and we could drive right up on the beach. Our ship drew two feet of water in the bow, four feet above the water in the stern.”

Klein also tells about Japan’s attempts at psychological warfare. Inevitably, there was the wake-up-call Charley who flew by the clock and often by advance announcements. “When we were on the beach there in Guam, he had radioed in and said he would come in at 4 in the morning and would drop a bomb 50 yards in front of the ship. There was nothing but LSTs there, and all we had were antiaircraft guns. “He would come in, and we would be all ready at general quarters. We started firing at him, and our gunnery officer told us to quit because two American planes — who weren’t supposed to be flying on that beach — were chasing him. “The Army shot down the two American planes, but the Japanese plane got away. The American pilots bailed out, but they lost their planes.” He said, “It was an attack on morale. He was trying to upset us all, was what he was trying to do. The same way with Tokyo Rose — she would radio a lot of propaganda saying that all the Americans were dead on a certain island, and different things like that. “But it turned out to be entertainment to us. We could hear her on the loud speakers that troops had set up.” Klein said that LST 803 had a high ranking officer in the ship, and was in command of more than 24 other LSTs.

His talents as a cook were appreciated by the troops, and when the 803 was parked at an island, the Army could sometimes eat fresh-cooked meals instead of K-rations. At times, they were also allowed to come aboard and make their own sandwiches. “There was one incident when I thought I was really going to get in trouble. Some Army guys came aboard who hadn’t had anything but K-rations for a long time — and they were hungry. So, I told them to line up, that I had plenty of cold cuts and bread that night, and I would put it all out: ‘Y’all can go through the line and make you a sandwich.’ “There was coffee already made,” he remembers.

His tall stature typically allowed him to keep order. “But there were two guys that came up and they were pushing and wanting to get to the head of the line. So, I went out and I grabbed them both by the collar and pulled them back, and said, ‘Get to the foot of the line!’” Then, they turned around, and he could see stars on the uniforms. “They were generals is what they were — and they went to the foot of the line. But the next day the captain called me to his quarters. I went in there, and knew I was in deep trouble — those two Army generals were in there, too. “But they started laughing, and they came up and said, ‘We commend you — you were the captain of that galley, and you did the right thing making us go to the foot of the line.’” Klein, who hadn’t known if he would reach 18, remembers replying, weakly, “I appreciate that. I thought I was in deep trouble.”

In early August 1945, LST 803 was preparing for an invasion of Japan. But the fighting ended quickly with the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And the ship sailed to Japan to supply occupation forces after the signing of the surrender papers aboard the USS Missouri. Klein remembers getting permission to go ashore. “We went
all over Tokyo, and got to see the Emperor’s wall. They had five Japanese and a Marine guarding the wall. There was a sign about the Japanese that said ‘Do not try to take the swords away, because they are allowed to use them.’ “They were guarding the Emperor. They were loyal, but they didn’t try to attack anybody. They were the guards for the Palace.” Klein may have been the first customer of the economic engine that Japan became after the war. “When we went into the stores, we bought several things to take home. I still have some stuff stored out in the store room. They were respectful to us. I bought my Mom a big sheet of silk. It was bright red. She made something out of it, I don’t remember what it was.” He thoroughly enjoyed the liberty in company with fellow sailors: “I was the youngest one, and the biggest one aboard ship — I made one of the Japanese guys get off of his bicycle, and I rode it all over.” It was more fun than cooking. [Source: Lubbock Avalanche-Journal | Ray Westbrook | April 4, 2016 ++]

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Obit: David Jonathan Thatcher ► 22 JUN 2016

Retired Staff Sgt. David Thatcher, one of the last two surviving members of the Doolittle Raiders - who bombed Japan in an attack that stunned that nation and boosted U.S. morale - has died in Missoula, Mont., his family said. The Associated Press reported that Thatcher, 94, died Wednesday 22 June in a Missoula hospital. He suffered a stroke Sunday, Thatcher’s son Jeff told the Missoulian newspaper. Thatcher’s death leaves Retired Lt. Col. Richard “Dick” Cole, a Dayton native now living in Comfort, Texas, as the only living airman from among 80 who took off from an aircraft carrier on 16 B-25 bombers to target factory areas and military installations in Japan on April 18, 1942. Afterward, the planes headed for airfields in mainland China, realizing they would run out of fuel, according to the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.

The mission lifted American spirits five months after Pearl Harbor was bombed and forced the Japanese to spend resources defending their home islands. Thatcher was engineer-gunner aboard the plane nicknamed “The Ruptured Duck.” After the bombing, Thatcher’s plane - running low on fuel - crash landed in the ocean near China. The plane flipped over and all the crew members except for Thatcher were seriously injured. Thatcher was knocked out, but soon regained consciousness, gathered the rest of the crew, administered first aid and convinced some Chinese guerrillas to take the crew to safety in inland China. Thatcher received a Silver Star for gallantry in action.

Saff Sgt. David Thatcher (left) looks on as the crowd gives the Tokyo Doolittle Raiders a standing ovation at the final toast at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio, on Saturday, Nov. 9, 2013

In November 2013, Thatcher was among three of the four surviving Doolittle Raiders at that time who performed the final toasting ceremony for their fallen comrades at the United States Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio. During an interview with The American Legion, Thatcher said they volunteered for the mission as a sense of duty. “The most memorable moment of the mission wasn’t the training, long over-water flight or the dropping of the bombs in Tokyo,” he said at the time. “It was the crash landing. You just can’t forget something like that.” The crew’s crash-landing and evasion of Japanese troops in China was depicted in the movie “Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo,” based on the book
written by the plane’s pilot, Lt. Ted Lawson. Because the bombing run was so dangerous, all those involved were volunteers. Thatcher said they gave little thought about earning a place in history. “We figured it was just another bombing mission,” he told The Associated Press in an interview in March 2015. In the years afterward, though, he said, they realized: “It was an important event in World War II.”

After his military career, Thatcher worked for the U.S. Postal Service for 30 years as a clerk and later a letter carrier. He retired in 1980. He stayed in contact with the surviving members of the Doolittle Raiders and attended nearly every reunion the group held through the Final Toast in November 2013. In March 2015, Thatcher and Cole presented the Raiders’ Congressional Gold Medal for heroism and valor to the Air Force museum for permanent display. Thatcher was born on July 31, 1921 in Bridger, Mont., one of 10 children. He is survived by his wife of 70 years, Dawn; three of their five children and seven grandchildren. [Source: WHIO Dayton | Jun. 22, 2016 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 29 JUN 2016

Retiree Appreciation Days (RADs) are designed with all veterans in mind. They're a great source of the latest information for retirees and Family members in your area. RADs vary from installation to installation, but, in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups, and various other services. Some RADs include special events such as dinners or golf tournaments. Due to budget constraints, some RADs may be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, scheduled appearances of DFAS representatives may not be possible. If you plan to travel long distances to attend a RAD, before traveling, you should call the sponsoring RSO to ensure the RAD will held as scheduled and, if applicable, whether or not DFAS reps will be available. The current updated schedule for 2016 is available at:

- 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 this schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\veterans related events such as town hall meetings, resource fairs, stand downs, etc. To get more info about a particular event, mouseover or click on the event under Event Location. (NOTE: Attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. "@" indicates event requires registration\RSVP.) For more information call the phone numbers indicated on the schedule of the Retirement Services Officer (RSO) sponsoring the RAD.

To quickly locate events in your geographic area just click on the appropriate State\Territory\Country listed at the top of the schedule. They will look like this:

- AK
- AL
- AR
- AZ
- CA
- CO
- CT
- DC
- DE
- FL
- GA
- GU
- HI
- IA
- ID
- IL
- IN
- KS
- KY
- LA
- MA
- MD
- ME
- MI
- MN
- MO
- MS
- MT
- NC
- ND
- NE
- NH
- NJ
- NM
- NV
- NY
- OH
- OK
- OR
- PA
- PR
- RI
- SC
- SD
- TN
- TX
- UT
- VA
- VI
- VT
- WA
- WI
- WV
- WY
- Belgium
- Germany
- Italy
- Japan
- Korea
- Netherlands
- Thailand

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | June 29, 2016 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 1 thru 31 JUL 2016

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

- **Biloxi, MS** - Biloxi-Gulfport Hiring Fair  [Details](#)  [Register](#)
  July 7 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

- **El Paso, TX** - El Paso Hiring Fair  [Details](#)  [Register](#)
  July 12 - 8:00 am to 1:00 pm

- **Scott AFB, IL** - Scott Air Force Base Transition Summit  [Details](#)  [Register](#)
  July 12 - 1:00 pm to July 13 - 4:00 pm

- **Detroit, MI** - Detroit Hiring Expo with Detroit Tigers  [Details](#)  [Register](#)
  July 15 - 9:30 am to 2:00 pm

- **Houston, TX** - Houston Hiring Fair  [Details](#)  [Register](#)
  July 16 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

- **Montgomery, AL** - Montgomery Hiring Fair  [Details](#)  [Register](#)
  July 26 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

- **Fort Indiantown Gap, PA** - Fort Indiantown Gap Hiring Fair  [Details](#)  [Register](#)
  July 28 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm

- **Atlanta, GA** - Atlanta Hiring Expo with Atlanta Braves  [Details](#)  [Register](#)
  July 28 - 9:00 am to 2:00 pm

[Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Assn June 29, 2016 ++]

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**Veteran State Benefits & Discounts**  ►  **California 2016**

The state of Arizona provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these plus discounts listed on the Military and Veterans Discount Center (MCVDC) website, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “Veteran State Benefits & Discounts – CA” for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below benefits refer to [http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/california.html](http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/california.html) & [http://www.cdva.ca.gov](http://www.cdva.ca.gov).

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Assistance Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Veteran Business Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

NDAA 2017 Update 14  ►  S.2932 | Passed 85-13

The Senate on 15 JUN easily approved an annual defense policy bill that authorizes roughly $602 billion in base defense and war spending — baiting a presidential veto. The 2017 National Defense Authorization Act’s passage came as the nation grapples with the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, in which a Florida man killed 49 people at a gay nightclub in Orlando. Reports the killer may have been inspired by jihadist ideas fueled debate of the bill. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) acknowledged the killer’s motives were under investigation, but rapped the Obama administration’s counter-Islamic State efforts as “insufficient,” and lauded the bill as a means to “fight back.” “We’re a nation at war, but we’re a nation under attack,” McConnell said in a floor speech ahead of the vote Tuesday. “We need to continue taking action to protect our country.”

Dem  Rep  

The measure, which passed unanimously by the Senate Armed Services Committee, sailed through a Senate vote 85-13. Procedural squabbles effectively limited debate on nearly all amendments, which prevented debate on an amendment stripping language that would compel women to register for a potential military draft — a historic first for the US. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) and the committee’s Ranking Member Sen. Jack (D-RI) both lauded the passage of the bill, stressing the aggressive acquisition reform measures it contained. That includes closure of the Pentagon’s chief weapons buyer’s office and shifting its duties to two new defense undersecretaries for innovation and acquisitions management. It also contains far-reaching language that would curb cost-plus contracts and be more inclusive of contractors from outside the Beltway. “The acquisition system is broken and needs to be fixed,” McCain said after the vote.

President Obama has threatened to veto the House and Senate versions of the bills — the House bill over its unorthodox treatment of overseas contingency operations (OCO) funds, and the Senate bill over its acquisition reform provisions and limits it would place on the closure of the Guantanamo military detention facility in Cuba. The House last month passed a version of the policy bill that shifts $18 billion in OCO toward base budget requirements, and adds more troops, jet aircraft, shipbuilding and rotorcraft than the president's budget. The House bill also cuts off OCO after April 30, 2017, a gambit to force the next president to ask Congress for supplemental defense spending next year.

The Senate last week voted down an amendment from McCain to raise the defense authorization by $18 billion, after Republicans voted down a measure to raise non-defense authorization by $18 billion. Hawkish Republicans, led by McCain, pressed for added troops, ships, jets and tanks left out of the administration ’s budget request, arguing a fiscally stretched military needs the increase as it struggles to absorb readiness and maintenance shortfalls and juggle threats the world over. McCain lost here and was frustrated in efforts to clear a logjam on amendments. The procedural
problems began after Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT) insisted on a vote on his measure to prevent the government from indefinitely detaining US citizens for links to terrorism. Because senators would not allow the vote, the stalemate effectively blocked debate on all other amendments — including one to allow US visas to Afghans who served as interpreters to the US-led coalition.

The Senate was able to take action on Russian rocket engines as it took a voice vote to pass an NDAA amendment to allow the military to continue to use Russian RD-180 rocket engines to launch national-security satellites until the end of 2022, though — in a compromise with McCain — caps the number at 18. Sen. Bill Nelson (D-FL) who offered the amendment sought flexibility for the Pentagon while officials develop and test an American-made replacement, while McCain pressed for a quicker end to US reliance on the engines. “This agreement is a win for America’s national security and taxpayers,” said Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Vice-Chair Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) who jostled with McCain on the issue. “It will provide for a responsible transition to American-made engines and guarantee America’s access to space.”

The measure includes several significant policy changes opposed by the White House — some that are not in the House measure — particularly with reforming the Pentagon’s organizational structure and targeting the White House’s national security apparatus. For instance, it eliminates the position of undersecretary for acquisition, technology and logistics, splitting the job’s duties into two roles. It curbs the size of the White House NSC, which is also included in the House measure. And it ends the F-35 Joint Program Office once the fighter jet has reached full-rate production, expected in 2019. It doesn’t stop a proposed reduction in the size of the Army and Marine Corps, nor does it include a higher pay raise for troops. It also doesn’t authorize funding for an additional 14 F/A-18 Super Hornets and 11 F-35 fighters, dozens of new Apache, Lakota and Black Hawk Army helicopters and several new Navy ships, including a third Littoral Combat Ship. All of those are in the House bill — and in McCain’s OCO amendment, which failed 56-42, four short of the 60 votes needed.

The bill now goes to a House-Senate conference committee for negotiations on ironing out the differences between their respective bills. The bill’s passage does not necessarily end the fight for more defense funding. SASC member Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) has said he plans to press for more when the Senate takes up the defense appropriations bill. “To those who have voted against expanding funding to defense, you have made a mistake,” Graham said. “Destroy radical Islam over there before it comes here. To do that you need a stronger military.” The House and Senate bills face significant differences for lawmakers to debate in conference, chiefly their approaches to defense acquisitions reform, where the Senate takes a more aggressive tack, and defense funding. Also, dramatically different provisions on TRICARE fee changes and housing allowance rates. With few days on Congress’ election-year calendar, lawmakers will have to act quickly to send the final version of the bill to Obama’s desk before the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30.
With this bill Obama has threatened to veto eight annual authorization bills, and did so last year over the blurring of wartime funding for base-budget needs, forcing a budget deal which netted parity for defense and non-defense spending. [Source: Defense News | Joe Gould | June 14, 2016++]

NDAA 2017 Update 15 ➤ H.R.4909 / S.2932 Reconciliation

Lead staff for the Senate and House armed services committees are readying for what is likely a summer-long conference process to reconcile differing defense policy bills, where the toughest issues are said to be funding, military health care reform and acquisition reforms. Facing White House threats to veto both bills, Defense Secretary Ash Carter’s charge that the bills represent “micromanagement” and closed-door negotiations with each other, the staff directors for the HASC and SASC offered defenses of their committee’s approach to the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). At an event hosted by the conservative think tank American Enterprise Institute on Tuesday, SASC Staff Director Chris Brose and HASC Staff Director Bob Simmons said both bills are seeking to help the military be more agile, innovative and robust. “The objectives are the same, the intent is the same,” Brose said.

Carter and the White House have found numerous faults with the policy bills, including the Senate’s plan to eliminate the undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics (AT&L), the House’s funding approach, and the refusal to allow the Pentagon to shut down installations across the country. Simmons defended the House-approved NDAA’s plan to stick to the bipartisan budget deal but use $18 billion from the overseas contingency operations fund to pay for base budget items, expecting the incoming president will ask Congress for a supplemental defense spending package. Simmons said the president’s veto threat over the bill was “ironic,” noting a Democratic Congress acted similarly in 2008, just before the Obama administration began. “It's not like we haven't done this before, and in fact it was the Democrats who did it last time,” Simmons said. “Then the candidate who ends up being the president can make their own assessment of what the foreign policy is, and the direction they want to take the country, then ask us for the funding appropriate for that effort.”

Opponents have said the House NDAA takes funding from troops, but that is “wholly incorrect,” Simmons said. The bill, he said, adds money to ready troops who are next to deploy. “We’re doing all these things to help the Department of Defense,” Simmons said. “If [the president is] going to veto it, he’s operating under false pretenses. We are taking care of the war fighter. We want to make sure those kids go into harm’s way with what they need.”

The Senate took a different tack on funding, meaning House and Senate conferees will have to work it out. Asked how the Senate might approach these talks, Brose said it was too soon to say as SASC Chairman John McCain (R-AZ) and HASC Chairman Mac Thornberry (R-TX) had yet to meet on the matter. Both chairmen have sought more troops and hardware left out of the president’s 2017 budget request, he noted. “We have no disagreement over the need for this, and the challenge is how you deliver it with a top-line both sides agree is inadequate,” Brose said.

The Senate’s NDAA blows up the position of AT&L undersecretary — currently held by Frank Kendall — and hands its duties to a new undersecretary of defense for research and engineering, or USD(R&E), and the renamed undersecretary of management and support, or USD(M&S). The USD(R&E)’s job would be to champion innovation for DoD. The SASC’s far-reaching reforms are aimed at untangling an acquisitions system that too rarely succeeds when “innovation is the sidecar” and “feels like a series of small-scale insurgencies,” Brose said. It also continues last year’s approach, which placed more acquisition authority in the hands of the services.

The House’s NDAA’s acquisition reform focus is to steer DoD away from lengthy, ambitious programs and toward incremental, rapidly fielded breakthrough technologies. It also aims to shake up the Pentagon’s risk-averse culture, Simmons said. “You don’t have to solve the whole problem,” Simmons said. “It’s a question: If I give you 30 percent of the capability, and you can field it today, or would you rather wait 15 years to get a 100 percent solution? Well if
30 percent today gives you a better position on the battlefield, you want that today.” [Source: Defense News | Joe Gould | June 22, 2016 ++]

DoD Appropriations Act 2017 ► H.R.5293 | Passed

On 16 JUN, the House passed the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2017. Nay voters included 6 Republicans and 132 Democrats. The spending bill includes $517.1 billion in discretionary funding for the DoD base budget, which is $3 billion above the fiscal 2016 enacted spending level and $587 million below President Barack Obama's request. In case you forgot, the earlier passed National Defense Authorization Act gives the authority to spend money on approved items. This appropriations bill actually makes available the funds to spend. To view the bill go to http://appropriations.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hrpt-114-hr-fy2017-defense.pdf . Note that all bills must be passed by both the House and Senate in identical form and then be signed by the President to become law. [Source: AUS Weekly Update | June 17, 2016 ++]

BRAC Update 50 ► H.R.5540 | A Bill to Override the Current Ban

Seven Democratic lawmakers are pushing to allow the military to close excess bases with a bill introduced in the House on 21 JUN. “We need to provide the Department of Defense flexibility to find savings and efficiencies wherever it can in order to support our warfighters,” Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, said in a statement. “That is especially true now, as Congress continues to strain the military by funding it through short-term budget agreements. We should not be making the military cut training and supplies while at the same time refusing to let DOD save money that we know is not being used productively.”

Smith introduced H.R.5540 to establish a fair and transparent process that will result in the timely consolidation, closure, and realignment of military installations inside the United States and will realize improved efficiencies in the cost and management of military installations, and for other purposes with Democratic cosponsors Reps. Sam Farr (CA, Susan Davis (CA), Jim Cooper (TN), Madeleine Bordallo (GU), Jackie Speier (CA), and Beto O’Rourke (TX). Right now, another Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round is prohibited. That ban would remain in place under the 2017 defense policy bills passed by the House and Senate recently. The same is true of the House-passed 2017 defense spending bill and the Senate version of the spending bill awaiting a floor vote.

Smith proposed replacing the ban with a plan that would allow for base closures when his committee considered the policy bill, but the effort went nowhere. The House also voted down, 157-263, an amendment from O’Rourke to the defense spending bill that would have struck the ban. The Pentagon recently submitted a report to Congress arguing for another BRAC round, saying it will have 22 percent excess capacity by 2019. The last round of BRAC was in 2005. Lawmakers have repeatedly denied requests for another round because of the potential for negative economic effects on the communities around bases, making the prospect politically unpopular. The bill introduced Tuesday, which is identical to Smith’s earlier plan, would override the bans in current law and set up a process that would allow for more closures. The process in the bill would start with:
• The Pentagon submitting a report to Congress on its projections on force structure 20 years out, an inventory of military infrastructure and the infrastructure capacity needed to support the 20-year force structure.
• The comptroller general would need to make a similar report.
• The Defense secretary would also need to certify that it’s necessary to close, consolidate or realign bases and that there would be a net savings within five years.
• Congress would then have 90 days to review the report and certification and could block the Pentagon from moving forward within that time.
• If Congress doesn’t block the Pentagon after 90 days, the Pentagon could then make recommendations on which bases to close based on criteria including military value and net savings.
• An independent commission would then review the recommendations and make its own recommendations to the president, who would then report the findings to Congress. Congress would then have 45 days to block the process from moving forward.

The bill seeks to address lawmakers' concerns about the 2005 BRAC round, its sponsors said, such as providing Congress a chance to block the process after the Pentagon’s report and placing an emphasis on cost savings after five years instead of 20. “This bill will help Congress overcome its fear of BRAC,” Farr said in a written statement. “It reforms the BRAC process so it is more community-oriented, more efficient and more about real cost savings. It also requires that the round be completed in five years rather than six, shortening the time that results will be achieved.”

[Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | June 21, 2016 ++]

DIC Update 09  ►  S.3032 | COLA Bill Introduced in the Senate

On June 8, 2016, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson (GA) introduced S. 3032—the Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2016. This bill, if enacted, would provide an increase, effective December 1, 2016, in the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) for the survivors of certain disabled veterans. This bill does not contain the round-down provision of previous years that reduced compensation and pension payments by millions of dollars— at the expense of disabled veterans and their families. Therefore, DAV strongly supports S. 3032.

Use the following prepared electronic letter or draft your own to urge your Senators to cosponsor S. 3032, and to urge the Senate Leadership to bring this bill to the floor of the Senate for a vote as soon as possible. As always, we appreciate your support for DAV and your grassroots activism in participating in DAV CAN. Your advocacy helps make DAV a highly influential and persuasive organization in Washington. All readers are to urged to Click https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/Tsdi_vCusi6DXPUUn_FRoYg to log in and send your message. [Source: DAV National Commander | Moses A. McIntosh, Jr. | June 18, 2016 ++]

VADIP Update 01  ►  Reauthorization Act of 2016 Introduced

Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) introduced the bipartisan VA Dental Insurance Reauthorization Act of 2016. This legislation reauthorizes the current veteran dental insurance pilot program, created by a Burr provision in the Caregiver and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, and expands access to all veterans who do not currently receive dental benefits. Senator John Tester (D-MT) is a cosponsor. “The veterans dental insurance pilot program is a success,” said Senator Burr. “We know that access to dental care is important to maintaining overall health. The veterans’ dental insurance program works and it is time to give all of our veterans access to this insurance.”
The dental insurance pilot program was established in 2014 and has been proving veterans with access to dental care for three years. If Congress does not act, the families currently participating will lose their dental insurance benefits when the program sunsets in 2017. The veterans, survivors and dependents who participate in the program have given it high marks for access to care and quality. The Burr bill puts the dental insurance program into law, ensuring that eligible veterans, survivors and dependents of veterans continue to have access to high quality, low-cost dental insurance. Veterans who are eligible to receive their dental care directly from the VA will not be impacted by this program and will continue to receive their care through VA.

The expiring three year pilot program known as the VA Dental Insurance Program (VADIP) offered a wide array of affordable plans to veterans and eligible dependents through Delta Dental and MetLife. Covered services covering diagnostic, preventative, surgical, emergency and endodontic/restorative treatment. Each participant paid the fixed monthly premiums for coverage and any copayments required, depending on the type of plan selected. Monthly premiums ranged $8.65 to $52.90, depending on level of coverage selected. The initial participation period was for 12 calendar months. Afterward, VADIP beneficiaries could renew their participation for another 12-month period or be covered month-to-month, as long as the participant remained eligible for coverage and the VA continued VADIP. Enrollment began on Nov. 15, 2013, with coverage beginning on Jan. 1, 2014. For more information refer to www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vadip and click the insurer’s link for specific information regarding registration, rates and services or call 1-877-222-VETS (8387). [Source: NCCN | Bruce Ferrell | 14 June 2016 16:35 ++]

TRICARE Participation  ►  H.R.5458 | Opt-Out legislation

Reps. Chris Stewart (R-UT) and Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) introduced legislation this week that would allow TRICARE-eligible military veterans to opt out of the military health insurance program in order to contribute to employer-sponsored Health Savings Accounts. The Veterans TRICARE Choice Act (H.R. 5458) would amend the Internal Revenue Code and Title 10 to allow military retirees and other TRICARE-eligible veterans the ability to freeze and unfreeze their participation in TRICARE, permitting them to become eligible for HSA contributions and the associated tax advantages. Veterans could opt back into the TRICARE program during the open enrollment season under the Federal Employees Health Benefits program.

As the lawmakers explained in a discussion paper: Not only are veterans excluded from making HSA contributions themselves, but so are their current, private employers even if the employer makes contributions to the HSAs of other employees. These HSA contributions are disallowed by law solely because these individuals are covered by TRICARE. Presently, there is no means for these individuals to opt out of TRICARE and become eligible for HSA contributions.


