

RAO

BULLETIN

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Attachment - Veteran Legislation as of 27 APR 2013

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VA Burial Benefit Update 21: A Veterans Affairs official told a House subcommittee his agency is willing to make changes in federal regulations requiring next-of-kin authorization for headstones on unmarked veterans' graves. The requirement, which has been discussed and complained about in Civil War News letters and stories since it went into effect on July 1, 2009, essentially meant that few if any Civil War graves could get a marker through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) National Cemetery Administration. Traditionally, applications for these graves came from heritage groups, such as Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War graves registration officers and local historians. Steve L. Muro, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, told the House Committee on Veterans Affairs 10 APR that the current Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 38.632 — Headstone and Marker Application Process — appeared to be “too restrictive.” He said his agency is willing to do some rewrites and make it “more user friendly.” The revised regulation will be put out for public comment, he said.

Muro's response to comments and questions from New Jersey Congressman Jon Runyan (R-3rd District) can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQBib7Sbr9I&feature=youtu.be> . Runyan's statement was prompted by a constituent and the Department of Ohio SUVCW. He told Muro that the next-of-kin requirement denying skilled researchers the ability to order a headstone gave people another reason to be disappointed with government bureaucracy. Runyan referred Muro to the Ohio Department's remedial suggestions: allow military researchers, local historians and genealogists to apply for a stone; or follow the National Archives and National Records Administration's policy that allows release of military records to other than next-of-kin for someone deceased more than 62 years. In its February 2013 issue of The Buckeye Bugle, the Ohio Department discussed the headstone issue and noted that the most recent version of the marker application language says: “Federal regulation defines ‘applicant’ as the decedent's Next-of-Kin (NOK); a person authorized in writing by the NOK; or a personal representative authorized in writing by the decedent. Written authorization must be included with claim.” The newsletter related VA rejection of six applications by the SUV Camp 142 Graves Registration Officer “for want of a descendant's signature though there are no known descendants to be found.” If the government refuses a headstone, the only option is a privately purchased civilian gravestone. The VA does replace damaged and worn headstones. [Source: CWN Newsletter May 2013 ++]

Obit ~ Alan Wood: The World War II veteran credited with providing the flag in the famous flag-raising on Iwo Jima, has died. Alan Wood, 90, died 18 APR of natural causes at his Sierra Madre home. He was a 22-year-old Navy officer in charge of communications on a landing ship on Iwo Jima's shores Feb. 23, 1945 when a Marine asked him for the biggest flag that he could find. After five days of fighting to capture the Japanese-held island a small act that would always remind him of the epic sacrifices made by so many on that desolate island 750 miles south of Tokyo., U.S. forces had managed to scale Mount Suribachi to hoist an American flag. Wood happened to have a 37-square-foot flag he had found months before in a Pearl Harbor Navy depot. Five Marines and a Navy Corpsman later raised that flag in a stirring moment captured by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal.



Alan Wood, a former JPL spokesman, was a Navy officer who provided the flag raised on Iwo Jima, a moment captured in a Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph.

His son Steven says his father was always humbled by his small role in the historic moment. In a 1945 letter to a Marine general who asked for details about the flag, Wood wrote: "The fact that there were men among us who were able to face a situation like Iwo where human life is so cheap, is something to make humble those of us who were so very fortunate not to be called upon to endure such hell." In its story on Wood's death, the Los Angeles Times reported that over the years others have claimed that they provided the flag, but retired Marine Col. Dave Severance, who commanded the company that took Mount Suribachi, said in an interview last week that it was Wood. "I have a file of more than 60 people who claim to have had something to do with the flags," he said from his home in La Jolla, Calif. Wood went on to work as technical artist and spokesman at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in La Canada Flintridge. His wife, Elizabeth, died in 1985. Besides his son, Wood was survived by three grandchildren. [Source: Los Angeles Times | Steve Chawkins | 25 Apr 2013 ++]



The flags from the first and second flag-raisings are conserved in the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle, Va. The second flag, pictured here, was damaged by the high winds at the peak of Suribachi. Like all American flags during World War II, it has 48 stars, since Alaska and Hawaii were not yet U.S. states.

HVAC Update 15: U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held an oversight hearing 24 APR on the strategic and policy implications of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) on veterans eligible for and engaged with health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Committee members examined the potential impact of the law and VA's efforts to understand, implement, and meet the ACA's requirements. "The implementation of the Affordable Care Act will be an historic accomplishment. It's important that VA is prepared and communicates with veterans," said Rep. Mike Michaud, Maine - District 2, ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. According to a report by the Urban Institute, a press release from his office states, approximately 13 million non-elderly veterans live in the United States. Of that population, 1.3 million, or one in 10, are uninsured and will need to select some type of medical coverage to comply with the law. "With the substantial number of uninsured veterans, I expect the VA to have an aggressive communications plan in place to inform veterans about the options available to them," said Michaud. "In light of the fast approaching deadlines contained within the law, our committee will continue to engage with VA on the implementation process."

Currently enrolled veterans and beneficiaries will experience no change in their VA-administered health care programs, services, or benefits, according to a press release from Michaud's office. VA health care programs meet the ACA health insurance coverage requirement and will not change as a result. Veterans or other beneficiaries currently enrolled in VA health care programs do not have to take any additional steps to comply with the health insurance requirement outlined in ACA. The Veterans Health Administration, with the assistance of a contractor, conducted several analyses to assess the potential impact of ACA provisions on veterans and VA. VA expects to see a modest net increase in enrollment of approximately 66,000 veterans, according to the press release. Enrollment and utilization changes may occur as some veterans and other beneficiaries respond to the new options for health care coverage available under ACA when fully implemented next year. [Source: St. John Valley Times article 26 Apr2013 ++]

DoD Benefit Cuts Update 15: NAUS President LTGen Jack Klimp, USMC (Ret), directed a letter to members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees regarding the Pentagon's request to steeply increase TRICARE fees, deductibles and related costs. The DoD assault would shift higher costs for the earned healthcare benefit by as much as 4 times for access to the defense health plan. The main body of his letter follows:

For years, we have listened to officials at the Department of Defense (DoD) complain about the rising costs of military health care saying that the amounts paid are hurtful, taking away from our nation's ability to defend itself. The fact is that TRICARE has not dented the nation's ability to defend itself. Defense healthcare costs remain at less than 10 percent of the base DoD budget, substantially below the percentage expended for health care by the Federal budget or by the average State budget. Moreover, personnel and healthcare costs together hold the same share of the defense budget as they have for 30 years, less than one-third.

It is also a fact that last year the medical inflation rate for TRICARE dropped, posting a negative rate of - 2.7 percent for retirees and their families and reducing overall TRICARE costs more than 10 percent below projected costs. During this period, as you recall, Pentagon leadership claimed TRICARE costs were crippling our national defense. In truth, however, TRICARE transferred hundreds of millions of dollars to cover cost overruns in other defense accounts.

Two years ago, NAUS staff was informed that an undefined amount, something in excess of \$500 million of unused TRICARE funding, had been reprogrammed to other priorities. Last year when the department requested authority to reprogram yet another \$708 million out of TRICARE, we sought the assistance of the Congress and learned that DoD had reprogrammed, over a period of three years, nearly \$3 billion (FY 2010-\$770 million, FY 2011-\$1.23 billion & FY 2012-\$708 million) of unused TRICARE funding to other priorities. It became apparent that health care for retirees, rather than being an anchor around the neck of DoD, was a bill payer for other programs. Recognizing all this, Congress, once again, came to the rescue of those who have served and sacrificed over a 20 to 30 year military career. After creating the programs designed to care for individuals who endured the extraordinary demands of a career in the defense of this country, it would be morally reprehensible to follow the lead of the administration and renege on the promises made over the years.

We ask you to reassure experienced former servicemembers that their promised benefits will be delivered by a grateful nation. We come to you, respectfully, to ask you to do the right thing. Reject the renewed call to shift higher costs onto the backs of those who have already given decades of service and sacrifice to country.

NGAUS also opposes these cuts and had issued an legislative alert asking their members and anyone else in the military community to contact their legislators and request they not approve the proposed cuts in the President's budget. Anyone desired to send NGAUS's preformatted editable message to thier legislators can do so by accessing <http://www.ngaus.org/issues-advocacy/take-action?url=http://www.capwiz.com/ngaus/issues/alert/?alertid=62598151&type=CO>. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 26 Apr 2013 ++]

Medicare IPAD: The Independent Payment Advisory Board, or IPAB, is a fifteen-member United States Government agency created in 2010 by sections 3403 and 10320 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act which has the explicit task of achieving specified savings in Medicare without affecting coverage or quality. Under previous and current law, changes to Medicare payment rates and program rules are recommended by MedPAC but require an act of Congress to take effect. The new system grants IPAB the authority to make changes to the Medicare program with the Congress being given the power to overrule the agency's decisions through supermajority vote.

Beginning in 2013, the Chief Actuary of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services will determine in particular years the projected per capita growth rate for Medicare for a multi-year period ending in the second year thereafter (the "implementation year"). If the projection exceeds a target growth rate, IPAB must develop a proposal to reduce Medicare spending in the implementation year by a specified amount. If it is required to develop a proposal, the Board must submit that proposal in January of the year before the implementation year; thus, the first proposal could be submitted in January 2014 to take effect in 2015. If the Board fails to submit a proposal that the Chief Actuary certifies will achieve the savings target, the Secretary of Health and Human Services must submit a proposal that will achieve that amount of savings. The Secretary must then implement the proposal unless Congress enacts resolutions made to override the Board's (or the Secretary's) decisions under a fast-track procedure that the law sets forth.

Critics of IPAB have charged that the board's cost-cutting mandate will inevitably bring about a reduction in care, despite the anti-rationing language in the bill. Congressman Phil Roe from Tennessee, a medical doctor, warned that IPAB will ration care through payment policy. American Medical News charged that the bill gives IPAB "unprecedented, dangerous authority to cut Medicare pay rates and strangle access to care. IPAB has frequently been denounced by its critics as a Death panel. On 25 APR NAUS President Jack Klimp signed and sent

a letter to Congress urging the repeal of the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB). President Klimp offered the following statement:

Empowering a board of unelected officials to determine Medicare policy completely undermines the critical role of Congress. Charged with cutting health care costs for seniors when spending hits an arbitrary cap, the IPAB would operate with very little oversight yet wield tremendous power over how Medicare operates. This will not only jeopardize the delivery of health care for seniors, but also inhibit research and innovation into new and improved medical procedures and treatments down the road, many of which could help save the lives of future service men and women.

On behalf of the service members and supporters across the United States that we represent, we urge the repeal of IPAB to ensure that our veterans, who sacrificed for our country, can rely on quality health care without the uncertainty that comes with an unelected board making cuts to vital services. Instead of handing over the critical role of protecting the health care of millions of Americans to an unelected board, we urge Congress to take responsibility for these difficult decisions and repeal IPAB without delay."

NAUS urges you to contact your elected officials and let them know how you feel about this issue. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 26 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims Update 22: During the Vietnam War, more than 20 million gallons of the herbicide Agent Orange was sprayed to remove jungle foliage. A toxic chemical in the herbicide, dioxin, was been linked to devastating health effects, including non-Hodgkins Lymphoma, prostate and other cancers, Type II Diabetes, and Parkinsons disease. In 1991, legislation was enacted that empowered the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to declare certain illnesses presumptive to exposure to Agent Orange and enabled Vietnam veterans to receive disability compensation for these related conditions. However, in 2002, the VA limited the scope of the Act to only those veterans who could provide orders for boots on the ground in Vietnam. Boots on the ground encompassed infantry and the inland waterways and harbors. As a result, veterans who served in the waters off the coast of Vietnam, commonly called blue water veterans, were forced to file individual claims with the VA to restore their benefits, which are then decided on a case-by-case basis. The VA has denied more than 32,880 over the past years.

A May 2011 report issued by the Institute of Medicine concluded that plausible routes of exposure to Agent Orange exist for blue water veterans. However, legislation was needed to allow VA to extend Presumptive coverage to these veterans. Presumption would lift the burden from the individual veteran to prove direct exposure to Agent Orange - a nearly impossible task due to a lack of record keeping and the inability to know the precise location of dioxins in the air and groundwater runoff . It would also reduce backlogged VA claims by automatically covering claims for disability compensation from these veterans who are suffering from diseases that the U.S. government has linked to Agent Orange. Rep. Chris Gibson (R-NY) has introduced the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act (H.R.543) to extend coverage and associated benefits with Agent Orange exposure to this additional group of Vietnam Veterans. The National Association of Uniformed Service (NAUS) has endorsed this legislation and is encouraging the military community to ask their legislators to also support it. They have provided an editable preformatted message at <http://capwiz.com/naus/home/> for you to use to send to your legislators with the click of a button. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 26 Apr 2013 ++]

Veteran Service Organizations Update 01: Overall, these organizations offer great service to many veterans. They provide free help with disability claims. They provide advocacy in Washington, D.C. They also assist in the health care delivery process with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Each has an executive board to manage the accomplishment of their organization's goals and the thousands of volunteers which support them. For most this comes at a cost. VA Secretary Eric Shinseki is paid \$200 K a year for his services. He also gets a limo, a driver and the rest of the medical/dental package. This compares to what is paid to the chief executive of the following top three vet organizations:

- DAV-Arthur Wilson 2011 wages \$353, 519.00
- VFW- Lawrence Maher 2011 wages \$238, 513.00
- AmLeg- Daniel Wheeler 2011 wages \$232,177.00

The IRS Form 990 is a public document that nonprofits are required to file with the IRS every year. These documents disclose the executive compensation and relevant expenditures as well as money from memberships, total assets, etc. To compare the top three which manage hundreds of millions \$\$ in assets refer to:

- <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2011/310/263/2011-310263158-089a69ed-9O.pdf> DAV
- <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2011/440/474/2011-440474290-080b13e2-9O.pdf> VFW
- <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2011/350/144/2011-350144250-088cb9b6-9O.pdf> AM Legion

To check out the financial position of any charitable organization go to <http://www.guidestar.org> and enter the organizations name in the search engine. For a different perspective of the VA, and Veteran Service Orgs check out: <http://asknod.wordpress.com/2012/08/24/vsos-a-major-conflict-of-interest/> . [Source: Veteran Issues Col Dan message 26 Apr 2013 ++]

Veterans' Treatment Court Update 19: A proposed law that would extend special considerations to military veterans caught up in the Louisiana criminal justice system cleared the state's Senate Judiciary Committee B on 23 APR. It heads to the full state Senate next for further debate. Senate Bill 32 would require court personnel to find out whether a defendant is an active-duty member of the military or a veteran prior to their arraignment and/or sentencing. Courts who determine that a defendant is a current or former military member would then have the option to consult with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, the state Department of Veterans Affairs or other agencies to consider special treatment programs the defendant may be eligible for prior to sentencing. The proposed law further says court personnel can investigate whether any military or veteran resources are available for a convicted defendant prior to sentencing if the person has been diagnosed as having a mental illness. State Sen. A.G. Crowe, R-Slidell, and sponsor of SB32, said the idea for the legislation came to him after hearing hardship stories from families of Iraq War veterans. He said the bill gives judges extra leeway to pursue options for defendants in lieu of jail time in applicable cases. [Source: The Advocate Capitol News Bureau 24 Apr 2013 ++]

Warranties: When you make a major purchase, the manufacturer or seller makes an important promise to stand behind the product. It's called a warranty. Federal law requires that warranties be available for you to read before you buy even when you're shopping by catalog or on the Internet. Coverage varies, so you can compare the extent of warranty coverage just as you compare the style, price, and other characteristics of products. Following are some types of warranties you should be familiar and know their limitations with when you make a purchase

Written. Although not required by law, written warranties come with most major purchases. When comparing written warranties, keep the following in mind:

- How long does the warranty last? Check the warranty to see when it begins and when it expires, as well as any conditions that may void coverage.
- Who do you contact to get warranty service? It may be the seller or the manufacturer who provides you with service.
- What will the company do if the product fails? Read to see whether the company will repair the item, replace it, or refund your money.
- What parts and repair problems are covered? Check to see if any parts of the product or types of repair problems are excluded from coverage. For example, some warranties require you to pay for labor charges. Also, look for conditions that could prove expensive or inconvenient, such as a requirement that you ship a heavy object to a factory for service, or that you return the item in the original carton.
- Does the warranty cover "consequential damages?" Many warranties do not cover damages caused by the product, or your time and expense in getting the damage repaired. For example, if your freezer breaks and the food spoils, the company will not pay for the lost food.
- Are there any conditions or limitations on the warranty? Some warranties provide coverage only if you maintain or use the product as directed. For example, a warranty may cover only personal uses—as opposed to business uses—of the product. Make sure the warranty will meet your needs

Spoken. If a salesperson makes a promise orally, such as that the company will provide free repairs, get it in writing. Otherwise, you may not be able to get the service that was promised.

Implied. Implied warranties are created by state law, and all states have them. Almost every purchase you make is covered by an implied warranty. The most common type of implied warranty—a "warranty of merchantability," means that the seller promises that the product will do what it is supposed to do. For example, a car will run and a toaster will toast. Another type of implied warranty is the "warranty of fitness for a particular purpose." This applies when you buy a product on the seller's advice that it is suitable for a particular use. For example, a person who suggests that you buy a certain sleeping bag for zero-degree weather warrants that the sleeping bag will be suitable for zero degrees. If your purchase does not come with a written warranty, it is still covered by implied warranties unless the product is marked "as is," or the seller otherwise indicates in writing that no warranty is given. Several states, including Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Vermont, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia, do not permit "as is" sales. If problems arise that are not covered by the written warranty, you should investigate the protection given by your implied warranty. Implied warranty coverage can last as long as four years, although the length of the coverage varies from state to state. A lawyer or a state consumer protection office can provide more information about implied warranty coverage in your state.

Extended. When you buy a car, home, or major appliance, you may be offered a service contract. Although often called "extended warranties," service contracts are not warranties. Service contracts, like warranties, provide repair and/or maintenance for a specific time. Warranties, however, are included in the price of the product; service contracts costs extra and are sold separately. To determine whether you need a service contract, consider:

- Whether the warranty already covers the repairs and the time period of coverage that you would get under the service contract;
- Whether the product is likely to need repairs and the potential costs of such repairs;
- The duration of the service contract;
- The reputation of the company offering the service contract.

[Source: <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0252-warranties> Apr 2013 ++]

DOD Tuition Assistance Update 02: The two senators who led the charge to save tuition assistance from budget cuts want to know what's taking the Defense Department so long to restart the benefits pipeline. In a 4 APR letter to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, Sens. Jim Inhofe (R-OK) and Kay Hagan (D-NC) said they expect "immediate action" to "restore this valuable program." Inhofe is ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee. Hagan also serves on the committee, and is chairwoman of its emerging threats panel. The two teamed up in a bipartisan effort that resulted in both the House and Senate agreeing to prevent tuition assistance from being terminated. Their letter reminds Hagel that the 2013 government funding bill signed by President Obama on 27 MAR requires the services to keep providing tuition assistance benefits through the end of September.

Exactly how much money is available is one of the unresolved issues. The language of the Inhofe-Hagan legislation requires the services to fully spend all of the money appropriated for tuition assistance but allowed the amount to be reduced under sequestration. One thing the two senators want to know is how much money each of the services has left. Defense and service officials have said they are trying to assess how much money is available and how best to spend it before the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps restart their tuition assistance programs. The Navy never stopped its program. In 2012, tuition assistance paid for 870,000 classes for service members leading to 50,500 degrees, diplomas or certificates, Inhofe and Hagan said. The "impressive" results included 33,300 two-year degrees, 9,600 four-year degrees, 5,800 master's degrees and 1,800 certificates or licenses, the letter says. "These are truly extraordinary numbers, which are even more striking since these accomplishments were achieved during a service member's limited free time," the letter says. Given the problems veterans face in finding post-service employment, the senators said they believe tuition assistance "is critical" in transitioning to civilian life. [Source: MilitaryTimes e-Report | Rick Maze | 4 Apr 2013 ++]

Veteran Status for Guard Update 04: The House Veterans' Affairs Committee will move again in APR to pass symbolic legislation allowing retired National Guard and reserve component members to officially be called "veterans." This will be the third time the committee has passed a measure that offers no extra pay or additional benefits — just the ability to stand and be recognized publicly on Veterans Day, Memorial Day or other ceremonial occasions. "Today, a reservist can successfully complete a Guard or reserve career but not earn the title of 'Veteran of the Armed Forces of the United States,'" said Rep. Timothy Walz (D-MN), a retired National Guard command sergeant major and chief sponsor of H.R.679, The Honor America's Guard-Reserve Retirees Act of 2013. Not all such retirees earn the title of veteran because the legal definition of that term requires being mobilized to active duty for federal service under Title 10 of the U.S. Code for duty other than drills and annual training. The bill is scheduled for a vote on 25 APR before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee's disability assistance and memorial affairs panel, where unanimous passage is expected, aides said.

Walz estimates there are 280,000 former Guard and reserve retirees who are not, technically, veterans, which prevents them from getting the same recognition as someone with a shorter period of service. "These service members could have spent their time and talents doing other things," Walz said. "They could have spent their weekends enjoying time with their families. Instead, they chose to prepare to defend our country." Part of the problem in passing the measure is that the Veterans Affairs Department does not support it, out of concern that passage would make retired Guard and reserve members think they are eligible for benefits they have not earned. "VA does not support this bill because it represents a departure from active service as a foundation for veterans' status," the department said in a statement provided to the House committee. While acknowledging that no new benefits would result if this became law, VA says it "would equate longevity of reserve service with the active

service long ago established as the hallmark for veteran status.” Some major veterans’ groups don’t see the problem.

- Veterans of Foreign Wars, the nation’s largest organization for combat veterans, “strongly supports this legislation,” said Raymond Kelley, director of the group’s national legislative service, who notes it is possible for someone to be receiving military retired pay, health care and other benefits but still not be considered a veteran under the “letter of the law.”
- The legal definition creates what Robert Norton, deputy government relations director for the Military Officers Association of America, calls a “strange situation” where National Guard members who served on military orders in New York City after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, on security duties along the southwest border or responding to hurricanes or oil spills “are not deemed to be veterans.”“It is deeply embarrassing,” for those veterans that they “are not authorized to stand and be recognized as veterans during Veterans Day and other patriotic celebrations,” Norton said.
- “Any man or woman who chooses to enlist and serve their country deserves, at a minimum, to be called a veteran,” Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America said in a statement. “If a veteran devotes years of his or her life to being ready to serve at a moment’s notice, it is admirable and selfless. These men and women served honorably and should not be penalized simply because their country did not call them up to active duty for the full requisite period,” IAVA said.
- The nation’s largest veterans’ organization, the American Legion, has no position on the bill but said in a statement it recognized that the legislation “would provide a purely honorific title.”
- Disabled American Veterans also has not taken a position on the bill.

