

RAO

BULLETIN

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DoD



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Editor/Publisher RAO Bulletin

QDR 2014 ► Rejected | HASC Tells DoD to Start Again

On 4 MAR House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Chairman Buck McKeon (R-CA) took the surprising step of rejecting the **Quadrennial Defense Review** (QDR) for 2014. The Department of Defense is required to submit a QDR every 4 years to Congress which (according to the 1997 law) will “make recommendations that are not constrained to comply with and are fully independent of the budget submitted to Congress by the president” It is also required creating a 20 year plan.

Well, in these tense times with a dramatic draw down proposed, the Chairman was not satisfied. He said: *“I appreciate the work that has gone into this QDR. A rigorous analysis and debate that takes place every four years as the review is put together should be immensely valuable to planners and senior commanders. Unfortunately, the product the process produced this time has more to do with politics than policy and is of little value to decision makers. For that reason, I will require the Department to re-write and re-submit a compliant report. In defiance of the law, this QDR provides no insight into what a moderate-to-low risk strategy would be, is clearly budget driven, and is shortsighted. It allows the President to duck the consequences of the deep defense cuts he has advocated and leaves us all wondering what the true future costs of those cuts will be. No QDR is perfect, but I have been disturbed that the review has become less compliant as time goes on. The QDR has legal standards to meet for a reason. They were designed to guide Congress and the Commander-in-Chief as we make tough choices about resources and security. The information produced by the review process could be immensely valuable, but is often withheld from those who need to understand it most. In the coming days, I will introduce legislation intended to reverse this trend. The legislation will require DoD to re-write and re-submit a compliant QDR for FY14, and could be considered on its own or incorporated into the National Defense Authorization Act. In the coming days, I will consider what measures could be added to such legislation to ensure a prompt and compliant re-write.”*

The Chairman’s office said that the report was unacceptable because it was:

- **Budget Driven:** The FY14 QDR is heavily constrained by low budget levels. The law requires the QDR to identify resources not included in the Pentagon’s 5 year spending plan. The whole point of the review is to identify the budget needed to address the evolving threat.
- **Shortsighted:** The FY14 QDR only looks out 5 years, instead of the 20 years required by law.
- **Assumes Too Much Risk:** The law requires the QDR to offer a low-to-moderate risk plan for our forces and mission. By Secretary Hegel’s own admission, this QDR accepts additional risks. “

What does this mean for our concerns? Probably it will be a question of end-strengths- especially in the Army. But we will see. [Source: TREA | News for the Enlisted | 10 Mar 2014 ++]

DoD Retirement ► A New Approach

After years of silence on the intensely controversial issue of military retirement reform, the Pentagon on 6 MAR unveiled a detailed proposal for fundamental, far-reaching changes to the current pension system, Military Times has learned. The changes would preserve the current system’s defining feature of a 20-year, “cliff-vesting,” fixed-income pension. But it would ultimately provide smaller monthly checks, according to documents obtained by Military Times. To compensate for that, the new proposal would offer three new cash payments to be provided long before old age — a 401(k)-style defined contribution benefit awarded to all troops who serve at least six years; a cash retention bonus at around 12 years of service; and a potentially large lump-sum “transition pay” provided upon retirement to those who serve 20 years or more. In the broad view, the new plan would lower the total economic

value of the military retirement package. But maybe not by that much. Details vary, but several options show a roughly 10 percent reduction in cumulative lifetime payments.

Pairing that long-term reduction with the new cash payments is a strategic decision by Pentagon personnel experts, based on the notion that troops would prefer a plan that gives them more money up front to reduce the impact of smaller pension payments later in life. “When compensation is paid out sooner, it has more value to the typical member who is assessing whether to continue in the military,” according to a 44-page report outlining the new proposals. Less than 20 percent of service members ever see any retirement benefits under the current system, so the new proposal may be welcomed by the vast majority of troops who do not plan to stay for a 20-year career. What is sure to be one of the most controversial options outlined in the report would give “working age” retirees only a “partial benefit” pension check, forcing them to wait until a traditional retirement age, probably age 62, until becoming eligible for more robust monthly checks that reflect the “full benefit.” That is a recognition that most service members go on to second careers in the civilian world before leaving the workforce and retiring for good.

The basic building blocks of the new proposal are the cash incentives that would come while a member is still in uniform and right at retirement:

- For all troops, DoD would set up a Thrift Savings Plan account, the federal government’s 401(k)-style savings account. Starting after two years of service, DoD would provide an annual direct deposit equal to 5 percent of basic pay. No contribution is required from service members, although they could contribute more on their own if they chose to. Full ownership of these accounts would transfer to individual service members after they reach six years of service, with the money available for withdrawal beginning at age 59½. Speaking hypothetically, Pentagon officials say that if such accounts had been in effect for the past 20 years, a retiring E-7 would have accumulated a total of about \$37,600 in his or her account, while a retiring O-5 would have an account worth about \$76,200. Both figures assume that the service members made no additional contributions, and that the annual rate of return on the investment was about 5 percent.
- The services would offer a retention incentive payment for troops who clear a midcareer milestone, most likely the 12-year mark. Also known as a “continuation pay,” this bonus might be equal to two months’ pay for enlisted troops and six months’ pay for officers. The individual services would control this payment, and it could vary by career field if manpower planners need to bolster retention in specific pockets of the force.
- Upon final separation, troops who have served at least 20 years would get lump-sum transition pay. That might be as much as three years basic pay under scenarios that substantially reduce pension checks. It might be less than one year’s basic pay under options that do not reduce the pension income as much. The size of this payment could be standardized under law to make it the same regardless of service or career field.

Building on those three incentives, the Pentagon report offers two “options” for a complete retirement overhaul, both of which involve reducing the “multiplier” used to calculate military retirement pay. The new Pentagon report does not appear to favor one approach over the other, saying only that research shows either option is workable and would not damage retention or force structure. Under both alternatives, the report notes, retirees could expect their income in old age to rise after their TSP money becomes available for withdrawal at age 59½. The options would be:

- 1) Structured similar to the existing system: Retirees would begin collecting pension checks immediately upon separation and continue receiving those payments, with minor annual cost-of-living adjustments, for life.
- 2) A second — and potentially far more divisive — option would offer similar cash benefits up front but would provide a two-tiered pension with only “partial” monthly payments immediately after separating from the military, probably capped at 25 percent of late-career basic pay. This “partial benefit” would shift to a more generous full benefit after an individual reaches a traditional retirement age, probably 62.

The fixed-income retirement system is based on a yearly multiplier, currently 2.5 percentage points. That means a member's retirement pay equals 2.5 percent of their average basic pay over their three highest earning years — almost always the last three — for each year of active-duty service. Serving 20 years results in a monthly check equal to 50 percent of that “high-three” average. A central question about the new retirement proposals is where to set the new multiplier.

- **Option 1:** Offers full benefits immediately after retirement but the multiplier would be reduced to 1.75 percent, giving troops retiring after 20 years monthly checks worth about 35 percent of their final high-three average. For example, an E-7 retiring after 20 years initially would get an annual retirement income of about \$19,970, which would rise to \$23,508 later in life, when additional income from the Thrift Savings Plan becomes available. Under the current system, that E-7 would get \$24,640 per year. For an officer retiring at the O-5 paygrade after 20 years, this option would result in an annual retirement income of \$37,884 during working-age retirement, rising to \$45,375 later when additional income from the Thrift Savings Plan becomes available. By comparison, that same officer under the current system would receive \$46,748.
- **Option 2:** Offers only a partial benefit for working-age retirees. The yearly multiplier might remain at 2.5 or be lowered to 2 percentage points, Pentagon documents show. Under this more aggressive version that lowers the multiplier to 2.0, troops retiring after 20 years would receive about 40 percent of their high-three basic pay average after age 62. Before then, the partial benefit plan would give retirees pension checks capped at 25 percent of their high-three basic pay average. In effect, under this option, an E-7 retiring after 20 years would get initial annual retirement income of about \$18,117, which would rise to \$26,946 later in life after full benefit checks kick in and additional income from the Thrift Savings Plan becomes available. The partial benefit option offers a higher income in old age when compared to the current system, which would give that same E-7 about \$24,640 per year, mainly because it would be paid for a far fewer number of years. For the example of an officer retiring at the O-5 pay grade, that “partial benefit” system would result in an annual income of \$34,369 during his or her working-age retirement, which would rise to \$52,020 in old age after “full benefit” checks kick in and additional income from the Thrift Savings Plan becomes available. Again, compared to the current system, that “partial benefit” offers a higher income in old age.

Note: An important difference between the two options involves the “transition pay.” Under the “partial benefit” plan that reduces retirement pay during the “working age” years and increases it at age 62, DoD would offer a generous lump-sum transition pay that amounts to about 2 1/2 or three years of basic pay. Under the other option that more closely resembles today's system, transition pay would probably be equal to one-half or three-quarters of one year's basic pay.

The proposals are detailed in a report prepared by the Defense Department's Personnel and Readiness Office and sent on Thursday to Capitol Hill and also to the Commission on Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization, which is conducting a detailed study of military pay and benefits. The proposals are not formal recommendations and are not included in the Pentagon's 2015 budget proposal. Making public the detailed analysis, known inside the Pentagon as a “white paper,” is intended only to inform public debate on a politically delicate issue that could have far-reaching effects on military retention. “These are the department's views of potential options for modernizing retirement,” said a senior defense official who helped write the report. The proposal is based on a deeper level of analysis than other plans drawn up outside the Pentagon. Manpower experts used complex computer models to help gauge how subtle adjustments in compensation affect troops' decisions about their own careers. “Unlike some of the proposals in the past, we were able to model various concepts to determine their impact on recruitment and retention,” the senior defense official said. Those retention models show that previous proposals calling for the elimination of the fixed-benefit pension and replacing it entirely with a 401(k)-style investment account would have a “devastating” effect on retention.

Still, the Pentagon’s top brass believes the military retirement system has become too expensive and may soon begin to inhibit spending on weapons modernization and research. Today for every dollar paid in current compensation for active duty troops, the federal government sets aside 44 cents to cover the accrual cost of future benefits. Under the current system, the total lifetime value of an enlisted retirement package is usually at least \$1 million and for officers it is often more than \$2 million. Defense officials acknowledge that the total savings from the new proposals would be modest, especially in light of the Pentagon’s current budget environment that emphasizes large-scale cost reductions to meet near-term spending caps imposed by Congress. Rather, the personnel experts who developed the proposal aimed to make it more efficient, to integrate the active- and reserve components under a single system and to give manpower planners more levers to shape a future force that requires an increasingly complex mix of skills and experience. “Saving money was not of paramount importance,” said another defense official who worked on the proposal. “It was of equal importance to making sure our members maintain a very good retirement and, secondly, giving our force managers a retirement system that will be able to maintain the force and give them some additional flexibility. “We were not trying to squeeze as much money as we can out of this thing, the defense official said.

The proposals include changes to retirement for active-duty troops, reservists, wounded warriors and also revamps the survivors benefit program for retirees. Any changes to military retirement would require approval from Congress, and lawmakers are unlikely to take any action until after the military compensation commission submits its formal report, due next February. Top defense officials strongly support grandfathering any and all of today’s troops under the current system. Yet defense officials also support giving today’s troops a choice to “opt into” the new system. Officials believe it might appeal to young enlistees or junior officers who have been in the military for only a year or two and remain far from certain about whether they plan to stay in for a full 20 years — and would see at least some retirement benefit for serving as few as six years. “The analysis conducted for this review suggests that a large fraction of personnel would opt into the new system,” the report said.

Officials acknowledge that fewer troops are likely to opt into a system that offers only “partial” retirement pay for working-age retirees. In other words, the belief is that troops would be more likely to opt into a new system with TSP contributions and transition pay if they can still count on a “full benefit” upon leaving service. “Nonetheless, the number of members who choose to participate in a new system would be sufficient to generate considerable cost savings in the initial years after the system is implemented,” the report said. Under all of the various plans, the cost of funding military retirement would go up temporarily as the Pentagon would have to meet new up-front commitments for the Thrift Savings Plan contributions for all troops, retention payments around the 12-year mark and the “transition pay” for departing troops. But in the long run, the new retirement plan would cost taxpayers less, with the savings growing over time as grandfathered troops retired and the force becomes filled with younger troops recruited under a new policy. Full savings would manifest only after about 30 years.

The Pentagon’s proposal could cut year-in, year-out accrual costs by more than 15 percent under the most aggressive options. The current retirement program costs taxpayers about \$25 billion annually in accrual costs. The new proposals would ultimately reduce that by between \$1.5 billion to \$4 billion, or between 5 percent and 15 percent. That amount of annual savings amounts to less than one percent of the overall defense budget, which this year is more than \$500 billion. [Source: ArmyTimes | Andrew Tilghman | 6 Mar 2014 ++]

DoD Disability Severance Update 03 ► Pentagon Proposes Change

The Pentagon’s new retirement reform proposal would make sweeping changes to the complex system of benefits that aim to compensate wounded warriors for injuries that cut short a military career. The new rules, proposed as one

element of a broader military retirement reform package, would allow more wounded warriors to qualify. It would increase payments to many individual veterans. And it would ultimately cost the Defense Department more money, according to a report unveiled 6 MAR. The biggest difference would be the elimination of the offset policy that prevents wounded warriors from collecting disability payments from both the Defense Department and Veterans Affairs Department. As a result, there would be no need for the convoluted rules for exemptions collectively known as “concurrent receipt.” Under today’s system, most military disability benefits are reduced dollar-for-dollar by the amount that a wounded warrior might receive in disability payments from VA.

The Defense Department’s proposal is an explicit acknowledgment that its current disability compensation benefit is deeply flawed. Today’s system “does not fully compensate service members for the expected value of a lost military career” and the new proposal is an effort to “close the gap,” according to the new Pentagon retirement report. On March 6, the Defense Department sent the 44-page report about retirement reform to Capitol Hill and also to the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, which is conducting a broad study of pay and benefits. The proposal would

- Change the qualifications for disability retirement benefits. Currently, a service member must be declared medically unfit for duty and also obtain a disability rating of 30 percent.
- Eliminate the 30 percent requirement for service members who have at least 12 years of service.
- Change the way disability benefits are calculated. Service members could no longer choose a payment based on their disability rating. Instead, the payment would be based solely on years of service.
- For wounded warriors stuck in the military’s limbo of “temporary disability,” which can last up to five years, the floor of disability payments would be raised.

[Source: Military.com | Andrew Tilghman | 6 Mar 2014 ++]

DoD Lawsuit ~ PTSD VN Update 01 ► Bad Paper Discharges

Five Vietnam combat veterans and three veterans’ organizations filed a class action lawsuit in federal court on 3 MAR, seeking relief for tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans who developed post-traumatic stress disorder during their military service and subsequently received an other than honorable discharge. Tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans received an other than honorable discharge for conduct attributable to their undiagnosed PTSD, according to a news release. Because PTSD was not a medical diagnosis until 1980, many Vietnam Era service members who suffered from PTSD and struggled to perform their assigned duties received “bad paper” discharges instead of the medical discharges they would likely receive today, the news release stated. Students from the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at the Yale Law School have been working on the issue for some time and recently released a report that the Coast Guard engaged in the same policy decisions with regard to PTSD. The class action suit names the U.S. Army, Navy and the Air Force. The law clinic, the Vietnam Veterans of America and the National Veterans Council for Legal Redress put out the following press release:

“When I was in high school, I worked at the VA (Veterans Administration) hospital in the kitchen as a dishwasher. But after I came home from Vietnam, I couldn’t even get my job back as a dishwasher because of my bad paper,” said plaintiff Conley Monk. “My discharge status has been a lifetime scar. If I were discharged today, my PTSD would be recognized and treated — and I wouldn’t be punished for having a service-connected medical condition.”

“Tens of thousands of brave and honorable Vietnam veterans with post-traumatic stress have been doubly injured by the black mark of an other than honorable discharge, resulting in unjustly denied support, services and benefits,” said U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT). “These heroic veterans are long overdue present day appreciation of modern mental health in the timely review of their discharge upgrade appeals.”

In addition to Monk, a New Haven resident and veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, the other individual plaintiffs are James Cottam (California, U.S. Army), George Siders (Georgia, U.S. Marine Corps), Kevin Marret (Indiana, U.S. Marine Corps), and James Davis (New York, U.S. Army). Vietnam Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America Connecticut State Council, and the National Veterans Council for Legal Redress have also joined the lawsuit on behalf of themselves and their members. Despite advances in understanding PTSD since 1980, the Pentagon has refused to apply medically appropriate standards in reviewing Vietnam veterans' requests to upgrade their discharges based on PTSD attributable to service. The decades-long failure of the service branches to give fair consideration to these applications is discrimination against a group of veterans who not only have PTSD, but are also elderly and often indigent.

"These veterans served their country, but their country, through the service branches' failure to upgrade their discharges, has not served them," said Dr. Tom Berger, executive director of the Veterans Health Council, Vietnam Veterans of America. "It's time to finally give them the upgrades and recognition they deserve." "We started the National Veterans Council for Legal Redress to rectify the injustices that veterans with less than honorable discharges have endured. Hundreds of thousands of veterans who served during the Vietnam Era returned home with bad paper, many unjustly," said Garry Monk, executive director of NVCLR and brother of Conley Monk. "Unfortunately, the Pentagon has refused to correct the decades of injustice experienced by tens of thousands of veterans who suffer from PTSD but were discharged before it was a diagnosable condition," said V. Prentice, a law student intern in the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School, which represents the plaintiffs in this suit. "This action seeks to compel appropriate action by the military and to finally secure justice for these veterans." [Source: New Haven Register, Conn | 3 Mar 2014 ++]

DoD Sexual Abuse Update 14 ► Senate Blocks Jurisdiction Change

The Senate on 6 MAR rejected a proposal to move sexual assault cases outside the military chain of command, instead backing simpler reforms to the military justice system. Victim advocates lamented the vote, which fell five senators short of advancing past a procedural hurdle, as a lost opportunity and a potentially discouraging message to female service members who face harassment and intimidation. But opponents of the proposal — among them, Pentagon leaders — called it a well-intentioned overreach that would handicap military efforts to crack down on sexual assaults. "The strongest, most effective approach we can take to reduce sexual assault is to hold commanders accountable," said Senate Armed Services Chairman Carl Levin (D-MI). "To do this, we must maintain the important authority to prosecute sexual assaults that our military commanders now have, and add greater accountability for those commanders."



Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y.

The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) would have overhauled sexual assault prosecution in the military by taking the decision of whether to pursue legal action away from commanders, instead giving it to independent prosecutors. Gillibrand said the move was the only way to ensure that serious crimes were pursued instead of covered up. Over the course of dozens of hearings and press conferences in the last year, she and supporters chastised a military old-boys network that revictimized sexual assault survivors, convincing many that it was better to stay silent than seek justice. “Today, many members of the Senate have turned their back on these victims and survivors,” she said after the vote. But opponents of her plan challenged her victims-vs-commanders narrative, saying that a reform package backed by Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO) was a more reasoned approach to solving the problem. Her legislation, which sailed through a procedural vote without opposition, is expected to be passed by the full Senate on Monday. It would remove the “good soldier” defense for troops, preventing military character from being used in trials to refute sexual assault claims, and allow victims’ input in whether their cases are tried in military or civilian courts.

McCaskill called the vote on her measure — and the defeat of Gillibrand’s bill — a victory for victims and the military. “We have a laundry list of things that will protect victims, bring perpetrators to justice, and hold our commanders accountable.” Thursday’s Senate vote came the same day as the start of trial of Army Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Sinclair, accused of forcing a female captain to perform oral sex and threatening to kill her family if she publicly acknowledged their three-year affair. The case against Sinclair became a cornerstone of a year-long debate about sexual assault in the military, and whether senior defense officials could be trusted to fix systemic cultural problems in the ranks. In addition, Army officials confirmed Thursday that a lieutenant colonel who supervises sexual assault prosecution for the entire service is under investigation for allegedly groping a female colleague.

McCaskill said she is hopeful House leaders will move ahead with her measure after it passes the Senate next week. Last year, as part of the annual defense authorization bill, Congress passed a host of related sexual assault reforms, including independent legal counsel for victims and mandatory dishonorable discharges for troops convicted of those crimes. Gillibrand, meanwhile, vowed to continue her fight. She hinted she may push to include the idea in the next defense authorization bill, despite resistance from Senate Armed Services Committee members. “What we’ve heard from military commanders for 20 years is zero tolerance,” she said, “but what we’ve seen is zero accountability.” [Source: Military.com | Leo Shane | 6 Mar 2014 ++]

DECA Budget Cuts Update 05 ► Curtailing Benefit Abuse

A 2015 DoD budget proposal looks to slash the commissary's funding from \$1.4 billion to \$400 million by 2017. Should it be approved by lawmakers, insiders speculate that DeCA will be forced to make up the bulk of that budget shortfall by asking Congress to allow them to raise prices. To help offset that Commissary officials will be cracking down on bulk coupon purchases in a move designed to "protect the commissary benefit" -- the first of its kind since the Defense Department confirmed a plan to gut the program's budget. The crackdown, announced on the Defense Commissary Agency's Facebook page 26 FEB, looks to block shoppers who use the store to turn couponing into a money making enterprise as well as those who abuse the system by buying products to resell. "This policy is designed to curtail possible abuse of the commissary benefit. The commissary is intended to enhance the quality of life of members of the uniformed services, retired members, and dependents, and to support military readiness, recruitment, and retention," DeCA officials said. "The commissary is not intended to be a bank or generate personal income for its patrons."

The newly announced rules restrict the ability of shoppers to place large special product orders. Under the new guidelines, shoppers may not order more than three cases or 36 units of any product. The rules also block patrons from "frequent/multiple" special orders as well as shoppers from bringing "unreasonable quantities" in for return, according to the Facebook post. DeCA officials said they do not track how many special orders are placed annually or how much those orders cost the agency each year. Previous to the rule change, shoppers were permitted to make unlimited special bulk orders of any product carried by the commissary system. Rather than clear the shelves of any given item, the policy allowed coupon users, for example, to order full cases of a sale item for which they held high valued coupons. While those suspected of using the system as a money making venture were supposed to be reported as abusers, the orders themselves were allowed.

Military shoppers also used the system to place special orders for food for units or on-base functions. DeCA officials said the new policy is only designed to shut down abuse, and regular orders for on-base functions will still be permitted. Those who travel long distances to visit the commissary and make special orders so they can ensure that enough of a product is in stock when they arrive will also still be permitted to regularly place orders, officials said. The previous rules also allowed returns of any number of products for any reason at any time, with or without a receipt except in the case of tobacco products or infant formula. Refunds of more than \$25 would be paid back to the shopper in the form of a DeCA gift card, and those below \$25 are given in cash. But the problems came when users abused the system. Some used the special order system to buy items in bulk, which they then took off base and resold at a mark-up, a long forbidden practice. Others used it to order huge quantities of items for which they had coupons. Those shoppers would sometimes then return the items, often numbering in the hundreds, for the full value cash back. A shopper who had coupons for \$2 off \$3 items, for example, could buy them, pay \$1 per item plus the commissary's normal 5 percent surcharge, and then later return it and get the full \$3 per item plus surcharge back. The new rules look to make those practices more difficult, if not impossible.

Another newly announced rule change alters the way couponers are able to receive cash back on purchases. Currently some couponers use the system as way to make money while buying large quantities of any given product. If a shopper has coupons for more than the price of the product, DeCA allows shoppers to receive up to \$25 in cash back and then gives the rest to the shopper on a commissary gift card. For example, in what one commissary user described as "the great KY lube incident of 2011," shoppers used coupons for \$3 off one tube of KY brand personal lubricant to bring in significant income. Since the commissary sold the small bottles for \$2 each, shoppers were able to use the coupon and earn \$1 simply by buying the product. "It was an extreme couponer's dream coupon so to speak," said Josey Thompson, a couponer and commissary shopper stationed with her Army husband at Fort Campbell, Ky. "My husband was stationed at Fort Hood at the time, and you could see people leaving the Warrior Way Commissary with more lube than a Proctology Practice probably uses in a lifetime. People were ordering the 2 ounce bottles of KY Lubricant by the pallets, literally pallets. The most I saw was 400 bottles for one shopper. Not only were the bottles free but the cashier had to pay over \$400 in cash back to the shopper."

To further game the system and get around the no cash over \$25 rule, extreme couponers would ask that their orders be split into multiple purchases. That practice would allow them to receive several cash payouts of under \$25 instead of one \$25 payout and gift cards for the remainder. The new rules shut that practice down. "Commissaries will no longer allow multiple or 'split' transactions for orders with coupon overages," the announcement states. Commissary officials said the new ID card scanning system, rolled out early this year, could be used to confirm shoppers are abusing the system. "The Defense Commissary Agency has no intention of monitoring patron abuse through the scanning of ID cards," they said. "However, abuse once committed may be confirmed by law enforcement or appropriate installation officials through a comparison of the information in the DEERS database with the patron's transaction."

Even though commissary officials confirmed that the rules are only designed to block cash back abuse, some extreme couponers worry that the new rules are too ambiguous and will hurt their ability to save money. "I think it

will affect us and others. I think I will shop somewhere else," said April Hughey, an Army wife and extreme couponer at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska who saved about \$1,400 last year just by using coupons. "Maybe I'm just upset about it ... but honestly if I'm not saving there then I'm not shopping there. I'm not loyal to the store. I'm loyal to the savings." Hughey said she never uses more than 20 of the same coupons for any given set of products, but relies on doing her order in separate transactions to use all of her coupons. And while the policy said those separate transactions are banned only in the case of overages, which Hughey said she rarely gets, she worries that commissary employees will not be aware of the difference. "I don't coupon to make overages. I do it so we can eat well," she said. "We live in Alaska and any other store is way more. Even with the extra pay we get, I also work full time. It is still hard to make ends meet when milk is \$4.49."

But Thompson sees the new rules as an important way to curb abuse. "My overall view is that those who are upset and up in arms about this are the abusers," she said. "They are probably the couponers who abused the system without thinking what it could do to our wonderful shopping benefit. I will continue to coupon and I will continue to shop at the commissary because beyond what most people seem to think they really are lower priced [Source: Mil.com | Amy Bushatz | 28 Feb 2014 ++]

Commissary Policy Changes Update 01 ► From Benefit to Business

Behind the plan to slash taxpayer support of commissaries is a concept Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and his senior advisors have embraced that base grocery stores should operate as a business and not a benefit. This shift is candidly revealed in budget documents released 4MAR and in a legislative packet for implementing the funding cuts drafted by the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA). The documents make clear that individual stateside commissaries will survive only if they produce enough revenue to cover operating costs. Hagel gave a softer summation to the Senate Armed Services Committee on 5 MAR. "We are not shutting down any commissaries. We recommend gradually phasing out some subsidies but only for domestic commissaries that are not in remote locations," the defense chief said. Because stateside stores "will continue to operate tax-and-rent free, they will still be able to provide people with a very good deal."

Resale industry officials and military associations dispute this and predict closure of most stateside commissaries. Only stores overseas and at 25 remote stateside bases would be funded after fiscal 2017. DeCA's annual appropriation of \$1.4 billion would be cut by then to \$400 million. That's enough to offer shoppers savings of 10 percent off "high priced private grocery stores," the budget documents estimate. Savings would be even "more modest" in comparison to prices at discount grocery chains. "In the end, patron usage of the commissaries will determine the savings and their comprehensive advantage," explains the "overview" report from the Obama administration on its 2015 defense budget request. Commissary shoppers now save an average of 30 percent compared to prices for a range of private sector grocery stores, DeCA said. The hit to those savings would be felt "worldwide," budget documents explain.

The draft implementing legislation has a telling description of commissaries run as businesses. Criteria for opening and closing stores, it says, would make cost recovery "the primary factor for their existence, as opposed to the needs of active duty members and their families or the welfare of the military community." That statement captures what's ahead for a long prized benefit if Congress adopts the plan in the budget, said an industry official. He described the plan as carelessly conceived and devastating to the "ecology" of base stores, both exchanges and commissaries. There were no signals of stiff resistance from the Senate Armed Services Committee on Wednesday when Hagel and Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, detailed the new budget with its sweeping changes impacting commissaries and the Tricare program.

Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) called commissaries a “core benefit” that contributes “greatly to recruitment and retention, even though I am one of those who thinks [troops] may get just as good a deal at some other retail outlets around the country.” Encouraging commissaries “to act more like a business...makes sense. I agree with that,” Chambliss said. But the senator questioned whether changes to this benefit should be delayed until the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission make its report in FEB2015. He and Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.) have introduced a bill to mandate such a delay. Hagel and his comptroller Robert Hale explained that some savings from compensation reforms are needed now because budget cuts already are impacting training, troop support and overall readiness. Hagel noted that exchanges operate on the same business model and are successfully self-sustaining. So senior leaders, relying on “significant analysis,” decided “we knew enough about where we thought we’re going to have to eventually go with commissaries,” Hagel said.

On 24 FEB, the day Hagel first unveiled highlights of the budget with its plan for commissaries, he recognized “senior enlisted leaders in each of the services for [their] help and input in crafting this budget.” Two days later, however, some of those enlisted leaders told a House appropriations subcommittee that their support for compensation reforms didn’t extend to the deep hit on the commissary benefit. Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Micheal P. Barrett and Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force James A. Cody noted that young families in particular depend heavily on the shopping discounts. Barrett called it “ridiculous that we’re going to go after something that saves some young lance corporal, an E-3, \$4,500 a year.” If that E-3 has two kids, he added, “and every time he shops it’s \$240, well unbeknownst to him he just put \$80 worth of gas into his car.” Base exchanges could also be at risk, say industry officials. Their profits already are stressed by base closures overseas, deep force cuts, and minimum wage hikes on service contracts.

The plan for commissaries would deepen these challenges by reducing shopper traffic on base and by allowing commissaries to offer products now sold only in exchanges. DeCA’s implementing legislation shows commissaries would operate far different than they do today. A surcharge of at least 5 percent would still be collected on goods sold. But to capture more revenue, DeCA seeks authorities to run its stores like commercial supermarkets. That means a broader mix of products including beer and wine. Restrictions would be lifted on sale of generic or local goods to compete with brand names. A legal requirement to sell goods at cost would end so prices could climb as needed and would vary from store to store. DeCA could advertise to try to keep patrons and hire private contractors to operate specific store functions. It also wants relief from “socio-economic” laws that dampen savings, including a requirement to buy certain supplies and services from nonprofit employers of persons who are blind or have other significant disabilities. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Tom Philpott | 7 Mar 2014 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 1 thru 14 Mar 2013

- **Fort Benning GA** – The identities of military members at Fort Benning, Ga., were stolen as part of a multimillion-dollar tax return scheme, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. Tracy Mitchell of Phenix City, who was an employee at the Fort Benning hospital, has been charged with eight counts each of wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. She had her initial court hearing 27 FEB, according to Todd Brown, the attorney prosecuting the case. “She turned herself in once she found out there was an indictment issued against her,” Brown said. The indictment was issued earlier this month by a federal grand jury.
According to the indictment, Mitchell knowingly used the names, birth dates and Social Security numbers of military personnel to file more than 1,000 false federal income tax returns that claimed more than \$2.2 million in refunds. According to Brown, Mitchell’s position at the hospital gave her access to the identification data of soldiers, including those currently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. When

investigators searched her home, they found \$329,242 stored inside a safe, Brown said. George Beck, U.S. attorney for the Middle District of Alabama, worked with Georgia’s Middle District to have the case prosecuted in Alabama. “Identity theft is a horrible crime, but stealing identities from those who are serving our country is absolutely deplorable,” Beck said. “While the defendant is presumed innocent, my office will vigorously prosecute those who prey on our military.” If convicted, Mitchell could face up to 20 years in prison for each count of fraud and two years for each count of identity theft. [Source: The Montgomery Advertiser | Rebecca Burylo | 28 Feb 2014 ++]

- **Pentagon** – The Senate wants answers from Pentagon officials on why the Defense Department spent more than \$754 million last fiscal year on parts it didn’t need. The Pentagon reduced its “on-order excess inventory” from \$1.3 billion in 2009 to \$609 million in 2011, but has since regressed, according to all MAR memo signed by Sens. Tom Carper (D-DE) and Tom Coburn (R-OK) [http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/media/majority-media/chairman-carper-and-ranking-member-coburn-urge-department-of-defense-to-end-purchasing-millions-of-dollars-of-unneeded-inventory#_edn1]. “These facts are troubling reminders that the DOD still has a lot of work ahead in its efforts to avoid wasteful spending by better aligning inventory with demand,” the memo stated. On-order excess parts are “already purchased but likely to be excess due to changes in requirements,” according to the 2013 General Accountability Office’s High Risk Report.

