

# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 15 May 2014

### PDF Edition

THIS BULLETIN CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

<u>Pg</u>	<u>Article</u>	<u>Subject</u>
<b>*DOD*</b>		
04 ==	Arlington National Cemetery [47] ----	(Still Holds Secrets @ 150)
06 ==	DoD Benefit Cuts [41] ---	(Pentagon Leaders Make A Last Stand)
07 ==	Traumatic Brain Injury [35] -----	(30K+ Undocumented TBIs)
09 ==	Commissary Case Lot Sales -----	(Returning in AUG)

<b>*VA*</b>		
09 ==	FHCC Chicago IL -----	(Final Salute Policy)
12 ==	VA Healthcare Stories-----	(What's Yours?)
12 ==	GI Bill [172] -----	(TEB Program Rules)
12 ==	VA Secretary [19] ----	(American Legion Demands Resignation)
13 ==	VA Secretary [20] -----	(Will Not Step Down   Urges Patience)
15 ==	VA Secretary [21] -----	(Let Him Do his Job)
16 ==	PTSD [166] -----	(Service Dog Treatment Study)
18 ==	VA Pain Management [04] -----	(Alternative Treatments Pushed)
19 ==	VA PACT -----	(Patient Aligned Care Teams)
20 ==	VA Bonuses [14] -----	(House Passes Ban Amendment)
20 ==	VAMC Phoenix AZ [02] -----	(VA Secretary Issues Statement)
22 ==	VAMC Phoenix AZ [03] -----	(2nd VA Doctor Comes Forward)
23 ==	VAMC Phoenix AZ [04] -----	(EWL Guidelines Not followed)
24 ==	VAMC Cheyenne WY ---	(Fort Collins Clinic Falsified Records)
24 ==	VAMC San Antonio TX -----	(More Wait Time Manipulations)
25 ==	VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse -----	(Reported 1 thru 15 May 2014)
26 ==	VA Loans -----	(Closing   What to Expect)
27 ==	VAVA -----	(Group Formed to Eliminate VA)

<b>*VETS*</b>		
28 ==	Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act [03] ----	(Vet Loan Settlement)

- 29 == National Coast Guard Museum ----- (Ground Broken)
- 29 == Flathead National Park Memorial [01] ----- (Retention Ruling)
- 30 == Wall That Heals [02] ----- (Additions & Changes)
- 32 == Burn Pit Lawsuit [02] ----- (Alan Metzgar et. al. v. KBR Inc)
- 33 == Bladensburg WWI Vet Memorial ----- (Lawsuit)
- 34 == POW/MIA [28] ----- (Wauwilermoos Airmen Medal Recipients)
- 36 == POW/MIA Recoveries ----- (140501 thru 140514)
- 38 == OBIT | Buska~Donald ----- (29 Apr 2014)
- 39 == OBIT | Barrios~Hector ----- (Apr 2014)
- 40 == Vet Jobs [151] ----- (Unemployment Rates Continue to Fall)
- 41 == Vet Jobs [153] ----- (U.S. Cyber Warrior Scholarship Program)
- 42 == Vet Job Opportunities ----- (Johnson&Johnson)
- 42 == Retiree Appreciation Days ----- (As of 12 May2014)
- 42 == Vet Hiring Fairs ----- (15 May thru 15 Jul 2014)
- 44 == WWII Vets 63 ----- (Buxton~Winslow)
- 46 == State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ----- (Wisconsin 2014)
- 47 == America's Most Beloved Vets ----- (American Revolution 1)

**\*VET LEGISLATION\***

- 48 == Vet Jobs [152] ----- (Hire More Heroes Act H.R.3474 & S.2190)
- 48 == NDAA 2015 ----- (Clears HASC 61-0)
- 49 == DECA Budget Cuts [10] ----- (HASC Considering \$100M Cut)
- 50 == Vet Bills Submitted to 113th Congress ----- (As of 12 May 2014)
- 51 == Veteran Hearing/Mark-up Schedule ----- (As of 13 May 2014)

**\*MILITARY\***

- 53 == DoD Benefit Cuts [41] ----- (Troop Survey Launch)
- 54 == Coastal Command Boat ----- (New Brown-Water Navy Vessel)
- 55 == USS Saratoga (CV-60) ----- (Navy Pays \$0.01 to Scrap)
- 56 == Soldier for Life Website ----- (New Online Home for Retirees)
- 57 == USNS Spearhead (JHSV 1) ----- (Maiden Voyage a Success)
- 58 == Upward Falling Payload ----- (Navy Cost-Cutter Project)
- 59 == Army Ranger Beret ----- (Petition)
- 60 == DoD Mobilized Reserve 29 APR 2014 ----- (Decrease of 937)
- 60 == Medal of Honor Citations ----- (Thomas~Charles L WWII)

**\*MILITARY HISTORY\***

- 63 == Aviation Art ----- (One the Hard Way)
- 63 == Polar Bears Monument ----- (Addition to NRHP Effort)
- 65 == D-Day [06] ----- (Dutch Minister Pays Tribute at Arlington)
- 67 == WWII PreWar Event ----- (Hitler / Mussolini Meeting 1934)
- 67 == Military History ----- (Revolt of the Admirals)
- 68 == Military Trivia ----- (Operation Little Vittles)
- 69 == Military History Anniversaries ----- (16 May - 15 Jun)
- 69 == Arlington National Cemetery [48] ----- (Origin)
- 71 == Spanish American War Image 44 ----- (Troops en route to Cuba)
- 71 == Faces of WAR (WWII) ----- (Eddie Rickenbacker)

**\*HEALTH CARE\***

- 72 == MERS-CoV ----- (GEIS Detects Earliest-Known Cases)
- 73 == Medical Marijuana ----- (Health Insurers Won't Be Paying For It)
- 74 == Traumatic Brain Injury [36] ----- (SMART Program)
- 75 == Insomnia ----- (Having trouble sleeping?)
- 76 == Ankle Sprains ----- (Cause and Treatment)
- 78 == VA Medical Records [01] ----- (Backlogged Consults Cancelled)
- 80 == TMOP [17] ----- (TFL Pilot Program Options)

**\*FINANCES\***

- 81 == Price Coding ----- (How to Determine if it is a Deal)
- 81 == Homeownership [01] ----- (Tax Liens | Do You Owe Interest?)
- 82 == Saving Money ----- (Plumbers 2 | Tricks of the Trade)
- 84 == Craigslist Job Scam ----- (How It works)
- 85 == Lottery Scam w/CPB ----- (How It works)
- 86 == Tax Burden for Louisiana Retirees ----- (As of May 2014)
- 87 == Thrift Savings Plan 2014 ----- (Share Prices + YTD Gain or Loss)

**\*GENERAL INTEREST\***

- 88 == Notes of Interest ----- (1 thru 14 May 2014)
- 88 == WWII Vet Incarcerated ----- (Decorated Vet Age 90 Gets 3-yrs)
- 89 == Mothers Day 2014 Index --- (Equivalent Pay for What She Does)
- 90 == Landline Phone Service ----- (Reasons Not to Cancel)
- 91 == Forced Arbitration ----- (Cable Company Contracts)
- 92 == Have You Heard? ----- (The Bagpiper)
- 93 == Photos That Say it All ----- (Memorial Day)
- 94 == They Grew Up to Be ----- (Arnold Schwarzenegger)
- 94 == Interesting Inventions ----- (Hidden Power Outlet)
- 95 == World Peace Day ----- (21 SEP 2014)

**\*ATTACHMENTS\***

- Attachment - Veteran Legislation as of 12 May 2014
- Attachment - Wisconsin Vet State Benefits & Discounts May 2014
- Attachment - The Revolt of the Admirals
- Attachment - Military History Anniversaries 16 May thru 15 Jun
- Attachment - Retiree Activity\ Appreciation Days (RAD) Schedule

**\*DoD\***



## Arlington National Cemetery Update 47 ► Still Holds Secrets @ 150

A lingering image for any Arlington National Cemetery visitor — more than caissons bearing the soon-to-be-interred or even the white-gloved honor guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier — is the perfect symmetry of alabaster headstones endlessly arrayed. The stone sentinels give up their dead only on close inspection to visitors who leave pathways to gingerly step close and read the black lettering etched into marble. “Christopher David Horton, Spc. U.S. Army, Afghanistan, Oct. 1, 1984, Sept. 9, 2011, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Valiant Warrior, Fearless Sniper” are words on one of more than 900 graves from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars in the cemetery’s Section 60. For the dead — like Horton, killed in a hail of enemy AK-47 fire — the words are a spare summary of sacrifice; what Abraham Lincoln called “the last full measure of devotion.” More than 400,000 are buried here. The epitaphs are reminders that ever since Union Army Pvt. William Henry Christman became the first to be buried here on May 13, 1864 — 150 years ago Tuesday — this place has always been less about grandeur, stone and protocol than about people.



Navy Secretary Ray Mabus touched on this theme before a congregation at an Arlington burial service a year ago for two sailors killed in war: “We are joined as Lincoln again reminded us by ‘the mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and every patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone.’” The sailors’ remains were recovered years earlier from the sunken wreckage of the USS Monitor, famed for battling a Confederate ironclad to a draw in 1862. As the Civil War dead were carried to their Arlington graves, hundreds gathered. Scattered throughout were sailors of today in dress uniforms eager to link with this moment, each crisply saluting from wherever they stood. The place is about people.