VA SSN Use Update 01  ►  S.3063 | Veteran’s ID Protection Act 2016

U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin introduced a bipartisan measure in Congress 16 JUN to require the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to stop using Social Security numbers to identify America’s veterans. Baldwin has been trying unsuccessfully to get the VA policy changed through the amendment process over the last month, and as a result joined U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kansas) to submit to colleagues the Veterans’ Identity Theft Protection Act of 2016. The measure would require the VA to change the identification process for new veterans entering the system within
two years of the legislation's implementation and gives the bureaucracy five years to change the existing IDs for the nation's current 22 million veterans.

The proposal comes after an April 1, 2015, incident where the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs accidentally emailed the Social Security numbers of hundreds of Wisconsin residents to a random citizen. "This can’t happen," said Baldwin in a news release issued by her office. "Our veterans should never be put at risk of identity theft with information that they have entrusted to the VA. That is why I am bringing this bipartisan solution forward to make certain that the VA stops using Social Security numbers to identify our veterans.” An investigative team from the VA’s Office of the Inspector General has been looking into what happened in Wisconsin since the email originated from a VA.gov email address, and Baldwin said its report should be completed shortly. Baldwin's proposal is based, in part, on bipartisan legislation recently passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama that required Medicare to remove the use of SSNs as its way of identifying patients. That change is being phased in over the next few years. [Source: WISC-TV News 3 | Adam Schrager | June 16, 2016 ++]

Vet Bills Submitted to 114th Congress ► 160616 thru 160630

Refer to this Bulletin’s “House & Senate Veteran Legislation” attachment for a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 114th Congress. The list contains the bill’s number and name, what it is intended to do, it’s sponsor, any related bills, and the committees it has been assigned to. Support of these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indication of that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At https://beta.congress.gov you can review a copy of each bill’s content, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor or cosponsor of it by entering the bill number in the site’s search engine. To determine what bills, amendments your representative/senator has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on go to: https://beta.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22%3A%5B%22legislation%22%5D%7D. Select the ‘Sponsor’ tab, and click on your congress person’s name. You can also go to http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php.

Grassroots lobbying is the most effective way to let your Congressional representatives know your wants and dislikes. If you are not sure who is your Congressman go to https://beta.congress.gov/members; Members of Congress are receptive and open to suggestions from their constituents. The key to increasing cosponsorship support on veteran related bills and subsequent passage into law is letting legislators know of veteran’s feelings on issues. You can reach their Washington office via the Capital Operator direct at (866) 272-6622, (800) 828-0498, or (866) 340-9281 to express your views. Otherwise, you can locate their phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making at either:

✓ http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm or
✓ http://www.house.gov/representatives

FOLLOWING ARE THE 5 VETERAN RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED IN THE HOUSE SINCE THE LAST BULLETIN WAS PUBLISHED

- **H.R.5472** : **VA Procurement Efficiency and Transparency Act.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the procurement practices of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes
  Sponsor: Rep Coffman, Mike [CO-6] (introduced 6/14/2016)

- **H.R.5501** : **Get Veterans a Doctor Now Act.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the recruitment of physicians in the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep O'Rourke, Beto [TX-16] (introduced 6/16/2016)
• **H.R.5526 : Improve VA Secretary Employee Authority.** To improve the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire and retain physicians and other employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Wenstrup, Brad R. [OH-2] (introduced 6/16/2016)

• **H.R.5540 : Military Infrastructure Consolidation and Efficiency Act of 2016.** A bill to establish a fair and transparent process that will result in the timely consolidation, closure, and realignment of military installations inside the United States and will realize improved efficiencies in the cost and management of military installations, and for other purposes.

• **H.R.5558 : VA Authorization Extension for Rural Vet Transportation.** A bill to extend the authorization of appropriations to the Department of Veterans Affairs for purposes of awarding grants to veterans service organizations for the transportation of highly rural veterans. Sponsor: Rep Young, Don [AK] (introduced 6/22/2016)

FOLLOWING ARE THE 3 VETERAN RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED IN THE SENATE SINCE THE LAST BULLETIN WAS PUBLISHED

• **S.3055 : Department of Veterans Affairs Dental Insurance Reauthorization Act of 2016.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide a dental insurance plan to veterans and survivors and dependents of veterans. Sponsor: Sen Burr, Richard [NC] (introduced 6/14/2016)

• **S.3063 : Veterans' Identity Theft Protection Act of 2016.** A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to discontinue using Social Security account numbers to identify individuals, and for other purpose. Sponsor: Sen Baldwin, Tammy [WI] (introduced 6/16/2016)

• **S.3081 : Provide DVA Case Tracking Info to Congressional Reps.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide certain employees of Members of Congress with access to case-tracking information of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Sen Cassidy, Bill [LA] (introduced 6/21/2016)


| * Military * |

**Munitions Disposal Update 01 ➤ Pueblo Depot | Mustard Gas**

The ribbon cutting was a bit premature, but officials at the Pueblo Chemical Depot say there's plenty to celebrate. Despite plumbing problems that delayed things until September, officials say they are on track to start the production-line destruction of more than 780,000 mustard gas munitions stored at the site and could finish work by 2020. The ribbon cutting, conducted at a park miles from the chemical weapons stockpile, marks something significant, officials said. "It's the beginning of the end of the mission," said John Riley, a retired colonel who commanded the depot in 2005 and now runs Pueblo County's Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program. The end of the beginning took decades.
The shells at the depot, east of Pueblo on U.S. 50, were put on a path to destruction by a 1993 treaty signed by the U.S. and 64 other nations banning the weapons and mandating the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles by 2007. Other American stockpiles have largely been destroyed. The Pentagon and Congress picked a new path of Pueblo's shells, authorizing a $4.5 billion program to build and operate a factory that cuts the shells open, strips out explosives, and washes away the mustard agent with a solvent. Ground was broken for the plant in 2004, but a string of delays have added years to the destruction plan. The latest came this year, when testing revealed piping problems that wrecked pumps and destroyed seals. "It has not been without its share of stress and frustration," Riley said. In 2015, the depot began blowing up shells that were too damaged to be run through the factory. So far, 560 shells have been detonated in a sealed blast chamber. "There is no margin for error here," said Conrad Whyne, who heads the Pentagon's office for chemical weapons destruction.

First used in combat during World War I, mustard gas is a mix of chlorine, sulfur and other compounds that blister exposed skin. If inhaled, mustard gas burns the lungs and can cause a fluid buildup that drowns victims. The shells in Pueblo, a mix of artillery and mortar rounds, were manufactured in the 1950s for possible use in the Cold War. They have been stored for decades in huts called igloos and have remained in what depot officials call "pristine" condition, thanks to Colorado's dry climate. The shells remain in Pueblo County because of a successful battle in Congress waged by local leaders to keep the munitions in place after the Army unveiled plans to transfer them for destruction. With more than 2,600 tons of mustard agent on its 23,000 acres, Pueblo is the chemical weapons capital of the Western Hemisphere.

At full speed the munition-destroying factory, completed in 2012, will be able to process as many as 100 artillery shells per hour. The ready-for-war shells will go in one end of the plant, and recyclable materials will come out the other, depot officials say. In the middle are a series of robots run by human operators that pierce the shells open, strip out explosives, and wash away the mustard agent. For four years, the depot has worked to bring the factory online. In recent months, employees have tested the system with hundreds of simulated rounds. "Our workforce now tops 1,300," said Rick Holmes, project manager for Bechtel, which runs the plant. Destroying the shells is an expensive proposition - now estimated at more than $5.768 per round for a project cost of $4.5 billion. All 780,000 shells are expected to be destroyed by 2020. "The true celebration will happen after the last munition is destroyed," Whyne said. [Source: The Gazette | Tom Roeder | June 20, 2016 ++]

Military Bands Update 01  ►  Supporters Push Back on Legislative Attacks

Supporters of military bands are pushing back against legislative attacks on the musicians’ work, arguing the benefits the groups provide outweigh the costs cited by critics. Earlier this month, House lawmakers approved new restrictions on military ensemble performances at social functions outside official duties. The move would not directly cut any performance funds, but would stop service musicians' appearances at military social events, if approved by the Senate
later this year. The House has already included a full review of band costs and manning in its draft of the annual defense authorization bill, arguing that “the services may be able to conserve end strength by reducing the number of military bands.”

According to Defense Department estimates, military bands spend about $437 million on instruments, uniforms and travel expenses each year. Lawmakers argue that money could be better spent elsewhere, given the strict spending caps placed on defense spending. But supporters of the bands call the moves short-sighted and ignorant of the scope of the performers’ work. “These servicemen and women set one of the highest examples of musical achievement, pride in nation, and further the aspirations of all citizens, including young American music students across the nation,” Mike Blakelee, executive director of the National Association for Music Education said in a statement. “They provide music throughout the entire spectrum of operations, to instill in our forces the will to fight and win, foster the support of our citizens, and promote America's interests at home and abroad.”

Just days after the latest House vote, supporters at https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/continue-military-bands-funding set up a petition on the White House website urging the president to support continued funding for the bands, arguing “if these events were contracted to civilian musicians, the cost would be significantly higher.” About 23,000 individuals have signed on to the effort, although 100,000 are needed before the White House is required to issue a response. If you are concerned about the band cutbacks sign the petition.

Lt. Col. Domingos Robinson, commander and conductor of the Eighth Army Band, took to his personal blog last week to blast the thinking behind the new pressure on the military performers. “The people who think that limiting military bands to ceremonies and funerals is a good idea have no idea what we do,” he wrote. “We make Americans feel good about their military and their country; we create connections between cultures; we set the stage for strategic talks; we bridge the gap; we provide context; we help people celebrate and we help people mourn.” So far, senators haven’t weighed in on the music fight. They’ll need to approve the House proposals before they can become law, a process that won’t happen until this fall at the earliest.

In the meantime, most military bands are preparing for performances around the July 4 holiday, shows that they say could get shut down next year if the House plans stay in the legislation. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | June 27, 2016 +]

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Retirement Ceremony Protocol ➤ Can “God” Be Included?

A retired airman who was thrown out of a friend’s retirement ceremony while attempting — at the retiring airman’s request — to deliver a flag-folding speech mentioning God did not violate any Air Force policies, according to the Air Force. Such religious scripts are allowed at retirement ceremonies because they are private functions and attendance is not mandatory. Retired Senior Master Sgt. Oscar Rodriguez is threatening to sue the service after he was physically removed from the ceremony. He is being represented by First Liberty Institute, a religious freedom organization.

“Air Force personnel may use a flag folding ceremony script that is religious for retirement ceremonies,” the Air Force said in a statement to Air Force Times. “Since retirement ceremonies are personal in nature, the script preference for a flag folding ceremony is at the discretion of the individual being honored and represents the member’s
views, not those of the Air Force. The Air Force places the highest value of the rights of its personnel in matters of religion and facilitates the free exercise of religion by its members.”

Retired Senior Master Sgt. Oscar Rodriguez

The controversy has now reached the highest levels of the Air Force. Secretary Deborah Lee James has now ordered the Air Force inspector general to review the incident, spokeswoman Capt. Brooke Brzozowske said in an email 22 JUN. Rodriguez was asked by Master Sgt. Chuck Roberson to deliver the speech at his April retirement ceremony at Travis Air Force Base, California, northeast of San Francisco. Rodriguez had performed the speech more than 100 times at ceremonies, and Roberson was moved after hearing it at a friend’s retirement ceremony, according to First Liberty. In a video posted online (https://youtu.be/B59XKDPG0lC) shortly after the ceremony, Rodriguez can be seen standing up and moving to the flag as two airmen unfurl it. Four noncommissioned officers quickly approach him. As soon as he starts speaking, the NCOs forcibly drag him from the room, as he continues shouting the opening lines of the speech.

In a 20 JUN letter to Maj. Gen. John Flournoy Jr., commander of the 4th Air Force at March Air Reserve Base, California, and Col. Raymond Kozak, commander of the 349th Air Mobility Wing at Travis, Michael Berry, the senior counsel and director of military affairs at First Liberty, said those NCOs committed unlawful assault and battery when they forcibly removed him. Berry also said Rodriguez is the victim of religious discrimination, and that his First Amendment rights to freely speak and freely exercise his religion were violated. “Military officers and NCOs have no right to assault and drag away a private citizen simply because they do not want him to mention the word ‘God,’ ” Berry wrote in the letter. “The fact that Mr. Rodriguez was going to mention the word ‘God,’ at the behest of the retiring service member, is an insufficient basis to silence him, much less commit assault and battery against him, followed by forcibly dragging him away.”

First Liberty is demanding the Air Force provide a written admission of wrongdoing and unlawful actions by the airmen involved in the incident, a written apology to Rodriguez, a written assurance that no member of the 349th will commit assault or battery against Rodriguez for engaging in constitutionally protected conduct, and punish those determined to be responsible for violating Rodriguez’ rights. If the Air Force does not respond by 27 JUN, Berry said First Liberty is prepared to sue.

Berry said in the letter that Lt. Col. Michael Sovitsky, the commanding officer of the 749th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Travis, tried to stop Rodriguez from attending Roberson’s retirement ceremony or delivering the speech once he learned Rodriguez planned to deliver a speech that referenced God. Berry said that when Sovitsky found out he could not bar Rodriguez from attending the retirement ceremony as a guest, he told Roberson not to allow Rodriguez to speak. Roberson told Sovitsky he would not change his plans. The letter said that Rodriguez and Roberson tried to resolve the conflict before the retirement day, and offered to place signs on the auditorium doors saying that the word “God” would be referenced during the ceremony.

Berry said in the letter that Sovitsky either told the NCOs to throw Rodriguez out, or the NCOs acted on their own and Sovitsky did not stop them. Either way, Berry said, Sovitsky caused or allowed Air Force members to “intentionally [violate] the constitutional rights of a private American citizen.” “Such acts fly in the face of the Air Force’s core values,” Berry said. In another video posted by First Liberty (https://youtu.be/U01CLR5Lkbc), Roberson expressed disbelief about what happened at his retirement ceremony. "It's my retirement," Roberson said. "I was very embarrassed and humiliated in front of all my family and friends."
In 2013, Rodriguez posted a YouTube video of himself performing the same speech at his own retirement ceremony. It contains these references to God:

“This [the flag] is what we live for; this is what we will fight for, and if necessary, to touch the hand of God in her defense.”

“Let us pray that God will reflect with admiration the willingness of one nation in her attempt to rid the world of tyranny, oppression and misery.”

“It is this one nation under God that we call, with honor, the United States of America. God bless our flag, God bless our troops, God bless America.”

The controversy has now reached the highest levels of the Air Force. Secretary Deborah Lee James has now ordered the Air Force inspector general to review the incident, spokeswoman Capt. Brooke Brzozowske said in an email 22 JUN. [Source: Air force times | Stephen Losey | June 22, 2016 ++]

Selective Service System Update 19 ➤ Opinion | Make Women Register

This has been a historic year of firsts for women in the U.S. military. The military has welcomed the first women Army Rangers, the first woman Army infantry officer, the first Marine enlisted infantry women and the first woman combatant commander. Amidst these momentous changes, Congress has debated – almost against its will – the future of Selective Service registration and the military draft. While the Senate approved the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act with an amendment that would require women to register for Selective Service, the House did not. The Senate and House are now at odds on whether the issue is important enough to be included in the final version of the legislation.

The authors of this article strongly encourage Congress to confront this issue directly in the upcoming conference committee, and recommend that they support the inclusion of women in the Selective Service system. If they are not willing to support this change, then they encourage them to at a minimum explore the role of the Selective Service system at a time when gender is no longer a barrier to national service. While we celebrate the extraordinary accomplishments of women who blazed new trails in the military in 2016, we fully recognize that a culture of inclusion in the military can only exist if all practices, laws and regulations that create or imply partiality or bias to a specific category of people are eliminated.

Instead of relying on emotional rhetoric about female frailty or obligations to protect our daughters, we must be willing to view the problem in logical terms. The truth is that no one wants young men or young women to be drafted against their will and sent to war. But as the saying goes, "If you want peace, prepare for war." Today, the threats to our national security are complex and numerous. Our nation's military leaders are currently in the process of accepting that service women can compete for every job, and that such opportunity will make the military more capable of meeting contemporary and future threats.
If a draft were ever to occur, the question must be asked, what would we missing if we excluded women? With 71 percent of the nation's youth unfit for military service, the exclusion of qualified women from compulsory service during a time of war would severely limit our access to qualified citizens and possibly put our nation at significant risk.

If women meet existing high standards for service and enjoy all of the benefits of citizenship in time of peace, they must be equally responsible for defending the nation in a time of war. We cannot expect full equality if we continue to support a Selective Service that only requires compulsory service by men. With the newly opened opportunities for women to serve in ground combat roles we must acknowledge the inconsistency presented by the current restriction against women registering for selective service, and demand change.

The Service Women's Action Network supports requiring women to register. They believe that men and women should be held to the same standards and expectations for the performance of their duties, whether as members of the military or as American citizens. At the same time, as the voice of service women, they believe that our military is currently well supported by its all-volunteer force and is not in danger of becoming dependent on a draft. Given changes in society and technology, they also would welcome a robust debate on whether it is time to abolish Selective Service registration entirely.

Yes, women are daughters, wives, sisters and mothers. But they are also soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and American citizens from every walk of life. Ultimately, facts, not emotions, must rule the day when it comes to deciding what is best for national defense. If Selective Service is still deemed necessary, requiring women to register for the draft will remove a final barrier to full citizenship and will go far to eliminate the existing perception in the military that there are double standards for women. Most importantly, the change will ensure that our national security remains in the hands of the most qualified individuals, and that the ultimate sacrifice of death in combat is borne equitably by all citizens, regardless of race, socioeconomic background or gender.

Once women could not vote. Now they can. Once they could not serve in the military. Now they can. We owe it to our nation to make this final step toward making women equal citizens with equal rights and equal obligations in times of peace and war. [Source: US News & World Report | Col. Ellen Haring & Lt. Col. Kate Germano | June 22, 2016 ++]

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Army Retired List Advancement ► How To Obtain

Enlisted Soldiers and warrant officers who held a higher grade than their retired grade can be advanced on the retired list. Section 3964, title 10, United States Code (10 USC § 3964) entitles certain retired members of the Army who retired with less than 30 years of active service to be advanced to the highest grade satisfactorily held when their active service plus service on the retired list totals 30 years. This section of federal law is applicable to warrant officers of the Army, enlisted Soldiers of the Regular Army, Army Reserve members who were serving on active duty at the time of retirement, and members of the National Guard serving on full-time National Guard duty at the time of retirement.

The Army provides guidance in Army Regulation (AR) 15-80, Army Grade Determination Review Board and Grad Determinations. AR 15-80 defines “Highest grade served on active duty” as the grade to which a Soldier was actually promoted and paid pursuant to lawful promotion and does not include promotable status, serving in an acting capacity or holding a position or job title of an authorized higher grade such as acting first sergeant or sergeant major. When the reduction from the highest grade held was caused by misconduct, inefficiency or for cause, the grade determination can be initiated at the 30-year mark or beyond if the member believes that advancement is appropriate to either the highest grade held or an intermediate grade. If the highest grade held was a commissioned officer, the individual must meet the statutory time in grade requirements to be advanced on the retired list.
Grade determinations for commissioned officers, enlisted Soldiers, warrant officers who retire with 30 or more years of service and individuals who are retired for non-regular service under 10 USC § 12731 (Reserve Component retirement normally at age 60) are completed when placed on the retired list. If you meet the criteria, you can apply by mailing your application letter to Army Review Boards Agency, AGDRB, 1901 South Bell Street, 2nd Floor, Arlington, VA 22202-4508. On the ARBA website http://arba.army.pentagon.mil/agdrb-overview.cfm there is a sample letter and more information on the ARBA. For additional assistance, contact your local Retirement Services Officer. [Source: Army Echoes | JUN - SEP 2016 ++]

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Military Promotion Policy ► 'Up-or-Out' Has Flaws

Defense Secretary Ash Carter would like to sidestep the "up-or-out" method of military promotions, saying it has been "highly successful" but has flaws. He is pushing for a promotion system based on merit, according to an article in Politico, a publication that covers Capitol Hill. Carter spoke about his idea during a speech last week at the Pentagon. He would also like to bring people directly into the military to join specialized and high-demand fields like cybersecurity. These people would be taken into the armed forces much like doctors. These ideas are part of the Carter's "Force of the Future" initiative that would make the military appeal to tech-savvy millennials, Politico reported. A key provision to that is how the military promotes. The "up-or-out" policy has been in place for decades and was designed to develop a young officer corps and prevent logjams at certain ranks. But it is now seen by many as pushing out good officers. Carter said, "It can offer little incentive for officers to focus, specialize or try something different from a traditional career path, even if it would benefit the DoD and make our force more effective." [Source: NGAUS Washington Report | June 14, 2016 ++]

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PTSD Punitive Discharges Update 03 ► New Navy Discipline Policy

For years, the military has struggled to deal with the unseen, psychological wounds of war, especially Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Now, Navy Secretary Ray Mabus has instituted major changes to the rules affecting sailors and Marines who suffer from PTSD. Mabus joins John Yang to explain the reforms and why they are necessary. In the following transcript:

JUDY WOODRUFF: Now to a major change being made by the U.S. Navy that will affect servicemen suffering from one of the unseen wounds of war.

JOHN YANG: The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have killed thousands of American servicemen and maimed and injured tens of thousands more, but some wounds are not as easily seen or identified. Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD afflicts as much as one-fifth of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in any given year. Compounding the affliction,
personnel who were kicked out of the military because of erratic behavior caused by PTSD, by traumatic brain injury, called TBI, or by other mental health conditions often lose their benefits, including access to veterans health care. But that will now change for at least one of the services, navy personnel, sailors and Marines, under a new policy enacted by Navy Secretary Ray Mabus. Secretary Mabus joins us now. Thank you for joining us.

RAY MABUS, Secretary of the Navy: Glad to be here.

JOHN YANG: Tell us what this new policy is and why you made this change.

RAY MABUS: The policy that we had been operating under was, if somebody committed misconduct, the erratic behavior you were talking about, that took preference over everything else in terms of a discharge. And so people would get discharged with bad paper, with discharges that didn’t give them any benefits when they left. What we have done with policy that I have just signed was to say, if you’re being administratively discharged for some misconduct, we’re going to take a look to see if you have got a diagnosable condition, to see if you have got PTSD, to see if you have got traumatic brain injury, and then that will factor in, so that you may still be discharged, but you will be discharged with benefits, with help that we’re going to recognize the reason for this erratic behavior and give you help after you leave the military. And it’s not just for combat injuries, combat wounds. It’s also for things like sexual assault that is often followed by PTSD.

JOHN YANG: And just to be clear, you say that this conduct took precedence. In other words, it didn’t matter that the misconduct may have had an underlying cause.

RAY MABUS: Right. The only thing that was looked at was the misconduct. And the discharge was based on that misconduct without why it was caused, without PTSD evaluation, without TBI evaluation. And the awful thing was, when people left under this circumstance, they got no benefits. So, they couldn’t get into veterans health care. They couldn’t get the assistance they needed to deal with PTSD or to deal with traumatic brain injury. It was a pure policy issue. And this is not just for people being discharged now, not just for active-duty people. If you’re a veteran, and you were discharged and got bad paper, and so you’re not getting any benefits, and you believe that it was caused by in some way or another PTSD or traumatic brain injury, come back. We will take another look at it. We will take another run at the determination of the discharge. If it is found by that, you will be able to get your benefits, even if you have been discharged for a while.

JOHN YANG: Any idea how many men and women that could affect?

RAY MABUS: The estimates we have got on traumatic brain injury are 46,000 sailors, 49,000 Marines. That’s a lot of people. It’s hard to know, in terms of why people were discharged, why — what kind of discharges they got. This sort of thing, it’s hard to know how many are going to fit in under that, but it’s clearly not just a few people.

JOHN YANG: Do you think enough is being done for sailors and Marines to recognize, on the commanders’ part, to recognize when behavior may be because of PTSD or traumatic brain injury?

RAY MABUS: I think we’re making progress on that.

The other part of this policy is that, if you’re going to be discharged and there’s a possibility you will be discharged without benefits, that discharge decision was moved way up in the chain of command. It has got to be done by an admiral or a general, a flag officer, instead of where it used to be which was a unit commander, which would be a lieutenant colonel, colonel, somewhere around in there.

JOHN YANG: Mr. Secretary, do you think the other services will follow your lead on this?

RAY MABUS: Well, I certainly hope so. And we have had some talks with the other services on how we implemented this and what the new policy is. And so this is the right thing to do.

JOHN YANG: Let me ask you one more question about an issue facing the modern military. The Pentagon just recently had their LGBT pride event. Secretary Carter said last year that he would — was looking to change the policy to allow transgender people to serve in the military. That new policy was due five months ago. Can you give us any insight into what the issues are that are holding this up?

RAY MABUS: I know that the process is ongoing. We have participated in the process in terms of transgender.
And I think that, from Secretary Carter’s memo, when he set this out, it’s not if, but when. It’s not if, but how. We had all expected the policy before now, but things take a while sometimes.

JOHN YANG: Very good. Secretary Ray Mabus, thank you for being with us.
RAY MABUS: Appreciate it, John.

