

RAO

BULLETIN

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PDF Edition

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AO & Prostrate Cancer Update 02: U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War ended in 1973, but the effects of nearly two decades of chemical warfare are still being felt by American veterans today. Exposure to the dangerous herbicide Agent Orange in Vietnam has been linked to a 52 percent overall increased risk of prostate cancer in Vietnam vets, according to an analysis published in the American Cancer Society journal Cancer. The researchers concluded that there was no increased risk for low-grade prostate cancer from Agent Orange, but there was a 75 percent increase in the risk of high-grade prostate cancer. For some Vietnam veterans, like Terry Dillon of Columbus, Ohio, exposure to Agent Orange was not taken into account during their prostate cancer diagnosis. “No doctors, and I’ve seen quite a few, ever asked me about my exposure to Agent Orange,” said Dillon, a 40-year member of the military who spent one year in Vietnam at the Nha Trang Air Base.

That base carried out Operation Ranch Hand, in which nearly 20 million gallons of Agent Orange was sprayed over Vietnam crops, in an effort to damage the Vietnamese ability to farm food. This is what led to Dillon’s exposure to Agent Orange. “We got exposed to it differently than other Army guys. When the aircraft would come back it was usually shot up with small arms ammunition, which left holes in the aircraft and the tanks with Agent Orange in them,” Dillon explained. “The tanks leaked inside of the aircraft, and it was several inches deep. Nobody at that time thought there was any kind of problem with it.” But in 2008, Dillon, a testicular cancer survivor, was diagnosed with prostate cancer believed to be the result of Agent Orange exposure. “Prostate cancer in veterans from my era is one of the indications of Agent Orange exposure. The (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs) won’t come out and say ‘absolutely that is linked to Agent Orange,’ but it basically is,” he believes.



The researchers who wrote the Cancer article analyzed medical records of 2,720 veterans who were treated at the Portland Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Oregon. They found that 896 veterans (32.9 percent) had been diagnosed with prostate cancer. More than half of veterans who had been diagnosed with prostate cancer had a high-grade, aggressive form of the disease. More of these veterans were exposed to Agent Orange (8.3 percent) than the remaining 1,824 veterans who had not been diagnosed with prostate cancer (7.1 percent). The details of a person’s exposure to something like Agent Orange can make a big difference in their risk, explained David B. Samadi, MD, Urologist and Chief of Robotics and Minimal Invasive Surgery at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City, who was not involved with the study. “The closer you are to the source, the amount, and the duration of exposure have a huge correlation with the chance of developing prostate cancer.” “Along the same lines as people in the World Trade Center on 9/11, with a lot of chemical debris exposure, we see some really aggressive

forms of prostate cancer,” added Dr. Samadi. “It can change the DNA and send a cell into a different cycle, making it a cancer cell.”

The study author's concluded that the new information would help diagnose aggressive prostate cancer earlier. “Incorporating Agent Orange exposure history into decision-making for prostate cancer screening among veterans may help to better predict clinically significant prostate cancer while not adding to the number of clinically insignificant prostate cancer diagnoses,” they wrote. Terry Dillon saw several doctors about his prostate cancer, but most said he was untreatable, and even gave him as little as three to five years to live. Fortunately, the doctors at Cleveland Clinic in Ohio were able to successfully remove the cancer from Dillon’s prostate and the areas it had spread to. Dillon is a prostate cancer survivor even without the benefit of early detection and knowledge of the prostate cancer risks associated with Agent Orange. Other veterans might not be so fortunate. When asked if he knew other veterans with similar health problems, Dillon's answer was an emphatic yes. [Source: Everyday Health | Jeffrey Kopman | 13 May 2013 ++]

Vet Charity Watch Update 35: Millions of dollars meant for veterans has been stolen by con men or misspent by charities in recent years, according to Ohio officials who tell the Dayton Daily News they are stepping up enforcement. Recently a sweeping investigation by the Ohio Attorney General of AMVETS found 59 locations around the state, including 15 locally, were diverting money for career training for veterans from its intended purpose. Meanwhile, a man accused of bilking donors out of \$100 million in 41 states by claiming the money was going to Navy veterans faces trial in Cleveland on fraud charges. Investigators say **John Donald Cody** — who went by the alias Bobby Thompson — had an office in Cincinnati and collected nearly \$2 million in Ohio. And just last week the Attorney General’s office announced it had shut down a Riverside-based charity whose director was accused of spending money on herself instead of helping incarcerated veterans charged with wartime crimes as it claimed. Increased outreach and better tools have led to more effective enforcement of charity rules, according to Pete Thomas, chief of the state’s attorney general’s charitable law division. “I frankly do think we’re doing a better job of what we’ve been doing all along,” he said.



A 2007 arrest photo of John Donald Cody, alias Bobby C. Thompson

Cari Johnson founded A Dollar to Care in 2010. She said her son had joined the military and she was learning about military life online when she stumbled across an article about soldiers serving time for crimes committed in war zones. “These are guys that went and fought for our country and maybe they didn’t kill the enemy in the politically correct way, but they killed them,” she said. “I could just imagine if my son were to be over there.” Johnson asked donors for a dollar at a time and sent gift cards for turkeys and Christmas gifts to children of about 15 families over the years, she estimates. But instead of paying monthly bills and household expenses for soldiers’ families as Johnson claimed, she was spending the money on herself, according to a settlement agreement she signed with the Ohio Attorney General. State officials say she used charity money at Redbox movie kiosks and liquor

stores. The agreement required her to shut down the charity and pay a \$20,000 fine, half of which the state will give to a registered charity.

Johnson disputes much of the state's claims. She said she helped one soldier's wife and three kids move across the country, bought another art supplies in prison and did more. She said there were some paperwork errors and the charity struggled financially; a motorcycle ride and concert fundraiser brought in \$3,000 but cost \$3,700 to put on. But she said she was never in it for herself. "If I was in this to make money, if I was in this to support myself ... I would have picked a hell of an easier cause," she said. "It was so difficult to get donations, it was so difficult of a mission, and I wouldn't have (just) asked for a dollar." She said her ex-husband did accidentally rent two movies for \$1.07 apiece from Redbox with charity money, and she may have bought cigarettes at a drive-thru while picking up cards with charity money. And her live-in ex-boardmember misused the card, she alleged. She admitted to paying her electric bill from charity funds, but said she only did that after depositing a Social Security check for \$932 into the organization. "Yeah, there were some stupid mistakes made," she said. "It was my organization and I have to take responsibility."

The attorney for one of the soldiers Johnson claimed to be helping said she did more harm than good. Tim Parlatore, attorney for Corey Clagett, said he attended the concert fundraiser and it was terribly run. Clagett's family had to pay their own expenses despite her promise to pay. The family tried to cut ties with Johnson, he said. Parlatore said she may have provided art supplies and a magazine subscription to Clagett. "When you're raising thousands of dollars for an organization but you send the guy \$20 worth of stuff is that really why you're raising all the money?" he said. "My impression was that she was just trying to take advantage of the situation," he said. "Through her online presence she tried to really create a cloak of legitimacy and try and make it seem that she was doing all this for the veterans, but it all really struck me as a scam, especially once I got out there and met her." Clagett is in Leavenworth military prison on a murder conviction. The charges stem from 2006 when the then-21-year-old followed orders with another soldier to release three Iraqi detainees and shoot them when they ran.

The number of complaints about charities received by Ohio's attorney general has stayed steady between a high of 1,320 in 2008 to a low of 1,247 in 2010. There have been 311 so far this year. The outcome of those complaints can range from nothing to a written warning to criminal prosecution. The attorney general's office has taken some kind of action against 259 organizations since the beginning of 2008. This includes 20 AMVETS posts, 40 VFW posts and 33 American Legion posts. The majority of these were violations of the state's bingo laws, which require 25 percent of bingo proceeds go to charity. "A lot of times it comes down to they haven't given the right amount of money because they haven't been keeping the books properly," Thomas said, attributing this more to incompetence than fraud. This does not include the 59 Ohio AMVETS posts that entered into settlement agreements with the state saying they did not use all of their charitable proceeds for veteran career training as they claimed. Locally that included posts in Montgomery, Greene, Clark, Butler, Warren and Miami counties.

A state investigation found that from Jan. 1, 2006, to May 31, 2012, these AMVETS posts made \$50.28 million in net profit from the sale of instant bingo tickets. They handed 25 percent of this over to AMVETS Career Center, Inc., which provides training for veterans. But the career center non-profit then handed 85 percent of the money back to the posts for supposed "career centers" that were largely idle or inoperable computer stations. Like all of these cases, DeWine said the worst part is all of the help this money could have done. "The sad thing is if they'd done what they were supposed to do there was millions of dollars that should have been spent on jobs training for veterans," he said. [Source: Dayton Daily News | Josh Sweigart | 13 May 2013 ++]

VA GWVITF Update 03: Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced that the Department's Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Task Force will publish a comprehensive draft report in the Federal Register for public feedback and comment. The report describes how the Department of Veterans Affairs has been, and will continue to address the concerns of Veterans who deployed during the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991. "We know Gulf War Veterans are experiencing critical long-term medical issues that are complex and difficult to label," said Shinseki. "VA has learned a great deal over the past 20 years about identifying, diagnosing and treating Gulf War Veterans, and we will continue to evaluate our research and clinical findings to ensure we keep providing world-class health care and benefits for Gulf War Veterans."

Over the past several years, the Task Force has refined an integrated roadmap to better synchronize efforts and improve care and services to Gulf War Veterans. VA is working towards these efforts becoming a part of the culture and operations. This year's report continues to focus on efforts to improve health care for Gulf War Veterans including innovative enhancements to clinical care. The draft report identifies seven specific areas where VA will strive to improve services for Gulf War Veterans. The seven areas focus on important components of health care, such as Veteran-centric approaches to specialty and primary care, delivering Veteran benefits, and improving open communications with Gulf War Veterans. The Task Force also developed plans to improve linkages between specialty knowledge and services at the basic point of care to address treatment for chronic multi-symptom illness, an ongoing concern of Gulf War Veterans, their families and their providers. VA continues to support ongoing efforts by providing clinical research and development, which is outlined in the recent, first-ever released Research Strategic Plan on Gulf War Illnesses. This plan will be used to help refine clinical practice and clinical education throughout VA. VA continues to strengthen partnerships to enhance medical surveillance related to potential health impacts on Veterans from the environmental exposures on today's battlefields.

VA and the Department of Defense recently approved a research project to develop a long-term exposure record to collect and share deployment and exposure data between the two Departments, a model informed by lessons learned in earlier Gulf War studies. "This decades-long research and continuing partnership has not only transformed the care and services to Gulf War Veterans, but has also made us smarter about how we care for Veterans of all eras," said Shinseki. Today, VA is seeking public comments on the draft Task Force report before final publication. The public notice and instructions for how to submit electronic and comments via postal mail will be posted at www.regulations.gov, and the draft written report will be open for comment for 30 days. In addition, VA recognizes that a great number of Gulf War Veterans use the Internet on a daily basis to share their ideas and concerns, so VA has also created a public discussion board on the seven focus areas at: <http://vagulfwartaskforce.uservoice.com/>. To view the report without making recommendations, visit VA's website at: http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/Draft_2012_GWVI-TF_Report.pdf. [Source: VA Secy Vet Group Liaison Officer Press Release 13 May 2013 ++]

SBA Vet Issues Update 30: The National Veterans Small Business Conference, the government's premier event for Veteran-owned small businesses, is coming to St. Louis' America's Center, on Aug. 6-8, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced 11 MAY. "VA is committed to bringing more Veteran-Owned Small Businesses into a public-private partnership to help them grow and succeed," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "This event is a unique opportunity for Veteran-Owned Small Businesses to connect directly with government procurement decision makers and business partners." During the conference, Veteran-owned business owners will:

- Receive information, tools, tips, techniques and how-to instructions to start, build and expand a small business idea into a life-changing reality.

- Be able to attend a wide variety of classes on business operations with more than 200 breakout sessions on how to start and grow a business and successfully compete for federal contracts. They will also have the opportunity to discuss business and contracting issues with key procurement decision makers from the federal government and private sector.
- Learn how to get the veteran-owned business certification needed to compete for federal contracts; outreach to veteran communities; and target networking to discuss government procurement and contracting requirements.

There are 26 million small businesses in the United States. Of these, 3.6 million are Veteran and Service Disabled Veteran-Owned businesses. Together they employ over 1.8 million workers and generate over \$1.6 trillion in revenue. VA assists Veteran-owned businesses with everything from small business start-ups to large defense contracts. More information is available at www.nationalveteransconference.com. [Source: VA Secy Vet Group Liason Officer msg. 11 May 2013 ++]

Sniper Fire Tracker: A team of researchers at Vanderbilt University has developed two hardware modules along with corresponding software that uses an Android smartphone to spot the location of a nearby shooter. The U.S. military has worked with the scientific community to develop systems to identify sniper locations for more than a decade. Pentagon leaders have already used at least two systems to track sniper fire — the Boomerang and Pilar acoustic sensor system. These systems use the sound created by the muzzle blast and/or the shockwave created by the bullet traveling at supersonic velocities to triangulate the location of a shooter. In order to best locate a shooter, the systems depend on networks of sensors. A processor collects the readings from the different sensors in the area and determines the location.



Vanderbilt's team has developed two modules of microphone sensors that can be connected to a smartphone. One is roughly the size of a pack of playing cards. It collects readings from both the muzzle blast and the shockwave to triangulate a location. For it to work, this version must have six nodes to get an accurate location, according to Akos Ledeczi, a member of Vanderbilt's team. The second module is slightly larger, but it only requires two people to have the module and collect data in order to gain a reading. The second version only collects data on the shockwave, and it can detect the direction of the shot as well as a general estimate of its range, Ledeczi said. This isn't the first time Ledeczi has worked on determining sniper locations. He led a team at Vanderbilt in 2007 that developed helmet mounted sensors that units could distribute and use to find snipers. He said it made sense to develop a system for the

smartphone because of their computing power and how prevalent they've become. Army leaders have said they eventually want to outfit all soldiers with smartphones in garrison and deployed. The 10th Mountain Division is set to deploy to Afghanistan with smartphone-like devices as part of Capability Set 13 and the Army Network. However, Ledeczi said the project at Vanderbilt has run out of funding. The team is looking for a grant or Pentagon funding to continue their work. He said he could see uses for both military and police units. [Source: Military.com | Mike Hoffman | 6 May 2013 ++]

DECA Budget Cuts: Commissary officials are conducting at least three short-fuse cost-cutting reviews, each of which could significantly reduce access to the benefit by either shutting down some stores or shortening their hours. A directive from the Pentagon comptroller requires the Defense Commissary Agency and others to look at cutting its \$1.4 billion annual budget by up to 33 percent, while focusing operations on supporting troops stationed overseas. That would cut deeply into operating funds from stateside stores. This directive also requires commissary officials to come up with a separate, short-term plan to save 5 percent of overall costs, and was due in early May.

DeCA, like all Defense Department agencies, must review its headquarters staffing under an initiative dubbed the Strategic Choice and Management Review. Commissaries will be studied by the Compensation Commission, mandated by Congress to review the value of all military pay and benefits programs. Although the commission has not yet been appointed, defense officials have been preparing data in advance. Most worrying to military advocates is the requirement to develop a plan to cut up to 33 percent of the commissary budget. This review is due in early July, according to DeCA Director Joseph Jeu, who spoke at a conference here 24 APR. Jeu said he considers this an "opportunity" for DeCA to be involved in shaping any changes in how the commissaries will operate. He noted that cuts made since the agency was created in 1992 have whittled the budget by \$700 million a year. "I don't think there are too many agencies that can say they reduced their budget costs by 50 percent," when inflation is taken into account, Jeu said. Without these cuts, the DeCA budget would have been on a trajectory to be more than \$2 billion. The cuts have been achieved in part by reducing DeCA staff by 2,500 people over the years.

Salaries make up about 70 percent of the commissary's operating budget; the next biggest line item is the cost of transporting groceries overseas, required by law to be paid by taxpayers. As such, shaving another 33 percent from DeCA's operating budget would translate into **closing stores and cutting hours**, said Pat Nixon, a former Marine who is also a former DeCA director. "That fundamentally changes the availability of the benefit," said Nixon, now president of the American Logistics Association, a trade group whose members sell products and services to commissaries and exchanges. Overseas troops and families are significantly more likely to use commissaries. About 13 percent of the active-duty force is stationed overseas, not counting Hawaii and Alaska, but they accounted for 24 percent of overall customer sales from October through February. That means they're about twice as likely to use the stores than those in the U.S., even before accounting for retirees, who overwhelmingly use stateside stores.

Nixon said the working group will come up with multiple scenarios to save the 33 percent, and is considering one in which some stores would close in metropolitan areas with multiple commissaries. That could still have an impact on patrons. In the Hampton Roads, Va., area, for example, a family in Chesapeake, Va., has a 3-mile drive to the commissary at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard; about 12 miles to stores at Norfolk Naval Station and Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek; 16 miles to Oceana Naval Air Station; and 21 miles to Langley Air Force Base. In looking at ways to trim DeCA costs, officials should consider the impact of DoD's current review of overseas bases, said Rene Campos of the Military Officers Association of America. She noted that DeCA could see future savings if DoD reduces its overseas footprint and some stores are not needed. "There are so many things going on, we're concerned something's going to be missed or misinterpreted without input from beneficiaries," Campos said.

"If dollars are driving the decision, chances are the beneficiaries are not going to be on the best side of that bottom line." Deeper changes — such as anything affecting the current 5 percent surcharge on goods, or taxpayer funding of employees' salaries or overseas transportation costs — would require changes in law, Nixon said.

The Pentagon hiring freeze is affecting commissary operations, and things could get worse before they get better. "I've got stores out there operating at 60 to 70 percent of manpower," said Keith Hagenbuch, executive director of store operations for the Defense Commissary Agency. "We're struggling just to keep the store operating." Speaking to a conference of the American Logistics Association on April 24 here, less than an hour's drive from DeCA headquarters in Fort Lee, Va., Hagenbuch described some of the impact, including the cancellation of the annual May case lot sales. DeCA spends about \$900,000 to run two case lot sales worldwide each year, he said. "That's an expense we couldn't afford, not with what's going right now. It's either get rid of people, or [cancel] a case lot sale.

We had to make some tough choices. That doesn't prevent you from going to that store, if they have the manpower, and coming up with some sort of deal, maybe a sidewalk sale, where industry pays for the tent." DeCA imposed a civilian hiring freeze 4 FEB, in line with the Defense Department-wide freeze. Commissary officials have asked DoD to allow some exceptions to the hiring freeze, said DeCA Director Joseph Jeu, and he is waiting for an answer. The number of open positions will likely increase, since the heavy summer permanent change-of-station season has started, and some military spouses who are commissary employees will be leaving their jobs. DeCA will continue to allow internal hires, so military spouses already employed by the commissary who leave because of PCS moves may be able to work at another commissary, if there are openings for which they are qualified. [Source: OASD-PA Early Bird | Karen Jowers | 13 May 2013 ++]

Legionnaires Disease: Regional directors in the Department of Veterans Affairs who fail to notify state and county health officials of infectious-disease cases could face suspension or more severe discipline under a bill introduced on 7 MAY by Sen. Bob Casey Jr. Casey (D-PA) could shore up lackluster communication inside the VA network. "One of the real problems here was this inability to have a rigorous notification system in place, this failure to have in place a structured and effective communication system so the guy who knows something about the water system and the pipes is interacting with the scientists and the infectious-disease people," Casey said.

Pittsburgh VA officials "could have and probably should have" shared information more readily with public health agencies during the Legionnaires' outbreak, acting state Secretary of Health Michael Wolf told the Tribune-Review. A Trib investigation published in March revealed that VA hospitals, as federal facilities, fall outside state health rules that require other hospitals to report cases of infectious diseases. Although many VA facilities comply voluntarily, they are under no legal liability to do so. Casey's bill, which the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs will review, specifies requirements for VA facilities. He said the legislation is intended to "help ensure an outbreak like this never goes unreported again." The bill would require regional VA directors to alert state and county health departments to cases of CDC-listed notifiable infectious diseases within 24 hours of confirmation. In each case, the CDC, national VA officials, the patient's primary-care provider and next-of-kin and VA workers in the affected hospital would receive alerts.

The VA Office of Inspector General would have to submit annual compliance reports to Congress and investigate compliance failures. Regional VA directors found to be responsible would be suspended, and the VA secretary could order additional discipline "as the secretary considers appropriate," according to the bill. The VA would not comment on the legislation but is "directly engaged" with Congress on the issue, spokesman Mark Ballesteros said. Casey's bill is similar to legislation introduced last week by Rep. Mike Coffman, a Colorado Republican who chairs the Oversight Subcommittee of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Other House legislation developed in

consultation with Casey's office and members of the Pennsylvania delegation will be introduced soon, said Matt Dinkel, a spokesman for Rep. Mike Doyle, D-Forest Hills. [Source: Tribune-Review | Adam Smeltz | 7 May 2013 ++]

Vet Gun Control Update 09: A House panel has approved legislation that would greatly curtail when veterans deemed mentally incompetent are reported to the FBI's background check system. The move to winnow what records get placed into the database comes even as both sides of the gun-control debate have called for strengthening the background-check system. Currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs automatically submits the names of those veterans who are deemed unable to handle their own financial affairs and have a fiduciary appointed to administer their benefits. But the House Committee on Veterans Affairs approved legislation requiring a judge's order before a veteran's name is submitted to the database. Lawmakers said veterans who are not a threat to harm themselves or others should not be denied a constitutional right to buy and possess guns. [Source: The Hill Post | Kevin Freking | 8 May 2013 ++]

BRAC Update 33: A U.S. senator wants the Air Force to prove it saved money by closing bases due to the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process. "Base closure commissions are supposed to take the politicians out of the process. I think they've replaced politicians with other politicians," said Sen. Dick Durbin, a Democrat from Illinois. "I've watched five base closure commissions," he said. "I want to see actual savings — start to finish — when you're closing a base, moving the personnel, moving the equipment, reassigning and then assessing how much money you've saved as a result of it." Durbin, chairman of the Senate's Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, spoke 8 MAY about the BRAC process and his skepticism of its effectiveness during a hearing on the Air Force's FY2014 budget. He has often expressed his skepticism of the process and has resisted them due to a lack of actual overall savings. The Air Force's 2014 budget request is \$114 billion, which includes nearly \$30 billion for Air Force personnel, \$46.5 billion for operations and maintenance, \$18.8 billion for procurement and \$17.6 billion for research and development. The personnel budget request includes increases of 1 percent for pay, 4.2 percent for housing and a 3.4 percent subsistence increase.

Republican members of Congress recently sent a letter to President Barack Obama contending that another BRAC round "will cost more than it saves in the near-term and thus will negate its value for deficit reduction." The next round of BRAC won't begin until 2015 under the Pentagon's 2014 budget. BRAC is the process Congress uses to decide which military bases to close and which assets to move. Defense Department officials are pushing hard for the base closures because the military has nearly 25 percent more infrastructure than it needs and the excess capacity will continue to grow as U.S. military missions and presence in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to draw down. The Air Force agreed to provide the Senate's Defense Appropriations Subcommittee with the savings earned from previous base closures. Durbin said money could be saved in the department's \$600 billion budget by concentrating on other programs that are costing money, such as the F-35 joint strike fighter program, a program which is seven years and more than \$164 billion over budget.

The 2005 BRAC round cost more than \$35 billion and eliminated tens of thousands of civilian jobs. According to a report from the Government Accountability Office, the 2005 BRAC cost more than was saved in the long run and was categorized by the office as "excessive." Scott Air Force Base in the 2005 BRAC gained personnel when it gained three Army Surface Deployment and Distribution centers but lost the inpatient mission at the Scott Air Force Base Hospital. A Mobility Air Forces Logistics Support Center was also established at the base. Durbin praised the men and women at Scott and the critical missions performed at the base. Under sequestration, the Air Force was

forced to cut its budget by about \$7 billion. To contend with the cuts, the Air Force reduced flying, weapons system sustainment, training, facility sustainment, and implemented civilian hiring freezes and furloughs.