The same report notes that in September 2011, even as DOD was cutting the excess items it was ordering, the department still had \$9.2 billion worth of excess inventory in stock. The senators’ memo called for Alan Estevez, undersecretary of defense for acquisitions, technology and logistics, to explain by April 25 why the inventory amount increased and what steps will be taken to reduce the excess. According to the memo, the Pentagon previously stated that the increases in excess were due to the shrinking budget, which led defense planners to be “more conservative” about canceling orders. The senators’ assertions indicated that cuts to excess orders would be particularly useful in an era of declining budgets. “This is another example of how the Department can reduce wasteful spending by simply canceling unneeded orders, using the inventory it has, and freeing up funds for the critical needs of our military,” the memo stated.

The Defense Department’s supply chain management has been included on the GAO’s High Risk Report — a list of areas prone to fraud, waste and abuse — since they began compiling the biannual report in 1990. More than one-third of the government programs placed on the list have been removed since 1990 due to improvement, according to the GAO. In its 2013 report, the GAO stated that “a number of challenges, including incomplete delivery data for many surface shipments to Afghanistan, have hindered the distribution of supplies and equipment to the warfighter, and will likely continue to affect operations in Afghanistan and limit DOD’s visibility and oversight of the supply chain.” [Source: Stars and Stripes | Erik Slavin | 12 Mar 2014 ++]

VA



VA Emergency Care Update 08 ► GAO Uncovers Denial Errors

Even as the Obama administration works to provide health coverage to millions of uninsured Americans, government investigators uncovered dozens of cases where the VA failed to cover emergency hospital costs for uninsured disabled veterans. Government Accountability Office investigators say the series of errors committed by the VA could be examples of a broader problem in a specialized area of compensation. The Department of Veterans Affairs must reimburse non-VA hospitals that provide emergency care to disabled veterans - such as for car accident injuries - if the veteran is uninsured, enrolled in VA health care and has received recent treatment at VA. Federal law requires that such emergency expenses be covered by the federal government even if the injury or illness is not related to the veteran's service-connected disability. But when GAO looked at a sample of 128 of these claims brought by non-VA hospitals in 2012 seeking reimbursement and that were later denied by the VA, investigators discovered mistakes in half of them, the report says.

The claims were brought to four VA hospitals - Washington D.C. VA Medical Center, White River Junction VA Medical Center in Vermont, Black Hills VA Health Care System in South Dakota and the North Texas VA Health Care System. The GAO said its investigation "raises concerns about the extent to which other VA facilities nationwide may be inappropriately denying claims." VA spokeswoman Victoria Dillon said the department is taking steps to better educate employees about handling these claims and better informing veterans about the benefit and how it works. The VA has since gone back and paid claims in 25 of the cases uncovered by GAO. In two-thirds of the claims GAO examined, there was evidence the VA never informed disabled veterans that their health care expenses would not be paid by the VA, leaving them unaware of appeal rights. When private hospitals were not reimbursed by the VA, they were left to bill the uninsured veterans directly. "These are not wealthy veterans," says Randall Williamson, the supervising GAO investigator for the report. Some of the mistakes by VA staff included failing to promptly date-stamp claims, sending them to the wrong payment office, routing them to the wrong VA facility and incorrectly concluding that veterans were not eligible.

"They were sloppy," Williamson said of the VA processors. A 15-year-old law known as the Millennium Act was designed to discourage disabled veterans from racing long distances to the nearest VA hospital when they need emergency treatment, the GAO report says. The VA estimates it will spend \$580 million on this benefit in 2015. "This report confirms what we've suspected for some time: VA's weak oversight of veterans' Millennium Act claims is placing an undue burden on veterans," says Rep. Jeff Miller, (R-FL), chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, which requested the investigation. [Source: USA TODAY | Gregg Zoroya | 7 Mar 3014 ++]

VA Strategic Plan ► FY2014-2020

VA's FY2014-2020 Strategic Plan is now available online at <http://www.va.gov/performance>. VA appreciates all the input they received from their partners, stakeholders and Veterans to help write this plan. In the spring of 2012, consultations were held with Congress, the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs, Veterans service organizations, military service organizations, VA's unions and VA advisory committees and the American public via a Federal Register Notice. The Strategic Plan incorporates VA's FY2014-2015 Agency Priority Goals which are to improve Veteran access to VA benefits and services, eliminate the disability claims backlog and eliminate Veteran homelessness. The Strategic Plan also outlines longer-term goals and objectives that place a strong emphasis on defining success by Veteran outcomes; enhancing the quality of and access to benefits and services through integration within VA and with our partners; and developing our workforce with the skills, tools and leadership to meet our clients' needs and expectations. VA's three strategic goals are:

- Empower Veterans to Improve Their Well-being

- Enhance and Develop Trusted Partnerships
- Manage and Improve VA Operations to Deliver Seamless and Integrated Support

This plan puts an emphasis on putting the Veteran in control of how, when and where they wish to be served. It continues to transform VA into a 21st Century organization to better serve their clients. [Source: VAntage Point | Elizabeth Olmo | 6 Mar 2014 ++]

VA Budget 2015 Update 01 ► President’s Proposal

Continuing the transformation of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) into a 21st century organization, the President has proposed a \$163.9 billion budget, a 6.5 percent increase over Fiscal Year 2014, that will support VA’s goals to expand access to health care and other benefits, eliminate the disability claims backlog, and end homelessness among Veterans. The budget includes \$68.4 billion in discretionary spending, largely for healthcare which includes approximately \$3.1 billion in medical care collections from health insurers and Veteran copayments. It also includes \$95.6 billion for mandatory programs – mostly disability compensation and pensions for Veterans. “This budget will allow us to continue the progress we have made in helping Veterans secure their place in the middle class,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “It is a tangible demonstration of the President’s commitment to ensuring Veterans and their families have the care and benefits they’ve earned and deserve. ... We remain committed to providing Veterans the opportunity to pursue their education, find meaningful employment and access high-quality health care,” Shinseki added. “From the men and women of ‘the greatest generation’ to the Veterans who have returned from our most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, no one deserves it more.”

VA operates one of the largest integrated health care systems in the country with nearly 9 million enrollees; the ninth largest life insurance program; monthly disability pay, pensions and survivors payments to more than 5.1 million beneficiaries of monthly pay, pensions and survivor benefits; education assistance or vocational rehabilitation benefits and services to 1.2 million students; mortgage guaranties to over 2 million homeowners; and the largest cemetery system in the nation. Here are highlights from the President’s 2015 budget request for VA.

Health Care

With a medical care budget of \$59.1 billion, including collections, VA is positioned to provide care to 6.7 million patients in the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. The patient total includes over 757,000 people whose military service began after Sept. 11, 2001.

Major spending categories within the health care budget are:

- \$7.2 billion for mental health;
- \$2.6 billion for prosthetics;
- \$561 million for spinal cord injuries;
- \$229 million for traumatic brain injuries;
- \$238 million for readjustment counseling; and
- \$7.0 billion for long-term care.

Expanding Access

The President’s proposed budget would ensure that care and other benefits are available to Veterans when and where they need them. Among the programs that will expand access under the proposed budget are:

- \$567 million in telehealth funding, which helps patients monitor chronic health care conditions and increases access to care, especially in rural and remote locations;
- \$403 million for health care services specifically-designed for women, an increase of 8.7 percent over the present level;
- \$534 million for the activation of new and enhanced health care facilities;
- \$562 million to continue on-going major construction projects;
- \$86.6 million for improved customer service applications for online self-service portals and call center agent-assisted inquiries; and
- \$3.6 million to open two new national cemeteries in Florida and prepare for the opening of two new rural national Veterans burial grounds.

Eliminating Claims Backlog

The President’s proposed budget provides for full implementation of the Veterans Benefits Administration’s (VBA) robust Transformation Plan -- a series of people, process and technology initiatives -- in FY 2015. This plan will continue to systematically reduce the backlog and enable the Department to reach its 2015 goal - to eliminate the disability claims backlog and process all claims within 125 days with 98 percent accuracy. Major transformation initiatives in the budget proposal invest \$312 million to bring leading-edge technology to the claims backlog, including:

- \$173 million (\$137 million in Information Technology and \$36 million in VBA) for the next generation of the electronic claims processing system Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS); and
- \$139 million for Veterans Claims Intake Program (VCIP) to continue conversion of paper records into electronic images and data in VBMS.

Eliminating Veterans Homelessness

A major strategic goal for the Department is to end homelessness among Veterans in 2015. The budget request targets \$1.6 billion for programs to prevent or reduce homelessness, including:

- \$500 million for Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) to promote housing stability;
- \$374 million for the HUD-VASH program wherein VA provides case management services for at-risk Veterans and their families and HUD provides permanent housing through its Housing Choice Voucher program; and
- \$253 million in grant and per diem payments that support temporary housing provided by community-based organizations.

Other Services for Veterans

Other features of the administration’s FY 2015 budget request for the department are:

- \$257 million to administer the VA-run system of national cemeteries;
- \$3.9 billion for information technology; and
- \$1.2 billion in construction, cemetery grants and extended care grants.

[Source: VA Press Release 4 Mar 2014 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 127 ► Appeals Resolution Now 923 Days

The average time for a denied claim to work its way through the cumbersome Department of Veterans Affairs appeals process shot up to more than 900 days last year, double the department’s long-term target. After hovering between 500 and 750 days for the past decade, what the VA refers to as its “appeals resolution time” hit 923 days in

fiscal 2013. That was a 37 percent jump in one year, from 675 in fiscal 2012, according to a review of the department's annual performance report. The department's long-term goal is to get that figure to 400 days, although the trend over the past decade has been in the other direction.

Asked about the slowdown during a conference call to discuss the VA's appeals system, the department said it has been reviewing the measure to see if it's the most meaningful one to convey to veterans how long the appeals process might take. The department also said it was continuing to look for ways to make the process more efficient. Laura Eskenazi, the official who oversees the department's Board of Veterans' Appeals, cautioned that the long processing "time is not at all indicative of inactivity." She said the many layers built into the system prompt many of the delays. The VA organized a conference call 27 FEB with reporters to explain its complicated, multi-layered appeals process, which begins when a veteran's claim for disability benefits is denied in full or in part. Disability benefits are awarded to veterans who suffer physical or mental injuries during their military service. They range from \$131 a month to \$2,858 a month for a single veteran.

The VA has been engaged in a very public battle to reduce its overall backlog – the number of claims awaiting an initial decision. By 2015, the department wants to get the backlog to zero. That would ensure that no claim is pending for more than 125 days. That's the goal that has gotten the most attention from Congress, the administration and veterans groups. Veterans who appeal their decisions go into a separate system that can extend those waits far longer. That appeals system has evolved in layers since it was adopted after World War I. It allows veterans, survivors or their representatives to trigger a fresh review of the entire appeal at any time by submitting new evidence or information, the VA said. The Board of Veterans' Appeals can grant, deny or – most commonly – remand the case to one of the VA's regional offices for additional review.

According to the most recent VA performance report, published in December, the VA's "strategic target" – essentially a long-term goal – for total appeals resolution time is 400 days; its short-term goal is 650 days. It hasn't hit that 650 target in the last five years, although it got close in 2010, when the average appeals time was 656 days, records show. Jacqueline Maffucci, research director for the advocacy group Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, said that the VA's intense focus on reducing its backlog could help explain the jump in appeals processing times. "As the VA has pushed to end the backlog, there's been a diversion of resources from the appeals system to tackling the backlog," she said. [Source: McClatchy Washington Bureau | Chris Adams | 27 Feb 2014 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 128 ► Brokering Impact on New Claims

Delaware veterans seeking compensation for service-related injuries or illnesses are getting pushed to the back of the line as older claims from larger service centers keep getting transferred to Wilmington. The practice, known as brokering, is one of the Department of Veterans Affairs strategies for balancing the agency's overall workload, which began growing out of hand in recent years as additional conditions for Vietnam-era chemical exposure were rated as "compensable" and troops returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began filing claims. The longest-standing claims – those that by VA's own standard have not been resolved for at least four months – now total just under 400,000 nationally. Brokering has had an outsized impact in Delaware. In the past year alone, the Baltimore and Philadelphia Veterans Benefits Administration offices have transferred hundreds of claims to far smaller Wilmington – even as hundreds of more complex appeals cases have been farmed out to other centers, including Philadelphia.

As a result, Delaware veterans are waiting longer because VA's stated policy is to get the oldest cases taken care of first. "They have been moved to the head of the line," said Beth McCoy, VBA's assistant deputy under secretary

for field operations, of the older claims, whether transferred or not. She said the policy has been a success, with all but 200 of the 67,000 two-years or older cases on the VA's books last April now eliminated. Wilmington's total of two-year-old claims is down to zero, McCoy said. The total of Delaware veterans waiting more than one year stood at about 130 in October 2012. That figure, she said, has fallen to 58. Those oldest settled claims at Wilmington would presumably include that of New Castle resident Dave Roberts, who began suffering migraine headaches in the early 1980s during extended military police duty with the Army. He finally filed for compensation and was awarded a rating of 30 percent in 2007. The current payment for a veteran so rated, without dependents, is \$400.93 per month.

The migraines have such a debilitating effect that Roberts, a machinist by trade, is unable to hold a job. Down on his health and luck, he has a room to stay in, he says, only through the kindness of his ex-wife, with whom he splits the rent, thanks in part to his monthly checks from VA and Social Security disability. Co-payments for medications are costly. "By the time I'm finished, I sometimes have less than \$100 for a full month," Roberts said. That prompted Roberts to appeal for a higher amount four years ago. It took until this past January that he was denied. "Even the customer service people [at VA] couldn't believe I'd been waiting for four years," Roberts said. Paul Lacour of Dover hasn't been waiting as long as Roberts did. But the Air Force veteran's claim is starting to gather dust. And he's wondering if the additional compensation he's seeking will ever materialize. "I'll be 83 in March," he said recently. "And I'd be surprised if I'm still alive to collect it."

Lacour, his heart weakened by Vietnam War exposure to the chemical defoliant Agent Orange, filed a claim for increased compensation on March 23, 2013. His "fully developed" claim – the sort VA says will expedite processing – was brokered from Wilmington to a "specialty processing center" in Janesville, Wis. And there, he said, it sits. Lacour's paperwork was assembled and packaged by James Withrow, who spent more than two decades as the service officer for the state chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and, after stepping down from his VFW perch in 2011, continues helping veterans navigate the VA bureaucracy out of his Frederica home. Withrow agrees with Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, who last fall characterized brokering as essentially a shell game. "It's not improving anything at Baltimore or Philly except their backlog statistics are being reduced," Withrow said.

VA says just the opposite. Moving the caseload to one of 15 brokering centers around the country – Wilmington is one of them – and the increasing ability to do so electronically rather than with paper files is "really increasing the efficiency and the effectiveness" of the claims system, McCoy said. "We know veterans have waited too long," McCoy said. "It's not acceptable to us." A leading lobbying group for modern-day war veterans, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, agrees there's been progress, as does VFW's current state veteran service officer. "There are improvements," said VFW's David Dilliard, "and I'm seeing them at ground level." But after months of improvement through 2013, the falling backlog has stalled – leading an official at IAVA, which recently issued an extensive analysis of the backlog and recommended fixes, to wonder if all of VA's efforts to automate and streamline the cumbersome process haven't peaked.

Nationally, VA's backlog is significantly lower than it was 11 months ago. According to VA's weekly report on March 30, 2013 there were 569,547 original and supplemental claims that had been on the books for more than 125 days – 70.8 percent of the total number of outstanding claims. In its most recent weekly report, VA reported that as of 22 FEB, that figure had fallen to 389,861 – 57.9 percent of all claims. On Nov. 2, however, the backlog stood at 382,473, and the backlog percentage was just a tick higher, at 58.7 percent. That concerns close observers such as IAVA's Tom Tarrantino, the advocacy group's chief policy officer. "They're making progress," he said. "They're making great progress." But he, like many, worries about the apparent stall. "My biggest fear," he said, "is what we're seeing is the actual rate of production." The VA touts the overall decline and credits a number of process improvements for helping bring it about: quality review teams, special teams to handle the most complicated cases,

automated questionnaires, creating digital health records, and the transfer of cases to various service centers in an effort to balance the workload and improve the flow.

Those transfers have caused significant increases at mostly smaller regional service centers such as Wilmington's. Eleven months ago, on 30 MAR, Wilmington had 654 original and supplemental claims over the 125-day guideline, representing 52.7 percent of all claims. As of 22 FEB that number had grown to 1,043 – 65.4 percent of 1,596 total claims. In August, when the News Journal last reported on the local backlog, it had a total of 1,373 cases, with 838 of them more than four months old. The total number of cases and the percentage of older cases – 61 percent – all have continued to grow. Meanwhile, the backlog at Baltimore, which stood on March 30 at 15,661, fell by 7,300 over the succeeding five months. Baltimore accomplished this largely by brokering cases to six other service centers, including Wilmington. Over that time, Baltimore and Philadelphia transferred nearly 800 cases to Wilmington, according to government documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. "It's fluid," McCoy said. "Some offices are going to creep up a bit, while many are going to be brought down. It's good service to veterans across the country. State by state that has a fluctuation. It's a downward trend overall so that no veteran is waiting more than 125 days by the end of 2015."

While claims from more recent veterans often seek initial compensation for larger numbers of medical issues than did those of an earlier era, older veterans are typically filing supplemental claims for additional benefits due to a worsening condition, or a subsequent problem that has arisen and is presumed to be related to their military service. These make up more than two-thirds of all pending claims, the VA says. Being older, they are nearly all paper-based and can take up multiple folders and binders containing related medical and operational documentation. To ease the process, VA is now paying a contractor to scan the voluminous paperwork so it can be more easily be transferred from the veteran to the VA and, when VA deems it necessary, to another service center for processing. "Now we're in our paperless system – that anchor has been taken away from us," said VA's McCoy. "That claims folder is viewable and available to us instantaneously. So when we file a claim – if you file a claim, you can see that claim – if it comes in paper, we send it off to a scanning vendor to be scanned and be uploaded into the paperless system. So anybody who needs to see that folder, we can do it."

In addition to working claims processors longer hours, VA says it has placed fully developed claims on a fast track. These are claims for which all necessary documentation has been gathered, supposedly smoothing the ratings process and getting approved compensation into veterans' hands more quickly. For Lacour, it's been an empty promise. So far, that's also been the case for Duane Evans of Dover – who, strangely, has been on the receiving end of responses from some phantom officials. Evans hasn't been kept waiting as Lacour and Roberts. But it's been nearly 250 days since the former Air Force cargo handler filed an "original" claim in May 2013. The claim was for diabetes mellitus type 2 and complications, the result of Vietnam-era exposure to Agent Orange. The claim was considered "ready to rate" the following month. During the ensuing year, Evans received three notices from the Wilmington VBA saying the office was "still processing" the claim. It was signed by service center manager "R. Burke," someone who, Withrow said, has never worked for Wilmington.

In January, he received another letter from the office signed by someone who had worked there. That person, the service center manager, had retired a year earlier. She has not been replaced. Evans, an easygoing sort, says he isn't too bothered by the wait but that his attitude might change if he's still waiting after a full year has passed. Evans' case would have been an easy fix during most of his VFW career, said Withrow. He recalls that for much of his time working for the VFW, he had a desk at the Wilmington VBA center, near the Wilmington Veterans Affairs Medical Center, where a quick conversation with a familiar face could yield quicker results. "We were partners," Withrow said. "I could walk down the hall and talk to anybody at the VA office. But when they started doing brokering, it was out of Wilmington's hands." Now, he says, "I can get in the front door. And that's it." He takes no issue with Wilmington's current staff, saying they're just following orders.

Tarrantino agrees that those relationships are critical. "There is still a need for a veteran to have some sort of physical interaction" with the VA. That wouldn't appear to be the way VA is going. Brokering, which began "about a decade ago," according to VBA's McCoy, remains a temporary fix. "We're moving away from that model of brokering centers to a national work queue," she said. In other words, a VBA spokesman explained, the ability to centrally assign cases based on workload and staffing at various centers. Withrow thinks VA should go in the opposite direction and decentralize operations it has consolidated in recent years, returning adjudication of all claims to the 57 regional offices, all of which used to process every type of veteran claim, be it for disabilities, survivor benefits or pensions. Just as important, Withrow said, is making accuracy a higher priority. VA says its workers processed 1 million claims a year for three years in a row from 2010 through 2012, although the number of new cases continues to outpace the number processed.

The most recent report of the Board of Veterans Appeals, published a year ago showed 45.8 percent of its 44,300 decisions during fiscal year 2012 were remanded to service centers because they were incorrect or incomplete. VA aims for a 98 percent accuracy rate, and currently claims a 12-month rolling average rate of 89.9 percent. That's roughly 5 percent higher than in 2011, VA says. The American Legion questioned those accuracy statistics at a 4 DEC hearing of a House Veterans Affairs subcommittee, noting that at one service center it visited, in Nashville, Tenn., its team found seven errors in 22 claims it reviewed. In the previous three months, the Legion said, the VA claimed a 95.1 percent accuracy rate for the Nashville office. Media, and even congressional, questions about VA's claims production are slow to get answered, if ever. Curt Cashour, spokesman for the Veterans Affairs Committee, provided a list of 50 instances, with story links, of news reports for which VA denied requests for comment; as of late January, he said, the committee itself had 121 outstanding requests for information.

The News Journal posed a set of questions to VA in mid-November but did not receive a response, despite repeated follow-up queries, until a blog post published in January about the delay received national attention and apparently prompted a response, along with the interview with McCoy. Tarrantino also is concerned with the way VA gauges progress, and says that a more complete public accounting would provide a better perspective. "We have a lot of measures of how many claims were processed this week," Tarrantino said. "But we don't know how many came in. So we never really know, did they actually crank up production and get rid of 10,000 claims this month? Or did they just get in a lot fewer four months ago?" [Source: The Delaware News Journal | William H. McMichael | 3 Mar 2014 ++]

VA Data Breaches Update 53 ► Beach Predicted within 12-18 Months

An internal investigation found the Department of Veterans Affairs' data security is so poor a data breach is "practically unavoidable" within 18 months, according to a draft of the VA's report. "It's practically unavoidable that a data breach to financial, medical, and personal Veteran and employee protected information may occur within the next 12 to 18 months, with no way of tracking the source of the breach," according to a report obtained by Military.com and first reported by CNBC. The VA's Office of Information & Technology Risk Management Team completed the assessment in July and found the department was "non-compliant with its own privacy and security policies and with federal laws and regulations," the draft report stated. "The VA cannot ensure the safety and privacy of Veteran and employee healthcare, benefits, and financial information," a heavily redacted version of the report stated.

However, the VA claimed the report may not be completely accurate. VA officials said the assessment did not take into account all of the security factors the VA already has in place for its systems and network. The VA emphasized the report was only an initial draft. VA leaders have since taken steps to validate the concerns in the

report or put in place additional protections, an official said. The VA did not specify why the VA's Information & Technology Risk Management Team would not be aware of the full range of the VA's data security system. "VA takes seriously its obligation to properly safeguard any personal information within our possession. VA has in place a strong, multi-layered defense to combat evolving cybersecurity threats," said Genevieve Billia, a VA spokeswoman. The VA holds personal records for about 20 million veterans, employees and dependents. In January, the VA sustained a "software defect" on its eBenefits website and released personal details for more than 5,000 people. Two years earlier, the VA mistakenly released data to the website Ancestry.com.

Despite the VA's claims that the problem is not as grave as the draft report suggested, members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs are concerned. Rep. Jackie Walorski (R-IN) said these sorts of risks are why the committee asked the VA to offer credit monitoring services to veterans and dependents in the VA database. "It's incumbent upon VA to clarify what specific portions of this report were inaccurate and what changes have been made since the report has been finalized," Walorski said. "Is a data breach to veterans' financial, medical and personal information 'practically unavoidable' as the report states? If not, how likely is it? VA owes it to America's veterans and American taxpayers to answer these questions in short order."

The VA's Information and Technology Risk Management Team found the VA's system did not comply with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act's Security Rule, the Federal Information Security Management Act, and the Fiscal Integrity Act."The result will be a significant possibility that inappropriate record access may cause unintended exposure of Veteran employee protected information resulting in litigation, Congressional scrutiny, fines and settlements," the report stated. VA leaders emphasized the department has put in place an "aggressive program to identify and address risks. The VA has designed a system to properly forecast and assess risks to veterans' data, an official said. "VA is committed to protecting Veteran information, continuing its efforts to strengthen information security, and putting in place the technology and processes to ensure Veteran data at VA are secure," Billia said. [Source: Military.com | Michael Hoffman | 24 Feb 2014 ++]



VA Gulf War Advisory Committee Update 04 ► Lost Autonomy

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs is putting together legislation to give autonomy back to a Gulf War illness advisory committee that has been stripped of its independence over the past year. The legislation would give the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses independent budget control and would require that its members be appointed by congressional veterans committees. "The committee is essentially having its legs cut out from underneath it," said Diane Zumato, legislative director for AMVETS, a veterans' service organization. "Veterans Affairs had a good idea in having this oversight group, and now it seems that they don't really like what

they're hearing because the group isn't parroting what VA is saying." Last week, Veterans Affairs notified the advisory committee that it could no longer release committee reports or recommendations without written VA approval. In the past year, Veterans Affairs has:

- Notified the advisory committee members that all but one of them would be replaced.
- Ended the tenure of Jim Binns, a Vietnam veteran and former principal deputy assistant secretary of Defense under President George H.W. Bush, as chairman of the board.
- Removed its charge to review the effectiveness of VA research.
- Moved back toward looking at stress as a cause of Gulf War illness, rather than following up on evidence that it is caused by environmental exposures, such as to insect repellent, anti-nerve agent pills and Sarin gas, as recent studies have shown.

VA did not address the committee's issues about losing their autonomy directly, but sent a statement about Gulf War illness in general: "VA agrees that there are health issues associated with service in the Gulf War, and is committed to ensuring Gulf War Veterans have access to the care and benefits they have earned and deserve," the statement reads. "VA is clear in our commitment to treating these health issues and does not support the notion some have put forward that these health symptoms arise as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental health issues that arose as a result of being deployed." The statement said that VA appreciates the "valuable advice" the research advisory committee provides "on research studies, plans and strategies aimed at improving our ability to serve Gulf War veterans."

While legislators were not able to speak about the legislation because it has not been finalized, Zumato said AMVETS members would reach out to every Congress member this week to talk about environmental toxins like those the 1991 Gulf War veterans were exposed to. She said organizers would make an issue of Gulf War illness so more recent vets — as well as future vets — would have access to care for all potential toxic exposures. "It's not just Gulf War," said Zumato, who joined the Women's Army Corps before it was incorporated into the Army in 1978. "It's anybody whose been exposed to any kind of toxic environment and now they have a very strong possibility of having illnesses caused by those exposures." She said she fears the veterans' injuries will continue to be ignored, or to be treated as mental health injuries, rather than physical injuries, to avoid having to pay medical costs. VA has said that it disagrees with the advisory committee, and that it agrees Gulf War Illness is a physical ailment.

This week, Binns sent a letter to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki letter that included 16 pages of research review that VA had prohibited the committee from including in its research report. "That whole 16 pages is basically one example after another of VA's staff efforts to reintroduce the idea that stress caused this problem," Binns said. The advisory committee was formed in 1997 after a congressional report found that VA's work on "Gulf War issues" was "irreparably flawed." Congress found that VA had focused most, if not all, of its attention on psychiatric causes of the illness. Symptoms of Gulf War illness include fatigue, muscle pain, cognitive issues, rashes and irritable bowel syndrome. Recently, researchers have found changes in veterans' brains that signify physical degeneration, and that a greater number of troops were exposed to small doses of sarin gas after the Air Force bombed an Iraqi chemical factory. [Source: USA Today | Kelly Kennedy | 5 Mar 2014 ++]

VA Mobil Counseling Centers Update 03: VA2Vets Tour 2014

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is rolling out the VA2Vets Tour to make sure eligible Veterans get the benefits that are available to them. The nationwide tour includes 70 RV's that are set up as mobile vet centers. Over the next year visit every county in Georgia as well as roam the nation to reach as many other counties as possible. The goal is to be accessible to Veterans who might otherwise not have access to a VA Center. The tour is kicking off

in Georgia. According to the VA, Georgia is home to 770,000 Veterans, thousands of whom aren't using, but may be eligible for, benefits through the VA. These include benefits like health care, help with buying a home, and money for a college education. "59% of Veterans know little to nothing about their benefits and these are life changing benefits," said Tommy Sowers, Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. "They change millions of Veterans lives, they changed my life," he said.

Vets can come to the mobile centers to get information, meet with counselors, and even sign up for benefits right there on the spot. One of the first stops on the tour was at Georgia Tech University. PHD student Mock Abdelaal served in the U.S. Marine Corps. "I served in Iraq and I was there for the invasion," he said. Abdelaal stopped by the mobile vet center. He says he knew the VA was there for him and knew they offered various services, but wasn't aware of the extent. "I didn't realize that I had 5 years of guaranteed medical coverage, cost free...because I'm a combat vet. So I didn't realize that and I had gone to doctors and paid money," he said. He says if he's not aware of certain benefits, he can only imagine the benefits that older generations are missing out on. He thinks these mobile units will help. "I have high hopes that people can get covered and get taken care of". [Source: All News 106.7 |Carolyn Ryan | 7 Mar 2014 ++]

VRAP Update 10 ► VA Will Advance Pay thru 30 Jun

Three years ago, the *Veterans Opportunity to Work Act of 2011* created the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) that has helped many unemployed veterans access educational programs. This program came at a crucial time when veteran unemployment was at 8.3%. VRAP was specifically designed to cover veterans who are not eligible to receive GI Bill educational benefits. VRAP has helped qualified veterans who are 35 to 60 years old obtain up to 12 months of education benefits equal to the full-time Montgomery GI Bill. Since the program's launch, it has come to support more than more than 76,000 unemployed veterans and helped our Nation honor the sacrifices they made to their country.

Under the current law, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) authority to issue payments to VRAP participants will end March 31, 2014 – in the middle of the Veterans' spring academic semester. Concerned that funds would be cut off before VRAP participants could complete their academic semesters, President Obama asked VA to explore all available options to ensure that eligible veterans are able to finish their Spring 2014 semester. Today, VA has taken steps to do just that. To enable VRAP participants to complete training for their current enrollment period, VA will make payments prior to March 31, 2014, to cover training from April 1, 2014 through the conclusion of a Veteran's current enrollment semester or term or through June 30, 2014, whichever is earlier. For more information on the VRAP program, please go to www.gibill.va.gov or call the VA GI Bill Benefits line at 1-888-442-4551. [Source: VAntage Point Blog | Curtis Coy & Rich Morales | 5 Mar 2014 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 1 thru 14 Mar 2014

- **Philadelphia PA** – A vet who claimed to be the founder of the non-profit Veterans Support Group of America, was sentenced to 30 months in prison this week for defrauding the Department of Veterans Affairs out of \$178,000 in healthcare and pension benefits. **Richard Gordon**, 65, pretended to be his brother, "H.G." who had served a tour of duty in the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam war. He assumed H.G.'s identity in 2004 because he was a fugitive from justice after being convicted of a felony in New

Jersey. Richard Gordon, would have qualified for VA benefits, because had spent one year in the U.S. Marines but had been discharged after claiming a family hardship. But fugitives are prohibited from receiving V.A. benefits, according to court papers. For 8 years, Richard Gordon used the identity of his brother, who had settled in the Netherlands after his discharge. During a two year period, he racked up \$86,500 in healthcare benefits. As pension checks arrived in his brother's name, he allegedly endorsed and cashed them. In Aug. 2008, Richard Gordon requested that his own V.A. benefits be reinstated. No longer considered a fugitive, the V.A. resumed sending him his monthly pension. Now, he collected two checks each month, according to court papers. During the seven-and-a-half year period, Gordon received \$178,607.20 from the government. His brother, living in Europe, never applied for or received a penny. Gordon pleaded guilty to conversion of government property in July, 2013. In addition to the federal prison term, Gordon will be required to pay full restitution and serve three years of supervised release. [Source: Philly.com | Sam Wood | 28 Feb 2014 ++]



Richard Gordon

- **ST. CLOUD FL** – A veteran has pleaded guilty to making false statements to receive benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and stealing government funds. According to court documents, **Walter Clarence Eatman**, 68, of St. Cloud, a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, applied for and received VA benefits for five years. Court documents said he falsely claimed he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder, hearing loss and tinnitus. Court documents also say he lied about serving in combat in Vietnam for two years and being awarded a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. Officials said Eatman never served in Vietnam, nor did he earn a Purple Heart or Bronze Star. By making these claims, Eatman received more than \$106,000 in government money and benefits including mental health care and medication. Officials said in September 2010, Eatman tried to increase his VA benefits for PTSD. He claimed he was haunted by his combat experiences, was wounded, and again claimed to have received a Purple Heart, officials said. Eatman tricked a VA psychologist into believing his story and received a letter from the psychologist documenting his conditions, officials said. Eatman is scheduled for sentencing on May 14 and faces up to 15 years in federal prison. [Source: Orlando WESH.com | Melissa Catalanotto | 28 Feb 2014 ++]
- **Nashville VARO** – Poor management oversight allowed a Veterans Affairs Department employee to skip work, use government computers for sex chats and bilk the agency out of nearly \$31,000, according to a new inspector general report. The news follows numerous complaints from conservative critics of the department that senior staffers haven't done enough to hold problematic employees accountable for their failings. Investigators found numerous fireable offenses by the unnamed employee, a claims rater out of the department's Nashville office. But instead of getting rid of him, supervisors worked to accommodate and promote the man — at one point creating a new, higher-paid job for him in Washington, D.C. The report

singles out five supervisors for their roles in the workplace malfeasance, and recommended administrative action against each. Investigators said their lax supervision not only broke government rules and hurt morale, but also in a small way may have added to VA's still problematic claims backlog, since the Tennessee office where he worked was without one of its rating specialists.