[Source: PBS Newshour | John Yang | June 16, 2016 ++]

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**Trump Military Missteps** ➤ **Iraq Reconstruction Funds,** ++

Presidential candidate Donald Trump faced renewed criticism from veterans’ activists after comments 14 JUN that appeared to accuse U.S. troops of stealing money earmarked for reconstruction efforts during the war in Iraq. During a campaign speech in North Carolina, the presumed Republican nominee talked about cutting government waste and improving oversight of taxpayer dollars, then transitioned to the costly war in the Middle East. “Iraq. Crooked as hell,” he said. “How about bringing baskets of money, millions and millions of dollars, and handing it out? “I want to know who are the soldiers that had that job because I think they’re living very well right now, whoever they may be. Think of it, the money that went out.” ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_r152kfgf4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_r152kfgf4))” After the speech, Trump’s campaign issued a statement saying the comments were directed at Iraqi troops, not U.S. forces in charge of managing hundreds of millions of dollars in reconstruction funds.

In response to Trump's charges, Senior adviser to VoteVets.org, Retired Major General Paul Eaton, a former commander in Iraq, said the following:

"Trump's attack against the courageous American men and women who heroically worked to restore law and order in Iraq is at once uninformed and irresponsible, and is testimony to why Mr. Trump is unqualified to serve as Commander in Chief of the finest troops on the planet.

"From saying he doesn't like POWs because they were captured, to trying to get disabled veterans kicked out from in front of Trump Tower, to belittling service by calling his sexual exploits in the 80s his "personal Vietnam," it is clear Trump has no respect for military service, or the people who serve.

"For him to smear our troops and veterans as he has, it is disqualifying, as far as I am concerned."

A Politico report noted that Trump has made similar comments in the past about reconstruction funds theft (refer to [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_r152kfgf4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_r152kfgf4)) and a 2015 Center for Public Integrity report listed 115 cases of U.S. troops committing theft and contract-rigging crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. VoteVets.org officials also listed a series of military missteps by Trump’s campaign in the last year, including comments questioning Arizona Sen. John McCain’s military service because of his capture during the Vietnam War and writings where he compared his boarding school experience to serving in the military. During the North Carolina speech, Trump repeated his assertion that he opposed the war in Iraq from the beginning, even though news reports have cast doubt on that claim.

VoteVets.org’s website identifies their organization in the following manner: “Founded in 2006, and backed by over 400,000 supporters, the mission of VoteVets.org Action Fund is to use public issue campaigns and direct outreach to lawmakers to ensure that troops abroad have what they need to complete their missions, and receive the care they deserve when they get home. VoteVets.org also recognizes veterans as a vital part of the fabric of our country and will work to protect veterans’ interests in their day-to-day lives. VoteVets.org is committed to the destruction of terror networks around the world - with force when necessary - to protect America. While non-partisan, the group is the largest progressive organization of veterans in America.” [Source: Military Times | Leo Shane | June 15, 2016 ++]
Online Course for Transitioning Service Members

If you’re a military veteran looking to enter the corporate world, you might need some help with the transition. Now, there’s an online entry-level course designed for that purpose, according to a news release issued by Georgia Tech Professional Education. The Veterans Education Training and Transition 101 program, goes by the acronym VET2. It was created by Georgia Tech Professional Education, in collaboration with the Georgia Department of Economic Development, to provide employment opportunities and assistance for up to 7,000 veterans from Fort Benning and Fort Stewart. It’s free to service members and combines professional education with job experience by partnering “active, transitioning and recently separated service members” with employers for classroom and online instruction. The course will focus on employment “soft skills” such as resume building and interview skills.

“During two decades of serving in the military, I never once had to review a job description, create a resume, or participate in an interview,” said James Wilburn, director of Military Programs at Georgia Tech Professional Education. “The VET2 101 program on Resume Building & Interview Skills will provide much needed assistance to our men and women transitioning from the service. With the number of soldiers being cut dramatically at bases nationwide, we worked to create an online course that transitioning veterans will be able to access anywhere in the world giving them the skills they need to start the transition process into the corporate workforce.”

The reduction in military force announced in 2015-16 will have the largest impact to Georgia’s military installations – specifically Fort Benning and Fort Stewart, according to the news release. The course is based on a book entitled “Boots to Loafers, Finding Your True North,” written by retired Lt. Col. John W. Phillips. Phillips currently collaborates with the Military Program, called VET2, offered through Georgia Tech Professional Education, and his book is required reading for students enrolled. “We look forward to leveraging the good work of Georgia Tech Professional Education in developing a training system for our state’s military personnel as they transition into the civilian workforce,” said Ben Hames, Deputy Commissioner of Workforce, Georgia Department of Economic Development. “This online course provides us with an additional tool to support our veterans.” For more info about VET2 101, go to www.pe.gatech.edu/VET101.

Note: Soldiers from Ft. Benning, Ft. Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield (HAAF), contact the course administrator (military.programs@pe.gatech.edu) prior to registration. For others there is a $59 registration fee.

[Source: Ledger-Enquirer | Alva James-Johnson | June 14, 2016 ++]

Iron Dome ► Anti-Rocket Interception System

Despite widespread global interest and reputed export sales to countries from East Asia to the Arabian Gulf, Israel’s Iron Dome anti-rocket intercepting system has not yet been sold to a single customer, government and industry sources say. That’s primarily because few countries in the world face the persistent threat of rocket barrages the way Israel does, sources here say. Developed by state-owned Rafael Ltd., Iron Dome has garnered extraordinary name recognition across the globe for operational successes in defending against Gaza-launched rockets. Since first fielded in 2011, Iron Dome has been credited with more than 1500 operational intercepts; a success rate of some 90 percent when measured against the number of rockets designated by the system as imminent threats to people or property. “Who else in the world is constantly threatened by rockets? It’s essentially only us and perhaps sheikdoms in the Persian Gulf, where for obvious reasons, we do not yet export,” said Uzi Rubin, a veteran missile defense expert and former head of Israel’s Missile Defense Organization.
An Israeli soldier (left) walks past an "Iron Dome" battery, a short-range missile defense system, designed to intercept and destroy incoming short-range rockets and artillery shells, on March 9, 2014, in the southern Israeli city of Eilat.

**Iron Dome launches (right) an interceptor during Operation Pillar of Defense**

Rafael executives say they aim to change the “no sales yet” status of Iron Dome through an expanded mission set, including sea-based defense, drone killing missions and the ability to intercept anything from mortars to precision-guided munitions (PGMs). “What the world has seen so far with Iron Dome is just the tip of the iceberg. Its footprint is much larger and its multi-mission versatility is much broader than anything we’ve seen in action,” said Rafael executive Ari Sacher. In recent months, a sea-based version of the system, called C-Dome, was successfully tested on one of the Israel Navy’s EL/M-2048 Adir radar-equipped Sa’ar-5 corvettes. Rear Adm. Yossi Ashkenazi, head of the Israel Navy’s Materiel Command, said the service plans to equip Sa’ar-6 combat vessels now under construction in Germany and two older Sa’ar-5 corvettes with the sea-based Iron Dome.

**C-Dome**

In April, Rafael and its US partner Raytheon Missile Systems Co. scored their first intercepts outside of Israel in a US Army test at White Sands, New Mexico. In that test, the Iron Dome’s Tamir missile was launched from a US Army Multi-Mission Launcher against a target drone, which was completely destroyed. Raytheon co-produces major parts of Iron Dome’s Tamir interceptors in the United States under a work-share arrangement mandated in exchange for US production funds. The two firms also have a teaming agreement whereby Raytheon co-markets Iron Dome for prospective sales in the US and select target markets. In parallel, Rafael is working with Raytheon to market the US Army-tested Tamir interceptor integrated into the service’s Multi-Mission Launcher under a program called Sky Hunter.

In an interview at Rafael corporate headquarters here, Sacher said the Iron Dome’s Tamir interceptors could be integrated into radars, launchers and control systems of interested countries for a multitude of missions. The Rafael executive also noted that in tests, Iron Dome destroyed salvos of artillery shells and “multiple” PGMs similar to those of the US Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM). “If someone tries to launch a JDAM at you and you have Iron Dome protecting a forward operating base, you can take out that JDAM,” he said. “What we’ve done in tests, which most
people don’t know, is we’ve destroyed salvos of artillery shells. These are really difficult to destroy because they are so thick and you have to penetrate the metal casings before you get to the warhead. But we did it. We whacked artillery shells with Iron Dome.” With respect to the proliferating threat of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), Sacher said Iron Dome’s powerful warhead can “rip a UAV apart.”

Sacher said the warhead designed for Tamir is much larger than the five- to seven-kilo warheads featured on most air-to-air missiles, such as the AIM-9 Sidewinder. “Most of the interceptors are based on air-to-air weapons, with their relatively small warheads. So if a Sidewinder (AIM-9) missile can take out a UAV, we can totally rip a UAV apart.” In tests, said Sacher, “Iron Dome has turned UAVs into UAV juice.” He added, “With such versatility, why use Iron Dome only against ballistic rockets?” [Source: Defense News | Barbara Opall-Rome | June 14, 2016 ++]

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**Lateral Entry ➤ Up To E-7 or O-6 Authority Sought**

For many sailors, earning the anchors of a chief petty officer is the culmination of 13 years of work, the reward for succeeding in the toughest jobs of the enlisted force. But those anchors may soon come readily, right after boot camp, for some specialists joining the service under a new proposal. This push is part of the military's controversial plan to recruit experts mid-career for growing areas like cyber warfare where the services want to build up the capabilities of their uniformed forces rapidly, by recruiting experienced operators from the private sector. The military has asked Congress to relax officer personnel laws so they could directly hire civilians at pay grades up to O-6.

The Navy wants to hire chiefs and captains – off the street

On the enlisted side, current Navy policy already allows the service to bring in sailors up to the E-6 level, which in the active-duty force is limited to musicians. It would only take the stroke of a pen to approve lateral entry into new communities and ranks as high as chief — a move Navy leaders have said they're interested in. “We're seeking the authority to bring somebody in at the E-7 level or up to the O-6 level,” said Vice Adm. Robert Burke in May. The Navy already direct accesses officer candidates with special experience, like lawyers and doctors, to ranks up to lieutenant commander. Navy officials want this expanded authority to fill critical needs in existing career fields and to build new capability fast. “Right now, the one we’re focused on is the cyber [community] because that’s the immediate need,” said Burke, who took over as the chief of naval personnel in May after a year overseeing personnel plans and policy. “But we want this authority in place so that we could use it where those needs arise, because we want to be responsive when the need comes — we don’t want to start writing policy the minute we discover we need it.”

The foremost challenge in changing the enlisted lateral entry rules will be persuading Navy chiefs to accept someone into their ranks who's just graduated from boot camp. "There is a heck of a lot more to being a Chief Petty Officer than whatever technical knowledge you may know," one commenter wrote in May, when Navy Times first wrote about this proposal. The boosted lateral entry powers center on the Navy's cyber force. They could also be used for Staff Corps and Restricted Line officer specialties. But in the foreseeable future officials say they won't be used for the Unrestricted Line officers that lead the Navy's combat forces. The Navy does not have any detailed plans, but could put this into effect as soon as October should Congress nod their approval.
Direct accessions are commonplace for some officer communities. Certain medical specialties can be brought in up to the O-5 level, but most come in as O-3s. Lawyers, chaplains, supply officers and civil engineers are directly accessed as well, but typically only to the O-3 level; it requires Navy secretary approval to direct access an officer to commander. The Navy Reserve has an active and successful direct commission officer program that hires officers straight off the street in one of 13 specialties, mostly in the restricted line specialties. For example public affairs, intelligence and engineering duty are all specialties. Many come in as ensigns. In the active-duty enlisted ranks, currently only the musician rating uses direct accession to recruit professional musicians into the bands located in Washington, D.C. These sailors are brought in as E-6s after completing boot camp. In the reserve, there’s the Advanced Paygrade Program that brings in enlisted sailors with needed skills in nearly all ratings at up to the E-6 level. Some have even come in at the E-7 level, though currently this requires an exception approved by CNP. With greater authorities, direct accession could eventually be used anyplace where Navy needs available advanced skills quickly.

In the short-term, the Navy wants this to expand their cyber capabilities. “Today, cyber is where we need it, tomorrow we might need it in 10 other places,” Burke said. “I just can’t foresee what those might be right now.” The Navy is seeking lateral accessions in the enlisted and officer force to draw on the experience of cyber experts in the civilian world, by promoting them to positions where their know-how is needed to pursue operations in the growing cyber force. “I think it would mean a lot operationally and it recognizes that sometimes this is a rank-free zone,” Vice Adm. Jan Tighe, who leads U.S. Fleet Cyber Command and 10th Fleet, said of the lateral accession push in May. “When we are doing operations, what someone is wearing on their collar may not have implications as to how much expertise or fight that they have in them — how much ability they have to deliver during cyber operations or information warfare operations. “So how do we resolve that? Either incentives or rewards or promotions or bringing them in at the right level.”

Officials said direct accession is unlikely to be used in the Unrestricted Line, where future leaders are built over years at sea, in the cockpit, in the SEAL teams. “We’re looking at having the ability to do this at our discretion,” said Adm. Bill Moran, the former CNP who became the vice chief of naval operations in May. “They are not going to be the rule — it allows us to have more options in the talent you want to recruit and retain.”

The Navy’s leadership sees direct accession from places like Silicon Valley as a means to build a robust cyber warfare capability fast. They warn it could take a decade or more to grow their own cyber warriors — an eternity in the rapidly evolving cyber battlespace. To wage this new fight, the Navy is leaning on its history. One of the foremost examples of widespread lateral entry was the rapid creation of the Navy’s Construction Battalions from scratch at the onset of World War II. The Navy had plans for construction troops during the 1930s, but it wasn’t until after the 1941 Pearl Harbor attack that those plans were set into motion. The capability was urgently needed for the Pacific island campaign that began in November 1942 in Guadalcanal. The service brought these Seabees in via direct accession from the construction trade organizations and unions; foremen and supervisors joined at more senior positions, while laborers came in as petty officers. During the war, over 325,000 were directly accessed into the Seabees alone.

Supply and medical, to name just two, also expanded their ranks by bringing in officers and enlisted laterally from civilian organizations. The Navy even brought in professional athletes to take charge of physical training. Legendary Cleveland Indian’s baseball pitcher Bob Feller was laterally accessed into the Navy in 1941 as a chief petty officer. He started and finished his career whipping recruits into shape as a chief specialist; he also served as a fitness instructor on the battleship Alabama and was a turret captain when the ship was called to general quarters. He served in combat during the Battle of the Philippine Sea in this role.

Should lawmakers approve of the Defense Department’s request, the communities seeking the lateral accessions would run the program. Boards could be convened to determine if candidates are suitable and qualified for service and decide what paygrade they’ll be offered. That’s how the service managed the process during World War II — and generally how they handle the reserve direct commissions today, though there’s usually no paygrade determination, as most come in at O-1. Today’s reserve selectees then go through the Officer Training Command in Newport, R.I.
The two-week Direct Commission Officer Indoctrination Course, affectionately known as “Knife and Fork School,” teaches them the basics. On the enlisted side, non-prior service direct accessions attend boot camp at Recruit Training Command Great Lakes, Ill. This applies to the Navy Reserve and active-duty musicians. Upon graduation, they assume their direct accession rank. Prior service sailors re-entering would most likely be treated different, having already graduated boot camp; they could be re-indoctrinated through the prior service training that at Great Lakes.

Beyond the Staff Corps and the enlisted musician rating, it's been a long time since the Navy has direct accessed on any scale. Moran says the biggest obstacle to bringing in candidates at senior positions is an age old one — money. “The governor on all this is money, if you bring someone in at the E-5 level or O-5 level, is that you will be paying them more at an early point in their career and that will always be somewhat of a limiting factor,” Moran said. “Once we get our arms around that and look at more creative ways of managing careers and take full advantage of the changes in the retirement — all of those things are merging together in a very important discussion — to look at policies to do lateral transition.” On the cultural side, there's also challenges. The foremost: persuading Navy chiefs to accept a civilian brought in at the E-7 paygrade.

When Burke discussed this idea in mid-May, he got an immediate reaction from some, like a chief aviation electronics technician who asked not to be identified by name out of concerns for his career. "Creating push button CPOs is ridiculous,” the ATC wrote of Burke's statement. “He states that he is, ‘seeking the authority to bring somebody in at the E-7 level.’ “I find the choice of words interesting — notice that he doesn't say that they want to bring someone in at the CPO level. There's only one entity that selects, tests and accepts Chief Petty Officers. That's the United States Navy Chief Petty Officers Mess. Anything else is an E-7. “They talking about cheapening the CPO brand. They're talking about creating counterfeit chiefs.” [Source: Navy Times | Mark D. Faram | June 19, 2016 ++]

Air Force Photos ► Walter Reed National Military Medical Center Therapy

Staff Sgt. Sebastiana Lopez Arellano, a patient at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, does pushups during a therapy session at the center’s Military Advanced Training Center, which provides amputee patients with state-of-the-art care, in Bethesda, Md. Lopez, who lost her right leg and suffered several other injuries in a motorcycle crash in 2015, is competing in the Department of Defense Warrior Games, which end June 21.
Hydrogen Bomb Accident 1966 ➤ B-52 Crash w/4 Bombs Onboard

Alarms sounded on United States Air Force bases in Spain and officers began packing all the low-ranking troops they could grab onto buses for a secret mission. There were cooks, grocery clerks and even musicians from the Air Force band. It was a late winter night in 1966 and a fully loaded B-52 bomber on a Cold War nuclear patrol had collided with a refueling jet high over the Spanish coast, freeing four hydrogen bombs that went tumbling toward a farming village called Palomares, a patchwork of small fields and tile-roofed white houses in an out-of-the-way corner of Spain’s rugged southern coast that had changed little since Roman times.

The debris of a crashed American plane in January 1966 in Palomares, Spain.

It was one of the biggest nuclear accidents in history, and the United States wanted it cleaned up quickly and quietly. To read about this event and the impact it had on the men involved in the cleanup refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “Hydrogen Bomb Accident 1966”. [Source: The New York Times | Dave Philipps | June 19, 2016 ++]

Iwo Jima Flag Raising ➤ One Participant Misidentified

The Marine Corps admitted Thursday that it misidentified one of the six men in the World War II photograph of a flag-raising in Iwo Jima — one of the most iconic images in American history. "Our history is important to us, and we have a responsibility to ensure it's right," Marine Corps' commandant Gen. Robert Neller said in a statement. For
more than 70 years, history said John Bradley, a Navy hospital corpsman, was one of the six men seen in the legendary photo from one of the war’s bloodiest battles. But the Marines now say Bradley is nowhere in the photo — and the man believed to be Bradley is in fact Harold Schultz, a private first class.

Schultz’s stepdaughter said he knew he was the man in the photo — but kept it to himself, save for one time he suddenly broke the news at a family dinner a few years before his death. “My mom was distracted and not listening and Harold said, ‘I was one of the flag raisers,’” Dezreen MacDowell told The New York Times. “I said, ‘My gosh, Harold, you’re a hero.’ He said, ‘No, I was a Marine.’ After he said that, it was clear he didn’t want to talk about it.” Schultz worked as a mail carrier after the war, and died in 1995 — with the flag photo in his belonging. Bradley had died the year before.

Bradley earned relative fame for his reported appearance in the photo, which was taken on Feb. 23, 1945. He was centrally featured in “Flags of Our Fathers,” a book co-written by his son James Bradley, which Clint Eastwood adapted into a 2006 film. Private first class Harold Schultz, the sixth man in the Iwo Jima photo. Navy corpsman John Bradley was long believed to be the sixth man. But Bradley consistently turned down interview requests through his lifetime and rarely spoke about his supposed spot in a historic snapshot. Bradley’s appearance in the photo came into question after Stephen Foley, an amateur historian in Ireland, noticed some discrepancies while analyzing the photo during his recovery from an operation. He and Eric Krelle, a Marine historian from Nebraska started probing the photo, leading the Marine Corps to open its own investigation in May.

Foley and Krelle said the man believed to be Bradley was wearing a cartridge belt with ammunition pouches and wire cutters — which a Navy corpsman would not have had. They also said photos from the same day showed Bradley in different clothing. Foley and Krelle were the first to say Schultz was the sixth man. After questions about the photo arose two years ago, Bradley’s son admitted he was no longer sure if his father was there. He said his father was involved in a different flag-raising, and may have mistakenly believed for the rest of his life he was in the Iwo Jima image. A documentary about the photo probe, “The Unknown Flag Raiser of Iwo Jima,” will debut on the Smithsonian Channel 3 JUL. [Source: New York Daily News | Jason Silverstein | June 23, 2016 ++]

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Khobar Towers ► 20 Years Later: Remembering the Attack

Alfredo Guerrero, a staff sergeant at the time, wasn’t supposed to be on top of Bldg. 131 in the Khobar Towers complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, on the night of June 25, 1996. But as the acting flight sergeant for the military police unit, he was checking on the Airmen who were assigned to sentry posts. Most of the Airmen in the building were assigned to the 4404th Wing (Provisional), and were in Saudi Arabia supporting Operation Southern Watch. It
was a time before the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant became a threat. In 1996, Hezbollah and Iran targeted Americans.

Nineteen Airmen died and more than 350 were injured in the terrorist attack at Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, on June 25, 1996. The front of Bldg. 131 was blown off when terrorists detonated a fuel truck parked nearby.

That night Guerrero arrived on the rooftop around 10 p.m., as he watched a large gas truck, followed by a car, make its way to the building he was on. That same car and truck was also spotted by then-1st Lt. Michael Harner, who was inside the building beside Guerrero. Harner, who had only been on station for several days, had just returned to his room, opened a sliding glass door and stepped out onto his balcony. Before the truck made its way to Guerrero’s building, Harner noticed it parked in a parking lot next to a mosque that was under construction. Days earlier, there had been no vehicle traffic through the parking lot. “I watched as it drove right in front of me, and the lights from the compound shone, so I could see the people in the truck, and there was actually a vehicle following the truck,” Harner said. “I thought that was very unusual to see that, and I didn’t know quite what to do about it, (because) nobody’s shooting or nobody’s doing anything.”

The truck then parked beside Guererro’s building. Two men got out and hurried into the car, which sped off. At that moment, it clicked for Guerrero that this wasn’t normal and something bad was about to happen. “I got on the radio and called the control center to tell them what was going on, and, before I finished my first transmission, I thought about the people in the building and realized, ‘Well, if this is what I think it is, this building is going down,’” Guerrero said. “And so, before I finished my first transmission, I told them I was beginning to evacuate the building.” The Airman with Guerrero overheard his radio transmissions and rushed into the building to begin evacuating. Guerrero got the attention of another Airman on the other side of the building and the two of them also began evacuating the eight-story building.

Guerrero only made it down a few floors before the blast went off. “I was fortunate enough to be behind an interior wall and so most of the overpressure from the bomb went right behind me. So, I was kind of in a protected area,” he said. “It just spun me around; it didn’t knock me down or anything.” Not all were that lucky. The explosion killed 19 Airmen and injured more than 350 service members and civilians. It was so powerful that all of the windows in a 2-mile radius were blown out. Sitting near the balcony door in the dorm’s common room, Harner recalled seeing a flash of light before the door was blown apart. “I ate that sliding glass door,” Harner said, as he described how the glass shredded his face, shoulder, arm and leg.
Both towers were dark. As Harner tried to feel his way around his dorm, he made his way back into his bedroom. He remembered yelling out of the hole in the wall where his window once was, “Is there anybody out there? “It was dead silence,” he said. “And it was probably one of the most eerie feelings I have ever had in my entire life.” Over in Guerrero’s building, an entire side of the building had completely collapsed. “The next thing I knew, everything was pitch black. I couldn’t hear anything or see anything,” he said. After he collected himself and was aware of where he was, Guerrero immediately began assisting the injured. After helping an Airman down the stairs and out of the building, he headed back inside to the second floor. It was there he saw a few Airmen lying motionless under some rubble. “Everything was kind of blurry and surreal,” he said. Soon after, his leadership arrived. He briefed them on what he had experienced and was sent away to get checked out and cleaned up.

Right before the explosion, then-Staff Sgt. Selena Zuhoski was watching a movie in the recreation building with fellow Airmen. “I remembered the lights flickered, and then I heard a deep ‘boom.’ And then I remember … dust billowing in,” she said. Zuhoski would later learn that she had been knocked unconscious. As she regained consciousness, she and a group of people headed outside, where they saw a mushroom cloud around the site of the explosion. When they headed toward the damaged building, she said she saw people coming over the fence. Her first thought was that they were under attack. The people hopping the fence were locals, coming to help. After reaching the building, Zuhoski heard “there’s a guy dying on the fourth floor. He’s going into shock.” With a flashlight in hand, she and others headed upstairs. “There was a man there in a puddle of blood and there was a door that had been blown off its hinges,” she recalled. The group utilized the door as a makeshift gurney and carefully loaded the injured man onto it and carried him downstairs and outside, where they put him on a table until paramedics arrived.

As the group headed back into the building, Zuhoski waited with the man until more help arrived. “I held his hand and I was covering this wound on his chest,” she said. “I was saying, you know, ‘Hold on, it’s gonna be OK.’ His hand was really cold and he was saying ‘Oh, God. Oh, God.’ And I said ‘Please. Please hold on.’ And then … I could tell the instant that the life left his body.” Paramedics arrived and took the man away, loading him onto a bus. Zuhoski then went back into the building to help more victims.

Harner, who at the time was a pavements engineer for the 4404th WG, suffered deep wounds from broken glass, along with PTSD. After being transported to a local hospital, they cleaned him up and packed him full of gauze, concerned that sewing him up with glass left inside of his body could lead to infection. Harner, who was deployed from Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, was medically evacuated the next day to Germany, where he spent two days before being sent back stateside. He would go on to receive the Purple Heart, and for the next decade, shards of glass would continue to work their way out of his body. Harner, now a colonel, serves as the associate director of civil engineers at the Pentagon.