"Scott Air Force Base in Southern Illinois is our major Air Mobility hub, hosting Guard and active duty units as well as U.S. Transportation Command. Members of its Tanker Airlift Control Center have called in emergency medical evacuations for service members injured in Afghanistan. The 126th Air Refueling Wing deployed to contribute to the no-fly zone in Libya. I am very proud that these men and women performing such critical tasks call Illinois their home," Durbin said. "Our job is to ensure the men and women in uniform are the finest, most skilled fighting forces in the world. It would be a mistake to allow budget pressures to squander their talent," he said. Scott has more than 13,000 military and civilian employees and is the region's largest employer. The base's economic impact on the St. Louis region is estimated at \$3 billion annually. [Source: Belleville News-Democrat | Jennifer Bowen | 9 May 2013 ++]

Car Insurance: Getting pulled over is a funny thing. No matter how old you are, you still feel like a teenager behind the wheel when those blue lights come on. But after you get a ticket and the squad car is pulling away, you have two very adult thoughts: "I wonder how much this is going to cost?" and "Oh no! What is this going to do to my insurance rates?" A study by Insurance.com analyzed 490,000 insurance quotes to figure out how different violations affect your car insurance rates. Here are their findings for 14 different violations:

- Reckless driving – 22 percent increase.
- DUI (first offense) — 19 percent.
- Driving without a license – 18 percent.
- Careless driving – 16 percent.
- Failure to stop – 15 percent.
- Driving 30 mph or more over the speed limit – 15 percent.
- Improper turn – 14 percent.
- Improper pass – 14 percent.
- Following too closely – 13 percent.
- Driving 15 to 29 mph over the speed limit – 12 percent.
- Driving 1 to 14 mph over the speed limit – 11 percent.
- Failure to yield – 9 percent.
- Driving without insurance – 6 percent.
- Seat belt infractions – 3 percent.

It could be even worse; those are just averages. Your actual rate will depend on a variety of factors, including your age, sex, where you live, your marital status, and how long you've been with your carrier. You can calculate your own results on Insurance.com at <http://www.insurance.com/auto-insurance/rate-increases-and-traffic-tickets.aspx>. Traffic violations show up on your state driving record, which is accessed periodically by your insurance company. There are a few things you can do to keep a ticket from appearing on your driving record or minimize the impact on your insurance rate.

- 1) **Go to court.** If you go to court, you may end up getting the ticket reduced to a lesser offense or having the case dismissed entirely. There are several reasons why a judge might dismiss your case. Among them:
 - The officer who issued the ticket didn't appear in court.
 - The ticket contains inaccurate information.

- You can prove you did not commit the offense.
- 2) **Hire a lawyer.** A lawyer could help your case. You'll have to pay, but probably not much. A lawyer we interviewed charges \$80 to handle a basic traffic case.
 - 3) **Attend traffic school.** Some states allow you to keep a violation off your record by attending traffic school. You can attend traffic school in person (many have night and weekend classes) or online and you'll have to pass a test, but it shouldn't be difficult if you were paying attention. The fee to attend the school is usually small.

If you end up paying the fine, here are some steps to take going forward:

- Avoid getting pulled over again. This seems obvious, but more violations will further increase your insurance rates. Keep your car maintained — no broken or malfunctioning lights – wear your seat belt, drive safely and defensively, and renew your registration on time.
- Be patient. Some insurance companies will reduce your rate after a year with no violations. Many moving violations will no longer affect your rate after three years.
- Comparison shop for new insurance. Insurance companies treat violations differently, so another company may offer you a better rate. But don't lie about past infractions. The company will be reviewing your driving record, even if you've moved to another state.


[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Angela Colley | 10 May 2013 ++]

Federal Jobs Update 02: A recently introduced bill H.R.1832 aims to give fathers of permanently disabled or deceased veterans additional hiring preferences when applying for civil service jobs. The 2013 Gold Star Fathers Act, introduced by Reps. Tim Bishop (D-NY) and Walter Jones Jr., (R-NC) on 6 MAY, would give fathers the same treatment currently afforded mothers of veterans. According to the Office of Personnel Management, mothers of disabled or deceased veterans are currently given an additional "10 Point Derived Preference" to their passing examination scores or ratings for federal jobs. The bill would replace the word "mother" with "parent" in the existing law. "We owe America's Gold Star families a debt that can never be repaid, and both fathers and mothers who have sacrificed so much for our nation deserve preference if they seek to serve as federal employees," Bishop said in a statement. Eligible parties must have sons or daughters who served in the armed forces during a war, or campaign in which a campaign badge was authorized. "This bipartisan legislation is about standing up for all those who have lost a child in our nation's service, or who are caring for a disabled veteran," Bishop said. [Source: GovExec.com | Kedar Pavgi | 8 May 2013 ++]

VA Patient Billing Statement: Every day, thousands of VA employees are working on things to make life easier for Veterans. Good news does not always make the front page but here's an impressive project just completed that will affect a lot of Veterans in a small but significant way every month. Millions of Veterans receive health care services from VA Medical Centers each year. Veterans with a cost-sharing responsibility receive a patient billing statement. VA received thousands of calls each month from Veterans and their families with questions about their statements. The high number of calls indicated the statement format was often confusing to customers. So, the Veterans Health Administration's Chief Business Office organized a workgroup to create a more patient-friendly statement that is easier to read and understand. Input from Veterans was used to develop improvements to the statement design. The improved statement has a concise and easy-to-understand layout and several new features that address issues identified by Veterans.

VA Medical Center
459 Veteran Blvd.
Anywhere US 12345-6789

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

STATEMENT QUESTIONS OR ADDRESS CHANGE?
Call
Methods of payment:
ONLINE: WWW.DMVA.GOV
BY MAIL: to the address below
IN PERSON: at any VA Medical Center
PAY BY PHONE: 1-888-827-4817

PATIENT NAME: Sample, John
ACCOUNT NUMBER: 1234567890
STATEMENT DATE: 04/15/2013

Statement reflects payments received by
LOCAL VA'S MESSAGE

ACCOUNT SUMMARY	PREVIOUS BALANCE	PAYMENTS RECEIVED	NEW CHARGES	Pay by 05/15/2013	BALANCE
	\$18.00	\$18.00	\$42.00		\$42.00

DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT	BILLING REFERENCE
COPAY RX: 1201964 FILL DATE: 4/20/2012 DRUG: CLOPIDOGREL BISULFATE 75 MG TAB DAYS: 90 QTY: 90 PHX: DOCTOR JOE CHG: \$27.00	\$27.00	589-K999999
OUTPATIENT CARE VISIT DATE: 04/20/2012	\$15.00	589-K999991

New design with features Veterans wanted.

The number one question Veterans had about the old statement was: “Where is my account number?” The account number is more prominently located on the new statement. The new statement also provides a simple summary of charges, payments received, and balance owed. The location of the account summary was moved from the bottom of the statement to the top. Veterans said they would like easy to find descriptions of the services they received. Now, services received, such as visits and prescriptions, are clearly listed on the statement. The new statement also provides a clear explanation of payment options and balance due date. Veterans began receiving the redesigned patient statements in March 2013, along with an insert that provides an overview of the new, patient-friendly design. Whoever was involved deserves a definite ‘Way to go!’

According to Philip Matkovsky, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Administrative Operations, “It may seem like a ‘little thing,’ but we generate somewhere over 16 million of these statements per year.” How is the new statement being received? Here is just one of dozens of compliments received (and this from a Veteran’s wife who is a retired nurse): “Whoever was involved in redesigning the statement needs to know that the bill is now very understandable. They could hold a seminar for some insurance companies on how a billing statement should read. The pamphlet enclosed is very informative on how to read the new statement and whoever was involved deserves a definite ‘Way to go!’” And says Rich Tremaine, Associate Director of the VA Central Western Massachusetts Health Care System, who is sometimes called on to explain the billing: “I just want to say as a Veteran, and an employee, thank you and your team for an outstanding product. This will make a huge difference in our Veterans’ ability to understand their VA bill.” [Source: VVA WEB Weekly 7 May 2013 ++]

Vet Health Care: Military veterans will have more health insurance options under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), but some vets, like many Americans, may still struggle to find affordable, accessible care that meets their needs. Roughly 40 percent of the 22.3 million military veterans receive health-care services from the Veterans Health Administration, which operates a nationwide network of medical centers, hospitals and clinics. Many veterans are eligible for both VA health care and Medicare, Medicaid or Tricare, the health plan for active and

retired military and their families. About half of veterans have private insurance; approximately one in 10 veterans younger than 65 are uninsured. Some health insurers and employers are offering positive incentives. But might taxes work? Veterans who were honorably discharged after being on active duty for at least two years may qualify for VA health services. Since funding for the VA health program is limited, however, priority is given to veterans who have service-related disabilities or low incomes. Although there are no premiums for VA health care, some veterans may owe co-payments for services. Veterans who return from active military duty are typically eligible for free VA health care for five years. Under the Affordable Care Act, most people will have to have health insurance starting in January or pay a penalty. Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care won't have to buy additional coverage, although they can supplement their coverage if they want to.

Mike Sage, 64, a Vietnam War combat veteran, pays \$15 per visit for primary-care services and \$50 for specialist care at the VA clinic near his home in Monmouth, Ill. Prescription drugs are \$8 for a 30-day supply. But his wife, Kay, like many veterans' spouses, doesn't qualify for VA health care. They plan to check out the policies offered on the Illinois health insurance exchange this fall to see if there's a better option than the catastrophic-coverage plan with a \$5,000 deductible that she currently carries. Kay Sage might qualify for a premium tax credit for coverage on the exchange if the couple's household income is between 100 percent and 400 percent of the federal poverty level (\$15,510 to \$62,040 for a family of two in 2013). The expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act — which states are currently wrestling over whether to implement — could also affect veterans' health care. The law allows the expansion of the federal-state program for low-income people to include adults with incomes up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level (\$15,856 in 2013). According to an analysis published by the Urban Institute last month, four in 10 uninsured veterans have incomes below 138 percent of the federal poverty level, potentially enabling them to qualify for Medicaid if their states expand the program. Most of those veterans have incomes below 100 percent of the poverty level. "For these veterans, it's critical that their state expand Medicaid," says Jennifer Haley, a research associate at the Urban Institute who co-authored the report.

In states that don't expand their programs, veterans whose income falls below 100 percent of the poverty level will generally not qualify for Medicaid, nor for subsidized coverage on the exchanges. Even though a non-disabled veteran may meet the income threshold for VA health care — nationally, about \$34,000, further adjusted by geographic location — he or she may not live near VA facilities or know that VA care is available, according to the report. At a hearing last month before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, VA officials said they expect a net increase of 66,000 veterans seeking health care through VA facilities when the mandate to have health insurance kicks in next year. Some veterans will come into the VA system but others will leave to seek coverage on the exchanges or through Medicaid, they said. Those who are eligible for more than one health program may pick and choose, using one program for cheaper prescription drugs, for example, and another for specialist care. But more choices may not mean better care, says Kenneth Kizer, director of the Institute for Population Health Improvement at the UC Davis Health System. In an opinion piece published last year in the Journal of the American Medical Association, Kizer, a former VA official, noted that having access to multiple plans can lead to fragmented care, increasing the chances of errors and other complications. "Tests get repeated, drugs get prescribed that may not be compatible with each other," he says. "One provider may not realize what the other is doing." [Source: The Washington Post | Michelle Andrews | 6 May2013 ++]

California Vet Home Update 15: Pressure is mounting on California officials to contain the ballooning costs of retirement homes for veterans so more money can be freed to provide other essential services for the next generation just returning home from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bottom line numbers show taxpayers spend a lot of money to serve relatively few residents of veterans homes. A state audit of veteran homes that was due out 9 MAY is expected to expose systemwide failings and questionable spending — as well as provide a guide

for reforms. The actual cost to the state general fund is eased somewhat by federal payments, insurance and other reimbursements. But the push is on to find savings. “We want to make sure they are well taken care of,” said Assemblywoman Toni Atkins, a San Diego Democrat active in veteran issues. “But when you’re dealing with limited resources you have to look at how to put the pieces of the puzzle together so we really are getting as much efficiency as we can.” The audit — nearly a year in the making — may prompt some hard questions: Should some veterans needing specialized care be steered into privately-run homes so the federal government picks up the tab? Should the state hand over more services, such as health care and food service, to private contractors? And how should the state better assimilate younger homeless veterans with mental health issues and drug problems into the homes, if at all?

The California Department of Veterans Affairs defends the spending, but adds it is taking steps to reduce costs by 7 percent while ramping up bed capacity throughout its network of homes from Chula Vista to Yountville to Redding. “These are veterans who are at their end of their lives. In most cases they have the most severe need. They have no other means of support or place to take care of them,” said Pounch Simpson, the department’s chief financial officer. Trimming those costs, opening two long-delayed homes and unearthing more resources to help newly discharged service members find housing and qualify for federal benefits are just a few of the perplexing challenges facing Gov. Jerry Brown and lawmakers as they negotiate budget priorities for the Department of Veterans Affairs. “Let’s look at every activity we have and ask why are we doing it,” said Assemblyman Rocky Chávez, R-Oceanside, a retired Marine Colonel who was once acting secretary of the state Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Department of Veterans Affairs says \$100.8 million out of the 2011-12 state general fund went to care for 2,082 residents, or \$48,433 each. That’s the net cost to the state’s general fund after subtracting reimbursements. Critics say the department’s numbers are understated, arguing that more accurate per capita annual cost is closer to \$100,000 after factoring in all government expenses that come out of taxpayer pockets. The department disagrees, saying the six-figure estimate does not subtract reimbursements from private insurers and also does not take into account \$20.7 million returned to the general fund when new homes in Redding and Fresno could not open as scheduled. Pressure is mounting on California officials to contain the ballooning costs of retirement homes for veterans so more money can be freed to provide other essential services for the next generation just returning home from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bottom line numbers show taxpayers spend a lot of money to serve relatively few residents of veterans homes: nearly \$190 million for about 2,000 veterans in 2011-12. Gov. Brown has proposed to increase the department’s overall budget by \$60 million in 2013-14.

A state audit of veteran homes due out Thursday is expected to expose systemwide failings and questionable spending — as well as provide a guide for reforms. The actual cost to the state general fund is eased somewhat by federal payments, insurance and other reimbursements. But the push is on to find savings. “We want to make sure they are well taken care of,” said Assemblywoman Toni Atkins, a San Diego Democrat active in veteran issues. “But when you’re dealing with limited resources you have to look at how to put the pieces of the puzzle together so we really are getting as much efficiency as we can.” In 2011-12, the Department of Veterans Affairs operated on an overall \$372.7 million budget for all of its various programs, but not all of that went to run the homes and the federal government provided a large share. Nearly 2 million veterans live in California and 228,500 of them are in San Diego County. Those ranks are expected to swell as the two wars wind down and belt-tightening in the Department of Defense continues.

California operates six veteran homes, including one in Chula Vista. The oldest, in Yountville, opened in 1880. Redding and Fresno homes are scheduled to open this fall. The average age of the slightly more than 2,000 residents is 79; most are WW II veterans although 104 served during a period of peace. Applicants must be 55 years old, but the age requirement is waived for the disabled and those who are homeless — the latter must pass a screening test to make sure they do not pose a danger to other residents. Fees are based on income and level of care they need — the

cap ranges from \$2,400 to \$5,600 monthly. The average veteran in those homes earns less than \$24,000 a year. Residents in the older three veteran homes — Chula Vista, Yountville and Barstow — pay on average \$51 per day, or \$1,518 per month. There are an estimated 16,000 homeless veterans in California. The department has become more aggressive in taking in the homeless. Since September, 63 of the 190 admitted had been living on the streets. The state also has a pilot program in its Barstow home to help formally homeless with counseling, job training and other specialized programs in the hopes of getting them a job and place of their own. At Yountville, the state works with Pathway Homes to provide programs for homeless or those with post-traumatic stress disorder or substance abuse problems. [Source: San Diego Union times | Michael Gardner | 6 May 2013 ++]

Iowa Veterans Home Update 05: Former employees of the Iowa Veterans Home criticized the institution's leadership during a state Senate hearing 6 MAY. During more than two hours of testimony before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, former employees said top managers of the home treated staff poorly and were not providing good care to veterans. Bill Rakers, former director of recreational therapy who worked at the home for 29 years before retiring in 2011, said "During the last year of my employment in 2011, a loving caring environment changed into, this is an institution." No current employees testified at the hearing, which was scheduled after more than 40 former staffers at the home signed a letter critical of management that was printed in the Des Moines Register.

David Worley, the commandant of the Iowa Veterans Home since 2010, said he was proud of the treatment offered at the home. He invited lawmakers to visit the facility. "What I would like is for you to come up there. I don't think the morale is as bad as some of those people — it may be for some of those people — but I still believe that the residents are getting great quality care. I see motivated happy residents," Worley said. "I spent five hours at the Veterans Home yesterday talking to families." Several people testifying said the state Department of Administrative Services had investigated complaints about leadership at the home. A spokesman for the department said they would have no comment on personnel matters, which are treated as confidential. Committee chairman Sen. Daryl Beall, D-Fort Dodge, said the panel will meet again to decide what action to take, noting that one option would be to refer it to the Senate Government Oversight Committee, which he said has the power to subpoena witnesses.

Sen. Steve Soddors, D-State Center called on Gov. Terry Branstad to also put Worley on administrative leave and conduct a full investigation. A spokesman for Gov. Terry Branstad said the governor is confident residents of the Veterans Home are receiving quality care. "David Worley has been a strong, effective leader at the Iowa Veterans Home, and Gov. Branstad wholeheartedly supports him," said Tim Albrecht in an emailed statement. The home in Marshalltown is Iowa's largest nursing home and among the biggest in the nation for veterans and their spouses. The home is made up of two separate facilities. One provides nursing care for about 500 residents. The other is a residential care facility where 100 more people live mostly independently. [Source: Associated Press | Catherine Lucey | 6 May 2013 ++]

DFAS myPay System Update 11: The Spring 2013 myPay release will affect all users and be phased in over the next 5 months, beginning 11 MAY. It requires users to change their passwords every 60 days using stronger 15 to 30 character passwords. The change strengthens security and complies with current Defense Department guidelines. myPay is the online pay management system for payroll customers of the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS). "While each myPay release brings new and better ways to manage the pay of our military, federal civilian employee and military retiree customers," said Dave McDermott, DFAS deputy director for

Operations, “the latest release will affect all 4.5 million established myPay account holders. New and more stringent password requirements may seem bothersome to some of our users, but in a world of identity theft and online criminal threats, it is the password requirements that safeguards your money, your identity and your well being.”

Beginning in May, groups of users will be required to establish new passwords when they attempt to access their accounts. DFAS expects it will take four months before all users have updated their passwords. Once a password has been created, each myPay user will have to update their password every 60 days. DFAS plans to send email alerts 10 days before expiration of a user’s password. Customers logging into myPay using DoD computer access cards (CAC) or a similarly encrypted federal ID card will not be required to enter a password to log in to myPay. “The FBI, the Commerce Department and other federal and state agencies all recommend strong passwords along with ways to protect personal information and computer networks as the best defense,” McDermott said. More information on the myPay Spring 2013 release and the new password requirements is available on the DFAS website at <http://www.dfas.mil/dfas/mypayinfo.html> or click on a link below to get myPay release details for that particular category

- Stronger Password Requirement (All myPay customers) <http://www.dfas.mil/mypayinfo/password.html>
- Password Reset Questions (all myPay customers) - <http://www.dfas.mil/mypayinfo/securityquestions.html>
- For Active Duty Army, Navy and Air Force - <http://www.dfas.mil/mypayinfo/foractiveduty.html>
- For Active Duty/Reserve Marine Corps - <http://www.dfas.mil/mypayinfo/formarines.html>
- For Military Retirees - <http://www.dfas.mil/mypayinfo/forretirees.html>
- For Savings Deposit Program participants - <http://www.dfas.mil/mypayinfo/forsdpparticipants.html>

[Source: DFAS Press Release 24 Apr 2013 ++]

VA Caregiver Program Update 20: On 25 APR Chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs

Committee Bernie Sanders introduced S.851, the Caregivers Expansion and Improvement Act of 2013.

This bill would expand eligibility for comprehensive benefits and services to family caregivers of all veterans who were severely injured in the line of duty while serving in the armed forces. Currently, only family caregivers of veterans severely injured on or after September 11, 2001, are eligible for these benefits and services such as: caregiver training; support groups, counseling and other support services; a monthly stipend; health coverage through CHAMPVA; respite care; mental health services and counseling related to the caregiver role and burden.

A survey by the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC) of caregivers who are caring for veterans from combat eras dating from World War II to the more recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan showed that the overwhelming majority of veteran caregivers are women. Twice as many veterans’ caregivers said they have been caregiving for 10 or more years compared to national statistics, three times as many caregivers reported spending 40 hours a week or more providing care compared to the national total, and six out of ten caregivers of veterans surveyed are at least 50 years of age including one in eight who is 65 or older. The military community is encouraged to support this bill by contacting their legislators with a request they sign on as a sponsor to the bill and ask that it be brought to the floor for a vote and enacted as soon as possible. Towards this the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) organization has provided a prepared editable message on their Take Action site at [http://capwiz.com/dav/issues/alert/?alertid=62647446&queueid=\[capwiz:queue_id\]](http://capwiz.com/dav/issues/alert/?alertid=62647446&queueid=[capwiz:queue_id]) which you can use to contact your Senators. [Source: DAV Action Alert 8 May 2013 ++]

Vet Motor Vehicle Crashes: For men and women who have fought in the country’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, death behind the wheel is becoming another lethal aftereffect of combat. After they leave military

service, veterans of the two wars have a 75 percent higher rate of fatal motor vehicle accidents than do civilians. Troops still in uniform have a higher risk of crashing their cars in the months immediately after returning from deployment than in the months immediately before. People who have had multiple tours in combat zones are at highest risk for traffic accidents. The phenomenon has been revealed by various pieces of evidence — research as well as observations of service members, veterans and counselors. The most common explanation is that troops bring back driving habits that were lifesaving in war zones but are dangerous on America's roads. They include racing through intersections, straddling lanes, swerving on bridges and, for some, not wearing seat belts because they hinder a rapid escape.

That's probably not the whole story, however. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suffered by thousands of veterans, increases aggressive driving. Drunken driving and thrill-seeking also are more common after combat, according to a few studies and the testimony of many veterans. If further research supports the observations, motor vehicle crashes will join suicide and interpersonal violence as a fatal, if indirect, consequence of the war on terrorism. Motor vehicle crashes have long been a serious problem in the military. From 1999 through 2012, a period spanning peacetime and the two wars, as many active-duty military personnel died in noncombat motor vehicle crashes both on and off duty (4,423) as were killed in the Iraq war (4,409). "Before suicides became the leading cause of non-battle injuries, motor vehicle injuries were," said Bruce H. Jones, a physician and epidemiologist who heads the Army's injury prevention program at Aberdeen Proving Ground, in Maryland. War, however, worsens the problem.

Men who served in the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan have a 76 percent higher rate of dying in vehicle crashes, and women a 43 percent higher rate, than people in the general population, according to an unpublished study by Han K. Kang, an epidemiologist with the Department of Veterans Affairs. The same phenomenon was seen in Persian Gulf War veterans and took five years to dissipate. Fatal motorcycle crashes in particular spiked during the wars. They accounted for 14 percent of military traffic deaths in 2001, but 38 percent in 2008. The absolute rate of motorcycle deaths also tripled over that period. "A lot of people come home and buy a motorcycle to have that adrenaline rush again," said Steven Acheson, 27, a former forward observer in the Army and an engineering student in Wisconsin. He spent time at Fort Stewart in Georgia, where the post put vehicles from fatal crashes on display as a form of warning. "There was once six or seven completely mangled motorcycles out in front of the gate," Acheson recalled.

One of the best pieces of evidence that combat raises a person's risk for car crashes comes from an in-house study by USAA, an insurance company in San Antonio that covers thousands of military personnel. The company offers a reduced-price insurance premium if vehicles are stored securely during deployment. Almost all of the company's active-duty customers opt for it. As a consequence, USAA has before-and-after records for 171,000 deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Troops had more at-fault accidents in the six months after their return from deployment than in the six months before they left. The increase was highest for people in the Army (23 percent) and in the enlisted ranks (22 percent). Tellingly, there was a "dose-response relationship" between deployment and risk. Troops with three deployments had 36 percent more accidents, compared with 27 percent more in the twice-deployed and 12 percent in people deployed only once. But the problem isn't just a carry-over of habits.