It was the bitterness of Quartermaster Gen. Montgomery Meigs that first led to the cemetery’s creation. Angry that his former mentor, Robert E. Lee, had joined the rebellion and desperate for more space to bury the accumulating dead of the Civil War, Meigs recommended that the Lee estate overlooking Washington be turned into a graveyard. Burials had already begun by the time approval came through on June 15, 1864. A century later, it was with a simple nod of her head that Jacqueline Kennedy acquiesced to the gravesite for her husband on the slope below the Lee Arlington House. She insisted that the assassinated president be laid to rest in a public, accessible place because “he belongs to the people.” A half-century after that, it was the outpouring of grief by young widows, parents and battle buddies that led to the only consistent splash of color within 624 acres of cemetery — the balloons, childhood drawings, stuffed Easter bunnies and unopened bottles of beer left on the graves of Iraq and Afghanistan war dead.

The now-widely recognized Section 60 is a long stroll from popular tourist sites such as the Kennedy grave and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Unlike the deceased retired military that make up most of the 27-30 burials that occur at Arlington each day, the dead of Section 60 were so young, that the grieving here is far more intense. So it is a place where a grieving father may be seen laying prostrate on his son’s grave or where a mother sits in a thunderous downpour unaware that her lawn chair is sinking into a softening earth. Those who mourn regularly have coalesced into a kind of club, but one that one mother conceded “nobody wants to be in.” For visitors who stroll the

walkways or ride the trolleys across the cemetery, there are more stories than a single trip can encompass. Here are seven seldom-known facts about the people of Arlington National Cemetery:

- For decades, an area south of the cemetery was home to thousands of former slaves. They began filtering into the capital area shortly after Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, hundreds settling near Arlington House. Freedman’s Village was born and thriving with a school, hospital and church until disbanded about 1900, the land eventually included in the cemetery. About 3,200 unmarked contraband graves remain.
- Among the more infrequent of headstones at Arlington are those with gold lettering against the white marble. There are 403. These signify that the buried service member received the highest valor award — a Medal of Honor. One of the more recent belongs to 19-year-old Army Spc. Ross McGinnis, who lowered himself onto a grenade thrown inside the Humvee he was riding in Iraq in 2006.
- When John F. Kennedy was assassinated, his younger brother, Robert, urged that the grave be adorned with a simple white cross. He was overruled by his brother’s widow, Jackie. After Robert was assassinated five years later, he was laid to rest near his brother, the grave marked with a simple, white wooden cross. The same now adorns the nearby grave of Edward “Ted” Kennedy. They are the only two wooden crosses in the cemetery.
- Among 16,000 Civil War dead buried at Arlington, including several hundred Confederate soldiers, is the son of cemetery founder Montgomery Meigs. Lt. John Rodgers Meigs died in a skirmish in October 1864. His father later had him re-interred at Arlington beneath a tomb depicting in statuary the lieutenant’s death scene, his body laying in the mud amid trampling hoof-prints of Confederate horses.
- Amid the head-stone covered hills of Arlington is one bare but for three graves representing two generations and two wars. One is the grave of Gen. John “Black Jack” Pershing, who led U.S. forces in World War I. Nearby are two grandsons: John W. Pershing, an Army veteran who died 1998 and Richard W. Pershing, killed in Vietnam in 1968. Along the slopes of the hill are buried troops the elder Pershing commanded.
- Three of the seven service members depicted in the iconic Marine Corps Memorial, showing the flag raising on Iwo Jima, are buried at Arlington. Two, Ira Hayes and Rene Gagnon, survived the battle and lived to see the memorial built just outside the cemetery. The third, Michael Strank, was killed in combat six days after the famous AP photo that inspired the statue was taken.
- A very rare group at the cemetery are the 184 victims of the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon. They are represented as co-mingled, unidentified remains buried under a memorial. There are individual victim graves nearby. One person whose remains were never identified was a 3-year-old girl aboard American Airlines Flight 77 that struck the Pentagon. The site is in a distant southeast corner of the cemetery several hundred feet from the Pentagon. It is unique in Arlington to be buried so close to where death occurred, cemetery officials say.

•



**Honor Guards Pvt. 1st Class Martin, left, and Spc. Holland stand guard at the Arlington House.**

[Source: USA Today | Gregg Zoroya | May 11, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **DoD Benefit Cuts Update 41 ► Pentagon Leaders Make A Last Stand**

Top Pentagon leaders made a last stand 6 MAY in their months long offensive in support of military compensation reform, imploring senators to back plans to trim troops' pay raises and benefits in the fiscal 2015 budget. They've already lost on the other front of the fight, with members of the House Armed Services Committee the previous week rejecting the proposed compensation changes in their initial draft of the annual defense authorization bill. If the Senate follows suit later this month, that will all but doom defense officials' plans to cut about \$2 billion from personnel costs next year and redirect the money into training and modernization programs.



**Amid a sea of Pentagon brass, Gen. Ray Odierno, Army chief of staff, discusses the Pentagon's proposed changes to military pay and benefits before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 6 May.**

At issue are plans to cap the military pay raise at 1 percent next year, cut housing allowance rates by 5 percent over three years, reduce the value of the commissary benefit and reorganize the Tricare system to include new fees for nonactive duty users. Joint Chiefs Chairman Army Gen. Martin Dempsey and six fellow four-stars - his own deputy, the four service chief sand the head of the National Guard Bureau - argued that those savings are crucial to preserve military readiness and modernization accounts, a refrain they have repeated to lawmakers since the 2015 budget proposal was unveiled three months ago. "Implementing this compensation package now will help us remain the world's best-trained, best-led and best-equipped military. Otherwise, we'll continue to hemorrhage readiness and cut into modernization funds." Dempsey said.

But outside advocates - and a growing number of lawmakers - have protested that the compensation plans cut too deeply into troops' wallets, leaving them with greatly diminished buying power even if their paychecks do not actually shrink. They maintain that DoD should hold off on any changes until at least next February, after the Military Compensation and Retirement Reform Commission issues a final report and recommendations on all pay and benefits programs. Dempsey said that timetable will delay meaningful reform until the 2017 budget, and cost DoD up to \$18 billion in potential savings. "We have enough information to request these nominal pay and compensation changes now," he insisted. "We know this budget features difficult choices ... but we have created a balanced package that enables us to fulfill the current defense strategy." Senators again reiterated dissatisfaction with self-imposed budget caps and looming sequestration spending cuts that have forced Pentagon belt-tightening, but have not offered any firm plans on a different way forward.

Members of the Armed Services Committee's personnel panel have indicated they want to wait for the commission report, although Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI), the committee chairman, appeared less willing to simply punt

decisions to next year. “We do not have the option of simply rejecting these compensation proposals,” he said. “We would have to make alternative cuts.” On 7 MAY, the House Armed Services Committee finalized its draft of the annual authorization bill, without the Pentagon’s requested compensation changes. Lawmakers did not specify an offset for the \$2 billion price tag next year, instead shifting dozens of spending priorities around to help pay for their preferred programs. They acknowledged that retirement and compensation will need an overhaul in the near future, but insisted the changes can wait nine more months for the commission’s report. Pentagon planners will know if their lobbying efforts before the Senate committee were more successful by early June. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane | 7 May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Traumatic Brain Injury Update 35 ► 30K+ Undocumented TBIs**

Despite its vaunted intelligence-gathering capability, the U.S. military was surprised when enemies in Iraq and Afghanistan began building and deploying roadside bombs to kill and maim U.S. troops. It got so bad that a soldier asked Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld nearly two years into the Iraq war why U.S. troops were forced to defend themselves against such improvised explosive devices with homemade hillbilly armor. “You go to war with the Army you have,” Rumsfeld told the soldier, “not the Army you might want or wish to have at a later time.” It took the Pentagon three more years before Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles finally began trickling into Iraq. While the troops were waiting for that armor, the Pentagon was also neglecting to track the traumatic brain injuries caused by such blasts, a new medical study says. TBIs—the “signature wound” of the post-9/11 wars—are tough to diagnose and treat. Without a good accounting of those who experienced a TBI, those challenges multiply.