Along with him and others, Zuhoski also suffered from PTSD. “I probably didn’t even realize the impact that this would have on me as far as being like a lifelong … traumatic event,” she said. “I thought that … it would eventually fade, but it hasn’t. It’s gotten worse. I have nightmares, I have guilt. (I) wish I would have been able to do more.” With the support of her husband, Zuhoski said she’s been able to use art as an outlet. Her husband set up a studio for her in their home about a year ago. “It’s really been therapeutic for me,” she said. Zuhoski said talking openly to others who experienced the same tragedy has also helped.

With every tragedy, policies, procedures and ways of thinking are updated to help prevent another one. Guerrero, now the anti-terrorism program manager at the Defense Threat Reduction Agency at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, said one point he hits hard on when giving anti-terrorism briefings is to know the enemy. “You have to know who you’re dealing with and how far they’re willing to go, what types of targets they’re looking for,” he said. He said there are no front lines anymore, and it’s everybody’s responsibility to be vigilant. “I think we’ve come a long way for protecting our folks. We’re teaching other countries how to do it,” Guerrero said. “My hope is that we’ve learned enough on where we can stop the next one, and so that’s what scares me -- the next one. What is the next one and how far are they willing to go.” Go to https://youtu.be/f0Nt6QKkONE to view a 20 minute video of the above survivors relating their experiences. [Source: Air Force News Service | Staff Sgt. Christopher Gross | June 24, 2016 ++]
USS William D. Porter (DD-549) ► Unluckiest WWII Ship

The USS William D. Porter (DD-579) — “Willie Dee” to her crew — was a War World II destroyer, and is arguably the unluckiest ship in the history of the world. She lasted less than two years, until her ill-fated demise in June of 1945. She was one of the many war-built assembly line destroyers. Although the ships were small compared to modern-day destroyers, they were formidable forces in their time. Their main armament included 10 fast-running and accurate torpedoes that carried 500-pound warheads, but also included anti-aircraft artillery weapons. The USS William D. Porter was commissioned on July 6th 1943 under the command of Lt. Cmdr. Wilfred A. Walter.

In November of 1943, she was ordered to accompany the battleship Iowa on a secret mission across the Atlantic that the crew of the Porter was told nothing about. The crew members quickly learned its tasks and purposes before setting sail, but clearly wasn’t ready for its upcoming mission — a few days later, they almost killed the precious secret cargo aboard the Iowa — U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and many high-level U.S. military officers. The series of misfortunes began with the surreptitious order to escort the Iowa to North Africa. The night before she was to set sail, the William D. Porter took out a nearby sister ship when, while backing into the side of this ship, tore down essential equipment with her anchor — including railings and the captain’s gig. The Willie Dee suffered only minor scratches to her anchor, but this marked the beginning of her two-year life of total chaos.

About 24 hours later, the four-ship convoy consisting of the William D. Porter, the Iowa, and two other destroyers had set sail for Africa. All of the ships were under strict orders to maintain total silence as they sailed through the waters that were suspected to contain German U-boats. The ships hoped to quickly and quietly cross the ocean undetected. Not long into the journey, there was a massive explosion that shook the entire small fleet. All of the ships immediately began anti-submarine maneuvering. The chaos continued until Lt. Cmdr. Walter admitted that a depth charge had fallen off of the stern of the ship. The safety on the charge had mistakenly not been set, and when it crashed into the rough sea, it detonated.

Soon after accidentally detonating a depth charge, a huge wave smashed into the William D. Porter — thus stripping it of everything that wasn’t tied down — and a man was washed overboard, never to be seen again. As a result of the wave, the engine room lost power in one of its boilers. The mission, which had demanded total silence, turned into an hourly reporting fiasco from Walter to the Iowa.
On Nov. 14th, 1943, the four ships were east of Bermuda when the president wanted to test the defenses of the Iowa in the event that they came under an air attack. The crew of the Iowa launched weather balloons to simulate anti-aircraft targets, and fired over 100 guns. In command of the William D. Porter, Walter, wanting to join in on the fun and redeem himself for the Willie Dee’s earlier episodes, sent his men to their battle stations. Willie Dee’s crew started shooting at the Iowa’s missed balloons that had drifted toward their ship. Down below on the torpedo mounts, the crew was preparing to take practice shots at the Iowa — which was 6,000 yards away. During live torpedo drills, primers, or small explosive charges, are removed for practice, but one of the torpedomen forgot to remove the primer from one of the torpedo tubes. Just as the torpedo officer ordered the fake firing command, a successfully armed and launched torpedo whizzed across the sea, straight toward the Iowa — endangering some of the world’s most influential figures, including Roosevelt.

According to Kit Bonner, a prominent historian who has studied the Porter, “the next five minutes aboard the Willie Dee were pandemonium.” The crew ran around yelling conflicting orders, and tried to think of the best way to contact the Iowa under their stringent orders of silence. They attempted flashing light signals (indicated in the wrong direction, of course) and then signaled a full speed reverse. The William D. Porter finally decided that it was necessary to break the mandatory silence, and notified the Iowa in the nick of time. When Roosevelt heard that a torpedo was zooming toward him, he asked to be moved with his wheelchair over to the railing so that he could see it. Fearing an assassination plot, the Iowa turned its guns toward the William D. Porter — however, the crisis ended when the torpedo finally detonated as it struck heavy waves created by the Iowa’s increased speed. Walter reportedly answered with a meek “We did it” when pressed. The entire crew was placed under arrest and sent to Bermuda to face trial — the first instance in U.S. Naval history that the entire crew of a ship had been arrested.

One of the torpedomen, Lawton Dawson, confessed to having accidentally left the primer in the torpedo tube and attempting to conceal the evidence by throwing the primer off the side of the ship. The inquiry proved that the situation was merely a string of unfortunate events and the information was not released to the public. Dawson was sentenced to 14 years of hard labor, and the rest of the crew’s careers were to be ended — but Roosevelt intervened, asking that no punishments be levied on the crew for the series of accidents.

The USS William D. Porter sinks after she was near-missed by a "Kamikaze" suicide aircraft off the coast of Okinawa, Japan, June 10, 1945

The William D. Porter was eventually reassigned to the Aleutian Islands in the northern Pacific, on a relatively simple patrol mission. Before being reassigned to a different area in the Pacific, however — the William D. Porter accidentally shot a five-inch artillery shell which landed on the commandant’s front yard on the American base in the islands. The William D. Porter was assigned to Okinawa, Japan, and finally did a fine job destroying many different
Japanese aircraft … oh, and three American aircraft. Those who greeted the ship’s crew often joked, “Don’t shoot, we’re Republicans!”

On June 10, 1945, the ship ran out of any luck it ever possessed. When a fully-loaded kamikaze plane — a Japanese bomber constructed mostly from canvas and wood — snuck into U.S. airspace, it attempted to crash into a ship near the William D. Porter. However, at the last moment, it veered away and crashed alongside the Willie Dee. The plane sunk, but still managed to explode underneath of the ill-fated destroyer. This tore open the ship’s hull and caused the ship to sink. In a final twist of much-deserved luck — all of the crew survived. [Source: http://taskandpurpose.com | Tahlia Y. Burton | Jun 10, 2016 ++]

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Military Trivia 123 ► Road to Tokyo | Final Fire Bombing Raid

Weeks would pass after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki before the official end arrived for World War II—and, during that time, even though the war had been effectively won, the incendiary air raids that had been such a large component of U.S. military strategy in Japan did not cease.

One of the Leaflets dropped to warn Japanese citizens of the consequences of a failure to surrender on display in the National WWII Museum

On Aug. 14–15, the very night before Emperor Hirohito would announce the impending surrender of his nation, a final firebombing raid went out on the city of Isesaki. One of the crewmen on that raid was First Lieutenant Maurice Picheloup, who held on to some souvenirs of that time—leaflets dropped to warn Japanese citizens of the consequences of a failure to surrender, which went on display over the weekend as part of a new exhibition at the National World WWII Museum in New Orleans, Road to Tokyo. These leaflets were meant to warn Japanese civilians of the impending firebombing and expose the weakness of the Japanese military in an effort to erode Japanese morale.

Picheloup told the museum that the crew expected all along to be called back, aborting the mission. “That we would once again be burning relatively small cities was abhorrent to all of us,” Picheloup said, “despite the fact that these target cities had been warned by leaflets that they would be bombed if their leaders did not stop the war.” But, as their B-29 approached its target, the code to abort (the word “Utah”) did not come. It was not until after the bombs had carried out their original orders, after the bombs had been dropped, that the code word came. Upon return to base they were told the war had ended. Here’s an English translation of a similar, dating from that time as well, of the leaflets’ contents:

TO THE JAPANESE PEOPLE:

*America asks that you take immediate heed of what we say on this leaflet.

*We are in possession of the most destructive explosive ever devised by men. A single one of our newly developed atomic bombs is actually the equivalent in explosive power to what 2000 of our giant B-29’s can carry on a single mission. This awful fact is one for you to ponder and we solemnly assure you it is grimly accurate.

*We have just begun to use this weapon against your homeland. If you still have any doubt, make inquiry as to what happened to Hiroshima when just one atomic bomb fell on that city.*
Before using this bomb to destroy every resource of the military by which they are prolonging this useless war, we ask that you now petition the Emperor to end the war. Our President has outlined for you the thirteen consequences of an honorable surrender: We urge that you accept these consequences and begin the work of building a new, better, and peace-loving Japan.

You should take steps now to cease military resistance. Otherwise, we shall resolutely employ this bomb and all other superior weapons to promptly and forcefully end the war.

EVACUATE YOUR CITIES

[Source: TIME | Lily Rothman | December 14, 2015 ++]

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Military History ► Meuse-Argonne Offensive | WWI

World War I will be remembered as one of the bloodiest wars in human history. Millions of soldiers died on both sides, and whole generations of young men were wiped out. Armies were bogged down in impenetrable trenches, resulting in thousands dying in futile assaults against fortified enemies. The war also introduced new and terrible weapons, such as the machine gun, which made the war even more horrific and bloody. There were many terrible battles, but the worst one for the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) was the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

On August 30, 1918, the supreme commander of Allied forces, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, arrived at the headquarters of General John J. Pershing's 1st US Army. Foch ordered Pershing to effectively shelve a planned offensive against the St. Mihiel salient as he wished to use the American troops piecemeal to support a British offensive to the north. Outraged, Pershing refused to let his command be broken apart and argued in favor of moving forward with the assault on St. Mihiel. Ultimately, the two came to a compromise: Pershing would be permitted to attack St. Mihiel but was required to be in position for an offensive in the Argonne Valley by mid-September. Foch also placed Pershing as the overall commander of the offensive since the American Expeditionary Force was to play the main attacking role in what would be the largest American-run offensive of World War I.

This required Pershing to fight a major battle, and then shift approximately 400,000 men sixty miles all within the span of ten days. Stepping off on September 12, Pershing won a swift victory at St. Mihiel and began moving his troops to the Argonne. Coordinated by Colonel George C. Marshall, this movement was completed in time to commence the Meuse-Argonne Offensive on September 26. Unlike the flat terrain of St.Mihiel, the Argonne was a valley flanked by thick forest to one side and the Meuse River on the other. This terrain provided an excellent defensive position for five divisions from General Georg von der Marwitz's Fifth Army. Flush with his St. Mihiel victory,
Pershing's objectives for the first day of the attack were extremely optimistic and called for his men to break through two major defensive lines dubbed Giselher and Kreimhilde by the Germans. In addition, American forces were hampered by the fact that five of the nine divisions slated for the attack had not yet seen combat.

A German Hannover CL III (left) shot down on October 4 between Montfaucon and Cierges, Argonne Traffic Jam, and Doughboys Under Fire (right) in the Village of Exermont

The Meuse-Argonne ground campaign began in the early morning fog on September 26, 1918. The previous night, Allied Forces had bombarded German positions. The fog gave good cover to the more than 700 Allied tanks that were advancing, with numerous infantry troops following behind. The Germans were taken by surprise and the Allied forces were gaining ground. They'd captured 23,000 German prisoners and moved almost 6 miles forward. While the goal of the offensive was to destroy the Germans, the strategy to do this was to cut off their main supply route. The Germans controlled the land between the Argonne Forest and the River Meuse in France, just inside its border with Belgium. The Sedan-Mezieres railroad, Germany's main supply link, was in this area. Taking control of this railroad was the Allied Force's main objective. Both the Allied Forces and the Germans understood how critical this area was to Germany's ability to continue its offensive into France. For this reason, both sides invested all available troops to the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and surrounding battles.

The Meuse-Argonne presented a number of challenges to the U.S. forces, which made up the largest part of the Allied Forces fighting. First, the overgrown, bushy, terrain of the area was difficult. The forest had no roads over which tanks and troops could easily move. Furthermore, the Germans had been in control of the area for the past four years and had well-fortified it. The other key challenge was logistical. Most of the Americans were some miles away where they had just fought a battle at St. Mihiel Salient. Moving that many troops and their armory in such a short time period was an unprecedented logistical operation. Without the successful troop movement, the Germans would have likely held their supply lines. However, one American division had difficulty capturing its assigned land and the entire Allied advance was slowed down. During this day-long stoppage, the Germans were able to retreat back to the Giselher line, where they prepared to make stand.

German General Max von Gallwitz directed six reserve divisions to shore up the line. The arrival of additional German troops ended American hopes for a quick victory in the Argonne. While Montfaucon was taken the next day, the advance proved slow and American forces were plagued by leadership and logistical issues. By October 1, the offensive had come to a halt. Traveling among his forces, Pershing replaced several of his green divisions with more experienced troops, though this movement only added to the logistical and traffic difficulties. On October 4, Pershing ordered an assault all along the American line. This was met with ferocious resistance from the Germans with the advance measured in yards. It was during this phase of the fighting that the 77th Division's famed "Lost Battalion" made its stand. Elsewhere, Corporal Alvin York earned the Medal of Honor for capturing 132 Germans.

On October 8, Pershing made a push on the east side of the Meuse with the goal of silencing German artillery in the area. This made little headway. Two days later he turned command of the 1st Army over to Lieutenant General Hunter Liggett. As Liggett pressed on, Pershing formed the 2nd U.S. Army on the east side of the Meuse and placed Lieutenant General Robert L. Bullard in command. From October 13-16, American forces began to break through the German lines with the capture of Malbrouck, Consenvoye, Cote Dame Marie, and Chatillon. With these victories in hand, American forces pierced the Kreimhilde line, achieving Pershing's goal for the first day. With this done, Liggett called a halt to reorganize. While collecting stragglers and re-supplying, Liggett ordered an attack towards Grandpre by the 78th Division. The town fell after a ten-day battle.
On November 1, following a massive bombardment, Liggett resumed a general advance all along the line. Slamming into the tired Germans, the 1st Army made large gains with the V Corps gaining five miles in the center. Forced into a headlong retreat, the Germans were prevented from forming new lines by the rapid American advance. On November 5, the 5th Division crossed the Meuse, frustrating German plans to use the river as defensive line. Three days later, the Germans contacted Foch about an armistice. Feeling that the war should continue until the German's unconditionally surrendered, Pershing pushed his two armies to attack without mercy. Driving the Germans, American forces allowed the French to take Sedan as the war came to a close on November 11, 1918.

The Meuse-Argonne Offensive cost Pershing 26,277 killed and 95,786 wounded, making it the largest and bloodiest operation of the war for the American Expeditionary Force. American losses were exacerbated by the inexperience of many of the troops and tactics used during the early phases of the operation. Germans losses numbered 28,000 killed and 92,250 wounded. The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was the largest American military campaign and one of the world's greatest battles. [Source: Together We Served | Mike Christy | Jan 2016 ++]

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Military History Anniversaries ► 1 thru 15 JUL

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “Military History Anniversaries 1 thru 15 JUL”. [Source: This Day in History http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history | June 2016 ++]

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Medal of Honor Citations ► Bausell, Lewis Kenneth | WWII

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor posthumously to

LEWIS KENNETH BAUSELL
**Rank and organization:** Corporal, U.S. Marine Corps. 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division  
**Place and date:** South Pacific, Peleliu Island 18 September 1944  
**Entered service:** Washington D.C. 15 December 1941  
**Born:** Pulaski, Virginia April 17, 1924

**Citation**

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division, during action against enemy Japanese forces on Peleliu Island, Palau Group, 15 September 1944. Valiantly placing himself at the head of his squad, Cpl. Bausell led the charge forward against a hostile pillbox which was covering a vital sector of the beach and, as the first to reach the emplacement, immediately started firing his automatic into the aperture while the remainder of his men closed in on the enemy. Swift to act, as a Japanese grenade was hurled into their midst, Cpl. Bausell threw himself on the deadly weapon, taking the full blast of the explosion and sacrificing his own life to save his men. His unwavering loyalty and inspiring courage reflect the highest credit upon Cpl. Bausell and the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

Lewis Kenneth Bausell was born in Pulaski, Virginia on April 17, 1924. Moving to Washington, he attended the local public schools and then went to work as a bookbinder for Ransdell, Incorporated, a Washington printer. He was employed there at the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941. The week following the Pearl Harbor attack, on December 15, Bausell enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps for a four-year period. After training at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina, he joined the 1st Marine Division in New River, North Carolina. Bausell was promoted to Private First Class on March 25, 1942, and to Corporal on June 1, 1942. On May 20, 1942, the 5th Marines sailed for the Pacific arriving at Wellington, New Zealand, on June 20, 1942, the marines immediately began preparations for landing in the Solomon Islands.

Corporal Bausell took part in the initial landings on Guadalcanal and fought there for four months before going southward to Melbourne, Australia. In the spring of the next year he sailed for New Guinea. Serving with the 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division, Cpl Bausell prepared for the next campaign, in New Guinea and then made the Cape Gloucester, New Britain, landing three days after the original invasion in December 1943. With that campaign concluded, the division returned to the Solomon Islands and went to Pavuvu Island for rest, rehabilitation, and preparation for another campaign.

The Peleliu landing took place on September 15, 1944 and the 5th Marines were the left flank regiment on the division front. In the first hour of action, the assault waves fought their way 100 yards inland to the top of a small coral ridge, one of dozens on the island. Cpl Bausell, who, one month earlier had been examined and found qualified for promotion to the rank of sergeant, was in a squad assigned to clean out one of the many enemy-infested caves.
which honeycombed the ridge. On one side of the cave, a Marine second lieutenant and several of his men used a flame thrower to force the enemy out while Cpl Bausell and several others waited with rifles ready. Two men stood at the entrance, firing into the cave. A Japanese soldier charged out holding a grenade against his body and lunged toward the small band of Marines. The grenade exploded injuring several Marines and killing the attacker.

As the remaining enemy combatants exited the cave, a grenade was thrown amongst the Marines. Cpl Bausell heroically threw himself on the grenade and saved the lives of his fellow Marines. Cpl Bausell was evacuated to a hospital ship where after three days, on September 18, he succumbed to his wounds. He was buried at sea The Medal of Honor, posthumously awarded the Marine by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was presented to his mother and father in the Navy Department in Washington, D.C. by Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal on June 11, 1945. Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift, then Commandant of the Marine Corps, was present for the ceremony, as were the Bausell's two sisters and one sister-in-law.

In addition to the Medal of Honor, Cpl Bausell was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart; Presidential Unit Citation; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with four bronze stars and the World War II Victory Medal. On November 19, 1945 in Bath, Maine, a new destroyer, the USS Bausell, was christened by Cpl Bausell's mother. She was a Gearing-class destroyer who served in the United States Navy during the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

[Source: http://www.history.army.mil/moh/wwII-a-f.html June 2016 ++]

* Health Care *

**Traumatic Brain Injury Update 54** ➤ **Study Detects Microscopic Scarring**

A personal, private decision by the families of eight Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans may have contributed to a significant discovery in the understanding of brain trauma caused by exposure to bomb blasts. The brains of eight veterans, all exposed to blasts from high explosives in combat, have been found to have microscopic scarring in the star-shaped cells that line the junctions between their gray and white matter, change patterns previously undetected by medical imaging such as CT or MRI scans. Most significant, researchers for the study, published 9 JUN in the scientific journal Lancet Neurology, found that the brains of three veterans who died just days after blast exposure showed signs of trying to repair themselves from this microscopic damage.

The findings are the first physical evidence of brain injury resulting from exposure to high explosives, damage that has been called an "invisible wound," since it does not show up on any tests or scans. Researchers with the Defense Department’s Center for Neuroscience and Regenerative Medicine say the results could account for the physical and behavioral changes seen in some troops after they return from war. “This is clearly a first step towards developing better means for diagnosis, prevention and treatment, now that we know somewhat of the nature of the problem, of the damage,” said Dr. Daniel Perl, director of the Brain Tissue Repository at the center.

The research focused on eight veterans: five with chronic blast exposure and three with acute exposure. Some of the veterans also had brain injuries as a result of impact, such as a concussion. Several had died of drug overdoses, and one committed suicide. The veteran who died by suicide, for example, was a military retiree who served with
distinction for more than 25 years. According to his wife, he had been exposed to multiple blasts, both during training and in combat, and, after retirement, sought medical treatment for headaches as well as memory problems and cognitive changes. He had been treated for PTSD, depression and anxiety, and a month before he died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, had an MRI that showed no evidence of brain damage. But the post-mortem analysis done at brain repository showed a brownish dust — scarring, according to Perl — along his brain's gray matter and elsewhere.

Dr. Daniel Perl

The authors say the blast wave causes damage at the interface of the brain's structural boundaries, to which the brain reacts with scar tissue. While examining the brains of former troops to understand the relationship between combat exposure and traumatic brain injury is not new, this study differs from previous ones that explore the effects of concussion or impact-related injury, Perl said. Researchers, including Perl, have long looked to troops to understand the development of and susceptibility to chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE, the wasting disease that has caused behavioral changes and dementia in NFL and NHL players, but few scientists have examined how blast exposure can affect brain cells.

The scarring found in the Lancet Neurology study differs from CTE, which results from the buildup of a protein, tau, in the brain and is thought to be related to multiple concussions. “CTE is an accumulation, and that takes years to develop,” Perl said. “The service members we are describing develop these symptoms rather quickly, and they come back from deployment with these persistent symptoms. We believe it’s related to the damage of the blast wave.” The brains of the exposed veterans were compared with a civilian control group, including several subjects who had died of opioid overdoses. No members of the control group had the telltale scarring of blast exposure.

The research could have widespread implications for military personnel with physical and mental health changes following deployment to a war zone. It also could have an impact on the future diagnosis and treatment of civilians, who increasingly are at risk for blast exposure from terrorist attacks, wrote the authors. For now, however, more research must be done to confirm Perl's findings and translate it into operational medicine. “We’ve made what we believe is a significant breakthrough. Through the research, we can come up with better means of prevention, diagnosis and treatment,” Perl said. He added that in order to follow up on the scientific discovery, however, researchers need more veteran subjects, and he asked military personnel — or their families — to consider making the same decision as those who already have left their brains to the military brain repository.

Veterans who want to learn more about the repository and request information about making a donation can do so through the center's website http://www.researchbraininjury.org/about-us. “This study could not have been done without the families of service members donating brains for research on military traumatic brain injury,” Perl said. [Source: Military Times | Patricia Kime | June 25, 2016 ++]
HIV/AIDS Update 01 ▶ Did You Know

HIV stands for the human immunodeficiency virus:

- H - Human. This virus infects human beings.
- I - Immunodeficiency. This virus attacks a person's immune system. The immune system is the body's defense against infections, such as bacteria and viruses. Once attacked by HIV, the immune system becomes deficient and doesn't work properly.
- V - Virus. A virus is a type of germ too small to be seen even with a microscope.

HIV is a virus. Some viruses, such as the ones that cause colds or flu, stay in the body for only a few days. HIV, however, never goes away. A person who is infected with HIV is said to be "HIV positive." Once a person is HIV positive, that person will always be HIV positive. All viruses must infect living cells to reproduce. HIV takes over certain immune system cells that are supposed to defend the body. These cells are called CD4 cells, or T cells. When HIV takes over a CD4 cell, it turns the cell into a virus factory. It forces the cell to produce thousands of copies of the virus. These copies infect other CD4 cells. Infected cells don't work well and they die early. Over time, the loss of CD4 cells weakens the immune system, making it harder for the body to stay healthy.

AIDS stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome:

- A - Acquired. This condition is acquired, meaning that a person becomes infected with it.
- I - Immuno. HIV affects a person's immune system, the part of the body that fights off germs such as bacteria or viruses.
- D - Deficiency. The immune system becomes deficient and does not work properly.
- S - Syndrome. A person with AIDS may experience other diseases and infections because of a weakened immune system.

AIDS was first reported in the United States in 1981 and has since become a major worldwide epidemic. AIDS is the most advanced stage of infection caused by HIV. The names HIV and AIDS can be confusing because both terms describe the same disease. But most people who are HIV positive do not have AIDS. An HIV-positive person is said to have AIDS when his or her immune system becomes so weak it can't fight off certain kinds of infections and cancers, such as PCP (a type of pneumonia) or KS (Kaposi sarcoma, a type of cancer that affects the skin and internal organs in HIV), wasting syndrome (involuntary weight loss), memory impairment, or tuberculosis.

Even without one of these infections, an HIV-positive person is diagnosed with AIDS if his or her immune system weakens, as indicated by the number of CD4 cells in his or her blood. A CD4 cell count less than 200 in an HIV-infected person counts as a diagnosis of AIDS. It can take between 2 to 10 years, or longer, for an HIV-positive person to develop AIDS if he or she is not treated. Most people who start treatment (with medicines called antiretroviral therapy or ART) soon after an HIV infection will not develop AIDS. Once a person has been diagnosed with AIDS, she or he is always considered to have AIDS, even if that person's CD4 count goes up again and/or they recover from the disease that defined their AIDS diagnosis.