[Source: MilitaryTimes e-Report | Rick Maze | 22 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Official Time: In 2011 taxpayers spent around \$156 million on federal employees who are not assigned any federal work at all. Under the law, a federal agency can pay its employees who act as union stewards on a full-time basis to work for an outside entity, the public employee union. This practice, known as "official time," amounts to a subsidy to the public employee unions who benefit from these taxpayer-funded employees. In 2011, the government did not disclose just how many employees were being paid to do nothing for the taxpayers. But now, due to a public personnel disclosure project being conducted by Americans for Limited Government (ALG), this is changing. Under the project, ALG has filed a series of Freedom of Information Act requests to find out how widespread is this practice of paying federal employees full time to work for a union no matter how many employees are involved. The results have been stunning.

- The U.S. Department of Transportation disclosed that it has 35 employees on full-time "official time" and their average salary is \$138,000 per year. Many of these employees have salaries in excess of \$170,000 per year.
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency disclosed that it spends more than \$1.6 million per year on employees who work full time for the union.
- The National Labor Relations Board disclosed that they have two employees working full time for the union and that they both make over \$100,000 per year.
- The VA department has over 250 employees working full time for unions such as the American Federation of Government Employees, the National Association of Government Employees, the National Federation of Federal Employees and the Service Employees International Union. At least one of these 250 doesn't even report to work at a department facility, but rather "teleworks from a private AFGE office in D.C."

Under the collective bargaining agreements between the agencies and the unions, the work that these employees do on "official time" status is controlled by the union, not the agency. Given the current sequester situation, massive deficit spending, agencies crying about strained budgets, threatening staff furloughs and closing the White House to

public tours, now is a great opportunity to take a serious look at cutting costs. One area ripe for cuts is the "official time" practice. [Source: Washington Examiner | Nathan Mehrens | 21 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Women’s Hotline: The Department of Veterans Affairs has launched a new hotline — 1-855-VA-WOMEN — to receive and respond to questions from Veterans, their families and caregivers about the many VA services and resources available to women Veterans. The service began accepting calls 27 March, 2013. “Some women Veterans may not know about high-quality VA care and services available to them,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “The hotline will allow us to field their questions and provide critical information about the latest enhancements in VA services.” The hotline is staffed by knowledgeable VA employees who can provide information about benefits including health care services for women. Callers can be linked to information on claims, education or health care appointments as well as information about VA cemeteries and memorial benefits. Staff can answer urgent questions and provide referrals to homeless and mental health services as well as provide Vet Center information.

Women make up nearly 15 percent of today’s active duty military and 18 percent of National Guard and Reserve forces. The population of women Veterans using VA benefits including health care is growing rapidly. Since 2000, the number of women using VA health care more than doubled, from nearly 160,000 in 2000 to more than 354,000 in 2012. Based on the upward trend of women in all branches of service, the number of women Veterans—and female VA users—will keep climbing. VA is committed to making improvements for the growing population of women Veterans, including the way it communicates with them. In 2010, VA established an outbound call center to contact women Veterans and encourage them to enroll in VA health care.

“In VA health care alone, women constitute only 6 percent of VA patients, but those Veterans have a high perception of the quality care they are receiving,” said Irene Trowell-Harris, director of VA’s Center for Women Veterans. “Many women who served don’t self-identify as Veterans and therefore don’t think they qualify for VA benefits. We need to correct existing misinformation and misperceptions so we can serve more women Veterans with the benefits they’ve earned.” Women Veterans are entitled to apply for the same benefits as their male counterparts, which include health care and pharmacy benefits as well as education benefits, disability compensation, home loans, employment assistance and more. The hotline (1-855-VA-WOMEN) joins numerous other VA hotlines that provide critical information and assistance to Veterans, such as those for Veterans in crisis and in danger of becoming homeless. Veterans can also receive information and apply for benefits online at VA’s www.eBenefits.va.gov and manage their health care at MyHealthVet.va.gov. [Source: VA News Release 23 Apr 2013 ++]

Reserve Deployment Policy: Overseas deployments for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve to places like Kosovo and the Sinai may end as the Army looks for ways to save money. The service’s Office of Legislative Liaison delivered a memo in mid-APR to both chambers of Congress citing the Budget Control Act of 2011 and a lack of sufficient funding for overseas contingency operations as the reason to end such missions for the reserve components. Last month, the Army announced it would not deploy to Afghanistan 950 soldiers from three Indiana Army Guard units, citing budget issues as the reason. The units were already leaning forward when word of the canceled deployments arrived. Guard leaders openly wondered at the time if that action was the start of a larger trend of shelving reserve-component units. The Army memo indicates that it was.

The memo, which was acquired by NGAUS, reads. "Beginning [fiscal 2014], the Army will substitute Active Component units for Reserve Component formations where cost savings are possible...The Army is working closely with the Army National Guard and Army Reserve to identify additional opportunities to substitute [active-component] formations for [reserve-component] units." But Annie Lively, the NGAUS Army programs manager, says the memo came as a surprise to Guard leaders. She says a long list of the Army's proposed changes was delivered to the Army Guard late last year for acknowledgement, including the proposal to end overseas deployments. In its response to the Army, Army Guard leadership agreed to some of the proposals, but opposed ending Guard deployments to places like Kosovo and the Sinai. Lively says the Army Guard did not see the final proposal that was sent 18 APR to Capitol Hill. The end of OCO missions for the Army Guard would mean a loss of all missions historically fulfilled by citizen-soldiers, including those in Kosovo, the Horn of Africa and the Sinai.

NGAUS sent a response to members of Congress today urging them to oppose any reduction to Guard deployments. The association says in its response, "This proposal runs counter to the Army's rhetoric of keeping the Guard and Reserve operational and represents the first major step toward relegating the reserve components back to a strategic reserve." at <http://www.ngaus.org/sites/default/files/ngausmemotocongressapr23.pdf> can be read the entire response Retired Maj. Gen. Gus L. Hargett Jr., the NGAUS president, says the Army's proposal is short sighted. "We may save a little money in the short term, but we do so at a potential tremendous cost in the long term," he says. "The nation invested billions of dollars over the last decade to build an Army Guard that can accomplish these missions. "Now, when we have an operational Guard that enables us to reduce the size of our standing Army and save billions of dollars, Army officials want to put the Guard back on the shelf. This is nothing more than an attempt to protect the size of the active-component Army." [Source: NGAUS Washington Report | April 23, 2013 ++]

Don't Ask, Don't Tell Update 09: Connecticut veterans who were dishonorably discharged under the U.S. military's former "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy against homosexuals would be eligible for state benefits, including local property-tax breaks, under a bill originally scheduled for debate 18 APR in the state Senate. However, that date was cancelled and will be rescheduled. Veterans would have to prove they were denied federal benefits based solely on their sexual orientation, under the former policy that discriminated against them. Their eligibility for federal benefits would have to be reinstated in order to become eligible for the state and local benefits. The legislation would require the state's Department of Veterans' Affairs to refer vets to organizations that can help them get the required upgrade in military discharges. The legislation would take effect on 1 OCT and apply to former military personnel who served between Dec. 21, 1993 and Sept. 20, 2011, the period covered under the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy established under President Bill Clinton and abolished under President Barack Obama. State cost is estimated at about \$10,000 for information pamphlets to be printed and distributed to veterans, who could later be eligible for admission to the state Veteran's Home in Rocky Hill and burial in the veterans' cemetery in Middletown. The vets could also be eligible for tuition waivers in state colleges and financial aid from the state. The legislative research did not estimate the number of veterans who could be eligible if the bill is approved and becomes law. According to an analysis of the bill, there would be a potential cost to towns and cities because veterans are allowed \$1,000 property tax exemptions; and are eligible for other tax exemptions if they were disabled. At present the state reimburses towns and cities for that lost revenue. [Source: <http://www.ctpost.com> 21 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Adult Day Care Program: The VA's Adult Day Health Care is a program Veterans can go to during the day for social activities, peer support, companionship, and recreation. It is for Vets who need skilled

services, case management, and assistance with activities of daily living such as bathing and getting dressed or instrumental activities of daily living such as fixing meals and taking medicines; are isolated or their caregiver is experiencing burden. Adult Day Health Care can be used in combination with other Home and Community Based Services. Health services such as care from nurses, therapists, social workers, and others may also be available. This program can provide respite care (short-term, temporary relief) for a family caregiver and can also help Veterans and their caregiver gain skills to manage the Veteran's care at home. It may be provided at VA medical centers, State Veterans Homes, or community organizations. For a list of State Veterans Homes locations, visit the National Association of State Veterans Homes at <http://www.nasvh.org/StateHomes/statedir.cfm>. You can also use the Helpful Websites (http://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/Guide/LongTermCare/Helpful_Websites.asp) listed in the Guide to Long Term Care at to locate Adult Day Health Care programs.



Adult Day Health Care can be a half-day or full-day program. Usually, you would go to an Adult Day Health Care center 2 to 3 times per week, but you may be able to go up to 5 times a week. Based on availability and need, you can create a regular schedule that works for you and your family caregiver. You may be able to get assistance with transportation to and from the center. To help you figure out what long term care services or settings may best meet your needs now or in the future you can use a Shared Decision Making Worksheet at http://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/Guide/LongTermCare/Shared_Decision_Making_Worksheet.pdf. All enrolled Veterans are eligible if they meet the clinical need for the service and it is available. A co-payment may be charged based on the veteran's eligibility status and means test criteria. To apply contact your VA social worker/case manager to complete the Application for Extended Care Benefits (VA Form 10-10EC). [Source: http://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/Guide/LongTermCare/Adult_Day_Health_Care.asp# Apr 2013 ++]

VA Non-Service-Related Care: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) wants to change the way it calculates how much veterans are able to pay for extended care. In a proposal to be unveiled on 22 APR, the VA will announce its desire to use a different calculation method to determine whether veterans are able to cover their copayments. For non-service-related disabilities, veterans can pay up to \$97 per day for extended care. However, the copayments only apply “to the extent the veteran and the veteran's spouse have available resources,” according to the law. The VA wants to change the definition of what it considers available resources. Currently, the agency only takes into account a veteran's and their spouse's assets above \$89,280 and exempts the amount below that threshold from its calculation once a veteran has been receiving care for 180 days. That dollar amount is derived from a provision calculating Medicaid allowances, but while the Medicaid limit increased with inflation since the copayment rule was published in 2004, the VA's never did.

The agency says it now needs to raise that threshold, called the spousal resource protection amount, to \$115,920, the current maximum standard under the Medicaid provision. The VA also wants to tie its threshold to Medicaid's, so that it would grow in future years. "This would ensure that the spousal resource protection amount accounts for inflation and is consistent with the comparable protections for spouses of Medicaid recipients," the proposal states. The agency claims that the change will ensure the family of a veteran receiving care will have more money to pay for expenses aside from the treatment. "We completely support the VA's efforts to try to modernize their view with regard to the liquid assets threshold," said Louis Celli, the legislative director of the American Legion. "We're very pleased to see the Department of Veterans Affairs has taken the time to review some of their more dated material to make sure that it's in line with current economic standards," he added. The proposed change "will provide a greater deal of protection to the veteran and the non-institutionalized spouse during a change in circumstances that can place financial strains on the family," the proposal claims. The department's proposal will be printed in the Federal Register on Monday, and the VA will accept comments on the proposal for 60 days after that. [Source: The Hill | Julian Hattem | 19 Apr 2013 ++]

2012 Tax Expenditure Breakdown: In his 2011 State of the Union Address, President Obama promised that, for the first time ever, American taxpayers would be able to go online and see exactly how their federal tax dollars are spent. And for the third year in a row, he's kept that promise. Just enter a few pieces of information at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/2012-taxreceipt> and you can view a Taxpayer Receipt that gives you a breakdown of how YOUR tax dollars are spent on priorities like education, veterans benefits, or health care. Below is a percentage breakdown



YOUR FEDERAL TAXPAYER RECEIPT

UNDERSTAND HOW AND WHERE YOUR TAX DOLLARS ARE BEING SPENT

Income Tax % of Total Income

| | |
|--|--------|
| National Defense | 24.64% |
| Health care | 22.45% |
| Job and Family Security | 17.26% |
| Education and Job Training | 3.30% |
| Veterans Benefits | 4.53% |
| Natural Resources, Energy, and Environment | 2.05% |

| | |
|--|--------|
| International Affairs | 1.72% |
| Science, Space, and Technology Programs | 1.06% |
| Immigration, Law Enforcement, and Administration of Justice..... | 2.05% |
| Agriculture | 0.65% |
| Community, Area, and Regional Development | 0.48% |
| Response to Natural Disasters | 0.43% |
| Additional Government Programs | 11.38% |
| Net Interest | 8.01% |

[Source: White House News Apr 2013 ++]

SBP DIC Offset Update 39: Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) on 16 APR reintroduced legislation to repeal the DIC offset to the survivor Benefit Plan. Under current law, the surviving spouse of an active or retired servicemember who dies from a service-caused condition is entitled to \$1215/mo in Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) from the Veteran's Administration. If the military retiree was also enrolled in the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP), DIC is deducted from the surviving spouse's SBP annuity. Nelson's Repeal the SBP-DIC Offset Bill (S.734) would repeal the offset of DIC payments from SBP annuities, in the belief that when service caused the death, the VA indemnity payment should be added to the normal SBP annuity, not subtracted from it. The bill was referred to Senate committee, read twice and referred to the Committee on Armed Services. Similar legislation has been introduced over the last decade only to die in Congress because of lack of support. Let's not let that happen again this year. The military community is encouraged to let their legislators know their constituents want them to sponsor and vote these bill into law to remove this widow's tax. MOAA's Legislative Action Center has available at <http://capwiz.com/moaa/issues/bills/?bill=62602196> an editable preformatted message that can be forwarded to your legislators via email to assist in your communications with Congress. [Source: MOAA Leg Up 19 Apr 2013 ++]

Oklahoma Vet Homes Update 03: The Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs lacks proper supervision and oversight of its seven facilities across the state, its workers are chronically underpaid and its governing board has done a poor job managing the agency, according to a state audit released 17 APR. The 59-page audit, which involved a five-month review of the agency's operations, was requested by Gov. Mary Fallin in August after the scalding death of a veteran at a facility in Claremore and other allegations of patient abuse and neglect. "The agency relies on the center administrators to operate the veterans' centers, but lacks integrated supervision and oversight necessary to ensure the centers have positive working environments and sufficient resources to provide that excellent quality care to the residents," the audit states. "This places the veterans center residents' well-being at risk."

About 1,400 war veterans live at seven veterans' centers located in Ardmore, Claremore, Clinton, Lawton, Norman, Sulphur and Tahlequah. The agency employs about 2,000 state workers, said agency spokesman Shane Faulkner. Among the problem areas identified in the report are inconsistent training, low wages and some administrators' disregard for staff input. "They've got to figure out ways to retain people longer, and investigations should be more centralized and conducted by someone outside the facility," Jones said. "It's kind of like the facility directors run their own centers. "We think they should set up standard operating procedures for all the centers instead of giving the individual directors such a long leash." The agency said in a statement that it already has taken steps to comply with many of the audit's recommendations, including the appointment of a deputy director to oversee daily operations and a revamping of the War Veterans Commission that oversees the agency. "ODVA

concur with the findings in the audit and has implemented many changes that fall in line with recommendations made in the report," the agency said.

Two bills pending in the Legislature this session would address some of the problems, including a measure that would require the veterans' centers to be regularly inspected by the Department of Health, and another that would centralize the management of the centers. "I am strongly encouraging lawmakers to send those bills to my desk to be signed into law," Fallin said in a statement. Fallin also suggested that the agency director be appointed by the governor, instead of the commission, to give the public more accountability. "This lack of accountability is particularly disturbing when one considers that veterans may have actually died in these facilities due to poor treatment," Fallin said. Another problem cited by both Jones and Fallin is that the pool of potential members of the War Veterans Commission is limited because they must be chosen from a list supplied by the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled American Veterans. "While I support the mission of each one of these organizations and applaud their good work, their combined membership represents only 15 percent of the state's veterans and largely excludes younger veterans who served in recent conflicts, such as Iraq and Afghanistan," Fallin said. [Source: AP | Sean Murphy | 17 Apr 2013 ++]

Vet Cemeteries SITREP: Nearly six decades after the Korean War armistice was signed, the United Nations Cemetery in Pusan, South Korea, is finally getting a monument that honors U.S. forces who fought there. While monuments to other U.N. forces have been erected at the cemetery, the sacrifice of American troops has yet to be recognized in such a way. "We will begin construction on a monument this spring and plan to dedicate it in July on the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Korean War armistice," said Raymond Wollman, deputy secretary of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC).



United National Memorial Cemetery in Korea

Wollman's announcement was part of his April 10 testimony before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. He also testified that three visitors' center projects will be completed this year: one at the Cambridge American Cemetery in England, another at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and Memorial near Anzio, Italy; and a third at the Pointe du Hoc Ranger Monument in Normandy, France. ABMC's first mobile app, a tour of the Pointe du Hoc battlefield, was released last December. The app gives users a virtual experience of the site, where U.S. Army Rangers scaled 100-foot cliffs during the June 1944 Normandy invasion to

destroy a critical German battery and take control of the coastal highway. "We plan to produce apps and virtual tours for all of our sites," Wollman said, "so we can bring these national historic assets to life — not only to our visitors, but on our website and in our classrooms." Congress has authorized \$5 million for ABMC to restore, operate and maintain Clark Veterans Cemetery in the Philippines. Wollman said an agreement is being negotiated with the Philippine government, but the funding "may be insufficient for a cemetery that is partially covered in volcanic ash and may have other unknown infrastructure issues. We won't know the true cost until we complete a site assessment. Nonetheless, the mission has been assigned to the ABMC, and we will work toward executing that mission when an agreement allowing us to do so has been signed with the Philippine government."

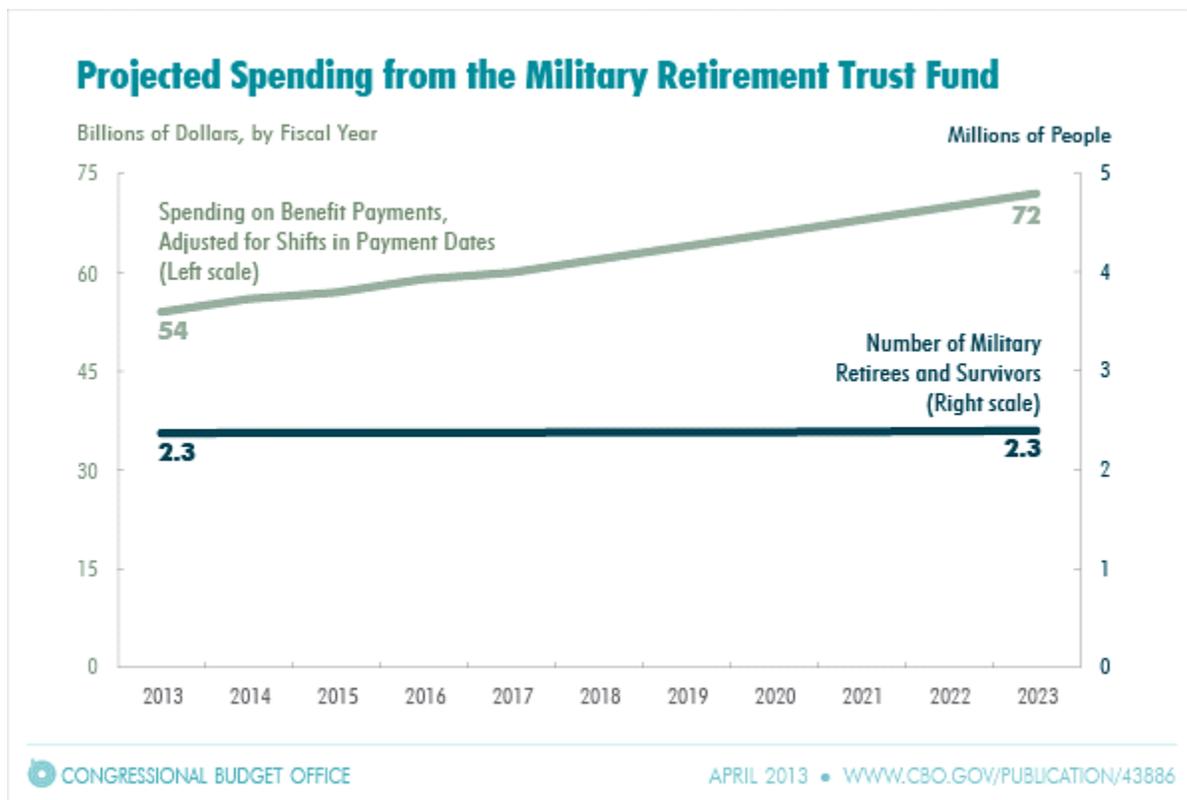
Kathryn Condon, executive director of Arlington National Cemetery (ANC), told the subcommittee that the cemetery had made much progress in its new digital environment. "Long gone are the typewriters, the three-by-five index cards and the paper maps colored in with pencils," Condon said. "In less than two years, we are the first national cemetery to geo-spatially manage cemetery operations." As directed by Congress, Condon said that ANC has achieved baseline accountability for all of its burial records and has created a single, verifiable and authoritative data base of all those laid to rest at the cemetery. The data base is linked to a digital mapping system that "allows us now to not only assign (and) manage, but to track our grave sites electronically." Last October, the cemetery launched its ANC Explorer mobile app that allows users to locate grave sites, monuments and memorials. Since then, Condon reported the app had been downloaded more than 40,000 times. "That allows the public to honor, remember and explore the national shrine virtually — wherever they want, whenever they want."

Kiosks with ANC Explorer have been installed at Arlington's welcome center; more will soon be installed at locations throughout the cemetery. ANC currently has three expansion projects: Columbarium Court 9, the Millennium Project and the Navy Annex Project. "Once completed," Condon said, "these projects should extend Arlington's first interment burials well into the 2050s." The new columbarium's dedication is scheduled for May 9. Covering nearly 63,000 square feet, the \$12.9 million structure will add more than 20,000 niche spaces, extending until 2024 the availability of first inurnments. The Millennium and Navy Annex projects will also add thousands of grave sites and urn niches to the cemetery. Condon told the subcommittee that, while ANC has made great strides, "work remains to complete the critical repairs of our crumbling infrastructure, and to improve our service to our veterans by reducing the wait time between the family's initial request and the actual burial."