VA officials did not respond directly to allegations in the report, and would not say what action was taken against the supervisors or if the unnamed employee was fired. In a statement, they noted that the department "takes any allegation regarding misuse of departmental resources very seriously" and "will determine appropriate actions to take." The inspector general report lays most of the blame for the episode on former VA senior adviser Jonah Czerwinski, director of the VA Center for Innovation until last October, when he left for a private-sector job. Investigators said Czerwinski pressured officials to create a new job for the employee in the department's central office after a short stint working together in 2010. While that position was being created, the man enjoyed free rein over his travel and work hours, taking unauthorized trips to Washington, Florida and New York. He often reported for duty from his hotel room, in violation of federal rules, and in many cases produced little.

"By his own admission, he took advantage of the lack of supervision and unlimited freedom given to him," the report states. He also racked up thousands in questionable expenses, including bar tabs, shopping trips and cash advances. Investigators found that he "downloaded and installed unapproved software to his VA-issued laptop for the purpose of [sex chats]." The man described his behavior to investigators as "out of control." The inspector general's office issued 16 recommendations related to the wrongdoings, including a review of all ratings workers "to ensure that any not performing the functions of their position are either properly detailed or returned to their duties." VA officials said they are reviewing the recommendations. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | 4 Mar 2014 ++]

- **Tampa FL** — Ryan Timoney's identity was stolen on June 21, 2012, the day he arrived at the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa with life-threatening injuries from a suicide bomber in Afghanistan. His name, birth date and Social Security number were traded for crack cocaine. On 6 MAR, U.S. District Judge Virginia M. Hernandez Covington sentenced identity thief and former hospital clerk and veteran **David F. Lewis**, 50, to six years in prison after hearing from Timoney, one of dozens of victims. He told the judge that his name was fraudulently used to apply for credit at Sears, Target, Walmart, Montgomery Ward and Chase. "I've been trained to engage certain kinds of threats," the 28-year-old Purple Heart recipient said, speaking from a wheelchair with a red sock over his partially amputated leg, "but I had no idea what to do with this."



David F. Lewis

Defendant Lewis served 15 years in the Air Force. His attorney, Gino Lombardi, announced that he, too, had served in the military. Lewis' sister, Dorothy, said she served in the Air Force Reserves. She was her brother's only character witness. "Nobody is here to condone his behavior," she began. She asked more than once that he receive rehabilitation, directing the plea first to Timoney and then to the judge. "He is unable to help himself," she said firmly. "I am asking you to help him to help himself." Assistant U.S. Attorney Sara Sweeney said Lewis had been removed from the military over drug use and had been given many opportunities to deal with his addiction. He turned away drug treatment while out on bail, only to test positive for drug use. It was difficult for her to be sympathetic, she said.

The lives of Timoney and Lewis crossed the day Timoney was admitted into Haley. Timoney told the judge what led him there, describing how he went face down in an attack that killed two officers and several Afghans, and being unable to get up despite a desire to react. "I couldn't move, talk, look," he said. "I just had to hang out." He lost consciousness in a helicopter and remembers little of the two months that followed. The second of those two months, he was transferred to Haley to be closer to family. His parents live in Jacksonville. The day Timoney arrived, Lewis printed out 25 patient records, court records state. He later admitted doing so on multiple occasions to trade for drugs. At least 59 stolen identities were used to file false claims for tax refunds totaling \$105,271. Others were used to apply for credit.

When it was his turn to speak, Lewis apologized and asked for forgiveness. He said his actions cost him his job at the VA and brought him shame. "I never intended to get rich or profit from any of my wrongdoing," he said. As Judge Covington prepared to impose sentence, she asked if anyone had anything else to say. Lt. Timoney spoke up again and told Lewis, "I'm Christian, I forgive you, truly." Then he said to the judge, "By the same token, it's the duty of government to do exactly what you do, ma'am. You have to hold standards and make examples of what happens when you do crime." Covington said that after hearing Timoney's story, she felt like giving Lewis a higher sentence, but had to be fair. She gave him four years for access device fraud and two years for aggravated identity theft and ordered that he pay IRS restitution of \$105,271. "While I recognize and applaud your service to country," the judge told Lewis, "you did it to a fellow veteran." [Source: Tampa Bay times | Patty Ryan | 6 Mar 2014 ++]

- **Milwaukee VAMC** — Four co-workers have been charged with exchanging or selling their own prescription medications while on the job at the Zablocki Veterans Affairs Medical Center. According to a criminal complaint released 7 MAR, three certified nursing assistants and a licensed practical nurse traded pain killers like oxycodone, hydrocodone, Percocet and Tramadol, and the anti-anxiety drug Lorazepam on the VA complex grounds. They used some of the drugs there and took some home. An investigation began after another co-worker reported seeing the exchanges among workers in Ward 3C in December. **Yvette Wright**, 46, a CNA, is charged with two counts delivery of a controlled substance. According to the complaint, she admitted to VA investigators that she had sold some of her Oxycodone pills to **Ryan Driscoll** for \$5 a pill, and given away some of her Percocet pills to **Alicia Ojeda**, 27. Jermaine Cohill, 38, the LPN, told investigators he got Percocet from Wright and Tramadol from Driscoll. He is charged with possession of narcotics without a prescription. Driscoll, 33, also a CNA, is charged with distributing Tramadol. He told investigators he had twice given 7 or 8 Tramadols to Cohill and had received Vicodin, a pain killer, once from Wright. Ojeda, 27, is charged with possessing a narcotic drug without a prescription. She told investigators she got oxycodone about 12 times from Wright, and got a Lorazepam once from Cohill, and half a Percocet once from Driscoll. The charges carry maximum penalties ranging from 18 months to 10 years in prison. [Source: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel | Bruce Vielmetti | 7 Mar 2014 ++]
- **San Juan, Puerto Rico** – On 5 FEB, a federal grand jury in the District of Puerto Rico returned a seven count indictment against Pedro A. Rodríguez-Colondres for wire fraud, false statement in application and use of passport, identity theft, aggravated identity theft, and false statement to a Department or Agency of the United States, Beginning in or about May 1984 and continuing through in or about October 2011 the

defendant devised a scheme and artifice to defraud and for obtaining money by means of false and fraudulent pretenses and representations, that is by knowingly enlisting in the United States Army Reserve under the assumed name of Pedro Colondres-Rosa and then being discharged under this name; and then applying for and receiving benefits granted under the assumed name. **Rodríguez-Colondres** received veteran's benefits from the Veteran's Administration from 1984; until 2011 under an assumed identity. The defendant enlisted in the US Army Reserve on April 26, 1974, and was discharged from the US Army Reserve on November 20, 1974. His discharge letter dated November 20, 1974 states, "*You lack the motivation to become a productive soldier. You speak no English and have a great deal of trouble adapting to the Army. You lack the stamina to complete road marches. You are requesting this discharge and this would be to your and the Army's advantage.*" The letter also informed him that he would be ineligible for reenlistment.

On September 14, 1977, the defendant fraudulently enlisted using the name Pedro Colondres-Rosa. He was subsequently medically discharged for temporary disability on May 17, 1978. On May 22, 1978, the defendant completed a VA FORM 21526E applying for disability benefits from the Veterans Administration. Rodríguez-Colondres devised a scheme to defraud the Department of Veterans Affairs by claiming to be entitled to benefits that he was in fact not entitled to. The defendant claimed to be Pedro Colondres-Rosa, when in truth and in fact, he was Pedro A. Rodriguez-Colondres. He then enlisted in the United States Army under this assumed identity and completed eight months and two days of active service. After the defendant was medically discharged, he and his wife applied for veteran's benefits listing his service under the assumed identity of Pedro Colondres-Rosa. The indictment lists 169 payments, a portion of the benefits he received illegally between the years 1997 to 2011 totaling \$424,281.36. Also, the indictment shows the medical benefits the defendant received illegally between the years 2000-2011 totaling \$81,984.00, and dependent educational benefits totaling \$44,584.56. The defendant was arrested 7 FEB by agents from the US Department of State, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, and the Veteran's Administration, who are in charge of the investigation. Rodríguez-Colondres appeared before US Magistrate Judge Camille L. Vélez-Rivé and was granted bail until the arraignment. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 20 years imprisonment, two consecutive years for the aggravated identity theft charge, three years of supervised release, and a \$250,000 fine. [Source: DoJ | Press Reelase | 7 Feb 2014 ++]

VA Loans ► JPMorgan Chase Whistleblower Earns \$63.9M

A Louisiana man who helped federal prosecutors make their case against JPMorgan Chase's mortgage lending practices has earned \$63.9 million for his efforts. The government will pay the amount to Keith Edwards, the whistle-blower who originally sued the bank last year, according to a filing in a United States District Court in Manhattan on 7 MAR. Last month, the bank agreed to pay \$614 million to settle charges that it violated rules at the Federal Housing Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs, which insure mortgages made by lenders. The bulk of the settlement, \$564.6 million, went to the F.H.A. Mr. Edwards will receive \$56.46 million from the F.H.A. and the remainder from the settlement reached in the Veterans Affairs case.

Mr. Edwards worked for JPMorgan from 2003 to 2008, according to court filings. He helped oversee JPMorgan's government insurance unit as it related to residential lending, and said that the bank pushed defective loans onto the two agencies. He sued the bank in JAN 2013 under the False Claims Act, a law that aims to encourage whistle-blowers to come forward by paying a portion of whatever money the government gets. "Keith's a courageous guy," his lawyer, David Wasinger, said on Friday. "He wanted to step forward and do the right thing." In 2012, a former UBS banker received \$104 million from the Internal Revenue Service for providing information about how the

Swiss bank pushed American citizens to avoid taxes. The award was the largest the I.R.S. had ever paid as part of its whistle-blower program. [Source: New York Times | Rachel Abrams | 7 Mar 2014 ++]

VAMC Columbia MO ► Response to Inspection Deficiencies

A routine report on operations at Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital found numerous deficiencies, including that the nursing station at the locked mental health unit "did not have a panic alarm system that ensured emergent response by staff and VA police." Most of the deficiencies contained in the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General's triennial Combined Assessment Report are minor. Of the 18 recommendations, five have been completed. All but one of the recommendations, including the new alarm system, was slated to be done by 31 JAN, Truman VA officials say. Hospital spokesman Stephen Gaither said all recommended changes are underway, many of which began while the review team was still in Columbia. "This isn't a surprise when we get the report," Gaither said. "They've already told us when they leave the findings, so we began working on them immediately."

Training for use of an alarm in the mental health unit and testing began in November, he said, when the review was conducted. Nurses in the unit now wear a locator badge they activate with a touch of a button. The signal simultaneously goes to the nurses' station and the hospital operator, and the Behavioral Emergency Team — which includes VA police and also is known as the Code Orange Team — responds immediately, Gaither said. "People on Code Orange Team are trained to appropriately respond to those situations," he said. Inspector general staffers conducted the review the week of Nov. 11, 2013, poring over hospital committee meeting minutes, employee training records and other internal reports kept by medical staff. The review is routine and was not triggered by the death of patient Robert Hill last year. The report was released 29 JAN.

By Feb. 28, the hospital's CPR Committee is supposed to establish a database to enter data from emergency "code blue" reviews as they are completed to examine the clinical issues that lead to patients needing resuscitation. Gaither said the timeline on that was chosen by the CPR Committee, which is working on a system to collect and analyze the data. "I think the action plans were fairly easy to identify and implement," Gaither said of the majority of the changes. The report outlined five changes needed in regard to pressure ulcer risk and management. This area was more thoroughly examined than in previous years because there have been related issues in other VA facilities, Gaither said. Modifications include consistently documenting risk score, developing treatment plans and better educating patients who are at risk. "That doesn't mean the information wasn't shared" with the patient, Gaither said. "Sometimes it means the patients didn't understand what was provided."

The Truman VA hospital has been in the spotlight recently after a Tribune story earlier this month revealed the findings of a VA inquiry into contributing factors that led to Hill's beating death on Feb. 1, 2013. Rudy Perez Jr. attacked Hill twice on that day, and Hill, 78, died from injuries suffered during the second attack. The report cited a breakdown of communication among staffers that led to Perez and Hill being placed in the same area in the hospital's mental health unit after the first attack. Gaither and Truman VA Chief of Staff Lana Zerrer have said changes recommended in that report are being made. No hospital staff members were disciplined in relation to Hill's death. Perez was charged with first-degree murder in Hill's death but was acquitted after a Boone County judge accepted his plea of not guilty by reason of insanity. [Source: Columbia Daily Tribune | Alan Burdziak | 30 Jan 2014 ++]

VAMC Richmond VA ► 30 Year Heart Transplant Survivor

Sixty-one-year-old James L. Hill, an Army Veteran, is now one of the longest living heart transplant survivors in the world. Hill received his new heart 30 years ago, back in 1984, at the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Va. He was 31 back then and the hospital's 27th heart transplant patient. The hospital now has more than 300 heart transplant operations to its credit. "I feel great," Hill told a Richmond Times-Dispatch reporter during a 7 JAN ceremony to commemorate the 30th anniversary of his life-saving operation. "I just thank God for the doctors who did the surgery and the nurses who put up with me... "I've been very well taken care of in the heart program here at McGuire," he added. "And I am very thankful I'm still alive 30 years following my heart operation!"



Veteran James Hill (Left) with Dr. Szabolcs Szentpetery, the VA surgeon who performed the transplant operation.

Dr. Szabolcs Szentpetery, who served in Vietnam, performed Hill's transplant operation three decades ago. Now 75, he's still with the McGuire VA. "We started our heart transplant program here at McGuire in 1980," Szentpetery said. "It was the first VA heart transplant program in the nation. Our medical team here continues to be on the cutting edge in the treatment of advanced and end-stage heart failure." He added: "I have seen patients come in for heart surgery that are so sick they couldn't remember their name. After treatment, they walk out and live a normal life. Now, that's rewarding." The first human heart transplant ever performed took place in December 1967, in Cape Town, South Africa. The surgery was performed Dr. Christiaan Barnard. McGuire remains the only in-house VA heart transplant program in the United States. "We're also the only VA medical center in the nation to offer the Left Ventricle Assist Device (LVAD) as a bridge to transplant," explained Dr. Neil Lewis, medical director of the McGuire heart transplant program. "We've increased our LVAD activity here in view of the burgeoning epidemic of heart failure in this country."

The LVAD is essentially a little pump, one end of which gets hooked up to your heart's left ventricle. The other end gets attached to your aorta. The power pack stays on the outside of your body. Lewis noted that instead of being used exclusively as a bridge therapy, LVADs are now becoming a destination therapy, which means patients can stay on them permanently. He said LVAD surgery outcomes have improved significantly ever since FDA approved the new generation of continuous flow LVADs in 2008. "This has allowed our team to provide the sickest patients the opportunity to dramatically improve the state of their health," he observed. "LVAD has also increased the opportunity for a successful outcome following a transplant."

Now In semiretirement, Dr. Szabolcs Szentpetery no longer does the technically and physically demanding heart transplant surgeries that he used to. You are up for long stretches, often through the night, waiting for the donor heart to be retrieved, he said. “I can still stay up all night, but it takes me three or four days to recover.” Top of Form And he is coping with his own heart problems now. “I have some heart rhythm problems. If I get into some stress, my heart starts beating all over the place.” Szentpetery, 75, has handed over leadership of the heart transplant program at McGuire Veterans Affairs Medical Center to surgical director Dr. Gundars Katlaps. But you will still find Szentpetery at the veterans hospital in South Richmond at least three days a week. He takes care of heart and lung patients and does two to three surgeries a week, usually of the lungs or esophagus. During his 30 years as a heart transplant doctor, he estimates he performed more than 300 transplants — including more than 200 at McGuire, several at VCU Medical Center and 80 to 100 when he practiced in Norfolk. To learn more about cardiac care at the Richmond VA Medical Center, go to www.richmond.va.gov. [Source: VA Health News | Tom Cramer | 27 Feb 2014 ++]

VAMC Butler PA ► End of Life Program #1

VA Butler Healthcare has made significant gains in the care provided to Veterans in the Hospice Care Program. In the recent Bereaved Family Survey, which measures excellence of care provided to Veterans at the end of life, VA Butler Healthcare ranked number one in the nation. The Survey is administered to families of Veterans who have died in a VA facility by the PROMISE Center at the Philadelphia VA Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion “Many positive changes have been initiated in VA Butler’s Hospice Care Program, some of which include: special tree and flag ceremonies on the Hospice Units in the Community Living Center, utilization of alternative pain management delivery systems, and frequent interdisciplinary rounds to support Veterans and loved ones,” said Dawn Jockel, VA Butler’s Palliative Care Support Coordinator.

Hospice is designed to focus on the quality of life and comfort for a Veteran with an advanced disease that is life-limiting. The program incorporates the physical needs of our Veterans, but also the psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of America’s heroes and their loved ones. America’s Veterans have given everything to protect our freedom. VA Butler is dedicated to doing everything to help Veterans and their family members make the most of the time they have left together. “One way we were able to help a Veteran in the Hospice Care Program this past year was by tracking his beloved cocker spaniel Charlie through the Humane Society adoption process. It brought him peace knowing his dog was adopted out to a loving home,” said Jockel. The goal of the hospice program is to ensure Veteran comfort and family support. “We also recently assisted an out-of-state transfer of a Veteran whose last wish was to be at home when he passed. This helped provide closure for his family and friends as well,” said Jockel.

When your loved one requires end-of-life care, it’s a hard road ahead, but you don’t have to travel it alone. VA Butler’s Hospice Team is there for you. They understand that this period of time is certainly the most difficult for you and your family. They’re here for the whole family – to provide support, care, and a shoulder to cry on. VA Butler also offers a bereavement support group to provide a venue for family members and Veterans to cope with a loss of a loved one. VA Butler admits Veterans who want or need inpatient hospice care to our Community Living Center. For more information about VA Butler’s inpatient Hospice Care program, contact the Palliative Care Coordinator at 1-800-362-8262, ext. 2763 or visit http://www.butler.va.gov/services/Hospice_Care.asp . [Source: Pittsburgh Tribune-Review | Adam Smeltz | 12 Mar 2014 ++]

Gulf War Syndrome Update 26 ► New Report Addresses Name

Gulf War veterans have such a wide array of symptoms and exposures that researchers and clinicians should not apply one definition to everyone, and should instead "select one based on their needs," according to a report from the Institute of Medicine released 12 Mar. The Department of Veterans Affairs should also continue to call the string of symptoms "Gulf War illness," rather than chronic multi-symptom illness as proposed, because chronic multi-symptom illness (CMI) "is not specific to the population and its unique experience," the report finds. "The wide variation in symptoms has complicated efforts to determine whether a distinctive illness exists, as many symptoms of CMI overlap with those of other diseases and conditions, such as fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome," the committee found.

But advocates for those suffering from Gulf War illness say the latest report ignores earlier research and reflects the VA's bias against coming to terms with the illness 23 years after the 1991 end of the Gulf War. "The conclusions of the report show that it was a waste of money," said Jim Binns, chair of the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses. "The committee never had the expertise or the process to do a case definition. It's good they didn't do one." Binns called the bulk of the report "a slanted view of Gulf War research totally inconsistent with the science of the past decade." He cited a previous report [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12835] from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) itself, as well as from his committee [http://www1.va.gov/RAC-GWVI/docs/Committee_Documents/GWlandHealthofGWVeterans_RAC-GWVIReport_2008.pdf]. Binns said the IOM's charge from the VA did not "provide for the rigorous data analysis and development of new data nor for the use of a panel of experts in the illness itself that are universally recognized as the keys to developing a case definition for an illness." Jennifer Walsh, a spokesperson for IOM, said the committee reviewed animal studies, but did not use animal or exposure studies in the report because it decided it would not look at the cause or origination of Gulf War illness.

The VA released a statement in response to the report and Binns' statement: "*The Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes and respects the service, dedication and many challenges faced by Veterans of the 1990-1991 Gulf War, and is committed to continuing improvements in care and services for Gulf War Veterans,*" it read. "*While IOM concluded there was insufficient evidence to develop a new case definition, VA agrees with their assessment that CMI is an important cause of disability and health issues for veterans as a result of their service during the 1990-1991 Gulf War.*" The IOM did find that fatigue, pain and neurocognitive issues had been reported in all of the studies that they reviewed. About one-fourth of the war's 700,000 veterans developed symptoms that include chronic headaches, widespread pain, memory and concentration problems, persistent fatigue, gastrointestinal problems, skin abnormalities and mood disturbances.

Gulf War veterans had feared the multi-symptom label would cause them to be lumped in with veterans of other wars who have returned with perplexing symptoms. But recent research has shown with MRIs that some Gulf War veterans have damage to the brain that could explain their symptoms. Other recent studies have shown damage to the autonomic nervous system. IOM researchers did not look at the possibility of environmental toxins, such as sarin gas, anti-nerve-agent pills, or insect repellent, which some scientists believe hold the key to the disease. "Since the conflict in the Persian Gulf from 1990 to 1991, Gulf War veterans have experienced various unexplained symptoms that many associate with their service, but no specific exposure has been definitively associated with symptoms," the committee found. They also found no "no clinically validated tests or measures for diagnosing CMI and was unable to develop a new consensus definition of CMI given the lack of uniform symptoms, the variety of symptoms, and the long onset and duration."

"CMI is an important cause of disability among Gulf War veterans," said Kenneth Shine, chair of the committee and special adviser to the chancellor at the University of Texas System. "The diversity and intensity of exposures

and experiences, as well as the breadth and extent of symptoms, warrant workable definitions of the illness and nomenclature so the VA can advance research and administer effective treatments." The Institute of Medicine is an independent, non-profit research arm of the National Academies, an umbrella research organization that includes academies for science and engineering. Its report follows a year of animosity between the VA and the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, an independent body charged with overseeing the VA's Gulf War illness research. In the past year, the VA has replaced all but one of the board members, ended Binns' tenure as the board's chairman, removed the board's charge to review the effectiveness of the VA, and pushed research that looks at stress as a cause, rather than environmental factors.

Last week, the VA told the board they must have the VA's written approval before releasing any reports. Soon after, they removed the board chairman's research report from a letter he wrote to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. Aides to members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee said they plan to introduce legislation asking that the board regain its autonomy. The VA released a statement saying they appreciate the board's "valuable advice" and that it does not support the idea that Gulf War illness is the result of "post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental health issues that arose as a result of being deployed." The advisory committee was formed in 1997 after a congressional report found that the VA's work on "Gulf War issues" was "irreparably flawed." Congress found that the VA had focused most, if not all, of its attention on psychiatric causes of the illness. [Source: USA TODAY | Kelly Kennedy, | 12 Mar 2014 ++]

Vets



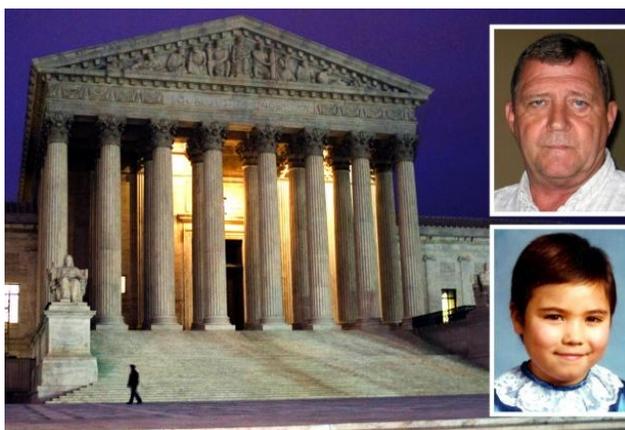
Vet Toxic Exposure~Lejeune Update 43 ► Dependent Care in Limbo

President Obama signed a law in 2012 offering health benefits to thousands of former Marines and their families who were exposed decades ago to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. But in a related case headed to the Supreme Court in April that could bolster or block their claims for damages, Obama's Justice Department has argued that the clock has run out. The little-noticed case could have profound implications for victims of hidden contamination at Camp Lejeune and other former industrial sites in states that set deadlines on damage claims. Those lawsuits generally involve "enormous financial stakes — typically in the millions of dollars," according to a petition filed by the electronics manufacturer at the center of the high court case. It also puts the Obama administration in the awkward position of opposing environmental cleanup and help for veterans — two issues that have been among the president's top priorities.

The focus of both the Supreme Court case involving property damage and health risks, and the more serious Camp Lejeune claims of deaths and serious illnesses from toxic water supplies, is a fundamental issue: How soon must victims cry foul? North Carolina, home to both conflicts, has a 10-year "statute of repose" after which claims are deemed moot. Unlike a statute of limitations, which usually begins when an injury is recognized, the clock ticks from the date of the final contamination — even if residents remain unaware until decades later. A provision in the federal Superfund law passed in 1980 was intended to help victims by giving them two years to file claims from the date they discover the cause of their injuries. Landowners who unknowingly bought contaminated property in Asheville, N.C. — the issue in the Supreme Court case — and veterans who lived and raised families at Camp Lejeune 400 miles away both discovered contamination decades later.

The Justice Department, which declined to comment on the case while it is pending, has contended that the state's 10-year deadline precludes the lawsuits. "The United States has a substantial interest in the proper resolution of this question," the government said in its August 2012 federal appeals court brief in *CTS Corp. v. Waldburger*. It specifically noted that the Camp Lejeune claims rest on the same issue. "The fact that some plaintiffs will be unaware of their claims until after the statute of repose expires is an inherent feature of statutes of repose," the government argued. Exposing polluters to greater liability could discourage voluntary disclosure and cleanup, it said, as well as pose a burden to industry.

The appeals court wasn't convinced. It sided with the 23 landowners seeking damages and remediation because their land had been contaminated with toxic chemicals from 1959 to 1985, when CTS Corp. ran an electronics manufacturing plant in Asheville. It wasn't until 2009 that landowners learned their water could cause liver and kidney damage, heart ailments and cancer. "Our decision here will likely raise the ire of corporations and other entities that wish to rest in the security of statutes of repose, free from the threat of being called to account for their contaminating acts," the panel said in a divided 2-1 ruling. Congress' intent in passing Superfund legislation, it said, was that "victims of toxic waste not be hindered in their attempts to hold accountable those who have strewn such waste on their land." How the Supreme Court handles the Waldburger case will affect Camp Lejeune claimants, and potentially others, who get caught in the no-man's land between state legal deadlines and federal Superfund laws. One clock ticks forward from the polluter's last act, the other from the victim's discovery. The last wells contaminated with industrial solvents such as trichloroethylene (TCE), benzene and other chemicals at the Marine Corps base came on line in 1985. Under North Carolina law, that means claims must have been filed by 1995. But no one knew of the danger until 1997.



Jerry Ensminger and deceased daughter Janey

Jerry Ensminger, a 24-year Marine veteran, was among the first to take notice. His daughter Janey was 9 when she died of a rare form of leukemia in 1985. She had been conceived at the base during her father's time there. In

recent years, health and environmental studies have classified TCE as a human carcinogen and linked it to kidney cancer, non-Hodgkins lymphoma, childhood cancers and other defects. Babies exposed during pregnancy have been found to be at greater risk of developing cancers or birth defects later in childhood. Ensminger's crusade to expose the Marine Corps he served was featured in a 2011 documentary, *Semper Fi: Always Faithful*. The following year, he stood beside Obama as the president signed the law — named after Janey Ensminger — offering health benefits to victims of the contamination. Obama noted that the law wouldn't help Janey or others who succumbed to their illnesses. But he said, "It will honor their memory by making a real difference for those who are still suffering."

Through 11 NOV of last year, 655 veterans had received treatment for one or more of the 15 illnesses or conditions covered under the law, according to Department of Veterans Affairs figures. To date, no family members have been helped. "That law is an admission by the government that they poisoned us," Ensminger says. Now he wants to see individual claims for damages by Camp Lejeune victims "go forward and be heard in an open courtroom." Thirteen Camp Lejeune claims are combined in a case pending before the 11th Circuit federal appeals court in Georgia. The government is opposing those on the same grounds — that the time for claims to be filed has expired. The case was argued in January, but no decision is expected until after the Supreme Court rules in *Waldburger*. The high court's decision, expected by June, could affect not only the Camp Lejeune claims but any future cases involving military bases, scores of which are located near environmental Superfund sites.

In a letter to Attorney General Eric Holder late last year, 23 environmental, health, veterans and related groups called the Justice Department's argument in the *Waldburger* case "particularly troubling" because it linked the potential result to the Camp Lejeune claims. If the government's argument prevails, they wrote, "landowners in Asheville and thousands more who have been unwittingly harmed in similar cases of contamination would be denied the justice they deserve." Mike Partain, who was born at the Marine base in 1968 and was diagnosed with male breast cancer seven years ago, puts it another way: "How many bullets do we have to take before we finally get our day in court?" [Source: USA TODAY | Richard Wolf | 1 Mar 2014 ++]

Vet Homeless Recovery Programs Update 01 ► Colorado Progress

Colorado had the second-largest decrease in homelessness among military veterans in the country last year according to a new Department of Veterans Affairs new report. They roughly estimate there are 150,000 veterans in America homeless at some point each year. The report published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development says that Colorado was able to move almost 830 veterans off the street, second only to California. Local agencies including the Rocky Mountain Human Services and Volunteers of America worked together on the effort, which is funded by VA grants. Those who benefited included a 72-year-old man who didn't know where to turn after his rental home burned down, and a couple of unemployed veterans with two young children whose apartment became uninhabitable with mold. The efforts go beyond the roofs over families' heads: The family was placed in an apartment, but also received job training. The father is now working, and they are about to purchase their own house. Those are the programs that not only win grant funding, but get people in stable environments.

Housing assistance, health care including mental health care and jobs and job training all play a role. The programs local agencies are applying for nationwide are varied. For instance, Arizona is paying some formerly homeless veterans to be Arizona State Park Rangers, and providing them with FEMA trailers to live in. The VA's stated mission is to end veteran homelessness by 2015. It's a worthy — but very lofty — goal. Homelessness among vets and the rest of the population is extremely complicated: Issues including disabilities, mental illness and substance abuse play a part in that. Criminal records for some make finding a job or just getting a lease signed very challenging. A lot of homeless veterans are Vietnam vets who have been homeless — or flipping between

homelessness and temporary housing — for decades now. But this report shows some promise: If other states can look at some of the practices that get veterans off the street and in homes, we can make great strides in what should be a moral imperative. If you know a veteran on Colorado who needs help securing housing, call 877-4AID-VET (424-3838). [Source: Daily Camera | Erika Stutzman | 28 Feb 2014 ++]

POW/MIA Update 23 ► Latest Example of JPAC's Problems

World War II officially ended with the surrender of the Japanese on Sept. 2, 1945, but it was far from over for 1st Lt. Horace Joe Gabbart. The Army Air Corps pilot fought the urge to rush home to see family and friends, instead choosing to stay behind to help complete the daunting task of repatriating war dead from across the Pacific. On May 17, 1946, Gabbart was behind the controls of a C-47B heading from Rangoon, Burma, to Barrackpore, India, with two other crewmembers, eight American Graves Registration Service personnel and the remains of 38 recovered American servicemembers when they disappeared. Almost 67 years later, his niece Neva Gabbart Erbacher is no closer to seeing Gabbart come home. She and other families of those onboard blame the Joint Prisoners of War, Missing in Action Accounting Command, which launched a fruitless recovery mission last year in India.

At the outset, the November 2013 recovery mission looked good; an independent MIA hunter claimed to have identified the crash and burial sites years earlier. But a Stars and Stripes investigation of the mission revealed that the site was never properly vetted by the JPAC excavation decision board, and was instead fast-tracked based on questionable assumptions and procedural missteps. Issues emerged just a few days into the \$502,000, 49-day mission, when the JPAC recovery team realized they were excavating the wrong site, according to JPAC situation reports. Their site contained remnants of a commercial airplane, not Gabbart's C-47B. Still, they continued to dig, spending half of their budget before scrapping the mission. The team left the country after 33 days. JPAC has since closed the case on Gabbart and the missing, saying the plane is believed to have been lost in the Bay of Bengal, according to internal documents. No future digs are planned unless new evidence surfaces, according to JPAC recovery team leader William Belcher. Internal JPAC documents show JPAC "never investigated this site" before the mission, and suddenly the search was over. "I think it's totally irresponsible and it's a misuse of funds," Erbacher said. "There are so many questions."