A person with HIV could show no symptoms for years, but could still pass the virus on to others. In 2015, more than 270,000 Veterans were tested for HIV at VA. Getting tested is simple, just ask your provider for a HIV test at your next appointment. Like many other diseases, it is better to diagnose and treat HIV early rather than late. The earlier HIV is detected, the sooner a person can receive treatment and begin taking steps to remain healthy for years to come. Learn more about the benefits of getting tested for HIV and why knowing your HIV status can save your life at [www.hiv.va.gov/patient/index.asp](http://www.hiv.va.gov/patient/index.asp) [Source: VA http://www.hiv.va.gov/patient/index.asp | June 2016 ++]
The idea that our favorite indulgences might actually be good for us is a long-standing and beloved narrative. It’s why people adore stories about centenarians who attribute their longevity to a daily glass of whiskey, or the idea that cheese is what makes French people slim. It’s likely, then, that the World Health Organization’s (WHO) announcement 16 JUN that regularly drinking coffee may prevent cancer will be met with similar jubilation by the well-caffeinated set. After all, the conclusion represents a rare reversal from the organization’s position 25 years ago, when it cautioned that coffee was possibly carcinogenic.

Too-hot coffee, or any other beverage for that matter, is still believed to cause cancer, the WHO points out. That’s based on studies that have found an association between drinking very hot coffee—close to 160 Fahrenheit—and esophageal cancer. According to The Wall Street Journal, this is “roughly 10 degrees hotter than people in the U.S., U.K. and Europe are accustomed to drinking coffee or tea,” and more consistent with the temperatures of tea or maté served in China and South America. But the back-and-forth on coffee more broadly, and in particular the question of whether consuming it is harmful, dates back more than a century, if not longer. In the 1870s, drinking coffee was advised for those interested in having good manners. “Unsweetened coffee cures bad breath,” a Tennessee newspaper reported in 1877. (The paper also advised people to eat cheese with a fork, and discouraged girls from strolling away with a gentleman at a picnic.)

In the early 1900s, doctors and health agencies warned that caffeine was essentially “poison,” and that drinking coffee would cause “nerve storms,” according to a 1912 issue of The Salt Lake Tribune. Nervous women, the newspaper cautioned, should abstain from coffee altogether. “Unsteady nerves are foes of beauty,” it said. But ads for coffee at the time promised scientifically perfected brew that would produce wondrous health effects. Advertisers also marketed special coffee formulas for people who couldn’t handle the real stuff. One ad, published in 1907, read: “Does coffee disagree with you? Probably it does! Then try Dr. Shoop’s ‘Health Coffee.’” Health Coffee apparently wasn’t
coffee at all, but brewed from a “clever combination of parched cereal and nuts” and advertised as safe “even for the youngest child.” Other ads encouraged people to drink coffee not because it was good for you, but as a way of selling pills for indigestion, like Stuart’s Dyspepsia Tablets, featured in the 1920 advertisement below. “Good coffee is good for you,” another ad—this one for Hill Bros. Red Can Coffee—promised that same year.

Over time, the debate about coffee—fueled by a combination of legitimate research, junk science, marketing, and the rumor mill—has amounted to what the writer Andrew Revkin has called “whiplash journalism,” in which sweeping conclusions about what’s good or bad for you contribute to a mess of contradictions. Just reading The New York Times in the 1980s, for instance, might leave someone wondering what to do given that drinking coffee could give you pancreatic cancer, but switching to decaf might put you at a higher risk of a heart attack. Red wine and chocolate occupy similar places in culture (new technologies, too, are routinely subject to exaggerated ideas about what’s ultimately good and bad for people). In media coverage about the potential health benefits associated with resveratrol—a substance found in grapes, chocolate, and red wine—one important detail is often buried: the fact that you would have to drink dozens of bottles of wine per day to get a potentially beneficial dosage of the chemical. (And by then, you’d be dead.)

Today, the health effects of coffee are of great enough interest to necessitate their own Wikipedia page—which is at least one way to measure cultural influence. But even the World Health Organization’s news on Wednesday doesn’t dramatically change conventional wisdom (or challenge recent research) about the beverage. Last year, the top nutrition panel in the United States concluded that, for adults, three to five cups of coffee daily—the equivalent of up to 400 milligrams of caffeine—is tied to reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. After that, in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s new dietary guidelines, coffee consumption was described as being part of a “healthy dietary pattern,” citing a protective association between coffee intake and the risk of Parkinson’s disease. (Though it did caution against overdoing it with sugar and cream.)

“Coffee has a long history of being blamed for many ills,” writes the Mayo Clinic on its website, “from stunting your growth to claims that it causes heart disease and cancer. But recent research indicates that coffee may not be so bad after all. So which is it—good or bad? The best answer may be that for most people the health benefits outweigh the risks.” [Source: GovExec.com | Adrienne LaFrance | June 15, 2016 ++]

PTSD Update 210 ► TNX-102 SL Trials Show Promise

An already-approved muscle relaxant may offer relief for U.S. military veterans and first responders suffering from combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The Phase 2 trials of the drug, TNX-102 SL, which contains the same chemical property as Flexeril, identified a dose and administration method that statistically improved participants’ PTSD symptoms among several mental health indices. No new PTSD drug has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) since Paxil in 2001, and before that, Zoloft in 1999.

The findings were announced this month at the American Society of Clinical Psychopharmacology Annual Meeting (ASCP), and could eventually lead doctors to unroll the first PTSD drug in more than a decade, said Dr. Harry Croft, Chief of CNS Studies at Clinical Trials of Texas. Croft, who has also headed the investigation of 60 similar clinical trials over the last 25 years, said current PTSD treatments either don’t address every individual’s range of PTSD symptoms, pose unwanted side effects, or have poor adherence rates. Thus, scientists have continued searching for new PTSD treatments. “The suffering caused by this condition is significant, not just for the veteran but for their family members,” Croft, medical director of the San Antonio Psychiatric Research Center, one of 24 U.S. research sites for the drug, told FoxNews.com. “We’re hopeful that we’re on the right track with this medication.”

TNX-102 SL, which is the chemical cyclobenzaprine, blocks certain neurotransmitters in the brain and receptors that scientists believe causes arousal responses and recurrent thinking, two signs of PTSD. The drug blocks the
histamine receptor, too, which causes the side effects dry mouth and day sedation. For the study, Croft’s team randomized about 230 patients to take either 2.8 milligrams or 5.6 milligrams, or a placebo once a day for 12 weeks, sublingually, before bedtime. Flexeril is typically taken at a 30 milligram dose and orally. Neither researchers nor the patients knew which dose they received, making it double-blinded.

Participants had to either serve in the military or be a first responder, and have a trauma-producing incident that led them to reach a CAPS score of at least 29, indicating moderate PTSD on a scale of 0 to 80. At the onset, doctors used the CAPS-5 (Clinical-Administered PTSD Scale for DSM-5, an index of mental health diagnoses) score to evaluate an individual’s mental health and functioning. Researchers completed evaluation training to ensure consistency across study sites, and found participants’ average CAPS score was about 40, indicating severe PTSD. They used other standard assessment tools, like the Clinical Global Impression—Improvement (CGI-I) scale, to evaluate participants’ depression and suicide risk at the beginning of the study. More than 80 percent of patients had gone to college, and two-thirds were employed. The average number of their deployments was 2.3 times.

Periodically, researchers assessed patients’ CAPS scores. At the outset they found those patients who received the higher dose resulted in statistically significant PTSD symptom improvement. Those patients’ CGI-I scores, which evaluate how an individual’s health changes over time, showed similar results to that of effective antidepressants. Not only did TNX-102 SL help patients sleep better, but it also reduced arousal and reactivity, anxiety, hypervigilance, and trouble concentrating—all symptoms of PTSD—Croft said. “The good news is because it goes directly into the bloodstream at a much smaller dose than the oral medication used for muscle relaxation, it seems to be well tolerated, and it was well tolerated in this study,” Croft said. When applied under the tongue instead of orally, the drug bypasses the liver and avoids getting metabolized. As a result TNX-102 SL has a shorter half-life and produces norepinephrine at lower levels. That neurotransmitter is thought to worsen PTSD, Croft said.

Study participant Mark Bratton was deployed five times overseas, two that were combat related, during his service in the U.S. Marine Corps from 2004 to 2013. His personal relationships suffered and he began coping with depression in 2007, when he returned home to Harlingen, Texas, from Iraq. But he pushed his discomfort aside because he didn’t want to be perceived negatively in the military or risk not being deployed again, he said. He was diagnosed four months before he was discharged from the Marines, and since then he’s tried several approaches—from Zoloft to cognitive behavioral therapy, to Wellbutrin, a mood stabilizer—to ease his symptoms. Therapy helped for a while, as did the Wellbutrin, but Zoloft made him feel “cloudy” and “zombie like,” he said.

TNX-102 SL, along with his service dog, a yellow Labrador retriever named Benny, has helped Bratton feel safer in crowds by reducing hypervigilance, and has helped him sleep better at night with fewer nightmares. “My depression started to ease up, and all these feelings of worthlessness, and just not feeling good about myself, started to subside,” Bratton, 30, told FoxNews.com of his experience with the drug. Bratton, who’s now studying history at Texas A&M University, said he was worried about stopping the drug after the study ended. But, to his surprise, the relief continued. “I think it flipped a switch on in my head, and I knew how I could be, and knew I could feel great and knew I could feel normal,” he said.

Stahl said it “makes complete sense” that TNX-102 SL helps relieve PTSD symptoms based on its mechanisms. He is part of an effort in California that’s working to reclassify drugs from their market names to their chemical properties. The idea is to help scientists more easily repurpose drugs for different conditions, like cyclobenzaprine. Despite its potential promise, Stahl said he was skeptical over whether there would be enough resources to get TNX-102 SL to market. According to a 2014 report by the Tufts Center for Study of Drug Development, the cost of developing a prescription drug and making it commercially available has surpassed $2.5 billion. Colston called cyclobenzaprine an “innovative approach” that could make for a good adjunct to current treatments like cognitive behavioral therapy.

Phase 3 studies of TNX-102 SL, which would be conducted in a larger population of veterans with both combat- and non-combat-related PTSD, may begin as early as the first quarter of 2017. “Because of this study, they’ll probably use the higher dose,” Croft said. “We’re very excited about finally, hopefully, having something that will make a real
difference for these folks because, as you know, they’re suffering and their families are suffering.” [Source: Fox News Health | Melinda Carstensen | June 21, 2016 ++]

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**Kidney Disease Update 05**  ►  DoD's New Transplant Program

A novel kidney transplant program at the Defense Department’s flagship hospital potentially could increase the number of organs available to military patients as well as civilians. At an “organ summit” held 13 JUN at the White House, surgeons from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, announced a first-of-its-kind program that will transfer a kidney from a deceased donor into an ill patient who has a designated living donor, but who can’t receive his or her kidney because it is not an exact match. The designated donor's kidney would then go to someone on the transplant list who is a match.

![Image of a patient sitting on a chair]

The system lets two people benefit from one family’s gift, explained Army Maj. Jason Hawksworth, transplant chief at the hospital. And it could serve as a model for similar donation chains nationwide. “What we are talking at Walter Reed is doing a small, three-way chain … if it can be broadly applied as part of organ allocation nationally, theoretically, though, every cadaver donation could be used to transplant more than one person,” Hawksworth said. He added that the setup could add several thousand kidneys to the national pipeline each year. Walter Reed-Bethesda is the Defense Department’s sole facility for organ transplants, providing necessary surgery to active-duty personnel, retirees, family members and veterans, through partnerships with Washington, D.C.-area Veterans Affairs medical centers. The hospital has a wait list of roughly 200 patients from across the military health system.

The military transplant program relies on an informal donation system, called “military share,” that allows families of active-duty troops to stipulate that their loved ones’ organs go to another military patient or family. The new program, organizers say, will help patients who are especially hard to match and also will help civilians, since a designated donor’s kidney would go to a match within the national organ procurement and transplantation network. Walter Reed surgeons perform about 30 kidney transplants a year, and last year participated in the largest kidney donation exchange in the country, with 34 patients — a complex logistics operation that starts with someone who wants to give a kidney and agrees to give it to a stranger to ensure that another patient receives one.

Nationwide organ chains require intricate planning and execution, from the shipping of organs and travel logistics of patients to matching donors compatible and coordinating patient, surgeon and organ viability time schedules. “We in military medicine excel at such challenges,” said Navy Capt. Eric Elster, professor and chairman of surgery at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, following the White House summit. "Our hope is we will know this can be done logistically. The United Network for Organ Sharing would implement this nationally. There are a lot of logistical barriers potentially to taking this national but I think eventually it will be a reality,” Hawksworth said. Walter Reed-Bethesda officials said the first transplant under this new program could occur within six months. [Source: Military Times | Patricia Kime | June 22, 2016 ++]
Sleep Update 01  ►  Tips for Improving

Many Veterans have trouble sleeping. This is well-known or expected by just about anybody, especially the Veterans who are suffering from it. According to a survey by Vetadvisor with over 2,000 voluntary participants, 76 percent said they didn’t sleep well and 91 percent said they feel tired all the time. The average sleep time for all the Veterans was only 5.6 hours. Seventy-four percent met criteria for having insomnia, where they can’t fall asleep or stay asleep for three or more nights a week. The study also reported that almost 30 percent of the Veterans never have brought the problem up to the VA office or when they have seen their doctor.

Those are some big numbers. It is assumed that most Veterans believe that it is “just normal” since they served in the military and have seen some stressful things. While Veterans are more susceptible to having sleep issues, it is not “just normal.” If you are suffering from sleep deprivation, then you should definitely stop believing the “just normal” statement and start believing that it can be managed or even cured. There are some great natural tips that can help you sleep better, including a lot of the tips the VA advises. If not, you may want to check those out. Of course like a lot of things in life, some things can be a lot simpler than we make it out be. Then of course, some things are not so easy. If you have tried many of those tips to get better sleep to no avail here are few things that you may not have tried.

Drinks. First, alcohol does not help you STAY asleep. It only helps you GO to sleep. Research also shows that alcohol messes up your sleep cycles, so you will more than likely still feel tired the next day even if you think you were out like a light the night before. You may know that certain drinks like milk can help you get sleepy or sleep better. Milk has tryptophan, which is thought to help you relax. There are some other drinks that you probably haven’t tried that have natural ingredients proven to help sleep such as melatonin, serotonin, chamomile and lavender. These drinks include:

- Tart Cherry Juice
- Decaffeinated Green Tea
- Lemon Balm Tea
- Neuro Sleep Drink
- Harney & Sons Yellow & Blue Tea
- The Republic of Tea “Get Some ZZZ’s”
- Ovaltine Malt
- Celestial Seasonings Sleepytime Tea

Devices/Gadgets. Believe it or not, there are devices besides the radio or a noise maker that can help you sleep. Actually, there are some very new and technologically advanced devices that you may not have heard of.

- Fisher Wallace Stimulator – FDA approved. A headband that sends signals to your brain to produce more serotonin.
- Rhythym Dreem – Comes out this year. Detects when you are in deep sleep and sends signals/sounds to keep you there so you can sleep longer.
Sleep Cogni – Has reportedly helped 50 percent of people it was tried on to fall asleep faster.
Sleep Shepherd – monitors your brainwaves and detects if they speed up during the night.

**Doctor/Psychiatrist.** This is pretty self-explanatory. Just tell somebody that can help you. If everything you have read about, seen or heard does not work, then you need to go see your doctor or a psychiatrist. You are not crazy for going to see a psychiatrist. Sleep has a LOT to do with psychological issues with stress being the lead one like PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Stress is what causes so, so many people to not get the rest they need. They either can’t wind down to fall asleep or their brain is active while they are asleep which results in them waking up.

Sleep is far more important than you may realize and it is not worth having restless nights in your bed to have to pay for them later. Lack of sleep is proven to cause all sorts of health problems so if you think you have problems now; you may have a lot more later. Go see somebody who can help or direct you in the right direction. [Source: VAntage Point | Aaron Stevenson | June 8, 2016 ++]

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**Mosquitos Update 01** ► 5 Best Repellents for Zika Virus Mosquitoes

Bug spray sales are spiking as the Zika virus is spreading. CBS MoneyWatch reports that sales of insect repellent and rodent control products topped $516 million during the 52-week period that ended Jan. 24 — an 11.2 percent increase from the prior year that has been fueled by fear of the mosquito-born virus. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued travel alerts for more than two dozen nations and territories because of the Zika virus, which is linked to serious birth defects. Earlier this month, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak, which is concentrated in the tropical Americas but has been reported in the U.S., a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern.” Now the nonprofit Consumer Reports is doing its part to help:

In response to this growing threat, Consumer Reports has released free to the public its exclusive test results and Ratings of mosquito repellents including those that will protect you best against Aedes mosquitoes, the type which carry the Zika virus. At [http://www.consumerreports.org/content/dam/cro/news_articles/health/Consumer-Reports-Insect-Repellent-Ratings-February-2016.pdf](http://www.consumerreports.org/content/dam/cro/news_articles/health/Consumer-Reports-Insect-Repellent-Ratings-February-2016.pdf) you can download the results of all tested. Consumer Reports’ ratings are generally available only with a paid subscription, but the organization notes that avoiding mosquito bites is critical, as there is currently no vaccine or drug for Zika virus. The nonprofit tested 15 mosquito repellents and gave its recommendation to five:

- **Sawyer** Picaridin Insect Repellent, a pump spray with picaridin 20 percent as its active ingredient (which earned an overall score of 96 out of 100 from Consumer Reports)
- **Repel Lemon Eucalyptus Natural Insect Repellent**, a pump spray with oil of lemon eucalyptus 30 percent (earned a score of 87)
• **Repel Insect Repellent Scented Family Formula**, an aerosol spray with DEET 15 percent (earned a score of 82)
• **Natrapel 8-Hour Insect Repellent**, an aerosol spray with picaridin 20 percent (earned a score of 81)
• **Off! Deep Woods Dry Insect Repellent VIII**, an aerosol spray with DEET 25 percent (earned a score of 74)

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | February 18, 2016 ++]

Liver Disease ▶ Cirrhosis | Coffee Impact on PSC

Just a few extra cups of coffee each month might help prevent the development of an autoimmune liver disease known as primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC), a new study suggests. Investigators from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., found that drinking coffee was associated with a reduced risk of developing the disease, which can lead to cirrhosis of the liver, liver failure and biliary cancer. This association, however, does not prove a cause-and-effect relationship. "While rare, PSC has extremely detrimental effects," Dr. Craig Lammert, an instructor of medicine at the Mayo Clinic, said in a news release from the American Gastroenterological Association. "We are always looking for ways to mitigate risk, and our first-time finding points to a novel environmental effect that might also help us determine the cause of this and other devastating autoimmune diseases."

The study involved a large group of patients with PSC and an early form of liver cirrhosis, known as biliary cirrhosis. The researchers compared these patients to a healthy "control" group. The findings indicated that drinking coffee was linked to lower risk for PSC. Coffee consumption, however, was not associated with reduced risk for biliary cirrhosis. The patients with PSC were much less likely to be coffee drinkers than those in the control group. The healthy participants spent roughly 20 percent more of their lives regularly drinking coffee, the investigators found.

A separate study found that enhancements to palliative care, or specialized comfort care for people with terminal illnesses, are needed to improve quality of life for cirrhosis patients who are rejected for a liver transplant. The review, conducted by researchers from the University of Alberta in Canada, found that only 3 percent of the patients examined died while in hospice care. "In our study, less than 10 percent of patients had even been referred to palliative care," said Constantine Karvellas, assistant professor of medicine at the university. "We need to be better about ensuring quality of life for these patients."

Palliative care focuses on relief from symptoms, pain and stress. The study showed that more than half of the patients involved in the study had pain and nausea in their final days. Other patients examined also experienced depression, anxiety, breathlessness and anorexia. The researchers said 80 percent were repeatedly hospitalized and underwent invasive procedures. "Palliative care offers a way to avoid some of these costly procedures and at the same time improve the quality of life for these patients," Karvellas said. "This data helps to start the conversation on how we can make a positive difference in the lives of many patients and families." The findings of both studies were scheduled for presentation at the Digestive Disease Week annual meeting in Orlando, Fla. Studies presented at medical meetings should be seen as preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal. [Source: NewsMax Health | May 13, 2016 ++]
Trauma ► Leading Cause of Death Under Age 46

With doctors continuing to treat victims of the Orlando massacre, and the increased likelihood of more terrorist attacks in the United States, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine on Friday urged greater collaboration between civilian trauma centers and the U.S. military. Arguing that a national trauma system — to include cross-training and treatment between military and civilian first responders, physicians and other medical personnel — could save American lives at home and on the battlefield, researchers called for the White House to spearhead a fully integrated system, with the aim to achieve “zero preventable deaths after injury.”

Donald Berwick, chairman of the committee that developed the report, "A National Trauma Care System: Integrating Military and Civilian Trauma Systems to Achieve Zero Preventable Deaths After Injury,” said improvements in emergency medicine as well as combat trauma have saved lives but that a fifth of deaths by accident or injury could still be prevented. “Both the military and civilian sectors have made impressive progress and important innovations in trauma care, but there are serious limitations in the diffusion of those gains from location to location,” Berwick said. “With the decrease in combat and the need to maintain readiness for trauma care between wars, a window of opportunity now exists to integrate military and civilian trauma systems and view them not separately, but as one.”

Improvements in combat casualty care in the past 15 years have reduced the military casualty rate to historic lows, according to medical professionals at the U.S. Army Institute of Surgical Research. But a 2013 study estimated that nearly a quarter of the 4,596 combat deaths from 2001 to 2011 were potentially survivable, and about 90 percent of
those deaths occurred before the injured troop reached a medical facility, indicating that improvements could be made in medical care at the point of injury. According to the National Academies' study, trauma, either from accidents, falls, car crashes or gun violence, is the leading cause of death for Americans under age 46. In the analysis, the panel concluded that as many as 20 percent — or about 30,000 — of the 147,790 U.S. trauma deaths in 2014 may also have been preventable with optimal care.

The report comes as Congress continues to pressure the Defense Department to open more military hospitals to complex civilian cases. The move, members argue, would allow military personnel to maintain skills honed in the last 15 years of war and practice new techniques. Several military trauma surgeons testified earlier this year that they train on their own time at civilian hospitals and pay out of pocket for advanced courses to practice their talents. The National Academies committee suggested that each element of trauma care, from emergency services at the accident scene to hospitalization and rehabilitation, could benefit from a “national system grounded in sound learning health system principles.” "Mass casualty incidents and increasing foreign and domestic threats to homeland security lend urgency to the translation of wartime lessons to civilian trauma systems,” the committee said. [Source: Military Times | Patricia Kime | June 17, 2016 ++]

Water Consumption ► Guidelines to Help Ensure You Drink Enough

Water is essential to good health, yet needs vary by individual. How much water should you drink each day? It's a simple question with no easy answers. Studies have produced varying recommendations over the years, but in truth, your water needs depend on many factors, including your health, how active you are and where you live. Although no single formula fits everyone, knowing more about your body’s need for fluids will help you estimate how much water to drink each day.

**Health benefits of water** - Water is your body's principal chemical component and makes up about 60 percent of your body weight. Every system in your body depends on water. For example, water flushes toxins out of vital organs, carries nutrients to your cells, and provides a moist environment for ear, nose and throat tissues. Lack of water can lead to dehydration, a condition that occurs when you don't have enough water in your body to carry out normal functions. Even mild dehydration can drain your energy and make you tired.

**How much water do you need?** Every day you lose water through your breath, perspiration, urine and bowel movements. For your body to function properly, you must replenish its water supply by consuming beverages and foods that contain water. So how much fluid does the average, healthy adult living in a temperate climate need? The Institute of Medicine determined that an adequate intake (AI) for men is roughly about 13 cups (3 liters) of total beverages a day. The AI for women is about 9 cups (2.2 liters) of total beverages a day.

**What about the advice to drink 8 glasses a day?** Everyone has heard the advice, "Drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day." That's about 1.9 liters, which isn't that different from the Institute of Medicine recommendations. Although the "8 by 8" rule isn't supported by hard evidence, it remains popular because it's easy to remember. Just keep in mind that the rule should be rephrased as: "Drink eight 8-ounce glasses of fluid a day," because all fluids count toward the daily total.

**Factors that influence water needs** - You may need to modify your total fluid intake depending on how active you are, the climate you live in, your health status, and if you're pregnant or breast-feeding.

- **Exercise.** If you exercise or engage in any activity that makes you sweat, you need to drink extra water to compensate for the fluid loss. An extra 1.5 to 2.5 cups (400 to 600 milliliters) of water should suffice for short bouts of exercise, but intense exercise lasting more than an hour (for example, running a marathon) requires more fluid intake. How much additional fluid you need depends on how much you sweat during exercise, and the duration and type of exercise.
- **Intense exercise.** During long bouts of intense exercise, it's best to use a sports drink that contains sodium, as this will help replace sodium lost in sweat and reduce the chances of developing hyponatremia, which can be life-threatening. Also, continue to replace fluids after you're finished exercising.

- **Environment.** Hot or humid weather can make you sweat and requires additional intake of fluid. Heated indoor air also can cause your skin to lose moisture during wintertime. Further, altitudes greater than 8,200 feet (2,500 meters) may trigger increased urination and more rapid breathing, which use up more of your fluid reserves.

- **Illnesses or health conditions.** When you have fever, vomiting or diarrhea, your body loses additional fluids. In these cases, you should drink more water. In some cases, your doctor may recommend oral rehydration solutions, such as Gatorade, Powerade or CeraLyte. You may also need increased fluid intake if you develop certain conditions, including bladder infections or urinary tract stones. On the other hand, some conditions, such as heart failure and some types of kidney, liver and adrenal diseases, may impair excretion of water and even require that you limit your fluid intake.