Veterans access to burial benefits was increased in 2012, with \$31.8 million worth of expansions and improvement projects completed at national cemeteries. Steve Muro, under secretary for memorial affairs in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA), also reported to the subcommittee that land acquisition and planning for the construction of five new national cemeteries has been initiated. Five new columbarium sites are being constructed in densely populated urban areas, and eight more national cemetery burial grounds are being added in rural areas. Muro said NCA awarded 18 grants to states and American Indian tribes to build or improve the veterans cemeteries they manage. "Taken together, these actions will contribute to 95 percent of the veterans having a burial option within 75 miles of their home by 2015," he said. In 2004, 75 percent of America's veterans had such an option. NCA also launched an online resource kit last year for funeral directors, which contains pertinent information that helps families plan for burials and apply for VA benefits. [Source: www.legion.org/legislative/214850/new-monument-south-korea-honor-us-troops 18 Apr 2013 ++]

Retiree Pay Update 04: The congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects spending for military retirement pay and survivors' annuities will rise by more than 30 percent over the next decade. About two-thirds of that growth will occur because those benefits are adjusted annually for inflation. The remaining growth will stem from increases in the initial benefit for new retirees; that benefit depends on service members' basic pay

during their active service, which typically grows faster than inflation. In contrast, CBO projects that the number of military retirees and their survivors will remain essentially unchanged in the coming decade, so the number of people collecting benefits will not contribute to the growth of spending. (Annual spending amounts shown here have been adjusted to account for shifts in the timing of payments.)



For more detail on CBO’s most recent projections for the Military Retirement Trust Fund, see Military Retirement-February 2013 Baseline at <http://www.cbo.gov/publication/43886>. [Source: CBO’s Budget Analysis Division | Matt Schmit | 17 Apr 2013 ++]

VRAP Update 07: A job-training program designed to help veterans re-enter the workforce has more than 60,000 empty slots, left unfilled despite efforts to reduce the jobless rate among veterans, federal auditors said in a new report. The program is geared toward unemployed veterans between the ages of 35 and 60. It covers up to one year of tuition for training at local community colleges in high-demand jobs such as nursing, construction and computer support. In all, Congress allowed for up to 99,000 participants, and the inspector general for the Department of Veterans Affairs found that only about a third of the slots were being used. Veterans have until 1 OCT to apply for the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program. The program is just one of a range of education benefits for veterans. Most of those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan qualify for one of the others, so they’re not eligible for this particular program.

Ryan Gallucci, a deputy director at the Veterans of Foreign Wars, said that veterans groups were not anticipating such low participation. He said that some veterans may be having trouble finding an eligible community college nearby. He also said that basic remediation classes weren’t aid for through the program, which is setting up some

veterans for failure and discouraging them from participating. The monthly stipend for those participating in the program is \$1,564. The inspector general said it was recommending that the VA begin contacting veterans who have been deemed eligible for the program but have yet to enroll to remind them that participation is limited. The VA said it agreed with the recommendation and had already made contact with 44,000 eligible veterans. Curtis Coy, a deputy undersecretary at the VA, told lawmakers at a hearing last week that the department also supports legislation that would extend the program. He said that a three-month extension would give more veterans time to select and complete their degree or certificate program. The department also estimated that enrollment has increased some since the inspector general conducted the review, and it has so far issued \$220 million in benefit payments to about 41,400 beneficiaries. [Source: Huff Post | Kevin Freking | April 16, 2013 ++]

National

Gulf War Memorial: More than two decades after Operation Desert Storm's conclusion, the United States still lacks a national memorial honoring veterans and casualties of the first Gulf War. Now, the House Committee on Natural Resources is reviewing the National Desert Storm and Desert Shield War Memorial Act (H.R.503), reintroduced 5 FEB by Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), legislative liaison for the National Desert Storm Memorial Association's board of directors. The 14th Quartermaster Detachment, based in the Hempfield village of Carbon, suffered the single greatest number of casualties of any allied unit during Operation Desert Storm. The U.S. Army Reserve water purification unit was mobilized for service Jan. 15, 1991 and arrived in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, Feb. 19. At 8:40 local time on Feb. 25 — six days after their arrival and three days before a cease-fire was declared — a Scud missile strike on the unit's temporary barracks killed 28 and wounded 99. Thirteen soldiers from the 14th Quartermaster died in the attack and 43 were injured.

On the first anniversary of the attack, a memorial to the members of the 14th Quartermaster killed in Saudi Arabia was dedicated at the Army Reserve Center in Hempfield. “It would be an incredible honor to those soldiers and very comforting to the families to know that they aren't forgotten,” retired 14th Quartermaster unit administrator and family readiness coordinator Dorothy Benyako Carbisiero said. “I think since we have (a memorial) in our local area we don't think about (the lack of a national memorial) as much because we can basically take a few steps and we're right there.”

The bill stipulates no federal funds be spent on the memorial. Financial backing for the memorial will fall on the National Desert Storm Memorial Association. The bill has 33 co-sponsors from 19 states. On 9 APR, Scott Perry, R-Dillsburg, became the first representative from Pennsylvania to sign on as a co-sponsor for the bill. “I was really hoping that we would have pretty much everybody in Pennsylvania on board in terms of representatives,” the association's President Scott Stump said. The group is hoping to find a sponsor to introduce companion legislation in the Senate, Stump said. “I'm going to be a co-sponsor,” Congressman Tim Murphy, R-Upper St. Clair, said 15 APR. “Because a lot of Pennsylvanians served and the 14th Quartermaster Unit from my district was the one that suffered the most casualties of any unit, but also because it was a significant military engagement in our country and we should have a memorial to recognize those who served and those who died in action.”

Murphy, along with former District 12 representative Mark Critz, introduced House Resolution 96 in 2011 to mark the 20th anniversary of the Scud missile attack on the 14th Quartermaster unit. Murphy presented a commemorative draft of the resolution at the 20th anniversary ceremony at the Hempfield Army Reserve Center on Feb. 25, 2011. A moratorium on building on the National Mall has the proposed Desert Storm memorial's final location in question, but Stump said the design firm donating its services to the cause, CSO Architects of Indianapolis, should have renderings ready to show the public before Memorial Day. [Source: The Blairsville Dispatch, Pa. | Greg Reinbold | 16 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Tinnitus Care Update 06: The American Tinnitus Association (ATA) announced today that National Tinnitus Awareness Week (TAW) will be celebrated May 19 – 25, 2013. ATA exists to cure tinnitus through the development of resources that advance tinnitus research. This year, ATA is saluting members of the United States military and all our veterans who have selflessly served, because they suffer from tinnitus disproportionately from the rest of the civilian population. For the past five years, tinnitus has been the number one service-connected disability for veterans from all periods of service and is particularly prevalent in Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) over 840,000 veterans currently receive disability compensation for tinnitus alone. “While ATA is increasingly encouraged by the growing interest in and pace of tinnitus research, there are still hundreds of millions of people worldwide who suffer with this condition on a daily basis,” said Mark K. Johnson, J.D., Chair of ATA’s Board of Directors. “ATA’s mission is to silence tinnitus by funding research, and we can only accomplish this with increased awareness of tinnitus and how it can interfere with and reduce a person’s quality of life,” he said.

According to the Department of Defense’s (DoD) Hearing Center of Excellence, economic loss to an individual who has tinnitus can be up to \$30,000 annually and up to \$26,000,000 to society as a whole. In addition, when quantified, the cost to the VA for tinnitus disability compensation is \$1.28 billion annually, a figure that is expected to grow to \$2.75 billion annually by 2016 at the current rate of increase. Because tinnitus is so prevalent in the military, on May 22, 2013, the Friends of the Congressional Hearing Health Caucus, in concert with the Military and Veterans Caucus and the Invisible Wounds Caucus, will hold a lunch briefing on tinnitus as it pertains to the military and veterans. Representatives from the VA and the DoD’s Hearing Center of Excellence have been invited to give remarks and ATA Board and staff will also be present.

Tinnitus is the perception of sound where no external source is present and is commonly referred to as “ringing in the ears.” Tinnitus is most commonly caused by exposure to loud noise and the second leading cause is head and/or neck injury. According to data analyzed from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 50 million people in the United States experience tinnitus and of those, 16 million suffer from chronic intrusive tinnitus and have sought medical attention for it. ATA has developed a TAW 2013 resource center on their website at <http://www.ata.org/taw2013>. Whether you’d like to request proclamations from locally and nationally elected officials, contact your local media outlets, or share an activities calendar and tinnitus-related crosswords and posters, ATA has all the materials you will need to get started in raising tinnitus awareness. [Source: USNewswire | American Tinnitus Association | 16 Apr 2013 ++]

Rhode Island VA Website: Governor Chafee announced the launch of Rhode Island government's first comprehensive veterans affairs website <http://www.vets.ri.gov>. “Rhode Island has had one of the highest deployment rates in the nation, and with so many veterans returning home from foreign deployments, we must do all we can to support military service members and their families – both during and after their service,” Governor Chafee said. The website includes information on veterans programs for higher learning at Rhode Island colleges and universities and links to federal education benefit programs. There is an interactive map of the RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery with a link to the federal grave-site locator database. The website contains details on pension benefits, employment, and training opportunities, as well as many other links to helpful services for veterans and their families. “This new web site developed by our Division of Veterans Affairs strengthens our department’s ability to deliver comprehensive and effective services to Rhode Islanders,” said Sandra M. Powell, Director of the Department of Human Services. [Source: WPIR 12 Eyewitness News | Hilary Bolton | 12 Apr 2013 ++]

Distinguished Warfare Medal Update 06: The so-called “drone medal” is no more. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel announced 15 APR he would follow the advice of a review overseen by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey and replace the medal intended to recognize drone operators and cyber warriors with a “new distinguishing device that can be affixed to existing medals to recognize the extraordinary actions of this small number of men and women.” The Distinguished Warfare Medal, announced in February by then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, created a firestorm of controversy when it was ranked above some that require servicemembers to risk life and limb to be eligible, such as the Purple Heart and Bronze Star, which are frequently rewarded for valor in combat.



Legislators and veterans groups derided the medal, and it also was mocked by some in the ranks, who suggested the award could be a gold-plated Xbox controller, among other things. The medal “undermines all other valor awards,” said Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA), a veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan who introduced legislation to rank the medal below the Purple Heart. Veterans of Foreign Wars National Commander John E. Hamilton meanwhile said “medals that can only be earned in direct combat must mean more than medals awarded in the rear.” Hagel last month ordered Dempsey to lead a review of the medal. The result is that combat medals will continue to be awarded only to those who risk all, he wrote in a memo to military leaders. “Utilizing a distinguishing device to recognize impacts on combat operations reserves our existing combat medals for those Service members who incur the physical risk and hardship of combat, perform valorous acts, are wounded in combat, or as a result of combat give their last full measure for our Nation,” Hagel said in a letter dated 15 APR.

In an earlier letter to veterans organizations sent prior to his ordering of the review, Hagel said it was important to recognize the changing face of warfare with the new medal. “Since Sept. 11, 2001, technological advancements have, in some cases dramatically changed how we conduct and support combat and other military operations. Accordingly the [Distinguished Warfare Medal] award criteria intentionally does not include a geographic limitation on the award, as it is intended for use as a means to recognize all servicemembers who meet the criteria, regardless of the domain used or the member’s physical location,” Hagel wrote. Veterans groups applauded Hagel’s decision.

- “The VFW is appreciative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their review, and commends Secretary Hagel for taking this issue on so early in his tenure,” said VFW’s Hamilton. “This decision will clearly keep medals that can only be earned in combat in their high order of precedence, while providing proper recognition to all who support our warfighters regardless of their distance from the fight.”
- American Legion National Commander James E. Koutz said replacing the medal with a device puts the valuable contributions of drone operators and cyber warriors in the proper perspective. “Cyber and drone warfare have become part of the equation for 21st-century warfare, and those who fight such battles with distinction certainly deserve to be recognized,” he said. “But The American Legion still believes there’s a fundamental difference between those who fight remotely, or via computer, and those fighting against an enemy who is trying to kill them.”

Defense leaders and veterans organizations will confer on the nature of the new device, as well as “a clear definition of the eligibility criteria for award of the device,” Hagel said. He wants the design and criteria for the new device to review within 90 days. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Chris Carroll | 15 Apr 2013 ++]

Scams ~ Property Tax Update 01: As the economy improves, property prices are rebounding... and so are property taxes. Most municipalities mail tax assessments each spring. Scammers are often close behind, posing as government programs that claim to lower your taxes for a fee. How the Scam Works:

- You get a letter in the mail that appears to come from a government agency. It's really a private business, and it promises to get your property taxes reduced by disputing your tax assessment. For this, the business charges from \$30 to hundreds of dollars.
- A typical letter reads: “The XYZ County tax authorities may have made an error when they recently assessed your property. The mistake means you may be over taxed by 2,000... For 10 minutes and a one-time fee of less than \$100, it's well worth the potential savings of \$2,000.”
- As always, several variations of the scam exist. Sometimes, scammers simply pocket the fee. Other times, it's more a case of misleading advertising. The businesses file the paperwork on your behalf and/or provide you with a government report. However, in most cases, the business is simply doing something homeowners can do themselves for free.
- Finally, some scammers use filing a property tax assessment dispute as an pretense to collect personal information for use in identity theft.

Ways to Spot a Property Assessment Scam: Reputable businesses are available to help you dispute your tax assessment, but watch out for the following warning signs. It may be a scam if the business:

- Poses as a government agency
- Requires an upfront fee instead of billing you after the service is rendered.
- Guarantees it can lower your property assessment and/or taxes. You can file a dispute, but the local government needs to approve it.
- Requests a certified copy of your property deed and charges you more than a few dollars for it. Learn more about this scam here.
- Asks for your Social Security number or other personal information.

[Source: BBB Consumer News | Emily Patterson | 28 Mar 2013 ++]

Scams ~ IRS Update 03: When it comes to the annual rite known as “doing your taxes,” there are a couple of movies that come to mind: “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly” and “The Dirty Dozen.” The IRS plays off the latter in releasing its list of Dirty Dozen Tax Scams for 2013. The Dirty Dozen listing is compiled annually by the IRS and lists a variety of common scams taxpayers can encounter anytime during the year. Many occur at alarming rates during tax season. Here's a quick rundown of the top 12 tax-related scams:

Identity Theft – This occurs when someone uses your personal information – name, Social Security number or other identifying information – without permission. Many times an ID thief uses taxpayer's ID to fraudulently file a tax return and claim a refund.

Phishing – This scam is typically carried out via unsolicited email or fake websites that pose as legitimate sites to lure potential victims and prompt them to provide personal and financial information that will be used in identity theft.

Return Preparer Fraud – While most tax professionals are honest, some unscrupulous preparers prey on their clients with the result being refund fraud or ID theft. Use only preparers who sign returns and enter their IRS Preparer Tax Identification Numbers.

Hiding Income Offshore – Many individuals evade U.S. taxes by hiding income in offshore banks, brokerage accounts or nominee entities, using debit cards, credit cards or wire transfers to access funds. Others use foreign trusts, employee-leasing schemes, private annuities or insurance plans.

“Free Money” from the IRS & Tax Scams Involving Social Security – Flyers and ads for free money from the IRS have appeared in community churches, targeting low-income and elderly individuals. These schemes promise refunds to those with little or no income. Scammers also lure unsuspecting individuals with promises of nonexistent Social Security refunds or rebates.

Impersonation of Charitable Organizations – Following major disasters, scam artists impersonate charities to get money or private information from taxpayers. Sometimes they operate via phony websites, other times they may contact victims directly and claim to be working for or on behalf of the IRS to help them file casualty loss claims and get tax refunds.

False/Inflated Income and Expenses – Claiming income that was not earned or expenses that were not paid in order to secure larger refundable credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit is another popular scam at tax time. Some taxpayers also file excessive claims for the fuel tax credit.

False Form 1099 Refund Claims – In this scam, the perpetrator files a fake information return, such as a Form 1099 Original Issue Discount 90ID) to justify a false refund claim on a corresponding tax return.

Frivolous Arguments – Promoters of frivolous schemes encourage taxpayers to make unreasonable and outlandish claims to avoid paying taxes.

Falsely Claiming Zero Wages – Fraudsters file a phony information return typically a Substitute Form W-2 or a “corrected” Form 1099 as an illegal way to lower the amount of taxes owed. Filing this type of return may result in a \$5,000 penalty.

Disguised Corporate Ownership – Third parties are improperly used to request employer identification numbers and form corporations that obscure the true ownership of the business.

Misuse of Trusts – While there are legitimate uses of trusts in tax and estate planning, some transactions promise reduction of income subject to tax, deductions for personal expenses and reduced estate or gift taxes.

[Source: BBB Consumer News | Luanne Kadlub | 26 Mar 2013 ++]

Scams ~ Lottery Sweepstakes: Wisconsin Physician Service (WPS) Health Insurance has become aware of a lottery sweepstakes scam in which fraudulent checks bearing the WPS name are being utilized. Individuals are contacted via mail with a letter informing them that they are "winners" of a Global Integrated Lottery Inc., Universal Finance Inc., or other such lottery or amounts ranging from \$250,000 to \$300,000. Accompanying the letter is a fraudulent check bearing the "WPS Insurance Corporation" name. The instructions on the letter inform the "winner" that the attached check is a portion of the winnings provided to help pay taxes, insurance, handling, and

shipping fees. The "winner" is also instructed to return a portion of the funds from the cashed check. Individuals receiving this letter and check should be aware that individuals may be trying to gain access to their bank accounts, or other personal information. Individuals who cash the check may be putting themselves at financial risk. Once the bank determines the check is fraudulent, the individual who cashed the check could be held responsible for returning funds back to the bank. Anyone who receives this lottery sweepstakes scam letter and check are encouraged to report it to the WPS SIU Fraud Hotline number at 888-766-4681 and ask to speak to Cindy Severson. [Source: WPS News Release 5 Mar 2013 ++]

Battleship Missouri Memorial Update 01: The Battleship *Missouri* Memorial at Pearl Harbor Hawaii has been designated as the permanent home of the Admiral Nimitz Sculpture. The sculpture pays tribute to the legendary World War II admiral, Chester William Nimitz. The statue is scheduled to be unveiled in conjunction with the Battleship *Missouri* Memorial's annual End of World War II ceremony on 2 SEP. The Battleship *Missouri* Memorial is open daily from 8 a.m. To 4 p.m. Or from 8 a.m. To 5 p.m. During June, July and August. General admission, which includes choice of a guided tour, is \$22 per adult and \$11 per child, ages 4-12. Military, kamaaina (local resident) and school group pricing is available. For more information or for reservations, call toll-free (877) 644-4896 or visit the USS Missouri Memorial Association website at www.USSMissouri.org. [Source: Military.com 15 Apr 2013 ++]

Vet License/Certification Laws: On 9 APR Arizona became the third state in two days to pass legislation that eases veterans' entry into the licensed and professional fields. H.B.2076 -- which passed unanimously in the state's senate and is expected to be signed into law by Gov. Janice Brewer -- will make it easier for veterans with combat medical training to gain Licensed Professional Nursing certification. The American Legion and its Department of Arizona were instrumental in getting the bill introduced in the state's house chamber in January and winning its eventual passage in the senate. The organization scored similar legislative victories in Georgia and Maryland yesterday with passages of measures in those states that allow military training and skills to fulfill state credentialing requirements. Essentially, Arizona's H.B. 2076 will allow medical training obtained in the military to count as the civilian equivalent for training required to become a Licensed Professional Nurse. The bill also will streamline the process of obtaining a temporary nursing license for veterans. To date 37 states have either passed credentialing legislation or are currently considering it. There have been 37 credentialing bills signed into law, and another 85 are in various stages of consideration in state legislatures around the nation. Members of the American Legion wanting to know the status of similar legislation in their states, or who want to assist in these efforts or provide updates of what efforts are occurring in their states should email Steve Gonzalez of the Legion's Economic Division at sgonzalez@legion.org. [Source: American Legion News 10 Apr 2013 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure ~ Ft Gillem: In the early 1990s the U.S. Army discovered hazardous chemicals dumped at Fort Gillem seeping into residential wells in neighboring Forest Park. The finding prompted the military to pass out bottled water and convert many residents to a county water system from their private wells. But two decades and a base closure later, state officials say the Army still hasn't done enough to clean up known and suspected carcinogens that are migrating from groundwater into surface water and, potentially, into the air residents breathe. State environmental officials worry that dangerous concentrations of toxic industrial solvents could be present in nearby Joy Lake, where many fish and eat their catch. They fear that the underground

concentration of one volatile solvent is so high that toxic vapor may be accumulating inside homes. They're not convinced the source of the contamination is contained. And they say the Army hasn't done enough to warn residents of potential danger.

Earlier this year, state officials grew so impatient that they turned to the environmental equivalent of the nuclear option: They asked the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to weigh the possibility of making Fort Gillem a Superfund site. That outcome could effectively kill a plan to transform the abandoned post into something Clayton County desperately needs, a job-creating industrial hub. "We're frustrated that it's taken this long," said Jim Ussery, assistant director of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division. "They've done a lot of good things, but we don't feel the pace is rapid enough and there are a lot of areas we have concerns about." Instead, state officials say the Army has placed too much focus on preparing to transfer the land to Forest Park, which purchased 1,170 acres of the base last year for \$30 million. Because of the pending sale, the state has asked for — but thus far not received — a plan outlining who will be responsible for the clean-up after the land is in the city's hands.

Army officials say they are committed to cleaning up the base. They deny that they are placing economic objectives over human health. They say they haven't dragged their feet but that environmental clean-ups are complicated, lengthy and rely on all parties to meet crucial deadlines. "We're never satisfied. We want it to be faster. But that doesn't necessarily equate to that occurring," said Glynn Ryan, the Army's site manager for Fort Gillem and Fort McPherson, both of which were closed as a result of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process. Ryan said the military is clear on its legal responsibility to manage contamination problems in perpetuity, and the Army plans to have the site cleaned up by 2018. "We're all interested in the same thing," he said: "the protection of human health and the environment." Army officials say they plan to do a vapor intrusion study in May. The last one was performed in 2003.

Opened in 1941 during World War II, Fort Gillem began as the Atlanta Quartermaster Depot and later became the Atlanta Army Depot. It earned its current name in honor of Lt. Gen. Alvan Gillem Jr. in the early 1970s when it became a sub-installation to Fort McPherson. Historically the base was used to ship supplies around the world. At different times Gillem was home to the First U.S. Army, military police and even the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Though the base officially closed in September 2011, the military retained 257 acres which house a forensic lab, as well as Army, Navy and Georgia National Guard units. The bulk of the base, however, is a reminder of years past, with abandoned warehouses and overgrown brush. As on many military bases, parts of Gillem became dumping grounds for all sorts of chemicals and other materials. In addition to engine oil, solvents and rubber, the base is home to a German mustard gas bomb that was leaking when it was buried in the 1940s. That World War II nerve poison has been decontaminated three times, Army officials say, and there's no evidence it remains a threat. [Source: The Atlanta Journal-Constitution | Katie Leslie & Shannon McCaffrey | April 14, 2013 ++]

VA Mental Health Center: The Unified Behavioral Health Center for Military Veterans and Their Families in Bay Shore New York is a first-of-its-kind partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs and private health care that will treat veterans and their families holistically under one roof. One side of the small center houses VA psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and counselors, and the other side has counterparts from North Shore Long Island Jewish Health System, which provides care to veteran families at no cost. The heart of the novel concept, the clinicians say, is their shared conference room. With the patient's consent, the clinicians from both divisions will "come together as a team and talk about the issues," allowing them to coordinate treatment plans based on what's happening with the entire family, said Charlene Thomesen, director of the VA side of the center.