**Captured explosives used in roadside bombs are detonated by an Army bomb-disposal unit in 2005**

The report’s authors, using amputations as a proxy for TBIs, conclude that the military documented only one in five TBIs estimated to have affected U.S. troops between 2003 and 2006. Responding to legislation, the Pentagon began tracking TBIs more closely beginning in 2007. Overall, during the eight years spanning 2003 to 2010, the study estimates that 32,822 active-duty troops suffered undocumented TBI wounds. That’s more than the 32,176 documented by the Pentagon over the same period of time. “This analysis provides the first estimate of undocumented incident TBIs among US military personnel serving in Iraq and Afghanistan” before Congress demanded the improved counting, the report says. Such missing diagnoses are important, says the study, conducted by a pair of Johns Hopkins University health experts. Undocumented TBIs could lead to troops being booted from the military as malingerers or for personality disorders—discharges that could restrict their access to care from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

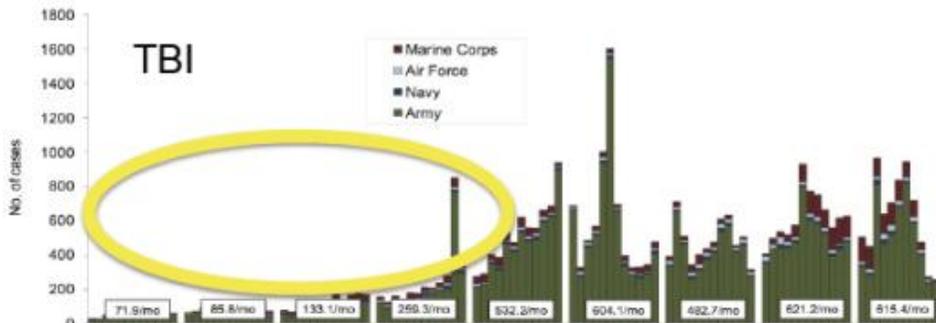
For those remaining in uniform, it could lead to additional combat tours, boosting their chances of a second TBI and the “visual and auditory deficits, posttraumatic epilepsy, headaches, major depression, and suicide risk” that accompany multiple TBIs, according to the study. Even a so-called “mild” TBI can rattle the (helmeted) brain inside

the skull, leading to a host of maladies including memory loss, cognitive deficits, mood volatility, substance-abuse disorders, personality changes, sleep difficulties and possibly post-traumatic stress disorder. “In recent years, the U.S. military has generally been reactive, rather than proactive, in responding to public health crises, including suicide, psychotropic drug misuse, and gaps in wounded warrior care,” says Remington Nevin, a co-author of the study. “Public-health leaders within the Department of Defense have a troubling history of having epidemics and programmatic deficiencies identified only by outsiders long after the time to act has passed, rather than having these identified internally in time to mount an optimally effective response.”

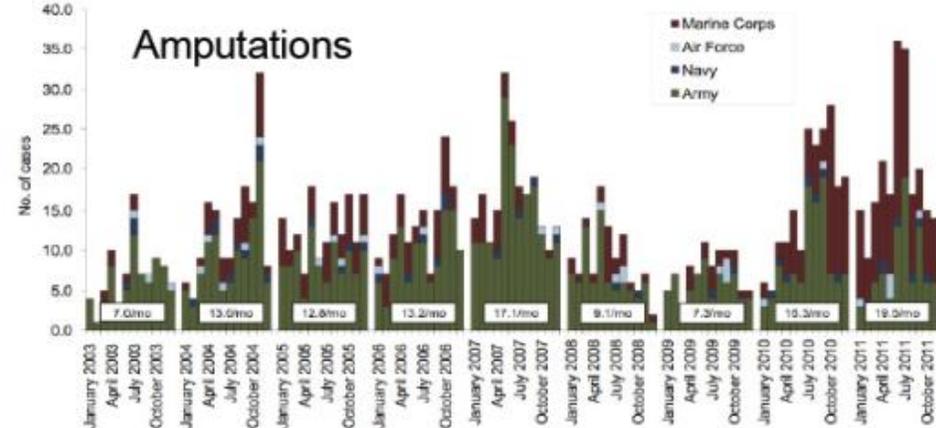
A top Army psychiatrist at the time says troops minimized the issue, and their leaders weren’t seeking it out. “Soldiers did not want to come forward, for fear that would be taken out of the fight, or thought to be malingerers,” says retired Army colonel Elspeth Ritchie. “And we — the medics and the line [officers] — were not looking for it.” The authors used an interesting yardstick to estimate the number of undocumented TBIs: they calculated them by developing a mathematic formula that established a relationship between amputations and TBIs, based on the wars’ later years when the Pentagon was more rigorously tracking TBIs. Unlike TBIs—the so-called “invisible wounds” of the nation’s post 9/11 wars—amputations are visible and easily counted. IED blasts cause most TBIs and amputations, making missing limbs a good tool to estimate the missing TBIs, says the paper, by Rachel Chase and Nevin of Hopkins’ Bloomberg School of Public Health. “Including amputation counts in the model as a proxy for injury causing events is appropriate, given strong clinical and ecological evidence of common mechanisms of injury” for amputations and TBIs, they write in an article in the Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation slated to be posted next week.

**Deployment-related conditions of special surveillance interest, U.S. Armed Forces, by month and service, January 2003 -November 2011 (data as of 22 December 2011)**

Traumatic brain injury (ICD-9: 310.2, 800-801, 803-804, 850-854, 907.0, 950.1-950.3, 959.01, V15.5\_1-9, V15.5\_A-F, V15.52\_0-9, V15.52\_A-F, V15.59\_1-9, V15.59\_A-F)\*



Amputations (ICD-9-CM: 887, 896, 897, V49.6 except V49.61-V49.62, V49.7 except V49.71-V49.72, PR 84.0-PR 84.1, except PR 84.01-PR 84.02 and PR 84.11)\*



Too often, wars' impacts aren't gleaned until years later. Mustard gas experiments poisoned thousands during World War II. Cold War nuclear-weapons tests are suspected of causing cancer. Agent Orange was the ticking time bomb in Vietnam—the Department of Veterans Affairs is still adding to its list of medical consequences. Gulf War Syndrome stemming from the first war with Iraq, in 1991, remains a mystery. Traumatic brain injury is simply the latest in the list of war's unintended repercussions. [Source: Time | Mark Thompson | Apr 30, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Commissary Case Lot Sales ► Returning in AUG**

Commissary case lot sales are returning, announced Defense Commissary Agency director Joseph Jeu. Jeu spoke at a commissary round table meeting of the American Logistics Association, whose members include manufacturers and distributors of products sold in commissaries, exchanges and other retail outlets on military bases. The sales will resume this year from mid-August through September, said DeCA spokesman Kevin Robinson. Until they were discontinued for budget reasons, the sales were held in May and September, generally in extra space outside the commissary. Larger items such as club packs helped offer savings over and above the regular savings that average about 30 percent. The sales are “back by popular demand,” Jeu said, noting that customers as well as members of industry have asked for them. Running two case lot sales in a year worldwide costs DeCA about \$900,000. Industry has agreed to provide more support to reduce the costs for DeCA, Robinson said. [Source: NavyTimes| Karen Jowers | May 1, 2014 ++]

\*VA\*



## **FHCC Chicago IL ► Final Salute Policy**

Navy sailors in their distinctive blue camouflage uniform and dozens of civilian employees lined both sides of the long hallway, heads down and hands clasped. Hands rose in solemn salutes as Holocaust survivor and Korean War Air Force Veteran Paul Argiewicz began his last journey on that Wednesday last December. Dozens of family members, including his wife, Cheryl, and his young great-grandson, Mason, walked alongside him. A broad-striped red, white and blue blanket, lovingly hand-knit by strangers, covered him. His local rabbi, Tzali Wilschanski, in a tall black hat and dark waistcoat, led the procession. “It was amazing, it was incredible; there were so many people, his doctors and nurses, [and] so many in uniform ... it was such a big honor. It wasn't anything I ever expected or heard about; it was just unreal,” Cheryl Argiewicz said, remembering Dec. 11, 2013, the day her husband died at Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center and was given a “final salute.” “It was the most beautiful thing,” she said.



**Paying their respects in a Final Salute Sailors and Civilian employees wait in a hallway on the medical-surgical floor at Lovell FHCC for the body of Holocaust survivor and Korean War Air Force Veteran Paul Argiewicz to be wheeled in a morgue cart to the elevators accompanied by the Argiewicz family's rabbi, Tzali Wilschanski, and the funeral director.**

For more than a decade, Argiewicz, 88, of Paddock Lake, Wis., was a frequent visitor to Lovell FHCC (and the North Chicago Veterans Affairs Medical Center before 2010) for outpatient appointments and some short hospitalizations. Most knew about the book, "Number 176520," which told his harrowing story of surviving the Holocaust as a teenager. So, on a crisp December morning, when staff received word of Argiewicz's death on the medical-surgical floor, many gathered for his final salute. "Everybody knew him at VA, in all the departments; everywhere we went, they would say, 'Hi, Paul.' He was just friendly. He loved to talk to everyone," Cheryl recalled.

Minutes after Argiewicz died, hospice and palliative care coordinator Anna Abraham followed a procedure that she and the hospice and palliative care team had established the previous year, calling the hospital's quarterdeck—an information desk at the main entrance manned by sailors—to round up final salute volunteers. Abraham said these procedures are standard for every Veteran patient, no matter the hour or where in the hospital they die. "Our [hospice and palliative care] team wanted this – it's the last thing we can do for our Veterans who have served our country, to honor them and pay respects," she said. Navy Hospitalman Gregory Spencer, from the optometry department, was one of the dozens of sailors who readily volunteered to help that day. It was the second time he had participated in a final salute. "Any time you are able to honor someone who has sacrificed in this way, and support the family, it's a very meaningful thing," Spencer said as he waited. Spencer said the best part about joining a final salute line is the appreciation shown by the Veterans' family members. "It's just a short time out of my day, and it means so much to the family. It's a privilege," he said. "I'll do it as many times as I can."