- **Pregnancy or breast-feeding.** Women who are pregnant or breast-feeding need additional fluids to stay hydrated. Large amounts of fluid are used especially when nursing. The Institute of Medicine recommends that pregnant women drink about 10 cups (2.3 liters) of fluids daily and women who breast-feed consume about 13 cups (3.1 liters) of fluids a day.

**Beyond the tap: Other sources of water** - You don't need to rely only on what you drink to meet your fluid needs. What you eat also provides a significant portion of your fluid needs. On average, food provides about 20 percent of total water intake. For example, many fruits and vegetables, such as watermelon and spinach, are 90 percent or more water by weight. In addition, beverages such as milk and juice are composed mostly of water. Even beer, wine and caffeinated beverages — such as coffee, tea or soda — can contribute, but these should not be a major portion of your daily total fluid intake. Water is still your best bet because it's calorie-free, inexpensive and readily available.

**Staying safely hydrated** - Generally, if you drink enough fluid so that you rarely feel thirsty and your urine is colorless or light yellow — and measures about 6.3 cups (1.5 liters) or more a day if you were to keep track — your fluid intake is probably adequate. If you're concerned about your fluid intake or have health issues, check with your doctor or a registered dietitian. He or she can help you determine the amount of water that's right for you. To ward off dehydration and make sure your body has the fluids it needs, make water your beverage of choice. It's also a good idea to:

- Drink a glass of water or other calorie-free or low-calorie beverage with each meal and between each meal
- Drink water before, during and after exercise

Although uncommon, it is possible to drink too much water. When your kidneys are unable to excrete the excess water, the electrolyte (mineral) content of the blood is diluted, resulting in low sodium levels in the blood, a condition called hyponatremia. Endurance athletes, such as marathon runners who drink large amounts of water, are at higher risk of hyponatremia. In general, though, drinking too much water is rare in healthy adults who eat an average American diet.


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**Water Intake & Heart Attack ➤ Bad Advice**

The Mayo Clinic, on behalf of Dr. Somers, debunked the below information contained in a circulating email in 2010 — yet obviously it persists and enjoys a strong afterlife. The one I received this week contained the below info and much more. Some true and some not true. The Mayo Clinic wrote: “Neither Dr. Somers nor Mayo Clinic contributed
to this email, which contains some information that is inaccurate and potentially harmful. We recommend that you speak with your physician if you have specific questions.”

**Very Important. From A Cardiac Specialist!**

*Drinking water at a certain time maximizes its effectiveness on the body*
- 2 glasses of water after waking up - helps activate internal organs
- 1 glass of water 30 minutes before a meal - helps digestion
- 1 glass of water before taking a bath - helps lower blood pressure
- 1 glass of water before going to bed - avoids stroke or heart attack

*Dr. Virend Somers is a cardiologist from the Mayo Clinic, who is lead author of the report in the July 29, 2008 issue of the Journal of the American College of Cardiology. Most heart attacks occur in the day, generally between 6 a.m. and noon. Having one during the night, when the heart should be most at rest, means that something unusual happened. Somers and his colleagues have been working for a decade to show that sleep apnea is to blame.
1. If you take an aspirin or a baby aspirin once a day, take it at night. The reason: Aspirin has a 24-hour “half-life;” therefore, if most heart attacks happen in the wee hours of the morning, the aspirin would be strongest in your system.
2. FYI, aspirin lasts a really long time in your medicine chest, for years, (when it gets old, it smells like vinegar).

[Source: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/24/online-myths_n_3954799.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/24/online-myths_n_3954799.html) | RAO Bulletin Editor | June 21, 2016 ++]

**Finances**

*Social Security Fund Depletion Update 11 ➤ 2016 Forecasts*

Another annual report on Social Security funding, another batch of bad news. The trustees who oversee the trust funds for Social Security and Medicare benefits issued their message to the public ([https://www.ssa.gov/oact/trsum](https://www.ssa.gov/oact/trsum)) along with their 2016 annual report ([https://www.ssa.gov/oact/tr/2016/index.html](https://www.ssa.gov/oact/tr/2016/index.html)) 22 JUN urging Congress to act “sooner rather than later” to prevent shortfalls. In the past fiscal year, Social Security and Medicare expenses accounted for 41 percent of all federal program expenses. The latest annual report forecasts:

- The Social Security trust fund for old-age benefits will deplete its reserves by 2034. This date is the same as the trustees predicted last year.
- The Social Security trust fund for disability insurance benefits will deplete its reserves by 2023. This date is later than the trustees predicted last year.
- The Medicare trust fund for Part A, which covers hospital insurance costs, is projected to deplete its reserves by 2028. This date is two years earlier than the trustees predicted last year.
Once Medicare Part A reserves are depleted, trustees expect that only 87 percent of hospital insurance costs would be covered. Medicare Part B, which covers doctor visit and other outpatient costs, and Part D, which covers prescription drug costs, are better off because current law provides for financing from other sources. So they are expected to be “adequately financed into the indefinite future.” Treasury Secretary Jack Lew, the managing trustee of Social Security and Medicare trust funds, said in a speech Wednesday: “… we have some time to address the fiscal challenges faced by the vitally important Trust Fund programs. But reform will be needed, and Congress should not wait until the eleventh hour to address the fiscal challenges given that they represent the cornerstone of economic security for seniors in our country.” [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | June 23, 2016 ++]

Military Retirement System Update 24  ▶  A Matter Of Financial Security

The Defense Department has released a three-minute explainer video providing a basic, broad overview of the military's new retirement system, which is scheduled to take effect in 2018. The video which can be accessed at https://www.dvidshub.net/video/449935/2018-blended-retirement-system-explained is part of what the Pentagon promises will be a thorough financial literacy campaign as officials prepare troops and their families for the change, which will scale back the military's traditional pension plan while introducing new individual investment accounts. Similar to 401(k) retirement plans offered in the private sector, these new accounts will include matching cash contributions from the federal government.

Starting in January 2018, military personnel with fewer than 12 years of service must choose whether to opt into the new "blended" system or stay enrolled in the traditional pension plan. Officials estimate that group includes 1.6 million people. Those with more than 12 years in uniform will remain enrolled in the traditional pension plan. "We're keeping up with what the force of the future will look like," Army Sgt. Maj. Michael Schultz, a senior enlisted adviser at the Pentagon, says in the video. "We need to keep up with our civilian counterparts out there, being sure, as leadership, we answer every question for them, we educate them on the choices. ... But at the end of the day, it's going to be their personal decision to make." Everyone who joins the military in 2018 and beyond will automatically be enrolled in the new system.

In approving the new system, officials both in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill have championed the fact that this new system will, for the first time, ensure service members who don't stay in uniform for a full 20-year career will receive at least some retirement benefit upon leaving. The move is not without controversy, however. Notably, officials have yet to resolve one of the plan's key components: its lump-sum payout option. The American Academy of Actuaries issued a warning to the Pentagon in May, saying it risks shortchanging enlisted personnel specifically. The Pentagon says its working to address the issue. Meanwhile, officials have introduced the first of four courses that will help the force prepare for decision time. They're targeting the military's leaders now, individuals expected to be on the receiving end of questions from rank-and-file personnel, but the course is open to anyone. It's accessible via the department's Joint Knowledge Online portal. It'll be December before a course is introduced that's tailored specifically for the troops who'll have to choose whether they want to opt in, officials say.

Retirement reform is a centerpiece of Washington's broad effort to overhaul key parts of the military's personnel expenditures, a series of moves — some ongoing — that have touched everything from healthcare to housing allowance. The Pentagon views these ballooning costs as a threat to its ability to maintain a modern military. Organizations that advocate on behalf of the nation's military personnel, by contrast, view these efforts as an attack on the quality-of-life-programs that were designed to offset the unique hardships troops and their families must endure. The explainer video calls the new retirement plan a matter of "financial security. [Source: Military Times | Andrew deGrandpre | June 14, 2016 ++]
Social Security Taxes Update 01 ► Should $118.5k Loophole Be Closed

Congress recently enacted legislation that ended two so-called Social Security benefit “loopholes” — known as “file and suspend” and “restricted application.” Details about the changes, which affect some married couples and took effect on April 30th, 2016 — can be found in the Social Security Q & A at [http://seniorsleague.org/2016/q-june-2016](http://seniorsleague.org/2016/q-june-2016).

While the benefit cuts were negotiated in secret and enacted swiftly with virtually no public debate, Congress passed up the opportunity to close another and far bigger Social Security loophole — one that allows people with the nation’s highest wages (including all Members of Congress) to get an enormous tax break, while paying Social Security (FICA) taxes on just a fraction of what they earn. In fact, about 6% of all wage earners, according to the Social Security Administration, pay no Social Security taxes at all on earnings over $118,500. Once they have earned $118,500, these workers get to keep 6.2% of every dollar earned over that amount in wages.

Scraping the Social Security payroll tax cap on the taxable wages would not only provide enough revenues to make the program solvent for another 50 years, but would also pay for a more fair and accurate cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for current retirees. For example, say a CEO of a company receives $2 million in compensation. That individual and the employer each pays 6.2% Social Security taxes on the first $118,500 in wages. Social Security receives a total of $14,694. But if the entire $2 million were taxed, Social Security would receive $248,000 instead.

According to a survey by The Senior Citizens League (TSCL), 70% of older Americans think Social Security’s solvency should be improved by scrapping the Social Security taxable wage limit of $118,500. TSCL supports legislation that would get rid of the taxable wage cap and require all workers to pay their fair share into Social Security.

[Source: TSCL | June 8, 2016 ++]

Rent To Own ► Buyer & Seller Pros & Cons

Many people who want to buy homes can’t quite qualify for a mortgage. Maybe they don’t have enough money for the down payment — even a super-small FHA down payment. Or their credit scores, while not horrific, aren’t good enough to get a mortgage, at least one that’s affordable. When it’s hard to get credit, buyers sometimes use an alternative method of buying a home called a “contract for deed” — otherwise known as a “lease with option” or “rent to own.” The seller, not a bank or mortgage company, finances the home purchase. But these agreements are different from the usual seller-financed mortgage. Buyers have few protections, and sellers keep most of the control.

Contract-for-deed agreements vary a great deal, but, unlike in a more common property sale, the buyer doesn’t buy the home right away but instead pays a fee for the right to purchase it at some later point. Until the purchase is complete the buyer can live there and pay rent, some of which is applied to the purchase price of the home. Rent-to-own contracts have attractions for both buyers and sellers:
Buyers get a chance at home ownership, even with a lower credit score.
Buyers get time to gather a down payment and improve their credit scores.
Buyers get a locked-in purchase price, even if local home prices are rising.
Sellers earn a nice income stream on a property.
Sellers may earn a higher-than-market purchase price or interest rate (or both).
Sellers avoid high real-estate agent sales fees and other expenses like closing and settlement costs.
Sellers find a way to sell a property when the local real-estate market is slow.

The devil, as they say, is in the details. If you are considering signing one of these contracts, be super careful. Although some consumer housing agencies use contracts for deed to help low-income clients get homes, they often are associated with cons and scams. To be sure, not all contracts for deed are scams. But scammers do often use them to fool people yearning to own a home. Here are a few of the many things that make this type of deal hazardous for buyers, according to the Minneapolis Federal Reserve:

- These are complex contracts. Everything is up for negotiation. Buyers have few protections.
- The home you buy may have hidden problems, including building and safety code violations, and you could be held responsible for repairs you can’t afford, forcing you to lose the entire investment.
- The seller may be able to put a lien on a home under contract and leave the buyer responsible for it.
- Sometimes sellers are hit with foreclosure or bankruptcy, canceling the deal.
- Buyers violating any provision of the contract — making just one late payment, for example — may lose their home.
- Buyers often have to pay for property taxes, home insurance and home repairs or risk losing the property.
- Your payments probably won’t improve your credit score since few sellers report buyers’ payments to credit bureaus.

In a contract for deed, buyers pay a nonrefundable fee for the option to buy the home later at a certain price. Depending on the contract, this fee may be applied to your purchase when you buy. These option fees run about 5% of the purchase price, plus or minus a few percentage points, says About.com’s banking expert Justin Pritchard. Don’t pay more because you’ll probably lose the money if you don’t buy the home. The contract sets a time frame for closing the purchase — one to five years is typical, experts say. At that date the buyer must produce the entire purchase amount — a “balloon” payment — to buy the home, usually by obtaining a mortgage. But some contracts run as long as 40 years, the New York Times reports. Unlike with a standard mortgage, you’ll have no ownership stake (equity) in the home and won’t get the deed until you have paid it off completely. If you don’t buy the home you forfeit the money you’ve paid.

According to the Minneapolis Federal Reserve, poorer buyers and those whose cash incomes make it hard to qualify for a mortgage are typical big users of contracts for deed. Thousands of cheap, run-down homes, many of them foreclosures, were purchased by investors who now sell them to buyers through contracts for deed, especially in the Midwest and South, says the Times, adding: “They (investors) do not take care of the code violations with these properties, which is why they are trying to pass them off to other people,” said Jill Steele, city attorney for Battle
Creek, Mich. Ms. Steele said Battle Creek has had a number of code violation issues with Harbour Portfolio Advisors, a firm out of Dallas that is one of the larger national players in the contract for deed business.

If you are considering using a contract for deed, it’s well worth the cost to get advice from an experienced real-estate attorney. Check an attorney’s credentials with the bar association in your state or find your state and search at http://www.llrx.com/features/lawyerlicenses.htm. Trulia, a real-estate marketplace, has tips for finding and hiring one at http://www.trulia.com/guide/home_buying/build_the_right_team/how_to_choose_the_best_real_estate_attorney.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | June 6, 2016 ++]

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**Bank Fees Update 03 ➤ 401K | The Worst by Far**

Of all those bank fees, convenience fees and other random charges we pay, the worst by far are the ones attached to 401(k)s and other retirement accounts. While new disclosure rules went into effect in 2012, these 401(k) fees are still poorly understood and often overlooked by workers. What’s more, the fees can seem deceptively small even though they have the potential to add up to hundreds of thousands of lost dollars. Consider the example from the U.S. Department of Labor at https://www.dol.gov/ebsa/faqs/faq-disclosures.html (or get the information by watching this video):

Assume you are an employee with a current 401(k) account balance of $25,000. If returns over the next 35 years average 7 percent, even if you don’t contribute another penny to your account, here’s what you’d have if your account fees were 0.5 percent and 1.5 percent. With fees and expenses of 1.5 percent, you’d receive only $163,000 after 35 years.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Beginning balance</th>
<th>Annual return</th>
<th>Fees</th>
<th>Balance in 35 years</th>
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<tr>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>$227,000</td>
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<td>$25,000</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
<td>$163,000</td>
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That adds up to $64,000 less to live on in your golden years. “The 1 percent difference in fees and expenses would reduce your account balance at retirement by 28 percent,” the Department of Labor says. And that’s if your 401(k) has only $25,000 in it. Imagine how much you would stand to lose if you were more diligent about your retirement savings.

Nearly 1 in 4 don’t know about 401(k) fees It may be news to you that you’re paying 401(k) fees. That’s part of the problem. Retirement plans are required to disclose how much they charge in fees. (The rules may be different for an IRA.) Even so, many employees believe (mistakenly) that they don’t pay any expenses or fees for their plan. Fees that are expressed as a percentage of your account balance can look small. However, “a 1 percent difference in fees — that’s literally hundreds of thousands out of [your] retirement account over the course of a lifetime,” Chad Parks, CEO of Ubiquity Retirement + Savings, a company that specializes in low-cost 401(k) plans for self-employed workers and small businesses, tells U.S. News & World Report. In fact, there can be dozens of fees attached to a 401(k). They typically fall into one of three categories:

- **Plan administration fees**: These are the fees associated with the cost of providing and maintaining your 401(k). They may be included in the investment fees or charged separately.
- **Investment fees**: This is the money you pay to have your money managed in an investment fund. These fees are listed on disclosure statements as percentages and often under the heading “expense ratio.”
- **Individual service fees**: These final fees are the ones attached to specific transactions and services, such as fees for requesting a loan or reallocating your funds.

While these fees can be thousands of dollars each year, you might never know it because you don’t pay them directly. Instead, they are pulled out of your 401(k) automatically. Without the pain of having to write a check to the
investment firm for managing your account, it’s easy to miss the fact that fees can be a drain on your retirement savings. For a quick recap of the above watch the video at https://youtu.be/-89F1KVDRgU?t=67.

**3 ways to lower 401(k) fees**

To stop the bleeding, you first need to assess the damage. Your 401(k) is required to provide an annual statement showing, among other things, the fees included in the plan. The statement gives help in comparing costs. Pull it out and take a look at what you’re paying. On average, American workers pay 1 percent of their retirement plan assets in fees, and workers invested in smaller plans pay even more — 1.32 percent in 2013, says the Center for American Progress (CAP). But fees can be as low as 0.25 percent, depending on your plan and the investments you select. The graphic at https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/401k-infographic.png from the Center for American Progress shows at a glance the cost to workers of higher fees, including the need to spend more years on the job. CAP’s advice is, if you’re paying more than 1 percent, it’s time for some damage control. Try these three ways to limit your fees:

- **Invest in index accounts:** Actively managed accounts have the highest fees, but Morningstar data show they often lag behind index funds in terms of performance. Invest your money in mutual funds tied to stock indexes, such as the S&P 500, to reduce your costs and maybe even increase your returns.

- **Leave your money alone:** Every time you transfer funds, you pay a fee. Pretend your 401(k) is a rotisserie chicken: Set it and forget it. Well, you don’t want to forget it completely, but you shouldn’t be switching funds every time the market hicups either.

- **Talk to your employer:** If you look through your plan prospectus and aren’t impressed with what you see, let your employer know. Ask if they would consider changes that may open up new fund options. Gather a few of your co-workers to approach the human resources department together in order to make a stronger case for your proposal. The law requires plan fiduciaries (an employer, usually) to consider fees and expenses when choosing a plan and to operate the plan in the interest of employees. Learn more by calling a federal Employee Benefits Security Administration adviser at 1-866-444-3272.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews & Center for American Progress | Maryalene LaPonsie | June 16, 2016 ++]

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**Workplace Benefits ► Changes Over Last 20-Yrs**

Some employee benefits appear to be slowly waning. More benefits have seen significant decreases than significant increases over the past two decades, according to the Society for Human Resource Management’s (SHRM) 20th annual benefits report, released 21 JUN. Notably, although monetary bonuses have become more common over the past five years, several other types of financial benefits have grown scarcer over the past 20 years. Credit union membership, for example, is now offered by fewer than one-third as many organizations as it was two decades back. Benefits that the SHRM considers to have seen “significant” decreases since 1996 include:

- Health care premium flexible spending account: 54 percent to 39 percent
- Credit union membership: 70 percent to 23 percent
- Employee discounts on company services: 43 percent to 32 percent
- Onsite health screening programs: 53 percent to 31 percent
- Temporary relocation benefits: 39 percent to 24 percent
- Matching employee charitable contributions: 30 percent to 21 percent
- Loans to employees for emergency/disaster assistance: 27 percent to 13 percent
- Unpaid sabbatical program: 27 percent to 12 percent
- Elder care referral service: 17 percent to 12 percent
• Parking subsidy: 25 percent to 10 percent
• Job sharing: 24 percent to 10 percent
• Employee stock purchase plan: 28 percent to 9 percent
• Spouse relocation employment assistance: 22 percent to 7 percent
• Mortgage assistance: 12 percent to 4 percent
• Vacation purchase plan: 11 percent to 4 percent

One increasing benefit that the SHRM highlights is telecommuting — offered by triple the number of employers today compared with 20 years ago. Tanya Mulvey, SHRM’s project lead for the 2016 benefits report, notes: “Flexible work arrangements should be considered a means of attracting and retaining workers. These benefits have proven to be highly valued among two sizable demographic groups: Millennials and 55-and-older employees.”

Benefits considered to have seen “significant” increases since 1996 include:
• Professional memberships: 65 percent to 88 percent
• Professional development opportunities: 75 percent to 86 percent
• Wellness resources and information: 54 percent to 72 percent
• Telecommuting: 20 percent to 60 percent
• Legal assistance/services: 13 percent to 25 percent

The most common type of retirement savings plan today is a traditional 401(k) or similar defined-contribution plan, offered by 90 percent of organizations surveyed. Three-fourths of organizations match employee contributions to such plans. The most common type of health care coverage is preferred-provider organization plans, offered by 84 percent of organizations. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | June 8, 2016 ++]

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**Saving Money**

A house doesn’t really become a home until you have added the small touches that make it truly yours. Since 1971, Bed, Bath & Beyond has been helping homeowners do just that. Stroll down the aisles of this mega retailer and you’ll find linens, bath mats, curtains, picture frames, small kitchen appliances and countless items to add just the right zing to your living spaces. Fortunately, there are many ways to save at BB&B. From a generous price-match policy to coupons that never die, here are 10 ways to save at one of America’s favorite home accessories stores.

1. **Stack your coupons** - Most savvy shoppers are familiar with BB&B’s coupons: You know, the blue-and-white ones that come regularly in the mail and offer 20 percent off a single item? But many shoppers are not aware that the retailer allows customers to use multiple coupons in a single transaction. We’re talking one coupon per item. That means if you have enough coupons, you can save 20 percent off every single accessory you purchase at this home goods heaven. Tip: To score additional coupons, sign up for the retailer’s email list.
2. **Use expired coupons** - Don’t toss your expired coupons into the recycle bin! You could be throwing tens (or even hundreds) of dollars down the drain. Although it’s not official store policy, Bed, Bath & Beyond typically lets shoppers use coupons well past their expiration dates. I have yet to have a cashier tell me that I can’t apply an expired coupon toward my purchase, and I am what you might call a “BB&B regular.”

3. **Use manufacturer coupons, too** - Those signature blue-and-white coupons aren’t the only savings certificates that Bed, Bath & Beyond honors. Many folks don’t realize that manufacturer coupons are valid at the retailer as well. Just be sure to check the expiration dates of these coupons in advance: BB&B will not recognize out-of-date coupons from others.

4. **Download the Amazon app before you shop** - Many retailers do not include Amazon in their price-matching policies. But you’ll be pleased to learn that this is one area where BB&B really steps up to the plate. If you spot an item in the store that’s less expensive on Amazon.com — or at other leading retailers, for that matter — the Bed, Bath & Beyond cashier will match the price ([www.bedbathandbeyond.com/store/static/pricematch](http://www.bedbathandbeyond.com/store/static/pricematch)) as long as it isn’t sold by a third party. Again, I speak from experience here, folks.

5. **Hit the clearance section** - There are some very good deals to be had in the BB&B clearance section — including closeouts. That’s especially true if you look early in the week, as it appears the store replenishes the markdowns during the weekend. I have seen items on sale for up to half-off in this section. You just have to be willing to search the shelves (or the website) and possibly purchase a previous year’s model. But, heck, I say a waffle maker is a waffle maker.

6. **Hang onto your receipts** - Bed, Bath & Beyond will often perform a price adjustment if an item goes on sale — or if you score a coupon — after you purchase it. Official store policy doesn’t appear to include a time frame for such adjustments, leaving it up to the individual stores. But in my experience, most are happy to refund the difference within a few weeks of your purchase. In a worst-case scenario, you can return said item and buy it again at the discounted rate.

7. **Keep your eyes peeled for gift cards** - BB&B occasionally offers gift cards when customers buy certain items. In the past, the retailer has issued gift cards with the purchase of Keurig and Calphalon products, to name a couple. And these gift cards never expire. So, you can redeem them the next time you come across another fabulous deal, allowing you to enjoy even greater savings.


9. **Get discounted gift cards** - Look for reputable websites that sell discounted gift cards, and you can increase your savings on any purchase. For example:
   - Cardpool offered gift cards that can score you a whopping 11 percent off when shopping on the BB&B website. ([http://www.cardpool.com/?utm_source=cj&utm_medium=affiliate&utm_campaign=cj+affiliates&CT_PID=5699256](http://www.cardpool.com/?utm_source=cj&utm_medium=affiliate&utm_campaign=cj+affiliates&CT_PID=5699256))
   - Raise recently offered BB&B gift cards for a discount of as much as 5.9 percent ([https://www.raise.com/buy-gift-cards?utm_medium=affiliate&utm_source=PPkX79_c*b0&utm_campaign=2&siteID=PPkX79_c*b0-L1ALFijB7kcind5cJfDjig&LSNPUBID=PPkX79/c*b0](https://www.raise.com/buy-gift-cards?utm_medium=affiliate&utm_source=PPkX79_c*b0&utm_campaign=2&siteID=PPkX79_c*b0-L1ALFijB7kcind5cJfDjig&LSNPUBID=PPkX79/c*b0)), while

10. **Take advantage of free shipping** - Keep your eyes peeled! On occasion, Bed, Bath & Beyond also offers free shipping for online purchases. At the moment, the retailer is offering “free standard shipping on orders over $25.” Certain exclusions apply, so be sure to check the store’s shipping policies for current and future deals and details at [http://www.bedbathandbeyond.com/store/static/ShippingPolicies?icid=personalizationBanner_homepage](http://www.bedbathandbeyond.com/store/static/ShippingPolicies?icid=personalizationBanner_homepage).
Identity Theft | Security Freeze ► Defend Veterans Identities

Have you ever been a victim of identity theft or concerned about someone stealing your personal information? Or did you recently request a copy of your credit report only to discover that new lines of credit were opened in your name without your permission? You should have every reason to be concerned. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, identity theft is the nation’s fastest growing crime. The Fair and Accurate Credit Transaction Act of 2003 defines identity theft as “fraud committed using the identifying information of another person.” Identity theft and fraud involving stolen identities is the fastest-growing category of complaints filed by consumers with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

Identity thieves have developed innovative techniques to gain access to your personal information, including that of many Veterans. Some common ways to commit identity theft or fraud are:

- Shoulder Surfing: stealing your information in public places while you make a purchase and provide your credit card over the phone or share your information with a sales associate in a store;
- Business Record Theft: stealing information from businesses where your personal information is stored (i.e., an employer, a medical provider’s office, etc.);
- Dumpster Diving: rummaging through trash or landfills to locate confidential information or discarded bank statements;
- Skimming: electronically recording credit card account numbers or account information as your credit card is processed, during or immediately following a transaction that you authorized; and
- Phishing: posting websites that pose as legitimate businesses or official entities, promising recipients benefits while requiring – then stealing – their identifying data.