The case is the latest example of the systemic troubles plaguing the Defense Department's accounting apparatus. Last month, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel gave the Pentagon 30 days to come up with a plan to consolidate all Defense Department assets into a single, more accountable entity that will manage personnel accounting resources, research and operations. The review comes on the heels of numerous reports of misconduct and poor management practices. A Stars and Stripes investigation in January alleged JPAC's Central Identification Laboratory had possibly desecrated remains and botched investigations into recovering remains from virtually every modern war. Stars and Stripes has previously reported charges that JPAC and the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office have prematurely routinely ignored leads on MIAs in Southeast Asia, declared Southeast Asia MIAs deceased and unrecoverable, and actively argued against identifying unknown World War II remains in government custody when evidence suggested they could be identified. In 2010, Congress directed the agency to increase their annual recoveries from 70 to more than 200 by 2015, but the numbers have changed little, or in some years have actually fallen. More than 73,000 Americans who served in World War II remain unaccounted for, according to DPMO.

Gabbart, like many Americans, joined the military after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The Oklahoma native was the middle child of three boys, all of whom signed up to serve. He went right into flight school, training to be a pilot. After the war, his brothers returned home, but something kept him behind. "He could have come home after the war," Erbacher said. "I asked my dad why. He said that he would have felt there was still a job to do." So while a

mass migration of sailors, Marines, airmen and GIs headed home to an America transformed by years of war, some like Gabbart were bringing fallen heroes like 2nd Lt. Joseph Rich home. Rich was navigator in a plane shot down Nov. 27, 1943, according to his great-niece Lisa Phillips. The plane burst into flames and he was stuck in the navigator's position, suffering severe burns. Rich lived and was taken prisoner by Japanese troops. He survived in the prison camp until Sept. 13, 1944, when he died from a lack of medical attention, malnutrition and disease. He weighed just 80 pounds.

Phillips said her family didn't know he had been taken prisoner until after the war. "There was always crying on Thanksgiving and Christmas," said Phillips, who has taken up the cause of finding his remains as president of WWII Families for the Return of the Missing. Neither Phillips nor Erbacher knew the men they are working to see returned home, but the women are drawn together by duty and honor. Erbacher seeks her uncle on behalf of her father, Bobby Bacon Gabbart, who passed away about five years ago, still hoping to see his brother buried on American soil. He gave a family reference DNA sample before he died. In the aftermath of the plane's disappearance in 1946, the U.S. military conducted aerial and ground searches for the missing plane but found nothing, according to internal JPAC documents. The case lay dormant for 63 years. Then, on Nov. 5, 2009, an independent MIA hunter claimed to have found Gabbart's C-47B.



Army Air Corps pilot 1st Lt. Horace Joe Gabbart

Clayton Kuhles, an avid climber, was mountaineering in Burma in 2002 when a guide told him about a wrecked American aircraft from World War II. He decided to take a two-week detour to locate the wreck out of curiosity, he told Stars and Stripes. He said he pried the ID plates off the aircraft and took them to the U.S. Embassy. From then on, the Arizona adventurer was hooked. Kuhles began researching wrecks in the region and found out the plane was one of hundreds lost by the U.S. in the theater encompassing China, India and Burma during the war. The most notorious stretch was an inhospitable mountainous region between U.S. airbases in northeastern India and airfields in China, called "the Hump." Due to weather and the terrain, many of these aircraft were never found and their crews declared dead, unrecoverable or MIA.

Kuhles joined organizations, talked to veterans as well as families of the missing, and pored over crash reports and documents as he expanded his operation, known today as the non-profit MIA Recoveries Inc. He claims to have found 26 aircraft, four of which could not be positively identified. From the 22 planes he says he has correlated, there are 193 personnel that he believes could be recovered. "I felt it was something that needed to be done," he said. "It seemed like nobody looked for these men." Kuhles said he submitted a contract offer to JPAC for recovery operations and agreed to give input, but he said they have not responded. He said JPAC has obtained information from his website for their own missions in an effort to take credit for his discoveries. Belcher denied the claims, saying Kuhles had not responded to numerous JPAC inquiries. Despite their tenuous relationship, Kuhles and JPAC often crossed paths in their searches.

In 2006, Kuhles claimed to have located the wreckage of the B-24J Liberator known as Hot As Hell, according to his website. The aircraft disappeared Jan. 25, 1944, while on a routine ferrying mission between Kunming, China, and Chabua, India. Eight men were lost. In 2008, JPAC investigators went to the crash site that Kuhles had

identified as belonging to Hot As Hell. The site was directly correlated to the crash. After getting approval from its excavation decision board, JPAC launched a full-scale recovery mission to the site in 2009, according to former JPAC employees speaking anonymously for fear of reprisal. However, the mission was abruptly suspended before any remains could be collected. According to Gary Zaetz, nephew of Hot As Hell navigator 1st Lt. Irwin Zaetz, the families were not informed of the reason the mission was stopped. JPAC recovery operations wouldn't resume again in India until a diplomatic agreement was reached in 2013.



Hot As Hell Crew

47B, about a one-day trek from the town of Birmani Kami. Kuhles said he had heard about the site through a trekking guide. His travels were complicated by a terrorist threat in the area, but after securing an armed police escort, he made it to the crash site, which was on a hillside extending half a mile down a stream bed. Locals shared longstanding stories about the crash into Long Thrai Mountain, he said, including how villagers had carried the bodies down to an impromptu cemetery. Kuhles claimed to have visited the cemetery near the crash site, and described it as “neatly fenced with woven bamboo” and “currently planted with ginger.” He took photos of wreckage, including one with a stenciled number that matched the C-47B, he said, and posted those as well as global positioning coordinates on his website. JPAC did not acknowledge his work, he said. In September 2013, then Defense Secretary Leon Panetta announced an agreement between American and Indian officials to allow JPAC operations to resume in India. JPAC began planning its return, but instead of going to the site of Hot As Hell in Arunachal Pradesh to finish the dig there, JPAC decided to pursue remains from Gabbart’s C-47B in Tripura state. Belcher said this was done because of weather concerns, fiscal preparation and political sensitivities in the northeast Indian states.

Before JPAC can excavate a site, there is clear protocol they have to follow, according to its standard operating procedure manual, obtained by Stars and Stripes. They first have to go before an investigation decision board, which determines whether there is enough circumstantial evidence to fund a mission to investigate a site. If there is, a small-scale mission is launched to the site, where investigators might dig test pits, search for plane parts or correlating evidence, and interview potential witnesses. The case is then brought back to JPAC’s offices, where it is presented to JPAC and CIL leadership on an excavation decision board that meets almost monthly. For a more costly and labor intensive excavation to be approved, the evidence must point to the likelihood that Americans will be recovered at the given site. If an excavation decision board approves a site, it is put on the master list, where families of the missing say it could be years before an excavation is launched. There are a multitude of factors that dictate which sites are chosen each year, including funding, weather windows or looming construction. “All cases being considered for future recovery team operations go before the EDB,” JPAC spokesman Army Maj. Jamie Dobson previously told Stars and Stripes. “The excavation board, in part, helps ensure we are good stewards of the tax payers’ money by not sending out recovery teams (and expending funds) on sites that are not solidly vetted.”

The alleged crash site of Gabbart's C-47B, however, was seemingly fast-tracked through the process. It was never investigated, never correlated to the plane with any evidence and was never brought before an excavation decision board, former JPAC employees told Stars and Stripes. Internal JPAC documents obtained by Stars and Stripes explicitly state JPAC had "never investigated this site" before the 2013 mission. Team leader Belcher said that was true, but told Stars and Stripes that procedures were followed. "I don't know if I would characterize this as skipping the procedures," he said. "We were really in a discovery mode ... We would have launched into recovery operations if it got to that point." Belcher repeatedly called the mission an "investigation" and not a "recovery." He said that if remains were found, they would have gone back and convened an excavation decision board before the excavation took place. However, internal JPAC documents paint a different picture.

- "From 05 NOV — 14 DEC 2013, JPAC will conduct recovery operations and site surveys with one recovery team, consisting of nine JPAC personnel," the mission planning statement said. "This team will operate in the State of Tripura in the Republic of India in order to locate and recover the remains of 49 U.S. Service Members who were lost in an alleged aircraft crash in 1946."
- Photographs show a large area of excavated land. Internal JPAC reports state that by Nov. 17, they had excavated 48 square meters of surface area. The documents never mention going back to convene the board if remains were found.
- Current and former JPAC employees said the mission was launched without investigation and the excavation decision board, saying it would not have made it through the scrutiny of the process.

Kuhles, as an independent contractor, was not involved in planning the JPAC mission. The site the JPAC team chose did not match the GPS coordinates and elevation of those posted on Kuhles' website, and no correlating wreckage was found there, according to Kuhles, Erbacher and JPAC officials. Belcher said they found a site that matched photographs of wreckage posted on Kuhles' website, but Kuhles' coordinates were about seven miles to the west. JPAC officials reported finding a remote burial site at least five miles away from their crash site. According to documents, an investigation was planned for the crash site after the excavation of the burial site. "This demonstrates a complete departure of normal established procedure which requires an investigation team locate and correlate the site and recommend the site for excavation to the Excavation Decision Board prior to the site excavation," a former JPAC employee said.

Within a few days of digging, it became apparent that the JPAC recovery team was excavating the wrong site, according to Belcher and situation reports drafted during the mission. About 20 interviews, a book by an Indian government official and newspaper articles written at the time confirmed this. The crash site they had been digging was for a commercial airliner. The team did not check the nearby site that Kuhles had identified. "They were in the neighborhood and never bothered to check there," Erbacher said. "Why did you continue there, spending all of that money? Why didn't you go seven miles west?" Belcher said that would have meant more planning, meetings with local officials and fresh permissions that take time. "It isn't as easy as just running down the road," he said. Belcher said he wasn't embarrassed the mission failed and it did not harm relations between the U.S. and Indian governments. Despite the \$234,000 price tag, the mission is viewed positively at JPAC. "We view this mission as a success because it channeled us for future operations in India," he said.

Families of the missing were angered by the unsuccessful mission. Two were invited by JPAC officials to their headquarters in Hawaii for a briefing — all expenses paid, according to internal JPAC emails. Stars and Stripes obtained a copy of a PowerPoint presentation given at the briefing in which experts were cited questioning the authenticity of Kuhles' correlating photo: "Aircraft expert reviews photo in December 2013 and advises metal is not from a C-47 and not WWII-era — high temperature metal based on appearance. ... Experts question validity of the construction number reporting format and location." In the presentation, JPAC stated that it now believes the plane

was lost over water in the Bay of Bengal. Gabbart, Rich and the others onboard the C-47B were declared “non-recoverable.” Erbacher said she was told JPAC has no plans to locate the plane unless families find more evidence. “They said they would pursue any evidence we could give them,” Erbacher said. “Why don’t they find the evidence?”

Erbacher said the families are taking a whole new look at the recovery efforts, although not all agree on what should happen next. Phillips said that about half the C-47B families agree with the JPAC decision. Some are considering hiring Kuhles to go back to the site he found. He said he was still actively trying to get government contracts to recover remains from the theater. Lost in all of this are the families from Hot As Hell. Zaetz feels betrayed. He said that JPAC has found his uncle’s crash site yet hasn’t brought him home. Years have gone by, and Zaetz’s 89-year-old father — Irwin’s surviving younger brother — is in failing health. “There are still close relatives of these people still alive,” he said. “If the Indians and JPAC don’t do what was promised to them, they will die” before they see their loved ones home. Belcher said they have plans to return to Hot As Hell in the fall. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Matthew M. Burke | 6 Mar 2014 ++]

POW/MIA Announcements ► 140301 thru 140315

"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 (7,921) Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,642), 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 or call (703) 699-1169. 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 announced 12 MAR that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from the Vietnam War, were recently accounted for and will be buried in a group burial ceremony. Army Staff Sgt. **Lawrence Woods**, 39, of Clarksville, Tenn., will be buried as part of group on March 21, at Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. in a ceremony honoring the servicemen who were lost in an aircraft crash on Oct. 24, 1964. Woods and seven other service members were aboard a C-123 Provider aircraft that crashed when it was struck by enemy fire while resupplying the U.S. Special Forces camp at Bu Prang, Vietnam. Also on board the aircraft were Air Force service members Capt. Valmore W. Bourque, 1st Lt. Edward J. Krukowski, 1st Lt. Robert G. Armstrong, Staff Sgt. Ernest J. Halvorson, Staff Sgt. Theodore B. Phillips, Airman 1st Class Eugene Richardson and Army Pfc. Charles P. Sparks. Shortly after the crash, U.S. forces arrived at the site and recovered remains of seven of the crew members, but they could not locate Woods. The remains for the seven crew members were individually identified and the men were laid to rest at that time. In early 1997, a joint U.S./Kingdom of Cambodia team investigated the crash site and found it to be on the Vietnam side of the border. Subsequently, a joint U.S./Socialist Republic of Vietnam team surveyed the site in 1999 and confirmed that the wreckage correlated to a U.S. C-123 Provider aircraft. In 2009-2010, U.S. and Vietnamese teams excavated the site and recovered human remains and additional evidence, including a metal identification tag from the aircraft's commander. To identify those remains, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command used forensic and circumstantial evidence, which allowed them to account for Woods.



Army Staff Sgt. Lawrence Woods

Korea

- The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced 6 MAR that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Pfc. **Donald C. Durfee**, 19, of Painesville, Ohio, will be buried March 6, in Rittman, Ohio. In November 1950, Durfee was assigned to Company M, 31st Infantry Regiment, 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT), when his unit was deployed to the eastern side of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. During the battle his unit was overwhelmed by Chinese forces, which caused the unit to begin a fighting withdrawal south. It was during this battle that Durfee was reported to have been killed in action on Dec. 2, 1950. Following the war in 1954, as part of prisoner exchange, known as Operation Glory, the remains of Durfee were not returned. In late 1954, Chinese forces repatriated 25 cases of remains from Durfee's last known location on the eastern side of the Chosin Reservoir. A military review board in December 1955, declared the remains as unidentifiable and at that time the remains were

transferred to Hawaii to be buried as unknown in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, known as the "Punchbowl." In 2013, due to advances in technology, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) determined that the possibility of identifying the remains now existed. The unknown remains were disinterred for analysis and possible identification. In the identification of Durfee, scientists from JPAC used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, such as dental comparison and radiograph comparisons, which matched his records. There were no surviving family members for Durfee's return.

World War II

None

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

NPRC VSO Webpage ► **Now Online**

A few months ago NPRC invited several hundred VSOs to respond to a survey. Almost all (93%) wanted a VSO web page. Additionally, they asked what information would be most helpful. They listened, and made that happen. There are now web pages on the National Archives website designed for Veterans Service Officers. The VSO pages are designed to assist you in assisting military veterans, retirees, and their Next of Kin. NPRC suggests VSO's read (or print and read) the general information section first. While some of the information here may be obvious, this is to ensure that VSOs have the up-to-date and accurate information about NPRC and military records. The information topics requested (in the order of importance based on the survey results) can then be read. The goal was to have the information that VSO's needed in one location. The info provided is of a general nature because there are many different circumstances unique to each person's request, such as:

- Branch of service: (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard)
- Time of service: (WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Gulf War, Cold War, Global War on Terrorism, Non-conflict times, etc.)
- Type of service: Active, Guard, Reserve
- Rank: Officer, Warrant Officer, Enlisted
- Record type needed: Personnel, Outpatient Medical, Inpatient Medical, etc.

The direct link for the VSO web page is: <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/vso/index.html>. The VSO web page may also be found by clicking on the VSO web page link in the lower right corner of the Veterans Records page on the <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/> site. NPRC sent notifications via email of the availability of the new links to approximately 1,400 VSOs. Some states did not have VSO e-mail addresses available, so feel free to share this information. VSOs are asked to take some time to see if this is useful and meets their requirements. In the next week or so, NPRC will be sending those on their mailing lists a link to a survey, so you can tell them if these pages are useful. For info NPRC has not yet figured out a way to create a VSO only phone line to NPRC that would not eventually be taken over by the general public (without creating individual accounts and issuing individual passwords). Also, NPRC is aware that the header on these pages reads "National Archives at St Louis", instead of "National Personnel Records Center", and that will be corrected in the future. [Source: NPRC Email Notice| Niels Zussblatt | 5 Mar 2014 ++]

OBIT | Lee~Kurt Chew-Een ► 20 Feb 2014

Maj. Kurt Chew-Een Lee, a Korean War hero who was also the first Asian American to be commissioned as a regular U.S. Marine Corps officer, has died at 88. He was found dead 3 MAR in his home in Washington, D.C., possibly of a heart attack, said his niece Lori Lee of Sacramento. Maj. Lee was a gung-ho Marine who gave no ground to enemy troops in battle or to bigotry at home. The firstborn son of Chinese immigrants, he climbed the ranks during a time of strong racial prejudice. Standing only 5-foot-6, he was nevertheless an imposing figure with a wiry, muscular build and an intimidating gaze. He demanded that subordinates who did not respect him must nevertheless respect his rank. “His legacy will always be that he broke down barriers,” said Freeman Lee, past commander of VFW Chung Mei Post 8358. “He had to go up against prejudices and racism, and he was able to overcome that. He was like a (George) Patton or (Douglas) MacArthur. He would make a great general on the battlefield.”



Retired Marine Corps Maj. Kurt Chew-Een Lee, right, with Rep. Mike Conaway, R-Texas, in 2010.

Maj. Lee was a young, skinny lieutenant at the start of the Korean War who earned the respect and loyalty of his men as a fearless leader in extreme combat conditions. He received the Navy Cross, the Marines’ second-highest honor, for bravery during a fierce assault by Communist Chinese forces aiding the North Koreans on the night of Nov. 2-3, 1950. To spur his men to fight, he took off in the darkness on a one-man raid and exposed himself to fire to pinpoint enemy positions for attack. Shouting in Mandarin to sow confusion, he hurled grenades and shot at Chinese troops, who fled. Wounded in the knee, he was shot the next day by a sniper and treated at an Army field hospital. Unwilling to be sent to Japan for treatment, Maj. Lee took a Jeep without approval and drove with another wounded Marine to rejoin their platoon in Baker Company of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment.

He was assigned to help relieve a Marine division that was encircled by overwhelming enemy numbers while trying to defend their only escape road in the bloody Battle of Chosin Reservoir in December 1950. Guided only by a compass in pitch-black darkness, he led 500 men through a nighttime blizzard over mountainous terrain at 20 degrees below zero. Pinned under intense enemy fire, he ordered his men to fire while advancing up a steep hill and shot two enemy soldiers along the way with his right arm still in a cast from his sniper wound. The ferocity of the Marine attack broke the resistance of enemy troops, who fled down the reverse slope. Maj. Lee suffered another bullet wound in his right arm during the successful operation, which enabled 8,000 Marines to escape annihilation by 60,000 Chinese troops. Several days later, he was hit by machine-gun fire that ended his combat service in Korea.

Although he received the Silver Star – the third-highest medal for bravery in combat – fellow Marines and other veterans who have studied his actions during the attack have argued that he deserved the highest award, the Medal of Honor. “Kurt Lee was a hero among heroes,” said Jim Kunkle, a World War II fighter pilot and member of the

elite Legion of Valor, a military organization open only to recipients of the Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross or Air Force Cross. "His combat actions were unbelievable, and many of us believe he should have gotten the Medal of Honor for Chosin Reservoir. He saved untold numbers of our troops by holding that valley pass open. He's always been my hero."

Born Jan. 21, 1926, in San Francisco, Chew-Een Lee was the third of seven children. He moved with his parents to Sacramento, where his father distributed farm produce to local restaurants and hotels. Known as Kurt, he enrolled in the ROTC program at Sacramento High School and studied mining at Sacramento City College before joining the Marines in 1944. He was the eldest of three Sacramento brothers who were American heroes in Korea. His brother Chew-Mon Lee received the Army Distinguished Service Cross and rose to the rank of colonel. Another brother, Chew-Fan Lee, was a lieutenant who earned a Bronze Star as an Army medic. After the Korean War, Lee served at The Basic School, a Marine officer training program, from 1962 to 1965. He was promoted to the rank of major in 1963 and was a combat intelligence officer in Vietnam. Besides the Navy Cross and Silver Star, he received a Purple Heart with one award star and other military honors. The story of his gallantry in Korea has been covered in several books and was the subject of a 2010 Smithsonian Channel documentary, "Uncommon Valor: Breakout at Chosin." In 2000, the California Military Museum opened an exhibition honoring him and his brothers for their service in Korea.

Maj. Lee retired from the Marines in 1968 and settled in the Washington, D.C., area. He worked for New York Life Insurance Co. for several years and retired after almost two decades as a compliance officer for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. He was active in veteran organizations and attended military reunions. He traveled widely speaking to students, civic groups and Chinese American organizations about his military service. He participated in recent Chinese New Year's Day celebrations in San Francisco and was in Sacramento last week visiting relatives. "He was very formal," his niece said. "He was a really, really nice guy. But he was really proud to be a Marine. He was a Marine to the very end." Maj. Lee had no children during two marriages that ended in divorce. He is survived by his adopted daughter Nicole; three sisters, Faustina, Betty Mar and Juliet Yokoe; and his brother Chew-Fan. Maj. Lee requested to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery. [Source: The Sacramento Bee | Robert D. Dávila | 5 Mar 2014 ++]

OBIT | Guarnere~William ► 8 Mar 2014

William "Wild Bill" Guarnere of South Philadelphia, a member of the famed 101st Airborne Division whose World War II exploits were portrayed in the TV mini-series *Band of Brothers*, died Saturday, March 8, at Jefferson University Hospital of a ruptured aortic aneurysm. He was a month shy of 91. Mr. Guarnere was taken to the hospital from his home of 70 years in South Philadelphia, son Gene Guarnere of Broomall said. Guarnere didn't talk about the war when his two sons were growing up, even though he lost his right leg while helping a wounded comrade and organized Army reunions beginning in 1947. "He never said a word," his son said. "I served in Vietnam in 1967. When I came home, I asked my father what he did in the war. He said, 'The war is over, kid. Forget about it.'"

Forgetting was not an option after writer Stephen Ambrose immortalized the members of Easy Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne Division in his best-selling book, later made into the HBO mini-series. The chronicles followed the soldiers from their training in Georgia in 1942 through the harrowing battles they fought across Europe until the war ended in 1945. As Guarnere told *The Inquirer* in 2010, D-Day was not only terrifying but vengeful. He learned of his brother Henry's death at the hands of the Germans in Italy just before parachuting directly into a firefight in Normandy, France. "I couldn't wait to get off the plane," he recalled. "I killed every German I could. That's why they called me 'Wild Bill.' I landed in the middle of a square and they [Germans] were shooting at us.

They were kind of scared; we were scared, too." Among Mr. Guarneri's buddies in the unit was fellow South Philadelphian Edward "Babe" Heffron. They remained friends until Mr. Heffron died in December.



William "Wild Bill" Guarneri

Guarneri and Heffron were instrumental in getting a monument erected in Normandy to honor the leadership of their unit, particularly their former commander, Richard Winters. "I was mesmerized by the story, not only of my father but of the whole company," Gene Guarneri said. The deceased remained dedicated to his band of brothers, running their reunions until 2003. Jake Powers, who runs a Band of Brothers tour company in Grafton, Mass., said Mr. Guarneri's defining trait was selflessness. "He was my oldest daughter's godfather," Powers said. "He had a heart of gold. He'd rather give than take." In addition to his son, Mr. Guarneri is survived by another son, William Jr.; nine grandchildren; and 14 great-grandchildren. At the direction of Gov. Tom Corbett, flags were raised at half-staff on 14 MAR at state veterans homes in Pennsylvania in honor of World War II veteran William Guarneri. Funeral services were held 14 Mar at St. Edmond's Church, 2130 S. 21st St.' Philadelphia. [Source: The Inquirer | Marie McCullough | 10 Mar 2014 ++]

OBIT | Hilsman~Roger ► 23 Feb 2014

Roger Hilsman, a commando raider during World War II who later served a tumultuous stint as State Department intelligence chief during the Cuban Missile Crisis and the early stages of the Vietnam War in the Kennedy administration, died Feb. 23 at his home in Ithaca, N.Y. He was 94. He had complications from several strokes, said his son Hoyt Hilsman. mDr. Hilsman, who was the son of an Army colonel, was a West Point graduate who served during World War II with a fabled Army commando unit in Japanese-occupied Burma known as Merrill's Marauders. After being wounded in battle, he transferred to the Office of Strategic Services, the wartime precursor of the CIA, and in 1945 took part in a parachute rescue mission to liberate a Japanese POW camp in the Chinese region of Manchuria. One of the prisoners in the camp was his own father, who had been seized by Japanese forces three years earlier in the Philippines. When he reached his father to free him from captivity, Dr. Hilsman wrote in his 1990 book, "American Guerrilla," his father remarked, "Son, what took you so long?"

Hilsman continued to serve in the Army while attached to the OSS and CIA for several years before receiving a doctorate in international relations from Yale University in 1951. He worked with NATO in Europe, and then resigned from the Army to join the Center of International Studies at Princeton University. He came to Washington in 1956 to work for the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress, where he became friendly with then-Sen. John F. Kennedy (D-MA). After Kennedy was elected president in 1960, Hilsman joined the State Department as director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research and became a key figure in planning foreign

policy. During the Cuban Missile Crisis in late 1962, Hilsman communicated with Soviet officials and briefed congressional leaders on developments in the tense Cold War standoff. He also became one of Kennedy's closest advisers on the growing crisis in Vietnam. After visiting Vietnam in 1962, he recommended that the United States develop ways to thwart the Communist Viet Cong forces. He favored the adoption of counterinsurgency efforts, not unlike the guerrilla-style tactics of his old World War II unit in Burma. Merrill's Marauders, named for their commanding officer, Gen. Frank Merrill, have often been cited as the forerunners of the modern military's special forces units.



Roger Hilsman Jr. at his desk after being named Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in Mar 1963, at the white house (far right) in Apr 1963, and some of the 5th Rangers Medics

Hilsman's thinking put him at odds with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department hierarchy, including Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who favored a more robust military response, including bombardment and more conventional forces. But Hilsman, who still had the ear of the president, remained an influential foreign-policy voice. "Hilsman had risen quickly in the bureaucracy," David Halberstam wrote in his authoritative 1972 book about the architects of the Vietnam War, "The Best and the Brightest." "Kennedy liked him particularly because he was unafraid to challenge the military." By April 1963, he had become assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs. He came to believe that South Vietnam's president, Ngo Dinh Diem, could not lead the country effectively unless he removed his brother and chief adviser, Ngo Dinh Nhu, from a position of authority. In August 1963, Dr. Hilsman helped write a controversial memorandum suggesting that the United States should abandon its support of Diem unless he booted his troublesome brother from power. Although it said nothing about a coup or assassination, the memo was interpreted in some quarters as giving authority to the South Vietnamese military to depose Diem and his brother. Both were assassinated in early November 1963, leading to instability in South Vietnam's leadership.

When Kennedy was assassinated on Nov. 22, 1963, Hilsman lost his key source of support. "He had probably made more enemies than anyone else in the upper levels of government," Halberstam wrote, "partly because of the viewpoints he represented, partly because of the brashness with which he presented them." He resigned under pressure in FEB 1964 and took a teaching job at Columbia University. "There has been a tendency to 'over-militarize' what is essentially a political struggle by relying too heavily on bombers, artillery and large-scale conventional operations," Dr. Hilsman wrote in the New York Times in 1964. "By themselves, military measures can only postpone a Communist takeover, and even then only for as long as the South Vietnamese and ourselves are willing to pay the price."

Roger Hilsman Jr. was born Nov. 23, 1919, in Waco, Tex., and grew up on military posts. After completing high school in California, he attended a long-defunct military prep school in Washington for a year in the late 1930s, then spent a year tramping around Europe, including a visit to Nazi Germany in 1939. He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., in 1943. He was wounded during a skirmish in 1944 before being reassigned to the special OSS unit, made up of U.S. commandos and international irregular forces. His later switch to academia and policymaking led Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) to call Dr. Hilsman a "latter-day Lawrence of Arabia." He wrote

many books on foreign policy and taught at Columbia until 1990. He ran an unsuccessful campaign for Congress in 1972 from Lyme, Conn., where he lived for many years and served on the town council.

In his influential 1967 book, “To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy,” Dr. Hilsman blamed Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, Rusk and the Joint Chiefs of Staff for escalating the war in Vietnam, which he had come to believe could not be won by U.S.-backed forces in any conventional sense. He maintained throughout his life that Kennedy would not have escalated the war the way his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, did by sending large numbers of troops to Vietnam in 1965. In his later years, Dr. Hilsman wrote books on Chinese cooking and what he called a “layman’s guide to the universe.” [Source: Washington Post | Matt Schudel | 11 Mar 2014 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 143 ► FEB Vet Unemployment 9.2%

The unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans jumped in February, nearly erasing the gains of a few months ago, Bureau of Labor Statistics data show. Meanwhile, the nation’s unemployment rate held steady around 6.7 percent and the economy added 175,000 jobs. The latest generation of veterans saw their unemployment climb to 9.2 percent, up from 7.9 percent in January. The number is comparable to the February 2013 unemployment rate of 9.4 percent for this group. Just two months ago, the post-9/11 unemployment rate was 7.3 percent, a lower number than such vets had seen in years. In a blog post about the rate, Jacqueline Maffucci of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America called for government and the private sector to continue to work together to help vets find jobs. “As IAVA prepares to launch its 2014 campaign to focus on combating military and veteran suicides, stressors such as job uncertainty and unemployment are certainly on our minds,” the blog post said. “It is imperative that the nation continues to focus on employment for veterans, and recognizes that younger OIF/OEF veterans continue to struggle to find employment once they separate from the military.” The post also suggested that vets having trouble finding work reach out to the group for help, at 855-917-2743 or transition@iava.org. For the veteran population as a whole, unemployment in February was 6.3 percent, up from January’s 5.6 percent rate. Because veterans employment reports have a small sample size and can fluctuate greatly, Labor Department statisticians warn against attempting to draw major conclusions from any one month’s jobs report. [Source: Military.com | George Altman | 7 Mar 2014 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 144 ► Student Conservation Association

The Student Conservation Association (SCA) welcomes US Military Veterans in all of their Corps and Internship programs across the country. They recognize that outdoor conservation work is a natural fit for many veterans who have experience living and working with others as a team, completing tasks that require endurance and rigorous physical conditioning, and adapting to outdoor living situations or other new environments. In collaboration with federal land management agencies, SCA offers training programs to help returning veterans transition to civilian life and prepare for careers in conservation. Veterans who successfully complete these programs earn certifications in wildland firefighting, chainsaw operation, wilderness medicine, and more. They also have the opportunity to build camaraderie with other veterans and emerging conservation professionals who share a passion for service. SCA waives application fees for all US Military Veterans. If you have any questions about these positions or other Veterans opportunities with SCA, email them at recruiting@thesca.org.

2014 Summer Veteran Fire Corps (US Military Veterans Only)

Expected Dates - May 25, 2014 to August 16, 2014

Site - SCA

Position ID - PO-00460096

- The Veterans Fire Corps is comprised of post-9/11-era US Military Veterans receiving essential training, credentials and experience to competitively pursue wildland fire and/or forestry careers. In this internship members will serve in teams of five with an experienced SCA Project Leader. Teams may work in National Forests in South Dakota, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah and/or Arizona. Corps members will become familiar with the Forest Service via fire training through multiple disciplines like wildlife ecology, botany and resource management. Team Projects may include, but are not limited to, participation on prescribed fires, fuels reduction, fire effects monitoring, educational outreach and pre fire preparation of burn units. A typical schedule consists of four consecutive 10-hour days with three days off.
- Wildland firefighting demands a high level of fitness to work in difficult environmental conditions, including steep terrain, extreme temperatures, altitude, and smoke. Members will be required to pass the Work Capacity (Pack) Test at the “arduous” level. The Pack Test consists of completing a 3-mile hike with 45-pound pack in 45 minutes. A form DD214 is required indicating an Honorable discharge or General discharge (under Honorable conditions) on a case-by-case basis.
- The following qualifications are required for selection: Post 9/11 US Veteran status; for potential career status in Federal Fire an age of 37 or younger; a form DD214 indicating an Honorable discharge or General discharge (under Honorable conditions) on a case-by-case basis. Acceptance into this program is contingent on proof of age and Veteran status.
- Members of this program must also have a valid driver’s license, successfully pass a criminal background check and be comfortable and willing to live and work with veterans from all branches of service. Benefits include housing, transportation, a living allowance of \$280/week and eligibility for an AmeriCorps education award.
- Location Description - Sites for summer Teams are in the Black Hills National Forest, SD; Bighorn National Forest, WY; Shoshone National Forest, WY; and Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest, CO/WY.
- Training Provided - Members of this Team will participate in the following trainings: Wilderness First Aid (WFA), Chainsaw Certification, and S130 Basic Wildland Firefighting (Red Card)
- Professional Development Opportunities - Main Area of Focus is Natural Resources Mgmt.
- Education, Training & Skills Expected - None listed.