One-quarter of the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans enrolled in a 60-day residential treatment program for PTSD in California said they drove after drinking. One-fifth said they used seat belts "less than sometimes," in part because they get in the way of a rapid escape from a vehicle. "Failure to adapt the unique combat driving behaviors used in the current conflicts cannot be the only explanation for deployment-related risky driving behavior and excess .??. mortality," wrote Mark A. Zamorski, a Canadian military physician, and Amanda M. Kelley, a civilian U.S. Army psychologist, in a report to NATO on the subject. "All of the likely mechanisms .??. could be mediated by distress or mental disorders," they wrote. 'You're scaring me' The military is beginning to pay attention to the particular risks facing — and needs of — Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who resume driving when they get home. The Army

gives out a brochure called “Post-Combat Driving: The American Road” that includes data from a survey that an occupational therapist at the University of Minnesota,

Erica B. Stern, conducted with deployed and non-deployed reservists. (Forty-nine percent of returning troops said they were anxious when cars approached quickly; 25 percent said they had driven through stop signs in the previous month.) The publication has tips on how to increase self-control; one is to tape a drawing by one’s child to the dashboard. VA has new training materials for clinicians advising them to talk about driving with veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, some of whom are enrolling in the department’s driver-rehabilitation programs offered at 40 VA medical centers across the country, which have traditionally been used by people with physical disabilities. The VA hospital in Palo Alto, Calif., is conducting a study aimed at identifying the best techniques for relieving driving anxiety while on the road. Veterans drive hour-long trips near the medical center that incorporate their “triggers” — underpasses, bridges, construction sites, busy intersections. Their pulse and breathing are monitored. When they feel panic, they pull over and try various self-calming techniques. Getting permission for the study from scientific review boards wasn’t easy. There haven’t been any disasters so far. Woodward hopes one day to extend it to an even more overlooked group — returning veterans who aren’t yet confident enough to resume driving. [Source: Washington Post | David Brown | 5 May 2011 3 ++]

DoD Sexual Abuse Update 05: As the Air Force struggles to come to grips with sexual assault in its ranks, it endured another high-profile setback: The chief of its sexual assault prevention and response branch was arrested this weekend and charged with sexual battery. Lt. Col. Jeffrey Krusinski, 41, of Arlington, Va., was arrested early Sunday morning, according to the Arlington police. He’s accused of approaching a woman in a parking lot and grabbing her breasts and buttocks, according to the crime report. He has been removed from his position, said Air Force spokeswoman Lt. Col. Laurel Tingley. Krusinski was released Sunday on a \$5,000 personal recognizance bond.

On Capitol Hill to testify on the defense budget, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III told the Senate Armed Services Committee on 7 MAY that the Air Force has requested jurisdiction in the Krusinski case from prosecutors in Arlington, where he will be arraigned on one count of sexual battery. A decision on jurisdiction should be made at that time, Welsh said. “We have requested jurisdiction, which is standard procedure in cases like these,” Welsh said. In a call 6 MAY with Air Force Secretary Michael B. Donley, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel “expressed outrage and disgust over the troubling allegations,” Pentagon spokesman George Little said in a statement, which did not mention Krusinski by name. Hagel “emphasized that this matter will be dealt with swiftly and decisively,” Little said.

Little said Hagel has been directing the department’s leaders to elevate their focus on sexual assault prevention and response, and he will soon announce “next steps in our ongoing efforts to combat this vile crime.” Krusinski has served in Afghanistan, in addition to serving as the deputy expeditionary mission support group commander at Joint Base Balad in Iraq, and commander of 6th Force Support Squadron at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Fla. He attended the U.S. Air Force Academy, where he lettered in baseball. In 2009, Krusinski was recognized by Air Mobility Command’s Manpower, Personnel and Services Directorate as its Force Support Field Grade Officer of the Year while assigned to MacDill, according to an archived news release on the Air Force’s web site. Krusinski’s arrest comes at a time when the Pentagon and the Air Force are already under intense scrutiny for not doing enough to stop sexual assault among the ranks following several high-profile incidents.

The Air Force recently came under fire for a decision by a lieutenant general to throw out the sexual assault conviction of fighter pilot Lt. Col. James Wilkerson. Wilkerson, 44, the former inspector general for the 31st Fighter

Wing at Aviano Air Base in Italy, was convicted last year of aggravated sexual assault and sentenced to a year in jail, forfeiture of pay and dismissal from the Air Force. Lt. Gen. Craig Franklin overturned the sentence and reinstated Wilkerson into the Air Force. The nomination of Lt. Gen. Susan J. Helms as vice commander of Space Command has been blocked by Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO), a member of the Armed Services Committee, who wants to examine Helms' previously unpublicized decision to overturn the conviction, on charges of aggravated sexual assault, of a captain at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. been convicted of misconduct with trainees, from fraternization to sexual assault. More cases are still under investigation.



Jeffrey R. Krusinski

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III has emphasized preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment and respect among airmen since he took over the job last year. "Every time I hear about another case, it breaks my heart," he said in a video posted on the Air Force's sexual assault prevention website. "You know what right looks like." In an interview with Stars and Stripes last summer before he was confirmed as chief of staff, Welsh said that sexual assault "just has the potential to rip the fabric of your force apart. I think it is doing that to a certain extent now." Rep. Jackie Speier, a California Democrat and longtime critic of how the military handles sexual assault cases, said news of Krusinski's arrest made her physically ill. "How many more reasons do we need to take cases of rape and sexual assault out of the chain of command?" she said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Jennifer Hlad | 6 May 2013++]

DoD Sexual Abuse Update 06: Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel is vowing to change the culture that allows sexual assault to be a serious problem for the Defense Department. In a memo released 7 May Hagel announced a number of initiatives to eradicate sexual assault. "While the department is putting in place important new programs to combat this crime, it is clear that we must do much more to eliminate this threat to the safety and welfare of our men and women in uniform, and the health, reputation, and trust of this institution," he wrote. Army Maj. Gen. Gary S. Patton, the director of the Pentagon's sexual assault prevention and response office, discussed the secretary's initiatives in an interview ahead of the memo's release. Patton said the secretary's initiatives will work to change the culture in the armed forces. The initiatives include:

- Dealing with the command climate and enhancing commander accountability, requiring that the results of command climate surveys will be provided to the next higher echelon of command.
- Directing the service chiefs to develop methods to assess the performance of military commanders in incorporating sexual assault prevention and victim care principles into their commands," Patton said.
- Directing the service chiefs to look at methods to incorporate this into annual assessments -- what would be appropriate ways to tie sexual assault prevention and response accomplishments into an evaluation or assessment system? The chiefs have to report back to Hagel with their conclusions 1 NOV.

- Directing the services and defense agencies have been directed to conduct a comprehensive visual inspection of department work places, including the service academies, by 1 JUL. This is similar to an inspection the Air Force conducted late last year to ensure workforces do not display degrading, offensive materials.
- Improving overall victim care and trust in the chain of command, to increase reporting of the crime, and to reduce the feelings victims have of being ostracized.
- Preventing sexual assault in the recruiting and early training process. This includes DOD-wide recruiting organizations, the military entrance processing centers [and] ROTC to assess them on their sexual assault prevention programs. This follows recent assessments conducted by the services of their military academies and initial entry training programs.
- On the military justice side, Hagel asked for the acting DOD general counsel to incorporate the rights afforded to victims through the Crime Victims' Rights Act into military justice practice. He also wants to evaluate the Air Force Special Victims Counsel pilot program to ensure victims of sexual assault are provided the advice and counsel they need to understand their rights and to feel confident.
- The defense secretary is asking a congressionally mandated panel to speed up its work on an independent review of the systems used to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate sexual assault crimes. The legislation gives the panel 18 months to finish its review. Hagel is asking them to finish in a year.

[Source: AFPS | Jim Garamone | 7 May 2013 ++]

Memorial Day Update 05: *Memorial Day* is a United States federal holiday which occurs every year on the final Monday of May which this year will be the 27th. It is a day of remembering the men and women who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces.



Formerly known as **Decoration Day**, it originated after the American Civil War, to commemorate the Union and Confederate soldiers who died in the Civil War. By the 20th century Memorial Day had been extended to honor all Americans who have died in all wars. It typically marks the start of the summer vacation season, while Labor Day marks its end. Many people visit cemeteries and memorials, particularly to honor those who have died in military service. Many volunteers place an American flag on each grave in national cemeteries. By the early 20th century, Memorial Day was an occasion for more general expressions of memory, as people visited the graves of their deceased relatives in church cemeteries, whether they had served in the military or not. It also became a long weekend increasingly devoted to shopping, family gatherings, fireworks, trips to the beach, and national media events.

Annual Decoration Days for particular cemeteries are held on a Sunday in late spring or early summer in some rural areas of the American South, notably in the mountains. In cases involving a family graveyard where remote ancestors as well as those who were deceased more recently are buried, this may take on the character of an extended family reunion to which some people travel hundreds of miles. People gather on the designated day and put flowers on graves and renew contacts with kinfolk and others. There often is a religious service and a "dinner on the ground," the traditional term for a potluck meal in which people used to spread the dishes out on sheets or tablecloths on the grass. It is believed that this practice began before the American Civil War and thus may reflect the real origin of the "memorial day" idea. Memorial Day is not to be confused with Veteran's Day; Memorial Day is a day of remembering the men and women who died while serving, while Veterans Day celebrates the service of all U.S. military veterans, living or dead.



The practice of decorating soldiers' graves with flowers is an ancient custom. Soldiers' graves were decorated in the U.S. before and during the American Civil War. A claim was made in 1906 that the first Civil War soldier's grave ever decorated was in Warrenton, Virginia on June 3, 1861, implying the first Memorial Day occurred there. There is authentic documentation that women in Savanna, Georgia decorated soldiers' graves in 1862. In 1863, the cemetery dedication at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania was a ceremony of commemoration at the graves of dead soldiers. Local historians in Boalsburg, PA, claim that ladies there decorated soldiers' graves on July 4, 1864. As a result, Boalsburg promotes itself as the birthplace of Memorial Day. [Source: Triple S Mobility Apr/May Newsletter ++]

Subic Bay Philippines: The thousands of big-spending sailors have been gone for more than two decades — since the United States turned over the Subic Bay Naval Station to the Philippines in 1992 — but the sprawling former military base still receives regular visits from U.S. Navy ships. For a snapshot of what it is today refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Shadows of an Old Military Base**”. [Source: Pittsburgh Post Gazette | Floyd Whaley | 26 Apr 2013 ++]

Arlington National Cemetery Update 41: Arlington National Cemetery leaders are working on what could be one of the largest expansions in decades, warning that without more burial space the nation's iconic military burial ground will run out of new grave sites for veterans within a dozen years. Workers just finished construction on a giant structure that can hold tens of thousands of cremated remains; cemetery officials hope to

begin a controversial 27-acre expansion this fall; and they will soon start designing a 38-acre addition around the Air Force Memorial near the Pentagon.



Millennium Project

This 27-acre site comprises land transferred from Fort Myer and part of Arlington House Woods, the forest around the former Custis-Lee Mansion, administered by the National Park Service. The expansion would add more than 27 interment sites.

Columbarium Court 9

On Thursday, a new columbarium will be dedicated that has capacity for 20,000 cremated remains.

Navy Annex

After the 1 million-square-foot Navy Annex complex is demolished and cleared, the surrounding 38 acres will be transferred, excluding the Air Force Memorial, for cemetery use.

The dramatic expansion plans are part of a whirlwind of modernization and improvements put in place since investigators revealed widespread problems several years ago. The changes, including digitized records that allow cemetery visitors to look up burial sites online, have transformed internal operations and the visitor experience at the cemetery, which dates to the Civil War. But one project — which officials say would beautify the area and add more than 27,000 much-needed interment sites for veterans on the northern side of the grounds — has sparked opposition. Critics say the Millennium Project, as the 27-acre expansion is called, doesn't fit the historic site, would damage a stream and raze hundreds of trees in place since the Civil War. And some ask whether it would make more sense to begin planning for the inevitable: the day when the cemetery will be full. It's no small question for a place that

attracts more than 4 million visitors a year, with graves that span U.S. history, including Revolutionary War soldiers, U.S. presidents, Abner Doubleday, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Joe Louis, Pierre L'Enfant and many thousands of others who served the country. "I love Arlington. But it's not big enough for all future wars," said Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN), a member of the House Armed Services Committee. "It seems like we need to be preparing for Arlington Two, making sure it's just as nice and wonderful and historical as Arlington One."

On 9 MAY, the cemetery will dedicate a new columbarium court, nearly as long as two football fields, where more than 20,000 cremated remains can be stored. Without it, Arlington would have run out of what cemetery officials call "niche" space by 2016. Now the focus is on new grave sites with the Millennium Project. "This is important," said Kathryn Condon, executive director of Army National Military Cemeteries, "because if we do nothing today, we will run out of in-ground burial space in 2025." There are about 22 million living U.S. veterans now, said Paige Lowther, of the National Cemetery Administration at the Department of Veterans Affairs, and each day many hundreds die. Nationally, only a little more than half of the VA's 131 national cemeteries — administered separately from Arlington, which is run by the U.S. Army — are fully open for new burials. The VA is planning to expand, as well, with five enormous new cemeteries. But Arlington's history sets it apart. Federal troops took over the Arlington House estate that had been home to Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee and his family during the Civil War and began burying Union soldiers there, including 1,800 killed at Bull Run. Arlington conducts 27 to 30 interments a day on its formal grounds, where magnolias bloom over seemingly endless rows of white headstones, caissons roll past and Old Guard soldiers give three-volley salutes as a final honor. Some families wait six months for an in-ground burial there.

On the southern side of Arlington, heavy machinery is demolishing a 1 million-square-foot Navy Annex office complex on a hill overlooking the Pentagon to make more space for another expansion. Cemetery officials are starting the \$19 million planning and design for that this year and project that the three projects together would allow new veteran interments into the 2050s. After that, there's nowhere else to grow. "Eventually, Arlington is going to close because there is no more space. That's a given," said Joe Davis, a spokesman for Veterans of Foreign Wars, which supports the expansions. "We want Arlington to continue to serve as the final resting place for all of our nation's fallen warriors for as long as it possibly can. "But Arlington does have a life span."

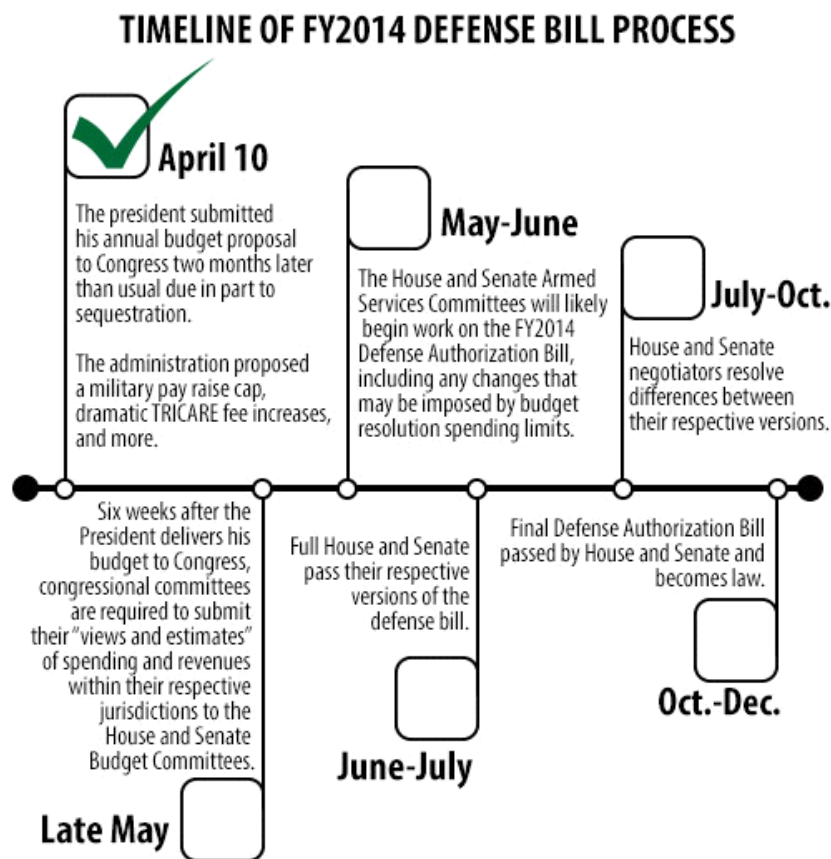
In 2010, cemetery leaders asked the Army Corps of Engineers' Norfolk District for "a more environmentally friendly design," cemetery officials said. But critics such as H. Hedrick Belin, president of Potomac Conservancy, said last month that the recent plans would "totally devastate the topography of the region," tearing down trees and leaving "some real questions about the impact on water quality in the Chesapeake Bay." The stream valley would be altered, he said. "We want to preserve this place, a wonderful place to reflect on their sacrifices," said Rob Nieweg of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "We oppose what we consider to be a ham-handed design." "Arlington wants to bulldoze [one section] essentially, remove 800 native trees and an extraordinary amount of earth." Those woods that one section would replace are historic, he argued. "These are the last remaining bits of the Arlington estate. The Custis-Lee mansion at one point was surrounded by 1,100 acres." Stephen Van Hoven, the cemetery's urban forester, said the work will preserve the stand of trees next to Arlington House, so the view from that site will remain the same. Lt. Col. David Fedroff of the Army Corps said the design requires cutting into the slope for safety reasons; a cemetery can't be put on a steep hill.

The project, which will be submitted to the National Capital Planning Commission for final approval in June or July, would also remove invasive species that choke native plants and vines that strangle trees, Van Hoven said. Plans call for nearly 800 new trees, thousands of bushes and seedlings, efforts to improve water quality and restoration of the eroded streambed. All the trees have been numbered with small metal tags, which helps track the different species. After earlier criticism, the design of a road was changed to save some trees. Orange ties around trunks mark a wetlands area as off-limits, and an arched bridge design allows animals to cross the stream; earlier plans had concrete embedded in the water, project manager Greg Hegge said. Hegge said cemetery officials think

that they have addressed almost all of the criticisms, although “some individuals have expressed such a degree of concern over the living trees on the site that they will accept no tree removal.” The officials won’t be able to satisfy those concerns, he said. “And we owe it to our veterans and our loved ones who served this country to make that balance,” Condon added.

But Arlington officials would not have so many environmental issues to juggle, said Cooper, the congressman from Tennessee, if they were not trying to expand into land so ill-suited for a cemetery. He wondered what the cost per grave will be and asked whether it is truly patriotic to spend so much. “I don’t mind paying top dollar, and our veterans deserve to be honored,” he said. “But anything we purchase — literally — would be cheaper than what we’re doing now.” Cemetery officials should be looking ahead and finding a beautiful new site, he said, rather than staying in denial. The Millennium Project has cost \$17 million so far, including planning and design, storm-water retention and stabilizing the stream, and \$82 million has been budgeted for construction, Arlington officials said. The new columbarium court cost nearly \$16 million. And it’s too soon to know how much the Navy Annex project might cost. “It’s tough,” said Davis, the VFW spokesman. “That’s where everyone wants to go. Even people whose immediate family doesn’t live anywhere near here. Because they’re surrounded by all their brothers. “My parents are buried there. I want to go there — knock on wood they have space for me.” [Source: Washington Post | Susan Svrluga | 4 May 2013 ++]

NDAA 2014: The House was expected to begin its consideration of the FY2014 defense authorization bill in early MAY. Below is an estimated timeline of FY2014 defense bill process.



- *April 10:* The president submitted his annual budget proposal to Congress two months later than usual due in part to sequestration. The administration proposed a military pay raise cap, dramatic TRICARE fee increases, and more.
- *Late May:* Six weeks after the President delivers his budget to Congress, congressional committees are required to submit their “views and estimates” of spending and revenues within their respective jurisdictions to the House and Senate Budget Committees.
- *May-June:* The House and Senate Armed Services Committees will likely begin work on the FY2014 Defense Authorization Bill, including any changes that may be imposed by budget resolution spending limits.
- *June-July:* Full House and Senate pass their respective versions of the defense bill.
- *July-October:* House and Senate negotiators resolve differences between their respective versions.
- *October-December:* Final Defense Authorization Bill passed by House and Senate and becomes law.

[Source: MOAA Leg Up 3 May 2013 ++]

Stolen Valor Update 87: The president of the Korean War Veterans Association admitted 2 MAY that he wore combat medals belonging to his late brother to several public functions, including some with President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden. **James Ferris**, of the Syracuse suburb of Clay, said he offered to resign as president but the offer was rejected. Ferris was a Marine who served in the United States and Japan in administrative roles with an engineering battalion during the war. Among the honors he wore publicly, including in ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery, were the Marine Corps Combat Action Ribbon, the Navy Occupation Service Medal and the New York State Conspicuous Service Cross.



Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta speaks with Korean War Veterans Association President James Ferris

The Syracuse Post-Standard was first to report Ferris' admission. The concerns were first aired in April on a website run by veterans who track false claims of valor. "I shouldn't have worn my brother's medals," he told The Associated Press by phone. "I made a mistake. I've admitted it. I'm extremely sorry for it." Of his brother, Frank Ferris, who he said died in the 1990s, he said: "He was a good Marine." At the height of the Iraq War in 2006, President George Bush signed a law making it a crime for anyone to wear military medals that they had not earned. In 2012, the Supreme Court struck it down as a violation of the First Amendment. Congress quickly acted with a new proposal, the Stolen Valor Act, which would make it a crime to lie about military service or make false claims about receiving military medals with the intent of benefiting from those claims. It would specifically exempt from

punishment those who simply wear military medals or decorations that do not belong to them. A House version of the bill is ready for a vote while similar legislation is currently working its way through the U.S. Senate.

Ferris, 81, says he never tried to use the medals to get benefits such as Veterans Administration health care that he didn't deserve. "I didn't get anything for this," he said. "You'd have to be cheating like using the VA or getting some compensation by lying about your service. I don't use the VA, I don't get anything." The Syracuse newspaper also found that Ferris misstated his service in Korea and served in the states and Japan during the war. The 15,000-member KWVA, chartered by Congress in 2008, was formed as a charitable entity to "organize, promote and maintain for benevolent and charitable purposes an association of persons who have seen honorable service during the Korean War" defined as from June 25, 1950, to January 1955. Ferris offered to resign, but Larry Kinard, the organization's first vice president, said the board of directors rejected the offer. Ferris will remain president through June 2014. "He's been an excellent president for our organization and we feel like he should stay in office and continue to do the good work he's been doing," Kinard said from his home in Mansfield, Texas. "I think he made a mistake and we're sad about that, but we don't think that's enough to discredit him in the eyes of what we're doing." Ferris told the AP he was humbled by the board's decision. "I'm pretty happy they have that much faith in me," he said. "I've worked hard for the Korean War Veterans Association. Very hard." [Source: Associated Press article 1 May 2013 ++]

DoD/VA Seamless Transition Update 18: The Defense Strategies Institute will hold a conference in Alexandria, Va., May 15-16 on the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments' planned integrated electronic health record featuring high ranking speakers from both departments. Any vendor who wants to attend can do so. But the **media will be prohibited**. Why no press coverage of a discussion that affects every member of the military and millions of veterans? Luis Hernandez, senior partner at New York City-based Defense Strategies said 30 APR that his company assured federal speakers ahead of time that the iEHR conference would be a media-free zone and that this in turn would help foster "dialogue" between government and industry. Hernandez also said the media probably would not be interested in covering the conference as a lot of it would be down into the technical "weeds".

Based on the speaker list and agenda and the fact that so many vendors have signed up they will be stashed in an overflow room, it is likely the conference will focus on far more than just technical weeds. It has attracted vendors because of the billions of dollars at stake. Top speakers include Barclay Butler, director of the Defense-VA iEHR Interagency Program Office; Robert Petzel, VA Under Secretary for Health; Dr. Karen Guice, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense; Air Force Maj. Gen. Douglas Robb, nominated last week to head the new Defense Health Agency; and a whole bunch of other speakers from the IPO, Defense and VA. This is an event that begs for coverage, particularly since Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said on 16 APR he has taken on personal responsibility for the iEHR. Both Defense and VA have been asked to furnish their policies on providing speakers to conferences barred to the media and designed to foster "dialogue" with vendors. As of this writing no response has been provided to the request. While it might be possible in America for high ranking federal officials to engage with industry in a media-free even it sure does not pass the smell test. [Source: NectGov.com | Bob Brewin | 1 May 2013 ++]

VA Beneficiary Designations: If you've had a recent life event such as a change in marital status, the addition of a child, or the death of a loved one, then now is a good time to review your beneficiary designations for Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI), Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) and VA Insurance

policies starting with V, RS, RH or J. It's the best way to ensure your life insurance benefit is paid to whom you want. Not keeping beneficiaries up to date may result in your benefits going to a former spouse, your deceased parent's estate, your estate, or even no one. It could also result in payment delays at a time when your loved one needs the money. For example, if the listed beneficiaries are children from a first marriage, children from a current marriage might contest the claim if they believe they have more recent documents showing they should be the beneficiaries. No one could be paid until it is determined who is legally entitled to the money. Even if you haven't had a recent life event it's a good idea to review your beneficiaries at least once a year around tax time or another memorable date. So mark it on your calendar as an annual event. You have the legal right to name any beneficiary you want and change your beneficiary at any time. You can access all Change of Beneficiary forms at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/INSURANCE/updatebene.asp>. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 3 May 2013 ++]

VA Bonuses Update 06: The U.S. Veterans Affairs inspector general issued a review that found systemic failures at the Pittsburgh VA led to a recent Legionnaires' outbreak that killed at least five veterans. Three days later VA regional director Michael Moreland, who oversees the Pittsburgh system, was in Washington, D.C., receiving the government's highest career award for civil servants. On 26 APR at a black tie banquet Moreland received the Presidential Distinguished Rank Award that included a \$62,895 bonus. The award is ultimately approved by the White House. That confluence of events has members of Congress, VA employees and families of the Legionnaires' victims furious that VA Secretary Eric Shinseki -- who nominated Mr. Moreland -- allowed him to receive the award even though many people believe he deserves at least some of the blame for the outbreak since it occurred under his watch as regional director.