“For example, we can better treat the wife because we’re informed of what’s happening to veteran,” said Mayer Bellehsen, a psychologist and Thomesen’s counterpart on the family side of the center.



The Unified Behavioral Health Center

At the center’s grand opening in December, Robert Petzel, the VA’s under secretary for health, spoke about how the VA wasn’t here “just to treat post-traumatic stress disorder, or depression, or substance abuse. We’re here to treat complex human beings. “And bringing the families into the treatment equation is something we should have started doing years ago. It’s long overdue.” This new model of care recognizes that military-related mental health issues affect the entire family, and treatment of the veteran alone often isn’t enough to resolve the issues. So rather than the veteran going to the VA for therapy, the wife going to another clinic and the child to yet another, they have a one-stop shop, which clinicians hope will lead to earlier intervention in problems and help keep marriages and families together. “It’s like going to a Walmart supercenter and getting everything,” said Mani Krishnamurthi, a VA psychiatrist, also noting that the new building provides the area’s 150,000 veterans with an improved place for care. For decades he saw patients in a VFW hall. Often a veteran will only get help once his wife gets treated herself, and with the center, the civilian doctors are more linked into the VA. The family getting treatment becomes a gateway to the veteran. “Maybe he’s not too thrilled, but we get him in the door at least,” said Andy Roberts, an Army veteran and the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans coordinator for North Shore.

The center is defining family broadly, including parents, siblings or any other relative with whom the veteran lives as eligible for treatment. On the other side of the house, for the VA doctors, the partnership eases getting care for the veteran’s family. Kathlyn O’Neill, an addiction counselor with the VA, calls the new set up “a dream come true.” She said with the traditional VA system, if she realizes a veteran’s child, for example, is struggling, she spends an inordinate amount of time playing case manager trying to coordinate care, figuring out what is available for the child at the school district or making telephone calls to providers. Now, she can refer them to the other side of the office to trusted doctors who are familiar with veteran family issues. Ken Storz, a retired Army Reserve colonel from Long Island, said this model of care “lessens the pressure on a returning vet, because his family can get the help that it needs.” The center is a rare embrace of the private sector for the VA, which is often a lumbering bureaucracy resistant to change and outsiders. Forging the unique public-private partnership took three years. “You don’t often get the opportunity to do things this creative in government because there’s so much red tape,” Thomesen said. The center wouldn’t have come together without private donations and funding, including a 3-year, \$300,000 grant that required matching funds from the community, and a \$1 million donation from locals Frank and Mildred Feinberg. The center’s staff sees the model as the way of the future, and they are collecting data. “We think it’s not just the way forward for the VA,” Thomesen said, “but for all mental health services to be provided this way.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Megan McCloskey | April 14, 2013 ++]

BRAC Update 32: The President's FY 2014 budget calls for another Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) in 2015, with the actual closing of bases beginning in 2016. In April, testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction-Veteran Affairs, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Installations, Environment and Logistics, Kathleen Ferguson emphasized the Air Force's desire for another BRAC round. The reason, the current infrastructure is far greater than today's mission requires. Ferguson testified the money being used to maintain unneeded facilities would be better spent on recapitalization and sustainment of other programs. Her comments were recently echoed by the ACC Commander, General Michael Hostage, III who briefed the Atlantic Council, "ACC could close one in every three of our installations and still have enough capacity for today's mission requirements". The administration previously asked for a BRAC for 2013 and 2015, but Congress didn't go along citing the long-term savings weren't worth the short-term costs. Next, AFSA does not advocate or take a role in deciding which bases to close. However, they do monitor the second and third order of effects generated by BRAC actions. Funding and programs to assist displaced personnel, the closing of base and healthcare facilities, and the impact on those left behind will be AFSA's focus if the BRAC process begins. Committee and subcommittee hearings continue on numerous aspects of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). House Armed Services Committee Chairman Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA) has announced that the NDAA full committee markup will begin the first week of June. Subcommittee markups for HASC will begin on May 22, and the full committee will meet on June 5 to debate the FY14 NDAA. [Source: Air Force Sergeants Association CEO msg. 15 Apr 2013 ++]

Gross Food Ingredients: A new (and disgusting) Food Beast report [<http://foodbeast.com/content/2013/04/01/apparently-cadbury-creme-eggs-contain-traces-of-beaver-butts/>] reveals that Cadbury Creme Eggs contain a substance from the castor sacs of beavers, which are located near the beaver's tail. The secretions are found in an artificial sweetener called castoreum, listed as "natural flavoring" in popular treats. Do a little more research and you'll find that this "natural flavoring" is also found in ice cream, gelatin, pudding, alcohol, and baked goods.



While the discovery is rather disturbing, it's only one of several bizarre ingredients found in food, some of which we consume daily.

1. Cochineal beetles. In 2012, some Starbucks patrons were enraged to learn the chain was using cochineal beetles in strawberry-flavored drinks like the Strawberry Frappuccino. The crushed-up beetles create a red dye effect. The chain declared it would stop using the beetles in its products. However, according to WildFlavors.com [http://www.wildflavors.com/?page=Cochineal_Carmine&r=1], cochineal extract can be found in meat, sausage,

red marinades, jams, gelatin desserts, juices, noncarbonated soft drinks, icings, toppings, fruit preparations, confections, and dairy products.

2. **Sawdust.** Ever wonder how that bag of shredded cheese is magically able to avoid clumping? You can thank sawdust for that. Many brands of prepackaged, shredded cheese use cellulose to prevent the shreds of cheese from sticking together, according to Care2.com [<http://www.care2.com/causes/what-gross-secret-ingredients-are-hiding-in-your-food.html>]. Cellulose is also used in meat products, ice cream, and spice and powdered-drink mixes.

3. **Sodium bisulfite.** A combination of sulfur dioxide and sodium carbonate, sodium bisulfite remains a topic of concern. It has been known to cause allergic reactions and, in rare cases, death. While it has been banned from use in fruits and vegetables that are intended for raw consumption, it's found in wine, potato chips, other potato products, and dried fruits.

4. **Isinglass.** Similar to the way cochineal beetles give red coloring to common food items, isinglass, otherwise known as dried fish bladder, is used to create the golden color of beer. According to Care2.com [<http://www.care2.com/causes/what-gross-secret-ingredients-are-hiding-in-your-food.html>], it's not necessary; yeast separates from the actual beer within a few days to create the color. Isinglass speeds up the process, though.

5. **Ammonium sulfate.** Fact: Ammonium sulfate is a chemical fertilizer. It's also used in many chain restaurant sandwich breads. It feeds yeast in the baking process, says TruTV.com [<http://www.trutv.com/conspiracy/bizarre/disgusting-ingredients/gallery.html?curPhoto=2>].

6. **Propylene glycerol.** Also noted on TruTV.com, propylene glycerol, commonly used in antifreeze and sex lubricants, is found in prepackaged salads. That's how they're able to look and stay so fresh. It's also used in food colorings and cake mixes.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Amanda Geronikos | 15 Apr 2013 ++]

TRICARE Coverage Update 03: TRICARE families should be aware of what care is covered by their health insurance plans. No one plan covers everything. You should carefully evaluate your health insurance needs for each family member to determine if you should stay with your other health insurance or supplemental plan. For those 65 and over the benefits of having just Medicare Part A & B and TRICARE for Life (TFL) is Medicare pays 80% of the covered services and TFL pays 20% of the cost leaving you little to nothing to pay out of pocket except for the annual \$1,200+ Medicare Part B premium. If one or more family members are under 65 than they are subject to copays. For more information on this visit <http://www.tricare.mil> or call TRICARE For Life at 1-866-773-0404. TRICARE doesn't make any recommendation for supplements. Some of the military fraternal organizations such as MOAA offer supplemental policies. Their monthly premiums normally increase annually with age so you may want to obtain one if your spouse is under 65 and you are 65 or older. Consider the following when in making your insurance decisions:

1. Covered by TRICARE and Medicare:

- When you see a participating or nonparticipating Medicare provider, you have no out-of-pocket costs for services covered by both Medicare and TFL.
- Most health care services fall into this category.
- After Medicare pays its portion of the claim, TRICARE pays the remaining amount and you pay nothing.

2. Covered by Medicare but not TRICARE:

- When you receive care that is covered by Medicare only (e.g., chiropractic care), Medicare processes the claim as the primary payer.
- TFL makes no payment, regardless of any action Medicare takes.
- You are responsible for the Medicare deductible and cost-shares.

3. Covered by TRICARE:

- When you receive care that is covered only by TFL (e.g., care received overseas), TRICARE processes the claim as the primary payer.
- You are responsible for the applicable TFL deductible and cost-shares. TFL claims are normally filed with Medicare first; however, when a health care service is not covered by Medicare, the claim may be filed directly with WPS/TFL, unless you have other health insurance (OHI).

[Source: Various Apr 2-13 ++]

TRICARE Emergency Centers Coverage: TRICARE beneficiaries may have noticed new kinds of “Emergency Centers” popping up in their area. It may seem like a tempting health care option but, free-standing emergency rooms (ER) that are not affiliated with a hospital may not be TRICARE-authorized. If a provider, such as a free-standing ER, is not authorized then TRICARE is prohibited from paying it “facility fees.” That can leave a beneficiary stuck with a big bill. Beneficiaries need to “know before you go.” Check a free-standing ER’s TRICARE status – before emergency care is needed.

TRICARE defines an emergency department as an organized, hospital-based facility available 24 hours a day providing emergency services to patients who need immediate medical attention. Emergency departments affiliated with a hospital are most likely TRICARE-authorized providers. Beneficiaries who seek care at a free-standing ER need to ask if the facility is affiliated with a hospital-based emergency department. If it isn’t, the beneficiary will need to make a decision about getting care elsewhere or being responsible for the facility charges. Beneficiaries can check if a provider is TRICARE-authorized by calling their regional contractor. Contact information for regional contractors is available at <http://www.tricare.mil/contactus> . All TRICARE network providers are also searchable at <http://www.tricare.mil/findaprovider> . Learn more about emergency care under [TRICARE at www.tricare.mil/emergency](http://www.tricare.mil/emergency). [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/BenefitUpdates> Apr 2013 ++]

TRICARE User Fees Update 97: Military folks upset by Obama administration proposals to cap pay raises, to phase-in sharply higher co-pays on prescriptions filled off base and to raise TRICARE costs on working-age retirees, also tend to rail against such changes with arguments politicians can shrug off as stale or in error. Two examples from the flood of feedback to recent columns are:

- “We were promised free health care for life.”
- “Before Congress votes to raise fees on those who secure our freedoms they should first pay more for their own health care.”

The flaw of the first is that “free lifetime” care promises were made to older generations and not to working-age retirees who are the main targets of proposed fee hikes. Also, federal appellate courts ruled a decade ago that benefits promised by recruiters or even commands at time of reenlistment aren’t legally binding for the government if not backed by federal statute. To the second popular argument, U.S. senators and representatives have the same health insurance as federal civilian employees, so they already pay higher premiums — as they should — than do military folks, and their premiums increase annually with overall health costs. But far more effective arguments

against compensation curbs are being made by representatives of The Military Coalition, a group of associations and veteran groups, who 24 APR testified before the Senate armed services' subcommittee on military personnel. Their talking points still seem to resonate with lawmakers even as government functions get squeezed by a debt crisis and frightened politicians avoid hard choices by using the automatic pilot of budget sequestration.

Though only several senators heard their points this day, coalition reps will continue to make them privately to key lawmakers and congressional staff. Still, it will be a Herculean task to avoid pay caps and higher TRICARE fees, certainly if lawmakers refuse to reach a debt deal to end sequestration. The Obama defense budget request for 2014 doesn't even reflect \$52 billion in deeper cuts that would occur if sequestration were not repealed. Kathleen Moakler with National Military Family Association warned the subcommittee that because of sequestration, and a recent six-month delay in passing the fiscal 2013 defense appropriations bill, "military families now doubt our nation's leaders' commitment to supporting their service." Steve Strobridge, a retired Air Force colonel who retires again this month, from Military Officers Association of America, after 19 years of hardnosed advocacy for troops, challenged the contention of multiple defense secretaries that personnel costs, particularly for TRICARE, are out of control. "Claims of exploding military health costs cite growth since 2001 as if that were a reasonable starting point. But it's not," he told the subcommittee. "Congress enacted TRICARE for Life in 2001 to correct the ejection of older retirees from military health care in the six years before that. There was a spike as they returned to coverage in 2002 and 2003. But the cost growth has actually been declining ever since."

At the same hearing, Defense Department witnesses defended the pay caps and TRICARE fee increases as necessary in tight budget times to keep smaller defense budgets "in balance" and protect readiness. Key lawmakers sent mixed signals. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), subcommittee chair, said she remains "very skeptical about increasing costs for military members and veterans." But Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), ranking Republican, suggested he could support fee increases if they made TRICARE more sustainable. "Because if it's not sustainable, it's a false promise," said Graham. He said he wants to avoid a situation where retiree health care costs and a shrinking defense budget lessen the capabilities of active duty forces. [Source: Military Update | Tom Philpott | 27 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Fraud Waste & Abuse Update 72:

- **Norfolk VA** — A former soldier with the U.S. Army turned civilian employee for the U.S. Coast Guard was sentenced 12 APR to 15 months in jail for lying to the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs about the extent of an old service injury. **Ronnie Ferebee**, 56, pleaded guilty last December to one count of making a false statement. According to court documents, Ferebee served in the U.S. Army from 1974 to 1985. He left the service after injuring his feet. He suffered frostbite while serving in Germany. In 2000, Ferebee told the VA he was no longer able to work because of the injuries to his feet. He made similar statements to the VA in 2005 and 2006. From 1990 through today, however, Ferebee has been employed full time with the Coast Guard as a "materials handler," earning less than \$20 per hour. "The fact that the defendant was employed by one branch of the federal government, while at the same time providing false statements to another branch of the federal government, establishes how brazen the defendant acted in the commission of this offense," Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph L. Kosky wrote in court documents. In all, Ferebee was overpaid \$77,850 between June 2005 and November 2009. While stressing Ferebee's "fraud, deceit and trickery" was to blame for what happened, U.S. District Court Judge Rebecca Beach Smith questioned how the VA didn't notice the fraud sooner. "It baffles the court that the VA would just take someone's word over the phone," she said. "It doesn't take a lot (to check).... Perhaps there should be more oversight in that regard." Officials with the VA did not respond to an email and phone call seeking comment. Smith gave

Ferebee 45 days to report to prison. Upon his release, she ordered him to pay \$350 per month restitution.
[Source: The Virginian-Pilot | Scott Daugherty | April 13, 2013 ++]

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CORPORAL CHARLES J. BERRY UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following CITATION:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a member of a Machine-gun Crew, serving with the First Battalion, Twenty-Sixth Marines, Fifth Marine Division, in action enemy Japanese forces during the seizure of Iwo Jima in the Volcano Islands, on 3 March 1945. Stationed in the front lines, Corporal Berry manned his weapon with alert readiness as he maintained a constant vigil with other members of his gun crew during the hazardous night hours. When infiltrating Japanese soldiers launched a surprise attack shortly after midnight in an attempt to overrun his position, he engaged in a pitched hand grenade duel, returning the dangerous weapons with prompt and deadly accuracy until an enemy grenade landed in the foxhole. Determined to save his comrades, he unhesitatingly chose to sacrifice himself and immediately dived on the deadly missile, absorbing the shattering violence of the exploding charge in his own body and protecting the others from serious injury. Stouthhearted [sic] and indomitable, Corporal Berry fearlessly yielded his own life that his fellow Marines might carry on the relentless battle against a ruthless enemy and his superb valor and unfaltering devotion to duty in the face of certain death reflect the highest credit upon himself and upon the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

/S/HARRY S. TRUMAN



Charles Joseph Berry



Elmwood Cemetery Lorain OH

[Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/html/moh/wwII-a-f.html> Apr 2013 ++]

PTSD Update 136: Are women Veterans more susceptible to developing than their male counterparts? And if so, why? “In the general population, women are twice as likely as men to develop post-traumatic stress disorder,” noted Dr. Sonja Batten, VA’s Deputy Chief Consultant for Specialty Mental Health. “But among recent returnees seeking care at VA, PTSD rates among men and women are the same. Statistics such as these suggest the need to better understand the role of gender in PTSD, particularly as it may impact our Veterans seeking care.” Researchers at the Department of Veterans Affairs are now taking some initial steps toward understanding this complex subject. To that end, Dr. Sabra Inslicht, a staff psychologist at the San Francisco VA Medical Center and an assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco recently led a VA study that took a closer look at how men and women learn to fear. Her work was published in the October 2012 issue of the Journal of Psychiatric Research. Inslicht said, “If we can learn more about potential gender differences in the process of fear learning, it may help us develop more targeted treatments that are geared more precisely to the unique needs of men and women.”

For their study, Inslicht and her team recruited 18 men and 13 women who had been diagnosed with PTSD. These participants were all shown various images on a computer screen. Electrodes were attached to their palms so researchers could measure participants’ physiological response to each image. After certain images appeared, the test subject received a small electrical shock. Gradually, the test subject came to associate these particular images with something unpleasant. “They learned to anticipate the impending shock,” Inslicht said. “They learned the danger cues. We call this ‘fear conditioning.’” Researchers carefully monitored test subjects’ skin conductive responses — that is, how sweaty their palms got — to measure the body’s stress reaction to the image on the screen. “We discovered that women responded more strongly to the visual cues than men when they saw a particular image that they knew was going to be followed by an electric shock,” Inslicht explained. “This suggests that women conditioned more robustly than men. In our future work, we’d like to get a better understanding as to why these differences may occur.” Understanding possible gender differences more precisely could put us in a position to develop much more effective, focused therapies for PTSD

The researcher said. “To some extent, learning to fear is important for survival,” the researcher said. “When we are threatened by something dangerous, we tend to react with a stress response or ‘fight-or-flight’ response. It helps keep us safe by mobilizing our bodies to either fight or flee a threat, thus enabling us to protect ourselves from harm in dangerous situations.” Inslicht said this ‘fight or flight’ response, however, can sometimes persist even in non-

threatening situations. “For example,” she said, “if you witnessed a suicide bombing while on patrol in a crowded marketplace in Afghanistan, you might develop a fear of crowded places. While you’re on patrol and in potential danger, a heightened level of vigilance can be protective. However, if that response persists even after returning home and to a safe place, it can become problematic. “When you’re unable to turn it off in safe situations, the stress becomes prolonged,” she continued. “This can cause wear and tear on both the mind and the body. When this heightened reactivity starts to negatively impact your daily life, we begin to worry about post-traumatic stress.” But if fear conditioning does, in fact, occur differently in men and women, then might not the process known as ‘fear extinction’ also be affected by gender differences? “Fear extinction happens,” Inslicht said, “when you are gradually exposed to the previously learned danger cues, such as crowds, and you gradually come to realize that the cue will not be followed by a stressful or potentially traumatic event. This results in the diminishing of the fear response. Since extinction learning is believed to be important for recovery from PTSD, a deeper understanding of this process could alter our strategy for how we treat PTSD in men and women.”

Inslicht said her small study leaves a number of questions unanswered, and that more in-depth research is needed. “For example, all our study participants had PTSD,” she said, “so we couldn’t arrive at any conclusions regarding whether women, as a general rule, condition more strongly than men do, or whether this difference is found only among women who have already developed PTSD.” We did not examine what may drive the gender differences that we found, the researcher noted. “For example, there may be biological differences such as particular hormones and neuropeptides that may mediate these effects.” Inslicht said the research community is only just beginning to understand fear learning and extinction mechanisms and their relationship to PTSD. “Ultimately, however, this line of research may result in advances for treatment,” she concluded. “There may be ways that we can enhance extinction learning — perhaps through medications or with other modifications to existing behavioral treatments.”

[Source: <http://www.va.gov/health/NewsFeatures/2013/April/PTSD-Study-Men-Versus-Women.asp> | Tom Cramer | 18 Feb 2013 ++]

PTSD Update 137: There is no way to cure post-traumatic stress disorder, but those suffering from it can learn to manage it, health professionals said 23 APR. Kevin Smythe, a supervisory psychologist in the Mental Health Service Line at the Fayetteville VA Medical Center, said managing the disorder is currently the only option. "There are a lot of ebbs and flows (with the disorder)," Smythe said. He was one of five panelists to speak about the disorder and post-traumatic stress symptoms. The Cumberland County Public Library headquarters on Maiden Lane hosted the event, where about 60 people attended to learn more about the disorder and how it affects the community. Other panelists included John Bigger, of the Regional Area Health Education Center; Dr. Harold Kudler, associate director of the VA's Mid-Atlantic Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center for Deployment Mental Health and medical lead for the VISN 6 Rural Health Initiative; Heidi Vance, a licensed professional counselor associate and yoga therapist; and Molly VanDuser, a national certified counselor.



Air Force poster for National Depression Awareness Month, which is October.

Post-traumatic stress starts after some life altering event that can be visible through several symptoms, including irritation, nightmares and hypervigilance, Kudler said. Post-traumatic stress disorder is when those symptoms have lasted longer than a month and affected one's ability to work and socialize. It is a diagnosed disorder, he said. Library officials said the topic was important to discuss in the community because Fayetteville's population is greatly affected by nearby Fort Bragg, one of the U.S. military's largest installations. "I still think there is a stigma attached to get information about this topic," said Jennifer Taft, who is the library system's awareness coordinator. Taft said the talk was aimed toward a general public audience to keep the discussion relevant as to how the disorder can affect the community. While Smythe said there's no cure for the diagnosis, VanDuser said family members and neighbors can work to address and soothe disorder symptoms. "Support them," she said. "That way, when (soldiers) get back, you'll have a pulse on them." VanDuser said being friendly with soldier neighbors and knowing their normal behavior could make it easier to notice changes in their behavior after they return from war. Even noticing changes and offering to assist those suffering from the disorder is only part of the equation, panelists said. Smythe said the only way someone can get better or remedy their symptoms is when they are ready to address their diagnosis. [Source: The Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer | Caitlin Dineen | 24 Apr 2013 ++]

WW II Pre War Events



Adolf Hitler, age 35, on his release from Landesberg Prison, on December 20, 1924. Hitler had been convicted of treason for his role in an attempted coup in 1923 called the Beer Hall Putsch. This photograph was taken shortly after he finished dictating "Mein Kampf" to deputy Rudolf Hess. Eight years later, Hitler would be sworn in as Chancellor of Germany, in 1933.