[Source: <http://www.thesca.org/serve/program/veterans-opportunities> Mar 2014 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► Mar 15 thru Dec 2014

Retiree Appreciation Days (RADs) are designed with you in mind. They're a great source of the latest information for retirees and Family members in your area. RADs vary from installation to installation, but, in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups, and various other services. Some RADs include special events such as dinners or golf tournaments. Due to budget constraints, some RADs may be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, scheduled appearances of DFAS representatives may not be possible. If you plan to travel long distances to attend a RAD, before traveling, you should call the sponsoring RSO to ensure the RAD will held as scheduled and, if applicable, whether or not DFAS reps will be available. Below is the schedule as of 14 MAR 2014. An up-to-date RAD list is always available online at <http://www.hostmtb.org/RADLIST-2014.html>. For more information call the phone number indicated below of the Retirement Services Officer (RSO) sponsoring the RAD.

2014 Retiree Appreciation Days (RAD) as of 14 March 2014

<u>RAD Locations (State\Country)</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>RAO\RSO Phone Numbers</u>
Redstone Arsenal, AL (1)	18-20 Sep	256-876-2022
JB Elmendorf-Richardson, AK	10 May	907-384-3500
Fort Wainwright, AK	17 May	907-353-2099
Little Rock AFB, AR	03 May	501-987-6095
USAG Benelux, BE (2)	04 Oct	0032-65-44-6293
NBVC Port Hueneme, CA (11)	29 Mar	805-982-1023
Los Angeles AFB, CA	31 May	310-653-5144
Camp Pendleton, CA (15)	14 Sep	760-725-9789
Buckley AFB, CO	14 Jun	720-847-9213
Orlando, FL - Ft Stewart RAD (13)	10 May	912-767-3326\813-828-0163
Fort Stewart, GA (13)	10 May	912-767-3326\813-828-0163
Robins AFB, GA	27 Sep	478-926-0193\9879
USAG Bavaria (Grafenwoehr), GE (2)	09 May	0049-09641-83-8709
USAG Ansbach-Katterbach, GE (2)	16 May	0049-0981-183-3301
Kaiserslautern/Ramstein, GE (2)	15 Oct	0049-0631-411-8405
USAG Stuttgart, GE (2)	23 Oct	0049-07031-15-2010
USAG Wiesbaden, GE (2)	25 Oct	0049-0611-705-7668
Boise, ID (Air NG RAD)	07 Sep *	866-482-7343
Boise, ID (Army NG RAD)	TBD	866-482-7343
Rock Island Arsenal, IL	25 Oct	563-445-0191
Des Moines, IA	28 Aug	515-277-6113
USAG Vicenza, IT (2)	17 Oct	0039-0444-71-7262
Fort Leavenworth, KS	25 Oct	913-684-5583
Fort Knox, KY	31 Oct-1 Nov*	502-624-4641\4315\1765
Camp Humphreys, KOR	18 October	010-3176-1696
Brunswick, ME (14)	02 April	207-406-4103
USCG Festival-Grand Haven MI (3)	25 Jul-03 Aug	616-846-5940
Selfridge ANG Base, MI	20 Sep	586-239-5580
Rosemount, MN	15 Aug	507-474-9297
Duluth, MN	12 Sep	218-590-3144
Malmstrom AFB, MT (4)	16-18 May	406-731-4751\406-866-0683
Watervliet Arsenal, Watervliet NY	03 May	518-266-5810

West Point, NY	03 May	845-938-4217
Fort Hamilton, NY	27 Sep	718-630-4552
Pope Army Airfield, NC (5)	16 May	704-391-4269\910-907-7247
Camp Lejeune, NC (6)	27 Sep	910-451-0287
Wright-Patterson AFB, OH	24 Oct	937-257-3221
Myrtle Beach, SC (7)	01-31 May	843-918-1014
Fort Jackson, SC	15-17 May	803-751-6715\5523
Fort Bliss, TX	27 Sep	915-569-6233\568-5204
Buffalo Gap (Abilene), TX (8)	21 Dec	325-572-3365
Richland, WA (12)	28 Mar	509-376-7588
JB Lewis-McChord, WA	16 May	253-966-5884\5881
Fairchild AFB, WA	06 June	509-247-5359
PacNW CG Ball-Bellevue, WA (9)	27 Sep	TBD
Fort McCoy, WI	05 Sep	608-388-3716
F.E. Warren AFB, WY (9)	19 Apr	307-773-3381\2309

COMMENTS:

1. For scheduled events planned for the Redstone Arsenal RAD, please contact the Redstone [RAO\RSO Rep](#) or view the [Space Calendar](#).
2. For up-to-date information about Europe-based RADs, i.e., scheduled events, location, times, registration, etc., please call the sponsoring RAO\RSO, view the December 2013 [INCOM-Europe Retiree Bulletin](#) or visit the [INCOM-Europe](#) Web Site.
3. Grand Haven MI, **aka Coast Guard City USA**, will hold a Coast Guard Festival and National Memorial Service from 25 July to 03 August 2014. Coast Guard-only events include a Retirees Dinner on 30 July, reservations are required. For more Retirees Dinner information, please get a copy of the [Retirees' Dinner RSVP](#) form and submit it by 17 July by mail or fax (616) 846-2509. To find out more about the 2014 Grand Haven Coast Guard Festival and National Memorial Service, please visit <http://www.coastguardfest.org>, call 616-846-5940 or [Email](#) to get a 2014 festival brochure.
4. Malmstrom Air Force Base near Great Falls, Montana, is planning a RAD Weekend during May 16-18, in conjunction with a commissary case-lot sale. Scheduled activities include a retreat ceremony followed by social hour, medical screenings, informational briefings, a formal dinner with Congressman Steve Daines as guest speaker, and a Sunday brunch. For more information, call 406-731-4751\406-866-0683 or send email to get [Malstrom AFB RAD Info](#).
5. The Pope AAF RAD will be held on Friday, May 16th at the Pope Family Readiness Group Center in Building 236 on Interceptor Street. The event will run from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Personnel from Fort Bragg's Womack Army Medical Center (WAMC) will provide medical and dental screenings. To get a complete list of medical\dental services that will be available during the RAD, please visit the [WAMC Website](#), Email [WAMC Public Affairs Office](#) or call 910-907-7247. For info about other RAD events please Email the [Pope AAF RAO](#) or call (704) 391-4269.
6. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune will be holding its annual RAD on the 27th of September at 0900. Guest speaker is the Director of the NC Veterans Service Office Mr. Ilario Pantano. For more info, contact RAO or EMail

[Camp Lejeune RAD Info.](#)

7. Myrtle Beach SC will host Military Appreciation Days (MAD) during May 2014. This month-long celebration is a "thank you" to our dedicated service men and women, and their families. The celebration includes active duty military personnel, reserves, the National guard and veterans from all service branches. During May, military personnel and their families can look for discounts at area restaurants and attractions, a traveling Vietnam Memorial Wall, a big Memorial Day weekend parade with Grand Marshal Montel Williams, live music, a 5K run and other special events. For more info about Myrtle Beach's 2014 MAD, please visit the [Myrtle Beach Website](#), call 843-918-1014 or send email to get [Myrtle Beach MAD Info](#).
8. Military Appreciation Day - Dec. 2014. Abilene TX Convention and Visitors Bureau. For more info, location, etc., visit [Abilene Visitors Website](#) or call 325-572-3365.
9. The 2014 Pacific Northwest Coast Guard Ball, sponsored by the Navy League Lake Washington Council, will take place on 27 September at the Bellevue Westin Hotel. When available, specifics will be posted on the [Coast Guard Retiree Council Northwest](#) website. POC Email: [Mr Phil Johnson](#).
10. F.E. Warren AFB WY is hosting a RAD on April 19, from 0900 to 1300. Scheduled activities include an opening ceremony; guest speakers; breakfast; base tours; base historical videos; ID cards; 24 base, medical and veterans organization booths; and a luncheon. Survivor benefit counselors and retiree pay issue representatives will also be available. Events will take place at the 90th Medical Group Center. For more information, call 307-773-5944\2309 or the base public affairs office at 307-773-3381, or send email to get [FE Warren RAD Info](#).
11. Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC) Port Hueneme will be hosting an all forces Military Retiree Town Hall Meeting & Info Fair on March 29 (Saturday) from 0900 to NOON. Contact is NBVC RAO @ 805-982-1023 or [Email](#)
12. The Farchild AFB Satellite RAO will hold a Military Retiree Information Day (our equivalent of a RAD) on March 28, 2014 in the Auditorium of the Federal Building in Richland, WA 99352. This is not at a military facility but rather the location of the Satellite RAO of Fairchild AFB's RAO. The Military Retiree Information Day will start at 09:00 and go until about 12:00. With tables for presenters. For information, [Email Satellite RAO](#) or call 509-376-7588 (normal office hours are 10:00 to 2:00 p.m., Wednesday through Friday).
13. The Fort Stewart RAD will be held on Saturday, May 10, 2014, at the University of Central Florida, 12777 Gemini Boulevard North, Orlando, Florida 32816. This event is open to all retirees and family members from all services. For more information about this event, please view the online [RAD Flyer](#), call the Fort Stewart Retirement Services Office at 912-767-3326 or email the [Fort Stewart RSO](#) or call the Army Retirement Services Office – MacDill AFB at 813-828-0163 or email the [Army RSO – MacDill AFB](#).
14. A Veterans Information Expo will be hosted by the Southern Midcoast Maine Chamber's Military Network Committee on Wednesday, April 2nd, from 2 PM to 6 PM, in the Community Room, 8 Venture Drive, Brunswick Landing (MTI Building), Brunswick. The event will provide health care information for all veterans and family members. Onsite reps from VA Togus, Tricare, Martin's Point, Delta Dental, and Small Business Association will be on-hand to share benefit information. The DAV mobile health care van has been requested (not yet confirmed). For more information, Email [Paul Loveless, RAO](#), call (207) 406-4103 or stop by the Mid Coast Veterans Resource Center at 62 Pegasus Street, Suite 101, Brunswick Landing, Brunswick.
15. MCCS Camp Pendleton will hold its 20th Annual Retiree Expo in the Pacific Views Event Center (formerly The South Mesa SNCO Club) on 14 September from 7:30am-11:30am. For more info, please view the [Retiree Expo](#) flyer, call 760-725-9789 or send Email to the [Camp Pendleton RAO](#).

[Source: <http://www.hostmtb.org/RADLIST-2014.html> 14 Mar 2014 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 16 Mar thru 15 May 2014

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program **employment workshops** are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. For details of each click on the link 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 shown below for the next 8 weeks.** For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. visit the USCC website at <http://www.uschamber.com/hiringourheroes/events>

Veterans Hiring Fair

March 20, 2014 – **Dallas, TX**
March 20, 2014 – **Greater Erie, PA**
March 24, 2014 – **Camp Pendleton, CA Networking Reception**
March 25, 2014 – **Military Spouse Hiring Fair and Career Forum Camp Pendleton, CA**
March 25, 2014 – **Eau Claire, WI**
March 26, 2014 – **Chicago, IL**
March 26, 2014 – **Casper, WY**
March 27, 2014 – **New York City**
April 1, 2014 – **Lincoln, NE**
April 2, 2014 – **Philadelphia, PA**
April 8, 2014 – **Ft. Lauderdale, FL**
April 8, 2014 – **St Louis, MO**
April 9, 2014 – **Washington D.C. at the Verizon Center with Military Spouse Networking Reception**
April 16, 2014 – **Hamden, CT**
April 16, 2014 – **New Orleans, LA**
April 17, 2014 – **Los Angeles, CA**
April 22, 2014 – **Celina, OH**
April 23, 2014 – **Dearborn, MI**
April 24, 2014 – **Evansville, IN**
April 29, 2014 – **Chicago, IL**
April 30, 2014 – **Cheyenne, WY**
April 30, 2014 – **Fayetteville, NC**
April 30, 2014 – **Trenton, NJ**
May 7, 2014 – **Birmingham, AL**
May 7, 2014 – **Kansas City, MO**
May 8, 2014 – **Salisbury, MD**
May 8, 2014 – **Rochester, NY**
May 12, 2014 – **Arlington, TX**
May 13, 2014 – **Rochester, MN**
May 13, 2014 – **Tampa, FL**
May 14, 2014 – **Camden, NJ**
May 14, 2014 – **Military Spouse Hiring Fair and Career Forum Lackland Air Force Base, TX**
May 15, 2014 – **Ogden, UT**
May 15, 2014 – **Military Spouse Hiring Fair and Career Forum Whidbey Island, WA**

Note: A key tactic that most job-seekers overlook when attending a job or career fair is to Stop at every table! One mistake we all make on occasion is to generalize. For example, people assume that health-care companies are only hiring health-care workers, or that insurance companies only need agents. So when they encounter these tables or displays, they typically say nothing and keep moving. Also, sell yourself! Be an extrovert and your own agent! Finally, your mission is fact-finding and networking. By spending time at each table, one learns to overcome stereotypes that lead to erroneous assumptions [Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Assn 14 Mar 2014 ++]

WWII VETS 59 ► Boggess~George

Army Veteran George Boggess is a man whose character has truly stood the test time. Celebrating his 102nd birthday on February 17, 2014, he is the oldest male resident of the Washington DC VA Medical Center's Community Living Center. Originally from Waco, Texas, Boggess moved to Washington D.C. in the fall of 1936 and hasn't looked back. He was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1942. That same year, he married Dorothy Marks, who is still by his side more than seven decades later. Boggess was promoted to the rank of warrant officer in 1944, spending time at Fort Myer and Fort Meade, Virginia and Camps Kilmer and Fort Dix, N.J., before being deployed to help fight the war in Europe. Serving in England, France, Luxembourg and Germany, he was eventually stationed in the Belgium Forest during the Germany's final assault at the "Battle of the Bulge."

During this conflict, Boggess was hit by enemy fire and wounded in his right knee, but was back on the battle field only a couple of weeks later. His resilience did not go unnoticed. Boggess received the Purple Heart for being injured in the line of duty, as well as the Silver Star for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States.



George and Dorothy Boggess

Growing up in Texas, Boggess was no stranger to discrimination. For him, segregation was a way of life. "I had no choice but to go to a black school...it was all I knew," he remembers. Even in the face of adversity, Boggess continued to progress, earning his Masters in Social Work from Howard University and working for the government until retirement. There's still so much to be done, especially for our young people. An avid supporter of civil rights, Boggess participated in several marches and was present for Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. When asked about the current state of African Americans in today's society, he admits: "Generally speaking, it's better. In theory, we can live where we want. In theory, we can work where we want. In theory, we can go where we want. But there's still so much to be done, especially for our young people." So what's Boggess' secret to living a long life? "Walking!" he declares, "Walking is man's best medicine."

[Source: <http://www.va.gov/health/NewsFeatures/2014/February/Veteran-with-102-Years-of-African-American-History.asp> Feb 2014 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► Utah 2014

The state of Utah provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these plus discounts listed on the Military and Veterans Discount Center (MCVDC) website, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits & Discounts – UT**” for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below refer to <http://veterans.utah.gov/homepage/stateBenefits/index.html> <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/utah.html>.

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/utah-state-veterans-benefits.html> Mar 2014 ++]

Vet Legislation



VA Claims Backlog Update 129 ► S.2091 Introduced

The backlog of benefits claims pending with the Veterans Affairs Department has dropped by almost half from this time last year, when it made headlines as a national embarrassment and an insult to the service of veterans.

But despite that dramatic reduction, a group of senators still worries the backlog is not disappearing fast enough. Members of the Senate’s VA Backlog Working Group are pushing for new legislation to help zero out the number, and to keep attention on the improving but still ongoing problem. Their bill, the **21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act (S.2091)**, would provide better customer service for veterans with pending claims, offer more money to veterans who file “fully developed” claims and mandate stricter oversight of claims officials. “The key is that we’re not here five years from now having the same conversations,” said Sen. Dean Heller (R-NV), sponsor of the legislation. “Right now, the system we have is designed for World War II veterans. We’re trying to drag this system into the 21st century.”

VA officials have not offered an official position on the new legislation. In a statement, spokesman Drew Brookie said the department is still focused on its publicly stated goal of zeroing out the backlog — claims cases pending for more than 125 days — by the end of 2015. “We have made strong progress, and we know there is more work to do,” Brookie said. The backlog currently sits at around 368,000 cases. It peaked at 611,000 in late March 2013, roughly four times higher than when President Obama pledged to erase the problem in early 2009.

VA officials have blamed more complex cases and a 2010 major revision in Agent Orange-related claims for the rise in the backlog. But they also credit better technology, new processing techniques and mandatory overtime in helping to drive down the backlog total. They also have implemented changes similar to the provisions of Heller’s bill, such as awarding a year of retroactive benefits to veterans who file fully developed claims, which are designed to make processing and completion of a case easier.

Heller applauded VA’s recent success but said he has concerns that the effort will not be sustainable without fundamental changes in how VA workers do business. He and other senators on the bipartisan working group also voiced concerns that the recent progress may divert attention and pressure away from VA, even though tens of thousands of veterans are still waiting for results. But whether the legislation can advance quickly enough to make a difference remains to be seen. Related comprehensive veterans legislation from Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, has been languishing in that chamber. And even with bipartisan support on the issue, it could take months to shepherd the bill through the House. The cost of the changes is unknown, although Heller maintains that it would be minimal for most of the items outlined in his bill. Meanwhile, the backlog total hasn’t dipped below 300,000 cases since January 2011. But VA could go under that mark before this summer, if recent progress trends hold steady.

Details of the 21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act:

Whereas the VA Backlog Working Group March 2014 Report identifies problems in current processes, the 21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act aims to provide a comprehensive solution. The bill is divided into three sections:

Title I – Benefits Claims Submission. This section is designed to encourage, assist and educate veterans on the benefits of submitting a completed claim, when possible, as well as reinforce the services available to help a veteran complete a claim.

- Includes proposals to improve veterans’ access to information about the claims process;
- Provides Veterans Service Organizations and veterans’ preferred secondary contact with better access to information; and
- Authorizes monetary benefits to incentivize developed claims submission.

Title II - Reforming Practices of Regional Offices. Personnel and management must be given tools to perform efficiently. This section requires the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to make structural changes that increase accuracy and efficiency at the regional office level in the following ways:

- Calls for audit of regional offices of the Veterans Benefits Administration;
- Ensures improved accountability and oversight of VARO management;
- Provides resources to VBA employees and implements changes in process that allows VBA employees to move claims through the electronic benefits awards structure more efficiently; and
- Improves transparency to the public on the size and scope of the current backlog.

Title III - Government Response. This section holds the government accountable and helps to ensure the claims process is a priority.

- Demands greater cooperation from federal agencies to transfer requested information; and
- Presses VBA employees to process information it receives from these agencies in a timely fashion.

[Source: MilitaryTimes & Sen. Moran News Release | Leo Shane | 6 & 10 Mar 2014 ++]

DoD Sexual Abuse Update 15 ► S.1917 Passed | Sent to House

The Senate on 10 MAR finalized plans for broad reforms in how sexual assault cases are handled in the military, just days after a bitter floor fight over a larger overhaul of the entire military justice system. The new measure, S.1917 Victims Protection Act of 2014 sponsored by Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO) passed unanimously, disguising deep rifts within the chamber over how best to protect victims and punish sex offenders. It halts — for now — a months-long fight between two top female Democrats in the Senate on this issue, one that McCaskill complained painted her as soft on military leaders despite her insistence on tougher rules for the services. “The argument was posed as victims versus commanders and whose side are you on,” she told reporters last week. “It’s not that simple.” Under the Senate-passed bill, military commanders no longer would be able to overturn jury convictions; the statute of limitations for military rapes would be erased; and victims would receive their own independent counsel in sex crimes cases.



Sen. Claire McCaskill

The bill also would require civilian review if a commander declines to prosecute a sexual assault case; require dishonorable discharges for troops convicted of such crimes; and create harsh punishments for anyone who retaliates against victims who report rapes and assaults. And it dumps the so-called “good soldier” defense, which allowed lawyers to cite service members’ past exemplary service as evidence that they would not commit violent crimes. The measure builds on sexual assault reforms already adopted by Congress last year, in response to questionable response from military leaders following several high-profile sex crimes and rising reports of improper behavior in the ranks. According to the Defense Department, roughly 26,000 instances of unwanted sexual contact occurred in the military in 2012, but less than 13 percent were reported and only half of those went to court. Critics of the system argued that military indifference and vindictiveness was to blame, often accusing victims of hurting unit readiness by reporting the crimes.

Veterans’ groups and victim advocacy organizations had lobbied for changes in McCaskill’s bill in recent years, particularly the extra protections for men and women who report sex crimes. But over the last year, a number of groups rallied behind an alternative measure sponsored by Sen. Kristen Gillibrand (D-NY), chairwoman of the Senate Armed Services Committee’s personnel panel, arguing that McCaskill’s reforms didn’t go far enough. Gillibrand’s plan, which was strongly opposed by military leaders, would have completely separated sexual assault prosecutions from the military justice system in an effort to ensure complete independence from negative influence.

Opponents called her plan a dismantling of the military’s judiciary, noting that under the bill other major crimes could be assigned to independent prosecutors. McCaskill argued that prosecutors — not commanders — were more loathe to go after sex offenders, and taking the cases away from them would result in less scrutiny of cases. Last week, Gillibrand’s measure fell five votes short of overcoming a filibuster that would have moved it forward for a straight up-or-down vote, despite 55 senators backing the proposal. Gillibrand has vowed to bring up the proposal again in coming months.

Meanwhile, McCaskill said she is hopeful that the strong Senate support for her measure in the wake of the controversy will provide momentum for her legislation in the House. She said the changes would give the military “one of the most victim-friendly justice systems in the world.” House leaders had publicly dismissed Gillibrand’s plan, but has been more receptive to accepting some of the changes in McCaskill’s bill. No hearings or voting timelines have been scheduled. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | 10 Mar 2014 ++]

VRAP Update 11 ► Help Hire Our Heroes Act

A bill that would continue training assistance for unemployed veterans has been introduced in the House. The Help Hire Our Heroes Act was announced 5 MAR by California Democrats Rep. Julia Brownley and Rep. Mark Takano, according to a statement from Brownley’s office. The bill aims to extend the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program through 30 SEP. The bill now goes to the House Veterans Affairs Committee. Funding to pay for it will come from cutting \$270 million from the Leaking Underground Storage Tank Trust Fund, said Brett Morrow, a spokesman for Rep. Takano. The program, which began in 2012, provided up to 12 months of training benefits at community colleges and technical schools in high demand occupations for unemployed veterans between the ages of 35 and 60 who are no longer eligible for the GI Bill. Due to funding limitations, the VA stopped accepting new VRAP applications 1 OCT, and is scheduled to stop paying benefits 1 APR. “Far too many veterans in Ventura County and across the country are unemployed, and we owe it to them to help them re-train for new high-skilled jobs and careers,” Brownley said in the statement. “The Veterans Retraining Assistance Program has succeeded in helping many veterans re-train and find employment, and it should not be allowed to lapse.” This is a separate action than that of Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) who is now pushing to extend the program through 2016. He’s co-sponsoring the “Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Act” S.1982. [Source: Stars & Stripes article 7 Mar 2014 ++]

Vet Legislative Issues Update 01 2014 ► Omnibus Bill S.1950 Fails

A divided Senate on 27 FEB derailed Democratic legislation that would have provided \$21 billion for medical, education and job-training benefits for the nation's veterans. The Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014 (S.1950) bill fell victim to election-year disputes over spending and fresh penalties against Iran. Each party covets the allegiance of the country's 22 million veterans and their families, and each party blamed the other for turning the effort into a chess match aimed at forcing politically embarrassing votes. Republicans used a procedural move to block the bill after Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-VT) chided GOP lawmakers about their priorities. "I personally, I have to say this honestly, have a hard time understanding how anyone could vote for tax breaks for billionaires, for millionaires, for large corporations and then say we don't have the resources to protect our veterans," said Sanders, the measure's chief author.



Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., stands in defeat after a divided Senate derailed S.1950

Democrats noted that more than two dozen veterans groups supported the legislation. But Republicans said they still favor helping veterans while also wanting to be prudent about federal spending. "We're not going to be intimidated on this," said Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama, top Republican on the Senate Budget Committee. "We're going to do the right things for the veterans of America." The fight over priorities demonstrated again the bitter divisions that have restrained the legislative process in recent years. Efforts to address immigration, a tax overhaul and job creation all seem likely to go nowhere this year. Republicans criticized how most of Sanders' bill was paid for — with unspent money from the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and the winding down of American military involvement in Afghanistan. The GOP says those are not real savings because no one expected those dollars to be spent as those wars ended. Republicans also objected to provisions making more veterans without service-connected injuries eligible for treatment at Department of Veterans Affairs facilities. They said that would swamp an already overburdened system.

The vote sidetracking the bill was 56-41, with supporters falling four votes short of the 60 they needed to prevail. Sens. Jerry Moran of Kansas and Dean Heller of Nevada were the only Republicans voting to keep the legislation alive and the only lawmakers crossing party lines on the vote. Veterans groups complained about being caught in partisan crossfire. "Veterans don't have time for this nonsense and veterans are tired of being used as political chew toys," said Paul Rieckhoff, founder and CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, which supported the legislation. Democrats wasted little time trying to cash in on the vote. Within moments, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee unleashed an email headlined, "Mitch McConnell Votes Against Kentucky Veterans." McConnell is up for re-election this year. Republicans said there would be no retribution from voters because the Democratic bill would have harmed veterans' services by flooding them with too many people. They also said this year's election campaigns will focus on other issues, such as President Barack Obama's health law. "We're sort of fooling ourselves to believe that this drives the election issue list," said Sen. Richard Burr of North Carolina, top Republican on the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Thursday's showdown came after Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., refused to allow votes on a GOP amendment slicing the bill's size and adding the penalties against Iran for its nuclear program. Obama opposes new penalties while international negotiations with Iran proceed. Fifty-nine senators of both parties have sponsored a separate bill imposing the punishment if the talks fail, though Obama's effort has weakened Democratic calls for a quick Senate vote. A vote could put the administration and some Democrats who favor the proposal in an awkward spot. The White House did not issue a public statement on whether it supported the veterans' bill. Sanders' legislation addressed everything from making more veterans eligible for in-state college tuition to providing fertility or adoption services for some wounded troops left unable to conceive.

The VA would have been given more tools to eat into its backlog of 390,000 benefit claims awaiting action for more than 125 days. The bill also would have bolstered programs for veterans who suffered sexual abuse, and would

have increased dental care and provided more alternative medicine, such as yoga for stress. In a two-year test program, some overweight veterans living more than 15 minutes from a VA gym would have been given memberships at private health clubs. Benefits for some spouses of deceased veterans would have improved, and aid to relatives caring for a wounded veteran would have been expanded to include those who served before the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Vet Legislation Offered in 113th Congress ► As of 13 Mar 2014

For a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 113th Congress refer to this 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 of that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At <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 the most effective way to let your Congressional representatives know your wants and dislikes. Members of Congress are the most receptive and open to suggestions from their constituents. The key to increasing cosponsorship support on veteran related bills and subsequent passage into law is letting legislators know of veteran's feelings on issues. You can reach their Washington office via the Capital Operator direct at (866) 272-6622, (800) 828-0498, or (866) 340-9281 to express your views. Otherwise, you can locate your legislator's phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making at <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d111/sponlst.html>. Refer to http://www.thecapitol.net/FAQ/cong_schedule.html for dates that you can access them on their home turf.

FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF VETERAN RELATED LEGISLATION INTRODUCED IN THE HOUSE AND SENATE SINCE THE LAST BULLETIN WAS PUBLISHED:

- **H.R.4068 : SCRA Rights Protection Act of 2014.** A bill to To amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to require the consent of parties to contracts for the use of arbitration to resolve controversies arising under the contracts and subject to provisions of such Act and to preserve the rights of servicemembers to bring class actions under such Act, and for other purposes.
- **H.R.4095 : Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2014.** A bill to increase, effective as of December 1, 2014, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes.
- **H.R.4096 : American Heroes COLA Act of 2014.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for annual cost-of-living adjustments to be made automatically by law each year in the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans.
- **H.R.4102 : Deceased Vet Estate Benefit Entitlements.** To amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify that the estate of a deceased veteran may receive certain accrued benefits upon the death of the veteran, and for other purposes.
- **H.R.4110 : Helping to Encourage Real Opportunity for Veterans Transitioning from Battlespace to Workplace Act of 2014.** A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide a tax credit to

encourage private employers to hire veterans, to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the reasonable efforts an employer may make under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act with respect to hiring veterans, and for other purposes.

- H.R.4140 : **Homeless Veterans with Children Act of 2014.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide per diem payments to eligible entities for furnishing care to dependents of certain homeless veterans, and for other purposes.
- H.R.4147 : **Student Veterans IT Upgrade Act.** A bill to direct the Chief Information Officer of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Deputy Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Economic Opportunity to submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of representatives a report regarding the information technology of the Department that is used in administering the educational benefits administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.
- H.R.4149 : **Help Hire our Heroes Act.** A bill to amend the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 to extend the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program, and for other purposes.
- H.R.4150 : **Veterans Employment and Training Service Longitudinal Study Act of 2014.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Labor to enter into a contract for the conduct of a longitudinal study of the job counseling, training, and placement services for veterans provided by the Secretary, and for other purposes.
- H.R.4151 : **Veterans Education Survey Act of 2014.** A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into a contract with a non-government entity to conduct a survey of individuals who have use or are using their entitlement to educational assistance under the educational assistance programs administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.
- H.R.4175 : **Victory for Veterans Stamp Act of 2014.** A bill to provide for the issuance of a Victory for Veterans stamp, and for other purposes.
- H.R.4184 : **VA Educational Assistance Advance Payments.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the manner in which an advance payment of initial educational assistance paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs is charged against the entitlement of a veteran to such assistance.
- H.R.4191 : **Disability Compensation Claims Medical Evidence.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the treatment of medical evidence provided by non-Department of Veterans Affairs medical professionals in support of claims for disability compensation under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.
- H.R.4198 : **VA Capacity for Treating Vets Report.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to reinstate the requirement for an annual report on the capacity of the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide for specialized treatment and rehabilitative needs of disabled veterans.
- S.2091 : **21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the processing by the Department of Veterans Affairs of claims for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.
- S.2095 : **Veterans Health Care Access Received Closer to Home Act of 2014.** A bill to reauthorize and modify the pilot program of the Department of Veterans Affairs under which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs provides health services to veterans through qualifying non-Department of Veterans Affairs health care providers, and for other purposes.

[Source: <http://www.loc.gov> & <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills> 23 Mar 2014 ++]

Veteran Hearing/Mark-up Schedule ► As of 13 Mar 2014

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>:

- **March 25, 2014.** SAC-MILCON-VA FY15 Budget Hearing.
- **March 25, 2014.** HVAC, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity will hold a hearing on Veterans Affairs Bills.
 - H.R. 2942 — A bill to amend Title 38, United States Code, to reestablish the Professional Certification and Licensure Advisory Committee of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
 - H.R. 3056 — A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on the provision of outreach and support services to veterans pursuing higher education under the Post 9/11 Educational Assistance Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
 - H.R. 3614 — A bill to amend Title 38, United States Code, to improve the recognition by states of skills learned in the military by a Veteran when issuing licenses and credentials.
 - H.R. 4031 — Department of Veterans Affairs Management Accountability Act of 2014.
 - H.R. 4037 — A bill to amend Title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs relating to training and rehabilitation for Veterans with service-connected disabilities, and for other purposes.
 - H.R. 4038 — A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make certain improvements in the information technology of the Veterans Benefits Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs to process claims more efficiently, and for other purposes.
 - H.R. 4147 — Student Veterans IT Upgrade Act.
 - H.R. 4150 — Veterans Employment and Training Service Longitudinal Study Act of 2014.
 - H.R. 4151 — Veterans Education Survey Act of 2014.
- **March 25, 2014.** HVAC O&I will hold legislative hearing with issues related to construction, health, and other matters.
 - *HR 3593* – Mandating arrangement with US Army Corps of Engineers for three major construction projects
 - *Draft bill* – informed consent for psychotropic drugs
 - *Draft bill* – oversight of contracts with service-disabled veteran owned small businesses
 - *Draft bill* –Gulf War Illness
 - *Draft bill* –Improve information security by implementing actions to improve transparency and governance
 - *Draft bill* –Biological implant protocol and procurement
- **March 26, 2014.** House Veterans' Affairs Committee and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee will hold a joint hearing to receive the legislative presentations of The American Legion.
- **March 26, 2014:** HVAC DAMA will hold a Legislative Hearing on bills related to NCA and VBA.