Many believe Mr. Moreland played a more direct role by closing the Special Pathogens Laboratory -- which oversaw Legionella control and prevention -- and firing and forcing out Legionnaires' experts Victor Yu and Janet Stout, when he was director of the Pittsburgh VA in 2006. "Are you kidding me?" said Judy Nicklas, daughter-in-law of William Nicklas, 87, of Hampton, who died in November after contracting Legionnaires'. "Unbelievable." Ward Morrow, assistant general counsel to the American Federation of Government Employees, which represents Pittsburgh VA employees, said, "Saying I'm shocked is an understatement." U.S. Rep. Tim Murphy, R-Upper St. Clair, said the timing could not have been worse "coming on the heels of an inspector general report finding serious problems at the veterans' hospital under [Mr. Moreland's] watch, and an ongoing criminal investigation looking into problems that occurred under his watch." Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), who chairs the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, said in a statement: "When it comes to executive bonuses, apparently there is no limit to VA's tone deafness. This is more proof that the department needs to re-evaluate its process for awarding bonuses, and we are calling on them to do just that."

To some, the award explains why the outbreak dragged on for two years in 2011 and 2012. "I'll bet the reason they managed to keep it quiet through most of 2012 is because he thinks he's going to get the highest civil award and the bonus," said Maureen Ciarolla, daughter of John Ciarolla, 83, of North Versailles, who was the first veteran to die during the outbreak. "Now it all makes sense." The Pittsburgh VA first publicly revealed it had an outbreak on Nov. 16, 2012, even though officials, including Mr. Moreland, knew they had a serious problem as early as July 2011, when Mr. Ciarolla died. The Distinguished Rank Award is a career service-based award given to less than 1 percent of the federal government's senior executives by every president since 1978. Fifty-four executives got it this year. Nominations for this year's award were due in March 2012, and, after a review by a committee and staff, the list was given to the White House in September. The White House finalized its list about November, and revealed the winners in January 2013, said Carol Bonosaro, president of the Senior Executives Association, the private organization that throws the annual banquet for the winners.

An Obama administration official said the VA was notified that Mr. Moreland was a winner of the award on 30 SEP 2012, a date mandated by statute. The award includes a certificate signed by President Barack Obama, who did not attend the banquet, as well as a gold pin, and a bonus equal to 35 percent of the awardee's annual salary. For Mr. Moreland's \$179,700 salary, that means he will get \$62,895. The Obama administration official said they "consulted with appropriate department VA officials, including former supervisors, professional colleagues and the office of inspector general to verify Michael Moreland's qualifications and record." Part of the award's guidelines allows the nominee's agency head -- in this case Mr. Shinseki -- to **withdraw the nominee any time** before the president approves the award. "Situations that could cause a withdrawal of the nomination might include being the subject of an unfavorable finding in an investigation, conflict of interest, EEO complaint, or adverse legal action," the guidelines for this year's awards read in part. "We also ask agencies to consider the potential reaction of employees, customers, and other stakeholders." Mr. Murphy said he intends to write a letter to Mr. Obama. "It's just so incredibly insensitive to the families and victims that no one in the administration put a hold on this," he said.

On learning of the latest VA debacle House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) said, "We are calling on VA to conduct a top-to-bottom review of its performance appraisal system to ensure outrageous bonus payments like this do not occur in the future. In the meantime, VA owes us all -- especially the families of those who died -- an explanation as to why the department awarded these bonuses." [Source: Pittsburgh Post-Gazette | Sean D. Hamill | 2 May 2013 ++]

VA Bonuses Update 07: On 29 APR the Department of Veterans Affairs announced bonuses would be withheld for senior officials who oversee disability claims, citing a failure to meet performance goals for reducing a sizable backlog in claims processing. The backlog has increased dramatically over the past three years, and the department has come under intense criticism from veterans groups and members of Congress who have asked President Barack Obama to try to speed the process. VA spokesman Josh Taylor said the savings would be used to help reduce the backlog. He didn't provide specifics, nor could he say how many people would be affected or how much the savings would be. The withholdings apply only to executives of the Veterans Benefits Administration with responsibility for "management" of the unacceptably large backlog at VA. "How does the department expect to turn things around when it is rewarding employees and managers for falling behind?" said Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. "One can only wonder what effect this sort of policy may have had if VA had instituted it years ago," he said. Records from the previous year, fiscal year 2011, show VA paid its senior executives a total of \$2.8 million in bonuses, despite the growing backlog of claims. Among the VBA bonuses, three staff members received the top payment of \$23,091. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 3 May 2013 ++]

VA Bonuses Update 08: The chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee proposed legislation that would ban all bonuses for senior executives in the Veterans Affairs Department for the next five years. The move by Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) is in response to VA's disability claims backlog and patient deaths in VA hospitals. "The fact that so many VA executives collected huge performance bonuses year after year while continually failing at their jobs calls into question whether department leaders even know the meaning of the word 'accountability,'" Miller said. Nextgov has learned that from 2007 through 2011, VA paid 398 bonuses to members of the Senior Executive Service totaling \$16.8 million. Last month, the department said senior executives in the Veterans Benefits Administration will not receive 2012 performance bonuses. The funds will instead be used to accelerate plans aimed at eliminating the claims backlog. That decision was insufficient, Miller said. "While recent VA decisions to forego

certain executive bonuses and review others are steps in the right direction, they don't go nearly far enough. VA owes every American an explanation for why it rewarded failing executives with bonuses, and we are calling on the department to conduct a top-to-bottom review of its performance appraisal system to prevent similar outrageous payments in the future. [Source: NextGov | Bob Brewin | 8 May 2013 ++]

Tricare Management Activity Update 02: Procurement personnel at the TRICARE

Management Activity, which had an acquisition budget of \$18.8 billion in 2012, lacked formal certification for their jobs, proper training and accurate position descriptions, the Defense Department Inspector General said in a highly critical report released 1 MAY. These problems start at the top, the IG said, noting that none of the 32 senior TMA acquisition personnel met all the requirements for their positions mandated under the 1990 Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act, including those who held Acquisition Corps positions. The Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act requires Defense agencies to establish formal career paths for personnel who want to pursue careers in acquisition. There are formal training and certification requirements for 15 positions at three levels: entry, intermediate and advanced. Defense agencies also are required to develop position descriptions for their acquisition workforce. The Defense IG said:

- Of TMA's 237 acquisition personnel, 52 (22 percent) did not achieve the required certification. Seventy (29 percent) did not have position descriptions with critical acquisition designators, and 83 (35 percent) did not have position descriptions with certification requirements. The law requires personnel to achieve certification within two years, a benchmark exceeded at TMA by 99 to 1,598 days, the IG reported, based on statistical samples.
- The deputy program executive officer for the Defense Health Services System, which on its website bills itself as "the largest acquisition program" for the Military Health System, did not have any certification at all, even though "he shared oversight and management responsibility for the development, acquisition, distribution, and deployment of highly specialized and dynamic information systems with the principal emphasis on managing the business and acquisition aspects."
- The program executive officer for Joint Medical Information Systems is not an Acquisition Corps officer and the deputy PEO did not sign a three year tenure agreement, a condition of employment. This office manages the Defense electronic health record system and the network and computing infrastructure for MHS.

The Defense IG recommended that TMA develop a certification plan for its acquisition workforce based on a timeline it did not define, and said personnel who did not meet the goals should be removed from acquisition positions. The IG also recommended key TMA acquisition personnel meet requirements to become members of the Acquisition Corps and that the agency review position descriptions annually and validate certifications. Katrina McFarland, assistant secretary of defense for acquisition, told the IG in a reply to the report that TMA's leadership is "working diligently to improve compliance with acquisition workforce policy." Dr. Jonathan Woodson, assistant secretary of defense for Health Affairs and the TMA director, said in an 11 APR reply to the IG that all TMA acquisition personnel who have not met their certification requirements will be notified within 30 days and directed to obtain certification. Woodson said all position descriptions in the TMA acquisition workforce will be reviewed within 60 days. The review will examine whether key leadership positions should require membership in the Acquisition Corps. [Source: NectGov.vom | Bob Brewin | 2 May 2013 ++]

Tricare Management Activity Update 03: TMA forecasted on 18 APR that it planned to run health IT procurements valued at \$2.3 billion this year. However, without any fanfare DoD has quietly shifted management and oversight of health information technology, including procurements from the Military Health System and the TRICARE Management Activity, to Frank Kendall, Under Secretary of Defense for acquisition, technology and logistics. One anonymous official said the move reflects frustration among senior Pentagon leaders with MHS efforts to procure new health IT systems, both independently and in partnership with the VA to develop the integrated electronic health record. The departments have spent at least \$1 billion over the past five years pursuing an integrated system without any positive results. According to Pentagon officials, Under Secretary Kendall will exercise tight control and oversight of the health IT procurement budget.

DoD Benefit Cuts Update 16: A recent op-ed piece in a national newspaper suggested the military could save money by shifting to a health savings account (HAS) plan instead of TRICARE. Bad idea. Very bad. Health savings accounts entail having a high-deductible insurance plan (usually something like a \$5,000 deductible) and giving people the option to put away their own money to cover the first \$5,000 with pre-tax money (similar to Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA's) offered by most employers — except the military — to let employees pay out-of-pocket health care expenses with pre-tax money). The differences as pointed out by the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) are FSA's and premium conversion accounts are benefit improvements supported by MOAA because:

- FSAs for currently serving military people could give them a tax break on money they were going to spend anyway on health costs that are not covered by TRICARE. (e.g. eyeglasses, contact lenses, dental deductibles and copays, etc.)
- FSA's for currently serving people could allow them to pay their TRICARE Reserve Select, TRICARE dental and TRICARE supplement premiums with pre-tax dollars
- FSA's for retirees could allow them to pay their FEHBP, TRICARE retiree dental and TRICARE supplement premiums with pre-tax dollars (this option is called premium conversion)...which gives them a tax break on premium dollars they're already spending on health care.

HSAs are a benefit cut — a big one, and does not have MOAA support. In contrast, HSAs are designed explicitly to make you (instead of the government) use your own money pay for things that are now covered by TRICARE. They try to put lipstick on that pig by giving you a tax break on the extra money you'd be required to spend out of pocket. But one problem is that people under HSAs often don't actually put enough money in the HSA to pay for the needed care...so they lose both ways. [Source: MOAA News Exchange 25 Apr 2013 ++]

DoD Benefit Cuts Update 17: The government must reform military pay and benefits to help the Defense Department rein in spending, according to a new report from a left-leaning think tank. The Center for American Progress praised Pentagon proposals to cut personnel costs, which include capping pay raises for service members beginning in fiscal 2015, raising TRICARE enrollment fees for military retirees to keep pace with increases in health care costs, creating a 401(k)-based retirement system to replace the current vesting system, and increasing the age at which service members can receive their pensions. The report, which outlined recommendations for “thoughtful” spending cuts while maintaining a robust national defense, also recommended reducing the number of active-duty personnel stationed in Europe and Asia, something the Obama administration also has proposed. Some personnel-related reforms CAP supports include:

- Limit pay increases beginning in fiscal 2015. “By repeatedly passing pay raises above and beyond the Pentagon’s request, Congress has driven military pay out of line with the Pentagon’s own standards,” the report stated. “Basic pay accounts for about half of military cash compensation -- service members also receive tax-free allowances for housing and subsistence, a variety of other tax breaks, and an array of special and incentive pay.”
- Raise TRICARE enrollment fees and deductibles for working-age retirees to reflect increases in health care costs during the past 20 years. Until 2011, TRICARE enrollment fees for military retirees younger than 65 had remained the same since 1995. As of Oct. 1, all retirees enrolled in TRICARE Prime now pay between \$39 and \$79 more annually than they did before.
- Implement an enrollment fee for TRICARE-for-Life.
- Mandate the working-age military retirees above a certain income level can enroll in TRICARE only if they don’t have access to other health care plans through their employer or spouse.
- Transition to a 401(k)-style retirement system. Specifically, military personnel with more than a decade of service could choose to stay in the current system or switch to a 401(k); those with less than 10 years of service could enroll in the new 401(k) system or a modified version of the current pension setup, which would vest at 10 years but “provide slightly less retired pay -- 40 percent of base pay at 20 years, rather than 50 percent permitted under the current system.”

The 2011 Budget Control Act mandates \$487 billion in Defense spending cuts over the next decade; if sequestration occurs in January, the Pentagon will have to slash an additional \$500 billion from its budget during that time frame. Defense annually spends about \$107 billion on salaries and allowances, which does not include health care costs or retirement benefits. Those expenses tack on another \$75 billion or so annually. All told, military compensation eats up about one-third of the department’s budget. There are three major components to military compensation: pay, health care and retirement benefits. In that sense, it’s similar to many pay and benefits packages elsewhere in government and in the private sector. But that’s where the similarities end. Take pay, for example. The military has more than 70 types of pay and allowances for service members. A typical active-duty service member receives basic pay, housing and food allowances, an annual pay increase, and some tax breaks. Service members also are eligible for combat pay or other kinds of incentive pay based on their specific jobs and any special skills, such as proficiency in a foreign language.

Health care and retirement benefits together cost the Pentagon less in actual dollars today than pay, but much more in political capital and good will among troops, retirees and their families. The House this spring shot down the administration’s recommendations to raise health care premiums for military retirees based on their retirement pay, in addition to other fee hikes. The Pentagon now has a 20-year cliff-vesting retirement system, which some critics would like to replace with one providing some benefits to all service members regardless of their tenure. Personnel who serve less than 20 years -- about 83 percent -- do not receive a retirement benefit, which some believe is unfair given their multiple deployments during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those who do spend a career in the military can hit the 20-year mark relatively early, retire from service in their 40s or 50s, draw a pension and work elsewhere for a while. About 17 percent serve 20 years or more in the military. “Military pay and health reform will allow the Pentagon to achieve substantial savings in the near term,” the report said. “Retirement reform, however, presents the greatest opportunity for savings.” To read the entire report refer to <http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/UnifiedSecurityBudget.pdf>. [Source: GovExec.com | Kellie Lunney | 1 NOV 2012 ++]

Sequestration Update 28: Built to dominate the enemy in combat, the Army’s hulking Abrams tank is proving equally hard to beat in a budget battle. Lawmakers from both parties have devoted nearly half a billion

dollars in taxpayer money over the past two years to build improved versions of the 70-ton Abrams. But senior Army officials have said repeatedly, “No thanks.” It’s the inverse of the federal budget world these days, in which automatic spending cuts are leaving sought-after pet programs struggling or unpaid altogether. Republicans and Democrats for years have fought so bitterly that lawmaking in Washington ground to a near-halt. Yet in the case of the Abrams tank, there’s a bipartisan push to spend an extra \$436 million on a weapon the experts explicitly say is not needed. “If we had our choice, we would use that money in a different way,” Gen. Ray Odierno, the Army’s chief of staff, told The Associated Press in late APR.

Why are the tank dollars still flowing? Politics. Keeping the Abrams production line rolling protects businesses and good paying jobs in congressional districts where the tank’s many suppliers are located. If there’s a home of the Abrams, it’s politically important Ohio. The nation’s only tank plant is in Lima. So it’s no coincidence that the champions for more tanks are Rep. Jim Jordan and Sen. Rob Portman, two of Capitol’s Hill most prominent deficit hawks, as well as Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown. They said their support is rooted in protecting national security, not in pork-barrel politics. “The one area where we are supposed to spend taxpayer money is in defense of the country,” said Jordan, whose district in the northwest part of the state includes the tank plant. The Abrams dilemma underscores the challenge that Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel faces as he seeks to purge programs that the military considers unnecessary or too expensive in order to ensure there’s enough money for essential operations, training and equipment.



M1A2SEpv2

Hagel, a former Republican senator from Nebraska, faces a daunting task in persuading members of Congress to eliminate or scale back projects favored by constituents. Federal budgets are always peppered with money for pet projects. What sets the Abrams example apart is the certainty of the Army’s position. Sean Kennedy, director of research for the nonpartisan Citizens Against Government Waste, said Congress should listen when one of the military services says no to more equipment. “When an institution as risk averse as the Defense Department says they have enough tanks, we can probably believe them,” Kennedy said. Congressional backers of the Abrams upgrades view the vast network of companies, many of them small businesses, that manufacture the tanks’ materials and parts as a critical asset that has to be preserved. The money, they say, is a modest investment that will keep important tooling and manufacturing skills from being lost if the Abrams line were to be shut down.

The Lima plant is a study in how federal dollars affect local communities, which in turn hold tight to the federal dollars. The facility is owned by the federal government but operated by the land systems division of General Dynamics, a major defense contractor that spent close to \$11 million last year on lobbying, according to the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics. The plant is Lima’s fifth-largest employer with close to 700 employees, down from about 1,100 just a few years ago, according to Mayor David Berger. But the facility is still crucial to the

local economy. “All of those jobs and their spending activity in the community and the company’s spending probably have about a \$100 million impact annually,” Berger said. Jordan, a House conservative leader who has pushed for deep reductions in federal spending, supported the automatic cuts known as the sequester that require \$42 billion to be shaved from the Pentagon’s budget by the end of September. The military also has to absorb a \$487 billion reduction in defense spending over the next 10 years, as required by the Budget Control Act passed in 2011. Still, said Jordan, it would be a big mistake to stop producing tanks. “Look, (the plant) is in the 4th Congressional District and my job is to represent the 4th Congressional District, so I understand that,” he said. “But the fact remains, if it was not in the best interests of the national defense for the United States of America, then you would not see me supporting it like we do.”

The tanks that Congress is requiring the Army to buy aren’t brand new. Earlier models are being outfitted with a sophisticated suite of electronics that gives the vehicles better microprocessors, color flat panel displays, a more capable communications system, and other improvements. The upgraded tanks cost about \$7.5 million each, according to the Army. Out of a fleet of nearly 2,400 tanks, roughly two-thirds are the improved versions, which the Army refers to with a moniker that befits their heft: the M1A2SEPv2, and service officials said they have plenty of them. “The Army is on record saying we do not require any additional M1A2s,” Davis Welch, deputy director of the Army budget office, said this month. The tank fleet, on average, is less than 3 years old. The Abrams is named after Gen. Creighton Abrams, one of the top tank commanders during World War II and a former Army chief of staff. The Army’s plan was to stop buying tanks until 2017, when production of a newly designed Abrams would begin.

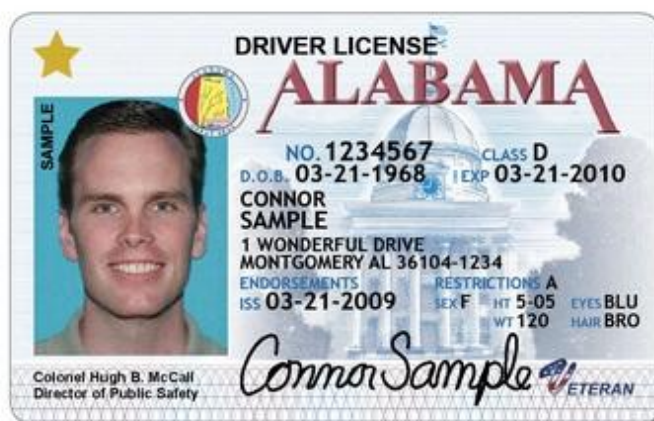
Orders for Abrams tanks from U.S. allies help fill the gap created by the loss of tanks for the Army, according to service officials, but congressional proponents of the program feared there would not be enough international business to keep the Abrams line going. This pause in tank production for the U.S. would allow the Army to spend its money on research and development work for the new and improved model, said Ashley Givens, a spokeswoman for the Army’s Ground Combat Systems office. The first editions of the Abrams tank were fielded in the early 1980s. Over the decades, the Abrams supply chain has become embedded in communities across the country. General Dynamics estimated in 2011 that there were more than 560 subcontractors throughout the country involved in the Abrams program and that they employed as many as 18,000 people. More than 40 of the companies are in Pennsylvania, according to Sen. Robert Casey, D-Pa., also a staunch backer of continued tank production. A letter signed by 173 Democratic and Republican members of the House last year and sent to then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta demonstrated the depth of bipartisan support for the Abrams program on Capitol Hill. They chided the Obama administration for neglecting the industrial base and proposing to terminate tank production in the United States for the first time since World War II.

Portman, who served as President George W. Bush’s budget director before being elected to the Senate, said allowing the line to wither and close would create a financial mess. “People can’t sit around for three years on unemployment insurance and wait for the government to come back,” Portman said. “That supply chain is going to be much more costly and much more inefficient to create if you mothball the plant.” Pete Keating, a General Dynamics spokesman, said the money from Congress is allowing for a stable base of production for the Army, which receives about four tanks a month. With the line open, Lima also can fill international orders, bringing more work to Lima and preserving American jobs, he said. Current foreign customers are Saudi Arabia, which is getting about five tanks a month, and Egypt, which is getting four. Each country pays all of their own costs. That’s a “success story during a period of economic pain,” Keating said.

Still, far fewer tanks are coming out of the Lima plant than in years past. The drop-off has affected companies such as Verhoff Machine and Welding in Continental, Ohio, which makes seats and other parts for the Abrams. Ed Verhoff, the company’s president, said his sales have dropped from \$20 million to \$7 million over the past two years. He’s also had to lay off about 25 skilled employees and he expects to be issuing more pink slips in the future. “When we start to lose this base of people, what are we going to do? Buy our tanks from China?” Verhoff said.

Steven Grundman, a defense expert at the Atlantic Council in Washington, said the difficulty of reviving defense industrial capabilities tends to be overstated. "From the fairly insular world in which the defense industry operates, these capabilities seem to be unique and in many cases extraordinarily high art," said Grundman, a former deputy undersecretary of defense for industrial affairs and installations during the Clinton administration. "But in the greater scope of the economy, they tend not to be." [Source: The Associated Press | Richard Lardner | 28 Apr 2013 ++]

Vet Drivers License Update 05: Starting 1 MAY, Alabama's more than 400,000 veterans will have the option to have the word "veteran" displayed on their driver licenses, according to the Alabama Department of Public Safety. The license would allow veterans to easily obtain benefits, or receive a military discount at a restaurant, hotel or other retailer. The designation also would clearly and immediately identify veterans if they need assistance or interact with law enforcement officers or medical providers. To establish proof of service, a veteran must visit one of the department's driver license examining offices, which can be located at <http://dps.alabama.gov/Home/DriverLicensePages/wfStarIDOfficeLocations.aspx>, and present a DD-214 form from the U.S. Department of Defense that indicates an "honorable" or "general under honorable conditions" status. A DD-214 is issued to service members who retire or are discharged from active duty. While there is no additional charge for the veteran designation, a veteran who adds it before his or her renewal date must pay \$18.50 for a duplicate license.