Mobilized Reserve 23 APR 2013: The Department of Defense announced the current number of reservists on active duty as of 23 APR 2013. The net collective result is 396 more reservists mobilized than last reported in the 15 APR 2013 RAO Bulletin. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 39,757; Navy Reserve 4,311; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve 8,269; Marine Corps Reserve 2,464; and the Coast Guard Reserve 541. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 54,946 including both units and individual augmentees. Since 911 there have been 874,480 reservists deactivated. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found online at <http://www.defense.gov/news/MobilizationWeeklyReport042313.pdf>. [Source: DoD News Release No. 268-13 dtd 24 Apr 2013 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 108: Hiring Our Heroes announced employment workshops are now available in conjunction with hundreds of our 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 click on the location next to the date in the below list. If it will not open refer to www.uschamber.com/hiringourheroes/events. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering for the fair:

Upcoming Hiring Fairs

April 30, 2013 – **Rocky Mount, NC**
April 30, 2013 – **Walnut Creek, CA**
April 30, 2013 – **Laramie, WY**
April 30, 2013 – **Killeen, TX**
May 1, 2013 – **Anchorage, AK**
May 1, 2013 – **Charlotte, NC**
May 1, 2013 – **Atlanta, GA**
May 1, 2013 – **Grand Island, NE**
May 2, 2013 – **Bennington, VT**
May 2, 2013 – **Southfield, MI**
May 2, 2013 – **Portage, IN**
May 2, 2013 – **Bordentown, NJ**
May 2, 2013 – **Murrieta, CA**
May 3, 2013 – **Colorado Springs, CO**
May 3, 2013 – **Jacksonville, FL**
May 3, 2013 – **Saginaw, MI**
May 3, 2013 – **Joint Base Andrews, MD**
May 4, 2013 – **Fresno, CA**
May 6, 2013 – **Miramar, CA Military Spouse Networking Event**
May 7, 2013 – **Yankton, SD**
May 7, 2013 – **Camp Pendleton, CA Military Spouse Hiring Fair**
May 7, 2013 – **Ontario, CA**
May 8, 2013 – **Binghamton, NY**
May 9, 2013 – **Twentynine Palms, CA Military Spouse Hiring Fair**
May 9, 2013 – **Asheville, NC**
May 14, 2013 – **Carlsbad, NM**
May 14, 2013 – **Ogden, UT**

May 14, 2013 – **Kingsport, TN**
 May 15, 2013 – **Fort Belvoir, VA**
 May 16, 2013 – **Medford, OR**
 May 16, 2013 – **Vancouver, WA**
 May 18, 2013 – **Selfridge ANGB, MI**
 May 21, 2013 – **Greenville, SC**
 May 22, 2013 – **Marion, IA**
 May 22, 2013 – **Fort Benning, GA Military Spouse Hiring Fair**
 May 23, 2013 – **Boston, MA**
 May 23, 2013 – **Indianapolis, IN**
 May 24, 2013 – **Pierre, SD**
 May 28, 2013 – **Columbus, OH**
 May 29, 2013 – **Cape Girardeau, MO**
 May 30, 2013 – **Birmingham, AL**
 May 30, 2013 – **Fargo, ND**
 May 31, 2013 – **Guayanilla, Puerto Rico**
 [Source: VA Secy Vet Group Liason Officer Kevin Secor 29 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 91: Senior executives from the Veterans Benefits Administration will not receive any performance bonus awards for fiscal 2012 because of lingering problems with the veterans claims backlog, department officials confirmed 26 APR. House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) called the move overdue. "It's about time VA stopped rewarding employees and managers for falling behind," he said in a statement. "One can only wonder what effect this sort of policy may have had if VA had instituted it years ago." In the interim the American Legion has launched a survey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/TX3PFDJ in order to get a better picture of the types of claims and lengths of wait for veterans filing benefits claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs, The Legion wants to hear from veterans about how long their claim has been pending, how many conditions were included with the claim, what type of claim it is and why the claim is pending. The survey will remain on [legion.org](http://www.legion.org) for 30 days. After the survey is completed, the results will be given to VA and also posted on the American Legion website at <http://www.legion.org>. [Source: www.legion.org/veteransbenefits 9 Apr 2013 ++]



VA Claims Backlog Update 92: As the backlog of pending disability claims at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) soars to nearly one million, today Concerned Veterans for America (CVA) is launching a new website (<http://millionvetbacklog.com>) and campaign to mobilize veterans and all Americans to demand accountability at VA. The new push calls on the White House to relieve VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and appoint a new Secretary who will pursue bold, innovative, and overdue reforms to a dysfunctional bureaucracy and calcified culture at VA. This new #MillionVetBacklog campaign includes a call-to-action video and a grassroots petition to keep the pressure on the White House to stop making excuses and start delivering results.

Pete Hegseth , CEO of CVA and Army veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, said the following about the new initiative: “The dysfunction at VA is deep and wide, growing day-by-day as more facts come out about the length of time veterans are waiting for their pending claims to be resolved. Rather than meeting the needs of veterans in a timely manner, VA’s bloated bureaucracy tells them to take a number and wait in line. That line has grown by 2,000% under this administration—a true failure of leadership. “Secretary Shinseki is an honorable man with a sterling record of military service; however, his tenure at VA has not produced the results he—or the White House—promised four years ago. Now is the time for a new leader and bold reforms.” To schedule an interview with Concerned Veterans for America, contact Kate Pomeroy at 703-638-3927 or kpomeroy@concernedveteransforamerica.org. Concerned Veterans for America is a non-partisan, non-profit, 501(c)(4) organization that advocates for policies that will preserve the freedom and liberty we and our families so proudly fought and sacrificed to defend. For additional info on CVA refer to <http://concernedveteransforamerica.org>. [Source: Concerned Veterans for America Apr 2013 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 93: The Department of Veterans Affairs announced 19 APR it is implementing an initiative to expedite compensation claims decisions for Veterans who have waited one year or longer. Effective on 19 APR, VA claims raters will make provisional decisions on the oldest claims in inventory, which will allow Veterans to begin collecting compensation benefits more quickly, if eligible. Veterans will be able to submit additional evidence for consideration a full year after the provisional rating, before the VA issues a final decision. “Too many Veterans wait too long for a decision, and this has never been acceptable,” said VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. “That is why we are implementing an aggressive plan to eliminate the backlog in 2015. This initiative is the right thing to do now for Veterans who have waited the longest.”

Provisional decisions will be based on all evidence provided to date by the Veteran or obtained on their behalf by VA. If a VA medical examination is needed to decide the claim, it will be ordered and expedited. “Issuing provisional decisions not only provides Veterans with applicable benefits much more quickly, but also gives them an additional one-year safety net to submit further evidence should it become available. Our door will remain open and if a Veteran has additional evidence, their case will be fast tracked,” said Allison Hickey, Undersecretary for Benefits. If any increase is determined to be warranted based on the additional evidence received, benefits will be retroactive to the date the claim was initially filed. The initiative protects the Veteran’s right to appeal the decision. If no further evidence is received within that year, VBA will inform the Veteran that their rating is final and provide information on the standard appeals process, which can be found at <http://www.bva.va.gov/>

Throughout this initiative, VA will continue to prioritize claims for homeless Veterans and those claiming financial hardship, the terminally ill, former Prisoners of War, Medal of Honor recipients, and Veterans filing Fully Developed Claims. More information about filing Fully Developed Claims is available at: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/transformation/fastclaims/>. Claims for Wounded Warriors separating from the military for medical reasons will continue to be handled separately and on a priority basis with the Department of Defense through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES). Wounded Warriors separating through IDES currently

receive VA compensation benefits in an average of 61 days following their separation from service. To read a Fact sheet on the initiative refer to <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2437>.

As a result of this initiative, metrics used to track benefits claims will experience significant fluctuations. The focus on processing the oldest claims will cause the overall measure of the average length of time to complete a claim—currently 286 days—to skew, rising significantly in the near term because of the number of old claims that will be completed. Over time, as the backlog of oldest claims is cleared and more of the incoming claims are processed electronically through VA’s new paperless processing system, VA’s average time to complete claims will significantly improve. In addition, the average days pending metric— or the average age of a claim in the inventory — will decrease, since the oldest claims will no longer be part of the inventory. While compensation claims are pending, eligible Veterans are able to receive healthcare and other benefits from VA. Veterans who have served in recent conflicts are eligible for 5 years of free healthcare from VA. Currently, over 55% of returning Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans are using VA health care, a rate of utilization greater than previous generations of Veterans. Veterans can learn more about disability benefits on the joint Department of Defense—VA web portal eBenefits at: <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits.portal>. [Source: VA News Release 19 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 94: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

Under fire from Congress for the Defense Department’s contributing role in the Veterans Affairs Department’s disability claims morass, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told House lawmakers 16 APR that DoD is “restructuring” relevant offices and responsibilities to ensure quicker delivery of medical records to VA. Promising an announcement of the changes within 30 days, Hagel acknowledged that the delay in electronic transfer of military medical records to VA is indefensible. “We’re way behind. We will do better,” Hagel told members of the House defense appropriations panel. The Senate and House Veterans’ Affairs committees sent letters to Hagel this month pressing for DoD and VA to adhere to a plan to improve the disability claims process by speeding records transfers to VA.

That plan, signed in February, requires DoD to hand over service treatment records to VA “immediately” and establish an electronics transfer capability for the records by the end of the year. But the lawmakers noted that in some cases, veterans’ disability claims remain delayed because it takes up to 175 days for VA to receive complete records from the DoD. “We support this initiative,” House Veterans’ Affairs Committee members wrote. “We want to ensure that the resources required to execute remain in place. ... We note that all concerns regarding funding of this initiative must be resolved promptly.” Legislators did not say what percentage of VA’s 890,000 total claims — including 620,000 considered “backlogged,” or older than 125 days — require DoD records for processing. The Pentagon is developing a “Health Artifact Information Management System,” consolidating and certifying military medical records and civilian treatment records before transferal to VA. VA and DoD also are developing an integrated electronic health record system that eventually will include a service member’s medical record, from recruitment to death, if they remain in the DoD or VA health systems.

In February, the departments announced they were abandoning an ambitious plan to develop a \$4 billion single electronic medical records system in favor of one that uses existing technology. VA Secretary Eric Shinseki has said his department will use its current system, known as VISTA. He told Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee members 16 APR that VA is awaiting DoD on the selection of its core system. “Both secretaries are pushing very hard on this,” Shinseki assured lawmakers. On 17 APR, Hagel said he deferred a request for proposal on DoD’s core system because he didn’t think we knew what the hell we were doing. “Until I get some understanding of this and some control of it, we’re not going to spend any more money on it,” Hagel said. “That doesn’t mean we aren’t making

progress — we are.” In a hearing 16 APR, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, called the delays unacceptable. “While some progress has been made, I am deeply concerned about the pace of this effort and the level of output produced,” Sanders told Shinseki. “The outcomes of this initiative impact nearly every aspect of VA’s operations, from claims processing to high quality health care delivery. We cannot afford to get this wrong.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Patricia Kime | 16 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Survivor's Benefits Update 02: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

The new chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee believes many military survivors are struggling financially and is making a priority of improving their benefits. About 350,000 surviving spouses and minor children receive survivor benefits from the Veterans Affairs Department, but 44 percent of the spouses are living on incomes of less than \$20,000 a year, according to the committee. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) who became committee chairman earlier this year, said that’s not good enough. “Low-income survivors are at a disadvantage when it comes to re-establishing stability for their families, but their challenges are shared by survivors of all income levels,” Sanders said in a statement. “Men and women who gave their lives in war or as a result of service to this country have left behind loved ones who deserve a grateful nation’s support.” He is proposing the Survivor Benefit Improvement Act of 2013 (S.735), a measure that would expand federal benefits at a time when most people in Congress are looking for ways to cut spending. The bill would:

- Provide grief counseling in retreat settings to survivors whose spouses died while on active duty. Child care would be included.
- Change remarriage rules so that survivors who remarry can continue receiving benefits under the same rules that apply to other federal benefits. Current rules cancel benefits for a spouse who remarries before age 57, but allow benefits to be restarted if the marriage ends. The bill would change the age to 55.
- Extends supplemental payments to survivors with children for five years after the veteran’s death instead of the current two.
- Expands benefits for children with Agent Orange-related spina bifida to include those whose parent or parents served in Thailand. Current benefits are limited to children of Vietnam veterans.

[Source: NavyTimes | Rick Maze | 16 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Appointments Update 08: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

The VA is proposing to scrap its policy of denying medical care to veterans who miss two or more medical appointments. The change will not take effect before 14 JUN, and likely won’t be finalized until fall because of the lengthy process of changing regulations. The current restriction, aimed at getting veterans to provide 24 hours of notice if they won’t be able to keep an appointment so that someone else can be offered the spot, “is inconsistent with VA’s patient-centered approach to medical care,” VA officials said in a statement. Veterans groups have complained that VA’s policy of refusing to make new appointments for veterans who have missed other appointments can be especially hard on homeless veterans and those with mental health issues, whose failure to show up for appointments might be a sign of the depth of their problems.

The current policy does not ban veterans forever. There is no penalty if they provide a “reasonable excuse” for missing appointments, and emergency care is still provided. And veterans can have an appointment restored if they agree to cooperate in making future appointments, according to the notice of the possible rule change posted in the

15 APR Federal Register. Explaining the decision to change the policy, the VA notice says patients have become “equal partners in making treatment decisions” under a “dramatic shift” that has taken place in health care throughout the U.S. “VA has adopted this approach and, whenever possible, eliminates both potential and proven barriers to care,” the statement says. “This is especially important in cases where VA provides treatment to vulnerable veteran populations, veterans who rely on VA as their primary source of medical care and those with service-connected disabilities. Denying follow-up medical treatment for even a short period can interfere with continuity and coordination of care.” Refusing to provide medical services because of a broken appointment “is counterproductive and may discourage them from attempting to access care in the future.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Rick Maze | April 16, 2013 ++]

Vet Gun Control Update 08: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

The Senate failed 17 APR to pass legislation preventing veterans from losing gun ownership rights simply for being incapable of handling their financial affairs. Under special rules for Senate debate on the gun bill, 60 votes were required for passage. The vote was 56-44. Still, the vote by a majority of the Senate to revise gun rights for veterans could be a sign of support for free-standing bills pending before the House and Senate veterans' affairs committees that also would block the Veterans Affairs Department from reporting to the FBI the names of veterans determined to be “incompetent.” That is a term used to describe those who are appointed a fiduciary to pay their bills and manage their finances. The amendment sought allow the VA to only report to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System if a judge, magistrate or other judicial authority determines a veteran is a danger to himself or others.

Wednesday's vote came on an amendment to S.649, the Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act, after the Senate also defeated attempts to expand background checks for gun purchases and to ban the sale of military-style assault weapons Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), who sponsored the Senate amendment, said current policy has led 129,000 veterans to be “deprived of their Second Amendment Rights to own firearms” without due process because they were declared financially “incompetent,” the term used by the VA for those appointed a fiduciary to handle their financial affairs. The decision is made by a benefits administrator, not by a mental health professional, said Burr, ranking Republican on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. “The current process is arbitrary. It does not look at whether they represent a danger to themselves or to others, and it is in no way relevant to whether the individual should have access to firearms.” The VA, however, stands by the current process.

In a statement submitted 16 APR to the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, where a free-standing version of the legislation is pending, the VA says current procedures allow a veteran to have firearms rights restored by either getting the incompetency determination reversed or by petitioning VA to have their firearms rights restored “on the basis that the individual poses no threat to public safety.” “VA has relief procedures in place, and we are fully committed to continuing to conduct these procedures in a timely and effective manner to fully protect the rights of our beneficiaries,” VA says. “Any person determined by a lawful authority to lack the mental capacity to manage his or her own affairs is subject to the same prohibition.” By exempting veterans, the bill “would create a different standard for veterans and their survivors than that applicable to the rest of the population, and could raise public safety issues.”

Burr, though, said the petitioning process isn't working. Only 200 veterans have sought relief, he said. Only six have been granted. “Why would only 200 people appeal this decision that was arbitrarily made? Well, the VA doesn't provide any help,” Burr said “We have made it as difficult as we possibly can,” Burr said. “The veteran is on his or her own. Even the cost to appeal is absorbed by the veteran.” Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., chairman of the House

Veterans' Affairs Committee and sponsor of what he calls the Veterans' Second Amendment Protection Act, said current policy isn't fair to veterans. "Taking away a constitutional right is a serious action and one that should not be taken lightly, particularly when it concerns our nation's veterans," Miller said.

The American Legion, the nation's largest veterans' group, supports changing the procedure. "It is both sad and ironic that the veteran community — a community in which each and every member swore to uphold the Constitution of the United States to include the Second Amendment — requires advocacy to maintain its constitutional right to bear arms," the Legion says in a statement. "Unless deemed unfit to possess weapons by a judicial authority with the full benefit of due process, each veteran regardless of disability should maintain the right to possess a firearm." The Legion notes that hunting and target shooting are activities included in some of VA's own programs for disabled veterans, and also expresses concern that veterans might not seek treatment for problems such as post-traumatic stress because of "fear of repercussions such as confiscation of firearms." Miller's bill, S 602, would come to a vote in his committee in May. [Source: ArmyTimes | Rick Maze | 17 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Sexual Trauma Program Update 05: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

The Veterans Affairs Department opposes bipartisan legislation that would make it easier for military sexual assault victims to receive trauma-related disability benefits — not because VA officials disagree with the intent, but because they don't think the legislation is necessary. The Ruth Moore Act, sponsored by Rep. Chellie Pingree, D-Maine, would relax evidentiary standards for sexual trauma victims who file claims for service-connected mental trauma. The bill, H.R.671, is named for a Navy veteran who fought for 23 years before becoming fully eligible for disability benefits for the post-traumatic stress that she says resulted from being raped twice during her military service. Appearing 16 APR before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee's disability assistance panel, Pingree said her bill is similar to the evidential standards put in place in 2010 for veterans claiming combat-related post-traumatic stress. In that case, she said, VA "finally acknowledged that far too many veterans who have deployed into harm's way suffered the emotional consequences of their service but could not, through no fault of their own, locate military documentation that verified the traumatic events that triggered their PTSD."

Under Pingree's bill, a veteran seeking benefits for trauma related to rape or sexual assault who did not have official evidence of a reported crime "would have to provide a statement that the assault took place, along with a diagnosis from a VA health care professional that links the assault to a mental health condition." Major veterans' groups, including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, support the bill and a similar Senate bill, S.294. Sexual trauma "is often an unreported crime, or even in the best cases poorly documented," the American Legion said in a statement. Even when reported, "it is not uncommon for a lackluster investigation to occur and the perpetrator of the crime not to be brought to justice." But VA does not think the bill is necessary. "While we appreciate the intent behind this legislation, we would prefer to continue pursuing non-legislative actions to address the special nature" of the sexual trauma claims, said David McLenachen, VA's director of pension and fiduciary service and the agency's representative at the hearing. While veterans who file sexual trauma-related claims are "given a full and fair opportunity to have their claim considered," McLenachen said VA would like higher thresholds for evidence.

Current policy does not require documentation of an assault or rape; when minimal circumstantial evidence is found, VA schedules a mental health professional to examine the veteran to provide an opinion about whether an in-service rape or assault occurred, he said. VA also will look at medical service records, veteran treatment records or any private records made available by the veteran to reach a opinion "as to whether it is at least as likely as not that

the symptoms or disability are related to the in-service event,” he said. Pingree said VA isn’t doing enough. “VA will tell you that their system accepts secondary markers as evidence to verify an assault occurred,” she said. “As comforting as that sounds, we have seen time and time again that VA is vastly inconsistent in applying those standards. What one regional office will accept as proof, another will deny. “The bottom line is that for too long the burden of proof has been on the veteran, and that needs to change now.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Rick Maze | April 17, 2013 ++]

GI Bill Update 144: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

Spouses and children of service members made up almost one-fourth of Post-9/11 GI Bill users last year, and their numbers appear to be growing, according to data provided by the Veterans Affairs Department. Troops and veterans, who can transfer the generous education benefit after meeting time-in-service thresholds, still accounted for the majority of Post-9/11 users in 2012: nearly 500,000 people, representing about a 13 percent increase from the previous year. But use of the benefit by spouses and children grew even faster. The number of spouses using Post-9/11 benefits jumped from some 32,000 in 2011 to more than 54,000 last year, an increase of nearly 70 percent. The rate of use by children increased more than 13 percent, to 93,500. Ryan Gallucci, an official with Veterans of Foreign Wars, said he's pleased to see the big increase in spouse usage, since the transient nature of military life leads to “significant economic disadvantages” for them. “I think it's also important to note that total enrollment among all three groups is up,” he said.

Overall, more than 646,000 people used the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2012, up 16 percent from the 555,000 users last year, data indicate. VA provided Military Times with numbers of Post-9/11 GI Bill users broken into the three categories, for the 2011 and 2012 fiscal years, which run from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30. VA was unable to produce additional years of data or more in-depth demographic information, such as a breakdown of the paygrades of the service members sharing their education benefits with family. VA also issued new information detailing how much money it paid for Post-9/11 benefits for troops, veterans, spouses and children in 2012. Such information was not available for 2011, officials said. While veterans and service members account for about 77 percent of the people using the benefit, they used more than 84 percent of the dollars spent on the program. Spouses, a little more than 8 percent of the demographic pie, used only about 3.5 percent of the dollars Why service members and veterans are pursuing more costly educations, on average, than spouses is unclear, though Gallucci suggested that Yellow Ribbon scholarships, which are available only to service members and veterans, could be a factor. Gallucci and Michael Dakduk, executive director of Student Veterans of America, both cautioned that drawing broad conclusions from the limited VA data is difficult.

One trend that Dakduk expects to continue over coming years is the overall rise in GI Bill usage. “There's a drawdown occurring right now,” Dakduk said. “I think you're going to see a rise in usage from veterans and from spouses and children.” Gallucci speculated that the drawdown might result in faster growth of GI Bill usage among veterans than among their family members. “Are we hitting a peak where transferred benefits are being taken advantage of?” he said. “You're going to have a lot more veterans and service members eligible for the benefit who need it for their own education.” The drawdown may also prevent some in the military from serving the number of years required to become eligible to transfer benefits, Gallucci noted. To transfer Post-9/11 benefits, a service member must have at least six years in the armed forces and agree to serve another four. Alternatively, troops can transfer benefits if they:

- Are eligible for retirement or will become eligible through August of this year.
- Have served at least 10 years, are prevented by law or policy from serving a full additional four years and agree to serve as much examining time as allowed.