Rev. Bill Vander Heyden, division officer for pastoral services, explained how the final salute at Lovell FHCC evolved from a "closed-door" policy to a celebration of life for staff and fellow patients, as well as family members and friends of the deceased Veteran. "Our team decided we had to do something about the way we escorted the Veteran's body off the unit," Vander Heyden said. "It used to be that the other patients on the floor would have to go back to their rooms, and we would close their doors so they wouldn't see and get depressed." But, in fact, Vander Heyden said what actually happened before the change in procedure was that fellow patients and staff members – who, in some cases, lived with and cared for the deceased Veteran every day in the facility's community living center – didn't have the chance to grieve and say goodbye. "So we decided to do just the opposite, to call everyone together and do this final salute," Vander Heyden continued. "This gives them an honorable, dignified way to leave, and it shows the other Veterans that when their time comes, the same ceremony will take place. Their fellow Veterans will have a chance to pay final respects."

The patriotic blanket that is draped over the morgue cart adds a meaningful touch to the final salute. Vander Heyden recounted how nurse manager Joyce Wadlington had asked what could be done about the stark, off-white aluminum cart. The team decided against using an American flag, because they didn't want to take away from the significance of the family receiving a flag at the Veteran's funeral, he said. Vander Heyden knew about a local craft group in McHenry Township named the Crafty "Happy" Hookers, who knit lap blankets for Veterans. The group, primarily made up of Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary members, was happy to oblige. The facility now has several handmade blankets that are reused as needed in various parts of the hospital. The final salute begins with the

chaplain, or in Argiewicz's case, his rabbi, reciting a prayer in the hall within earshot of those lined up, followed by the playing of Taps on a portable CD player as the body is wheeled down the hall. Those in uniform salute as the cart passes.

For Cheryl Argiewicz, the sight of her husband's nurses and doctors, including his longtime primary care clinician Julia Kizhner, standing silently as they waited to start his final salute, was overwhelming. "She was just fantastic; so many people were fantastic, because they had a personal interest in Paul; so when I saw them there, it was just unbelievable." Although Argiewicz was not in hospice care when he died, he had made the decision, with the help of Dr. Kavita Sharma, attending physician for hospice and palliative care, to "stop fighting." He had been hospitalized at Lovell FHCC for about six months, with a multitude of problems relating to his heart and kidneys. "It got to the point when he said, 'please don't hurt me anymore,' so we stopped all the stuff that was painful and made him comfortable," Cheryl said.

Argiewicz's Jewish faith dictated that his body not be embalmed or be buried on a Friday, the beginning of the Sabbath. Therefore, his body was transported directly from Lovell FHCC to the funeral home, and he received a full military funeral with a gun salute the next day. In the blur of the hours and days of the Jewish weeklong period of mourning known as Shiva, Cheryl was in awe of the outpouring of love and support for her husband. "The man was just bigger than life," she said. "I can't even tell you how many cards, cakes ... came to the home ... there was a crowd gathered every night. It was amazing."



**Paul Argiewicz shows the tattoo from his imprisonment in Nazi camps during World War II.**

Many people knew Argiewicz from the book "Number 176520," about his ordeal in German camps during World War II. It was a story he frequently recounted to schoolchildren and civic groups, and at the annual "March of Remembrance" in Washington, D.C., over the years. The book, by Deanne Joseph, was named for the concentration camp number tattooed on his arm. Paul Argiewicz, born in Bielsko, Poland, was arrested at age 10 by the Waffen-SS, the military force of Nazi Germany, for stealing bread for his family members, who were starving in the Jewish ghetto. More than once during his imprisonment, he lied about his age and work skills to survive. He was liberated from the Buchenwald concentration camp at age 15. His parents and an older sister did not survive the Holocaust.

After the war, he immigrated to America and joined the U.S. Air Force in 1952. He served as a crew chief in the Korean War, during which he was shot down. Seriously injured, he was captured and held prisoner for nearly a year. "He bailed out the plane, lost part of his clavicle (collarbone) and his hearing," Cheryl said. "He used to tell people that being a POW was nothing compared to the Holocaust." After he was discharged from the Air Force, Argiewicz worked as a steamfitter in Chicago and started his own business, Argo Heating and Cooling. He was widowed by his first wife and married Cheryl (then Erdman) in 1996. In addition to public speaking, Cheryl said he counseled many fellow Veterans over the years, including some who were considering suicide. "He put a real value on life ... he touched thousands of lives over the years," she said. [Source: Vantage Point | Jayna Legg | 14 May 2014 ++]

**Note:** A Federal Health Care Center is a partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD). With this partnership, FHCC represents the total integration of the health care delivery and operations of two distinct and separate health care organizations owned by different cabinet level departments within the federal Government. FHCC is part of the Veterans Integrated Service Network

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Healthcare Stories ► What's Yours?**

The VFW wants VA-enrolled veterans to call the toll-free 1-800-VFW-1899 telephone line and tell them if your VA medical facility is properly serving you. According to VFW National Commander Bill Thien, recent allegations about improper care in Arizona, Colorado, Texas and elsewhere has made it difficult to separate truth from conjecture. "Veterans die every day, but veterans dying due to wrong diagnoses, unsterilized equipment or while awaiting treatment is a failure of leadership and management both in Washington and out in the field," he said. "We need to hear real life stories, good or bad, not hearsay. Only then can we hold VA officials properly accountable for their actions or inactions." The toll-free number was rolled out in 1996 as the VA was transforming from primarily a hospital-based system into an integrated healthcare system that now includes 820 outpatient clinics that serve veterans closer to where they actually reside. Call 1-800-VFW-1899 to voice your VA healthcare experiences. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly, May 9, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **GI Bill Update 172 ► TEB Program Rules**

Military members are required to serve an additional four years after deciding to transfer benefits to a family member under the Post-9/11 GI Bill Transfer of Education Benefits (TEB) program. Here are key points:

- (1) Members to have at least six years of eligible service and agree to serve an additional four years.
- (2) Spouses may use the benefit once the TEB is approved; however, children can use the benefit only after the service member has completed at least 10 years of service;
- (3) Failing to complete the service agreement, including voluntary retirement, invalidates the agreement required to transfer the benefits; and
- (4) Members must elect to transfer Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits using the TEB webpage in the milconnect portal at <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect>.

[Source: NAUS Weekly Update May 9, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Secretary Update 19 ► American Legion Demands Resignation**

The American Legion is demanding the immediate resignation of Veteran Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki and two other top VA leaders, citing a pattern of "poor oversight" and "failed leadership." In a news conference 5 MAY, Legion National Commander Dan Dellinger said Shinseki's tenure at VA has been plagued by "bureaucratic incompetence" and disheartening results for veterans. The latest scandal — allegations that as many as 40 veterans may have died because of delayed care and secret waiting lists at the Phoenix VA health system — was the last straw for officials at the Legion. "It's not something we do lightly," Dellinger said. "But we do so today because it is our responsibility as advocate for the men and women who have worn this nation's uniform." Dellinger's full statement can be read at <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20140505/NEWS01/305050047>. The group is also calling for the resignation of Under Secretary for Health Robert Petzel and Under Secretary for Benefits Allison Hickey, saying new leadership is needed throughout the department.



**Eric Shinseki**



**Robert Petzel**



**Allison Hickey**

The Legion, with more than 2.4 million members, is the nation’s largest veterans organization and one of the most influential. In recent years, the group has praised Shinseki’s work at VA, and a year ago even offered an angry defense of the secretary when a Time magazine article demanded his firing. But Dellinger said recent problems have changed the perspective of Legion officials toward Shinseki. He cited multiple recent scandals involving preventable patient deaths, controversy over executive bonuses, and a concern among Legion members that VA services are on the decline. “Our veterans need to know that the VA health-care system is a safe place where they can receive treatment and feel assured that patient safety is a top priority,” he said. “Errors and lapses can occur in any system. But The American Legion expects when such errors and lapses are discovered, that they are dealt with swiftly and that the responsible parties are held accountable. “This has not happened at the Department of Veterans Affairs. There needs to be a change, and that change needs to occur at the top.”

The comments were the harshest criticism Shinseki has endured since early 2013, when the mounting veterans’ disability claims backlog and problems with VA mental health care drew calls for top VA officials to resign. On 2 MAY, officials with the Veterans of Foreign Wars blasted “bureaucrats who are safely entrenched within the system” for a host of problems within VA, calling the Phoenix allegations “criminal malfeasance.” VFW asked for an independent review of the Phoenix situation separate from the VA Inspector General review that is already under way, calling that “akin to asking the fox to guard the hen house.” But VFW stopped short of demanding Shinseki be removed as VA secretary. Other advocacy groups, including Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, have offered similar critiques without the resignation demands. Officials at the conservative Concerned Veterans for America have been calling for Shinseki’s ouster for months.