The change will take effect because of the Veteran's Driver License legislation that was passed last year. The bill, introduced by State Rep. Marcel Black, D-Tuscumbia, was signed into law by Gov. Robert Bentley in May 2012. "Now, our veterans may readily show their status to obtain any benefits, rebates and accommodations they richly deserve," Black said in a news release. "I am proud to have played a part, along with Sen. Marc Keahey, D-Grove Hill, in making this happen." For more information, visit the department's driver license division page at dps.alabama.gov. Alabama is not the first state to add a veteran designation to driver's licenses. Almost every state in the U.S. either already allows the designation on driver's licenses or has pending legislation that would implement such a program. [Source: <http://blog.al.com> | Kelsey Stein | 28 Apr 2013 ++]

Vet License/Certification Laws Update 01: Rep. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) has introduced legislation on 26 APR to ease the professional certification and licensing process in the civilian job market for

veterans who have had similar training while in uniform. The Troop Talent Act of 2013, H.R.1796, joins a companion bill S.700 introduced on 10 APR in the Senate by Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA) and Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-GA). If signed into law, the bill would allow military tuition assistance and the Post 9/11 GI Bill to be used for courses required for credentials. The House bill has 27 co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle. "Members of our military who serve in positions such as truck drivers and pilots should be able to earn credentials for similar roles in the private sector at the same time," Duckworth said in a statement. "Veterans who have performed their duties under intense pressure serving our country will be invaluable to employers in need of talent." [Source: NGAUS Press Release 30 Apr 2013 ++]

Reserve Component SBP: Inequalities in survivor benefit plan (SBP) protections for the families of reserve-component members exist. Action is being taken by Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) to rectify the inequities in his bill H.R.1770. Under current law, the surviving spouse of a reserve-component member who dies from an inactive duty training (IDT) injury will likely receive only a small fraction of the annuity paid to the surviving spouse an active-component member. Surviving spouses of reserve-component members receive an annuity based on the complicated reserve retirement formula applied to the deceased member's retirement points at the date of death. This will invariably be substantially less than the annuity paid to family members of active-component members whose annuity is calculated at the total disability retirement rate. Under H.R. 1770, the annuity for survivors of a reserve-component member would be computed as if the deceased member had been retired with a total disability and a survivor indemnity allowance. It would also allow the possibility of paying the annuity to dependent children instead of the surviving spouse. Your support is needed to get this bill to the floor for a vote. Readers are urged to ask their representatives to support and cosponsor H.R. 1770 as introduced. NGAUS has provided a quick and simple way to do this at <http://www.ngaus.org/issues-advocacy/take-action?url=http://www.capwiz.com/ngaus/issues/alert/?alertid=62652016&type=CO>. There you will find an editable sample letter/email that can be forward to your representative automatically via the site. All you need do is fill in the personal identity section. For further information and background, visit the NGAUS website at <http://www.ngaus.org>. Direct any questions to Pete Duffy, the NGAUS acting legislative director, at 202-454-5307 or via email at pete.duffy@ngaus.org. [Source: NGAUS Legislative Alert #13-12 9 May 2013 ++]

VA Fraud Waste & Abuse Update 73:

- **Hydes MD** - Six military veterans from Maryland pleaded guilty to fraud charges in a scheme to obtain federal military benefits and state tax breaks with faked documentation claiming they were exposed to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War, according to the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office. The veterans allegedly paid thousands of dollars in cash to David Clark, the former deputy chief of veterans claims in the state Department of Veterans Affairs Office, in exchange for \$1.4 million in fraudulent benefits and tax breaks, prosecutors said. The veterans, some of whom never even served in Vietnam, are from multiple branches of the military, the indictment says. Clark and two others have also been indicted in the scheme, which allegedly dates back to 1995. Clark, 68, was in charge of submitting claims to the federal veterans department on behalf of Maryland veterans, and allegedly forged or fraudulently completed doctors' notes and federal forms alleging he and eight other veterans had developed illnesses - including Type II diabetes and neuropathy - and were forced to take medications because of Agent Orange exposure, the indictment says. Clark allegedly fabricated documents showing he and others had been awarded service honors, the indictment says, including Purple Heart Medals and Vietnam Service Medals. The fraudulent documentation made those it was submitted for eligible for retroactive lump-sum payments and increased benefits from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Through the scheme, Clark also allegedly obtained

Maryland property tax waivers for those involved through a "service connected disability" qualification. The fraud resulted in benefits losses of more than \$1.15 million and property tax losses of more than \$250,000. Those who pleaded guilty are Kenneth Williams, 64, of Baltimore (Marine Corps); Raymond Sadler, 61, of Middle River (Marine Corps); Sandra Tyree, 64, of Rosedale (Air Force); Kenneth Webster, 67, of Pasadena (Marine Corps); Paul Heard, 64, of Baltimore (Navy); and John Bratcher, 54, of Conowingo (Air Force). All face up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, and must pay back what they earned through the scheme, prosecutors said. The two others named in the indictment are Richard Genco, of Baltimore, who served in the U.S. Navy, and George Kulla, of Baltimore, who served in the Army. There are also 10 other veterans identified only by their initials who allegedly played some role in or benefited from the scheme, according to the indictment. [Source: The Baltimore Sun | Kevin Rector | 2 May 2013 ++]

- **Columbia SC** - The Department of Veterans Affairs is being sued over a missing laptop officials say contained personal information of thousands of veterans. In a lawsuit filed last month, two veterans say the theft from the William Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center in Columbia put them at risk. Last month, the VA said 7,000 veterans' identities may have been compromised after a laptop was discovered missing from a respiratory lab. Officials said it contained unencrypted data like patients' names and birthdates. The suit says the VA failed to implement basic computer safeguards. Dorn officials say the investigation into the missing laptop is ongoing. The VA has urged affected veterans to sign up for identity theft protection and offering them a year of free credit monitoring. [Source: Associated Press article 1 May 2013 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations:



The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the
MEDAL OF HONOR to

SERGEANT

JOHN BASILONE
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following CITATION:

For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry in action against enemy Japanese forces, above and beyond the call of duty, while serving with the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division in the Lunga Area, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, on 24 and 25 October 1942. While

the enemy was hammering at the Marines' defensive positions, Sgt. Basilone, in charge of 2 sections of heavy machine guns, fought valiantly to check the savage and determined assault. In a fierce frontal attack with the Japanese blasting his guns with grenades and mortar fire, one of Sgt. Basilone's sections, with its gun crews, was put out of action, leaving only 2 men able to carry on. Moving an extra gun into position, he placed it in action, then, under continual fire, repaired another and personally manned it, gallantly holding his line until replacements arrived. A little later, with ammunition critically low and the supply lines cut off, Sgt. Basilone, at great risk of his life and in the face of continued enemy attack, battled his way through hostile lines with urgently needed shells for his gunners, thereby contributing in large measure to the virtual annihilation of a Japanese regiment. His great personal valor and courageous initiative were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

Born 4 November 1916 in Baltimore New York, Basilone worked as a golf caddy for the local country club before joining the military. He enlisted in the United States Army in 1936 and completed his three-year enlistment with service in the Philippines, where he was a champion boxer. In the Army, he was initially assigned to the 16th Infantry at Fort Jay, before being discharged for a day and reenlisting and being assigned to the 31st Infantry. Upon returning home, he worked as a truck driver in Reisterstown, Maryland but, after a few months, he wanted to go back to Manila and believed he could get there faster as a Marine than in the Army. He enlisted in the Marines in July 1940. After recruit training the Corps sent him to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba for his next assignment and then to Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands as a member of Dog Company 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment 1st Marine Division.

After receiving the Medal of Honor, he returned to the United States and participated in a war bond tour. His arrival was highly publicized and his hometown held a parade in his honor when he returned. The parade on September 19, 1943 drew a huge crowd with thousands of people, including politicians, celebrities and the national press. It made national news in Life magazine and Fox Movietone News. After the parade, he toured the country raising money for the war effort and achieved celebrity status. Although he appreciated the admiration, he felt out of place and requested to return to the operating forces fighting the war. The Marine Corps denied his request and told him he was needed more on the home front. He was offered a commission, which he turned down, and was later offered an assignment as an instructor, but refused this as well. He requested again to return to the fighting in the Pacific theatre and this time the request was approved. He left for Camp Pendleton, California, for training on December 27, 1943.



John Basilone a.k.a Manila John



Arlington Cemetery

Basilone was assigned to Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division during the invasion of Iwo Jima. On February 19, 1945, he was serving as a machine gun section leader in action against Japanese forces on Red Beach II. During the battle, the Japanese concentrated their fire at the incoming Americans from heavily fortified blockhouses staged throughout the island. With his unit pinned down, he made his way around the side of the Japanese positions until he was directly on top of the blockhouse. He then attacked with grenades and demolitions, single-handedly destroying the entire strongpoint and its defending garrison. He then fought his way toward Airfield Number 1 and aided an American tank that was trapped in an enemy mine field under intense mortar and artillery barrages. He guided the heavy vehicle over the hazardous terrain to safety, despite heavy weapons fire from the Japanese. As he moved along the edge of the airfield, he was killed by Japanese mortar shrapnel. His actions helped Marines penetrate the Japanese defense and get off the landing beach during the critical early stages of the invasion. For his valor during the battle of Iwo Jima, he was posthumously approved for the Marine Corps' second-highest decoration for bravery, the Navy Cross. He was the only enlisted Marine in World War II to receive the Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross. [Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/html/moh/wwII-a-f.html> May 2013 ++]

PTSD Update 138: If you suffered from mental anxiety to the point that your career was stunted, your life upside-down, would you want to get therapy through a video screen? The answer is yes, according to San Diego veterans in a recent study of post-traumatic stress disorder therapy by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The finding could be important, as the VA has been criticized — even sued by veterans groups and called incompetent by judges — for failing to provide adequate mental-health care to the generation of returning post-Sept. 11 military veterans. Therapy by video conference allows a veteran to get care closer to home, or even at home. It might save hours of driving time for people living in rural areas far from a VA clinic. Even in San Diego County, a veteran without a car might spend a whole morning on the bus in transit to the La Jolla VA hospital. Now, research from the San Diego VA shows that veterans rate PTSD therapy by videoconference just as favorably — or even more favorably — as face-to-face counseling sessions.

It's an interesting wrinkle to PTSD, one of the signature wounds of U.S. military veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan. The distance of the videoconference is reportedly comforting, as PTSD sufferers often report anxiousness in crowds and the desire to be alone. The findings surprised even lead researcher Steven Thorp, who studied 207 local veterans involved in a 12-week course of PTSD therapy. It's one of the largest VA studies to test new ways of delivering PTSD treatment. "What was most striking was how easily people fell into this mode of treatment — both my therapists and subjects in the trials. From many of them we heard reports of, 'After 5 or 10 minutes, I forgot I was on video entirely,'" said Thorp, a VA psychologist and associate professor with the University of California San Diego. "The other big surprise was that some of our veterans and some of my therapists preferred the teleconferencing mode," he said.

Iraq War veteran Tyrone Berry is one example. Discharged in 2009, the former soldier went back to school and graduated with a degree in respiratory therapy. Berry's choice was inspired by his war service. He helped with medevac helicopter flights during two tours in Iraq, and the medical side of the work appealed to him. But once he began working in clinics, his post-traumatic stress stirred. He just couldn't face the sight of blood, or even enter a hospital without anxiety. Now, he is working logistics for a San Diego technology company and is halfway through his PTSD care via videoconference. At a recent session, Berry sat in a sterile beige office, looking at a blank video monitor. There was a small electronic sound — bloop, bloop — and a woman's face popped onto the 24-inch screen. It was Carrie Morrison, his therapist from the U.S. Veterans Affairs Department. Berry's two-hour therapy session had begun. He's in a Mission Valley office building. She's 15 miles away at the VA medical complex in La Jolla. [Source: U-T San Diego | Jeanette Steele | 5 May 2013 ++]

PTSD Update 139: 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. 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 (PTSD) 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.



Air Force poster for National Depression Awareness Month (Oct)

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 Observer | Caitlin Dineen | 24 Apr 2013 ++]

Mobilized Reserve 7 MAY 2013: The Department of Defense announced the current number of reservists on active duty as of 7 MAY 2013. The net collective result is 350 more reservists mobilized than last reported in the 1 MAY 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 39,338; Navy Reserve 4,254; Air

National Guard and Air Force Reserve 8,722; Marine Corps Reserve 2,457; and the Coast Guard Reserve 525. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 55,296 including both units and individual augmentees. Since 911 there have been 875,147 reservists activated for duty. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found online at <http://www.defense.gov/news/MobilizationWeeklyReport130507.pdf>. [Source: DoD News Release No. 315-13 dtd 8 May Apr 2013 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 109: The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. For details of each 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 hiring fairs which are presently scheduled for:

May 16, 2013 – [Vancouver, WA](#)
May 16, 2013 – [Medford, OR](#)
May 18, 2013 – [Selfridge ANGB, MI](#)
May 21, 2013 – [Greenville, SC](#)
May 22, 2013 – [Post Falls, ID](#)
May 22, 2013 – [Marion, IA](#)
May 22, 2013 – [Fort Benning, GA Military Spouse Hiring Fair](#)
May 23, 2013 – [Indianapolis, IN](#)
May 23, 2013 – [Boston, MA](#)
May 24, 2013 – [Pierre, SD](#)
May 28, 2013 – [Columbus, OH](#)
May 29, 2013 – [Cape Girardeau, MO](#)
May 30, 2013 – [Fargo, ND](#)
May 30, 2013 – [Birmingham, AL](#)
May 31, 2013 – [Guayanilla, Puerto Rico](#)
June 4, 2013 – [Philadelphia, PA](#)
June 4, 2013 – [Lake City, FL](#)
June 5, 2013 – [Buffalo, NY](#)
June 6, 2013 – [Orlando, FL](#)
June 11, 2013 – [Washington, DC](#)
June 12, 2013 – [Omaha, NE](#)
June 12, 2013 – [Albany, GA](#)
June 13, 2013 – [Orland Park, IL](#)
June 13, 2013 – [Madison, WI](#)
June 14, 2013 – [Ashland, KY](#)
June 14, 2013 – [Meadville, PA](#)

[Source: VA Secy Vet Group Liason Officer Kevin Secor 29 Apr 2013 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 110: On 30 APR, First Lady Michelle Obama unveiled the new Information Technology Training and Certification Partnership to put thousands of service members to work with industry-

recognized IT certifications in hand before they leave the military. "This new partnership," the First Lady said, "will provide up to 161,000 service members with the chance to gain the certifications they need for 12 different high-demand, high-paying technology careers ... from IT security analysts to computer programmers to quality assurance engineers." Industry leaders that will help support the initiative are Cisco Systems, Microsoft Corp., Oracle, CompTIA NetApp, Hewlett-Packard, Futures, Global Knowledge, Gogo Training and SANS Institute and Global Information assurance Certification, according to White House officials. The initiative Mrs. Obama said, "Will help our veterans and military families have good jobs ... and create a better future for their children." [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 3 Mar 2013 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 95: After U.S. Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki on 2 MAY praised the VA's Hartford regional office as a top performer in reducing disability claims backlogs, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal stood next to him and strongly criticized the entire VA, saying "we owe our veterans better than they are now getting from the VA." Shinseki visited the regional office where officials announced a 65 percent drop in Connecticut veterans waiting more than 125 days for disability claims to be processed since January, 2012. The VA defines waits longer than 125 days as backlogged and has a goal of no such waits by July, 2015. Last September, the Hartford VA became one of the first offices in the country to convert to a paperless process designed to reduce the backlog. Shinseki said all 56 regional offices should make the change by the end of this year. "We owe our veterans everything we can do to make them to be as successful in their communities as they were in the military," Shinseki said at a news conference at the regional office, which is located in Newington. He also visited the VA in West Haven.



U.S. Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki

But, Blumenthal, a Connecticut Democrat, called the VA system "still very much a work in progress." He said there are "a lot of angry veterans who complain about "seemingly endless delays. "Of all the problems I see in government today, this is the most vexing and perplexing," said Blumenthal who was invited by the VA to speak at the Shinseki news conference. Blumenthal was among 67 senators who on 30 APR sent a letter to President Obama, asking him to take action to reduce the disability claims backlog. In Connecticut, 2,628 veterans are waiting for their disability claims to be processed with an average wait of four months (122.3 days), according to VA figures released by the Hartford office. The number of veterans waiting more than 125 days in Connecticut has been reduced from a peak of 2,938 cases in January, 2012 to 1,023 now.

Nationally, as of the end of April, 796,731 are waiting for claims to be processed, with 70.8 percent waiting more than 125 days, according to VA statistics compiled by the Center for Investigative Reporting. The average national wait is nearly 10 months, 292 days, figures show. Shinseki said a record 4.1 million disability claims have been processed across the country in the last four years. But, the VA hasn't kept up with the total 4.6 million claims filed in that period. He attributed the volume to: the fact that after decades veterans are now able to file claims for Agent Orange, dating back to the Vietnam War, and for nine new diseases recognized as connected to service in Desert Storm; and claims for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder by veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. U. S. Rep. Rosa L. DeLauro, a New Haven Democrat, pointed out at the news conference that "the complexity of claims" has increased with succeeding wars. She said World War II veterans reported one to two disabilities, Vietnam veterans, three to four disabilities, Gulf War veterans nine to 11 disabilities, and Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, 15 to 20 "or more." "The increase is staggering and exponential," she said, "we have an urgency here."

In another effort to reduce the backlog, the VA also announced that veterans waiting the longest for disability claims to be processed will be given provisional decisions so they can start collecting benefits for up to a year before final decisions are made in their cases. After the final decisions, they will have another year to appeal. Jessica Maki, Hartford's veterans service center manager, said there are five Connecticut veterans who have been waiting more than two years and their claims will be processed within the next 40 days. Then, the claims of 66 veterans waiting more than one year will be processed. She said this number has dropped from a high of 120 at the end of last October. In the letter to Obama, the senators wrote that nationally "the number of claims pending for over a year has grown by over 2,000 percent, despite a 40 percent increase in the VA's budget." They stated that Congress has added funding and employees for the VA, without a resultant elimination of backlogs. "We need direct and public involvement from you to establish a clear plan to end the backlog once and for all," they wrote. [Source: Connecticut Health I-Team | Peggy McCarthy | 2 May 2013 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 96: Democrats on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee have announced a coordinated legislative effort to help the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) in its efforts to address the growing backlog of claims. The 10 bills, which are outlined below, seek to help VA accomplish its goal to eliminate the backlog by 2015. "We need to address the unacceptably large backlog of claims in order to get veterans the benefits they've earned faster. The VA has set an aggressive goal of ending the backlog by 2015, and our efforts are focused on helping them accomplish it," said Rep. Mike Michaud (ME-02), the top Democrat on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. "These bills represent a coordinated effort to put forth a pragmatic, solutions-oriented approach. A number of these initiatives already enjoy strong bipartisan support and are backed by veteran advocates. As we maintain our oversight of VA's efforts, we look forward to continuing to work with our Republican colleagues to address the backlog and advance forward looking solutions." This legislative package seeks to bolster VA's current efforts to modernize and foster further innovation in order to get veterans' claims and compensation settled faster. Some bills would have an immediate impact, some over the next two years, and others are designed to be long-term approaches to prevent future backlogs. Committee members believe that all three should be incorporated into congressional efforts to address the VA backlog moving forward. Goals of the legislative package announced today include:

H.R.1521 (Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney) — extends VA's authority to contract for medical disability examinations by five years. **IMPACT:** VA's ability to have contractors provide medical exams increases the availability and timeliness of those exams. VA needs the support of the contract exams to reach the goal of processing all claims within 25 days by 2015. Without this reauthorization, VA medical examinations would overwhelm the VA health-care system.

H.R. 1623 (Rep. Gloria Negrete-McLeod) — requires VA to provide numerous data points in an online setting that would better detail the backlog, the timeliness and accuracy of VA regional offices, and timeliness and accuracy of adjudicating specific medical conditions. **IMPACT:** The reporting would provide both the VA, the public, and policy-makers with better clarity on the backlog and the specific claims that are proving to be a challenge. This additional level of detail was not available in the legacy paper system. VA indicates that this level of clarity should be available in VBMS. This would insure that VBA builds in the capability of understanding the workload at this level of granularity and ultimately may lead to gains in efficiency by better understanding the backlog and ways to address it.

H.R.1729: VA Claims, Operations and Records Efficiency Act (Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick) — requires DoD to provide certified, complete, and electronic records to VA within 21 days. **IMPACT:** Would substantially reduce the amount of time spent waiting for DoD to provide information in a timely manner.

H.R.1739: Veterans Backlog Reduction Act (Rep. Grace Meng) — Pay veterans as medical conditions are adjudicated (Rep. Dina Titus) — requires VA to pay for medical conditions as they are adjudicated in an electronic system. **IMPACT:** Currently, veterans receive payment when all medical conditions within a claim are fully adjudicated. This legislation will require VA to pay veterans as individual medical conditions are adjudicated, which will pay veterans at a faster rate.

H.R.1759: Require Detailed Reporting on VA Information Requests to Federal Agencies (Rep. Raul Ruiz) — requires VA to track all information requests to other federal entities. **IMPACT:** Would require VA to provide quarterly updates to Congress in regards to the timeliness of other agencies in fulfilling their information requests. Veteran's claims are often untimely because VA is waiting for other agencies to provide information. By having more definitive data, VA and Congress can work to reduce these bottlenecks.

H.R.1805: Veterans Claims Efficiency Through Automation Act (Rep. Ann McLane Kuster) — requires VA to provide an annual report to list those medical conditions that are processed in an electronic automated fashion, the feasibility/consideration for adding additional medical conditions, and any barriers barring VA from adding those medical conditions that are not automated. **IMPACT:** The reporting would require VA to consider how and if any of the medical conditions that they adjudicate could be automated or simplified. Any work that can be automated or simplified will allow VA to focus limited resources on the more challenging workload.

H.R.1809: Expedite claims processing by educating veterans on the quickest route to receive their decision (Rep. Beto O'Rourke) — provides veterans with information regarding VA's timeliness for adjudicating claims in different formats such as paper application or online utilizing the Fully Developed Claims program. **IMPACT:** Would encourage and educate veterans to utilize methods that may increase the timeliness of their claims.

H.R.1824: VA Regional Office Accountability Act (Rep. Grace Meng) — requires annual reports on VA regional offices that are not meeting their administrative goal of no claim taking longer than 125 days with 98% accuracy. Details would be required explaining why the office did not meet the goal, what they need to meet it, and how failure to meet the goal was considered in regards to the VARO Director's performance appraisal. **IMPACT:** The reporting requirement would serve as a motivator for leadership to meet their administrative goal. It would also provide additional information in regards to the backlog at the individual VARO level and the information could assist policy-makers in considering additional solutions to reduce the backlog and provide better services to veterans.

Bill Number Not Yet Assigned: Require VA to maximize the use of private medical evidence (Rep. Tim Walz) — amends title 38, United States Code, section 5103A(d)(1) to provide that, when a claimant submits private medical

evidence, including a private medical opinion, that is competent, credible, probative, and otherwise adequate for rating purposes, the Secretary shall not request a VA medical examination. **IMPACT:** Would conserve resources and enable quicker, more accurate rating decisions for veterans.

Bill Number Not Yet Assigned: Claims adjudication Centers of Excellence (Rep. Mike Michaud) — requires VBA to establish a pilot for Conditions Adjudication Centers of Excellence that would focus on the 10 most complex and time consuming medical conditions. **IMPACT:** The pilot would utilize the highest performing offices to adjudicate the most difficult medical conditions, such as PTSD and TBI, encouraging the VA to specialize claims processing by condition, reduce the time it takes to adjudicate these conditions, and decrease the error rates on difficult claims.

[Source: BDN Maine Politics | Rep. Mike Michaud (D-ME) | 9 May 2013 ++]

WWII Prewar Events: Captured Great Wall of China



A Japanese soldier stands guard over part of the captured Great Wall of China in 1937, during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The Empire of Japan and the Republic of China had been at war intermittently since 1931, but the conflict escalated in 1937. [Source: <http://www.theatlantic.com/infocus/pages/ww2> ++]

WWII Vets Update 43: The images of the German city of Dresden after the Allied firebombing in February 1945 are still vivid in the mind of 87-year-old Gerald “Jerry” Lamb. As an American prisoner of war, Lamb went out on numerous work details in the burning city to remove dead bodies. “It was like War of the Worlds,” said Lamb, a Cleveland native who has lived in Bath Township for 40 years. Lamb was kept in

Slaughterhouse Five, a place where German merchants cut up meat in stalls before the war. The makeshift prison was made famous in the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*, by Kurt Vonnegut, who was a POW there along with Lamb. “Buildings were on fire and were caving in ... and everything was collapsing,” Lamb said. There are historical accounts that put the number of those killed in the February 1945 bombings at 135,000 people.



Jerry Lamb holds a photograph of himself taken in 1944

Lamb grew up during the Great Depression in Cleveland. He says the hard-scrabble life of those times helped prepare him for the horrors of war. After graduating from John Hay High School, Lamb entered the Army in early 1944. Eventually, he was assigned to the 106th Infantry Division and arrived in Scotland on his 19th birthday in October 1944. He landed in France in December and headed to the front in Belgium. Several days before Christmas, at the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge, his unit surrendered to German forces. “Then they started marching us,” Lamb recalled. “That’s when you started seeing the real horrors of what was going on. They marched us down a ravine. The ditch was running with blood.” After being put in boxcars, the POWs were shipped without food or water for a week by train to a German POW camp. There, Lamb said a British soldier suggested he volunteer to go with a group of 150 soldiers on a work detail. He was then herded onto another boxcar destined for Dresden.