- HR 2018 – Honor Those Who Served Act
 - HR 2088 – Centers for Excellence
 - HR 2119 – Veterans Access to Speedy Review (Video Hearing)
 - HR 2529 – Veterans Spouse Equal Treatment Act
 - HR 3671 – NCA Medallion Bill
 - HR 3876 – Burial with Dignity Act
 - HR 4095 – Annual COLA
 - HR 4102 – Require Payment for Accrued Benefits to Veterans Estate
 - HR 4141 – Expand Enhanced Use Leases to Cemeteries
 - HR 4191 – Quicker Veterans Benefits Delivery Act (REVISED)
- **March 27, 2014.** HAC-MILCON-VA FY15 Budget Hearing.
- **March 27, 2014.** HVAC Health intends to hold a Legislative Hearing on health related bills.
- H.R. 183 – The Veterans Dog Training Therapy Act
 - H.R. 2527 – Veterans counseling and treatment for sexual trauma that occurred during inactive duty training
 - H.R. 2661 – The Veterans Access to Timely Medical Appointments Act
 - H.R. 2974 – To provide for the eligibility for beneficiary travel for veterans seeking treatment or care for military sexual trauma in specialized outpatient or residential programs at facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes
 - H.R. 3387 – The Classified Veterans Access to Care Act
 - H.R. 3508 – Qualifications of hearing aid specialists
 - H.R. 3180 – To include contracts and grants for residential care for veterans in the exception to the requirement that the Federal Government recover a portion of the value of certain projects (Kaptur)
 - H.R. 3831 – The Veterans Dialysis Pilot Program Review Act of 2014 (Roe)
 - H.R. 4198 – The Appropriate Care for Disabled Veterans Act
 - DRAFT – To authorize major medical facility projects for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2014 and for other purposes. (VA FY14 Construction Package)

[Source: Veterans Corner w/Michael Isam 13 Mar 2014 ++]

Military



Military Dependent Immigration ► New Policy Gives Legal Status

Immigration reform may be stalled in Congress, but a new Obama administration policy is extending legal status and military benefits to thousands of illegal immigrants who are the spouses, parents and children of American

military members. Supporters say the policy -- which **applies to active-duty military, reservists and veterans** -- is long overdue. "Those veterans and those men and women who serve in the National Guard certainly deserve the peace of mind that their family members will not be deported," immigration attorney Faye Kolly said. But critics say the policy is tantamount to backdoor amnesty. "A whole class of aliens with no right to be in the United States are suddenly going to be allowed to live and work here on the basis of their relationship with military and veterans," said Dan Cadman, with the Center for Immigration Studies.

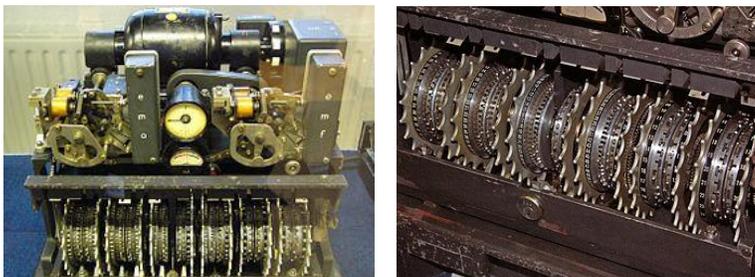
The exemption, called parole in place, came in the form of a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services "policy memorandum." It was not submitted to or approved by Congress, and the regulations were not published in the Federal Register, which allows for public comment prior to a rule taking effect. "I don't want to overstate it, but it sounds very similar to imperial decree if you ask me," Cadman said. "The public had no chance to comment on this new policy. I believe the way this was done was illegal." Obama administration officials say the new rules do not require congressional action because they're based on existing statutes. "It's clearly within the president's authority to enforce the law and choose which immigrants he thinks are the priority," said Brent Wilkes of the League of United Latin American Citizens. "These folks aren't threats. They've got a relative that's serving our nation."

One face of this new policy is Christian Gonzalez, a retired Marine who has been recommended for a Purple Heart. He was attacked five days in a row by improvised explosive devices (IED's) in Afghanistan. The last one nearly claimed his life. "For a brief period, I was paralyzed from the waist down. I suffered a pretty traumatic brain injury from that," said the San Antonio resident, sitting alongside his wife Laura, who was brought to the U.S. illegally as a child. "Without her, you know, I'd be lost with my disabilities. Critics only look at her as an illegal alien. They're not looking at her as the spouse of a veteran," he said. Christian and Laura met in middle school. He enlisted in the Marines during high school. They got married when he returned from multiple tours in Afghanistan and Iraq. Under the new policy, tens of thousands of illegal aliens like Laura will be offered a green card and legal residency. As the wife of a veteran, she would be entitled to his health care, education and survivor benefits, as well as simple things like a Social Security number and driver's license. "I'm covered, my kids are covered, but the woman that runs the house, she's not covered. So that's probably the hardest part," Gonzalez said. "Now she'll be able to get a job, go to school. It would make her feel like she contributes more to the family."

[Source: Fox News | William La Jeunesse, & Dan Gallo | 11 Mar 2014 ++]

Military Trivia ► **Colossus Computer**

Colossus was the world's first electronic digital computer that was at all programmable. The Colossus computers were developed for British codebreakers during World War II to help in the cryptanalysis of Germany's Lorenz cipher generated by the t equipment shown below.

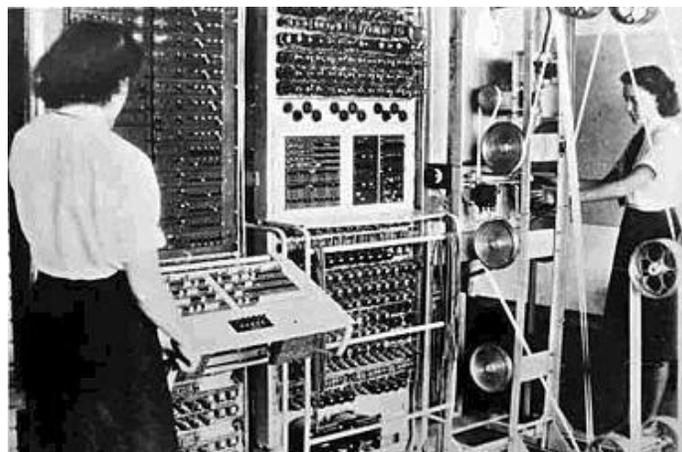


The Lorenz SZ42 machine with its covers removed reveals its 12 wheels each with a different number of cams (or "pins").

Wheel number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
BP wheel name	ψ_1	ψ_2	ψ_3	ψ_4	ψ_5	μ_{37}	μ_{61}	χ_1	χ_2	χ_3	χ_4	χ_5
Number of cams (pins)	43	47	51	53	59	37	61	41	31	29	26	23

German teleprinter signals encrypted by Lorenz machines were first heard in Britain by police officers on the south coast listening for possible spy transmissions in 1940. In August 1941, a procedural error by a German operator enabled Colonel John Tiltman, a top code-breaker at Bletchley Park (Churchill's Secret Intelligence and Computers Headquarters) to decipher a message. Mathematician Bill Tutte began working on the case and was able to deduce the complete logical structure of the above cipher machine, which we now know as Lorenz. Code-breakers began breaking the codes by hand, but this was very time consuming. The head of the so-called Newmanry group, Max Newman, a mathematician at Bletchley Park, believed certain aspects of the decryption process could be automated. Initially electro-mechanical Robinson machines were used to find the start positions of the Lorenz wheels to speed up code-breaking. But the Robinson machines had shortcomings.

The Colossus was designed by British telephone engineer Tommy Flowers to speed up code-breaking of the complex Lorenz cipher. It enabled the Lorenz start-wheel positions to be found in a few hours, thereby greatly shortening the code-breaking process. By the end of the war there were ten functioning Colossus machines and they had a decisive impact in shortening the war and saving countless lives. Colossus was the first electronic computer, but news of its existence was kept top secret for 30 years because of the sophistication and sensitivity surrounding the encryption it had helped to break. The computer, which was 7ft high by 17ft wide and 11ft deep, weighed a ton and used 8kw of power. It incorporated 2,500 valves, 501 of which are thyatron switches, about 100 logic gates and 10,000 resistors connected by 7km of wiring. Reading 5,000 characters per second - faster than anything ever produced commercially ever since - it found the start wheel positions of Lorenz messages.



A Colossus Mark 2 computer being operated by Dorothy Du Boisson (left) and Elsie Booker. The slanted control panel on the left was used to set the "pin" (or "cam") patterns of the Lorenz. The "bedstead" paper tape transport is on the right.

It usually took Colossus up to three or four hours to establish the start wheel positions of messages, but it is often surmised that the Allies might have been reading some of the decrypted messages before they reached German High Command. By the end of the war, 63 million characters of high-grade German messages had been decrypted by the 550 people working on breaking Lorenz. Colossus Mk I attacked its first Lorenz-encrypted message on 5 FEB 1944 in a bid to decipher the highly sophisticated cipher used in communications between Hitler and his generals during World War II. It was succeeded in June of that year by the Mark II. The deciphered messages provided the Allies with crucial intelligence on what enemy armed forces were plotting. The allies knew for example that Hitler had swallowed the bait that the D-Day landings in June 1944 would be at Calais rather than Normandy . This gave the Allies a decisive advantage. In honour of the men and women who worked at Bletchley Park during the war, Tony Sale, co-founder of The National Museum of Computing, led a team to rebuild Colossus in 1994. On November 15, 2007, a rebuilt fully-functioning Colossus Mark II was unveiled to the public at The National Museum of Computing.



The team of WWII women code-breakers who worked in Bletchley Park , Buckinghamshire operating the world's first electronic computer in 1945. Joanna Chorley, 88, pictured standing far right and below is credited with being one of the world's first computer operators.



[Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colossus_computer Mar 2014 ++]

Military Sea Pay ► First Increase in 10 Years

Sailors and Marines could see as much as a 25 percent increase in sea pay, according to Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus in a Navy release 4 MAR. This is the first increase in sea pay in more than a decade and is expected to take effect this summer. The adjustment is aimed at keeping pace with the dollar's inflation rate since October 2001. You need \$1.32 today to buy what \$1 bought in October 2001, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Those sailors and Marines on sea duty, deployed away from home around the world, are the backbone of the Navy and Marine Corps, and enable us to provide and maintain our global presence," Mabus said in the release. "This change to Career Sea Pay will both improve critical sea-duty manning and reward those who take these challenging sea-going assignments. This increase is long overdue and is meant to reward our sailors and Marines for their continued sacrifices as part of 'America's Away Team'."

Additionally, sailors and Marines who have served more than 36 consecutive months in a sea billet will see a boost to the incentive based career sea pay premium. This premium will increase anywhere from \$100 per month to \$200 per month depending on rank and time at sea. "It's long overdue," Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. Bill Moran said during an all-hands call aboard the USS Bataan earlier this year. "We haven't adjusted sea pay in over 10 years and we are absolutely convinced that it is the right thing to do for sailors who are committed to sea duty or serving at sea." Approximately 100,000 sailors receive career sea pay and approximately 13,000 receive career sea pay premium. The Navy expects the increase to cost \$66 million per year. The updated chart can be accessed on the Navy's website at http://www.navy.mil/navydata/people/cnp/Moran/Resource/SEAYPAY_Previous_and_New_Tables.pdf. [Source: Stars and Stripes | James Kimber | 5 Mar 2014 ++]

Reserve Retirement Age Update 27 ► Pentagon Proposes Change

Reservists would be eligible to begin receiving military retirement pay immediately after completing 20 years of part-time service under a new Pentagon proposal for overhauling the retirement system. The plan would blur the lines between active and reserve careers by allowing both to qualify for "working age" retirement checks that for decades have been limited to the full-time active-duty force. The fundamental change for reservists — who today must wait until age 60 to collect their first nickel of retirement pay — is one element of a broader set of proposals that the Defense Department unveiled Thursday in a report sent to Capitol Hill and also to the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, which is conducting an in-depth study on the issue and preparing recommendations for Congress early next year.

The new Pentagon proposal would convert both active and reserve retirement packages into a "hybrid" that promises smaller monthly retirement checks supplemented with a 401(k)-style investment account that troops and retirees would own outright. Reservists would get the same annual government contributions equal to 5 percent of basic pay, and ownership of those investment accounts would transfer to service members after six years of service. That would mark the first time that a limited retirement benefit would be provided to troops who do not complete a 20-year career in either component. Under one option, reserve pension checks would be structured similar to the current system, forcing reserve retirees to wait until age 60 before drawing any retirement pay. A second option,

however, would create a two-tiered pension system that provides only a “partial benefit” during the early retirement years, increasing to a “full benefit” after retirees reach a more traditional retirement age, such as 62.

Under that two-tiered option, both active and reserve troops would be eligible for the “partial benefit” pension check after completing 20 years of service. Those checks would be exceptionally small for reservists who spend an entire career in drilling status, perhaps several hundred dollars a year. But for troops who spend years in the active-duty force and then complete 20 years of service in a reserve component, the working-age pensions become more generous and more closely resemble active-duty career benefits. The change could reshape the decision-making process for millions of individual troops. It might motivate younger reservists to stay in uniform for a full career. It may also make some active-duty troops view the reserves more positively if transferring into part-time status does not eliminate the possibility of early retirement checks.

It’s part of a broader goal inside the Pentagon to bring both active and reserve troops under a single retirement system. “The two-tiered defined benefit was designed with the reserves in mind,” said a defense official who helped draw up the proposals. The plan would reinforce a push inside some parts of the Pentagon to increase future use of the reserve components. During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, reservists mobilized far more often than any previous era of the all-volunteer force. Some officials want to retain that high level of readiness and increased operational role for the reserves. “In these times of emergency, they move back and forth between active duty and reserve duty, between the two components. So our attempt was to see whether or not changes to retirement might facilitate that movement a little more easily,” the defense official said. The proposal is also designed in part to save money. For most reservists, the two-tiered plan ultimately would lower the value of the total economic value of the retirement package when based on current life expectancy. Under the most aggressive scenarios, that total lifetime value could be reduced by as much as 20 percent. But military manpower experts are banking on the belief that reservists would place more value on the prospect of getting a small pension earlier in life rather than a larger package that is back-loaded to provide more benefits in old age.

The proposal offering early checks for reservists requires a “delicate balance” when determining how much to pay in the early retirement years, officials say. If payments are too generous and approach standard drill pay, most reservists would retire immediately after becoming eligible. Also, a generous retirement for part-time troops may provide an incentive for those on active duty to transfer into the reserves and potentially create a retention problem for the active components. Offering a new retirement benefit to “gray-area” reservists — those who serve long enough to qualify for military retirement benefits but are not yet age 60 — would likely change the shape of the force, according to the Pentagon report. Today, the reserve components struggle to retain midcareer service members, but those who stay tend to stay for many years and remain in the force well into their 40s and 50s. Early retirement checks would likely boost retention among midcareer reservists as individuals who are motivated by the early pension but also incentivize some older reservists to go ahead and retire and begin collecting benefits. In the end, the composition of the reserves would look more like the active-duty force under this proposal, according to the Pentagon report. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Andrew Tilghman | 6 Mar 2014 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Paige-Mitchell WWII



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

Paige, Mitchell

Rank and organization: Platoon Sergeant, U.S. Marine Corps

Place and date: Solomon Islands, 26 October 1942

Entered service at: Pennsylvania

Born: 31 August 1918, Charleroi, Pennsylvania

Citation:

For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry in action above and beyond the call of duty while serving with a company of marines in combat against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands on 26 October 1942. When the enemy broke through the line directly in front of his position, P/Sgt. Paige, commanding a machinegun section with fearless determination, continued to direct the fire of his gunners until all his men were either killed or wounded. Alone, against the deadly hail of Japanese shells, he fought with his gun and when it was destroyed, took over another, moving from gun to gun, never ceasing his withering fire against the advancing hordes until reinforcements finally arrived. Then, forming a new line, he dauntlessly and aggressively led a bayonet charge, driving the enemy back and preventing a breakthrough in our lines. His great personal valor and unyielding devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

/S/ FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT



Lt Mitchell Paige

Mitchell Paige was born to a hard-working railroad construction family of Serbian ancestry on August 31, 1918, in the small town of Charleroi, Pennsylvania. While completing high school in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, Mitch was active in the Boy Scout program at his school. His mother taught him never to forget his Serbian roots, but always to be thankful for the privilege of living in America. Patriotism was an important part of his learning process. At the age of seventeen he attempted to enlist in the Marine Corps, but was denied due his youth. He returned on his 18th birthday in 1936 to reaffirm his commitment to service. Following boot camp at Parris Island, SC Mitch went on to serve in Cuba where his fellow Leathernecks had served since the Spanish-American War.

At the start of that conflict, the United States had fewer than 3,000 Marines in service, most scattered around the globe on Navy ships and at every American Embassy in the world.

Everything changed when Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Huntington landed his 1st Marine Battalion at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba on June 10, 1898. Outnumbered ten-to-one, the 623-man battalion secured the area and held it for the next half century. Following the Spanish-American War, in 1913 the Advanced Base Brigade of Marines was formed in Philadelphia. These Marines continued to build an admirable reputation of heroism and service in Mexico, Haiti, Nicaragua, and elsewhere throughout the Caribbean. Among the legendary early Marines Mitchell was privileged to serve was Herman Henry Hanneken who, as a young second lieutenant, earned the Medal of Honor in Haiti. *"Of all the jungle fighters who have ever lived,"* Mitch states without hesitation, *"Herman Henry Hanneken was the greatest of them all."* On February 1, 1941 the 1st Marine Division was formed at Guantanamo Bay. It was the first Division in Marine Corps history. Within 18 months this new Division would conduct the first American offensive of World War II on the island of Guadalcanal. It was there, just one month after his 24th birthday, that Mitch Paige would meet his greatest challenge, and earn the Medal of Honor.

Mitchell went on to serve 28 years in the Corps holding practically every rank and assignment of an Infantry platoon from private to commanding officer. He retired as a Colonel on July 1, 1964. He remained very active in veterans' programs and for decades beyond his retirement was a popular guest and speaker for activities around the nation. The interest in Mitch's story begged for a book, a project Mitch at first was hesitant to undertake. Thanks to urging from his close friend actor Lee Marvin however, [A Marine Named Mitch](#) was published in 1975. *"Our history, with its heroes, is a truly necessary foundation for every American boy and girl,"* Mitch wrote for fellow MOH recipient Pete Lemon's 1997 book [Beyond the Medal](#). *"Without this knowledge, how can they understand why our nation became the great country that it is today?"* I

Ironically, it is Mitch himself who has become one of those necessary heroes. When Hasbro Toy Company released its *Classic Collection* GI Joe figures, one was created to remember the young hero of Guadalcanal himself. The Mitchell Paige GI Joe figure was released in 1998. Mitchell and his wife Marilyn made their home in California, where they are both trying to slow down some. For decades they had worked hard towards patriotic education as well as programs within the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. Over the decades he received and responded to tens of thousands of letters, and always been gracious with photos and autographs. His last seven years were difficult ones, his ability to continue his important work often hampered by repeated surgery and concerns for his heart. On November 15, 2003, Col. Paige died of congestive heart failure at his home in La Quinta, California at the age of 85. He was the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient of the Guadalcanal campaign. He was buried with full military honors at the Riverside National Cemetery in Riverside, California.



Among his numerous military decorations were: the Medal of Honor, the Purple Heart, the Presidential Unit Citation, the Good Conduct Medal, the China Service Medal, the American Defense Service Medal with Base clasp,

the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with two bronze stars, the World War II Victory Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Korean Service Medal, the Marine Corps Reserve Ribbon, and the United Nations Service Medal.

[Source: <http://homeofheroes.com/mitch/index.html> & http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitchell_Paige Mar 2014 ++]

Military Lingo/Jargon/Slang ► 029

USA Academy: *Slug* - A special punishment for serious offense.

USA Acronyms: *USM* - U Suckers Missed Christmas

USA Equipment: *Pussy Pad* - A foam bed roll, used for sleeping on the ground. Named so since tough soldiers supposedly didn't need it.

USA Field Slang: *Fort Lost in the Woods* - Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri due to its remote location in rural Missouri.

USA Misc: *Wall-to-Wall Counseling* - To physically beat a subordinate in order to impress upon them a mistake they have made; thought to have been derived from slamming a soldier into opposite walls, repeatedly. It is currently forbidden by regulation; however anecdotes suggest it is still in practice.

USA Rank: *Short Colonel* - Older reference to a Lieutenant Colonel, esp. when casually discussing Unit Organization

USA Soldiers: *Meat Gazer* - An appointed urinalysis NCO who observes as the soldier urinates

USA Unit Nicknames: *Electric Chili Pepper B* - The 25th Infantry Division, for their patch

USAF: *Hospitality Check*. A group of no less than 10 drunken pilots from a single squadron paying a visit to their Commander's home at no earlier than 1:00 a.m. on a Friday night to gauge his sensitivity to their concern for the health and well-being of his spouse, young children, refrigerator, and liquor cabinet. This particular check-list was deleted from all T.O.s in late 1979.

USMC: *As you were* – Order to disregard the immediately-preceding order.

USN: Dog Watch Dog Watch is the name given to the 1600-1800 and the 1800-2000 watches aboard a ship. The 1600-2000 four-hour watch was originally split even to prevent men from always having to stand the same watches daily. As a result, Sailors dodge the same daily routine, hence they are dodging the watch or standing the dodge watch. In its corrupted form, dodge became dog and the procedure is referred as "dogging the watch" or standing the "dog watch."

Vets: Pickle button - The little red button on the stick that releases the bombs under the wings



Aviation Art 59 ► **Welcome Home Yank**



Welcome Home Yank

by William S. Phillips

A B-24 has lost one engine and streams smoke from another. She's close to the White Cliffs of Dover but not out of trouble. Any second now, the last power may fail. Without enough altitude for a safe bail-out, her crew will brace for ditching and the English Channel is cold and choppy. She's got one thing going for her—a Spitfire Mark IXB of the 403 Squadron based at Kenley-Middlesex has come to meet her and weaves above. If her pilot chooses to ditch, the Spit pilot will tell Air-Sea Rescue. Many Old bomber pilots like recall the exact situation, the irony of struggling out of enemy skies only to go down a few miles from the home base and the joy of seeing an RAF plane coming to ride herd. Built as an interceptor, the Spitfire lacked range for escorting the bombers very far. But all agreed that the plane was a beauty and never more so than when it played Samaritan for its wounded allies. [Source: <http://www.brooksart.com/Welcomehomeyank.html> Mar 2014 ++]

Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial Update 10 ► Save Petition Filed

On 4 Mar the Mt. Soledad Memorial Association (MSMA), represented by Liberty Institute and Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, LLP, filed a petition asking the United States Supreme Court to save the historic 29-foot-tall Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial Cross in San Diego, CA from being torn down. To view the petition online, go to <http://www.libertyinstitute.org/document.doc?id=133>. The MSMA’s petition for the U.S. Supreme Court to grant review of the case, Mt. Soledad Memorial Association v. Steve Trunk, et al., follows a district court’s order in December requiring the removal of the Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial Cross. Erected in 1954, the Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial is the nation’s oldest Korean War Veterans Memorial. It contains over 3,300 plaques honoring individual veterans’ selfless sacrifice and service. “Due to the unique circumstances and the gravity of the Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial case, we wanted to give the Supreme Court an opportunity to take the case now if they choose—since they will be deciding it eventually,” said Liberty Institute President and CEO Kelly Shackelford. We are hopeful that, once and for all, the Court will settle this question of the constitutionality of the Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial, as the fate of hundreds of other similar veterans memorials hang in the balance.”

Bruce Bailey, MSMA President and CEO, said, “The Association is eager to have this case reviewed by the highest court in the land. We built this Korean War veterans memorial with support from The American Legion close to 60 years ago to honor the selfless sacrifice and service of the thousands of veterans who fought for the freedoms we, Americans, enjoy today. The sacrifice of these great men and women must not be in vain. We will continue to depend on the steady hand of leadership of our attorneys and the court system, and I am confident we will ultimately prevail.” Liberty Institute is a nonprofit legal group dedicated to defending and restoring religious liberty across America — in our schools, for our churches, in the military and throughout the public arena. Liberty’s vision is to reestablish religious liberty in accordance with the principles of our nation’s Founders. For information, visit <http://www.LibertyInstitute.org>. [Source: PR Newswire 4 Mar 2014 ++]

Military History ► Battles for Forts Henry, Heiman & Donelson

On May 7, 1861, the state of Tennessee decided to withdraw from the Union and join the Confederacy. Southern leaders hoped Kentucky would follow Tennessee’s example, giving the South a formidable northern boundary on the Ohio River. Kentucky’s decision not to follow Tennessee out of the Union and declare neutrality forced Southern leaders to defend the Tennessee border. Unfortunately for the Confederacy, the Mississippi, Tennessee, and Cumberland Rivers crossed this state border and each river provided opportunity for Union invasion. For the Union to prevail, armies had to be sent into Confederate territory. The Union Army faced the daunting task of occupying and controlling this vast area. In order to accomplish this task, large armies had to be trained, supplied, and moved into the South. Supply lines had to be developed and maintained. The ability to keep this army supplied and reinforced was so critical that victory could not be achieved without the use of rivers and railroads. The Southern strategy of defending its borders to secure their new country required controlling these major transportation routes. In short, controlling the rivers and railroads would be vital for the success of the Union and the Confederacy.

Kentucky’s neutrality was first violated on September 3, when Confederate Brig. Gen. Gideon J. Pillow, acting on orders from Maj. Gen. Leonidas Polk, occupied Columbus. Two days later Union Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, displaying the personal initiative that would characterize his later career, seized Paducah, a major transportation hub

of rail and port facilities at the mouth of the Tennessee. Henceforth, neither adversary respected the proclaimed neutrality of the state and the Confederate advantage was lost; the buffer zone that Kentucky provided was no longer available to assist in the defense of Tennessee. By early 1862, on the Confederate side, a single general, Albert Sidney Johnston, commanded all forces from Arkansas to the Cumberland Gap. But his forces were spread too thinly over a wide defensive line: his left flank was Polk in Columbus with 12,000 men; his right flank was Brig. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner in Bowling Green, Kentucky, with 4,000; the center consisted of two forts under the command of Brig. Gen. Lloyd Tilghman, also with 4,000. Fort Henry and Fort Donelson were the sole positions to defend the important Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, respectively. If these rivers were opened to Union military traffic, two direct invasion paths would lead into Tennessee and beyond. To learn how the Union opened these invasion paths refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, **“Battles for Forts Henry, Heiman & Donelson”**. [Source: <http://usmilitarybattles.com/battles-for-forts-henry--heiman---donelson.html> , U.S. Library of Congress & Armchair Reader Civil War Feb 2014 ++]

WWII Prewar Events ► **Hitlerites Protest Berlin Woolworth Store**



Four Nazi troops sing in front of the Berlin branch of the Woolworth Co. store during the movement to boycott Jewish presence in Germany, in March, 1933. The Hitlerites believe the founder of the Woolworth Co. was Jewish.

Pearl Harbor Day Relics ► **A6M2 Zero Stencil Number Auction**

A rare piece of Pearl Harbor's Dec. 7, 1941, history that even the USS Arizona Memorial museum would like to have in its collection is up for sale on eBay. What is believed by experts to be the stenciled fuselage serial number from Japanese Petty Officer 1st Class Takeshi Hirano's crashed A6M2 Zero fighter started at the bargain-basement

price of 99 cents 4 MAR. As of the evening of 6 MAR the nearly 9-inch serial number 5289, its ragged aluminum edges looking like it was cut out with a can opener, was at \$610 with four days left. Daniel Martinez, chief historian for the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, which includes the Arizona Memorial, said the relic, which he calls "very rare," has a far greater value. "Certainly people have the right to sell artifacts on eBay, but something as important, something that can relate directly to the Pearl Harbor attack, has its value and importance for future generations when it's held by a museum authority that will preserve it and protect it for future generations,"

Martinez said. "Once something like that is purchased privately, very rarely does it get donated." The serial number stencil has taken a nearly 73-year journey since Hirano's Zero violently careened into palm trees and a group of coast artillery men at the entrance of an ordnance machine shop on Fort Kamehameha, which later became Hickam Air Force Base. "The engine, with its bent propellers, mowed down one group of soldiers. Other men were struck by the fuselage and/or wings on the ramp or pinned against the building," wrote military researcher Jim Lansdale. Somehow, the fuselage stencil came into the possession of Jack Dodd, who worked for the Army Corps of Engineers on Oahu, and then his granddaughter in Southern California, and then into a pawnshop, and then onto eBay, according to the pawnshop's owner, Noel Goetz. Goetz said he was consigned the artifact by the owner, who decided to make a "leap of faith" by offering it on eBay at the starting price of 99 cents.

Martinez and other experts have looked closely at photos and concluded that the cut-out aluminum stencil from the Zero's fuselage is the real deal. "There are a lot of people who have done the research on the provenance of this piece every way except downtown, and it's, to me in my mind, unquestionably (what it's advertised to be)," said Mike Wenger, a North Carolina-based military historian. Wenger said another portion of the Zero's fuselage stencil abutting the part that's now for sale is known to be in the southern United States, "and somebody checked the cut marks out of that and it supposedly matches up," he said. "But from the standpoint of the colors and the configuration of the stencil and everything, it appears to be what it is," Wenger said. In the eBay picture, the fuselage marking looks practically brand new. They probably were at the time of the crash, Goetz said "That airplane was probably no more than 4 to 6 months old when it crashed," said Goetz, owner of Ponderosa Coin and Loan in Beaumont, Calif. For many years after that, the stencil was "stored in an envelope and filed away," he said, adding, "It hasn't been in the sunlight."

So how rare is it? "I know that there are any number of collectors all over the country that collect airframe data plates and collect things with aircraft serials on them," said Wenger, the military historian. "There are some of those that exist for Pearl Harbor, but (this) is as close to being a unique piece as you'll ever find." Goetz said he's known the owner, who doesn't want to be identified, for a long time, and for years she was the caretaker of his mother. The owner's mother, Marianne Dodd, moved to Hawaii at 13 with her parents, Jack and Alice Dodd, in 1940, he said. Some of the provenance in the sale of the aircraft stencil includes copies of family photos and excerpts of an account of the family's time in Hawaii put together by Marianne. She recounts how beautiful the islands were on arrival in Honolulu Harbor on July 2, 1940, and how her father, who had come earlier, showed her Pearl Harbor and where he worked. The family rented a big house at 602 Judd St. and took in boarders. At the time, her father was working for the Corps of Engineers at Schofield Barracks.

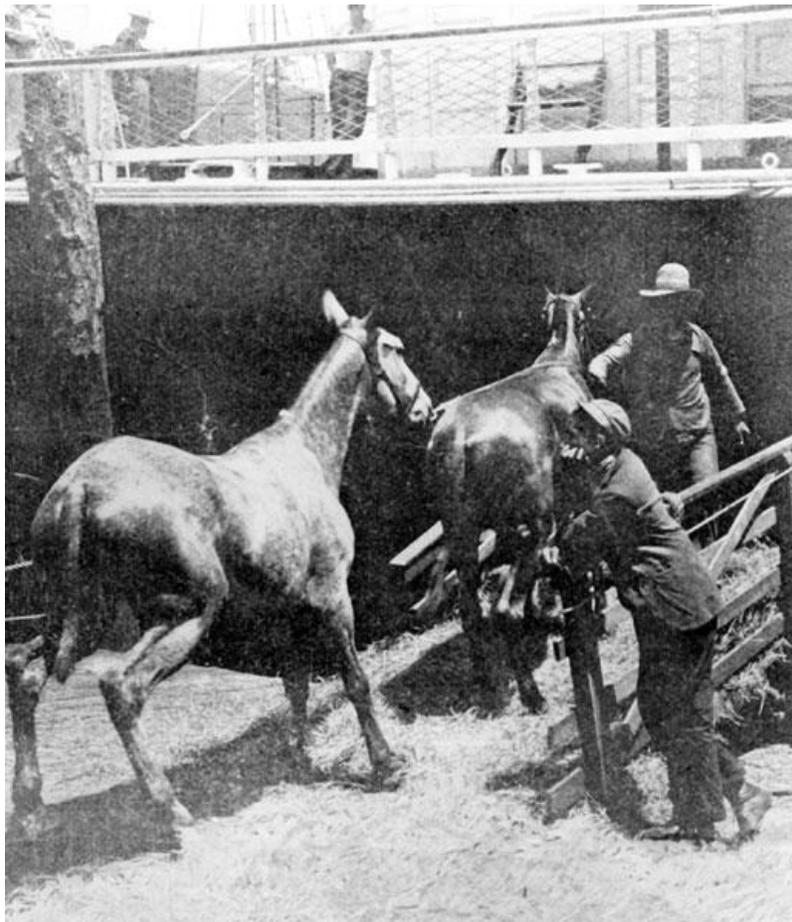
Then came Dec. 7, 1941, and everything changed. "A few of the boarders were welders and they worked day and night on the bottom of the overturned Arizona and other ships, trying to cut into and save the trapped men," Marianne wrote. "They would hear tapping from inside the hulls, but after a few days, the tapping stopped. There were some saved, then they took bodies out and the smell was so bad, the boarders came home so tired and from the smell, could not eat." According to Pearl Harbor historian David Aiken, Hirano and another pilot shot down the first plane of the new war with America a civilian Piper Cub. Hirano and other Zeroes also strafed John Rodgers and Hickam fields, Aiken said. A map taken from the dead Hirano had courses laid out on it that gave clues to the location of the Japanese fleet. Goetz said the owner can't afford to donate the artifact to a museum. Martinez, who is

with the World War II Valor in the Pacific monument, said the stencil is "part of the fabric of history." "The owner can make those kind of decisions (to sell the piece)," Martinez said, "but it would be nice if someone purchased it and then donated it to us." [Source: Honolulu Star-Advertiser | William Cole | 7 Mar 2014 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ▶ 15 Mar thru 15 Apr

Significant events in U.S. Military History are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 15 Mar thru 15 Apr**".