The benefit can be transferred, in whole or in part, to a service member's children, spouse or both. The Post-9/11 GI Bill covers the full cost of in-state tuition at public universities, helps cover books and pays a generous housing stipend that varies depending on location but averages \$1,400 to \$1,500 per month nationwide. The VA data provides a fuller picture of the frequency of benefit transfers, but also leaves many questions unanswered. "Is this [benefit transferring] a trend among officer versus enlisted?" Gallucci said. "I don't think we have enough data to go off of to make a really informed opinion." Dakduk said his organization is working with VA to get more in-depth data on the demographics of service members who transfer their benefits, and hopes to know more by year's end. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | George Altman | 15 Apr 2013 ++]

GI Bill Update 145: Soldiers who opt to transfer their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits to a family member will now be required to serve an extra four years in the Army, regardless of the amount of time they've already been in the service. The policy change, announced in a 15 APR memo to military personnel, starts 1 AUG. The new rule will affect mainly retirement-eligible senior officers and enlisted soldiers. The current policy allows retirement-eligible members to transfer their GI benefits to a family member with anywhere from zero to three extra years' service depending on the length of time the applicant has been in the military. Non-retirement-eligible soldiers who wish to transfer their GI Bill benefits to a family member were already required to have six years of active duty and then re-up for another four years.

The new policy makes the additional four-years a requirement for anyone wanting to transfer their benefits. "This is a benefit. Soldiers are entitled to the benefit for their own use, but to transfer to dependents: that is used as a recruiting and retention tool," said Lt. Col. Mark Viney, chief of the Enlisted Professional Development Branch. Viney said if a soldier has incurred additional time in service in order to transfer GI benefits and then is unable to serve that additional time, he or she may be required to pay back the benefits. That rule won't apply to soldiers who are involuntarily separated from the Army as it looks to draw down its number of troops. "We want soldiers to be informed of the impact of this change in policy," Viney said. "This is going to impact their decisions and their families, and whether or not they are going to have this money available to find their dependent's education."

The Coast Guard TEB website states it as clearly as possible: "If you don't want to stay in the [Insert Your Service Branch Here] longer than 20 years, be sure to transfer at least one month of benefits to each dependent before you reach the 16-year point in your career." It is highly recommended you give at least one month to each dependent. If you have given a dependent "0" months and then you separate/retire, you will NOT be able to grant them benefits thereafter. You will only be able to modify benefits for those dependents granted eligibility prior to your separation. For some guidance on how to Transfer Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits refer to http://www.uscg.mil/reserve/docs/member_resources/Education/How_To_Process_a_TEB_Applicationv2.pdf [Source: Alabama Media Group | Leada Gore | 18 Apr 2013 ++]

GI Bill Update 146: Veteran service organizations and some lawmakers expressed support for a bill to push public colleges and universities to offer in-state tuition rates to all veterans, but university advocacy groups, as well as the Veterans Affairs Department, are not on board. All parties praised the goal of H.R.357: to prevent vets from being charged higher, out-of-state rates that the Post-9/11 GI Bill won't fully cover, and from being saddled with student loan debt as a result. Yet during a 11 APR hearing of a House Veterans' Affairs Committee's economic opportunity panel, doubts were tuition for all vets would be ineligible to receive GI Bill money under the proposal. Such a mandate wouldn't just raised about how the bill would reach that goal. Any school that doesn't offer in-state tuition for all vets would be ineligible to receive GI Bill money under the proposal. Such a mandate wouldn't just

punish schools but also could hurt vets whose preferred schools were barred from accepting Post-9/11 benefits, some witnesses said.

Vets who may have lost their state residency status when the military required them to move would have to choose between settling for their second-choice schools or finding another way to pay for college, likely including loans. “ The in-state tuition requirements vary across all 50 states, and within schools, and one of our concerns is: Could, or might, or how, would we help define a program that would not limit choices to our veterans?” said Curtis Coy, a VA deputy undersecretary. Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), who is sponsoring the bill, told the subcommittee federal dollars usually come with requirements and universities, school boards and state legislatures should make the effort to comply with his proposed requirement. “While it may be difficult to change residency requirements, it’s an opportunity for the appropriate government bodies, and those bodies that determine tuition rates, to recognize the contribution of the 1 percent who defend the 99 percent,” Miller said.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill covers the full cost of tuition at a public university at in-state tuition rates, but not the additional money such schools charge out-of-state students. The difference between the two rates is not small: \$8,655 was the average cost of in-state tuition in fees at public universities in the 2012-13 school year, but that figure jumped to \$21,706 for out-of-state students, according to the College Board. Under Miller’s bill, schools would have to pay the full difference between the in-state and out-of-state rates for vets. Michael Dakduk, who spoke in favor of Miller’s proposal alongside representatives of Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, drew a parallel between this situation and the debate over private, for-profit colleges. The for-profit sector has come under intense scrutiny in Washington from critics who accuse many such schools of pursuing service members mainly to rake in profits, viewing them as “dollar signs in uniform.” “Now we have an instance where public universities ... are looking at veterans as dollar-signs as well,” Dakduk said.

Susan Aldridge, a senior fellow at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, described public institutions as in a financial bind, with state governments across the country sharply cutting the state dollars that help subsidize in-state tuition. In addition, it is often those same state governments — and not the schools themselves — that have the power to set public university tuition rates and rules, Aldridge said. As a result, some schools will likely “not have the ability to charge in-state rates, even if they desire to do so,” she said. The economic opportunity panel has scheduled further action on the bill in late April. [Source: MilitayTimes e-Report | Rick Maze | 11 Apr 2013 ++]

WWII Vets [42]: Just before New Year's Day 1945, Don Worpell packed his gear for a train ride from Camp Butner, N.C., to what his World War II papers described as a "secret destination" in Massachusetts. His crack artillery unit had spent six months in Carolina's hardwood forest honing their long-range gunnery skills, and Worpell, a 21-year-old draftee from Detroit, had just completed eight months of engineering courses at Loyola University on the Army's dime. Instead of the .30-caliber carbine that he slung over his shoulder, he was ready to fight the war with maps, a range-finder and a surveyor's transit. He would use these tools and his math skills to calculate where his team should aim their howitzers to kill the enemy. It was all part of a plan to help Lt. Gen. George S. Patton drive Nazi forces on a breakneck retreat after the Battle of the Bulge.

He had no idea when he left the "secret destination" staging area at Camp Myles Standish and boarded the troop ship at Boston Harbor on Jan. 10, 1945, that he was beginning a journey that would change his life forever. "It took us two weeks to get across because we were zigzagging to avoid German submarines. That was a long time on the ship," he said of the vessel, Uruguay, which dropped anchor at Le Havre, France, on Jan. 21, 1945. After a few

months of firing their big guns to chase Nazi troops, Worpell and the rest of the 914th Field Artillery Battalion witnessed the horrors that soldiers in Patton's Third Army found when they liberated Ohrdruf concentration camp in early April 1945. The soldiers of the 914th stood behind Patton, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower and Gen. Omar Bradley when they saw where American POWs too weak to walk as human shields had been gunned down by Nazi guards at Ohrdruf. It was, Worpell said, days before Adolf Hitler committed suicide. "I was just in awe of all the death and mangled bodies," recalled Worpell, 89. "As we got close to Ohrdruf, the guards shot all the prisoners who could not travel."



Don Worpell 1945

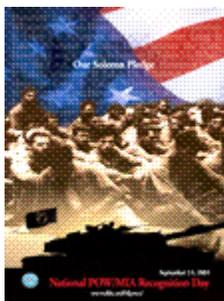
The reflections of Worpell, former psychologist at the Las Vegas Mental Health Center, are backed up in the battalion's log from April 6, 1945. "It was here that the first real Nazi 'horror' atrocities were viewed by the members of the 914th. The concentration camp of Ohrdruf was a revelation to be indelibly etched in the memories of all men of the 914th Field Artillery," the narrative reads. "Men lying in heaps where they had fallen when murdered was one sight; a neat stack of at least 50 murdered bodies sprinkled thoughtfully with lime; and a large improvised incinerator which disposed of countless numbers of unfortunate prisoners." The sight, said Worpell, even upset Patton, the "blood-and-guts" general known for his toughness: "Patton started to cry. Eisenhower just stood there looking."



Worpell's battalion, part of the 89th Infantry Division, had bombarded the Germans on their retreat, driving them across the Rhine River in late March 1945. Some days they fired hundreds of 105 mm shells. "I rode on a truck, and my job was to calculate where our howitzers should shoot to get the Germans," he said. "I'd have to go out into the field and survey their positions," he said of the artillery squads. "They'd get information from the forward observers, and using algebra and trigonometry, I'd figure out how they should aim their guns to hit the targets." The German soldiers, he said, "kept running in front of us. They were being chased. As they left, they were killing people along the way because we found bodies in the ditches and along side the road." The war left its mark on all the soldiers of the 914th, according to the unit's narrative, which described the battalion's return to the French coast in June 1945. "Taps was sounded for the battalion in France, a battalion which had just reached the peak of fighting efficiency in combat as the war ended," the log reads. "However, a new era of peace faced all these men with a challenge for the future - the future which was fought for."

Worpell completed his tour unscathed, but his brother, who also served in Europe, was wounded. Looking back, he said the experience "was a terrible situation, but it was something we had to do. The world came out better because of what we accomplished. Hitler was out to conquer as much as he could. So we put a stop to him." Nevertheless, he said, "It cost us a lot of money, a lot of lives, and there was a lot of limitations in this country because of that." Worpell continued his college education on the G.I. Bill after coming home, but switched majors, earning a doctorate in counseling, guidance and psychology from the University of Michigan. He then spent 25 years helping people at the Las Vegas Mental Health Center. [Source: Las Vegas Review-Journal | Keith Rogers | 29 Dec 2012 ++]

POW/MIA Update 40: "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 (73,000+), Korean War (7,900+), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,655), 1991 Gulf War (0), and OEF/OIF (6). 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.dtic.mil/dpmo/accounted_for. For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1420. The remains of the following MIA/POW's have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:



Family members seeking more information about missing loved ones may 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:

Vietnam

- None

Korea

- The DPMO announced 22 APR that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Master Sgt. **Robert A. Stein**, 29, of Jamestown, N.Y., will be buried April 27, in Arlington Heights, Ill. In late 1950, Stein and elements of the 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT) were engaged by vastly superior numbers of enemy forces east of the Chosin Reservoir near Sinhung-ri, South Hamgyong Province, North Korea. On Dec. 1, 1950, remnants of the 31st RCT, known historically as Task Force Faith, began a fighting withdrawal to a more defensible position near Hagaru-ri, south of the reservoir. Stein was reported missing Dec. 2, 1950. After the 1953 armistice, surviving prisoners of war who returned during "Operation Big Switch" said Stein had died in a POW camp during an aircraft rocket attack. Stein's remains were not part of the 1954 United Nations and Communist Forces remains exchange known as "Operation Glory." Between 1991 and 1994, North Korea gave the United States 208 boxes of human remains believed to contain the remains of 200-400 U.S. servicemen. North Korean documents, turned over with some of the boxes, indicated that some of the remains were recovered from the area where Stein was last seen. In the identification of the remains, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence, compiled by DPMO and JPAC researchers, and forensic identification tools, such as dental comparison, to identify Stein. They also used mitochondrial DNA—which matched Stein's cousin.

World War II

- None

[Source: http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news_releases Apr 2013 ++]

Saving Money: Whether you're headed to Disneyland or Walt Disney World, you've already shelled out big bucks for accommodations and park tickets. It might be the happiest place on Earth, but a Disney theme park is also a business designed to separate you from your money. When it comes to drinks, snacks, souvenirs, meals, and even strollers, you could easily end up doubling the cost of your trip. Still, everyone should get the Disney experience at least once in their lifetime, and it is still possible to have a great vacation without spending a fortune. It is possible to save money at Disney theme parks. Most of the items that you can purchase on-site are highly overpriced. Disney knows that you're in the buying mood when you visit their parks, which is why you'll happily whip out your wallet to pay \$10 for a souvenir you wouldn't otherwise buy. It's always a good idea to check yourself before using your credit card or handing over cash at Disney – would you buy the item or snack at that price from the grocery store or mall? If the answer is no, you might want to reevaluate your potential purchase. If your kids start to beg for souvenirs, take a minute to remind everyone that you're there to have fun – not to spend.



Don't skip the Disney experience entirely because you think you can't afford the steep travel, lodging, and food prices. Be creative and you can find ways to maximize your vacation for less money. You'll get the same amazing memories with less damage to your bank account. Disney parks become much more affordable when you know how and where to save your money:

1. **Plan for the Off-Season.** Do you really want to score the deepest discounts at Disney? Plan your trip anytime from September to May; January through March will likely score you the deepest discounts. Nearby hotels and on-site resorts offer discounted rates, and as an added bonus, the parks will be less crowded, meaning more time on rides and less time to get cranky while waiting in the sun.

2. **Stay Off-Resort.** Sure, Disneyland and Disney World offer a ton of resorts and hotels that are on-site at the parks, but they're very pricey, and you might not receive the free amenities offered at other hotels. If you check out hotels [<http://www.moneycrashers.com/ways-save-hotels-vacation/>] that are within five miles of the park, you'll probably find that they're much cheaper, and also offer perks like in-room refrigerators, continental breakfast, and less crowded pools. By finding a hotel with the amenities you want, you can keep your kids entertained after hours, keep your own snacks and drinks cold, and, most importantly, fill up on a healthy breakfast [<http://www.moneycrashers.com/healthy-breakfast-food-ideas/>] before you set foot in the park. Check out travel sites for hotel reviews – you'll score the best deal on one that's a few miles away from the park, but offers a free shuttle to Disney to make up for the distance. Riding a couple of minutes both ways can help save major bucks on your bottom line. You may also want to consider a vacation rental home [<http://www.moneycrashers.com/save-vacation-home-rental/>]. You'll get more space and privacy than a hotel or resort, and you may ultimately pay less than staying at the park.

3. **Pack Drinks and Snacks.** Invest in a quality backpack that you can bring into the park. Fill it with a couple frozen bottles of water, and by the time you've purchased your ticket and start walking around, they'll have started to melt and will be icy cold. Buying drinks at Disney could run about \$2.50 a bottle, so it pays to bring your own. Disney restaurants always offer a free cup of water. If you're totally parched, head to one of the eateries and ask for water only. If your kids are begging for a souvenir, choose the souvenir cup. It costs about \$7, but it means you'll get free juice and soda refills all day long. If you plan to eat on-site, remember that portion sizes at Disney are fairly large. Two kids can easily share one meal and feel full.

4. **Buy Souvenirs Elsewhere.** Who doesn't love a pair of Mickey ears? Disney souvenirs, however, are very expensive when purchased from any of the on-site gift shops. If your kids have a case of the "gimmies," wait until the end of the day and head to a nearby department store. You'll likely find many of the same souvenirs as you will in the park, but at a much cheaper price.

5. **Book for Breakfast or Lunch.** Are you dying to eat with Ariel and Goofy? “Character dining” is one of the best ways to interact with your favorite characters, but you must pay a premium for the privilege. Dinner might be the most popular character meal, but breakfast and lunch give you the same interaction with a cheaper menu. Book your character dining experience for breakfast or lunch, and you’ll spend significantly less than you would if paying for dinner. Plus, it’s likely that the meal will be less crowded.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews Jacqueline Curtis article 13 Apr 2012 ++]

Spanish American War Image 25



Spanish American War - Americans landing at the pier

Notes of Interest:

- **Taxes.** President Obama’s biggest 2012 charitable contribution claimed deduction by far — \$103K — went to the Fisher House Foundation for military families
- **Taxes.** Vice President Biden’s employer is listed as “United States Senate” on his 2012 tax return (i.e. president of the senate).
- **Lone Ranger.** If you are old enough to remember the Lone Ranger on radio check out <http://www.wimp.com/harmonicacarnegie> and reminiscence a little.

- **Vet Care.** Seven out of 10 veterans and service members obtain services from private health care providers, making it difficult for the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense to maintain a complete record of a patient's health care.
- **CPI.** You may not have felt it, but the government says getting by got cheaper last month. The Consumer Price Index dropped 0.2 percent in March. That's after rising 0.7 percent in February,
- **Overcharging.** Laptop batteries are lithium-ion, and will only keep a certain amount of charge, so they won't take on more than they can handle, even if you leave your laptop plugged in all day.
- **VA Claim Appeals.** The U.S. court of Appeals for Veterans claims provides a list of attorneys by state at http://www.uscourts.cavc.gov/public_list.php who have been admitted to practice before the Court and have expressed an interest in representing appellants.
- **Vet Advocates.** At NOVA's website <http://www.vetadvocates.com/directory2.html> can be found a list of Veteran advocate by state.
- **Doolittle Raid.** An interesting video regarding the raid narrated by Doolittle's granddaughter is available for viewing at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgt8PMoRGG8>.
- **MFH.** If you are either a veteran interested in living in a medical foster home (MFH), or interested in applying to become a caregiver, call the VA Medical Foster Home Program at 704-639-2370, ext. 8657.
- **Tootsie Rolls.** If you ever visit the National Museum of the Marine Corps, look for tootsie roll wrappers in the Chosen Reservoir display. To see more on this review the tape at http://www.youtube.com/embed/8emP0_xDP2Q?feature=player_detailpage

[Source: Various 16-30 Apr 2013 ++]

Medicare Fraud Update 118: Six U.S. Senators are calling for an overhaul of the federal government's \$35 billion plan for doctors and hospitals to switch from paper to electronic medical records, citing concerns from patient privacy to possible Medicare billing fraud. The report issued 16 APR by the half-dozen Republicans concedes that many lawmakers and medical experts believe the digital systems can reduce health care costs and improve the quality of care by reducing duplicative testing and cutting down on medical errors. But the report asserts that the Obama administration's push to use billions of dollars in stimulus money helping doctors and hospitals buy digital systems needs to be recalibrated. "Now, nearly four years after the enactment...and after hundreds of pages of regulations implementing the program," the document says, "we see evidence that the program is at risk of not achieving its goals and that \$35 billion in taxpayer money is being spent ineffectively in the process." Among the report's conclusions:

- Despite expectations of cost savings, the digital systems may be increasing unnecessary medical tests and billings to Medicare.
- The government has not demanded that the various digital systems be able to share medical information, a critical element to their success.
- Few controls exist to prevent fraud and abuse. Many doctors and hospitals are receiving money by simply attesting that they are meeting required standards.
- Procedures to protect the privacy of patient records are "lax and may jeopardize sensitive patient data."
- It remains unclear whether doctors and hospitals that have accepted stimulus funding will be able to maintain the systems without government money.

Some of the concerns cited were detailed by the Center for Public Integrity's "Cracking the Codes" series last year. The year-long investigation found that thousands of medical professionals have steadily billed higher rates for treating seniors on Medicare over the last decade -- adding \$11 billion or more to their fees. The Center's probe uncovered a broad range of costly billing errors and abuses that have plagued Medicare for years--from confusion over how to pick proper payment codes to outright overcharges. The findings indicated that Medicare billing

problems are worsening as doctors and hospitals switch to electronic health records. Addressing the coding abuses the senators wrote: "However, early reports raise concerns that health IT may have actually accelerated the ordering of unnecessary care as well as increased billing for the same procedures."The administration's Office of National Coordinator, which oversees the program, referred a request for comment on the report to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. A CMS official did not respond to written questions. It's unclear what steps administration officials are taking to combat fraud and abuse from errant billing, a process known as "upcoding."

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Attorney General Eric Holder last September notified five medical groups of their intention to ramp up investigative oversight of upcoding, including possible criminal prosecutions, but it is not clear if any follow-up actions are underway. In addition, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services on May 3 is holding a summit in Baltimore to discuss electronic records systems, "the increase in code levels billed for some Medicare services, and appropriate coding in an increasingly electronic environment." The Congressional report, titled "REBOOT: Re-examining the Strategies Needed to Successfully Adopt Health IT" was released on Tuesday by Senators John Thune (R-S.D.), Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), Richard Burr (R-N.C.), Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), and Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.). [Source: Huffington Post | Fred Schulte | April 16, 2013 ++]

Medicare Fraud Update 119: Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius on 24 APR announced a proposed rule that would increase rewards paid to Medicare beneficiaries and others whose tips about suspected fraud lead to the successful recovery of funds to as high as \$9.9 million. In addition, a new funding opportunity released this month supports the expansion of Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) activities to educate Medicare beneficiaries on how to prevent, detect and report Medicare fraud, waste and abuse. "President Obama has made the elimination of fraud, waste and abuse, particularly in health care, a top priority for the administration," said Secretary Sebelius. "Today's announcement is a signal to Medicare beneficiaries and caregivers, who are on the frontlines of this fight, that they are critical partners in helping protect taxpayer dollars."

Over the last three years, the administration has recovered over \$14.9 billion in fraud, some of which resulted from fraud reporting by individuals - a proven tool in helping the government detect fraud, waste and abuse in the Medicare program. Under the proposed changes, a person that provides specific information leading to the recovery of funds may be eligible to receive a reward of 15 percent of the amount recovered, up to nearly \$10 million. HHS currently offers a reward of 10 percent up to \$1,000 under the current incentive reward program. The changes are modeled on an IRS program that has returned \$2 billion in fraud since 2003. The proposed rule would also strengthen certain provider enrollment provisions including allowing HHS to deny enrollment of providers who are affiliated with an entity that has unpaid Medicare debt, deny or revoke billing privileges for individuals with felony convictions, and revoke privileges for providers and suppliers who are abusing their billing privileges.