“Dresden was beautiful,” he said. “It had parks and statues and hospitals.” Lamb said German troops marched him and the others into a building that was called Slaughterhouse Five. “In the back were two buildings they had prepared for us with barracks,” he said. Before long, he said, leaflets dropped by American planes began falling from the sky. They were written in German, “We know you are using Dresden which we have not bombed because it is a hospital area for the wounded but you are storing vital parts for airplanes and tanks and if you don’t cease and

desist, we will bomb you,” is Lamb’s recollection of what the leaflets said. He and other POWs were in their barracks later when air raid sirens went off. “Soon you could hear bombs going off,” he said. When the bombing stopped, Lamb and others were sent out into the city to remove the dead. “Where a person might have been, there was nothing but a black spot on the ground,” he said. One vivid memory is what they found inside a train station. “It had burned and caved in,” he said. “There was a Red Cross room where the children went. We went to that room. Kids and nurses were dead. We had to carry all those kids and throw them onto trucks.”

In early April, Lamb and two others escaped and for 10 days were on the run across the German countryside. They ran into Russian troops who directed them to the American troops. The war ended shortly after that and he was sent home. He has a full VA disability for frostbite he suffered on his feet and for psychological trauma. “It seems in the twilight, between wake and being asleep, things sort of come back to you,” Lamb said. “You don’t plan on it or think about it, but suddenly you are back in a different time or space.” In war, he said, “you are always living on the edge between life and death. You didn’t know between this hour and the next if you were going to make it.” About 20 of Lamb’s stories are included in a 2008 book about Dresden called *Shadows of Slaughterhouse Five: Recollections and Reflections of the Ex-POWs of Schlachthof Fünf, Dresden, Germany*. It is written by Ervin E. Szpek Jr. and Frank J. Idzikowski and edited by Heidi M. Szpek. [Source: Akron Beacon Journal | Jim Carney | 4 Apr 2013 ++]

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

- The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced 30 APR that a Navy pilot, missing from the Vietnam War, has been accounted for and will be buried with full military honors along with his crew. Navy Lt. **Dennis W. Peterson** of Huntington Park, Calif., was the pilot of a SH-3A helicopter that crashed in Ha Nam Province, North Vietnam. Peterson was accounted for on March 30, 2012. Also, aboard the aircraft was Ensign **Donald P. Frye** of Los Angeles, Calif.; Aviation Antisubmarine Warfare Technicians **William B. Jackson** of Stockdale, Texas; and **Donald P. McGrane** of Waverly, Iowa. The crew will be buried, as a group, on May 2 at Arlington National Cemetery. On July 19, 1967, the four servicemen took off from the USS Hornet aboard an SH-3A Sea King helicopter, on a search and rescue mission looking for a downed pilot in Ha Nam Province, North Vietnam. During the mission, an enemy concealed 37mm gun position targeted the helicopter as it flew in. The helicopter was hit by the anti-aircraft gunfire, causing the aircraft to lose control, catch fire and crash, killing all four servicemen. In October 1982, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) repatriated five boxes of remains to U.S. officials. In 2009, the remains within the boxes were identified as Frye, Jackson, and McGrane. In 1993, a joint U.S./S.R.V. team, investigated a loss in Ha Nam Province. The team interviewed local villagers who identified possible burial sites linked to the loss. One local claimed to have buried two of the crewmen near the wreckage, but indicated that both graves had subsequently been exhumed. Between 1994 and 2000, three joint U.S./S.R.V. teams excavated the previous site and recovered human remains and aircraft wreckage that correlated to the crew's SH-3A helicopter. In 2000, U.S. personnel excavated the crash site recovering additional remains. Analysis from the Joint POW/MIA Command Central Identification Laboratory subsequently designated these additional remains as the co-mingled remains of all four crewmen, including Peterson. DoD scientists used forensic tools and circumstantial evidence in the identification of the remains.
- The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced 7 MAY that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, killed in action from the Vietnam War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Navy Lt. **Richard L. Laws**, 26, of West Sacramento, Calif., will be buried May 10, in Annapolis, Md. On April 3, 1966, Laws was strafing enemy targets in Thanh Hoa Province, North Vietnam, when his F-8E Crusader was struck by enemy ground fire. His mission commander saw his aircraft crash into a nearby hillside and explode. As a result, Laws was declared killed in action. From 1994 to 2003, joint U.S./Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) teams conducted interviews and excavations of the crash site in Thanh Hoa Province, based on an investigative lead from the Vietnam Central Armed Forces Museum in Hanoi. The teams recovered human remains, U.S. aircraft wreckage, personal effects and life-support equipment; however, no remains could be attributed to Laws given the technology of the time. In 2006, another U.S./S.R.V. team expanded the excavated site in Thanh Hoa Province. The team recovered additional human remains, aircraft wreckage, life-support equipment, and personal effects from the site. 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 and forensic identification tools, such as mitochondrial DNA—which matched Laws' mother.
- The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office announced today that the remains of one U.S. serviceman, missing from the Vietnam War, were recently accounted for and will be buried along with the 12 other servicemen who were lost in the same crash. U.S. Marine Pfc. **Daniel A. Benedett**, of Seattle, will be buried May 15, at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C., along with Air Force 2nd Lt. Richard Vandeger, of Cleveland; Navy Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Bernard Gause, Jr., of Birmingham, Ala.; Hospitalman Ronald J. Manning, of Steubenville, Ohio; Marine Corps servicemen Lance Cpl. Gregory S. Copenhaver, of Lewistown, Pa.; Lance Cpl. Andres Garcia, of Carlsbad, N.M.; Pfc. Lynn Blessing, of Lancaster, Pa.; Pfc. Walter Boyd, of Portsmouth, Va.; Pfc. James J. Jacques, of La Juaunta,

Colo.; Pfc. James R. Maxwell, of Memphis, Tenn.; Pfc. Richard W. Rivenburgh, of Schenectady, N.Y.; Pfc. Antonio R. Sandoval, of San Antonio; and Pfc. Kelton R. Turner, of St. Louis. On May 12, 1975, Khmer Rouge gunboats captured the S.S. Mayaguez in the Gulf of Thailand, approximately 60 nautical miles off the coast of Cambodia. The vessel was taken to Koh Tang Island. U.S. aircraft began surveillance flights around the island. After efforts to secure the release of the ship and its crew failed, U.S. military forces began a rescue mission. Three days after the Mayaguez seizure, six Air Force helicopters were dispatched to the island. One of the helicopters came under heavy enemy fire and crashed into the surf with 26 men on board. Thirteen of the men were rescued at sea, leaving Benedett and the 12 other service members unaccounted-for. Between 1991 and 2008, investigators conducted more than 10 investigations and excavation, led by Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. On three occasions Cambodian authorities turned over remains believed to be those of American servicemen. In 1995, U.S. and Cambodian specialists conducted an underwater recovery of the helicopter crash site where they located remains, personal effects and aircraft debris associated with the loss. Between 2000 and 2004, all of the missing service members from this helicopter, except Benedett, were accounted for. On Jan. 30, 2013, Benedett was accounted-for. DoD scientists used circumstantial evidence and DNA process of elimination to account for his remains. Four servicemen not associated with this crash remain missing from Koh Tang Island.

- The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office announced 10 MAY that the remains of one U.S. serviceman, missing from the Vietnam War, were recently accounted for and will be buried along with the 12 other servicemen who were lost in the same crash. U.S. Marine Pfc. **Daniel A. Benedett**, of Seattle, will be buried May 15, at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C., along with Air Force 2nd Lt. Richard Vandegeer, of Cleveland; Navy Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Bernard Gause, Jr., of Birmingham, Ala.; Hospitalman Ronald J. Manning, of Steubenville, Ohio; Marine Corps servicemen Lance Cpl. Gregory S. Copenhaver, of Lewistown, Pa.; Lance Cpl. Andres Garcia, of Carlsbad, N.M.; Pfc. Lynn Blessing, of Lancaster, Pa.; Pfc. Walter Boyd, of Portsmouth, Va.; Pfc. James J. Jacques, of La Juanta, Colo.; Pfc. James R. Maxwell, of Memphis, Tenn.; Pfc. Richard W. Rivenburgh, of Schenectady, N.Y.; Pfc. Antonio R. Sandoval, of San Antonio; and Pfc. Kelton R. Turner, of St. Louis. On May 12, 1975, Khmer Rouge gunboats captured the S.S. Mayaguez in the Gulf of Thailand, approximately 60 nautical miles off the coast of Cambodia. The vessel was taken to Koh Tang Island. U.S. aircraft began surveillance flights around the island. After efforts to secure the release of the ship and its crew failed, U.S. military forces began a rescue mission. Three days after the Mayaguez seizure, six Air Force helicopters were dispatched to the island. One of the helicopters came under heavy enemy fire and crashed into the surf with 26 men on board. Thirteen of the men were rescued at sea, leaving Benedett and 12 other service members unaccounted-for from the crash. Between 1991 and 2008, investigators conducted more than 10 investigations and excavations, led by Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC). On three occasions Cambodian authorities turned over remains believed to be those of American servicemen. In 1995, U.S. and Cambodian specialists conducted an underwater recovery of the helicopter crash site where they located remains, personal effects and aircraft debris associated with the loss. Between 2000 and 2004, all of the missing service members from this helicopter, except Benedett, were accounted-for. On Jan. 30, 2013, Benedett was accounted-for. Scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and DNA process of elimination to account for his remains.

Korea

- The DPMO announced 3 MAY 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 Sgt. **William C. Knight**, 20, of West Brookfield, Mass., will be buried May 10, in his hometown. In late November 1950, Knight and elements of the Headquarters Battery, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 31st

Regimental Combat Team (RCT) were engaged by enemy forces east of the Chosin Reservoir in 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 the Hangaru-ri, south of the reservoir. During the withdrawal, the 31st RCT encountered an enemy road block that forced their U.S. truck convoy off the road. The convoy came under intense enemy fire, resulting in numerous casualties. It was during this attack that Knight was reported missing. In August 2002, a joint U.S./Democratic People's Republic of Korea (D.P.R.K) team excavated a mass grave on the eastern side of the Chosin Reservoir; near the last-known location of Knight. During this excavation operation, the team recovered remains from the site. 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 Knight. They also used mitochondrial DNA—which matched Knight's two brothers.

World War II

None

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

Spanish American War Images 14



Colored Troops

Saving Money: Considering taking your put in for a basic tune-up -- teeth cleaning, neutering, etc. -- be prepared to shell out hundreds of dollars. \$13 billion was spent on vet care in 2010 alone. In case you're wondering, the American Pet Products Association notes that vet fees for dogs and cats are essentially the same. According to their most recent survey, dog owners spent on average \$248 annually on routine vet visits, as opposed to only \$219 for cat owners. Surgical procedures, however, cost slightly less for dogs -- \$407 versus \$425 for cats. Whether you own a dog or a cat, here are a few tips to help you keep the cost of their medical services manageable...

1. **Spay or neuter your pet.** Pet experts say that "fixing" your pet helps prevent breast, uterine, and testicular cancer and the corresponding future vet bills that would come with it.
2. **Maintain good dental hygiene.** Major's breeder recommended regular vet dental cleanings every four years. That's because, like humans, teeth full of tartar can lead to gum disease, which, believe it or not, can adversely affect your pet's health in other ways.
3. **Take advantage of vet specials.** Veterinarians run specials and many vet hospitals offer package deals for very young and very old animals.
4. **Pamper those paws.** It's no secret that dogs and cats like to lick their paws. Experts recommend washing your pet's paws after walks to prevent ingestion of potential carcinogens that they might pick up.
5. **Shop around.** Vet charges for identical services can vary by as much as 300 percent.
6. **Give your pets plenty of exercise.** Like us humans, pets that get regular exercise are naturally leaner, which helps them avoid orthopedic problems and other obesity-related disorders.
7. **Control food intake.** Pets that are allowed to graze all day long are fatter, on average, than pets that aren't. So don't leave their food out all day long.
8. **Use low-cost clinics.** You can save money by spaying, neutering, and vaccinating your pets at veterinary schools.
9. **Use the Internet.** You can also save money by ordering medications online rather than buying them at a veterinarian office. There are many low-cost sites including DiscountPetMedicines.com and 1-800-PetMeds.
10. **Take advantage of free samples.** It never hurts to ask your vet if she has any free samples of prescribed medicines.

Ask about alternatives. If your veterinarian suggests an expensive treatment, don't be afraid to ask about less costly methods that could also be effective. Unless you want to insure against catastrophic conditions that would require expensive care, pet insurance is not a financially sound option. In fact, Consumer Reports recommends that because of substantial deductibles and exclusions in pet policies, pet owners might be better off putting what they pay in monthly premiums into a savings account. [Source: MoneyTalksNews Len Penjo article 12 Jul 2012 ++]



Notes of Interest:

- **Tricare Pharmacy.** An updated fact sheet containing information about TRICARE pharmacy options, including military pharmacies, TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery, retail network pharmacies and non-network pharmacies, details about copayments, filing claims, contact info, and many other topic is now available at : www.tricare.mil/~media/Files/TRICARE/Publications/FactSheets/Pharmacy_FS.ashx.
- **B-17E 666.** Check out <http://voxvocispublicus.homestead.com/morrow.html> to view a video on the most highly decorated aircraft mission of WWII.
- **Wi-Fi.** The Navy Exchange Service Command (NEXCOM) has announced that all 40 of its Navy Lodges worldwide now offer free Wi-Fi to guests

[Source: Various 1-15 May 2013 ++]

Medicare Provider Charge Data: On 8 MAY the Obama administration made public previously unpublished hospital charges for the 100 most common inpatient treatments in 2011, saying a similar release of physician data is on the horizon. The massive data file reveals wide variation in charges for these 100 services listed in hospitals' "chargemasters" -- industry jargon for what hospitals charge. The data set represents added transparency the administration hopes will influence consumer behavior. "Making this available for free for the first time will save consumers money by arming them with information that can help them make better choices," Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said in a call with reporters 8 MAY. The data only include inpatient hospital services, but when asked about physician fees and other inpatient services, a top Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) official said those data could come later as the agency expands its price transparency initiative. "We don't have a set timetable for expansion for this data release," Jonathan Blum, PhD, acting principal deputy administrator at CMS, said on the same call as Sebelius. "I think it is fair to say we intend to build upon this data release."

Blum said multiple times in his call with reporters that CMS will study the impact this information has on consumer behavior and what value the public places on it. Steven Brill -- who wrote a 4 MAR Time magazine cover story on healthcare-pricing practices largely credited for CMS' action -- said in a blog that Sebelius and CMS should next focus on outpatient services. "The Feds need to publish chargemaster and Medicare pricing for the most frequent outpatient procedures and diagnostic tests at clinics -- two huge profit venues in the medical world," Brill wrote. "This will be harder -- the government doesn't collect that data as comprehensively -- but those outpatient centers and clinics provide a huge portion of American medical care." A quick scan of the hospital data released 8 MAY reveals wide variation for the same procedure in the same town. For example,

- St. Dominic Hospital in Jackson, Miss., charged nearly \$26,000 to implant a pacemaker while the University of Mississippi Medical Center across town charged more than \$57,000 for the same procedure.
- In Washington, the George Washington University Hospital charged nearly \$69,000 for a lower-leg joint replacement without major complications. That same procedure cost just under \$30,000 at Sibley Memorial Hospital -- a nonprofit community hospital 5 miles away.
- A joint replacement ranged from \$5,300 at a hospital in Ada, Okla., to \$223,000 at a hospital in Monterey Park, Calif.

Regarding the release of this data Kathleen Sebelius said, "Hospitals that charge two or three times the going rate rightfully face greater scrutiny". Jonathan Blum said, "We're really trying to help elevate the conversation and continue the conversation and to ask questions why there is so much variation." Common explanations for the varying costs -- patients' health status, hospital payer mix, teaching status -- don't seem accurate or clear from data CMS released, said Blum, adding that making such information public will help researchers, consumers, and others

better ask questions and engage in debate over costs. Opponents to such transparency note that chargemaster prices are irrelevant to most patients. Private insurance companies and Medicare negotiate their own prices with hospitals. Instead, it's only the uninsured who face the prices on the chargemaster. Comments included:

- Ron Pollack, executive director of the liberal patient rights group Families USA here, said in a statement. "Most perniciously, uninsured people are the ones who usually pay the highest prices for their hospital care, .. It is absurd – and, indeed, unconscionable – that the people least capable of paying for their hospital care bear the largest, and often unaffordable, cost burdens."
- The American Hospital Association (AHA) said healthcare's "charge" system is a matter of financing that urgently needs updating. "The complex and bewildering interplay among 'charges,' 'rates,' 'bills' and 'payments' across dozens of payers, public and private, does not serve any stakeholder well, including hospitals," [AHA president and chief executive Rich Umaddenstock said in a statement](#). "This is especially true when what is most important to a patient is knowing what his or her financial responsibility will be."
- The Federation of American Hospitals declined to comment.

The data provided in the listings include hospital-specific charges for the more than 3,000 U.S. hospitals that receive Medicare Inpatient Prospective Payment System (IPPS) payments for the top 100 most frequently billed discharges, paid under Medicare based on a rate per discharge using the Medicare Severity Diagnosis Related Group (MS-DRG) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2011. These DRGs represent almost 7 million discharges or 60 percent of total Medicare IPPS discharges. Hospitals determine what they will charge for items and services provided to patients and these charges are the amount the hospital bills for an item or service. The Total Payment amount includes the MS-DRG amount, bill total per diem, beneficiary primary payer claim payment amount, beneficiary Part A coinsurance amount, beneficiary deductible amount, beneficiary blood deductible amount and DRG outlier amount. For these DRGs, average charges and average Medicare payments are calculated at the individual hospital level. Users will be able to make comparisons between the amount charged by individual hospitals within local markets, and nationwide, for services that might be furnished in connection with a particular inpatient stay. TRICARE users subject to copay and veterans not qualified for VA care will find this data useful in selecting providers that charge less for the same services. To access the list for:

Inpatient Charge Data, FY2011, Microsoft Excel version go to <http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Medicare-Provider-Charge-Data/index.html>

Inpatient Charge Data, FY2011, Comma Separated Values (CSV) version go to http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Medicare-Provider-Charge-Data/Downloads/IPPS_DRG_CSV.zip

[Source: MedPage Today | David Pittman | 8 May 2013 ++]

Medicare Fraud Update 121:



- Detroit MI** — The mastermind of a \$29.1 million Medicare fraud scheme involving approximately 30 purported medical clinics pleaded guilty 3 MAY in Detroit for his role in the scheme. **Sachin Sharma**, 37, of Detroit, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Denise P. Hood in the Eastern District of Michigan to one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud and one count of tax evasion. According to court documents, Sharma oversaw and directed operations of a broad network of home health, psychotherapy, and other purported medical clinics in and around Detroit, including Reliance Home Care LLC, First Choice Home Health Care Services, Inc., and Haven Adult Day Care Center LLC. Working with co-conspirators, Sharma created and/or operated these companies for the purpose of billing Medicare for home health and psychotherapy services that Sharma knew were not provided. Court documents show that Sharma paid kickbacks to patient recruiters in order to obtain the information of Medicare beneficiaries, which he then used at these companies to bill Medicare for services that were not medically necessary and/or were not provided to these beneficiaries. Sharma trained others on techniques to defraud Medicare and to conceal the fraud and directed employees to fabricate and alter medical documents to give the false impression that home health and psychotherapy services were provided when, in fact, they were not. He admitted that from 2007 through 2011, he received substantial proceeds of the fraud from these companies, but failed to report these proceeds on his individual federal income tax returns. Also, that he filed no individual income tax returns from 2007 through 2011. Between 2007 and 2012, Sharma caused these companies to submit approximately \$29,171,017 in claims to Medicare for services that were not medically necessary and/or not provided. At sentencing, scheduled for August 8, 2013, Sharma faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.
- Texas** — The FBI has arrested a famous Pakistani heart specialist Dr. **Tariq Mahmood** MD for false and fraudulent claims of more than Million of dollars submitted to the US Health department. The accused has been indicted and may face seven counts of crime each carrying 10 years, totaling 70 years all together if convicted. Dr. Tariq owned and operate in several hospitals in the state of Texas, including Cozby Germany Hospital in Grand Saline, Renaissance Terrell Hospital in Terrell, Central Texas Hospital in Cameron, Community General Hospital in Dilley, and Shelby Regional Medical Center in Center. The allegations against Dr. Tariq is that in several hospitals functioning under his management he had prepared a fraudulent scheme between 2010 to 2013. Under the scheme he was issuing bogus claims for counterfeit prescriptions to Medicare and Medicaid. Mahmood and others added, changed, deleted, and incorrectly sequenced diagnostic codes in a way that did not reflect the actual diagnoses and conditions of the patients. By means of fraudulent billing practices, the defendant and his co-conspirators unlawfully submitted false claims of more than \$1.1 million and obtained more than \$375,000. If convicted, Mahmood faces up to 70 years, 10 years in federal prison for each charge.
- Miami FL** — **Vitas Hospice Services** and parent company Chemed Corp. are facing a lawsuit from the U.S. Department of Justice over allegations they defrauded Medicare with false claims. The lawsuit accuses the Miami-based Vitas, the nation's largest for-profit hospice company, and Cincinnati-based Chemed (NYSE: CME) of admitting patients who were not dying, which is normally the requirement to be in a hospice, and submitting unnecessary claims for services. In some cases, the services were not delivered, the lawsuit claims. The government alleges that tens of millions of taxpayer dollars were misspent. Chemed and Vitas issued a statement saying that they intend to defend the lawsuit vigorously. The lawsuit was filed in U.S. federal court for the Western District of Missouri, where the district's attorney general led the investigation.
- Miami FL** — A patient recruiter for a Miami health care company was sentenced today to serve 37 months in prison for his participation in a \$20 million Medicare fraud scheme. **Manuel Lozano**, 65, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Joan A. Lenard in the Southern District of Florida. In addition to his prison term,

Lozano was sentenced to serve two years of supervised release and ordered to pay \$1,851,000 in restitution, jointly and severally with co-conspirators. In February 2013, Lozano pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to receive health care kickbacks. He was a patient recruiter who worked for Serendipity Home Health, a Miami home health care agency that purported to provide home health and therapy services to Medicare beneficiaries. From approximately April 2007 through March 2009, Lozano recruited patients for Serendipity, and in doing so he solicited and received kickbacks and bribes from the owners and operators of Serendipity in return for allowing the company to bill the Medicare program on behalf of the patients he recruited. These Medicare beneficiaries were billed for home health care and therapy services that were medically unnecessary and/or not provided. From approximately January 2006 through March 2009, Serendipity submitted approximately \$20 million in claims for home health services that were not medically necessary and/or not provided, and Medicare paid approximately \$14 million for these fraudulent claims. As a result of Lozano's participation in the illegal scheme, the Medicare program was fraudulently billed more than \$1 million but less than \$2.5 million for purported home health care services. In a related case, on June 21, 2012, **Ariel Rodriguez** and **Reynaldo Navarro**, the owners and operators of Serendipity, were sentenced to 73 and 74 months in prison, respectively, and ordered to pay \$14 million in restitution and severally with each other and their co-defendants, **Melissa Rodriguez** and **Ysel Salado**. Ariel and Melissa Rodriguez, Navarro and Salada each pleaded guilty in March 2012 to one count conspiracy to commit health care fraud.

- **Detroit MI** — A Miami couple who ran clinics in the Detroit area have been sentenced for their roles in a \$13.3 million Medicare fraud scheme. The Justice Department said 8 MAY that 42-year-old **Raymond Arias** was given 8 years and 4 months in prison. His 25-year-old wife **Emelitzia Arias** was sentenced to a year in prison. Raymond Arias was sentenced Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Detroit and ordered to pay \$5.4 million in restitution. His wife was sentenced Wednesday and ordered to pay \$532,000 in restitution. They pleaded guilty in October to conspiring to commit health care fraud. The government says that beginning in 2009, claims for never-rendered infusion therapy treatments at clinics in Westland and Madison Heights were submitted to Medicare. Prosecutors say Medicare paid about \$5.9 million.
- **Baton Rouge/Houston.** A former office manager for psychiatric clinics in Baton Rouge and Houston pleaded guilty 9 MAY to one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud in a case she admitted cost Medicare as much as \$50 million. **Erica Williams**, 42, of Beaumont, Texas, is one of at least 17 people who have been charged in Baton Rouge in connection with alleged frauds committed through three outpatient clinics — Shifa Community Mental Health Center in the 6700 block of Goya Avenue and Serenity Center in the 1000 block of Lobdell Boulevard in Baton Rouge, as well as Shifa CMHC of Texas LLC in Houston. Williams is one of six defendants who have either pleaded guilty or agreed to plead guilty in the ongoing investigation by the Baton Rouge Medicare Fraud Strike Force. Williams admitted she routed patients who were not eligible for partial outpatient psychiatric services to a doctor for treatment. Williams also admitted she falsified records to hide those crimes and directed other employees to falsify records and that her actions contributed to Medicare losses of at least \$20 million, possibly more than \$49 million. She is scheduled for sentencing on Sept. 25. The judge noted that the maximum possible penalties for conspiracy to commit health care fraud include a 10-year prison term and fine of \$250,000.