The U.S. Department of Justice recommends four steps, using the acronym “SCAM,” to avoid becoming a potential victim.

- Remain Stingy about providing personal information to others, providing it only to people who have a need to know.
- Immediately Contact financial institutions or credit card companies to report any unauthorized withdrawals or charges.
- Periodically Ask for a copy of your credit report.
- Maintain careful records of your banking and financial accounts.
A credit freeze, also referred to as a security freeze, is an effective tool against identity theft. This action allows you to seal your credit reports and use a personal identification number that only you know and can use to temporarily “thaw” your credit so legitimate applications for credit and services can be processed. Credit freezes can safeguard your data and prevent third-parties and identity thieves from establishing new credit in your name even if they obtain your identifying information. Freezing your credit files has no impact on any existing lines of credit. These credit freezes have been available to victims of ID theft for years, but recently all three major credit bureaus have allowed non-victims to establish credit freezes as well for a small fee. To implement a credit freeze, you will need to contact each of the three major credit reporting agencies; Experian, TransUnion and Equifax. You can initiate the process with the credit bureaus online, by phone or by e-mail.

The credit bureaus will request the following information to implement the security freeze on your behalf: Name | Address | Date of birth | Social Security Number. The credit bureaus may request that you provide supporting documentation if you are a victim of identity theft or have been impacted by a national breach. Once your application is reviewed, the credit bureau(s) will issue a confirmation letter regarding your request to freeze your credit file. The letter will provide specifics around the freeze and a PIN or passcode. The turnaround time to process the request will vary for each credit reporting agency. The security freeze will remain on your credit file until you remove or temporarily lift the freeze, for example, if you need to apply for a loan or additional lines of credit.

States laws around security freezes vary but most states permit victims of identity theft to add a credit freeze at no charge. Fees may apply for individuals who have not been subjected to identity theft at the time that they request the credit freeze. If you are a Veteran and believe your identity or information has been compromised, please contact the VA Identity Safety Service at vaidtheft@va.gov or call the VA Identity Theft Help Line at 1-855-578-5492.

The FTC’s Privacy and Identity page https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/topics/privacy-identity-online-security provides extensive information, tools and best practices regarding identity theft and credit freezes. ConsumerUnion released a credit freeze guide http://consumersunion.org/research/consumers-unions-guide-to-security-freeze-protection/ on February 5, 2014. This guide contains state-by-state credit freeze laws and security freeze instructions for the national credit bureau agencies. You can also contact your State’s Attorney General to gather information about your state’s identity theft and credit freeze laws and provisions.  [Source: VAntage Point | June 23, 2016 ++]

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**Paper Statements**  ► Would you Pay to Continue Receiving them?**

Most consumers — 54 percent — still receive a paper statement for a credit card or checking account, according to a new CreditCards.com survey of 1,000 U.S. adults. Among consumers who prefer paper, nearly half are so attached that they would choose to continue receiving paper statements even if they were charged extra for them. Reasons commonly cited by people who prefer paper statements include:

- They like to keep paper for their records.
- They like to pay bills by check, and mailed statements provide the bill and the envelope.
- The paper serves as a reminder the bill has to be paid.
- They’re comfortable with paper.

Reasons commonly cited by people who prefer digital statements include:

- They can access them anywhere.
- It’s environmentally friendly to save paper.
- You can pay bills faster.
- They’re comfortable being online.
CreditCards.com’s survey found that age appears to affect a person’s preference, with the youngest consumers polled (ages 18 to 25) being six times more likely to prefer digital over paper statements compared with the oldest consumers polled (ages 71 and older). Some consumers choose both forms of statements:

- 55 percent of consumers who receive their checking and debit card account statements electronically also receive paper copies.
- 44 percent of consumers who receive credit card statements electronically also receive paper statements.

A recent report from the National Consumer Law Center urges that paper statements should be available for free and that customers who prefer paper should not be steered into electronic billing by default. The national nonprofit says there are several advantages to paper statements, even in the technology age. To learn more, check out “Why Old-Fashioned Paper Statements May Be a Better Choice.” (http://www.moneytalksnews.com/why-old-fashioned-paper-statements-may-better-choice). [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | June 24, 2016 ++]

Student Tax Scam ► How It works

Scammers are targeting college students with a new twist on a classic con. Con artists impersonate IRS agents and demand that students pay a fictional tax... or face arrest.

How the Scam Works:

- Your phone rings, and the Caller ID shows it's from the IRS. When you answer, the caller claims to be an IRS agent. He or she says that you failed to pay your "federal student tax." Now, insists the caller, you are wanted for tax evasion and a warrant will be issued for your arrest.
- However, the "agent" can clear your name if you pay the tax immediately. You need to go to a nearby store and purchase a prepaid debit card, money order, or even a gift card and read the numbers to the "agent." If you do so, the "agent" will steal the money and disappear.
- IRS impostors often go to great lengths to appear realistic. Victims report that scammers use Caller ID spoofing technology to appear to be calling from IRS headquarters in Washington, DC. Con artists sometimes follow up scam calls with an email, which use the IRS logo, colors and official-sounding language.

How to Spot an IRS Impostor Scam:

- Be wary if you are being asked to act immediately. Scammers typically try to push you into action before you have had time to think. The IRS will give you the chance to question or appeal what you owe.
- The IRS doesn't call, text, or email first. The IRS won't call about payment or overdue taxes unless they have first contacted you by letter.
- Don't wire money, use a prepaid debit card or pay by gift card. Scammers often pressure people into these forms of payment. It's like sending cash: once it's gone, you can't trace it. The IRS says it will never demand
immediate payment, require a specific form of payment, or ask for credit card or debt card numbers over the phone.

- If you owe taxes or you think you might, contact the IRS at 800-829-1040 or irs.gov. IRS employees at that line can help you with a payment issue, if there is an issue.

Note that, although this particular scam is based in the U.S., similar scams mimicking the tax agency often appear in other countries. Canadian Revenue Agency scams are huge in Canada. Learn more about common tax scams on the IRS website https://www.irs.gov/uac/tax-scams-consumer-alerts. To find out more about other scams, check out BBB Scam Stopper (bbb.org/scam). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker (bbb.org/scamtracker). [Source: BBB Scam alert | June 24, 201 ++]

Tax Burden for Illinois Retired Vets ➤ As of June 2016

Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn’t necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retire in Illinois:

**Sales Taxes**
- **State Sales Tax:** 6.25% (1% on qualifying food, prescription & non-prescription drugs, medical appliances). Local government taxes can raise the total to a high of 8.45%).
- **Gasoline Tax:** 48.58 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)
- **Diesel Fuel Tax:** 57.80 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)
- **Cigarette Tax:** $1.98 /pack of 20 (In Chicago, the state and local rate is $6.16)

**Personal Income Taxes**
- **Tax Rate Range:** Flat rate of 3.75 percent of federal taxable income
- **Personal Exemptions:** Single – $2,125; Married – $4,250; Dependents – $2,125
- **Standard Deduction:** None
- **Medical/Dental Deduction:** Health insurance and long-term care insurance premiums are deductible.
- **Federal Income Tax Deduction:** None

**Retirement Income Taxes:** Illinois does not tax distributions received from qualified employee benefit plans, including 401(K) plans; an Individual Retirement Account, (IRA) or a self-employee retirement plan; a traditional IRA that has been converted to a Roth IRA; the redemption of U.S. retirement bonds; state and local government deferred compensation plans; a government retirement or government disability plan, including military plans; railroad retirement income; retirement payments to retired partners; a lump sum distribution of appreciated employer securities; and the federally taxed portion of Social Security benefits. For more information refer to http://www.revenue.state.il.us/individuals/pension.htm

**Retired Military Pay:** Not taxed.

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

**VA Disability Dependency and Indemnity Compensation:** VA benefits are not taxable because they generally are for disabilities and are not subject to federal or state taxes.
Military SBP/SSBP/RCSBP/RSFPP: Generally subject to state taxes for those states with income tax. Check with state department of revenue office.

**Property Taxes**
Taxes are imposed by local government taxing districts (counties, townships, municipalities, school districts, and special taxing districts. Most property in the state is assessed at 33.33% of its market value, except farmland which is based on its ability to produce income. Cook County has different criteria. Single family residences are assessed at 16%. For more information go to [http://tax.illinois.gov/Publications/PIOs/PIO-16pdf](http://tax.illinois.gov/Publications/PIOs/PIO-16pdf). There are seven major homestead exemptions and some that are limited in the application. For details go to [http://www.revenue.state.il.us/LocalGovernment/PropertyTax/taxrelief.htm](http://www.revenue.state.il.us/LocalGovernment/PropertyTax/taxrelief.htm). The exemption categories are:

- **General Homestead Exemption**: is available annually for owner-occupied residential property. The amount of exemption is the increase in the current year’s equalized assessed value (EAV), above the 1977 EAV, up to a maximum of 6,000.

- **Senior Citizens Assessment Freeze Homestead Exemption**: allows senior citizens who have a total household income of less than $55,000, and meet certain other qualifications to elect to maintain the equalized assessed value (EAV) of their homes at the base year EAV thereby preventing any increase in that value due to inflation.

- **Homestead Improvement Exemption**: is limited to the fair cash value that was added to the homestead property by any new improvement, up to an annual maximum of $55,000. The exemption continues for four years from the date the improvement is completed and occupied.

- **Senior Citizens Homestead Exemption**: allows a $4,000 reduction in the EAV of the property that a person 65 years of age or older is obligated to pay taxes on, and owns and occupies, or leases and occupies as a residence. Exemption is limited to the fair cash value that was added to the homestead property by any new improvement, up to an annual maximum of $45,000. The exemption continues for four years from the date the improvement is completed and occupied.

- **Disabled Veterans’ Homestead Exemption**: may be up to $70,000 of the assessed value for certain types of housing owned and used by a disabled veteran or his or her unmarried surviving spouse. The Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs determines the eligibility for this exemption, which must be reestablished annually.

- **Senior Citizens Real Estate Tax Deferral Program**: allows persons age 65 or older, who have a total household income of less than $50,000 and meet certain other qualifications, to defer all or part of their real estate taxes and special assessments. The deferral is similar to a loan against the property’s market value and a lien is filed on the property in order to ensure repayment to the deferral. The state pays the property taxes and then recovers the money, plus 6 percent annual interest, when the property is sold or transferred.

- **Disabled Persons’ Homestead Exemption**: provides a $2,000 reduction in a property’s equalized assessed value to a qualifying property owned by a disable person. An application must be filed annually for this exemption.

Information on the state’s Circuit Breaker and Pharmaceutical Assistance programs can be found in the state’s Web site at [http://www.illinois.gov/aging/BenefitsAccess/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.illinois.gov/aging/BenefitsAccess/Pages/default.aspx).

**Inheritance and Estate Taxes**
Illinois saw its estate tax disappear on January 1, 2010 due to repeal of the federal estate tax, and despite the retroactive reinstatement of the federal estate tax, Illinois’ tax did not come back automatically. Nonetheless, the Illinois legislature acted quickly at the beginning of 2011 to reinstate the Illinois estate tax for the 2011 tax year with a $2,000,000 exemption. However, in December 2011 the Illinois legislature acted to increase the exemption to $3,500,000 in 2012 and $4,000,000 in 2013.

For further information, visit the Illinois Department of Revenue site [http://www.revenue.state.il.us/#&panel1-1](http://www.revenue.state.il.us/#&panel1-1) or call 800-732-8866. [Source: [http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-alabama-iowa#ILLINOIS](http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-alabama-iowa#ILLINOIS) Jun 2016 ++]
**General Interest**

**Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 30 JUN 2016**

- **Female Vet Survey.** The American Legion has created a military women veterans survey in order to make specific recommendations for congressional appropriations, Veterans Affairs programs and facilities, and increase the public awareness of issues facing women veterans. Women veterans can access the survey at [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ALwomenvets](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ALwomenvets) until July 18, 2016.

- **Brexit.** A petition to Parliament arguing that "if the remain or leave vote is less than 60 percent based [on] a turnout [of] less than 75 percent there should be another referendum" on Brexit has attracted more than 3 million signatures from Britons since this past week’s vote.

- **Drilling Wall Holes.** You know how when you drill a hole in the wall, you get wood, plaster or sheet rock dust in a little heap on the floor below? To do this task without the mess, first grab an ordinary envelope. Open it so it forms a pocket. With the flap folded to the back of the envelope, tape it to the wall just under the site where you want to drill. When you drill, the shavings and dust will fall into the envelope for easy disposal. The beauty is that you are done — no need to go in search of the vacuum or broom and dustpan!

- All information from the survey is kept private and submitted anonymously.

- **Donating.** Americans love to give. We opened our pocketbooks wider than ever before in 2015, donating a record $373.25 billion. That’s according to a new report from Giving USA. The record-breaking total is an increase of 4.1 percent from 2014 – another record-breaking donation year – and includes donations from individuals, estates, foundations and corporations.

- **Grill cleaning.** This sounds odd, but you can use an onion to get your grill nice and clean. Once your grill grates are really hot, you can jab a fork into an onion that’s been cut in half, then rub the onion face down on the grill until the grill’s grates are wiped clean of that black grime and gunk.

- **Grilling Lean Meat.** Lean foods can stick on a grill, even if it’s clean. To reduce sticking, you can soak a paper towel in vegetable oil and use it – holding it with tongs – to rub oil over the grill rack.

- **Weather Reporting.** Check out [https://www.youtube.com/embed/dsYfn8yg41w?autoplay=1&rel=0](https://www.youtube.com/embed/dsYfn8yg41w?autoplay=1&rel=0) to hear an Aussie’s commentary on curvaceous Mexican TV Weather ladies.

- **Ship Naming.** A Republican lawmaker has introduced legislation to keep Congress members’ names off Navy ships if they haven't served as president or in the military. If passed, the proposal would block the naming of two ships — one after civil rights leader Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and one after former Senate Armed Services Chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich).

- **SBP/RCSBP Reminder.** If your former spouse died and you remarried before Nov. 25, 2015, and you want your current spouse to be covered by the Survivor Benefit Plan, you must take action before Nov. 24, 2016. That is the last day of the Congressionally-declared SBP open season. The effective date of your spouse SBP coverage and cost will be the date of your former spouse’s death or the first anniversary of your remarriage, whichever is later. Contact your Retirement Services Officer (RSO) for information and open enrollment procedures.
• **COLA.** The May CPI is 234.444, and .1 percent above the FY 2014 COLA baseline. Because there was not a positive COLA in FY 2015, the FY 2014 baseline is used. The CPI for June 2016 is scheduled to be released on July 15, 2016.

• **CRSRS Report.** On June 9, the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC), a Washington think tank, released the recommendations of its chartered Commission on Retirement and Personal Savings, which examined whether Americans are meeting the financial retirement goals. To see the commission's full public report go to [http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/retirement-security](http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/retirement-security).


• **FICO.** A bad score means less access to credit and higher interest rates if you can get it. Consider you’re borrowing 200 grand on a 30-year fixed mortgage at today’s average rates. Show up at the lender’s office with a 620 to 639 credit score, and you’ll pay 4.8 percent. If you make minimum payments, your total interest bill for that mortgage will amount to about $179,000 over 30 years. But if you have a 760 score, you’ll only pay 3.24 percent, and your total interest bill over the life of the loan declines to about $113,000.

• **Wet Sneakers.** To dry, tie the laces of the sneakers to the laces of a second pair of shoes — the latter will act as a counterweight. Then drape the laces over the dryer door so that the wet shoes are inside the dryer, the counterweight shoes are on the outside. Close the door and turn on the dryer. It will tumble and circulate the warm air, but the wet shoes will hang there on the door and — voila! — they get dry.

• **War Deaths.** Numbers of Americans who died in war
  -- 620,000: Civil War
  -- 116,516: World War I
  -- 405,399: World War II
  -- 36,574: Korean War
  -- 58,220: Vietnam conflict
  -- 383: Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm
  -- 4,424: Operation Iraqi Freedom
  -- 73: Operation New Dawn
  -- 2,349: Operation Enduring Freedom

• **Car Insurance.** According a study commissioned by InsuranceQuotes.com, American families pay an average of 79 percent more for their car insurance policy after they add a teen driver, between the ages of 16 and 19. If you live in New Hampshire, you might pay a whopping 125 percent more.

• **The Next Generation.** The video at [https://youtu.be/gM07qFvcTE8](https://youtu.be/gM07qFvcTE8) is of a Palestinian school graduation ceremony which featured a theatrical show of terrorist skills presented by the graduating children of the 2016 Al-Quds class of the Islamic Al-Hoda kindergarten. The intended message, “We do not want to kill you. Get out of our land”.


• **Scarborough Shoal.** Philippine President-elect saying no to war with China over disputed shoal complicating U.S. ‘Line in the Sand’ deterrence effort.

• **Ohio Vets.** The Ohio Department of Education has eliminated fees for teaching licenses for military veterans and for active-duty service members and their spouses. The department says in an announcement this past week the change is to recognize the contributions of military families.

• **U.S. Coast Guard Academy.** The Academy is welcoming an incoming class with the highest percentage of women ever: 38 percent. The female enrollment rate has not been matched at the Naval Academy, the Military Academy at West Point or the Air Force Academy, though each has seen an increase in female enrollment at a time when gender barriers have been falling across the armed services.

• **Costco Members.** Sam’s Club is welcoming Costco members into its clubs for free through Monday, July 4. Just show your Costco membership card.
• **4th of July.** The average American household will spend $370.75 on Independence Day festivities this year—a 7 percent increase from last year, according to WalletHub.

• **TSP.** Several of the Thrift Savings Plan’s offerings were in the red by close of business 24 JUN because of the global financial and political uncertainty caused by Britain’s decision last Thursday to leave the European Union (Brexit).

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**Relationships ➤ How to Foster Them in 10 Minutes**

It is often heard from leaders that they have higher priorities on their plate than making connections with others. The truth is that things don’t get done if you don’t connect to the people who are contributing to those deadlines and bottom-lines. Why would others care about you and the organizational initiatives you’re responsible for if you don’t show that you appreciate and value their contributions? There are many things you can do to foster amazing, supportive relationships in a small amount of time. Consider the following that could be done in 10 minutes or less:

![10min](image)

**Tell them what they’re doing well.** Your stakeholders are weary of critical feedback. Try watching for what others are doing well and tell them what you notice.

**Write a thank-you note.** Handwritten is best but even an email thanking someone for their support, kindness, or an extra effort will go a long way to build a relationship.

**Encourage them when they’re down.** Everyone needs a little extra “I know you can do it!” from time to time. Watch for opportunities to encourage others.

**Coach them when they’re stuck.** Ask, “What would you do if you weren’t stuck (afraid, angry, upset)?” or “How can I help?” to get someone unstuck.

**Let them know you’re thinking of them.** Has someone been absent from work for a while? Let them know you are thinking of them.

**Let them talk.** Ten minutes of listening to someone goes a lot further in creating a relationship than talking to them. Just listen to them, even if you disagree.

**Ask them about their family, their history, or their hobbies.** When you learn a little more about their life outside of work, you have a conversation starter for the next time you see them that will continue to foster your relationship.

**Ask them a question that will make them think:** “What are you really good at?” or “What makes you happiest at work?” or “Who can help you?” are all good places to start. Questions like that are gifts that provide insight.

**Be present.** Sometimes, the best thing you can do for someone is to just focus on them.

**Meet them in person or pick up the phone:** Email is overrated and often misunderstood. Walk to their office, or if they are too far away, pick up the phone for a conversation. These are better way to handle sticky subjects or smooth over misunderstandings.
You can nurture important work relationships in very little time between all those other important things you do. (And by the way, don’t you need good, strong relationships to help you get those important things done?). [Source: GovExec.com | Mary Jo Asmus | June 24, 2016 ++]

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Flag Day Update 03 ➤ 100th Anniversary of Wilson’s Proclamation

It has been more than a century since Bernard Cigrand as a young Wisconsin schoolteacher, began an effort to honor the United States flag. He wrote countless letters and essays and, after years of work, eventually saw 14 JUN designated as Flag Day — a time still earmarked to celebrate the flag and all that it signifies. “This is about recognizing the flag as a symbol of our country and the sacrifices our founders made,” said Mike Tettleton, president and co-owner of Lone Star Banners and Flags in Fort Worth, who is among those wishing more people celebrated Flag Day. “This is the symbol everyone around the world knows is a symbol of the United States.” Cigrand, known as the Father of Flag Day, died of a heart attack in 1932.

Flags around the Washington Monument, as viewed through a wide-angle lens.

This year marks the 100-year anniversary of the presidential proclamation calling for a nationwide observance of Flag Day on June 14. It has been 67 years since Congress established National Flag Day and 239 years since the Continental Congress approved the design of a national flag. The effort to bring more recognition to the U.S. flag began simply enough. Cigrand, a young teacher, put a 10-inch American flag in an ink well on his school desk on June 14, 1885, and asked his students to write essays on the meaning of the flag. Through the years, he wrote articles and essays — as well as letters to elected officials, including several different presidents of the United States — about the need to observe the birth of the flag on June 14. People began gathering for general public celebrations of the flag, and eventually President Woodrow Wilson formally declared Flag Day an annual, national event. Wilson’s proclamation asked that Flag Day be marked by “special patriotic exercises” to show “our thoughtful love of America, our comprehension of the great mission of liberty and justice to which we have devoted ourselves as a people …” more than a decade before Congress formally established a National Flag Day in 1949. Following are some ways to honor the U.S. flag.

Displaying flags. Properly displaying flags, according to USHistory.org, USFlag.org and the American Legion. (Reminder: The flag should never touch the ground and it is only flown upside down as a distress signal.)

- On a wall: The flag may hang vertically or horizontally but the stars should be at the top of the flag on the observer’s left.
• At a home: Flags generally are displayed just from sunrise to sunset. But if the flag remains on display through the night, it should be illuminated. Any flag on display outside during bad weather should be made of all-weather material.

• On a street: When the U.S. flag is displayed over the middle of the street, it should hang vertically with the stars to the north or the east.

• In a group of state flags: The U.S. flag flies at the center and tallest point of a group of state or local flags. No other flag may be larger. And the U.S. flag is always the first to be raised and lowered.

• On a casket: The U.S. flag, when covering a casket, should be placed so that the union is at the head and over the left shoulder. But the flag shouldn’t stay on the casket as it’s lowered into the grave. And it shouldn’t touch the ground.


Buying new flags. Flags may be bought at a variety of stores, including specialty flag stores. But people may also buy flags that have flown over the Texas Capitol (refer to the Texas House of Representatives Texas Flag Request Site at www.flags.house.state.tx.us/(S(5bowkh1mx57frusjqzqzugy))/TermsAndConditions.aspx) or anywhere from $13.03 for a 3x5 flag to $44.45 for a 6x9 flag. Requests for U.S. Capitol flags go to the state’s senators.

Disposing of flags.
• Eventually, a flag will become old or tattered and must be retired. The U.S. Flag Code states that when the flag is “no longer a fitting emblem for display, [it] should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning.” If that’s not what you want to do, Mike Tettleton, president and co-owner of Lone Star Banners and Flags in Fort Worth, said anyone may bring (or send) their old flags to Lone Star Banners and Flags, which works with an American Legion Hall that properly disposes of them.

• For anyone who burns their retired flag, the flag should be properly folded and placed on a fire big enough to make sure the entire flag is burned. People may stand at “attention, salute the flag, recite the Pledge of Allegiance and have a brief period of silent reflection,” according to Veterans of Foreign Wars. “After the flag is completely consumed, the fire should then be safely extinguished and the ashes buried.”

• “The main thing is to do it respectfully,” Tettleton said. “Respect the flag.”

[Source: Fort Worth Star-Telegram | Anna M. Tinsley | June 14, 2016 ++]

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Guam ▶ America’s Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier

This tiny Pacific island has several nicknames. There is “the tip of the spear” because it is the closest U.S. territory to potential hot spots in Asia, such as North Korea and the South China Sea. There is “America’s unsinkable aircraft carrier,” because the island is home to a huge air force base. And then there is “Fortress Pacific,” because of the huge military buildup that is planned to take place over the next decade. But Guam’s population calls it by another name: Ours. And a sizable portion wants a real say in how it is run. “This American territory is not enjoying democracy, where citizens can determine who their leader will be and what laws will be put upon them,” said Gov. Eddie Baza Calvo, who has called a vote for November on Guam’s political status. “It’s up to our people to decide which way to go: whether to be fully in union with the United States or to chart a separate course.”