The SMP is a national, volunteer-based program that empowers Medicare beneficiaries to prevent and report Medicare fraud, waste, and abuse. Since 1997, more than 3.5 million beneficiaries have learned how to recognize and fight fraud and abuse, and more than 7,000 referrals have been made to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the Office of the Inspector General for investigation. To expand the SMP program's capacity to reach more Medicare beneficiaries, the Administration for Community Living issued a new funding opportunity. Each of the current 54 SMP projects is eligible for varying funding levels, up to a total of \$7.3 million across the program. These proposed changes will support the administration's comprehensive approach to program integrity, including the work being done with the Health Care Fraud Prevention and Enforcement Action Team, a joint effort between HHS and the Department of Justice to fight health care fraud. This joint effort recovered a record \$4.2 billion in taxpayer dollars in fiscal year 2012. To read a fact sheet about the proposed rule visit:

Medicare Fraud Update 120:



- **Los Angeles CA** — A doctor with a clinic in the San Fernando Valley faced sentencing 15 APR for bilking Medicare out of more than \$3 million by submitting bills for procedures never performed, sometimes involving "patients" who were already dead. **Pezhman Ebrahimzadeh** -- who is known as Pez Abrahams -- pleaded guilty in January to one count of health care fraud before U.S. District Judge George H. Wu, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. Since entering his plea, state authorities arrested Ebrahimzadeh for allegedly sexually assaulting a patient under the guise of conducting a physical examination. He failed to report the March 8 arrest to pretrial authorities, as required by the conditions of his bond. Ebrahimzadeh, 50, of Calabasas owns the Winnetka Medical Group, a cosmetic health care clinic operating under the name Health & Beauty Clinic, where cosmetic treatments that involve radiofrequency lasers and liposuction are performed. As some of his patients were Medicare beneficiaries, Ebrahimzadeh obtained their beneficiary information, which was used to bill Medicare for procedures he did not perform. He also obtained beneficiary information for patients he never treated, and used that data to submit other bogus bills to Medicare, according to court papers. For one of about 25 Medicare patients who were dead at the time of supposed treatments, he billed the federal insurance program for seven separate high-paying procedures, altering medical records in an attempt to conceal the fraud. In relation to the phony bills submitted to Medicare, Ebrahimzadeh typically claimed he had performed three expensive procedures: revascularization, ablation of a bone tumor or the placement of a radiotherapy catheter in a breast, federal prosecutors said. He made those claims despite lacking the equipment needed to perform revascularizations or the placement of radiotherapy catheters, according to prosecutors. Between September 2008 and April 2012, Ebrahimzadeh submitted \$7.5 million in bogus claims, and Medicare paid just over \$3 million. Ebrahimzadeh faces up to 10 years in federal prison but is expected to receive less than five years behind bars, prosecutors said.
- **Chicago IL** — An elderly man was admitted to Sacred Heart Hospital on Chicago's West Side in late February, intubated and sedated for more than a week and scheduled for an emergency tracheotomy even though it was medically unnecessary, federal prosecutors allege. After a hospital administrator raised questions, the surgery was postponed. Later that day, the administrator asked the longtime owner of the hospital, **Edward Novak**, if he was upset about the cancellation. "Tell me about it! Tell me about it!" Novak allegedly replied. What Novak didn't know was the administrator was secretly recording their conversation while working undercover as part of a federal investigation into an elaborate kickback scheme at Sacred Heart that allegedly involved everything from unnecessary sedation to penile implants, all fraudulently billed to Medicare and Medicaid. The three-year investigation came to light early 16 APR

when federal agents arrested Novak, 58, of Park Ridge, as well as another hospital executive and four physicians in connection with a scheme that prosecutors said netted more than \$225,000 in cash and at least \$2 million in health care program reimbursements. Also charged were the hospital's executive vice president and chief financial officer, Roy Payawal, 64, of Burr Ridge, as well as four of the hospital's affiliated doctors: Venkateswara Kuchipudi, 66, of Oak Brook; Percy Conrad May Jr., 75; Subir Maitra, 73; and Shanin Moshiri, 57, all of Chicago. Agents executed search warrants 16 APR at the small for-profit hospital hauling out boxes of medical records, computer drives and other evidence. About 40 patients were at the 119-bed hospital when the raid took place. At a news conference, interim U.S. Attorney Gary Shapiro hinted more arrests would be coming, pointing to a government affidavit that included wide-ranging allegations against additional doctors and hospital administrators.

1. In one example, the affidavit referred to an uncharged "Physician E," the doctor who was to perform the tracheotomy on the elderly man that was postponed. The affidavit alleged that in 28 such procedures performed at Sacred Heart by Physician E since 2010, five patients died within two weeks of the surgery, more than triple the statewide mortality rate.
 2. Investigators are also looking into "Physician D," who allegedly ordered patients to be heavily sedated over a long period of time, making it more difficult to be weaned off a ventilator and leading in some cases to a tracheotomy that might otherwise be unnecessary.
 3. The investigation also uncovered a system to admit nursing home patients to Sacred Heart "irrespective of any medical necessity" by using certain ambulance companies allegedly in on the scheme that were able to transport them as emergency room patients and directly bill Medicare, according to the affidavit. No one has been specifically charged in the transport scheme.
- **Fort Worth TX** — The owner of two Texas-based durable medical equipment companies **Hugh Marion Willett, 69**, was sentenced 18 APR to 41 months in prison, followed by three years of supervised release, and ordered to pay \$182,450 in restitution. **He** was found guilty in January by U.S. District Judge Jane J. Boyle in the Northern District of Texas on all seven counts of a June 2012 second superseding indictment: one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud and six counts of health care fraud stemming from a durable medical equipment (DME) fraud scheme. His wife, Jean Willett, previously pleaded guilty to the same charges and was sentenced in September 2012 to 50 months in prison. The evidence at trial showed that between 2006 and 2010, the Willets co-owned and operated JS&H Orthopedic Supply LLC and Texas Orthotic and Prosthetic Systems Inc., which claimed to provide orthotics and other DME to beneficiaries of Medicare and private insurance benefit programs including Aetna, Blue Cross Blue Shield and CIGNA. Evidence presented in court proved that both of these companies intentionally submitted claims to Medicare and other insurers for products that were materially different from and more expensive than what was actually provided, and that Hugh Marion Willett was a knowing and willful participant in the fraud.
 - **San Gabriel CA** — A former owner of a medical equipment supply company in San Gabriel pleaded guilty 22 APR to conspiring with others to defraud Medicare, officials said. **Tigran Aklyan, 37**, of Van Nuys pleaded guilty to one of conspiracy to commit health care fraud. He faces a maximum of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine at his 5 AUG sentencing. Aklyan was the owner and president of Las Tunas Medical Equipment Inc. From about October 2007 through May 2009, he provided power wheelchairs and other equipment that weren't medically necessary to Medicare beneficiaries and also submitted false claims to Medicare, according to court documents. Authorities said Aklyan paid the owners and operators of fraudulent medical clinics to provide him with prescriptions and supporting medical documents for the power wheelchairs and equipment that he billed to Medicare. From approximately Dec. 17, 2007, through Feb. 20, 2009, officials said Aklyan submitted about \$910,377 in fraudulent claims to Medicare for power wheelchairs and related services. Medicare paid Las Tunas Medical Equipment approximately \$653,461 on those claims.

- **Killen AL** — A federal judge on 22 APR sentenced a Lauderdale County physician to one year and a day in prison for health care fraud totaling about \$1 million in connection with billing a health insurer and Medicare for non-reimbursable cosmetic skin treatment. U.S. District Judge Inge P. Johnson sentenced **Diana K. McCutcheon**, 55, of Killen, on four counts of health care fraud and two counts of wire fraud. Judge Johnson ordered McCutcheon to pay restitution of \$990,389 to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama and Medicare. McCutcheon also must pay the same amount to the government as proceeds of illegal activity. McCutcheon agreed to the forfeiture in her plea agreement with the government. She pleaded guilty to the charges in November. “This defendant carried on a scheme for several years, fraudulently billing private and public insurance plans for payments she was not entitled to,” Vance said. McCutcheon conducted her fraud through her medical clinics in Elgin and Lexington in North Alabama. According to court records, she operated a scheme to defraud Blue Cross Blue Shield and Medicare between 2007 and 2011 by fraudulently billing for the removal of multiple skin lesions on patients who had received cosmetic laser and other treatments for various skin conditions. The conditions included sun spots, age spots and wrinkles and were not covered by insurance.
- **Detroit MI** — An employee of Detroit medical service companies that fabricated patient visit notes and other documents as part of a \$24 million home health care fraud scheme pleaded guilty 24 APR for her role in the conspiracy. **Dana Sharma**, 30, of Detroit, pleaded guilty in the Eastern District of Michigan to one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud. According to court documents, Sharma worked at purported home health companies, including First Choice Home Health Care Services Inc. and Reliance Home Care LLC, where she and other conspirators agreed to submit false and fraudulent claims to Medicare for home health services. Among other things, Sharma organized and maintained company patient files, knowing that these files contained falsified patient visit notes that created the false impression that home health care had been provided to patients. She admitted that she knew that these documents would be used by these companies to submit claims to Medicare for home health services that were not medically necessary and/or not provided. Between January 2007 and May 2012, Sharma’s conduct caused home health companies to submit claims to Medicare for services that were not medically necessary and/or not provided, which in turn caused Medicare to pay these companies approximately \$923,286. At sentencing, scheduled for Aug. 1, 2013, Sharma faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.
- **Miami FL** — Last summer, Miami prosecutors made a splash when they charged **Oscar L. Sanchez**, owner of a Naples check-cashing store, with laundering millions of Medicare dollars that wound up in Cuba. His case marked the first time that authorities traced fleeced U.S. healthcare proceeds to Cuba’s state-controlled bank. On 26 APR, without fanfare, the now-convicted “financier for fraudsters” was sentenced to 4½ years in prison by a Miami federal judge. Sanchez, 47, was also ordered to serve an additional year of home confinement, turn over about a half-million dollars in assets to the U.S. government and perform 1,600 hours of community service. He must surrender on June 15 to start his prison term. U.S. District Judge Paul Huck generally granted prosecutor Ron Davidson’s recommendation to reduce Sanchez’s sentence by 40 percent because the defendant helped authorities bring Medicare fraud and money-laundering charges against three other suspects. Sanchez, a Cuban-born U.S. citizen, was indicted on a single conspiracy charge of playing a pivotal role in laundering the profits of 70 South Florida medical companies that falsely billed Medicare for \$374.4 million and were paid \$70.7 million. In late August, he pleaded guilty, held responsible for laundering about \$10 million of that total. Soon after, however, it became apparent that Sanchez was not the mastermind of the scheme, as many first believed. In October, prosecutors revealed that Sanchez collaborated with a currency exchange businessman who allegedly played the dominant role in the scheme. Through Sanchez’s cooperation, prosecutors discovered that an offshore remittance company called Caribbean Transfers financed the complex money-laundering

ring that moved more than \$30 million in stolen Medicare money from South Florida into Cuba's banking system.

[Source: Various 16-30 Apr 2013 ++]

Medicaid Fraud Update 84:

- **Miami FL** — A federal jury today convicted a Miami-area supervisor of a mental health care company, Health Care Solutions Network (HCSN), for helping to orchestrate a fraud scheme that crossed state lines and that resulted in the submission of more than \$63 million in fraudulent claims to Medicare and Florida Medicaid. After a five-day trial, a jury in the Southern District of Florida found **Wondera Eason**, 51, guilty of conspiracy to commit health care fraud. Sentencing is scheduled for July 8, 2013. Eason was employed as the Director of Medical Records at HCSN's Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP). A PHP is a form of intensive treatment for severe mental illness. In Florida, HCSN operated community mental health centers at two locations. After stealing millions from Medicare and Medicaid in Florida, HCSN's owner, Armando Gonzalez, exported the scheme to North Carolina, opening a third HCSN location in Hendersonville. Evidence at trial showed that at all three locations, Eason, a certified medical records technician, oversaw the alteration, fabrication, and forgery of thousands of documents, which purported to support the fraudulent claims HCSN submitted to Medicare and Florida Medicaid. Many of these medical records were created weeks or months after the patients were admitted to HCSN facilities in Florida for purported PHP treatment and were utilized to support false and fraudulent billing to government sponsored health care benefit programs, including Medicare and Florida Medicaid. Eason directed therapists to fabricate documents, and she also forged the signature of therapists and others on documents that she was in charge of maintaining. Eason interacted with Medicare and Medicaid auditors, providing them with false and fraudulent documents, while certifying the documents were accurate. The "therapy" at HCSN oftentimes consisted of nothing more than patients watching Disney movies, playing bingo and having barbecues. Eason directed therapists to remove any references to these recreational activities in the medical records. According to evidence at trial, Eason was aware that HCSN in Florida paid illegal kickbacks to owners and operators of Miami-Dade County Assisted Living Facilities (ALF) in exchange for patient referral information to be used to submit false and fraudulent claims to Medicare and Medicaid. Eason also knew that many of the ALF referral patients were ineligible for PHP services because many patients suffered from mental retardation, dementia and Alzheimer's disease. From 2004 through 2011, HCSN billed Medicare and the Florida Medicaid program approximately \$63 million for purported mental health services.
- **Newark NJ** — A Hunterdon County pediatrician is facing up to 10 years in prison for allegedly overbilling the federal Medicaid program by more than \$73,000 during the course of more than three years, authorities said Friday. Ibilola Ighama-Amegor, 51, of Hampton, was charged 26 APR with 17 counts of second-degree health-care claims fraud and one count each of third-degree Medicaid fraud and third-degree theft by deception, according to New Jersey Attorney General Jeffrey S. Chiesa. "This defendant allegedly billed as if she was working 24 hours a day," acting state Insurance Fraud Prosecutor Ronald Chillemi said in a statement. "The Office of the Insurance Fraud Prosecutor will continue to crack down on unscrupulous individuals who defraud the Medicaid program, which provides vital assistance to vulnerable New Jersey residents." Ibilola-Amegor is accused of overbilling Medicaid from her Newark-based practice, Quality Pediatric, which investigators reportedly found to be open just seven hours per day, three days a week. Yet she allegedly falsely billed for 24 hours or more of work on 17 days between Jan. 1, 2008, and May 16, 2011, authorities said. In addition to up to 10 years in prison, she is facing potential fines of \$150,000 on

each second-degree charge and \$15,000 on each third-degree charge, according to the Attorney General's office.



Ibilola Ighama-Amegor

[Source: Various 16-30 Apr 2013 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits: The state of Minnesota provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Veteran State Benefits – MN**” for an overview of the below those benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each refer to <http://www.minnesotaveteran.org>.

- Housing Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits

[Source:<http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/minnesota-state-veterans-benefits.html> Apr 2013++]

Veteran Hearing/Mark-up Schedule: Following is the current schedule of recent and future Congressional hearings and markups pertaining to the veteran community. Congressional hearings are the principal formal method by which committees collect and analyze information in the early stages of legislative policymaking. Hearings usually include oral testimony from witnesses, and questioning of the witnesses by members of Congress. When a U.S. congressional committee meets to put a legislative bill into final form it is referred to as a mark-up. Veterans are encouraged to contact members of these committees prior to the event listed and provide input on what they want their legislator to do at the event. Membership of each committee and their contact info can be found at <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/committees.tt?commid=svete>. Missed House Veteran Affairs committee (HVAC) hearings can viewed at <http://veterans.house.gov/in-case-you-missed-it>. Text of completed Senate Veteran Affairs Committee (SVAC) hearings are available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/committee.action?chamber=senate&committee=va&collection=CHRG&plus=CHRG>:

- **May 8, 2013 (T).** The Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs intends to hold a legislative hearing on VA's health care programs and other purposes. The tentative bill list:
 - *S. 49* Veterans Health Equity Act of 2013 (Shaheen)
 - *S. 62* Check the Box for Homeless Veterans Act of 2013 (Boxer)
 - *S. 131* Woman Veterans and Other Health Care Improvements Act of 2013 (Murry)
 - *S. 229* Corporal Michael J. Crescenz Act of 2013 (Toomey)
 - *S. 287* A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand the definition of homeless Veteran for purposes of benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes (Begich).
 - *S. 325* A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the maximum age for Children eligible for medical care under the CHAMPVA program, and for other purposes (Tester)
 - *S. 412* Keep Our Commitment to Veterans Act (Landrieu)
 - *S. 422* Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act of 2013 (Blumenthal)
 - *S. 455* A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to transport individuals to and from facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs in connection with rehabilitation, counseling, examination, treatment, and care, and for other purposes (Tester)
 - *S. 522* Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act (Durbin)
 - *S. 529* A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to modify the commencement date of the period of service at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, for eligibility for hospital care and medical services in connection with exposure to contaminated water, and for other purposes (Burr)
 - *S. 543* VISN Reorganization Act of 2013 (Burr)
 - *S. 633* A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for coverage under the beneficiary travel program of the Department of Veterans Affairs of certain disabled Veterans for travel in connection with certain special disabilities rehabilitation, and for other purposes (Tester)

- **May 15, 2013 (T).** The Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs intends to hold a legislative hearing on VA's benefit programs and other purposes.
 POC: David Ballenger 1-4646; Joanna Glaze 1-6439;
Current Testimony Status: In Development. The tentative bill list is as follows:
 - *S. 6* Putting Our Veterans Back to Work Act of 2013 (Reid)
 - *S. 200* A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the interment in national cemeteries under the control of the National Cemetery Administration of individuals who served in combat support of the Armed forces in the Kingdom of Laos between February 28, 1961, and May 15, 1975, and for other purposes (Murkowski)
 - *S.257* GI Bill Tuition Fairness Act of 2013 (Boozman)
 - *S.262* Veterans Education Equity Act of 2013 (Durbin)
 - *S. 294* Ruth Moore Act of 2013 (Tester)
 - *S. 373* Charlie Morgan Military Spouses Equal Treatment Act of 2013 (Shaheen)
 - *S. 430* Veterans Small Business Opportunity and Protection Act of 2013 (Heller)
 - *S. 492* A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to require States to recognize the Military experience of Veterans when issuing licenses and credentials to Veterans and for other purposes (Burr)
 - *S 495* Careers for Veterans Act of 2013 (Burr)
 - *S. 514* A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide additional Educational Assistance under Post-9/11 Educational Assistance to Veterans pursuing a degree in science, technology, engineering, math, or an area that leads to employment in a high-demand occupation, and for other purposes (Brown)
 - *S 572* Veterans Second Amendment Act (Burr)
 - *S. 629* Honor America's Guard-Reserve Retirees Act of 2013 (Pryor)

- S. 674 Accountability for Veterans Act of 2013 (Heller)
- S. 690 Filipino Veterans Fairness Act of 2013 (Schatz)
- S. 695 A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the Authorization of appropriations for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to pay a monthly assistance allowance to Disabled Veterans training or competing for the Paralympics Team and the authorization of appropriations for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide assistance to United States Paralympics, Inc., and for other purposes
- S. 705 A bill to amend title 36, United States Code, to ensure Memorials commemorating the service of the United States Armed Forces may contain religious symbols, and for other purposes (Burr)

[Source: Veterans Corner w/Michael Isam 29 Apr 2013 ++]

Military History: The Great Locomotive Chase or Andrews' Raid was a military raid that occurred April 12, 1862, in northern Georgia during the American Civil War. One civilian and 22 volunteers from the Union Army, led by civilian scout and part time spy James J. Andrews, commandeered a train and took it northward toward Chattanooga, Tennessee, doing as much damage as possible to the vital Western and Atlantic Railroad (W&A) line from Atlanta to Chattanooga as they went. They were pursued by Confederate forces at first on foot, and later on a succession of locomotives. Because the Union men had cut the telegraph wires, the Confederates could not send warnings ahead to forces along the railway. Confederates captured the raiders and executed some quickly as spies. Some of Andrews' raiders were the first to be awarded the Medal of Honor by the US Congress for their actions, though Andrews himself was not. To learn more details of the raid refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Great Locomotive Chase**" [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Locomotive_Chase Apr 2013 ++]

Military History Anniversaries: Significant **1–15 May** events in U.S. Military History are:

- May 01 1778 – American Revolution: The Battle of Crooked Billet begins in Hatboro, Pennsylvania.
- May 01 1863 – Civil War: Battle of Chancellorsville, VA (29,000 injured or died)
- May 01 1898 – Spanish–American War: The Battle of Manila Bay – the U.S. Navy destroys the Spanish Pacific fleet in the first battle of the war.
- May 01 1960 – Cold War: U–2 incident – Francis Gary Powers, in a Lockheed U–2 spyplane, is shot down over the Soviet Union, sparking a diplomatic crisis.
- May 01 2003 – 2003 invasion of Iraq: In what becomes known as the "Mission Accomplished" speech, on board the USS Abraham Lincoln (off the coast of California), U.S. President George W. Bush declares that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended".
- May 02 1863 – Civil War: Stonewall Jackson is wounded by friendly fire while returning to camp after reconnoitering during the Battle of Chancellorsville. He succumbs to pneumonia eight days later.
- May 02 1945 – WW2: Italian Campaign – General Heinrich von Vietinghoff signs the official instrument of surrender of all Wehrmacht forces in Italy.
- May 02 1945 – WW2: The US 82nd Airborne Division liberates Wöbbelin concentration camp finding 1000 dead inmates, most starved to death.
- May 02 1964 – Vietnam: An explosion sinks the USS Card while docked at Saigon. Viet Cong forces are suspected of placing a bomb on the ship.
- May 03 1926 – US marines land in Nicaragua (9–mo after leaving), stay until 1933
- May 03 1942 – Japanese naval troops invade Tulagi Island in the Solomon Islands during the first part of Operation Mo that results in the Battle of the Coral Sea between Japanese forces and forces from the United States and Australia.

- May 03 1945 – WW2: USS Lagarto (SS-371) sunk by Japanese minelayer Hatsutaka in Gulf of Siam. 86 killed.
- May 04 1942 – WW2: Battle of Coral Sea begun (1st sea battle fought solely in air)
- May 05 1864 – Civil War: The Battle of the Wilderness begins in Spotsylvania County, Virginia.
- May 05 1916 – US marines invade Dominican Republic, stay until 1924
- May 05 1945 – WW II: Admiral Karl Dönitz, President of Germany after Hitler's death, orders all German U-boats to cease offensive operations and return to their bases.
- May 06 1863 – Civil War: The Battle of Chancellorsville ends with the defeat of the Army of the Potomac by Confederate troops.
- May 06 1942 – WW2: On Corregidor, the last American forces in the Philippines surrender to the Japanese.
- May 06 1945 – WW2: Axis Sally delivers her last propaganda broadcast to Allied troops (first was on December 11, 1941).
- May 07 1864 – Civil War: Battle of Wilderness ends (total losses: USA-17,666; CSA-7,500)
- May 07 1915 – WWI: German submarine U-20 sinks RMS Lusitania, killing 1,198 people including 128 Americans. Public reaction to the sinking turns many formerly pro-Germans in the United States against the German Empire.
- May 07 1942 – WW2: During the Battle of the Coral Sea, United States Navy aircraft carrier aircraft attack and sink the Japanese Imperial Navy light aircraft carrier Shoho. The battle marks the first time in the naval history that two enemy fleets fight without visual contact between warring ships.
- May 07 1945 – WW2: Germany signs unconditional surrender terms at Reims, France, ending Germany's participation in the war. The document takes effect the next day.
- May 07 1954 – Vietnam: 55-day Battle of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam ended with Vietnamese insurgents overrunning French forces.
- May 07 1960 – Cold War: U-2 Crisis of 1960 – Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev announces that his nation is holding American U-2 pilot Gary Powers.
- May 07 1984 – Vietnam: Agent Orange class-action suit brought by Vietnam veterans settled out of court for \$180 Million.
- May 08 1846 – Mexican-American War: The Battle of Palo Alto – Zachary Taylor defeats a Mexican force north of the Rio Grande in the first major battle of the war.
- May 08 1942 – WW2: The Battle of the Coral Sea comes to an end with Japanese Imperial Navy aircraft carrier aircraft attacking and sinking the United States Navy aircraft carrier USS Lexington. The battle marks the first time in the naval history that two enemy fleets fight without visual contact between warring ships.
- May 08 1945 – WW2: Combat in Europe ends – V-E Day. German forces agree in Rheims, France, to an unconditional surrender.
- May 08 1972 – Vietnam: U.S. President Richard M. Nixon announces his order to place mines in major North Vietnamese ports in order to stem the flow of weapons and other goods to that nation
- May 09 1951 – Korean War: Air raid on Chinese positions at Yalu River
- May 10 1797 – 1st Navy ship, the "United States," is launched
- May 10 1801 – First Barbary War: The Barbary pirates of Tripoli declare war on the United States of America.
- May 10 1863 – Civil War: Confederate General Stonewall Jackson dies eight days after he is accidentally shot by his own troops.
- May 10 1864 – Civil War: Colonel Emory Upton leads a 10-regiment "Attack-in-depth" assault against the Confederate works at The Battle of Spotsylvania, which, though ultimately unsuccessful, would provide the idea for the massive assault against the Bloody Angle on May 12. Upton is slightly wounded but is immediately promoted to Brigadier general.