Spanish American War Image 11 ▶ Loading Horses



Loading Rough Riders' horses for transport to Cuba

Faces of WAR (WWII) ► General Anthony McAuliffe Feb 1945



American General Anthony McAuliffe, commander of the 101st Airborne at Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge. February 1945

Health Care



Traumatic Brain Injury Update 32 ► Concussion Coach APP

War often moves medical practices and innovation forward or refocuses research into specific conditions. The knowledge gained by VA medical staff in treatment of traumatic brain injury extends far beyond the care of Veterans of OEF/OIF/OND. While combat injuries to our Servicemembers and injures to professional athletes gain

media attention, TBI is most often caused by falls, vehicle accidents and violence. TBI is a major cause of death and disability worldwide, especially in children and young adults. Sharing the knowledge gained in treatment of mild to moderate concussion VA's Polytrauma/TBI System of Care has developed "Concussion Coach," a mobile application that provides portable tools to assess symptoms and to facilitate use of coping strategies. This mobile app is available to Veterans and the general public and is intended to support treatment with a healthcare professional by providing portable, convenient tools for the user to assess symptoms and cope with concussion-related problems. While the app is a useful tool, it is NOT intended to replace professional diagnosis, medical treatment or rehabilitation therapies for those who need them.

Concussion Coach Mobile App

Available now on the App Store. Coming to Google Play in 2014.

Learn about:

- concussions, related symptoms, and treatment
- ways to improve concentration, thinking, and memory
- types of headaches, how to assess, and available treatments
- sleep and tools to help manage sleep problems
- symptoms of anxiety and PTSD and the relationships to concussions
- irritability and tips to help manage it

Evaluate your symptoms with a self-assessment and receive interpretive feedback, including symptom severity and information about how your score compares to your last assessment.

View previous assessments on a line graph and schedule reminders to take it in the future.

Select a coping tool, or begin by identifying a symptom and indicating your distress from 0 to 10. Based on your rating you will be offered a tool for crisis management or for your specific symptom.

Rate your distress again after using the tools and receive feedback.

Give a thumbs up or down to each tool, making it more or less likely to come up again.

Set goals to keep yourself motivated, track your symptoms and what has been effective in managing them in the Wellness Journal, make a plan to reduce isolation by selecting social activities and adding them to your calendar, and learn about smartphone features that may make it easier to keep up with daily activities and help with recovery.

Connects user with public and private resources to contact when support is needed, information to help user find professional care, and links for more extensive education.

Concussion Coach was a collaborative effort between the Department of Veterans Affairs Rehabilitation & Prosthetic Services, the Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD (NCPTSD), and the Department of Defense National Center for Telehealth and Technology (T2).

Concussion Coach was collaboratively developed by VA's Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services and the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, and the Department of Defense National Center for Telehealth and Technology. Concussion Coach is available for mobile Apple devices (iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch) from the App Store: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/concussion-coach/id713590872?ls=1&mt=8>, and will be available on Google Play later in 2014. [Source: Vantage Point | Randy McCracken | 7 Mar 2014 ++]

DEERS Registration ~ Thailand ► ID Desk Resumes Operations

Joint United States Military Advisory Group, Thailand (JUSMAGTHAI) provides Joint NCOIC Support for DEERS Registration and ID card issuance to the military community residing in Thailand. There is presently a backlog of people requiring this service due to recent problems with their ID card printer. Those problems have been resolved and the ID card printer is back in working condition. This allows the ID desk to resume processing cards. Note that due to the number of people who have called and emailed about the status of the machine it is anticipated that those applying within the next two weeks will experience long waits and waiting times. As the office does not make appointments they may have to cut the line if the number of people waiting is greater than can be handled on a given day.

The ID Card desk is open on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday's from 8:00-11:00 only. Sometimes the system takes time to connect with DEERS/RAPIDS so try and give yourself 30-60 minutes for processing. Also, due to system irregularities it is best to give yourself two days in Bangkok (should the system be down that day). Sponsors are required to be with their spouse at the time of DEERS update/ID Card issuance. For any ID card (retiree, CAC, Dependent) issuance you will need to comply with the following:

- Bring CAC card/ U.S. passport to access the JUSMAG compound;
- Bring two forms of ID (passport & drivers license are fine). Know that the CAC card/retiree ID Card or Dependent ID Card cannot be used as one of the two that need to be scanned into DEERS/RAPIDS. All ID must have a picture and must not be expired.
- Sponsors wishing to update/renew/first issue for Dependent ID Cards are required to be with their spouse at the time of issue. The sponsor will need one other ID card in addition to the military ID.
- First time dependents will need the original marriage certificate, as well (if necessary) the translated into English copy with original stamps from the company that did the translation (photocopies of the translation will not suffice; it must have the original certifiers stamp).

Although they are an authorized DEERS/RAPIDS site, their resources are limited to both the internet connectivity to the main stateside DEERS/RAPIDS Server and availability of ID card stock on hand. They are not authorized to “set aside” any cards for personnel who may be traveling to Thailand and they are not authorized to access the system outside the hours established with DEERS/RAPIDS. The ID desk is located in the JUSMAGTHAI compound at Sathorn Soi 1 (between the German Embassy and Q House Lumpini). Telephone Number (Thailand) 02-287-1036 x180. Telephone Number (Outside Thailand) +66 2-287-1036 x180. [Source: RAO Thailand 10 Mar 2014 ++]

TRICARE Medical Tests ► Two Levels of Coverage

Members of Congress who represent Fort Bragg are pressing defense officials for answers about changes to a military healthcare program. U.S. Sens. Richard Burr and Kay Hagan and U.S. Reps. David Price and Renee Ellmers were among the more than 50 members of Congress to sign a letter sent last month to Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel. The lawmakers said they had concerns regarding Tricare's change in reimbursement policy to exclude certain medical tests from coverage. Those tests include molecular pathology laboratory tests, or MoPath, and other laboratory developed tests, or LDTs. The tests are used to screen for cystic fibrosis, Fragile X Syndrome, spinal

muscular atrophy and common cancers. Reimbursement for some of those tests stopped in 2013, according to the letter. Others are covered only if they are done in a military treatment facility.

In the letter, lawmakers said they are concerned the new policy creates two levels of care within the military health system: one for those with access to military hospitals and another for those who do not. During a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing 5 MAR, Hagan, a Democrat, asked Hagel about the letter and told him of two examples where families were affected by the changes.

- In one example, a military couple expecting a baby was tested prior to 2013 and learned they were both carriers for a gene thought to cause cystic fibrosis. "This testing was covered by Tricare at the time," Hagan said. "Based on these findings, the delivery location was moved to a hospital with neonatal intensive care facilities, and the baby was born in a setting that was able to address a life threatening complication from cystic fibrosis immediately. If these circumstances were to occur today, these same cystic fibrosis tests would not be covered by Tricare, and, if not performed, the baby might have been born in an inappropriate delivery setting."
- In the other example, Hagan said a military retiree in remission from leukemia was billed more than \$1,000 for a blood test needed to monitor his cancer because the test was no longer covered by Tricare. "These tests provide useful information to help physicians determine the best course of treatment for their patients and are widely considered by the medical community to be the normal standard of care," Hagan said. "Tricare needs to move quickly and reverse this decision so that those who have sacrificed so much for our country are not forced to pay out of pocket or forgo them altogether."

In a release, Burr, a Republican, also weighed in on the issue. "Our military's health insurance should adhere to the widely held standards of care accepted by the medical community at large," he said. "Our members of the military and their families should have the same access as other government employees and civilians in the private sector and not be penalized for receiving care at a private facility." The letter, signed by 26 Democrats and 25 Republicans, poses four questions to Hagel and requests an answer by Friday. The letter asks about Tricare's policies for a notification or public comment period for policy changes, what feedback was considered before the change, Tricare's justification for the changes and the Tricare appeals process for services that are not covered by the program.

During Wednesday's hearing, Hagel said changes to Tricare were required for the Department of Defense to find the money to protect training and readiness under tight budgets. "In recent years, Congress has permitted DoD to make some changes that slow the growth in military health care costs; however, these costs will continue to grow, and we need to slow that growth in order to free up funds for training and readiness," Hagel said. "So we need to make some additional smart, responsible adjustments to help streamline, simplify and modernize the system while encouraging affordability." Hagel said more than 90 percent of active-duty service members and their families live within 40 miles of a military treatment facility. [Source: Fayetteville Observer | Drew Brooks | 8 Mar 2014 ++]

Eye Care ► **Injuries Avoidable | 20/20/20 rule**

March is National Save Your Vision Month, and the Defense Department wants service members to take care of their eyes by wearing eye protection when performing dangerous work, reducing eye strain and routinely undergoing eyeDr. Robert Mazzoli, an ophthalmologist at the Vision Center of Excellence at Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, Wash., noted the Iraq and Afghanistan wars of more than a decade produced a historic high in the percentage of eye injuries. "When we were first going into Iraq, eye injuries accounted for 25 percent of all combat casualties," he said. "That's because people weren't wearing their eye protection."



U.S. Army 1st Lt. Anthony Aguilar wears the ballistic protective eyewear that prevented a bomb fragment from possibly damaging his eyes

That was when warfare was different and comprised mostly of artillery, Mazzoli said. After the introduction of improvised explosive devices, he said, eye injuries dropped to about 10 to 15 percent, which still is higher than it's been in the U.S. history of war. After witnessing fellow troops with compromised or lost vision, service members eventually began to understand the importance of wearing their protective eyewear, he noted. The military is assertive about its service members wearing protective eye wear, Mazzoli said. "If you can't see, you can't shoot [and] that becomes ineffective to the unit and the service member," he said.

The military spent a lot of money on improving its eyewear, Mazzoli said. "We have continually modified, improved and refined combat eye protection," for such issues as visual clarity, he said, adding that the combat eye protection the military is fielding is bulletproof and can stop fragments. And since about 2005, commercial eyeglass companies have contracted with the military to make combat eyewear a bit more fashionable too, the doctor said. "Prevention is always better than treatment," Mazzoli said. "The No. 1 point is to wear eye protection even when you don't think you need it, because that's when you're going to wish you had it. "Eye injuries are completely avoidable," Mazzoli said. Even outside the combat arena, some 90 percent of eye injuries that happen at home could be prevented by wearing eye protection, he said.

- Simple activities such as using a hammer, stretching a bungee cord or using weed eaters are common causes of eye injuries when protective eyewear isn't used, Mazzoli said.
- Recreational activities also can take a toll on eye injuries. Basketball is a common source of eye injuries, he said. "Even LeBron James [of the NBA's Miami Heat] wears a big plastic mask because he got elbowed and broke his nose," he said.

When an eye injury occurs, it is critical to not apply pressure to the eye before seeing a doctor to avoid further damage, Mazzoli emphasized. Unlike tight tourniquets and compresses used to stop bleeding in other parts of the body, eye injuries should not be patched, he said. Shielding the eye with glasses or sunglasses is acceptable as long as they do not touch the eye, Mazzoli said. Another approach to keeping eyes healthy is to take breaks from electronics, such as computer monitors, smartphones, tablets, GPS units and other items with screens, because they strain the eye from "near work," he said. Activities such as crocheting, woodworking and reading books also qualify as "near" work, he pointed out. Televisions usually don't apply because they are not close enough to cause eyestrain, Mazzoli said.

For "near" activities, Mazzoli suggests the "20/20/20 rule:" Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds. Routine eye examinations are important to maintaining healthy eyes, he said, adding that a family eye history of a disease such as glaucoma or diabetes dictates how often people should visit their eye doctor. Wearing sunglasses with ultraviolet protection year-round also is important for healthy vision, he said. The eye "is the

window to the body, because [certain] diseases such as hypertension and diabetes can be seen in the back of the eye," Mazzoli said. "If we see diabetic changes going on in the eye, there's a good chance those kinds of changes are happening in the kidney, brain, heart, liver and everywhere else in the body," he pointed out. [Source: AFPS | Terri Moon Cronk | 8 Mar 2014 ++]

Colon Cancer Update 04 ► March Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. Colorectal cancer is the nation's second leading cancer killer of men and women in the United States and a cause of considerable suffering among the 137,000 adults diagnosed with colorectal cancer each year. In 2010, over 52,000 Americans died from this cancer;1 however, when colorectal cancer is detected early, illness and death can be prevented. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is committed to boosting public awareness about the importance of screening and treatment for colorectal cancer. Colorectal cancer poses the greatest risk to adults over the age of 50, and the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends that all individuals aged 50-75 be screened for colorectal cancer as part of routine preventive health care. Currently, about 1 in 3 adults between the ages of 50 and 75 are not receiving recommended screening. These are most likely to be Hispanics, those aged 50-64, men, American Indian or Alaska natives, those who don't live in a city, and people with lower education and income.

With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, a major barrier to regular screening—cost of access to preventive care—has been removed. For the first time in our nation's history, many Americans can receive without cost sharing high value preventive services, such as screening for colorectal cancer and other diseases that threaten health and shorten lives. Colorectal cancer and death from this disease can be prevented thanks to effective screening tools. Many people do not realize that three tests—colonoscopy, highly sensitive stool tests (FOBT, fecal occult blood test, or FIT, fecal immunochemical test) and flexible sigmoidoscopy— are all effective at finding cancer early, and the best test is the test that gets done.

In summary, colorectal cancer screening has been proven to save lives. We are committed to eliminating colorectal cancer as a major public health problem. Increasing the nation's screening rate to 80 percent by the year 2018 is absolutely possible, but there is much work to be done, especially in communities where those without insurance can't regularly access the health care system. We need greater national efforts to inform and remind appropriate patients that they are due for colorectal cancer screening, and ensure that all Americans between the ages of 50 and 75 receive this important life-saving intervention. [Source: Assistant Secretary for Health Statement | Dr. Howard K. Koh | 5 Mar 2014 ++]

TRICARE Emergency Care ► ER or Urgent Care Decision

When we're in pain or sick, we're anxious and it can be hard to think straight. We want relief as soon as possible. When a child is hurt or ill, the anxiety can be even greater. In those moments, it is can be hard to determine if you need to go to the emergency room or if an urgent care center will do. It's important to make that distinction because making the wrong choice will cost both time and money. The general rule of thumb for TRICARE beneficiaries is that if a condition is threatening to life, limb or eyesight, it is considered an emergency and a trip to the emergency room is warranted. TRICARE defines an emergency department as an organized, hospital-based facility available 24 hours a day providing emergency services to patients who need immediate medical attention. Emergency departments affiliated with a hospital are most likely TRICARE-authorized providers. Beneficiaries and their

families will get the appropriate level of care and save money by having urgent care needs met in urgent care facilities.

Over the last two decades, over 9,000 urgent care centers have emerged across the country and this may lead to more urgent care facilities in an area than emergency rooms. However, beneficiaries who seek care at an urgent care facility need to ask if it is affiliated with a hospital-based emergency department. If it isn't, the beneficiary will need to make a decision about getting care elsewhere or being responsible for those facility charges. Beneficiaries can check if a provider is TRICARE-authorized by calling their regional contractor. Contact information for regional contractors is available at www.tricare.mil/callus. Learn more about emergency care under TRICARE at www.tricare.mil/emergency. [Source: Tricare News 26 Feb 2014 ++]

Mental Health Screening Update 05 ► Preservice Conditions Revealed

Almost one in five U.S. soldiers had a common mental illness, such as depression, panic disorder or ADHD, before enlisting in the Army, according to a new study that raises questions about the military's assessment and screening of recruits. More than 8 percent of soldiers had thought about killing themselves and 1.1 percent had a past suicide attempt, researchers found from confidential surveys and interviews with 5,428 soldiers at Army installations across the country. The findings, published online 3 MAR in two papers in JAMA Psychiatry, point to a weakness in the recruiting process, experts said. Applicants are asked about their psychiatric histories, and those with certain disorders or past suicide attempts are generally barred from service. "The question becomes, 'How did these guys get in the Army?'" said Ronald Kessler, a Harvard University sociologist who led one of the studies. A third study looked at the increased suicide rate among soldiers from 2004 to 2009. The study, which tracked almost one million soldiers, found that those who had been deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq had an increased rate of suicide. But it also found that the suicide rate among soldiers who had never deployed also rose steadily during that time. The study did not explain the cause.

The Pentagon did not make officials available Monday to discuss the studies. The three studies are the first from a massive research initiative started in 2009 by the Army and the National Institutes of Mental Health in response to the surge in suicides. In 2011, a representative sample of soldiers was extensively questioned and assessed for a history of eight common psychiatric disorders. Traditionally, the Army has been psychologically healthier than the rest of society because of screening, fitness standards and access to health care. Soldiers committed suicide at about half the rate of civilians with similar demographics. But researchers found that soldiers they interviewed had joined the Army with significantly higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, panic disorder and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder than those in the general population. Most notably, more than 8 percent of soldiers entered the Army with intermittent explosive disorder, characterized by uncontrolled attacks of anger. It was the most common disorder in the study, with a pre-enlistment prevalence almost six times the civilian rate.

"The kind of people who join the Army are not typical people," Kessler said. "They have a lot more acting-out kind of mental disorders. They get into fights more. They're more aggressive." The researchers found that despite screening, pre-enlistment rates of depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and substance abuse were on par with civilian rates. Rates of suicidal ideation, planning and attempts were lower than in the general population but still significant, given the military's practice of excluding recruits with a known suicidal history. During their military service, the soldiers' rates of most psychiatric disorders climbed well past civilian levels, several times the rate for some disorders. A quarter of soldiers were deemed to be suffering from a mental illness - almost 5 percent with depression, nearly 6 percent with anxiety disorder and nearly 9 percent with PTSD. The percentage of soldiers who had attempted suicide rose from 1.1 percent to 2.4 percent.

Matthew Nock, a Harvard University psychologist who led the study on suicide, said more than 30 percent of suicide attempts that occurred after enlistment would have been prevented if the Army had excluded recruits with pre-existing mental health conditions. Nock said he thought the Army should improve its screening of recruits, not to exclude them but to provide treatment to those who acknowledge a history of mental illness. Screening out mentally ill recruits is not as simple as it sounds, because the military largely has to rely on applicants to disclose their mental health histories. "People who want to come into the Army are no fools," said Dr. Elspeth Ritchie, a former chief psychiatrist in the Army. "They know if you say you had a past suicide attempt, you're probably not going to get in."

Dr. Eric Schoomaker, who served as surgeon general of the Army until 2012, said more stringent screening "would just lead to driving the problems further underground." In addition, the military would not meet its recruiting targets if it were able to identify and exclude everybody with a history of mental health problems, experts said. During the peak years of war, as the military was struggling to fill its ranks, some recruiters were known to discourage applicants from disclosing such problems. [Source: Los Angeles Times | Alan Zarembo | 4 Mar 2014 ++]

Tricare News Update 04 ► DoD Proposed Consolidation & Fees

Tricare Prime, Standard and Extra would go the way of the dodo, replaced by a single Tricare plan with a fee structure adjusted to where beneficiaries get medical care, under the Pentagon's proposed fiscal 2015 budget. The proposed \$47.4 billion health care budget would consolidate the three major Tricare programs into a single program starting in January 2016. It would introduce fees for retirees who use military treatment facilities, add enrollment fees for future Tricare for Life beneficiaries and increase prescription drug co-pays for nearly everyone who uses Tricare's retail or mail order pharmacy benefits. Pentagon officials say the biggest change, to consolidate Tricare, is aimed at encouraging beneficiaries to seek care from military facilities or network providers - or pay more out of pocket. "We will ask retirees and some active-duty family members to pay a little more in their deductibles and co-pays, but their benefits will remain affordable and generous ... as they should be," Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said in unveiling the broad outline of the defense budget in late February.

The plan calls for increased "participation fees" - currently called enrollment fees - for retirees and their family members, higher catastrophic caps and cost-shares determined by where the care is received. Active-duty service members would continue to get care from military physicians or facilities at no charge. Their families also would see no change in their costs as long as they go to a military clinic or hospital for treatment. But co-payments for primary care would rise for active-duty family members who get care from network providers, from zero now to \$10 for family members of sponsors in paygrades E-4 and below, and to \$15 for family members of sponsors in grades E-5 and above. Fees also would be created or increased for specialty care, urgent care and emergency room visits, ranging from \$20 to \$50 depending on the sponsor's rank and the type of visit. The cost of out-of-network visits for active-duty family members would rise to 20 percent of the Tricare allowable charge, up from the current 15 percent.

Retirees also would see changes, starting with enrollment fees: Beginning Jan. 1, 2016, annual enrollment fees would rise to \$286 for an individual, up from \$269, and to \$572 for a family, up from \$539. Retirees also would begin making co-payments for services at military treatment facilities, ranging from \$10 for a primary care visit to between \$20 and \$50 for specialty care, urgent care, emergency room and ambulatory surgery. Visits to a network provider for retirees and family members would range from a \$20 co-payment for primary care to \$100 for a

network ambulatory surgery visit. For all out-of-network care, retiree cost-shares would remain at 25 percent of the Tricare allowable amount. Deductibles for out-of-network care would rise for E-4 and below, to \$100 for an individual from \$50, and to \$300 for a family from \$150. For all others, the deductibles would rise to \$300 for an individual from \$150, and to \$600 for a family from \$300. Catastrophic caps for active-duty families would rise to \$1,500 for network or \$2,500 for combined network and non-network visits, and for all others, to \$3,000 for network and \$5,000 combined.

And, reprising an idea it unsuccessfully floated last year, the Pentagon also wants to create new annual enrollment fees for Tricare for Life retirees. Current TFL beneficiaries would not have to pay the fee, but new beneficiaries would pay enrollment fees based on a percentage of gross retired pay - 0.5 percent in 2015 - capped at \$150 a year for a family and \$200 for retired flag and general officers. By 2019, TFL enrollees would pay a fee amounting to 2 percent of gross retired pay, up to a maximum of \$614. Flag officers would pay up to \$818 by 2019. Retirees in TFL also pay monthly Medicare Part B premiums.

One proposal that would touch all Tricare users would be future hikes in co-pays for generic prescriptions purchased through retail pharmacies and increases in brand name drugs, both at retail pharmacies and by mail. Prescriptions would continue to be filled free for everyone at military treatment facilities and generic drugs also would be available at no charge through Tricare's mail order system. Generics would continue to cost \$5 at a retail pharmacy in 2015 but would rise to \$6 in 2016. Brand names would jump in 2015 to \$26 per prescription, up from the current \$17. Medications not on the Tricare formulary also would be tightly restricted; they currently cost \$44 but would be available only on a limited basis starting in 2015. Costs for mail order prescriptions would rise, to \$16 from \$13 for brand name medications. Unlike retail pharmacy prescriptions, medications filled by mail are for 90 days. Nonformulary medications would still be available by mail, with co-pays rising to \$54 from the current \$43.

According to Pentagon estimates, the average active-duty family of three accrues \$11,459 in medical costs per year, with the military bearing \$11,301 of the expense while the family picks up \$158, or about 1.4 percent. Under the new plan, families would bear 3.3 percent of the overall cost, which would drop to \$10,952, accounting for flat health care costs and savings under consolidation. A working-age retiree's family of three accrues \$14,813 in medical costs per year, according to DoD, and pays \$1,378, or 9.3 percent of the cost. Under the plan, they would pay \$1,526, or 10.8 percent, of the estimated \$12,626 cost.

Pentagon comptroller Robert Hale said 4 MAR if Congress does not approve the changes to compensation proposed in the budget plan - not only the Tricare changes, but also changes to housing allowances, basic pay raises, the commissary benefit and more - the Defense Department would see a \$2.1 billion budget shortfall in fiscal 2015 that could grow to as much as \$30 billion by 2024. When asked what reception he thought the budget would receive on Capitol Hill, Hale demurred. "I don't want to get inside their heads. ... I think that they realized there needs to be a balanced package here," he said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | 4 Mar 2014 ++]

DoD/VA Seamless Transition Update 21 ► Unsubstantiated Claims

Last year, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Defense Department shelved plans to jointly develop an integrated EHR system due to cost and schedule challenges, and instead decided to pursue separate efforts to modernize or replace their existing systems. However, according to a new Government Accountability Office [<http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/661208.pdf>], the VA and DOD "have not substantiated their claims that the current approach will be less expensive and more timely than the single-system approach." Ostensibly, VA would modernize its existing Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture system, while DOD

would buy a commercially available system to replace its existing Armed Forces Health Longitudinal Technology Application system, with the departments ensuring interoperability between the two systems.

By September 2014, VA intends to deploy clinical capabilities of its new system at two locations and DOD has set a goal of beginning deployment of its new system by the end of fiscal 2016. Yet, the departments have yet to update their joint strategic plan to reflect the new approach or to disclose what the interoperable EHR will consist of, as well as how, when, and at what cost it will be achieved. "Without plans that include the scope, lines of responsibility, resource requirements, and an estimated schedule for achieving an interoperable health record, VA, DOD, and their stakeholders may not have a shared understanding of how the departments intend to address their common health care business needs," stated the GAO report. In addition, government auditors found that VA and DOD have not addressed management barriers to effective collaboration on their joint health information technology efforts in the areas of enterprise architecture and I.T. investment management, among others. Moreover, the GAO report revealed the two departments have yet to address these barriers by developing a joint health care architecture or a joint I.T. investment management process to guide their collaboration.

Making matters worse, the Interagency Program Office which was established by law to act as a single point of accountability for the departments' development of interoperable health records, "has not implemented the IPO in a manner consistent with effective collaboration," charged the report. To remedy the situation, the GAO recommended that VA and DOD develop and compare the estimated cost and schedule of their current and previous approaches to creating an interoperable electronic health record and, if applicable, provide a rationale for pursuing a more costly or time-consuming approach. Auditors also recommended that the departments develop plans for interoperability and ensure the IPO has control over needed resources and clearer lines of authority. In response, VA and DOD concurred with the GAO's recommendations. [Source: Health Data Management | Greg Slabodkin | 28 Feb 2014 ++]

Finances



Debt Collection Update 04 ► **Military Consumer Complaints Rise 148%**

Debt collection is emerging as a big issue for service members and veterans, according to data released by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau on 6 MAR. Since the agency began accepting complaints in some categories last July, roughly 3,800 complaints specifically about debt collection have been received from military consumers — service members, veterans and their families. A breakout of how many complaints came from active-duty members and their families was not available. Over the same period, the bureau has received 14,100 complaints from consumers in the military community, and has helped them recover more than \$1 million. The complaint volume rose by 148 percent from 2012 to 2013, according to the bureau.

Debt collection has quickly become the highest-volume complaint category for military consumers. Those complaints are about to overtake mortgage complaints as the largest category in terms of cumulative volume. Since the bureau began accepting complaints about mortgages in December 2011, about 4,700 such complaints have been received from the military community. The 3,800 debt collection complaints have been racked up in just seven months. “The sheer volume of debt collection complaints alone makes this an important complaint category [for the CFPB’s Office of Servicemember Affairs],” wrote Holly Petraeus, assistant director for that office, in an introduction to the CFPB report. “Beyond the number, however, I have heard in my many visits to military installations across the country about aggressive and deceptive tactics by debt collectors specifically targeting members of the military.”

Tactics to coerce payment often involve contacting the service member’s chain of command, threatening punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, threatening to have a service member reduced in rank or threatening to have the service member’s security clearance revoked, she wrote. Many of the complaints are not related to monetary relief; the office also has helped military consumers with such problems as correcting credit report errors or opening or closing a bank account. In addition to the 3,800 debt collection complaints and 4,700 mortgage complaints from July 21, 2011, through Feb. 1, 2014, CFPB also has received the following from military consumers:

- 1,700 credit card complaints.
- 1,500 bank account and services complaints.
- 1,200 credit reporting complaints.
- 600 consumer loan complaints.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | 7 Mar 2014 ++]

SBP Premium ► Pentagon Proposed Change

A Defense Department proposal to revamp its Survivor Benefit Program would save money by increasing the premium that retirees pay for coverage. The SBP is provided at no cost to active-duty troops. Retirees also can purchase it to ensure monthly military pension checks continue coming to their spouse in the event of their death. The new Pentagon proposal, part of a broader plan to overhaul the military retirement system, calls for raising the premium cap for retirees from 6.5 percent of each monthly retirement check to 10 percent. At the same time, the maximum payout for beneficiaries would be reduced to 50 percent of retired pay, down from the current payout of 55 percent. The proposal also would limit retirees to two basic options:

- A “full benefit” that would cost 10 percent of gross monthly retirement pay and would continue to pay beneficiaries 50 percent of the military pension.
- A “half benefit” that would cost 5 percent of gross monthly retirement pay and continue paying beneficiaries 25 percent of the military pension.

The proposal was included in a report the Pentagon sent to Congress 6 MAR outlining potential changes to the entire military retirement system. The new proposal also calls for eliminating the offset policy that reduces SBP payments if the survivor is also receiving benefits from the Veterans Affairs Department. That means the net value of a total survivor benefit may increase in some cases. The report notes that survivors also would benefit from the related proposal to shift some of the military retirement benefit away from fixed-income pensions and into a civilian-style investment account that is owned by the service member or retiree. Any funds remaining after death can be passed along to family members. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Andrew Tilghman | 6 Mar 2014 ++]

Death Taxes ► Estate & Inheritance

You know what they say about death and taxes. And when it comes to death taxes, it appears that some states are not good places to die. The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 made permanent a \$5 million federal estate tax exemption, which is indexed annually for inflation. But that doesn't mean you're in the clear. Nineteen states and the District of Columbia have their own estate or inheritance taxes. Maryland and New Jersey impose both. For 2014, up to \$5.34 million of an individual's estate will be exempt from federal estate tax, with a 40 percent tax rate applied to any excess over the exemption amount. By contrast, states with estate taxes typically exempt far less per estate from their tax and impose a top rate of 16 percent. As in the federal system, bequests to a spouse are tax-free. Estate taxes are based on the entire value of your estate in excess of the applicable exemption. Tax rates for states in which they apply are:

- Less than \$1 million exemption – New Jersey and Rhode Island (both 16 percent).
- \$1 million exemption – Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, and the District of Columbia (all 16 percent).
- \$2 million exemption – Connecticut (12 percent), Maine (12 percent) and Washington (19 percent).
- \$5.25 million exemption – Delaware and Hawaii (both 16 percent).

Inheritance taxes are assessed on the value of specific inherited assets in excess of the applicable exemption. The exemptions are zero or otherwise pretty small, except for Tennessee, where it's \$1.25 million for 2013. The maximum tax rates for states in which they apply for 2013 are:

- Iowa – 5 percent.
- Kentucky – 16 percent.
- Maryland – 10 percent.
- Nebraska – 18 percent.
- New Jersey – 16 percent.
- Pennsylvania – 15 percent.
- Tennessee – 9.5 percent.

State inheritance and estate taxes are subtracted from the value of the taxable estate in calculating the federal estate tax. While death taxes alone might not be a reason to move from your beloved home, they are something you should discuss with an estate planning professional. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | 6 Mar 2014 ++]

Train Discounts ► Seniors

On Amtrak travelers 62 years of age and over are eligible to receive a 15% discount on the lowest available rail fare on most Amtrak trains. On cross-border services operated jointly by Amtrak and VIA Rail Canada, a 10% Senior discount is applicable to travelers aged 60 and over. Discount Limitations are:

- The senior discount is not valid on the Auto Train.
- The senior discount is not valid on weekday Acela Express trains.
- The senior discount does not apply to Business class, First class or sleeping accommodation. These upgrades are permitted upon payment of the full accommodation charges.
- The senior discount is not valid for travel on certain Amtrak Thruway connecting services.