A “decolonization commission” is set to report to Calvo (R) next month on whether to proceed with the plebiscite, which would give Guamanians three alternatives to their current status as a U.S. territory. That status — shared by
Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands — confers U.S. citizenship on people born here but does not give them the right to vote in presidential elections or a voting representative in Congress. “Guamanian soldiers have gone to fight in countries so they can have democracy and vote, yet we have never voted for the person who sends us to war,” the governor said. The three alternatives under consideration are:

- Statehood, which would give Guam all the rights (and burdens) of being a state, albeit a very small one, with a population less than one-third that of Wyoming.
- Free association with administrative power, like Palau and the Marshall Islands.
- Independence, which would make Guam a (minuscule) sovereign state.

The vote would not be binding — only Congress can change Guam’s political status — but would be symbolic of the territory’s sentiment. The issue has been simmering for years but returned to the political front burner with the Pentagon’s preparations to relocate thousands of troops stationed on the southern Japanese island of Okinawa to here. The U.S. military presence on Okinawa has long been a source of contention in a prefecture that complains of being treated as a second-class citizen by Tokyo. But there are similar complaints on Guam, a 30-mile-long tropical island of only 160,000 people, which is already home to large Air Force and naval bases. Pockets of fierce opposition to the initial plan formulated a decade ago to move 10,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam led the Defense Department to halve the number coming here. “The prospect of the military buildup caused a crack in the facade of American-ness on this island,” said Michael Lujan Bevacqua, who teaches the indigenous Chamorro language at the University of Guam.

Bevacqua is a strong advocate of breaking free from the United States. “Being independent and having the ability to determine our own policies is much better for us,” he said. LisaLinda Natividad, another proponent of change, says the decision to move the Marines onto this island is the latest sign of Washington’s highhanded ways. “The whole Guam buildup was set in motion because we’re a U.S. colony, and they think they can do whatever they want with our land,” said Natividad, who sits on the decolonization commission. “Just drive around for 10 minutes and it’s obvious.” The issue of Guam’s political status is complicated. Some resent the U.S. military presence but do not want to give up their American passports. Some want greater independence but want their taxes to stay here on the island, as they do now, rather than going into the federal coffers. Some fear the lack of opportunity if they could no longer travel freely to the mainland.

It is also controversial. People who have lived here for half a century take issue with the way the vote is being structured, saying it unfairly favors the Chamorro people. Only people who can trace their roots on the island back to 1950, when the island became an unincorporated territory, will be allowed to vote. Efforts to populate a voter registry
have been slow-going — only 10,500 have registered so far, Calvo said — and the education campaign is barely existent. “I believe that before we have a vote, we need to have a strong education effort where people can really see what each status would mean,” said Shannon Murphy, a local journalist who runs the Guampedia website. “I haven’t seen it laid out in a way where people can compare each option.” Even advocates of political change, including Bevacqua, say the governor is rushing the plebiscite because he has his mind on his legacy. A vote can only be held in an election year, and term limits mean Calvo will be on his way out of office at the 2018 poll. Calvo, who prefers the statehood option, said he called the vote because the time was right.

For the vote to go ahead, the governor, the decolonization commission and the Election Commission all have to agree. The decolonization commission is due to decide whether to press ahead at its meeting next month. Local business representatives think that moving to lessen or get rid of the military presence on Guam would be economic suicide. “As a business person, I wonder if they have thought through the economic aspects of the decisions they want to make,” said Joe Arnett, an accountant who has lived on Guam for 32 years and runs the armed forces committee for the local chamber of commerce. “The U.S. federal government puts $600 million a year into Guam through Social Security and taxes paid by military personnel stationed here. That’s not including food stamps and school lunches and things like that,” he said.

Almost $9 billion has been earmarked for the base expansion and support facilities, one-third of which will be moved from Japan. In the north of Guam, preparations are underway. The Pentagon has unlocked $309 million for the first phase of construction of the new Marine base, which will be built on existing military land lined with palm trees. Next door at the Andersen Air Force Base, where B-52 bombers were lined up on the runway this week, construction workers were building a new hangar that will be part of the expanded footprint. But the buildup will be long and slow. The first wave of 2,500 Marines is expected here by 2022, with the remainder due by 2027.

The Marines are making sure to stay out of the local debate. “Guam needs to figure out what’s best for Guam,” said Col. Philip Zimmerman, the officer in charge of the 20-strong Marine contingent on Guam. But, he said, from a military perspective, Guam is a crucial forward base, noting tensions with North Korea and with China around the Spratly Islands and the South China Sea in recent months. It is 2,500 miles to Beijing from here, but more than double that to Los Angeles. The base itself would be good for the island’s economy, Zimmerman said. “We will be creating jobs during the buildup, then we’ll be creating civilian jobs to run the ranges and to run the base itself,” he said. A military socioeconomic impact assessment study found that the new base would create more than 3,000 full-time civilian jobs in 2021, and tax revenues to the Guam government would increase by about $40 million a year from 2028. For his part, the governor said he would “gladly” pay federal taxes so that Guam could be a full-fledged state. “But anything is better than being an unincorporated territory,” Calvo said. “That’s just another word for colony.”

[Source: The Washington Post | Anna Fifield | June 17, 2016 ++]

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**Car Overheating** ► **Eight Checks to Avoid Problems**

The weather’s warm and getting warmer. Forecasters are predicting a hotter-than-usual summer for most of the United States, including the northern states. You’re probably already thinking about how to keep your home cool. But have you considered that your car, too, needs protection from the heat? Most vehicles aren’t designed for extreme temperatures. They need special care when the mercury rises, particularly during summer road trips. Driving an overheated vehicle can cause expensive damage. Cars and trucks that can limp around town for short runs in the cooler months are prone to breakdowns when it’s hot. But even well-cared-for vehicles can be laid low, if you don’t heed warning signs and stay on top of hot-weather maintenance. Running too hot can degrade engine oil, ruin gasket seals and even melt the vehicle’s engine block. Have a carefree summer by keeping your coolant system topped off when it’s hot. Pull off the road if the vehicle’s temperature gauge gives you a warning. And follow these eight tips for keeping your vehicle running cool:
1. **Radiator** - The point of a radiator is to keep your engine running cool. So make sure it’s functioning at its best. Check the coolant level at least every oil change, and have the system flushed every 24,000 miles or two years. Radiator fluid can come in several colors — most commonly orange or green — but should not look milky or rusty. If it does, have the system flushed and inspected by a mechanic. Never remove the radiator cap when the engine is hot — the coolant could be boiling under pressure and gush out, burning your face or arms.

2. **Hoses** - Your coolant’s not doing much good if it’s not properly circulating through the hoses, and extreme heat can damage a worn hose. Hoses are usually good for at least four years, but not always. Check them visually for leaks, cracks and peeling. While the engine’s still warm, squeeze along the hose’s length — it should feel firm, but not hard. If the hose is spongy or soft in even one section, replace it before it fails and causes bigger problems.

3. **Oil** - Oil lubricates lots of moving parts and helps prevent overheating. Without it you’ll blow up your engine and your budget. It’s easy to check, so make a regular habit of it. Here’s how: After the car’s been running for a few minutes, shut off the engine, pop the hood, pull the labeled dipstick out, and wipe it off completely with a paper towel so you can get a clear reading. Slide it all the way back in, then remove it again. Near the bottom, you’ll see two marked lines, pinholes, crosshatching or “min/max” labels. As long as the oil is a yellowish brown (dark oil “needs a change,” milky oil “needs a mechanic”) and stays between those two lines, you’re OK. If it’s low, add a quart or two of the grade your owner’s manual recommends, through the oil cap. Oil should be changed roughly every 5,000 to 7,500 miles, depending on your driving and your owner’s manual.

4. **Battery** - Battery problems are often associated with winter, but AAA says summer is actually worse: “Heat and vibration are a battery’s two worst enemies leading to internal breakdown and eventual failure.” Many auto places will check your battery free of charge, and they’ll recommend you replace it every three years. If you want to check it yourself, start by seeing if your battery has removable caps on top — if so, peek inside and see if the water level looks low. Add distilled water to every cell that needs it. With the engine off, check for frayed wires and corrosion (a powdery buildup) around the terminals, where the cables are clamped to the battery posts. Make sure the clamps are firm, too. If there is corrosion, don’t clean it with your bare hands — it’s acid. You can scrub it off with a disposable toothbrush and a mixture of baking soda and water. If you have to disconnect the cables, always disconnect the negative (-) wire first and reconnect it last to reduce the chances of a short circuit and serious injury.

5. **Air conditioning** - For obvious reasons, you want your air conditioning at its best in the summer. An easy way to check is to stick a thermometer through the vent to see how cool the air is getting compared with what temperature the car says it is. If it’s not as cool as you’d like, the first thing to try is checking and replacing your car’s cabin air filter — it’s a $10 job you can handle yourself that should be done every 20,000 miles. If that doesn’t help, you may need more refrigerant, have leaks, or suffer from bigger problems. Time to see a mechanic.

6. **Temperature gauge** - Keep an eye on your temperature gauge and make sure it registers cool. High speeds, idling in traffic, running the AC or pulling a heavy load will cause your car to heat up faster. If you’re worried you may be close to overheating, here is a trick to try: Turn the air conditioning completely off and put the heater on max. This will vent some of the engine heat — right in your face, but it’s better than the alternative. Roll the windows down and pull over to a safe place. Don’t keep driving while your temperature gauge is in the red zone. Give the vehicle time to cool down, and phone for help. Driving your overheated car can result in repairs that can cost in the thousands.
7. **Tires** - Heat affects tire pressure, so under-inflation or over-inflation are risky in extreme weather. Use a hand pressure gauge to make sure your tires’ pressure matches what the owner’s manual or the specs listed on the side of your tire say it should be. Fill up with air at the gas station. Check tire tread with a penny: if you can see all of Abe’s head, you don’t have enough tread. That means it’s time to replace those tires to stay safe on the road. You can get your mechanic to check all this, too, as well as alignment and balance. You can also usually get your tires rotated for free along with any other service.

8. **Emergency kit** - Sometimes even a reasonably well-maintained car will break down. Be sure you’re prepared for an emergency, with some basic supplies, including water for the radiator and yourself, jumper cables, a flashlight and batteries and a first aid kit.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Brandon Ballenger | June 7, 2016 ++]

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**Ultrasound Dryer**  ►  **Estimated Availability About 5-Years**

Imagine a heatless dryer that dries clothing twice as fast as today’s consumer dryers while being three to five times more energy-efficient. Oh, and it causes less fading of clothing and creates less lint. It’s not science fiction. It’s science — researchers at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee are currently developing an ultrasonic dryer that can do just that. Lead researcher Ayyoub Momen tells CNN Money that a full-size prototype is expected to be completed in August, paving the way for ultrasonic dryers to become available to consumers in about five years. Momen will work with General Electric to design consumer versions of the ultrasonic dryer, which he estimates will cost around $500 to $1,000.

Whereas today’s dryers use heat to evaporate water, the ultrasonic dryer will use low-energy, high-frequency vibrations to displace water. So instead of heating elements, the ultrasonic dryer will contain electric devices called piezoelectric transducers that emit sound so high-pitched a dog cannot hear it, CNN reports: The sounds cause vibrations that shake the wet fabric so vigorously that all of the moisture can be extracted even in cold air. That water is turned into a mist and collected in a little tank for the user to drain later. Momen came up with the concept, modeled after ultrasonic humidifiers, in response to a dryer-innovation challenge from the U.S. Department of Energy. For now, he and his fellow researchers have been working on small-scale prototypes, testing them out on scraps of fabric. You can see the prototypes demonstrated in the video at https://youtu.be/PjSjpVYpg0c from Oak Ridge National Laboratory. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | June 23, 2016 ++]

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**Food Hacks**  ►  **Kitchen Tips**

1. **Revive Stale Bread:** When your day-old bread is hard as a rock, just sprinkle it with some cold water, wrap it in foil and bake it in the oven until it’s as good as new.
2. **Cut Cake Cleaner**: Using dental floss pulled taut is a quick and easier way to more cleanly cut cake (and soft cheese, for that matter) than with a knife. Just be sure to use unflavored, or else you'll add a minty taste!

3. **Cook Steak Straight from the Freezer**: Going against popular practice, it turns out there are advantages to cooking frozen steak – without defrosting it first. America’s Test Kitchen put science to work and discovered that frozen steak doesn’t have the dreaded grey band and retains more moisture during cooking. ATK recommends freezing steaks on a parchment-lined baking sheet before wrapping in plastic wrap and storing in a Ziploc bag to avoid freezer burn. Watch their video at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLWsEg1LmaE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLWsEg1LmaE) here for the full instructions.

4. **Peel Mangoes with a Cup**: Peeling mangoes can be messy, slippery and lead to a low yield. To get the most fruit, peel it by sliding it against the lip of a cup just where the skin meets the flesh. Voila, perfectly ripe mango ready to eat.

5. **Peel Garlic Cloves between Two Bowls**: Peeling an entire head of garlic takes time and makes your hands reek. To do a batch quickly, separate the cloves from the head, stick them between two aluminum bowls to form a circle and shake rapidly and vigorously for 30 seconds. The skin will have shaken loose from the cloves.

6. **Use Ice Cube Trays to Freeze Wine, Coffee and More**: Icing something is the surest way to cool it down quickly, like your not-so-cold white wine or lukewarm iced coffee. Problem is, the water also dilutes whatever you put it in. The next time you make coffee, smoothies or punch, simply freeze some of it in ice cube trays and use those cubes to cool down the same product next time around. And always keep some spare frozen wine on hand for those emergency situations (or when you don’t want to open an entire bottle when a recipe calls for a small amount).

7. **Wrap Banana Tops with Plastic Wrap to Make them Last Longer**: Extend the life of your bananas by separating them and wrapping the tops with plastic. The explanation is super scientific, but essentially, this prevents gas from emitting from the banana that causes it to ripen.

8. **Cut Grapes, Cherry Tomatoes or pitted Olives in Half between Two Tupperware Lids**: Cutting cherry tomatoes or grapes one by one in half can be a laborious process. Do a big batch quickly by sitting them on a Tupperware lid and covering with another lid. Then, use a very sharp knife to slice through the entire batch at once.

9. **Separate Eggs with a Water Bottle**: Use a clean, empty water bottle and hold the open tip over the egg yolk. Squeeze it into the bottle, and no egg white will follow. Then, squeeze it back out into a separate bowl. Bam!

10. **Defrost Meat in 5 Minutes**: Sometimes your microwave is otherwise occupied, or you forget to leave your meat out to defrost. In a pinch, just turn a pot upside-down, place the steak (inside a plastic bag) on top. Then, fill another pot with water to give it some weight and place it (regular side up) on top of the steak, sandwiching the steak between the two pots. Within five minutes, the weight will have defrosted the meat. Cook away!

[Source: Various | June2016 ++]
Gun Control Update 02  ►  Jim Tice Retirees After 46-years

Omar Mateen used a legally purchased semi-automatic rifle to fatally gun down 49 people and wound dozens more at an Orlando, Florida, nightclub on 12 JUN. The very next day, a reporter for the Philadelphia Daily News purchased – (http://www.philly.com/philly/columnists/helen_ubinas/20160614_Ubinas__I_bought_an_AR-15_semi-automatic_rifle_in_Philly_in_7_minutes.html) an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle in just seven minutes in Philadelphia. Two days after the mass shooting, two Huffington Post reporters walked into a Florida gun shop empty-handed and left just 38 minutes later with an AR-15 assault rifle in hand (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/ar-15-orlando_us_576059f3e4b0e4fe5143fd4d). The gun shop employee there told the HuffPo reporters that they would have been in and out of the store with a gun in five minutes, but there was a backlog of background checks because people were rushing to purchase guns in the wake of the Orlando shooting. Although licensed gun dealers work with the FBI to conduct federal background checks on prospective gun owners, most states don’t require background checks if you’re purchasing a gun from a private individual at a gun show, according to MarketWatch.

I bought an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle in Philly in 7 minutes

It’s not unusual for gun (and ammunition) sales to spike after a high-profile shooting as many Americans stock up on ammo and guns, fueled by fear of tighter gun control initiatives. The FBI conducted a record 23.1 million firearm background checks in 2015 — more than 3.3 million of which occurred in December, after the deadly shooting spree in San Bernardino, California, that left 14 dead and 22 seriously wounded. Just how easy (or difficult) is it to obtain a firearm in the United States? Well, here are four (far less lethal) items that are arguably more difficult to get:

- **Allergy/cold medicine:** If you’re suffering from a cold or allergies, getting your hands on Sudafed (or another similar over-the-counter cold medicine with pseudoephedrine in it) can be a pain. Because pseudoephedrine is used to make methamphetamine illegally, you have to show a photo identification to purchase the medicine, which is also logged into a database. The U.S. government has also implemented daily sales limits and 30-day purchasing limits on the medicine — a part of the Combat Methamphetamine Act of 2005.

- **A pet:** Adopting a pet in the United States isn’t easy. You don’t walk into a shelter, find a cute puppy and head home with your new dog the same day. Typically, animal shelters require an extensive application, interview, background check and some even ask for personal references. There’s also a chance your home may be inspected before the shelter decides if you’re fit to be a pet owner.

- **Marriage license:** In Montana, Before to get a marriage license you have to get a blood test for rubella immunity, so there was a waiting period between the test and obtaining the license. If you want to get married in Louisiana, you have a three-day waiting period between the time you obtain the marriage license and the
actual marriage ceremony. As the Philadelphia Daily News reporter found out, you can leave a gun shop with a semiautomatic rifle in seven minutes.

- **An abortion:** In Florida, there’s no waiting period to purchase an assault rifle like Mateen used. But if a woman wants to get an abortion in the Sunshine State, she must have an ultrasound and in-person counseling, plus delay for a 24-hour waiting period, before she’s able to get the medical service performed, according to Rolling Stone.

Do you think it’s too easy to get your hands on a gun in the United States? Let your local and federal government representatives know your feelings on the matter. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | June 15, 2016 ++]

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**Adult Summer Camps ➤ Relax and Act Like a Kid Again**

The fun, friendships and adventures of summer camp are no longer experiences exclusive to kids. Many adults are now making new camp memories and reliving some of the best parts of their childhood at adult summer camps. After all, it’s not fair that kids have all the summer camp fun, right? Here are some camps that allow — and encourage — adults to relax and act like kids again:

1. **Camp Bonfire** [http://campbonfire.com]: There are 35 different activities to enjoy — including archery, canoeing, yoga, tai chi, singalongs, capture the flag, dancing and s’mores — at this adult summer camp, located at Lake Owego Camp in Pennsylvania, about 2.5 hours from Philadelphia and New York City. The three-day, two-night camp starts at $449 a person and includes lodging, meals, snacks, drinks and evening cocktails. “I don’t think there are a lot of spaces for connection and play for adults that don’t infantilize or condescend,” Camp Bonfire co-founder Benjamin Camp told Philly.com.” We aren’t saying you need to pretend to be a child to experience joy. You don’t need to go back. You have that right now.”

2. **Camp Grounded** [http://campgrounded.org]: “This is just like the camp you went to as a kid … only designed for adults,” reads the Camp Grounded website. “No screens. No filters. No big data. No agenda. No bulls***. Just good old camp.” If you want — or desperately need — a tech-free weekend, this is the adult camp for you. As soon as campers arrive, they’re required to hand over their phones, tablets, computers and watches to the camp tech crew. With prices starting at roughly $500 and weekend camps planned at different locations across the country, Camp Grounded aims to offer adults a chance to unwind and make new friends and memories without the distraction of technology.

3. **Camp No Counselors** [https://www.campnocounselors.com]: This camp’s slogan is “Play like a kid. Party like a grown-up.” The open-bar camp seems to cater to young adults who “work hard, play harder.” “Each camp weekend is filled with land and water sports, arts ‘n crafts activities, epic nightly theme parties, an open bar, gourmet meals
and, of course, all of your favorite classic camp activities from Color War to Talent Show,” according to the Camp No Counselors’ website. This hard-partying camp for adults has locations across the nation, with prices starting at about $500.

4. **Camp Chief Ouray** [http://campchiefouray.org/adult-family-camps/active-older-adults](http://campchiefouray.org/adult-family-camps/active-older-adults): Run by the YMCA of the Rockies, this camp offers separate camps for kids, families and active seniors, ages 50 and up. The adult camps, which run Sunday-Thursday, are $345 for non-seniors and $325 for seniors. Activities include archery, fishing, hikes, dancing, rafting, woodcarving and zip-line riding.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | June 7, 2016 ++]

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**MASH 4077 Test**

If you can remember the TV comedy MASH about the Korean War, then take this test and see how well you remember that series:

1. **Which two characters were married (not to each other) by Father Francis Mulcahy?**
   - Hawkeye and Margaret | BJ and Radar | BJ and Klinger | Margaret and Klinger

2. **Who was known for having a teddy bear?**
   - Margaret | Sidney | Radar | Kelly

3. **Which major character never made it home?**
   - Henry | Trapper | Frank | Klinger

4. **Colonel Sherman T. Potter was played by which actor?**
   - Alan Alda | Wayne Rogers | Mike Farrell | Harry Morgan

5. **Who was the 4077th's chief surgeon?**
   - Charles | Hawkeye | Francis | Klinger

6. **Who is known as "Hot Lips"?**
   - Nurse Able | Margaret | Kelly | BJ

7. **In the last episode, which character was going deaf?**
   - Frank Burns | Sherman Potter | Max Klinger | Francis Mulcahy

8. **M*A*S*H took place during which war?**
   - WW II | The Korean War | WW I | Vietnam

9. **Which of these characters was married to the same person since their first appearance?**
   - BJ Hunnicutt | Max Klinger | Charles Winchester III | Walter O'Reily

10. **Which of these characters was the last one to make their first appearance on the show?**
    - Frank | Klinger | Charles | BJ

11. **Which character's both movie and TV series actors died back to back on February 15th and 16th, 1996 of a heart attack?**
    - Henry | Potter | Radar | Hawkeye

12. **Klinger's FIRST wife was?**
    - Soon Lee | Margaret Houlihan | Doris Day | Laverne Esposito

13. **Who suffered from a nervous breakdown and was transferred back home after Margaret's marriage to Donald?**
    - Hawkeye | Frank | Charles | Radar

14. **BJ Hunnicutt replaced which character after he was sent home?**
    - Francis | Walter | Charles | Trapper

15. **Who was Sidney Freedman?**
    - A psychologist | A cook | The company clerk | A helicopter pilot
Rare Historical Photos ► California Redwoods

California lumberjacks working on Redwoods

*********************************

Brain Teaser ► Weighing Stuff

Due to the local Kebab shop being closed, Mad Ade has some spare time on his hands, so he is playing around with a two-plate scale and finds that the scale stays in equilibrium if one plate is filled with two keys, two coins and three toy soldiers OR one apple, one toy soldier and one lemon, and the other plate with a weight of 100 grams. One coin, one key, one soldier and one plum together weigh 50 grams. The lemon, the apple and the plum weigh exactly the same as one coin, one key, one soldier and one pen.

How much does the pen weigh?

*********************************

Have You Heard? ► Admiral’s Aide + Unstoppable Virus

A young Naval Officer was in a terrible car accident, but due to the heroics of the hospital staff the only permanent injury was the loss of one ear. Since he wasn’t physically impaired he remained in the military and eventually became an Admiral. However, during his career he was always sensitive about his appearance.

One day the Admiral was interviewing two Navy Master Chiefs and a Marine Sergeant Major for his personal staff. The first Master Chief was a Surface Navy type and it was a great interview. At the end of the interview the Admiral asked him, ”Do you notice anything different about me?” The Master Chief answered, ”Why yes. I couldn't help but notice you are missing your starboard ear, so I don't know whether this impacts your hearing on that side.” The Admiral got very angry at this lack of tact and threw him out of his office.

The next candidate, an Aviation Master Chief, when asked this same question, answered, ”Well yes, you seem to be short one ear.” The Admiral threw him out also.

The third interview was with the Marine Sergeant Major. He was articulate, extremely sharp, and seemed to know more than the two Master Chiefs put together. The Admiral wanted this guy, but went ahead with the same question. ”Do you notice anything different about me?” To his surprise the Sergeant Major said, ”Yes. You wear contact lenses.”
The Admiral was impressed and thought to himself, what an incredibly tactful Marine. "And how do you know that?"
the Admiral asked.

The Sergeant Major replied, "Well sir, it's pretty hard to wear glasses with only one f*!**g' ear."

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I thought you would want to know about this e-mail virus.
Even the most advanced programs from Norton or McAfee cannot take care of this one.
It appears to affect those who were born prior to 1955.

Symptoms:
1. Causes you to send the same e-mail twice. Done that!
2. Causes you to send a blank e-mail! That too!
3. Causes you to send e-mail to the wrong person. Yep!
4. Causes you to send it back to the person who sent it to you. Aha!
5. Causes you to forget to attach the attachment. Well well!
6. Causes you to hit "SEND" before you've finished. Oh, no not again!
7. Causes you to hit "DELETE" instead of "SEND." And I just hate that!
8. Causes you to hit "SEND" when you should "DELETE." Oh No!
IT'S CALLED THE "C-NILE VIRUS."
Have I already sent this to you? Or did you send it to me?

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***************

Brain Teaser Answer ► Weighing Stuff

50 grams.

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1910 Tent Wagon

1920 Salon Hair Dryer

Single Paddy Wagon

1910 Street Lamp Repair

1920 Treadmills

1920 Refrigerator

1920 Telephone Engineer

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RAO Bulletin Editor/Publisher:
Lt. James (EMO) Tichacek, USN (Ret) Tel: (858) 432-1246 Email: raoemo@sbcglobal.net

RAO Baguio Director:
SMSgt Leonard (Len) D. Harvey, USAF (Ret) PSC 517 Box 4036, FPO AP 96517-1000, Tel: 63-74-442-3468; Email: lenharvey@live.com.ph

RAO Baguio Office: Red Lion Inn, 35 Leonard Wood Road, Baguio City, 2600 Philippines
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