[Source: Various 1-1 May 2013 ++]

Medicaid Fraud Update 85:

- **Las Vegas NV** — **Ini Odong**, 34, has been sentenced to prison for his role in bilking Medicaid of about \$2 million, according to the state's attorney general's office. Nevada Attorney General Catherine said

Odong was also ordered to pay more than \$2.2 million in restitution and fines as part of Medicaid fraud. Odong was convicted on charges of submitting false Medicaid claims, theft, failure to maintain adequate records and using another person's identification for unlawful purposes. Masto's office said Odong made phony claims in 2009 of medical equipment deliveries to clients through Golden Heart Medical Supply. He had more than \$1.1 million in reimbursements funneled from Golden Heart to a delivery company, which he made several large cash withdrawals. In trial, it was revealed Odong withdrew more than \$300,000 in cash from the delivery company and spent \$100,000 at bars and nightclubs on the company account cards. Masto's office said the supposed clients identified in Odong's claims were actually clients of other companies and that none of the supplies got to those people. Masto urged anyone who knows of possible fraud involving Medicaid to contact her Medicaid Fraud Control Unit at 702-486-3187 or visit <http://ag.nv.gov>.

[Source: Various 1-15 May 2013 ++]

Missouri

State Veteran's Benefits: The state of Missouri 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.mvc.dps.mo.gov>

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Assistance Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/missouri-state-veterans-benefits> May 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 15, 2013 (T).** The Senate Committee on Veteran’s Affairs intends to hold a legislative hearing on VA’s benefit programs and other purposes. 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)

DRAFT BILLS

- S. XXXX Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2013 (Sanders/Burr)
- S. XXX Claims Processing Improvement Act of 2013 (Sanders)
- S. XXX Veterans Equipped for Success During Transition Act of 2013 (Sanders)
- S. XXX A bill to provide in-state tuition to transitioning Veterans (Sanders)
- S. XXX A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend expiring authority for work-study allowances for individuals who are pursuing programs of rehabilitation, education, or training under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to expand such authority to certain outreach services provided under through congressional offices, and for other purposes (Sanders)
- S. XXX Veterans' Outreach Act of 2013 (Sanders)

[Source: Veterans Corner w/Michael Isam 14 May 2013 ++]

Military History Anniversaries: Significant 16–31 May events in U.S. Military History are:

- May 16 1940 – WWII: Germany occupies Brussels, Belgium and begins the invasion of France.
- May 17 1987 – An Iraqi missile hits the American frigate USS Stark in the Persian Gulf. 37 sailors die
- May 18 1863 – Civil War: The 47 day Siege of Vicksburg begins. Casualties and losses: US 4,835 - CSA 32,697.
- May 18 1917 – WWI: The Selective Service Act of 1917 is passed, giving the President of the United States the power of conscription.

- May 18 1944 – WWII: Battle of Monte Cassino – Conclusion after seven days of the fourth battle as German paratroopers evacuate.
- May 19 1776 – American Revolution: A Continental Army garrison surrenders in the Battle of The Cedars.
- May 19 1848 – Mexican–American War: Mexico ratifies the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo thus ending the war and ceding California, Nevada, Utah and parts of four other modern–day U.S. states to the United States for US\$15 million.
- May 19 1967 – Vietnam: U.S. planes bomb Hanoi for the first time.
- May 19 1864 – Civil War: the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House ends.
- May 20 1864 – Civil War: Battle of Ware Bottom Church – in the Virginia Bermuda Hundred Campaign, 10,000 troops fight in this Confederate victory.
- May 20 1902 – Latin America Interventions: U.S. military occupation of Cuba (since Jan 1, 1899) ends
- May 20 1969 – Vietnam: US troop capture Hill 937/Hamburger Hill
- May 20 1951 – Korea: U.S. Air Force Captain James Jabara becomes the first jet air ace in history.
- May 21 1863 – Civil War: The Union Army succeeds in closing off the last escape route from Port Hudson, Louisiana, in preparation for the coming siege.
- May 21 1941 – First U.S. ship sunk by a U–boat. SS Robin Moore crew and passengers allowed to man lifeboats by U-69 Commander before he torpedoed and shelled the ship. Event happened before U.S. entered into war with Germany.
- May 21 1951 – Korea: The U.S. Eighth Army counterattacks to drive the Communist Chinese and North Koreans out of South Korea.
- May 22 1863 – Civil War: Siege of Port Hudson – Union forces begin to lay siege to the Confederate–controlled Port Hudson, Louisiana.
- May 22 1864 – Civil War: After ten weeks, the Union Army's Red River Campaign ends with the Union unable to achieve any of its objectives.
- May 22 1871 – The U.S. Army issued an order for abandonment of Fort Kearny in Nebraska.
- May 22 1944 – WWII: Anzio Beachhead, Italy — Allied forces, including elements of three National Guard divisions—the 34th (IA, MN, ND), 36th (TX) and 45th (AZ, CO, OK)—begin their final push to break out of the besieged positions just south of Rome for four months. The original intent was to land behind the German Gustav Line, running across Italy about 100 miles south of Rome and rush to capture Rome before the Germans could react. But poor leadership slowed the advance and the enemy sealed the Allied forces on the beachhead. They shelled it constantly with heavy rail guns and bombed it from the air. Finally, after four months in which thousands were killed or wounded, the Allies make some headway. The breakout would be completed on May 31, with the Allies entering Rome on June 5.
- May 22 1947 – Cold War: in an effort to fight the spread of Communism, U.S. President Harry S. Truman signs an act into law that will later be called the Truman Doctrine. The act grants \$400 million in military and economic aid to Turkey and Greece, each battling an internal Communist movement.
- May 22 1968 – Last radio message received from USS Scorpion (SSN–589). Declared lost 6 JUN. Cause not ascertainable; most probable inadvertent activation of battery of torpedo resulting in a possible "hot run" torpedo detonation off Azores. 99 died.
- May 23 1900 – Civil War hero Sgt. William H. Carney becomes the first African American to receive the Medal of Honor, 37 years after the Battle of Fort Wagner.
- May 23 1939 – USS Squalus (SS–192) foundered off Portsmouth, New Hampshire. 26 died.
- May 24 1846 – Mexican–American War: General Zachary Taylor captures Monterrey.
- May 24 1861 – Civil War: Union troops occupy Alexandria, Virginia.
- May 25 1915 – WWI: 2nd Battle of Ypres ends with 105,000 casualties
- May 25 1953 – The first atomic cannon is fired in Nevada.

- May 26 1783 – American Revolution: A Great Jubilee Day held at North Stratford, Connecticut celebrated end of fighting in American Revolution.
- May 26 1865 – Civil War: Confederate General Edmund Kirby Smith, commander of the Confederate Trans-Mississippi division, is the last general of the Confederate Army to surrender, at Galveston, Texas.
- May 26 1940 – WWII: Battle of Dunkirk – In France, Allied forces begin a massive evacuation from Dunkirk, France.
- May 26 1945 – WWII: U.S. drop fire bombs on Tokyo
- May 26 2004 – The U.S. Army veteran Terry Nichols is found guilty of 161 state murder charges for helping carry out the Oklahoma City bombing.
- May 27 1813 – War of 1812: In Canada, American forces capture Fort George
- May 27 1944 – WWII: American General MacArthur lands on Biak Island in New Guinea.
- May 27 1965 – Vietnam: American warships begin the first bombardment of National Liberation Front targets within South Vietnam.
- May 28 1754 – French and Indian War: in the first engagement of the war, Virginia militia under 22-year-old Lieutenant Colonel George Washington defeat a French reconnaissance party in the Battle of Jumonville Glen in what is now Fayette County in southwestern Pennsylvania.
- May 29 1780 – American Revolution: At the Battle of Waxhaws, the British continue fighting after the Continentals lay down their arms, killing 113 and critically wounding all but 53 that remained.
- May 29 1932 – WW I Veterans begin to assemble in Washington, D.C. in the Bonus Army to request immediate payment of cash bonus certificates issued to them for redemption in 1945.
- May 29 1916 – U.S. forces invade the Dominican Republic, stay until 1924.
- May 29 1945 – WWII: U.S. 1st Marine division conquerors Shuri-castle Okinawa
- May 29 2004 – The WWII Memorial is dedicated in Washington, D.C.
- May 30 1868 – Decoration Day (the predecessor of the modern "Memorial Day") is observed in the United States for the first time (By "Commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic" John A. Logan's proclamation on May 5). It begins when two women place flowers on both Confederate and Union graves.
- May 30 1912 – U.S. Marines are sent to Nicaragua to protect American interests.
- May 30 1958 – Memorial Day: the remains of two unidentified American servicemen, killed in action during World War II and the Korean War respectively, are buried at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery
- May 30 1965 – Vietnam: Viet Cong offensive against U.S. base Da Nang, begins
- May 31 1900 – U.S. troops arrive in Peking to help put down the Boxer Rebellion.
- May 31 1912 – U.S. Marines land on Cuba.

[Source: Various May 2013 ++]

Military Trivia 74: The Holocaust of the Jews has come to be seen as one of the key events of World War II and of the twentieth century more generally.

1. The expression "the Holocaust" for the Nazi genocide of the Jews replaced an earlier term. What was it?

The Final Solution | Auschwitz | The Master Plan | The Great Genocide

2. Until 1960 or later it was widely taken for granted that Hitler had planned the Holocaust early in his political career and had a master plan in place by 1925. What is the strongest evidence against this assumption?

- a) That the Holocaust began only after Hitler had been in office for about eight years.
 - b) Until July 1941 Jews in Germany were allowed to emigrate.
 - c) There is no evidence against it
 - d) The Nazi regime's talk of shipping the European Jews to Madagascar
3. On the eve of World War II which European country had the largest Jewish population (1939 borders)?
- Hungary | The U.S.S.R. | Poland | Romania
4. Between October 1939 and February 1940 about 95,000 Jews were deported from Moravia, Vienna and Pomerania to a 'Jewish reservation', set up by Eichmann and other SS officers. Where was it?
- Near Lublin (Poland) | It didn't exist: it was a euphemism for gassing | In the Warsaw Ghetto | Near Pinsk (Belarus)
5. On 15 October 1941 the first trainload of Jews left Berlin, bound for Eastern Europe. Some were dumped in the already overcrowded Lodz Ghetto. Where were most of the others taken to?
- Smolensk | Riga | Pinsk | Mogilev
6. In October 1939 the Nazis began forcing Jews in Poland to live in ghettos. Which of these ghettos lasted longest?
- Warsaw | Bialystock | Krakow | Lodz
7. When did the mobile killing units (SD-Einsatzgruppen) first go into action in Operation Barbarossa, and where?
- Dec 1941, Minsk, Belarus | Oct 1941, Czernowitz, Bukovina | Jun1941, Kaunas, Lithuania | Aug 1941, Lviv (Lvov, Lemberg), Ukraine
8. Routine mass gassings of Jews began on 8 December 1941 using specially designed vans. Where?
- Auschwitz-Birkenau | Treblinka | Belzec | Chelmno (Kulmhof)
9. In December 1941 an early report of the Holocaust reached the Foreign Office in London. The official who read it wrote a comment in the margin. What was it?
- Bolshevik propaganda? | Poor devils! | We must help them. | Important. Check details urgently.
10. In the case of one extermination camp, the SS's own figure for the total number of Jews killed there is known. Which camp is it?
- Stutthof | Majdanek | Belzec | Sobibor
11. Holocaust scholars distinguish between extermination camps and other concentration camps. What made the extermination camps different?
- Their purpose was to exterminate | The harshness of conditions | The actual death toll | The brutality
12. One of these survivors was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. Who was it?

Jean Améry (pen-name of Hans Mayer) | Viktor Frankl | Primo Levi | Elie Wiesel

13. Some camps had brass ensembles or even orchestras. Which of these camps had a women's orchestra of about forty?

Treblinka | Auschwitz-Birkenau | Sachsenhausen | Chelmno

14. In October 1943 there was an uprising and mass breakout at Sobibor led by Alexander Pechersky and Leon Feldhendler. Pechersky lived till 1990. What happened to Leon Feldhendler?

- a) He was recaptured five days later and hanged.
- b) His fate is unknown.
- c) He died of natural causes in 1944
- d) He was murdered in April 1945 by antisemitic Poles

15. Did the Allies do anything specifically designed to prevent or halt the Holocaust, other than winning the war?

Yes | No

Answers

- 1) **The Final Solution.** Short for the Nazis' own term - the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" The term "the Holocaust" in this specific sense only gained widespread acceptance in 1978 after the showing of the TV miniseries of the same title. Some people object to the term on account of its connotations of "whole burnt sacrifice" and instead call it the "Shoah" (Hebrew for "catastrophe").
- 2) **B.** Hitler's statements in "Mein Kampf" about his plans for the Jews, though inflammatory in the extreme, do not indicate that he had a plan for genocide at that stage. The 1940 "Madagascar Plan" was so unrealistic as to leave real doubts as to how seriously it was intended. Until July 1941 Jews were (generally) allowed to leave Germany if they had somewhere to go and could actually travel there and were able to pay the fare in advance. They had to pay a high charge for permission to emigrate and after 1935 were allowed to take almost no money with them. Obviously, World War II disrupted international communications badly, but a handful of Jews managed to reach the U.S. and some other safe countries after the outbreak of war in 1939.
- 3) **Poland.** On the eve of World War II Poland had a Jewish population of about 3.3 million (of whom about 2.9 million were killed in the Holocaust). The Soviet Union, Romania and Hungary also had large Jewish communities, which suffered very heavy losses in the Holocaust.
- 4) **Near Lublin (Poland).** The plan for a reservation (sometimes called the Nisko Plan) was very poorly thought out and the 'reservation' was abandoned in April 1940. Able-bodied, skilled workers were sent to camps within the designated 'reservation', while many others were simply dumped in open country and told never to show themselves again. Some of the deportations were observed by journalists from neutral countries and the matter was reported in Western Europe and the US at the time. The next deportations were undertaken on the personal initiative of the two Gauleiters, who went beyond the orders that they received. Hitler had ordered that the recently reacquired Alsace and Lorraine be cleared of Jews. On 21 and 22 October 1940 about 6,500 Jews from Baden and the Palatinate were transported to Gurs concentration camp in the south of France. The journey by slow freight trains took about 80 hours, without any food or drink, and many older Jews were dead on arrival.

- 5) **Riga.** Riga, in Latvia, was turned into a vast killing field for Berlin Jews. At that stage the Nazi regime did not have mass gassing facilities. Soon afterwards, other Jews from North Germany were sent to Maly Trostenets (near Minsk, Belarus), and some were dumped in the already overcrowded Warsaw Ghetto.
- 6) **Lodz .** The head of the Lodz Jewish Council (Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski) believed that if he could make the Lodz Ghetto economically useful to the Nazis, a fair number of the inhabitants would stand a chance of surviving. At one stage the Lodz Ghetto had 116 workshops. His rule in Lodz was autocratic and is controversial. However, it was the last ghetto to be completely dissolved. It was liquidated in August 1944, when the remaining Jews in Lodz were sent to Auschwitz.
- 7) **June 1941, Kaunas, Lithuania.** On the night of 25-26 June 1941 the mobile killing units went into action in Kaunas on a vast killing spree. They were assisted by local Lithuanian volunteers who believed that "the Jews" had had been responsible for the annexation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union in 1940. Some scholars have suggested this as the beginning of the Holocaust, but there is a growing consensus that there was no single starting date.
- 8) **Chelmno (Kulmhof).** Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor and Auschwitz-Birkenau only became operational as extermination camps from March 1942 onwards. (Some experimental gassings, using mainly Soviet prisoners of war, had taken place earlier in Auschwitz I). Chelmno used enclosed vans with the carbon monoxide exhaust fumes diverted into the van. It did not have fixed gas chambers. The vans drove directly to mass graves in a forest some way from the town. The whole 'operation' at Chelmno was designed in such a way that there were very few prisoners there at any one time: new arrivals were gassed within about 24 hours. It was not a conventional concentration camp.
- 9) **Bolshevik propaganda.** Early reports were viewed with skepticism in Britain and the US. Germany's reputation as a civilized country, and the fact that in World War I Britain had gleefully spread false and implausible stories about German atrocities may have played a part, too. However, it was not till 1944 that the Allies took reports about the scale of the Holocaust entirely seriously, when Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler escaped from Auschwitz and provided much more detailed information than had hitherto been available. The Soviet Union also had difficulty getting the Western Allies to accept reports about Nazi atrocities on Soviet territory.
- 10) **Belzec.** It was operational as an extermination camp from March-December 1942. On 11 January 1943 SS-Sturmbannfuehrer Hoefle sent a radio telegram to Eichmann reporting the total number of Jews killed by the end of 1942. The message was intercepted and decrypted by Bletchley Park but nobody, it seems, was able to make sense of it at the time. The figure for Belzec is given as 434,508. Since the camp had ceased operation by the end of 1942, this figure is widely regarded as reliable. In addition, an unknown number of Roma (gypsies) were killed there, but they are not mentioned in the telegram.
- 11) Their purpose was to exterminate. The distinction is often blurred by the use of the term "death camps" for all Nazi camps that had a high death toll. The extermination camps were nearly all located in Poland. There were eight. Moreover, the matter is complicated by the fact that Nazi concentration camps were graded I, II and III for harshness. At the Grade III camps, such as Mauthausen and Auschwitz III the aim was generally to work the prisoners to death.
- 12) **Elie Wiesel.** He is particularly well known for his autobiographical work "Night", which describes his experiences in the Holocaust. (It is, in fact, the first volume of a trilogy, but the two succeeding volumes, "Dawn" and "Day", are not particularly well known). The Nobel Prize citation described him as "a messenger to mankind".
- 13) **Auschwitz-Birkenau.** Auschwitz II (Birkenau), as well as being an extermination camp, contained the Women's (Work) Camp. This had a Women's Orchestra (often called the Girls' Orchestra). It was formed on the initiative of the de facto commandant of the Women's Camp, the usually sadistic Maria Mandl. She arranged for the orchestra to be adequately fed and clothed, given better accommodation and provided with adequate heating. In order to allow for rehearsals she arranged for their exemption from all other work; she also turned a blind eye to some breaches of camp rules - and of course provided them with musical instruments. On one level it was one of those grotesqueries of the Holocaust: the women had to play when

the long columns of other women marched off to work; they had to play when they returned, and they had to play during executions! Music-loving SS officers, including Mengele, got private concerts and are reported to have said things like, 'You play so movingly'.

- 14) **He was murdered in April 1945 by antisemitic Poles.** Conspiracy theories about "Jewish Bolshevism" were widespread in Poland at the time and played a key role in the murder of Jews in Poland after the Holocaust. There was also the Kielce pogrom of July 1946.
- 15) **No.** That said, it is not easy to see what could have been done. The Allies could, perhaps, have tried to bomb the rail network near the major camps, and they could have urged resistance groups to give a high priority to disrupting the transports to the extermination camps. Auschwitz III (Monowitz) was bombed, but only because it was a chemicals factory. There is only one single known instance of a resistance group stopping a train transporting victims to a camp: on 19-20 April 1943 members of the Belgian resistance stopped a train from Mechelen to Auschwitz and managed to free 17 people, but the train was heavily guarded. The US government established the War Refugee Board in 1944, with an annual budget of \$1 million. Its mission was rescue.

Source: <http://www.funtrivia.com/trivia-quiz/History/The-Holocaust-I-311581.html> May 2013++]

Tax Burden for West Virginia 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 West Virginia.

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 6% (prescription drugs exempt). Food taxed at 1%. Seniors age 60 and older are eligible for the Golden Mountaineer Discount Card that can be used for pharmaceutical discounts, retail and professional discounts. Some municipalities may add a local sales tax of up to 1%. To apply or obtain more information, call 304-558-3317 or 877-987-3646.

Gasoline Tax: 51.8 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 56.5 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: 55 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 3%; High – 6.5%

Income Brackets: Five. Lowest – \$10,000; Highest – \$60,000. For joint returns, the taxes are twice the tax imposed on half the income.

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$2,000; Married – \$4,000; Dependents – \$2,000

Standard Deduction: None

Medical/Dental Deduction: For tax year 2007, if you had no employer and were not self-employed, you may claim as a subtraction from income 33.4% of the amount you paid for medical care insurance. If you had an employer or were self-employed, you may be able to claim a subtraction from income for the amount you paid for medical insurance. It does not include long-term care insurance.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: The beginning point for West Virginia taxation is federal adjusted gross income. Therefore, any amount of the IRA distribution or pension income that is taxable and included in federal adjusted

gross income is taxable on the West Virginia income tax return. \$2,000 of civil, and state pensions are exempt. Social Security income is taxable only to the extent that the income is includable in your federal adjusted gross income. Taxpayers 65 and older or surviving spouses of any age may exclude the first \$8,000 (individual filers) or \$16,000 (married filing jointly) of any retirement income. Out-of-state government pensions qualify for the \$8,000 exemption. An individual, regardless of age, may deduct up to \$2,000 of benefits received from the West Virginia Teachers Retirement System, West Virginia Employees Retirement System, and military and federal retirement systems.

Retired Military Pay: First \$2,000 is exempt (see above). Military retirees are able to take an additional decreasing modification for military retirement up to \$20,000.

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

Property tax is administered by county officials and officials of several state government agencies. Although the Department of Tax and Revenue plays a major role in the administration of this tax, less than one-half of one percent of the property tax collected goes to state government. The primary beneficiaries of the property tax are county boards of education. Property taxes are paid to the sheriff of each of the state's 55 counties. Each county and municipality can impose its own rates of property taxation within the limits set by the West Virginia Constitution. Property is assessed at 60% of fair market value.

The West Virginia legislature sets the rate of tax of county boards of education. This rate is used statewide by all county boards of education. However, the total tax rate for county boards of education may differ from county to county due to excess levies. The total tax rate is a combination of the tax levies from four state taxing authorities: state, county, schools, and municipal. This total tax rate varies for each of the four classes of property, which consists of personal, real, and intangible properties. Property is assessed according to its use, location, and value as of July 1. The amount of property tax paid depends on the following factors: the assessed property value as determined by a county assessor, and the tax rate levied against each \$100 of the property's assessed valuation. The assessed value of the property must be 60 percent of the property's true and actual value, which is defined as the amount of money the property would be worth in a sale. For more information on property taxes refer to <http://www.wva.state.wv.us/wvtax/propertyTax/frequentlyAskedQuestions.aspx>.

Senior citizens eligible for the Homestead Exemption Program may be entitled to a Senior Citizen Tax credit. The credit is based on the amount of property taxes paid on the first \$10,000 or portion thereof, of the taxable assessed value over the \$20,000 Homestead Exemption. The credit is based on the amount of property taxes paid on the first \$20,000, or portion thereof, of the taxable assessed value over the \$20,000 Homestead Exemption. Taxpayers who pay the federal alternative minimum tax cannot claim this credit.

Seniors who are 65 or older and who experience a property tax increase of at least \$300 on their owner-occupied West Virginia home over the past year may qualify for the Senior Citizen property Tax Deferment if their income was no more than \$35,000. The credit must be approved by your county assessor's office.

The state's homestead Excess Property Tax Credit is a refundable personal income tax credit for real property taxes paid in excess of your income. The maximum refundable tax credit is \$1,000.

For more information on the above refer to <http://www.state.wv.us/taxrev/tsdPublications/tsd411.pdf> and <http://www.wva.state.wv.us/wvtax/seniorCitizens.aspx>.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance and the estate tax is limited and related to federal estate tax collection.

For further information, visit the West Virginia State Tax site <http://www.wva.state.wv.us/wvtax/default.aspx> or call 304-558-3333 or 800-982-8297. Also visit the West Virginia Department of Revenue site <http://www.revenue.wv.gov>.

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#WESTVIRGINIA> May 2013 ++]

Aviation Art (39):



Peenemunde by Frank Wootton.

During World War II, the Germans built a highly secret research station at Peenemunde - laboratories, workshops and an administrative complex designed for creating huge stockpiles of newly developed pilotless airplanes and rockets.