White House and VA officials offered no immediate response to the Legion announcement. Shinseki, who took office in January 2009, is the longest serving secretary in VA history and the longest serving leader of federal veterans programs since the end of the Vietnam War. He is also among the longest serving members of President Obama’s Cabinet. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | May 5, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Secretary Update 20 ► Will Not Step Down | Urges Patience**

Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki is promising “swift and appropriate” punishment for any employees who may have been involved with medical appointment delays and subsequent coverups at VA hospitals in Arizona and Colorado. But Shinseki urged patience in waiting for investigators to fully uncover and report on the problems. In an interview with Military Times on 7 MAY, Shinseki also spoke about recent criticism of his leadership style and the American Legion’s demand that he and two of his top deputies resign from their jobs. He acknowledged

frustration over the controversies, but said he has no intention of resigning and worries that the recent headlines will discourage veterans from seeking care in the system. Following is a partial transcript of the interview:

**Q. How do you feel the department has responded to the Phoenix allegations?**

**A.** Any time allegations like these come up, we're going to take a look. We take them seriously. When we heard about these allegations, in congressional testimony, that afternoon I invited the inspector general to go down to Phoenix and get to the bottom of things, do a complete and thorough review and get me a response as soon as possible. So that is underway. I also ensured he had the ability to do that, and the resources he needs. I have checked several times, and he feels he is resourced to do that, so I await the results. As this is happening, I just want veterans to know that VA is here to provide care for them. That's our only mission. We intend to do that well. Care has everything to do with quality, quality of service and quality of benefits. They've earned them, and we're going to deliver them. I'd just like veterans to understand when they walk into one of our facilities that they're in a safe facility. And I want employees to understand it's our responsibility to provide that high-quality care. We have the responsibility to ensure that confidence is high.

**Q. Why should veterans have confidence in the system?**

**A.** That's why it's important to me to make sure veterans know they have high-quality care and that VA is committed to them. They are the reason we have a mission. Across our system, there are 1,700 points of care. Outpatient clinics, vet centers, even mobile systems that travel to the most remote areas. So it's a complex and a large system. Whenever an incident pops up, like in Fort Collins [Colorado] or Phoenix, we go and investigate. We take it seriously. And we tell people what we find. And then we survey the entire system, so if there is any place where concerns are being expressed, we find them and we take corrective action. In Fort Collins, it's an internal report that has surfaced this, and I've charged [VA Undersecretary for Health Robert] Petzel to look into it, to make sure corrective actions are taken, and to make sure no similar incidents are occurring anywhere else. That's underway.

**Q. But is the department responding fast enough? Is the department moving as quick as it can on these problems?**

**A.** We try to move as quickly as we can in these reviews. It's not just looking at a single incident. That takes time. It takes longer than I'd like to be able to get those findings and get corrective actions. But sometimes these processes take time. We go back five years, 10 years to do a thorough review. That takes time. It takes longer than I'd like to be able to get those findings and get corrective actions. But sometimes these processes take time. When we find anything, we're in position to take corrective action across the system. In a large health care system like we have — 85 million appointments a year, 25 million consults a year — if we're going to do the deep dive and find out what the root causes were, we have to wade through that information. Once we have the findings we need, we take corrective actions.

**Q. Why should veterans feel confident someone will be held accountable?**

**A.** Our record is pretty clear. As a department, in the last two years, we have removed roughly 3,000 people a year who didn't meet our standards or couldn't live by our values. So we do have tools. And we have demonstrated that, even at the executive level, we're willing to take action. That's why I want the independent IG to provide us with findings. If any of the allegations are substantiated, we're going to take swift and appropriate action. I don't like the allegations, and I want to find out more.

**Q. What was your personal reaction to the Phoenix allegations?**

**A.** We didn't have any details. This came up in testimony. There apparently is a list with 40 veterans' names on it. We tried to acquire that, we were never given that list. So we asked the IG to get involved in a formal review. He has those lists, and we're waiting for those outcomes.

**Q. Do you feel like you've been a visible enough leader on this?**

A. I do engage veterans. I meet with the veterans service organizations monthly. It's a direct, no-holds-barred discussion. I travel to their conventions, where I speak to the veterans membership. I do travel. I've been to all 50 states. When I do, I engage veterans locally. So I get direct feedback from those veterans. That feedback provides some grist to our discussions.

**Q. But is that enough on a national level?**

A. That's part of the reason we're talking today, and you'll see me doing more of this. But I am sensitive to the IG's independent review in Phoenix, and am careful not to get out ahead of him. He has an important responsibility, and anything I declare or if I suggest there are outcomes is not helpful to him.

**Q. Were you surprised by the American Legion's call for your resignation?**

A. I spent five years working very hard to develop a relationship with the veterans service organizations. We have together worked some major projects. I didn't know [the Legion announcement] was going to happen. I learned a long time ago these things aren't personal. It's a demonstration that I need to work harder here, redouble my efforts, improve communication with all the VSOs, especially with the American Legion. That's what I'm focused on, that's what I'll go to work on

**Q. What about their calls for the resignation of Petzel and Undersecretary of Benefits Allison Hickey?**

A. [Petzel and Hickey] are doing what I asked them to. They have expectations they're going to deliver on those tasks. Hickey has a [disability benefits claims] backlog to end in 2015. She's knocked a good piece of that off.

**Q. How quickly will we see a response after the IG's report on Phoenix is finished?**

A. It'll be quick. But we ought to wait to see what the IG report says, and what it tells us.

**Q. Should you have had a better handle on what was happening in Phoenix, and elsewhere in the VA?**

A. It's tough. It's a big system, and it's demanding. But it doesn't lessen the importance of leadership here. Whenever an allegation like this comes up, we're going to react. We're going to thoroughly investigate, get to the bottom of things. And, if substantiated, we'll take swift and appropriate action. What I want veterans to know is that VA is here to care for them. VA is a good system — health care wise, safety wise — highly comparable to any other system out there. Our oversight reviews tell us that. I'm very comfortable in the quality of our system. I also want our employees to understand that serving veterans is our only mission. I expect them to provide the highest quality of care to veterans, as they have been. Veterans themselves, in the feedback I'm provided, over 90 percent are confident and comfortable they are receiving quality care. That's what I want to make sure we continue, that veterans have that confidence.

[Source: MitiaryTimes | Leo Shane | May 7, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

**VA Secretary Update 21 ► Let Him Do his Job**



To Our Military and Veteran Community,

While some have called for the resignation of the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Sec. Eric Shinseki, we at Student Veterans of America (SVA) are reminded of the other side of the story. Sec. Shinseki has demonstrated remarkable stewardship of the VA, not seeking political stunts in the news, but pushing for reform of the VA over his tenure. We

are sensitive to the recent allegations, and encourage swift action once the facts are fully clear based on the findings of the Office of the Inspector General and the Congress.

Sec. Shinseki's dedication to our men and women who have served our nation's cloth is unparalleled. More than ever, Sec. Shinseki is fighting hard for our veterans, despite the uphill battle in an environment where bureaucracy can be slow to respond.

Over the last five years, Sec. Shinseki led the VA as it brought GI Bill processing times down to just one week, and tripled the number of VetSuccess On Campus (VSOC) chapters across the country. In that same time, the VA has paid out more than \$40 billion in tuition and benefits to nearly 1.2 million Veterans, service members and their families since the Post-9/11 GI Bill went into effect on August 1, 2009. Sec. Shinseki continues to be an ardent champion of veterans in higher education, and beyond.

At SVA, we believe the best thing for veterans right now is to let their top champion do his job. We maintain full faith in Sec. Shinseki, and encourage veterans to utilize the benefits they earned across a broad array of education, health, and financial services. If there has been any negligence, we are confident that those responsible will be held accountable under the Secretary's leadership.

Most sincerely,



D. Wayne Robinson  
President and CEO

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said over the weekend that embattled Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki is "one of the most decent human beings who ever wore the uniform or who led the nation's Army," Speaking with reporters in Durham, North Carolina, where he delivered the commencement address at Duke University, Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey said Shinseki, who retired as Army chief of staff in 2003, is leading the Department of Veterans Affairs "with integrity and transparency and energy." Dempsey said the Defense Department and VA have been working closely together to address problems as service members transition to being veterans. The two departments are "trying to work to make the transition from active care to veterans care much more fluid, much more responsive, much more seamless," he said. "We've made progress, but we haven't made enough progress." Leaders in both agencies understand the scope of the problems and what needs to be done to correct them, the chairman said. Dempsey employed the interview as an opportunity to express his confidence in Shinseki. "I know there is a series of investigations ongoing now, and I have confidence that if anyone can help us make this enterprise ... that flows from DOD to Veterans Affairs, it is him," he said. "And I hope he is given the chance to do it." [Source: SVA Press Release & AFPS | D. Wayne Robinson & Jim Garamone | May 10 & 12, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PTSD Update 166 ► Service Dog Treatment Study**

A much-anticipated Veterans Affairs Department study into the effectiveness of service dogs for treating post-traumatic stress disorder will restart in the coming months, with veterans receiving dog care training in anticipation of being paired with an animal. The study, "Can Service Dogs Improve Activity and Quality of Life in Veterans

With PTSD?” will include 220 veterans, half teamed with a dog trained to address their disability and the rest paired with an emotional support dog — basically, a pet or companion that has passed a rigorous obedience course but is not specifically trained to perform tasks to mitigate PTSD. The research aims to determine the impact of a service dog on the quality of life and activities of a veteran with PTSD compared with a common companion animal or pet.



**Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Richard Simonsen, who has been diagnosed with PTSD, hugs his service dog, Yoko**

The differences between the two are notable. Trained, well-bred service dogs can cost upward of \$25,000, including purchase, training and care, and they are allowed by law to accompany their handlers in public spaces. And, depending on the study outcome, they might become an accepted treatment for PTSD covered by VA. Emotional support dogs essentially are well-trained pets that provide comfort and support. They do not have the same public access as service dogs under the Americans with Disabilities Act, although they’re offered some protections under the Fair Housing Act and on commercial airlines.