- The senior discount may not be combinable with other discount offers; refer to the terms and conditions for each offer.
- Additional restrictions may apply.
- Valid proof of age is required when purchasing your ticket and onboard the train.

For more information, go to <http://seniordiscounts.com/Business/AMTRAK/NA/NA/Serves-most-of-US/NA/38801.html> Mar 2014 ++]

IRS VITA Program ► Free Tax filing Assistance

The IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and the Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) Programs offer free tax help for taxpayers who qualify.

- The VITA Program generally offers free tax help to people who make \$52,000 or less and need assistance in preparing their own tax returns. IRS-certified volunteers provide free basic income tax return preparation with electronic filing to qualified individuals in local communities. They can inform taxpayers about special tax credits for which they may qualify such as Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and Credit for the Elderly or the Disabled. VITA sites are generally located at community and neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls, and other convenient locations.
- The TCE Program offers free tax help for all with priority assistance to people who are 60 years of age and older, specializing in questions about pensions and retirement issues unique to seniors. IRS-certified volunteers who provide tax counseling are often retired individuals associated with non-profit organizations that receive grants from the IRS.

Self-Help Tax Preparation

In addition to traditional face-to-face tax preparation, the IRS is offering a self-assistance service at many VITA and TCE locations. If individuals have a simple tax return and need a little help or do not have access to a computer, they can visit one of the participating tax preparation sites and an IRS-certified volunteer will guide them through the process. There are thousands of VITA sites located across the country. You may find a site near you between January and April using the VITA Locator Tool at <http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Find-a-Location-for-Free-Tax-Prep> or by calling 1-800-906-9887. An example of what you will be provided at the locator tool after entering your zip code is:

Provider	Distance	Dates	Hours Languages	Appointment
PERRIS VALLEY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER 371 WILKERSON AVENUE SUITE L, PERRIS, CA 92570 951-443-1158 Get Directions	2.2 MI	3 FEB 2014 thru 11 APR 2014	English & Spanish	Required

A majority of the TCE sites are operated by the AARP Foundation's Tax Aide Program. To locate the nearest TCE site or AARP Tax-Aide site between January and April use the AARP Site Locator Tool at <http://www.aarp.org/applications/VMISLocator/searchTaxAideLocations.action> or by calling 888-227-7669. If you

use the locator tool simply enter your zip code and a list of sites by distance will be provided along with a map.

Items You Need to Bring. To have your tax return(s) prepared at a VITA or TCE site you need to bring the following information with you:

- Proof of identification – Picture ID
- Social Security Cards for you, your spouse and dependents or a Social Security Number verification letter issued by the Social Security Administration or
- Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) assignment letter for you, your spouse and dependents
- Proof of foreign status, if applying for an ITIN
- Birth dates for you, your spouse and dependents on the tax return
- Wage and earning statement(s) Form W-2, W-2G, 1099-R, 1099-Misc from all employers
- Interest and dividend statements from banks (Forms 1099)
- A copy of last year’s federal and state returns if available
- Proof of bank account routing numbers and account numbers for Direct Deposit, such as a blank check
- Total paid for daycare provider and the daycare provider's tax identifying number (the provider's Social Security Number or the provider's business Employer Identification Number) if appropriate
- To file taxes electronically on a married-filing-joint tax return, both spouses must be present to sign the required forms.

It is extremely important that each person use the correct Social Security Number. The most accurate information is usually located on your original Social Security card. If you do not have an SSN for you or a dependent, you should complete Form SS-5, Social Security Number Application. This form should be submitted to the nearest Social Security Administration Office. If you or your dependent is not eligible to get a Social Security Number, you may need an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). For procedure on how to obtain one refer to [http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Individual-Taxpayer-Identification-Number-\(ITIN\)](http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Individual-Taxpayer-Identification-Number-(ITIN)).

[Source: <http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Free-Tax-Return-Preparation-for-You-by-Volunteers> Mar 2014 ++]

Saving Money ► Air Fresheners

When something stinky takes over your home, the first thing you reach for might be Febreze. But when you run out, you have no choice but to rely on Mother Nature to provide aromatic relief (which, by the way, is better for the environment and your budget). So to help you battle all the stench and smells that life wafts your way, here are 10 natural air fresheners that make breathing more bearable.

1. **Vinegar** - Vinegar is one of the most effective and inexpensive air fresheners around. Just pour distilled white vinegar in a spray bottle and attack the problem areas head on. The vinegar scent may be overpowering at first, but as it evaporates, it'll take the offensive odors with it.
2. **Kitty Litter** - Kitty litter makes sense as a natural air freshener because its main purpose is to mask the scent of a feline's "business," but one litter brand in particular — Jonny Cat Litter — is a cut above the rest, according to Joey Green, author of "Joey Green's Cleaning Magic." The main ingredient in Jonny is diatomaceous earth, a mineral that absorbs odors and moisture in the air. If you can't find Jonny Cat, settle for straight-up diatomaceous earth, which you can find at a garden supply store.
3. **Ground Coffee** - To use coffee grounds as an air freshener, let them dry out (an important step to avoid mold) before transferring to a bowl or wrapping in an old stocking that you'll place in an area that you want to freshen. If

you're not a coffee drinker visit your nearby coffee joint and ask if you can take some of their used grounds off their hands.

4. **Potpourri** - There are many recipes to make all-natural, homemade potpourri, but I thought you might enjoy this video recipe for "green" potpourri. All you'll need is a brown bag, dried flowers (passion, hibiscus), orris root, orange peel, juniper berries, sandalwood, and orange-scented essential oil. You can find all these organic ingredients in a natural herb store.

5. **Vodka** - The reason vodka makes such a great freshener is because it contains ethyl alcohol — the main ingredient in store-bought, chemical-laden fresheners — and when it dries, it leaves no odor. You can, however, enhance the smell of the vodka freshener with an essential oil — about 25 drops will do. And if I may — use the cheap stuff; you're not drinking it, so there's no need to waste the Grey Goose.

6. **Citrus and Spices** - Bring a pot of orange or lemon rinds and peels to a boil, add in a few cinnamon sticks and/or cloves, and enjoy the fresh, festive fall-like scent it sends through your home. While this freshener will begin to work immediately from the stove, there's no reason you can't bottle it for later use.

7. **Essential Oils** - Essential oils are an important part of several of these natural air fresheners in order to give the base a more pleasant scent. But outside of vodka and potpourri, you can add essential oils to just about anything — such as a homemade candle, perhaps — that will help facilitate easier breathing wherever you are.

8. **Baking Soda and Essential Oils** - Combine baking soda and essential oils in a small jar to make a natural air freshener for two reasons: It's small, unassuming, and aesthetically pleasing and it's perfect for gifting.

9. **The Great Outdoors** - Nature is Earth's air freshener — which is something we often overlook. When there's a foul odor permeating your abode, open the window — or several — and let the cool breeze travel through your home while pushing out any offensive stench.

10. **Lemons** - To remove seafood smells for your hands, it's recommended to rub them with lemons. Likewise, when your garbage disposal starts to stink, throw a few lemon slices down the hole and run the blades for a burst of citrusy freshness. When you want to deodorize your home, dissolve one-eighth of a cup of baking soda in two cups hot water and a half-cup of lemon juice for an instant air freshener.

[Source: Wisebread | Mikey Rox | 11 Sep 2012 ++]

Google Wallet Scam ► How It works

Google Wallet is a handy feature that allows you to store all of your loyalty shopper cards in one virtual place, make purchases online via stored credit and debit cards and even send money securely to friends and family. While using the app, all of your financial information is protected and encrypted and the Google Wallet Purchase Protection covers 100% of eligible unauthorized Google Wallet transactions. While this Google feature is both popular and useful, the feature has been exploited recently by **scammers** hoping to steal money from unsuspecting users by creating **fraudulent invoices** that look similar to Google Wallet Checkout invoices.

A typical scam might look like this:

- You are looking to purchase a used car and find one online for an exceptionally good price (almost too-good-to-be-true?).

- You contact the seller (the scammer) and he or she suggests that you use Google Wallet to make the purchase because it will be protected.
- Next, they send you a fake invoice which looks like a Google Checkout invoice, instructing you how much to pay and how to make the payment. However, the transaction is fraudulent and has nothing to do with Google Checkout. The invoice will instruct you to make a payment often via Western Union, MoneyGram or bank transfer.
- The reality is that there is no car, you are not using Google Wallet and the scammer succeeds in stealing your money.

Here are some important **red flags** regarding the Google Wallet scam:

- Google Checkout currently supports payments made by **credit or debit cards only**. If a seller suggests you pay via wire or bank transfer with your Checkout account, don't proceed with the transaction; it's likely fraudulent.
- Scammers may reference certain terms such as "Verified Google Checkout Agent," "Regional Manager," "Purchase Protection Account," or some other form of escrow account in their spoofed invoice. None of these terms are used on Checkout.
- Scammers may request high dollar transactions to be broken down into **smaller payments**, sometimes with each payment going to a different person.
- The price of the goods you are interested in purchasing seems **too-good-to-be-true**, or the seller claims to have the new hot item that is sold out everywhere else.

If you received a fake Google Checkout invoice, you may wish to **file a report** with the appropriate authorities and/or your regional fraud reporting center — such as the Internet Crime Complaint Center (www.ic3.gov), a partnership between the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National White Collar Crime Center. For more information on the Google Wallet purchasing scam, please see this post on the Google website at <https://support.google.com/faqs/answer/2952493?rd=1#vehicle>.

Additionally, if you think you've encountered a scam involving a fraudulent Google Wallet transaction, complete the form at <https://support.google.com/wallet/contact/fraudulent> to provide information to Google. [Source: BBB | Hannah Sassi | 30 Jan 2014 ++]

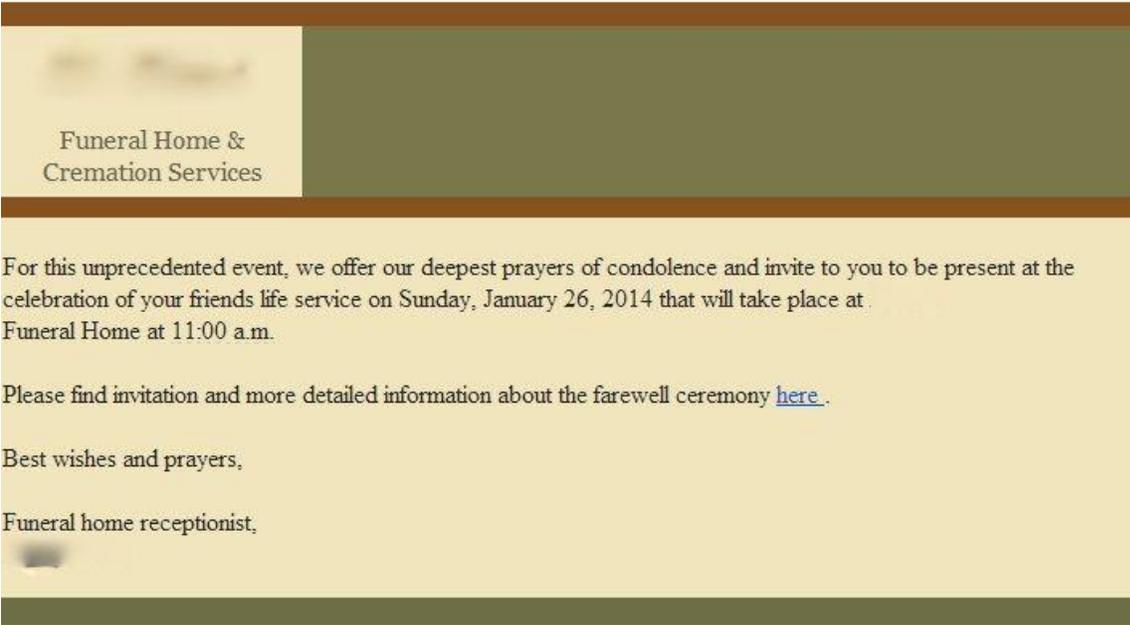
Funeral Email Notification Scam ► **How It works**

Email users are increasingly savvy about spotting scam messages. So scammers are always on the hunt for new ways to evade the "delete" button. This scam email, disguised as a funeral notification, reaches a new low.

How the Scam Works:

You receive an email with the subject line "funeral notification." The message appears to be from a funeral home in Texas, but it could be from anywhere. The email invites you of an upcoming "celebration of your friends' life service." The email looks real. It uses the business's actual colors and logo.

The email instructs you to click a link to view the invitation and "more detailed information about the farewell ceremony." But instead of pointing to the funeral home's website, it sends you to a foreign domain. Scammers place malware on these third party websites that downloads to your computer, giving scammers access to information on your machine.



As usual, watch for scammers changing up this con. They may hijack a different funeral home's name and/or change their message.

Tips to Avoid Email Scams: Spot common email scams no matter the circumstances, by following these tips:

1. **Don't believe what you see.** As in the example above, scammers can easily copy a real business' colors, logo and even email address.
2. **Hover over links to check their source.** Place your mouse over hyper-linked text and the true destination will appear.
3. **Be wary of unexpected emails that contain links or attachments.** As always, do not click on links or open the files in unfamiliar emails.
4. **Beware of pop-ups.** Some pop-ups are designed to look like they've originated from your computer. If you see a pop-up that warns of a problem that needs to be fixed with an extreme level of urgency, it may be a scam.
5. **Watch for poor grammar and spelling.** Scam emails often are riddled with typos.
6. **Ignore calls for immediate action.** Scam emails try to get you to act before you think by creating a sense of urgency. Don't fall for it.

To find out more about scams, check out [BBB Scam Stopper](#). [Source: BBB Scam Alert 31 Jan 2014 ++]

Tax Burden for Illinois Retirees ► As of Mar 2014

Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a

state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retire in Illinois:

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 6.25% (1% on qualifying food, prescription & non-prescription drugs, medical appliances). Local government taxes can raise the total to a high of 10.5%.

Gasoline Tax: 57.5 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 68.9 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$1.98 /pack of 20 (In Chicago, the state and local rate is \$6.15)

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Flat rate of 5 percent received in 2013.

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$2,100; Married – \$4,200; Dependents – \$2,100

Standard Deduction: None

Medical/Dental Deduction: health insurance and long-term care insurance premiums are deductible.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

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

<http://www.revenue.state.il.us/individuals/pension.htm>.

Retired Military Pay: Not taxed.

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

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

Military SBP/SSBP/RCSBP/RSFPP: Generally subject to state taxes for those states with income tax. Check with state department of revenue office.

Property Taxes

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

<http://www.revenue.state.il.us/LocalGovernment/PropertyTax/taxrelief.htm>. The exemption categories are:

- General Homestead Exemption is available annually for owner-occupied residential property. The amount of exemption is the increase in the current year's equalized assessed value (EAV), above the 1977 EAV, up to a maximum of 6,000.
- Senior Citizens Assessment Freeze Homestead Exemption allows senior citizens who have a total household income of less than \$55,000, and meet certain other qualifications to elect to maintain the equalized assessed value (EAV) of their homes at the base year EAV thereby preventing any increase in that value due to inflation.

- Homestead Improvement Exemption is limited to the fair cash value that was added to the homestead property by any new improvement, up to an annual maximum of \$55,000. The exemption continues for four years from the date the improvement is completed and occupied.
- Senior Citizens Homestead Exemption allows a \$4,000 reduction in the EAV of the property that a person 65 years of age or older is obligated to pay taxes on, and owns and occupies, or leases and occupies as a residence. Exemption is limited to the fair cash value that was added to the homestead property by any new improvement, up to an annual maximum of \$45,000. The exemption continues for four years from the date the improvement is completed and occupied.
- Disabled Veterans' Homestead Exemption may be up to \$70,000 of the assessed value for certain types of housing owned and used by a disabled veteran or his or her unmarried surviving spouse. The Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs determines the eligibility for this exemption, which must be reestablished annually.
- Senior Citizens Real Estate Tax Deferral Program allows persons age 65 or older, who have a total household income of less than \$50,000 and meet certain other qualifications, to defer all or part of their real estate taxes and special assessments. The deferral is similar to a loan against the property's market value and a lien is filed on the property in order to ensure repayment to the deferral. The state pays the property taxes and then recovers the money, plus 6 percent annual interest, when the property is sold or transferred.
- Disabled Persons' Homestead Exemption provides a \$2,000 reduction in a property's equalized assessed value to a qualifying property owned by a disable person. An application must be filed annually for this exemption.

Information on the state's Circuit Breaker and Pharmaceutical Assistance programs can be found in the state's Web site at <http://www.cbrx.il.gov>.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

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

For further information, visit the Illinois Department of Revenue site <http://www.revenue.state.il.us/#&panel1-1> or call 800-732-8866. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-alabama-iowa#ILLINOIS> Mar 2014 ++]

Thrift Savings Plan 2014 ► Share Prices + YTD Gain or Loss

TSP Share Prices for 12 Mar 2014

	Close	YTD
<u>G Fund</u>	\$14.3530	+0.46%
<u>F Fund</u>	\$16.0436	+1.92%
<u>C Fund</u>	\$24.2427	+1.54%
<u>S Fund</u>	\$34.9124	+3.69%
<u>I Fund</u>	\$25.4441	-0.47%
<u>L 2050</u>	\$14.2627	+1.42%
<u>L 2040</u>	\$25.1713	+1.36%

L 2030	\$23.7425	+1.21%
L 2020	\$22.0204	+1.03%
L Income	\$16.9428	+0.75%

[Source: <http://tspcenter.com/tspReturns.php?view=year> 13 Mar 2014 ++]

General Interest



Notes of Interest ▶ 1thru 14 Mar 2014

- **CPI.** The Consumer Price Index jumped up in January to 230.040. It now stands only 0.1 percent below the FY2014 COLA baseline of 230.327.
- **AF Promotion.** The Air Force is planning to require lieutenant colonels to have a master’s degree before they can receive promotion to colonel.
- **Thank you for your Service.** Check out <http://offthebase.wordpress.com/2014/03/03/a-gold-star-kid-and-a-20-bill/> to see how a young boy feels about soldiers.

Driver’s License Points ▶ **Impact on Car Insurance**

Scoring points is a good thing, unless it’s on your driving record. Still, if you know how your state’s point system works, you’ll have a better game plan for keeping your license — and your auto insurance.

Here are 10 things every driver should know:

1. Auto insurance companies don’t rely on state motor vehicle department point systems — they use their own. Both state motor vehicle departments and insurance companies use point systems to track driving performance, but they are separate assessments. DMV points are applied when you are convicted of certain traffic violations. If you accumulate too many points within a certain period of time, your license is typically suspended or revoked. Insurers don’t generally pay much attention to DMV points because they use their own point system when deciding how much to raise your rate. Based on the infraction, your rates rise by a predetermined amount at certain thresholds. “For example, one Minnesota insurer assigns four points to a chargeable accident with a claim of \$750 or more and three points to a speeding conviction for 10 mph over the limit. Its surcharge schedule shows the rate for a driver with seven points would be multiplied by 1.27 — that is, a 27 percent increase,” says Penny Gusner, consumer analyst for CarInsurance.com.

2. Not all states use point systems. There are nine states that don’t use points to keep track of bad drivers, but that doesn’t mean you’re off the hook if you rack up violations. These states simply monitor your driving record to determine if your license should be suspended or taken away. For instance, in Oregon, if you have four accidents or four convictions — or a combination that totals four — in a 24-month period, you lose your license for 30 days. And because auto insurers review your driving record, violations can affect your rates. States that don’t have a driver’s

license points system are: , Hawaii, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wyoming

3. Violation points add up and can result in losing your license Most moving violations result in points on your record. For example, reckless driving, speeding, illegal turns, not making a complete stop, drunken driving and at-fault accidents all incur points. Each state assesses points under its own laws, but the more serious the violation, the more points you get. Penalties for too many violations or accidents on your record vary greatly from state to state.

In California, points ranging from zero to three are assigned based on the severity of an offense. Your license will be suspended for six months and you'll be on probation for a year if you get:

- Four points in 12 months.
- Six points in 24 months.
- Eight points in 36 months.

4. Some violations don't trigger points, but you still have to pay the ticket – and insurance increase. In general, non-moving violations and minor offenses will not result in a point assessment. That means parking tickets and fix-it tickets for things like broken lights will not add points, though you still have to pay the fine. In some states, though, serious violations such as DUI mean an automatic license suspension, so no points are given, but your auto insurance rates will certainly go up. For instance, an Insurance.com analysis found that a ticket for DUI means an average rate increase of 19 percent.

5. Texting tickets can ring up driving points. Forty-one states ban texting while driving, but less than half consider texting behind the wheel a moving violation. If you're ticketed in a state where texting violations add points to your driving record or are considered moving violations, an insurer may raise your premiums upon review of your driving record. States with a texting law specifying that violations add points and/or are considered a moving violation include:

- Alabama — two points.
- Colorado — one point.
- District of Columbia — one point and is a moving violation; three points if it is judged to have caused an accident.
- Florida — three points and a moving violation for a second ticket within five years; two points if a texting ticket is issued in a school safety zone; six points if it's found that unlawful use of a wireless communications device results in a car crash.
- Georgia — one point.
- Kentucky — three points.
- Maryland — one point and a moving violation; three points if the texting contributed to an accident.
- Missouri — two points.
- Nebraska — three points.
- New York — five points.
- New Jersey — three points for a third offense.
- North Dakota — moving violation.
- Nevada — first offense not considered a moving violation; repeat offenses add four points.
- Vermont — two points for first offense and five points for a subsequent offense.
- Virginia — three points.
- West Virginia — three points for a third offense.
- Wisconsin — four points.

6. Points can stick to your record for one to 10 years, depending on the violation and your state laws. In many states, driving record points dog you for two to three years for lesser offenses, but there are exceptions. For instance,

in Virginia and Michigan, points stick for two years from the date of conviction. In California, points for minor offenses remain on your record for three years, but DUI and hit-and-run points last for 10 years. In Nevada points stay on your record for just a year, but major offenses including DUI result in automatic license suspension, rather than points.

7. If you get a ticket and points on your license, there are ways to ease the insurance pain. Many states allow you to take a defensive driving course to dismiss a violation before it shows up on your record, with the exception of major offenses such as DUI. Rules vary so check with your state insurance commission to find out details. In Virginia, drivers also earn “safe driving points” in addition to demerit points. Safe driving points are assigned for each full calendar year that you hold a valid Virginia driver’s license and drive without any violations or suspensions. You can accumulate a total of five safe driving points and you may use these safe driving points to offset demerit points.

8. Some states assign license points even if you’re not driving a car. In Michigan, if you are convicted of DUI on a snowmobile or other off-road recreational vehicle, points can haunt your driving record.

9. When children are involved, seat belt tickets may mean points. You won’t typically get points if cited for failing to wear your seat belt, but in New York, if you are ticketed for having a child in the car under age 16 without a seat belt, the violation adds three points to your driving record.

10. In some states, if you’re busted by a red-light camera, you get a ticket but not points. Typically, if you get a ticket for running a red light, you also get driver’s license points. But in some states, if you are caught by a red-light camera, you don’t get points. Other states tack on points for running red lights regardless of whether a camera or a cop busts you. For example, Arizona assesses two points for red-light tickets, from either a camera or law enforcement. New Jersey, however, tacks on two points only if you get a traditional ticket from a police officer.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Michelle Megna | 11 Mar 2014 ++]

Wreaths Across America Update 10 ► Military Graves Xmas Wreaths



During the holiday season, Americans give billions of gifts to family and friends. Most of those gifts receive a warm reception, but not all. Each December, when the folks working with an organization called Wreaths Across America (WAA) present some very special gifts to a very special group of people, the moment is solemn. No words are spoken, but the impact is enormous. WAA has been transporting and laying red-bowed remembrance wreaths upon the graves of U.S. soldiers since 1992. The annual effort is part of the nonprofit's mission to remember, honor and teach about veterans' service and sacrifices. Even though WAA has volunteers throughout the country, they rely on others to help them cover as many gravesites as possible. In 2008, Schneider National signed on to help move wreaths from Harrington, Maine to cemeteries throughout the country. The company's specially decorated Ride of

Pride truck is now a staple in the convoy of vehicles bringing wreaths to Arlington National Cemetery, site of the largest wreath-laying event.



On December 14, 2013, two Ride of Pride tractors and their U.S. veteran drivers helped deliver over 140,000 wreaths to Arlington. That same day, four other Schneider trucks, including two Ride of Pride trucks, also participated in the second largest ceremony in the country. The drivers helped place over 40,000 wreaths on gravestones at Houston National Cemetery. "Wreaths Across America Day is an enormous effort that depends heavily on trucks, trailers, professional drivers, a dispatching system, and plenty of wreath sponsorships," Karen Worcester, WAA's executive director said. "We know that the cost of operating trucking equipment is expensive—especially fuel." In 2013, Schneider and the program's other motor carrier partners transported 500,000+ wreaths. "It's an amazing commitment that truly shows what values the trucking industry stands for," Worcester continued. To learn more about Wreaths Across America, go to www.wreathscrossamerica.org. [Source: Mil.com Schneider National | 28 Feb 2014

Rental Rights & Responsibilities – Landlords ► Do You Know?

Even as demand for rental housing remains very strong, there is a great deal of confusion over existing rental laws among many landlords, and among tenants themselves, according to a Zillow Rentals survey. On average, renters and landlords answered about half of survey questions incorrectly (47 percent incorrect for renters / 50 percent for landlords) when asked about their respective rights and responsibilities.

- 82% of renters / 76% of landlords lack understanding of laws on security deposits, credit and background checks.
- 77% of renters / 69% of landlords lack understanding of privacy and access rights.
- 62% of renters / 50% of landlords lack understanding of laws on early lease termination.

The survey included those who rent the home they live in ("renters") and those who own the home they live in and own one or more additional homes, which they rent to a tenant ("landlords"). Renters and landlords alike demonstrated the least amount of knowledge around credit and background checks, security deposits, early lease termination, and privacy and access rights. Both renters and landlords showed the most knowledge around discriminatory advertising for rentals, responsibility for repairs and maintenance, and requirements around terminating month-to-month agreements. "While rental laws vary by state and local jurisdiction, there are some important rules that affect just about everybody. Every landlord and renter should take time to research and understand their rights." To see how knowledgeable you are check out the following true or false questions:

1. This is an example of a legal advertisement for a rental property: *"Two-bedroom, two-bath unit, perfect for female roommates. \$800 per month plus utilities."*

2. As a landlord, I am allowed to reject an applicant if I discover he or she has been convicted of illegal drug use while living in a previous rental.
3. When a tenant moves out, federal law states that the landlord has no more than 60 days to either return the tenant's entire security deposit or provide an itemized statement of deductions and refund any deposit balance.
4. As a landlord, you must make yourself, or someone you designate to act on your behalf, available to your tenants 24 hours a day in the event of an emergency.
5. As a landlord, if my tenant's dog or other animal bites someone, I am not legally liable, unless I am living in the same building.
6. If I need to rent my home to one of my family members, I have the right to terminate the current lease as long I give three months notice.
7. As of 2010, laws in most states allow landlords to send eviction notices by email.
8. After a lease has expired or gone month to month, the landlord must give 30 days notice before terminating the lease.
9. It is illegal to deduct the mortgage interest paid for my rental property on my taxes.
10. As a landlord, it is within my right to enter the rental property to make emergency repairs whenever I need to.

Answers

1. **False.** All landlords are required to follow the provisions of the Fair Housing Act prohibiting discrimination in advertising. You may not make any statement in an ad or notice that indicates a preference, limitations or discrimination based on race, color, sex, national origin, family status (e.g., number of children) disabilities or religion
2. **False.** While you may reject an applicant for any other criminal conviction, you cannot reject someone with a conviction for drug use; you can, however, reject a person who has been convicted of manufacturing or selling drugs, or who currently uses illegal drugs.
3. **False.** Security deposits are strictly regulated by state law and sometimes by city ordinance. While laws vary from state to state, in most states, the limit for returning a security deposit is between 14 and 30 days.
4. **True.** You must make yourself, or someone you designate to act on your behalf, available to your tenants 24 hours a day in the event of an emergency.
5. **False** If a person injured by a vicious animal can prove to the insurance adjuster (or a jury) that the landlord knew (or should have known) that the animal had dangerous tendencies, and failed to take reasonable steps to prevent the injury (such as demanding that the animal leave the property or evicting the tenant), the landlord may be held liable.
6. **False.** You may not evict a tenant during the term of the lease because you would prefer to rent the unit to a friend or family member, or someone willing to pay higher rent.
7. **False.** The eviction process is lengthy, and it is important for the landlord to follow the law, which varies from state to state. Nearly everywhere, though, landlords are required to file with the local court and arrange to have the tenant properly serviced with a summons or complaint as the first step in the eviction process. This usually requires having an authorized person attempt to physically deliver the legal notice to the tenant face to face. Check with your attorney for the requirements in your area.
8. **False.** You can terminate any month-to-month tenancy with proper notice (30 days in most states). You needn't give a reason, as long as your motives aren't discriminatory or retaliatory. For a tenancy governed by a lease, you'll have to wait until it expires on its own at the end of the lease term. You generally are not required to renew a lease.
9. **False.** While rental income from the property is taxable, you can deduct most of the expenses related to owning and maintaining the property - including mortgage interest, insurance, repairs and upkeep, business expenses and professional fees. Additionally, you can take an annual tax deduction for depreciation.

10. **False.** Landlords typically cannot enter without a tenant's permission unless they give advance notice, generally at least 24 hours beforehand.

[Source: <http://www.zillow.com/rentals/quiz/> Feb 2014 ++]

Photos That Say it All ► Where's the Sugar



They Grew Up to Be? ► Mother Theresa

This beautiful heiress from a wealthy family named the Viachs of Albania was Agnes Bolagiu n but she became...

Mother Theresa

The image contains two side-by-side photographs. The left photograph shows a young girl with dark hair, wearing a dark, patterned dress with a white collar. The right photograph shows an elderly woman wearing a white headscarf with a blue stripe and a blue and white striped scarf. Below the photographs is a caption in white text on a black background, and the name 'Mother Theresa' is written in yellow text below the right photograph.

Have You Heard? ► Alzheimer's Test

The following was developed as a mental age assessment by The School of Psychiatry at Harvard University. Take your time and see if you can read each line aloud without a mistake. The average person over 50 years of age cannot do it!

1. This is this cat.
2. This is is cat.
3. This is how cat.
4. This is to cat.
5. This is keep cat.
6. This is an cat.
7. This is old cat.
8. This is fart cat.
9. This is busy cat.
10. This is for cat.
11. This is forty cat.
12. This is seconds cat.

Now go back and read the third word in each line from the top down.

Interesting Inventions ► Bike Pack



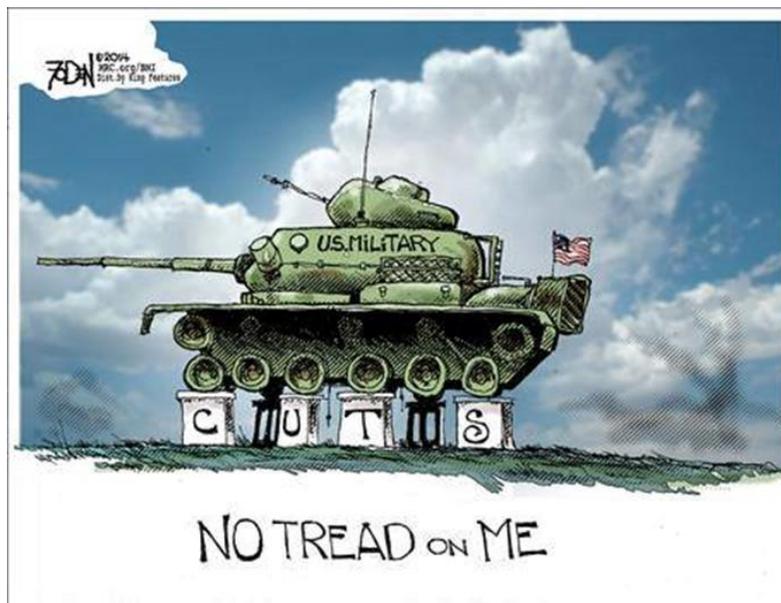
“Troops may complain about compensation and benefit cuts in the Defense Department's budget proposal, but they will accept them.”

--- **Gen. Martin Dempsey** (1952 – TBD), 18th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff comment regarding the Pentagon’s Budget Proposal to Congress.





“FIRST COMES FAT TUESDAY, THEN ASH WEDNESDAY, FOLLOWED BY TEMPTATION THURSDAY.”



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Notes:

1. The Bulletin will be provided as a website accessed document 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. Readers 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 16,995 subscribers who have responded to date.

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 entering the email addressee raoemo@sbcglobal.net into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either <http://www.veteransresources.org> (PDF & HTTP Editions), <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTTP Editions), or <http://www.nhc-ul.com/rao.html> (PDF Edition) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at any of these sites let me know. 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 current mailing list.

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