Hitler planned to launch thousands of these V-1 and V-2 weapons daily in a saturation onslaught against southern England, calculated to produce the final destruction of their will to continue the fight. The night mission pictured, said artist Frank Wootton, "flown by Bomber Command, was one of the most effective and important of the war. Six hundred aircraft flew more than 600 miles to wage the attack. Pathfinder flares illuminated the target with burning magnesium and a full moon carved the dark Baltic coastline in sharp relief. A wall of smoke was released in an attempt to hide the facility but it spread too slowly and too late." In this image, English bombers and German fighters are in combat, set against the bright carpet of fire and explosion. Because of this raid, the great quantities of weaponry required were never realized and the plan to break the English will was defeated in a single blow. [Source: <http://www.greenwichworkshop.com/details/default.asp?p=543&t=1> May 2013 ++]

VA Sexual Assaults Update 08: The Veterans Affairs department spent almost \$872 million in 2010 to deal with the health impacts of sexual assaults on former military personnel. This figure is based on the \$10,880 dollars the Veterans Administration spends to treat each sexual assault victim after he or she leaves the service. The \$872 million does not include costs for victims still in the military. In 2011, the last year that information on sexual assaults is available, 3,192 cases were reported to Pentagon brass. Former defense secretary Leon Panetta estimated nearly 20,000 occur each year within the military. According to a 2011 military health survey, one in five soldiers said they had been touched inappropriately since joining.

It's not clear how much the Pentagon spends dealing with these attacks. But because of the nature of how the military deals with sexual assault allegations, it's likely that it costs the Pentagon tens of millions of dollars. "It's bound to be more than we would ever guess given the number of people who are coming forward, both women and men, reporting that they'd been sexually assaulted," said Deborah Tucker, executive director of the National Center of Domestic and Sexual Violence. "They're eligible for six visits with a counselor before it's given to their command. They get caught up in the military's own sexual assault office staff at each installation." "If you start counting all of that, plus medical costs, because I'm sure people are getting not only forensic exams and ongoing care for injuries sustained, it's a staggering number," Tucker added.

In recent months, after years of ignoring or covering up sexual assaults, advocates have made great strides in raising awareness of sexual violence in the military. After an Air Force colonel's sexual assault conviction was overturned and the officer was transferred away from the victim, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel ordered a review of military law governing rape cases. "These changes would increase the confidence of service members and the public that the military justice system will do justice in every case," Hagel said earlier this month. But Congress is demanding more. A recent report commissioned by lawmakers found that rape cases often lead to cases of post-traumatic stress disorder and recommended DOD do more to combat them. The report also made clear that the military would be paying for these PTSD cases long after soldiers left the service. "Increased efforts by DOD are necessary, and a zero-tolerance approach should be implemented," the Institute of Medicine said in its report. "Previous wars have demonstrated that veterans' needs peak several decades after their war service."

Recently, the military began to speak about sexual assault not as a legal or moral problem, but one of readiness. A Navy myths and facts worksheet published in 2012 lists the belief that rape does not hurt readiness as a myth. "The crime of sexual assault takes an immeasurable toll on the victim and diminishes the Department of Defense's overall capability by undermining core values, degrading mission readiness, subverting strategic goodwill, and raising financial costs," the Navy wrote in the worksheet. But rape is clearly not a budget priority. The program that deals with rape prevention – the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program – has a budget of just \$14 million dollars. DOD has never aggregated the total costs of dealing with all aspects of sexual assault. This includes counseling, costs related to the trial, medical care while the victim is still in the military, and costs of

imprisoning soldiers who are found guilty. Much of the media attention this issue has received concerned cases in which women were assaulted. But according to the military, the majority of sexual assaults — 56 percent — actually involve men.

Tucker said the Pentagon must act to remove the stigma attached to these attacks. Many men and women are ashamed and refuse to come forward. They also fear that reporting the assault could hurt their military careers. She added that the military must put more money into prevention programs that stop assaults before they happen. “The emphasis has to be more and more on prevention and to explain to people that any time they push someone to engage in contact with them that’s not given with consent, it’s assault,” she said. One such prevention effort was unveiled this month. The Pentagon paid an undisclosed amount to WILL Interactive, a Maryland firm that makes interactive movies, to create a video game in which soldiers are confronted with choices while drinking at a bar. The goal of the game, called Team-Bound, is to educate soldiers on what constitutes sexual assault. DOD likes it so much it’s ordered a sequel. But advocates dismissed the game as a waste of money. “For decades, leaders in our military have thought that they can end the epidemic of sexual assault in the military simply through training programs,” Nancy Parrish, president of Protect Our Defenders, told NBC News. “Not only is it a waste of taxpayer dollars, it is affront to victims of sexual assault.” [Source: The Fiscal Times | David Francis | 30 Apr 3023 ++]

VA Sexual Assaults Update 09: (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 Departments views as unnecessary a House committee-passed bill H.R.671 (Ruth Moore Act of 2013) to change evidentiary rules for veterans filing disability claims related to sexual assaults. VA says it is doing fine without it. Approval of disability claims for military sexual trauma are “roughly on par” with approval rates for claims of post-traumatic stress from combat veterans, said VA press secretary Josh Taylor. VA, he said, has taken “concrete actions” and there is “more to come.” Statistics provided by Taylor show that in December, VA approved 59 percent of PTSD claims and 53 percent of military sexual trauma claims, a reflection of steady improvement over an 18-month period. In June 2011, VA approved 61 percent of PTSD claims but only 34 percent of sexual trauma claims.

Taylor’s comments come after the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee passed a revised version of the Ruth Moore Act on 8 MAY, a bill named for a Navy veteran who spent 23 years trying to receive full disability pay for the mental health issues she said were the result of two rapes while she was on active duty. VA officials opposed the bill, but the measure passed by voice vote and with no opposition after several rewrites that weakened the provisions. It is unlikely VA opposition will prevent the House from passing the bill, which has strong bipartisan support. The Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee had not yet take up its version of the bill. As passed by the House committee, the bill leaves details to VA on what evidence would be needed to approve a claim. To make certain regulations are changed, though, the bill creates an onerous reporting process that would take effect if new guidelines for handing claims is not issued within 15 months. However, the goal is to get VA to accept a victim’s statement that mental health problems are the result of rape or sexual assault while in the military in the absence of evidence as long as a mental health exam does not disprove the veteran’s claim.

In a statement to the House veterans’ committee trying to stop the bill from passing, VA officials said they are working on a policy to make decisions “compassionately and fairly” with “sensitivity to the unique circumstances presented by each individual claim.” When reviewing sexual trauma claims, VA recognizes official reports and records may not be available, so it is developing procedures similar to those for post-traumatic stress claims to consider other evidence. This includes, VA officials said in the statement, reviewing military records “for evidence of the claimed stressor.” Examples, officials said, would be evidence of behavioral changes, such as sudden requests

for transfer to another duty station. Statements from family members and other service members also could support a claim. "If minimal circumstantial evidence of a stressor is obtained, VA will schedule an examination with an appropriate mental health professional and request an opinion as to whether the examination indicates that an in-service stressor occurred," the statement says.

As an added step, all military sexual trauma claims are being handled by the "most experienced and skilled employees." VA officials have promised that denied sexual trauma claims will be reviewed if the veteran wants, but they have not yet announced the process for requesting the review. The statement says the Veterans Benefits Administration, responsible for claims, "is planning to advise veterans of the opportunity to request that VA review." "Those veterans who respond will receive reconsideration of their claims based on VA's heightened sensitivity to military sexual trauma and a more complete awareness of evidence development," the statement says. [Source: ArmyTimes | Rick Maze | 8 May 2013 ++]

VA Suicide Prevention Update 17: (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.)

About a third of veterans considered to be at high risk for suicide don't receive the recommended follow-up care after they've been discharged from Veterans Affairs Department inpatient mental health care, according to a new report from the VA inspector general. The VA study shows that of 215 cases reviewed between April and September 2012, 65 did not receive the recommended after-care of four visits within 30 days of being discharged. Thirty-three percent did not have any record of being contacted by a suicide prevention coordinator or case manager, as also is recommended in VA treatment policies. "Although MH providers scheduled follow-up appointments prior to patient discharge, timely post-discharge MH evaluations were not consistently provided," VA Assistant Inspector General for Healthcare Inspections Dr. John Daigh wrote.

According to the report, patients who weren't deemed at high risk for suicide fared slightly better: VA requires that patients discharged from acute mental health hospitalizations receive an evaluation within seven days of discharge, and the inspector general found that 78 percent of 475 patients had received some type of evaluation within the expected time frame. But 79 of those patients had received only phone calls, and 30 of them did not get an appointment with a provider or even a telehealth counseling session in two weeks after discharge. Nearly three-fourths of patients did not receive any follow-up evaluation within 48 hours. The inspector general found that one of the main concerns was missed appointments: More than 40 percent of the medical records reviewed of patients considered at high risk of suicide showed they'd missed at least one appointment. "Staff did not document follow-up attempts for missed appointments for 8 percent of these patients," the report noted.

A recent VA study found that the number of veterans committing suicide per day rose from 18 in 2007 to 22 in 2010. VA has been building a database of suicide statistics to better understand the scope of the problem and develop programs to prevent it. The department has been harshly criticized by veterans advocates and lawmakers for failing to provide veterans with mental health services in a timely manner. A 2012 review found that some veterans wait an average of two months to receive an initial mental health appointment. In its response to the April 29 IG Combined Assessment Program Summary, Veterans Health Administration officials concurred with the IG's findings. VA Undersecretary for Health Robert Petzel said his department would issue a memo "charging facilities with creating a local patient registry for follow-up on all patients discharged from inpatient mental health units." He added VHA also will send a notice to remind medical facilities they need to contact veterans who miss appointments and note this contact in the patient's electronic health record. [Source: ArmyTimes | Patricia Kime | 1 May 2013 ++]

DoD Religious Expression Policy: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized

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The Defense Department was engulfed in a firestorm over religious expression in late APR, caught in the middle of a tit-for-tat fight between Mikey Weinstein, the former Air Force officer and lawyer at the head of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, and retired Army Lt. Gen. Jerry Boykin, a senior official with the conservative Family Research Council. Weinstein met with Air Force officials 24 APR that the Air Force take stiffer action to stop the intrusion of religion in the work place. The only way to do that, he contends, is to slap offenders with nonjudicial and judicial punishment — including courts-martial. That was enough to light up the opposition. The Family Research Council launched a petition 29 APR imploring Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel to “resist the demands of anti-Christian activists who are calling for a court-martial order upon chaplains and service members who share their faith.” Within days nearly 130,000 people had signed on.

The showdown brought to a head a long-simmering debate over the limits of religious expression in the ranks. It pitted two former officers who personally symbolize that debate: Weinstein is a well-known and relentless critic of any whiff of what some would consider proselytizing in the military. Boykin, when he was in uniform, gained notoriety in 2003 when he seemed to cast the war on terrorism in religious terms, referring to Allah — Islam’s word for God — as “an idol.” The 130,000 signatures in three days reflected the reach of the council, a Washington-based, conservative Christian organization, as well as the passions at play. “We want to see a statement from [DoD] that makes it very clear that they gave no assurances about prosecuting through court-martial people of the Christian faith, or any other faith, for openly expressing their beliefs,” said Boykin, executive vice president of the FRC. DoD has a long-standing policy against forcing one’s religious views on others while in uniform or discriminating against troops for their religious — or nonreligious — beliefs. Commanders to decide whether to punish troops who violate the ban, said DoD spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Nate Christensen.

Weinstein’s meeting with Air Force officials included the judge advocate general, Lt. Gen. Richard Harding and some of his staff, said Air Force spokeswoman Lt. Col. Laurel Tingley. “At Mr. Weinstein’s request, several Air Force officials met with him and two other members of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation to discuss his concerns,” Tingley said. “He’s not a consultant for the Air Force, nor did we consult with him on Air Force policy on religious tolerance.” There is no new regulation in the works, she said. However, the meeting came just as the Air Force was about to distribute its new pocket-sized “Blue Book,” a compilation of regulations on appearance, conduct and work environment. It includes a section that restates a 2011 servicewide memo directing leaders to balance constitutional protections on individual exercise of religion or other personal beliefs and the constitutional ban on governmental establishment of religion. Failure to comply with any of the regulations — as with all military orders — is punishable under the UCMJ. Weinstein said the only way to stop the intrusion of religion in the workplace is to slap offenders with nonjudicial and judicial punishment. “This little book is not going to solve the problem,” he said. “We need people to understand the boundaries. People are violating it all over the place, and ... they don’t want to do anything about it.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Markeshia Ricks | 3 May 2013 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 24: (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’s proposed fiscal 2014 budget contains no funding to establish or maintain a registry for service members exposed to open-air burn pits. The 2012 Dignified Burial and Veterans Benefits Improvement Act, signed by President Obama on Jan. 10, requires VA to establish a burn-pit registry by January 2014. And VA officials say they are working to develop one. But they could

not provide a cost estimate for starting or completing the project and say they now are conducting budget assessments to determine how much money will be needed. "The fiscal 2014 budget was developed prior to enactment of Public Law 112-260," VA spokeswoman Gina Jackson said. "VA has already begun work to meet the Jan. 10, 2014, mandate to establish and maintain the Open Burn Pit Registry using available fiscal 2013 funds." The law seeks to determine how many veterans were exposed to burn-pit smoke while deployed so VA can track their medical histories and keep them apprised of new treatments for associated conditions. Some troops who lived and worked near burn pits in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere have complained of ailments and symptoms ranging from shortness of breath and general malaise to rare lung diseases and cancerous tumors. Troops deployed in support of contingency operations and stationed at a location where an open burn pit was used will be eligible to register. The VA's military exposures website encourages active and former troops who have concerns to speak with their doctors. VA will announce directions for signing up when the registry becomes available, according to the site. [Source: ArmyTimes | Patricia Kime | 9 May 2013 ++]

Veteran Legislation Status 7 MAY 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> May 2013 ++]

Have You Heard?

One day the first grade teacher was reading the story of Chicken Little to her class. She came to the part of the story where Chicken Little tried to warn the farmer. She read, ".... and so Chicken Little went up to the farmer and said, "The sky is falling, the sky is falling!"

The teacher paused then asked the class, "And what do you think that farmer said?"

One little girl raised her hand and said, "I think he said: 'Holy Mackerel! A talking chicken!'"

+++++

"How was your game, dear?" asked Jack's wife Tracy.

"Well, I was hitting pretty well, but my eyesight's gotten so bad I couldn't see where the ball went," he answered.

"But you're 75 years old, Jack!" admonished his wife, "Why don't you take my brother Scott along?"

"But he's 85 and doesn't play golf anymore," protested Jack.

"But he's got perfect eyesight. He would watch the ball for you," Tracy pointed out.

The next day Jack teed off with Scott looking on. Jack swung and the ball disappeared down the middle of the fairway. "Do you see it?" asked Jack.

"Yup," Scott answered.

"Well, where is it?" yelled Jack, peering off into the distance.

"I forgot." replied Scott

++++++

A man was being interviewed for a job. He was asked, "What are your qualifications for the job of night watchman?" His response was, "The slightest noise wakes me up."

++++++

Patient to Doctor, "Doctor, you told me I have a month to live and then you sent me a bill for \$1,000! I can't pay that before the end of the month!"

Doctor to patient, "Okay, you have six months to live."

++++++

Osama bin Laden went to heaven and was greeted by George Washington, who slapped him and yelled, "How dare you try to destroy the nation I helped conceived?"

Patrick Henry then approached and punched Osama in the nose.

James Madison entered and kicked him in the shin.

An angry Thomas Jefferson whacked Osama over the head with a cane.

The thrashing continued as John Randolph, James Monroe came in and unleashed their anger on the terrorist leader.

Suddenly, as Osama lay writhing in unbearable pain, an angel appeared.

"This is not what you promised me," said Osama.

"Come on Osama," the angel replied. "I told you there would be 72 Virgin-ians waiting for you in Heaven."

++++++

They found about 200 dead crows near Topeka, KS. and there was concern that they may have died from Avian Flu. They had a Bird Pathologist examine the remains of all the crows, and he confirmed the problem was definitely NOT Avian Flu, to everyone's relief.

However, he determined that 98% of the crows had been killed by impact with trucks, while only 2% were killed by an impact with a car.

Kansas then hired an Ornithological Behaviorist to determine the disproportionate percentages for truck versus car kill. The Ornithological Behaviorist determined the cause in short order. When crows eat road kill, they always set-up a look-out Crow in a nearby tree to warn of impending danger.

His conclusion was that all the lookout crows could say "Cah", but none could say "Truck."

Military Lingo/Jargon/Slang:

USA Academy: *Bust* - To revoke the appointment of a cadet commissioned or non-commissioned officer.

USA Acronyms: *DAT* - Dumb-Ass Tanker (in the pre-computer era).

USA Equipment: *Digitals* - The new ACU and MARPAT digital camouflage uniforms, which consists of a pattern of pixelated squares.

USA Field Slang: *Rock-Eaters* - A term used by troops during the Balkan missions to describe locals. It comes from the locals' tooth decay, which was explained by saying that they ate rocks, making their teeth fall out. It can also refer to a character under that very name in the 80s movie *The Never Ending Story* a giant with teeth that looked very much like badly decayed human teeth (his were made of stone, like the rest of his body).

USA Misc: *Blood Wings/Blood Pin* - Originally, to force the pin backing of Airborne wings directly into a soldier's chest. Now, blood-pinning refers to pinning anything into a soldier's chest, as well as the shoulders in the case of rank.

USA Rank: *Company-grade (officer)* - The ranks of Second Lieutenant, First Lieutenant, and Captain

USA Soldiers: *Brokedick* - a soldier who is accident-prone and seemingly is always on sick call or has a profile limiting what he/she can do. Also a generic term for anyone on light duty due to illness or injury.

USA Unit Nicknames - The Band-Box Troop - F Troop, 7h Cav (1876), for its spit-polish.

USAF: *Big Chicken Dinner* - A Bad Conduct Discharge.

USMC: *Acquire* - Euphemism denoting theft, sometimes jokingly referred to as tactical.

USN: *Cockbilling Yards* - Yards (spars) were once "cockbilled" and rigging was slacked off to show grief. The half-masting of colors is in reality a survival of the days when a slovenly appearance characterized mourning. The term cockbilled can also apply to the suspension (an anchor) by the ring stopper esp. before dropping .

Vets: *BUFF* - Big Ugly Friendly Fellow
[Source: Various 14 May 2013 ++]

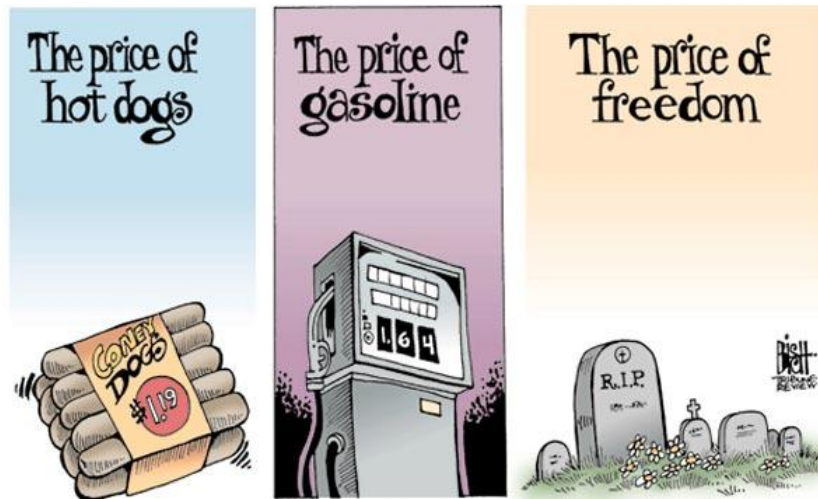
"In general, the art of government consists of taking as much money as possible from one party of the citizens to give to the other."

— **Voltaire** (1694-1788) French Enlightenment writer, historian, philosopher, and satirical polemicist.

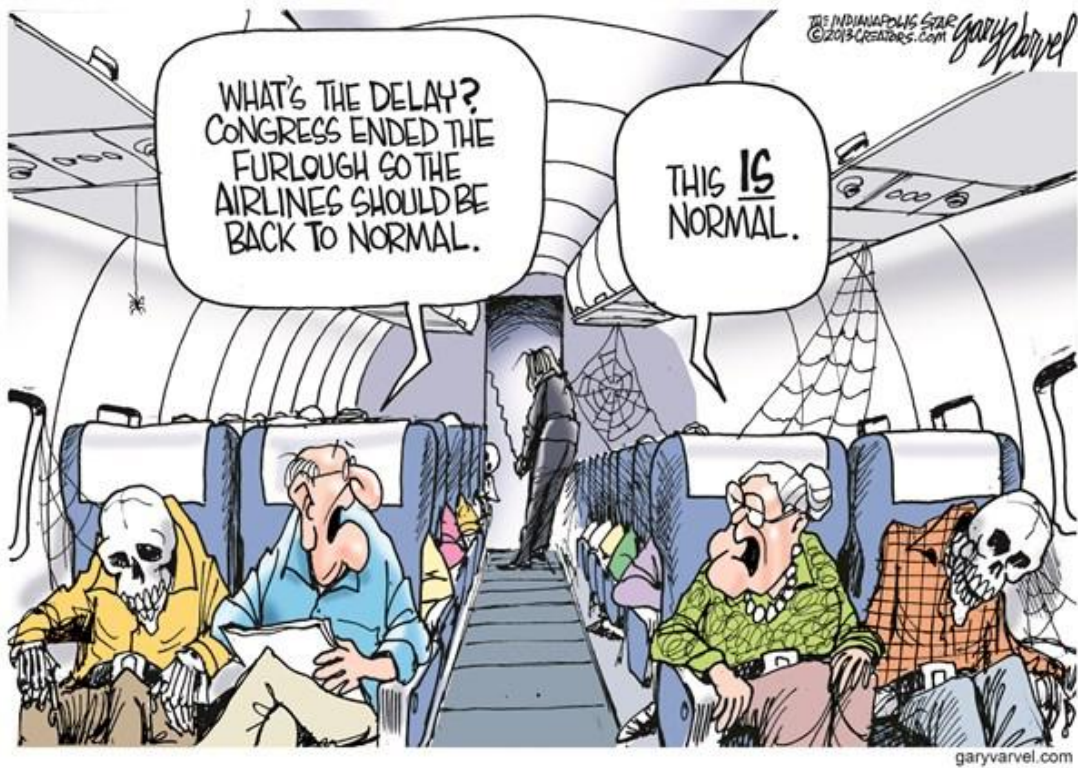
Interesting Ideas: Keyboard Shelf







THINGS TO REMEMBER ON MEMORIAL DAY





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Notes:

1. The Bulletin will be provided in the above format until further notice. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's former 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 10,470 email addressees.
3. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.

4. New subscribers and those who submit a change of address should receive a message that verifies their addition or address change being entered in the mailing list. If you do not receive a message within 7 days it indicates that either I never received your request, I made an error in processing your request, or your server will not allow me to send to the email addressee you provided. Anyone who cannot reach me by email can call (951) 238-1246 to ask questions or confirm info needed to add them to the directory.

5. If you have another email addressee at work or home and would like to also receive Bulletin notices there, just provide the appropriate email addressee to raoemo@sbcglobal.net.

6. Past Bulletin articles are available by title on request to raoemo@sbcglobal.net. Refer to the RAO Bulletin Index alphabetically listing of article and attachment titles previously published in the Bulletin. The Index is available under pinned topics at <http://s11.zetaboards.com/CFLNewsChat/forum/27519/>. Bear in mind that the articles listed on this index were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or become outdated.

7. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. To aid in continued receipt of Bulletin availability notices, recommend enter the email addressee raoemo@sbcglobal.net into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either <http://www.veteransresources.org> (PDF & Website Editions), <http://frabr245.org> (Website Edition in Word format), or <http://vets4vets.zymichost.com/rao.html> (PDF Edition) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you can access the Bulletin at any of the aforementioned sites it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my email. Either your server considers it to be spam or I have somehow incorrectly entered or removed your addressee from the mailing list. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the validated mailing list. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at any of these sites let me know.

== To subscribe first add the RAO email addressee raoemo@sbcglobal.net to your address book and/or white list.

Then send to this addressee your full name plus either the post/branch/chapter number of the fraternal military/government organization you are currently affiliated with (if any) "AND/OR" the city and state/country you reside in so your addressee can be properly positioned in the directory for future recovery. Subscription is open to all veterans, dependents, military/veteran support organizations, and media.

== To automatically change your email addressee or Unsubscribe from Bulletin distribution click the "Change address / Leave mailing list" tab at the bottom of the Bulletin availability notice that advised you when the current Bulletin was available.

== To manually submit a change of email addressee provide your old and new email addressee plus full name

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