The 2010 Defense Authorization Act required VA to study the effectiveness of service dogs for treating PTSD. VA provides support and veterinary care for dogs for visual and hearing disabilities, as well as mobility impairments, including traumatic brain injuries that cause seizures or affect a vet’s ability to move or make decisions. But it does not cover service dogs for mental health disorders.

VA has partnered with several service dog organizations to pair veterans with PTSD with potential service dogs, but the vets in these programs are working with dogs that are later trained as guide or service dogs for veterans with physical disabilities. VA has said there isn’t enough scientific evidence regarding their effectiveness for that purpose to warrant benefits coverage. And when it comes to PTSD, VA officials say they must use proven treatments. While stories abound about veterans with PTSD and service dogs, few clinical studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of animals for PTSD. In April, a Texas State University researcher completed a small study on the topic that found PTSD symptoms were reduced by 22 percent in veterans who completed training their own psychiatric service dog through the program Train A Dog Save A Warrior.

According to graduate student Jeff Nelson, study participants completed the PTSD Checklist-Military Version, or PCL-M, a self assessment of PTSD symptoms. Those who finished the program scored nearly 12 points lower — they had fewer symptoms — than those entering the program. Nelson acknowledged some limitations in the study. For example, it did not measure results against a control group or incorporate companion dogs. And because of time constraints, Nelson was not able to administer the PCL-M to the same participants before and after the training — a measure that he said would better reflect the effectiveness of the program. But, he said, the findings should nonetheless contribute to the somewhat scant clinical research. “This is a good first step. Serious organizations are not going to give money for more research or programs without evidence of it being effective and, if it works, it hopefully will bring more people into the treatment,” Nelson said.

VA's original study on the effectiveness of service dogs for PTSD was suspended in September 2012, amid concerns over the animals' care at some facilities, as well as the dogs' training. According to VA, 17 dogs were placed with veterans before the shutdown. Six participants have completed the study, six are still involved and five withdrew. Sixteen veterans still have their dogs; one dog was euthanized for health issues, spokeswoman Gina Jackson said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | May 12, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA PACT** ► **Patient Aligned Care Teams**

VA is the largest integrated health care system in the United States, caring for approximately 5.3 million Veterans in primary care settings. Over the past two years, VA has bolstered its support to all medical centers to expand established Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs). Teams are comprised of a provider, a Registered Nurse care manager, a clinical associate, and an administrative associate. Clinical pharmacists, social workers, nutritionists, and behavioral health staff support PACTs. Since implementing PACTs, the number of primary care patients has increased 12 percent, and the number of encounters with Veterans has increased 50 percent mostly due to telehealth, telephone and group encounters. Communicating with health care professionals through secure electronic means has increased dramatically as well. Despite the increase of primary care patients, access to primary care has improved and continuity of care is better.



Additionally, approximately 65 percent of Veterans requesting a same day primary care appointment with their personal provider are accommodated and 78 percent of Veterans are able to see their own primary care provider for an appointment on the date they desire. Veteran access to primary care during extended hours (non-business hours) has increased 75 percent since January 2013. Over 72 percent of all Veterans discharged from VA are contacted within two days to ensure they are following discharge instructions and check in on their condition. These critical post-discharge follow-ups are important to reducing readmissions. Mental Health Integration is also a critical component of PACTs and the program's goal to provide coordinated care. Veterans now see mental health providers in the primary care setting. In just one year (FY12-FY13) using the PACTs model, mental health services offered in VA primary care clinics increased 18 percent.

Overall, PACTs program implementation has been associated with important utilization changes—fewer primary care patients are receiving care in urgent care settings (decreased 33 percent) and acute hospital admissions have decreased 12 percent due to improved care management and coordination from PACTs. Equally important, both rural and urban Veterans report a high level of satisfaction with VA services. Veterans also indicated they are more likely to recommend treatment at a VA facility than at non-VA facilities. This positive feedback is consistent with the 2013 American Customer Satisfaction Index, which reported that Veterans strongly endorse VA health care, with 91 percent offering positive assessments of inpatient care and 92 percent for outpatient care. The PACT model has allowed VA to create **COMPASS**—a dashboard program which extracts and derives these types of metrics and information from multiple VA sources to track the status of the implementation. The PACT initiative is consistent with VA's commitment to its 12 patient-centered principles:

- Honor the Veteran's expectation of safe, high quality and accessible care.
- Enhance the quality of human interactions and therapeutic alliances.
- Solicit and respect the Veteran's values, preferences and needs.
- Systematize the coordination, continuity and integration of care.
- Empower Veterans through information and education.

- Incorporate the nutritional, cultural and nurturing aspects of food.
- Provide for physical comfort and management of pain.
- Ensure emotional and spiritual support.
- Encourage involvement of family and friends.
- Provide an architectural layout and design conducive to health and healing.
- Introduce creative arts into the healing environment.
- Support and sustain an engaged workforce as key to providing patient-centered care.

“Our PACTs outcomes to date support VA’s ongoing health care transition to a health system focused on a personalized approach to care. We seek to help every Veteran achieve his or her unique health goals.” said Dr. Robert A. Petzel, VA’s Under Secretary for Health. Refer to [www.va.gov/health/services/primarycare](http://www.va.gov/health/services/primarycare) and [http://www.montana.va.gov/features/VA\\_PACT\\_Puts\\_Veterans\\_at\\_Center\\_of\\_Health\\_Care\\_Decisions\\_and\\_Planning.asp](http://www.montana.va.gov/features/VA_PACT_Puts_Veterans_at_Center_of_Health_Care_Decisions_and_Planning.asp) for additional info on PACT.[Source: VA News Release 30Apr 2014++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Bonuses Update 14 ► House Passes Ban Amendment**

The House on 30 APR passed an amendment to the Veterans Affairs Department spending bill to prohibit bonuses for any senior executives at VA in fiscal 2015, despite outcry from federal employee groups that say the ban will drive employees out of federal service. The amendment, introduced by Rep. Keith Rothfus (R-PA) passed without objection by voice vote. The larger, \$71 billion spending bill, which also appropriates funds for military construction projects, passed easily by a 416-1 vote. “Paying bonuses to senior executives of an organization with an abysmal performance record is ridiculous,” Rothfus said on the House floor when introducing his amendment. “These valuable resources should be used to ensure that our veterans receive the first-rate service and care they rightfully deserve.”



**Rep. Keith Rothfus**

The House cleared a similar amendment during last year’s appropriations process for fiscal 2014, but the Senate never took up the legislation. The Republican-controlled House has repeatedly targeted the VA after the agency has consistently displayed poor oversight and fallen short of claims backlog reduction goals. Members have passed several bills to eliminate bonuses and to make it easier to fire executives. Still, the VA and advocacy groups disapproved of the measure. “The action by the House today was unnecessary and does nothing to address the critical issues of the claims backlog and access to patient care,” the Senior Executives Association said in a statement. “A blanket ban on performance awards only serves to punish those senior executives who are high performing and those who may not have a direct line of responsibility for the issues being raised in Congress.”

A report on the original language of the spending measure said members’ concerns over senior executives’ bonuses had been assuaged. “VA has centralized senior executive award decisions, strengthened the link between organizational performance and awards, added an additional level of review in consideration of awards, and significantly reduced the value of awards compared to prior years,” the report stated. “Most importantly, the secretary has demonstrated his willingness to use the bonus system as a way to reward and penalize staff based on

performance.” VA has made progress delivering care to veterans, the department said in a statement. “VA must remain competitive to recruit and retain the best people in order to continue our progress.” the statement said. [Source: GovExec.com | Eric Katz | 1May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VAMC Phoenix AZ Update 02 ► VA Secretary Issues Statement**

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki made the following statement on the allegations regarding the Phoenix VA Health Care System:

*“We take these allegations very seriously. Based on the request of the independent VA Office of Inspector General, in view of the gravity of the allegations and in the interest of the Inspector General’s ability to conduct a thorough and timely review of the Phoenix VA Health Care System (PVAHCS), I have directed that PVAHCS Director Sharon Helman, PVAHCS Associate Director Lance Robinson, and a third PVAHCS employee be placed on administrative leave until further notice. Providing Veterans the quality care and benefits they have earned through their service is our only mission at the Department of Veterans Affairs. We care deeply for every Veteran we are privileged to serve. We believe it is important to allow an independent, objective review to proceed. These allegations, if true, are absolutely unacceptable and if the Inspector General’s investigation substantiates these claims, swift and appropriate action will be taken. Veterans deserve to have full faith in their VA health care. I appreciate the continued hard work and dedication of our employees and of the community stakeholders we work with every day in our service to Veterans.”*

Shinseki took the steps a day after his top health official told Congress there was no evidence so far that up to 40 patients died awaiting care at the Phoenix facility, nor that records of delayed appointments were falsified. Dr. Robert Petzel, VA undersecretary for health, told the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs 30 APR that an initial review had found no basis for the allegations. The office began an investigation five months ago after Arizona Republic reports about the whistle-blower complaints in early April. Petzel said allegations, if true, are "absolutely unacceptable," but he cautioned against a "rush to judgment." The furor over Phoenix's VA medical system erupted in early April, when a House committee revealed allegations by Sam Foote, a recently retired VA physician who had filed complaints with Congress and the inspector general. No documentary proof has been made public, but other whistle-blowers have supported Foote's claims. [Source: VA News Release & USA TODAY | Gregg Zoroya & Dennis Wagner | May 1, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VAMC Phoenix AZ Update 03 ► 2<sup>nd</sup> VA Doctor Comes Forward**

Late on Sunday night (27 APR), Dr. Katherine Mitchell said she received a phone call from a fellow employee at the Phoenix VA hospital who needed advice on how to handle a sensitive situation. Her co-worker explained that patient appointment records in the Phoenix VA Health Care System were in danger of being destroyed. But he had printed paper copies to ensure that accurate wait times for patient care would not be lost if removed from computers. The purported "secret lists," along with accusations that up to 40 Arizona veterans died awaiting care, are the subject of national controversy and investigations by Congress and the VA Inspector General. Mitchell was a confidante with experience — nearly 16 years at the veterans hospital, first as a nurse who became supervising physician in the emergency room, then as medical director over a transition program for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.