- May 10 1865 – Civil War: Jefferson Davis is captured by Union troops near Irwinville, Georgia.
- May 10 1865 – Civil War: In Kentucky, Union soldiers ambush and mortally wound Confederate raider William Quantrill, who lingers until his death on June 6.
- May 10 1941 – WW2: Rudolf Hess parachutes into Scotland in order to try and negotiate a peace deal between the United Kingdom and Germany.
- May 10 1946 – Cold War: First successful launch of an American V–2 rocket at White Sands Proving Ground.
- May 10 1960 – The nuclear submarine USS Triton completes Operation Sandblast, the first underwater circumnavigation of the earth.
- May 10 1969 – Vietnam: The Battle of Dong Ap Bia begins with an assault on Hill 937. It will ultimately become known as Hamburger Hill.
- May 11 1846 – Mexican American War: President James K. Polk asked for and received a Declaration of War against Mexico, starting the Mexican–American War
- May 11 1943 – WW2: American troops invade Attu Island in the Aleutian Islands in an attempt to expel occupying Japanese forces.
- May 11 1944 – WW2: The Allies start a major offensive against the Axis Powers on the Gustav Line.
- May 11 1945 – World War II: Off the coast of Okinawa, the aircraft carrier USS Bunker Hill, is hit by two kamikazes, killing 346 of her crew. Although badly damaged, the ship is able to return to the U.S. under her own power.
- May 12 1780 – Revolutionary War: Charleston, South Carolina is taken by British forces.
- May 12 1863 – Civil War: Battle of Raymond: two divisions of James B. McPherson's XVII Corps (ACW) turn the left wing of Confederate General John C. Pemberton's defensive line on Fourteen Mile Creek, opening up the interior of Mississippi to the Union Army during the Vicksburg Campaign.
- May 12 1864 – Civil War: the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House: thousands of Union and Confederate soldiers die in "the Bloody Angle".
- May 12 1865 – Civil War: The Battle of Palmito Ranch: the first day of the last major land action to take place during the Civil War, resulting in a Confederate victory.
- May 12 1949 – Cold War: The Soviet Union lifts its blockade of Berlin.
- May 12 1962 – Douglas MacArthur delivers his famous "Duty, Honor, Country" valedictory speech at the United States Military Academy.
- May 13 1945 – WW2: US troops conquer Dakeshi Okinawa
- May 14 1863 – Civil War: The Battle of Jackson takes place.
- May 14 2005 – The former USS America, a decommissioned supercarrier of the United States Navy, is deliberately sunk in the Atlantic Ocean after four weeks of live–fire exercises. She is the largest ship ever to be disposed of as a target in a military exercise.
- May 15 1864 – Civil War: Battle of Resaca, Georgia ends.
- May 15 1864 – Civil War: Battle of New Market, Virginia – In a small engagement fought near this central Shenandoah Valley town, a Union force composed of about 10,000 men from a variety of states is opposed by a smaller Confederate force made up primarily of Virginians. Among the troops on the southern side are cadets from the Virginia Military Institute. During the climax of the battle, these boys, ages 12 to 16, charge across an open field, taking casualties but capturing a battery of guns on a commanding hill. Ten cadets are killed and 50 are wounded. Though the battle would end in a Confederate victory, in the long run, it would prove to be futile due to the overwhelming numbers of Union forces which would quickly regroup and advance again down the Valley, burning fields and barns as they moved.
- May 15 1942 – WW2: Lieutenant Ronald Reagan, a cavalry officer, applies for reassignment to the Army Air Force, where he would eventually put his thespian background to use on World War II propaganda films.

- May 15 1962 – Vietnam: US marines arrive in Laos.
- May 15 1972: The U.S. Army Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa) reverted to the full control of Japan but the U.S retained its rights to nuclear free bases.
- May 15 1997 – The United States government acknowledges the existence of the "Secret War" in Laos and dedicates the Laos Memorial in honor of Hmong and other "Secret War" veterans.

[Source: Various Apr 2013 ++]

Military Trivia 73: Unique Military Bases

1. Thule Air Base, one of the most inaccessible United State Air Force Bases, is located in which of the following inhospitable locations? Atacama Desert | Easter Island | Bikini Atoll | Northern Greenland
2. In which American desert would you find Dugway Proving Ground, one of the largest U.S. Army Facilities in the world? Gobi Desert | Mojave Desert | Great Salt Lake Desert | Sonoran Desert
3. The military base known as HAARP, located near Gakona, Alaska, is primarily concerned with the study of which of these options? Non-petroleum based fuels | Ionosphere | Desert plant life | Pharmaceuticals
4. Which of these things about the Cheyenne Mountain Complex is true?

This is the alternate name for Area 51
It is housed 2,000 ft (600 m) inside a mountain
You must be female to be stationed at this location
This is a Russian Air Force base located in Arizona
5. Where would you find Devil's Tower Camp, home to a very strategically placed British Army garrison? Berlin, Germany | Gibraltar | The Falkland Islands | Hong Kong
6. Joint Defense Space Research Facility Pine Gap is a military facility whose main purpose is satellite tracking, and is located in which of these desolate spots?
The center of Australia | The Kamchatka Peninsula | Machu Picchu | The Golan Heights
7. Located southeast of Calgary, in which province would you find CFB Suffield, Canada's largest military base? Nova Scotia | Alberta | Ontario | Prince Edward Island
8. Which military base, located on the southern tip of Nevada, is home to the largest and most advanced air combat training facility in the world? Andrews AFB | MacDill AFB | Ramstein Air Base | Nellis AFB
9. From the outside, RAF Menwith Hill is a military base that appears to the untrained eye to have multiple white objects that look somewhat like which of the following? Pyramids | Obelisks | Swimming pools | Golf balls
10. Which one of these military bases has been used as an option for the landing of the Space Shuttle?

Edwards Air Force Base in California | HMAS Albatross in New South Wales | CFB Halifax in Nova Scotia | Ramstein Air Base in Germany

Answers

- 1) **Greenland.** Thule Air Base is located on the northwest shore of Greenland and is the U.S. Air Forces most northerly Air Base. The weather is so bad that it is accessible only three months each year. Supplies, including medications, equipment and food, must all be brought in or taken out within this small window of time. This base is manned all year around. Its major job is to track ICBM missiles and any other incoming weapons aimed at North America, and to tracks all global satellites. Its construction was very difficult and required North America and Europe to work together in a joint effort. The base is located less than 550 miles (885km) from the magnetic North Pole.
- 2) **Great Salt Lake Desert.** Dugway Proving Ground is located 85 miles (140 km) southwest of Salt Lake City, Utah. It encompasses 1,252.352 sq mi (3,243.576 km²) of the great Salt Lake Desert, an area similar in size to the whole state of Rhode Island, and is surrounded on three side by mountains. Dugway's primary mission is the testing of biological and chemical weapons, and was chosen because of its isolated and secure environment. In March of 1968 over 6,000 sheep died in Skull Valley, which is over 30 miles away from Dugway's testing sites. Necropsy proved they died from a nerve gas being tested at Dugway. While the government did not openly take blame for the incident they did pay the ranchers for their losses.
- 3) **Ionosphere.** HAARP (High Frequency Auroral Research Program) is a highly classified facility whose main object of study is the ionosphere, the uppermost portion of the atmosphere. This facility is jointly run by the U.S. Air Force and Navy as well as the University of Alaska. The classified status of this base has led to it being a favorite target of conspiracy theorists who have blamed it for numerous natural disasters.
- 4) **It is housed 2,000 ft (600 m) inside a mountain.** The Cheyenne Mountain Complex is housed 2,000 ft (600 m) inside Cheyenne Mountain southwest of Colorado Springs, Colorado. This unusual base is a bi-national base and is home to about 200 servicemen from the U.S. Air Force, Army, Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Corps, as well as personnel from the Canadian Military. Its primary job is to collect and process data from radar, satellites and other sensors located all over the globe and to process this information in real time. This underground center is virtually invisible from the air, save for the two entrances into the mountain. It is this facility that is responsible for issuing alerts of a possible nuclear attack anywhere in the world.
- 5) **Gibraltar.** The Devil's Tower Camp is located on Gibraltar, strategically located at a point where the Mediterranean Sea opens out to the Atlantic Ocean. Ceded to Britain in 1713 in the Treaty of Utrecht this location has been closely guarded ever since. The Devil's Tower Camp sits atop a 35 mile long system of tunnels which are used to practice trench and tunnel warfare. The location is also conducive to parachute and sea diving training. The base may be one of the more inviting in this quiz - as long as you are above ground, that is!
- 6) **Australia.** Located 11 miles (18km) southwest of Alice Springs in the heart of Australia, the Joint Defense Space Research Facility Pine Gap is jointly run by both the American and Australian Military. The airspace over the facility is the only location in the whole country that has a no-fly zone. While much of its work is secret and highly classified, Pine Gap is known to have been involved in numerous military satellite operations and is also involved in signals intelligence collection. The exact geographical size and population is not known exactly, but at least 1,000 military and civilian personnel on loan to the military work at this location.
- 7) **Alberta.** CFB Suffield located in southern Alberta is the largest military base in Canada, as well as being the largest military base anywhere in the British Commonwealth. It is home to both British and Canadian military personnel. The total land area of this immense base covers over 1,040 sq. miles (2,690 km²). It is a multipurpose military base that specializes in tank warfare training as well as biological and chemical warfare training and research.
- 8) **Nellis AFB.** Nellis Air Force Base is the premier training facility for combat pilots. This location was chosen for its ideal weather and clear skies all year around. It is home to the United States Air Force

Demonstration Squadron known as "The Thunderbirds". The huge military base covers over 15,000 sq. miles (39,000 km²) and the sound of jets and sonic booms can be heard 24 hours a day.

- 9) **Golf balls.** Found in Yorkshire, England RAF Menwith Hill is often called the largest electronic monitoring station found on the planet. It has multiple radomes which are large weatherproof geodesic structures that protect microwaves and radar antenna. They have the appearance of giant white golf balls. This location is used to monitor all communications that originate in the Soviet Union/Russia.
- 10) **Edwards AFB.** Edwards Air Force Base in southern California is located in the flat terrain of the Mojave Desert. It is used for testing new plane designs, the landing of the Space Shuttles and other major aeronautical breakthroughs. It was here that Chuck Yeager became the first man to break the sound barrier in 1946 and was the landing point for the round-the-world flight for the Rutan-Voyager which was the first aircraft to fly around .

[Source: <http://www.funtrivia.com/submitquiz.cfm?quiz=341451> Apr 2013++]

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

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 5% (food and prescription drugs exempt). Most counties have adopted a 1.5% sales tax which is added to the state tax.

Gasoline Tax: 51.3 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 57.3 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$2.52 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 4.6%; High – 7.75%. The tax brackets reported are for single individuals.

Income Brackets: Six. Lowest – \$10,570; Highest – \$232,660

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$700; Married – \$1,400; Dependents – \$700; 65 or older – \$1,000.

Additional Exemption: Each taxpayer and spouse over 65 – \$250

Standard Deduction: To view various tax tables, including standard deduction, refer to

<http://www.revenue.wi.gov/taxpro/calctb1s.html>.

Medical/Dental Deduction: 5% credit for expenses in excess of standard deduction. For details refer to

<http://www.revenue.wi.gov/taxpro/fact/hsa2011.pdf>.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Generally the same amount of your pension and annuity income that is taxable for federal tax purposes is taxable by Wisconsin. Social Security and Railroad Retirement benefits are not taxable. Certain Wisconsin state and local government retirees qualify for a tax exemption. Out-of-state government pensions are fully taxed. All retirement payments from the U.S. military employee retirement system, the Coast Guard, the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Public Health Service are exempt. Retired persons whose income is less than \$10,000 (\$19,000 if married filing a joint return) are also eligible for a "working families tax credit." This credit reduces or completely eliminates the Wisconsin income tax for persons, including retirees, who are full-year residents of Wisconsin. It is not necessary that you be

employed, or that you have more than one person in your household, in order to claim this credit. For more details refer to <http://www.revenue.wi.gov/pubs/pb106.pdf>

Individuals who receive income from a qualified retirement plan or an individual retirement account (IRA) may be able to subtract up to \$5,000 of such retirement benefits when computing their Wisconsin income tax. To qualify for the subtraction the individual must be at least 65 years of age before the close of the taxable year for which the subtraction is being claimed, and meet the following income limitations for that year. If the individual is single or files as head of household, his or her federal adjusted gross income is less than \$15,000. If the individual is married and files a joint return, the couple's federal adjusted gross income is less than \$30,000. If the individual is married and files a separate return, the sum of both spouses' federal adjusted gross income is less than \$30,000.

The subtraction does not apply to retirement benefits that are otherwise exempt from Wisconsin income tax. For example, an individual is receiving military retirement benefits that are exempt from Wisconsin income tax. The individual may not claim the \$5,000 subtraction based on the military retirement benefits. Individuals who will qualify for the subtraction may want to consider the subtraction when determining the amount of their estimated tax payments.

Retired Military Pay: All military retirement pay is exempt.

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

Homeowners and renters whose household income is less than \$24,680 can benefit from the homestead credit program that is designed to soften the impact of property taxes on persons with low income. The credit is based on the relationship of household income to the amount of allowable property taxes and/or rent for the calendar year. Wisconsin also has a school property tax credit that is available to homeowners. It is actually a credit against Wisconsin income tax liability. Details on the state's property tax system can be found [here](#). For information on the Homestead Credit refer to <http://www.revenue.wi.gov/faqs/ise/home.html>.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax but Wisconsin does have an estate tax. As a result of the Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010, approved by Congress and signed into law by President Obama on December 17, 2010, there is no Wisconsin estate tax for deaths in 2011 and 2012 unless action is taken by the Wisconsin Legislature to impose an estate tax. A federal estate tax is imposed on estates of \$5,000,000 or more. The credit for state death taxes paid has been eliminated for deaths in 2011 and 2012, which would have been the basis for Wisconsin's estate tax. The Act allows a deduction for state death taxes paid. On January 1, 2013, EGTRRA (Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act) sunset provisions would again apply with federal or state legislative action necessary to eliminate the Wisconsin estate tax for 2013.

For further information, visit Wisconsin Department of Revenue website <http://revenue.wi.gov> or call 608-266-2772. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#WISCONSIN> Apr 2013 ++]

Aviation Art (38):



Iwo Jima *- A Hard Won Haven -* by John Shaw

With an engine out, a B-29 comes in to land on Iwo Jima. At great cost, the island had been taken in order to provide an emergency landing strip for damaged B-29s returning from their long range missions to Japan. [Source: <http://www.brooksart.com/Iwo.html> Apr 2013 ++]

Veteran Legislation Status 27 APR 2013: For a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 113th Congress refer to the Bulletin's "**House & Senate Veteran Legislation**" attachment. 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 on 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 <http://thomas.loc.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. To determine what bills, amendments your representative has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on refer to <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d111/sponlst.html>.

Grassroots lobbying is perhaps the most effective way to let your Representative and Senators know your opinion. Whether you are calling into a local or Washington, D.C. office; sending a letter or e-mail; signing a petition; or making a personal visit, Members of Congress are the most receptive and open to suggestions from their constituents. The key to increasing cosponsorship 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 on <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d111/sponlst.html> your legislator's phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making. Refer to http://www.thecapitol.net/FAQ/cong_schedule.html for dates that you can access your legislators on their home turf.

[Source: <http://www.loc.gov> & <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills> Apr 2013 ++]

Have You Heard? Geniuses and Idiots

- If you can get arrested for hunting or fishing without a license, but not for being in the country illegally ...you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.
- If you have to get your parents' permission to go on a field trip or take an aspirin in school, but not to get an abortion ... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.
- If the only school curriculum allowed to explain how we got here is evolution, but the government stops a \$15 million construction project to keep a rare spider from evolving to extinction ... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.
- If you have to show identification to board an airplane, cash a check, buy liquor or check out a library book, but not to vote who runs the government ... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.
- If the government wants to ban stable, law-abiding citizens from owning gun magazines with more than ten rounds, but gives 20 F-16 fighter jets to the crazy new leaders in Egypt ... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.
- If, in the largest city, you can buy two 16-ounce sodas, but not a 24-ounce soda because 24-ounces of a sugary drink might make you fat ... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.
- If an 80-year-old woman can be stripped searched by the TSA but a woman in a hijab is only subject to having her neck and head searched ... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.
- If your government believes that the best way to eradicate trillions of dollars of debt is to spend trillions more ... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.
- If a seven year old boy can be thrown out of school for saying his teacher "cute," but hosting a sexual exploration or diversity class in grade school is perfectly acceptable ... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.
- If children are forcibly removed from parents who discipline them with spankings while children of addicts are left in filth and drug infested ?homes?... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.

- If hard work and success are met with higher taxes and more government intrusion, while not working is rewarded with EBT cards, WIC checks, Medicaid, subsidized housing and free cell phones ... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.
- If the government's plan for getting people back to work is to incentivize NOT working with 99 weeks of unemployment checks and no requirement to prove they applied but can't find work ... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.
- If being stripped of the ability to defend yourself makes you more "safe" according to the government ... you might live in a country founded by geniuses but run by idiots.

Military Lingo/Jargon/Slang:

USA Academy: *BTO* - Brigade Tactical Officer

USA Acronyms: *DH* - Darling Husband (used almost exclusively by dependent spouse types)

USA Equipment: *Dash-Ten* - An operator's manual for any piece of military equipment, vehicle or aircraft; all operator's manuals' reference numbers end in "-10."

USA Field Slang: *Kurd Killers* - Humanitarian relief pallets dropped from cargo planes. Kurds after Operation Desert Storm would get under the large pallets as they were parachuted down. Some Kurds were crushed.

USA Misc: *Blanket Party* - the act of beating someone senseless in their bunk after lights out by throwing a blanket over their head so they can not identify the perpetrators.

USA Rank: *Chief* - The unofficial form of address for any Warrant Officer (CW-2 to CW-5)

USA Soldiers: *Blue Falcon* - Someone that screws others over for their own comfort or convenience;

USA Unit Nicknames - *Screaming Eagles* - 101st Airborne Division, for the Eagle on their shoulders

USAF: *Bat decoder* - The current airborne communication codes on one sheet of paper which is carried on all flight operations.

USMC: *8th & I* - Nickname for Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C. so named from its street address at the corner of 8th and I Streets SE.

USN: *Careen* To beach a ship and list her so as to expose her bottom for the marine growth to be scraped off. The word comes from an old French word "Carine" meaning the bottom of a ship.

Vets: *Augmentation Duty* - The first job you had for a month after you got to Thailand. Full battle dress cocked and locked. M-26s and Flak vest were the uniform of the day. The Air Force didn't have nearly enough SPs for the job so each tenant "contributed" a few to fill out the towers on the perimeter. 12 on. 12 off. Six days a week.

[Source: Various 30 Apr 2013 ++]

Interesting Ideas

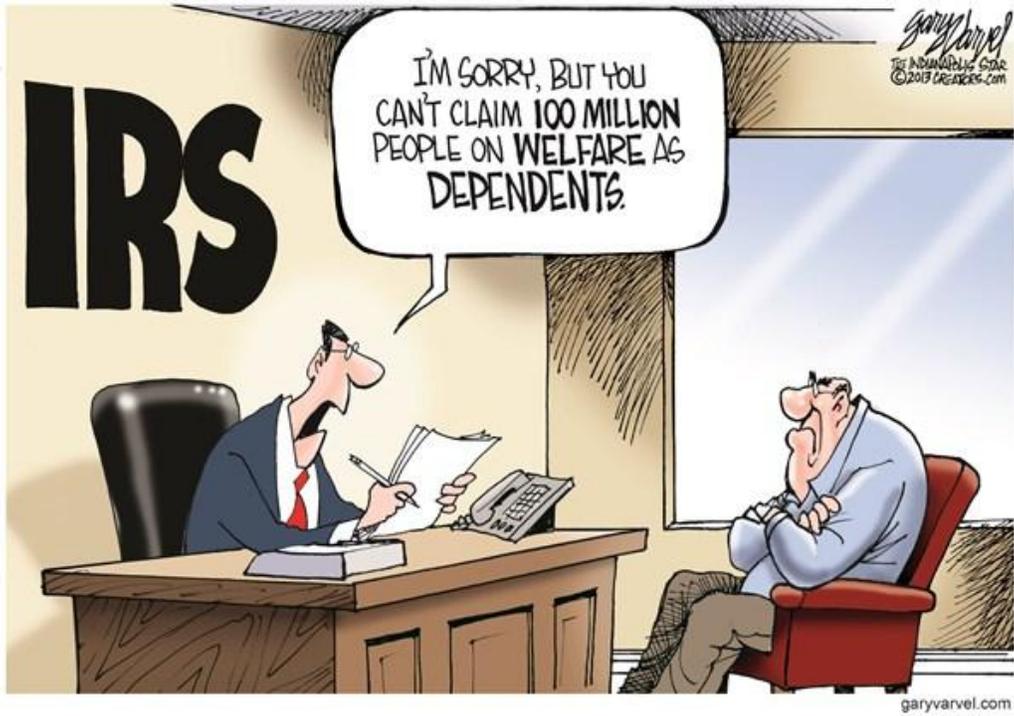


"Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote."

— **Ben Franklin** (1706-1790) Leading author, printer, political theorist, politician, postmaster, scientist, musician, inventor, satirist, civic activist, statesman, and diplomat.



Him? No, he doesn't want a cookie. He says I can have two.





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1. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at the above sites let me know. The Bulletin will be provided in the above format until further notice. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base (94,000+) were choking the airways interfering with other email user's capability to use it. They directed us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all email capability if we did not.

2. Subscribers who have not yet validated their email addressee who desire to continue to receive the Bulletin can send a message to raoemo@sbcglobal.net with the word "KEEP" in the subject line to restore their subscription. Anyone who no longer wants to receive the Bulletin should send a message to raoemo@sbcglobal.net with the word "DELETE" in the subject line. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 9,994 email addressees.

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