**Dr. Katherine Mitchell, medical director of a Phoenix VA program for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Mitchell is also former co-director of the Phoenix VA Emergency Department in Phoenix.**

Dr. Mitchell said her colleague explained that the documents were likely to be deleted within a day. Aware that the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs had issued orders for the VA to preserve documents at the medical center in Phoenix, the two agreed to protect evidence. Mitchell said she went to the medical center and walked her co-worker to VA police headquarters, where they asked officers to secure the documentation. Police declined, Mitchell said, but suggested they find a safe place to conceal the materials inside the hospital. Twelve hours later, Mitchell said, her co-worker delivered the evidence and a statement to an investigator from the Office of the Inspector General while Mitchell visited *The Arizona Republic*, asserting status as a government whistle-blower. Mitchell struggled with emotions as she described the incident, her career-threatening decision and concerns about the integrity of VA administrators. "I had no doubts they were capable of destroying evidence, or altering evidence," she said. "So there I am, a 47-year-old doctor with two degrees, trying to figure out where to hide stuff. "I spent my whole professional life wanting to be a VA nurse, and then a VA physician. ...(But) the insanity in the system right now needs to stop, and whatever I can do to accomplish that, I will."

The Republic this week sought comment from Phoenix VA Health Care System Director Sharon Helman about Mitchell's assertions, and an interview with the director, scheduled 1MAY, was canceled at the last minute when Helman was placed on administrative leave by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki. Mitchell said she fought for improved veterans care within the system, warning that Emergency Department patients were in jeopardy and, more recently that suicides had escalated amid a shortage of mental-health staffers. She said she was transferred, suspended and reprimanded. Many of her allegations coincide with complaints lodged by Sam Foote, a VA primary-care physician who retired in December. In letters to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the inspector general, as well as in interviews with *The Republic*, Foote first made the accusation about patient deaths and fraudulent records.

Both physicians, as well as other VA employees who asked not to be named for fear of retribution, said the Phoenix VA leadership disdains internal criticism and retaliates against those who speak out. In interviews and a written statement, Mitchell told *The Republic* she can no longer remain silent. "I am violating the VA 'gag' order for ethical reasons," she wrote. "I am cognizant of the consequences. As a VA employee I have seen what happens to employees who speak up for patient safety and welfare within the system. The devastation of professional careers is usually the end result, and likely is the only transparent process that actually exists within the Phoenix VA Medical Center today." In recent interviews, VA Director Hellman said employees are encouraged to express concerns, especially about medical care. She and chief of staff Darren Deering said their leadership team has dramatically improved service to veterans, is unaware of any patient deaths linked to delayed care and did not manipulate or falsify wait-time data. But Mitchell and other VA employees have expressed fears of evidence-shredding before and after inquiries were launched by congressional committees and the Office of Inspector General.

Those concerns were echoed 1MAY by Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) who first disclosed the Phoenix VA allegations as chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. In a letter to Shinseki, Miller warned against the destruction of evidence and threatened to issue a subpoena. Helman was placed on leave hours after that letter was sent, and one day after Dr. Robert Petzel, undersecretary for health in the Department of Veterans Affairs, told the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs that a VA team sent to Phoenix found no evidence of secret patient lists or related patient fatalities.

Mitchell said she decided to go public as a last resort, risking a career she loves. "It's not like I'm going to get any fame or fortune out of this," she said. In her letter, she wrote: "The pending investigation has the potential to help address and resolve the issues which have held a stranglehold on our facility, our veterans and our employees for decades. ... Although I welcomed news of an official Senate Committee inquiry last week, I have no faith at this point that the VA Medical Center is capable of providing an accurate accounting of its deficiencies, or that an investigative team will accurately document what it finds." [Source: The Republic | Dennis Wagner | May 2, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VAMC Phoenix AZ Update 04 ► EWL Guidelines Not followed**

The Phoenix Veterans Affairs Healthcare System in 2012 finally installed an electronic waitlist system that an internal manual reveals had been available and deployed elsewhere in the Veterans Affairs Department since at least 2002. The electronic waitlist, or EWL, that was deployed across the Veterans Health Administration in 2002 aimed to do away with "ad hoc" waitlists, like the one discovered by CNN in Phoenix 12 years later. "Ad hoc 'waiting lists' of new veteran enrollees to be entered into the scheduling system are known to exist, and waiting times for new enrollees seeking care are anecdotally reported to be long," Laura Miller, then-VA deputy undersecretary of health operations and maintenance, wrote in a 2002 memo quoted in the manual. "We will attempt to formalize an 'electronic waiting list' in VistA [Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture electronic health record] to more consistently and accurately reflect demand across VHA, and reduce the risk to enrollees lost to follow-up due to clerical error."

In a letter earlier this week to Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), who chairs the House Veterans Affairs Committee, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki said Phoenix was not in compliance with agency policy before it installed the electronic waitlist in 2012. "As is VHA policy, new patients who cannot be provided clinical appointments within 90 days of the date of the request should be placed on the EWL," Shinseki said. "At this juncture, it does not appear that PVACHS patients who were not able to be seen within 90 days were handled consistently prior to the arrival of the current management team in 2012. Patients appear to have been scheduled beyond 90 days and not placed on the EWL, contrary to VHA's policy for new patients. When the existing leadership came on board in 2012, they initiated VHA's current national standard policy and the use of the EWL." A March 19, 2014 update to the EWL now allows scheduling more than 120 days from the desired appointment date. VA is supposed to provide care to patients in a timely manner, within 14 to 30 days.

Ozzie Garza, a VA spokesman, said the EWL has actually been in use by VA since 2001. "In the past, some facilities listed both new and established patients on the EWL. In an effort to remedy this inconsistency, VHA issued a clear policy statement in March, 2013," he said. "Only new patients should be placed on the EWL. With minor exceptions, new patients are defined as those who have not been seen in the clinic for which the appointment is requested for the past 24 months. "VHA endeavors to schedule new patients within 30 days of their desired date. However, when this cannot be accomplished due to clinic capacity, and the patient cannot be accommodated within the 90 days, the facility is required to place that individual on the EWL," Garza said. According to a former VA

official, each of the 152 VA hospitals decided when to use the EWL application “and Phoenix was one of the very last to deploy.” He added, “Transition from a paper based system to the electronic one was not handled well. From what I hear, there was a great deal of resistance from staff as well.” [Source: Nextgov.com | Bob Brewin | May 9, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VAMC Cheyenne WY ► Fort Collins Clinic Falsified Records**

A VA investigation of one of its outpatient clinics in Colorado reveals how ingrained delays in medical care may be for an agency struggling to rapidly treat nearly 9 million veterans a year amid allegations that dozens have died because of delays. Clerks at the Department of Veterans Affairs clinic in Fort Collins were instructed last year how to falsify appointment records so it appeared the small staff of doctors was seeing patients within the agency's goal of 14 days, according to the investigation. A copy of the findings by the VA's Office of Medical Inspector was provided to USA TODAY. Many of the 6,300 veterans treated at the outpatient clinic waited months to be seen. If the clerical staff allowed records to reflect that veterans waited longer than 14 days, they were punished by being placed on a "bad boy list," the report shows. "Employees reported that scheduling was 'fixed,' " the findings say.

After the VA endured a year of criticism that it took too long to deliver earned compensation to disabled veterans, the agency faces a new wave of attacks over slow medical care. The Medical Inspector's probe in the Fort Collins case could not confirm that patients had been harmed "due to the lack of specific cases evaluation." A key allegation by the whistle-blowing retired doctor in Phoenix is that staff members manipulated records to hide delays. The same practice was found by the VA Office of Medical Inspector at the clinic in Fort Collins. While investigators found that VA policies were violated, local medical leaders concluded that the violations were less intentional than the result of confusion and no disciplinary action was taken, says a VA statement released 3 MAY. Retraining and weekly audits were implemented, the statement says.

The VA in 2013 revamped some of its tracking procedures to better gauge wait times for nearly 100 million medical appointments each year at 151 hospitals and 820 clinics. The agency found that only 41% of new VA medical patients were seen within 14 days last year, down from 90% reported in 2012 under an old, now-abandoned measurement method. The VA found it wasn't doing so well with first-time mental health appointments, either. The agency reported in 2011 that 95% of new mental health patients were seen within 14 days, but the new tracking system found the rate in 2013 was 66%. Mike Davies, the VA director of access, says the revised system for tracking new-patient appointments has finally provided accurate measurements on wait times. He says the department's commitment to track every single appointment is far more stringent than industry standards. "I don't think there's any other health-care system that does this," Davies says. He says the VA now can better determine what additional resources it needs to make sure veterans are treated more rapidly.

As a result of what happened at Fort Collins — the Medical Inspector's investigation was completed in December — the VA has done four site inspections to see whether timely treatment standards are being met, Davies says. They found "other instances of misunderstanding" wait-time tracking requirements, "but we have not found any widespread patterns of misunderstanding," Davies says. But federal investigators say that despite these efforts, the VA health-care system remains plagued by delays in treatment and opportunities to cover them up. "Data has to be reliable to be useful," says Debra Draper, who directs an investigative staff for the Government Accountability Office. "So if you've people going in there and doing all kinds of things (to change the data), it really is not reliable." Draper has led investigations into VA health care problems for years and says the agency has been struggling to accurately assess wait times for decades.

Draper says a key problem is a lack of oversight by top VA officials. The Fort Collins problems, for example, came to light only after a whistle-blower stepped forward. Numbers of outpatient visits are spiraling, in large part because of an aging veteran population and young combat survivors suffering multiple medical and psychological issues. At Fort Collins and the nearby VA Medical Center in Cheyenne, Wyo. — which oversees seven clinics, including the one in Fort Collins — officials complained they didn't have enough doctors or supporting staff. The result is jobs are left undone, VA investigators found. Staff required to follow up with veterans to schedule necessary appointments often didn't have time. Investigators found that nearly half the clinic's 6,000 veteran patients did not have necessary medical appointments scheduled. "Many of the (clerks) reported significant stress when trying to explain to veterans why they cannot make earlier appointments for them," the report says. "By entering (false data), the wait time for that patient appears to be zero days. ... The wait times were actually much longer." [Source: USA TODAY | Gregg Zoroya | May 04, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

### **VAMC San Antonio TX ► More Wait Time Manipulations**

A Department of Veterans Affairs scheduling clerk has accused VA officials in Austin and San Antonio of manipulating medical appointment data in an attempt to hide long wait times to see doctors and psychiatrists, the American-Statesman has learned. In communications with the U.S. Office of Special Counsel, a federal investigative body that protects government whistleblowers, the 40-year-old VA employee said he and others were “verbally directed by lead clerks, supervisors, and during training” to ensure that wait times at the Austin VA Outpatient Clinic and the North Central Federal Clinic in San Antonio were “as close to zero days as possible.”

The medical support assistant, who is seeking whistleblower protection and has been advised to remain anonymous by federal investigators, said he and other clerks achieved that by falsely logging patients’ desired appointment dates to sync with appointment openings. That made it appear there was little to no wait time, and ideally less than the department’s goal of 14 days. In reality, the clerk said, wait times for appointments could be as long as three months. The claims echo recent allegations that VA officials in Arizona and Colorado similarly manipulated wait time data or maintained secret lists to obscure lengthy wait times for medical care. Three top administrators at the VA medical center in Phoenix have since been put on leave and the VA’s inspector general is conducting an investigation into an alleged secret wait list at the facility. A retired doctor at the Phoenix facility told CNN that more than 40 veterans there died while waiting for an appointment. [Source: American-Statesman | Jeremy Schwartz | May 6, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

### **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 1 thru 15 May 2014**

**Shannon, North Carolina -- Steven Mickey Bunker**, age 47, of Aynor, South Carolina, and also of Shannon, North Carolina, pled guilty in federal court in Florence, to theft of government property and conspiracy to make false statements to federally licensed firearms dealers when purchasing firearms. **Thomas Leon Martin**, age 66, and **Betty Jean Martin**, age 74, pled guilty to conspiracy to make false statements to federally licensed firearms dealers when purchasing firearms. United States District Judge R. Bryan Harwell of Florence accepted the plea and will impose sentence after he has reviewed the presentence report which will be prepared by the U.S. Probation Office. Evidence presented at the change of plea hearing established that Veterans Affairs began an investigation of Steven Mickey Bunker after the Sun News interviewed Steven Bunker and published an article concerning injuries Bunker claimed to have sustained while serving in the military in Iraq.

After the news article was published, the Department of Veterans Affairs was notified because the newspaper received so much negative feedback indicating that Bunker had made false statements concerning his injuries. At

the time, Bunker was receiving total disability from the VA as a result of his claims that he was paralyzed and unable to walk, drive, eat, or otherwise take care of himself without assistance. Bunker's total disability included payment for others to take care of Bunker at his home. Bunker also received over \$40,000 to purchase a vehicle to be driven by someone without the use of their legs which Bunker promptly traded for a Hummer. The VA's investigation revealed that Bunker was able to walk, drive, and otherwise take care of himself. As a result of Bunker's false claims he received over \$159,000 in VA benefits. Also during the VA investigation it was discovered that Bunker had failed, as required, to register as a sex offender after previously being convicted for a lewd act or attempted lewd act upon a minor less than 16 years of age. It was further discovered that Bunker's step father, Thomas Leon Martin, and Bunker's mother, Betty Jean Martin, had assisted Bunker in purchasing twenty three firearms by lying on ATF forms when purchasing the firearms. Thomas and Betty Martin purchased the firearms by falsely stating on the ATF forms that they were purchasing the firearms for themselves knowing that the purchases were really being made for Steven Bunker who picked out and paid for the firearms. Steven Bunker was not permitted to purchase firearms because of his prior felony conviction. The maximum penalty Bunker can receive is a fine of \$250,000.00 and/or imprisonment for 15 years, plus a special assessment of \$100.00. [Source: U.S. Attorney's Office Middle District of Florida press release 14 Feb 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Loans ► Closing | What to Expect

It starts out relatively quietly. You decide to get a VA loan to buy a home or you decide it's time to refinance. Either way, your next step is applying for the mortgage. You find a lender, speak with a loan officer and ultimately choose your VA lender and the wheels begin to turn. And turn. And turn. You provide tax returns, bank statements, pay check stubs and sign a seemingly endless stack of VA and lender-required paperwork. You know it will end soon, but do you know how it will end?

**The Process.** Once you apply for a loan, you automatically trigger a full range of federal and state regulations. Lenders are required to provide you with a written estimate of closing costs, your annual percentage rate and your fair share of loan disclosures. Once you've picked out a property, the wheels turn faster still. An inspection is ordered along with a property appraisal. A closing date and location are selected and you begin to document your loan file. As you provide your documentation and the lender has ordered services from third parties such as title insurance and closing services, your loan is slowly put into a position of being submitted to an underwriter who will ultimately decide whether or not your loan meets VA guidelines. Even though your loan officer asks for more information and you provide it, the loan doesn't get evaluated until the file is complete. Once completed, it then goes for an approval.

**After the Approval.** When your loan is approved, the lender is saying that your loan application and the documentation included meets the required VA lending guidelines. Sometimes, in fact usually, the lender has additional questions that need to be answered before your loan papers can be ordered and sent to the closing table. These additional questions are called "loan conditions" and simply mean that the lender will approve your loan "on the condition" that you clear up any confusion in your loan file. For example, you had a garage sale two weeks ago and deposited \$800 in cash. That \$800 shows up on your bank statement and the lender wants to know where it came from. At first glance that seems a bit silly to document more money but lenders do ask that all undocumented deposits be, well, documented. Perhaps your pay check stub included in your application is more than 30 days old. The lender will ask for a new stub because the guidelines do require that VA loans have pay check stubs in the file the most recent 30 day period. Once your conditions are met, your loan papers are drawn up and electronically submitted to your closing agent. But before you go, there's something you first want to see.

**How Much Money Do You Need to Bring?** 24 hours before you're expected to sign your closing papers, your lender will forward to you a copy of your estimated settlement statement. This document itemizes all charges, credits and payments to all parties associated with the sale. This includes not just the seller and you, but third party providers such as attorneys and inspectors. On the bottom left hand side of the settlement statement you'll see the exact amount you're required to bring to the closing table. If there are any discrepancies or mistakes, contact your loan officer and get them fixed. A common error might be an appraisal fee you paid ahead of time but you're still being charged for it. Once you're satisfied the numbers are correct, you move forward.

**At the Closing Table.** It's the big day. The day you take ownership of your new home. So what happens? You'll probably be asked if you'd like some coffee or a soft drink then you're taken to a room where the closing agent sits. This agent can be an attorney or escrow officer or any duly licensed closing agent authorized to handle the transfer of real estate. You will sign more documents, some of them originals of copies you've signed before. Your closing agent follows "lender's instructions" line by line, making sure that you sign where you're supposed to sign and collect the proper amount of money from you. You can bring a cashier's check with you or arrange to have your funds wired to the closing agent ahead of time. Once you've signed everything, you'll provide two pieces of ID, with at least one of them with a photo. The closing agent will copy your ID, verify your identity, scan your signed documents then electronically return them to the lender for review. Once the lender has determined that the closing agent followed the instructions correctly, the lender releases the funds needed to the closing agent and you get your keys. All of this took about an hour. The closing is a cathartic moment. It's been a bit hectic at times and you might feel that the VA lender had a never ending avalanche of paperwork but you made it. You exhale, smile and celebrate. Congratulations! [Source: Mil.com | VA Loan Captain | Sep 2013 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VAVA ► Group Formed to Eliminate VA**

A veterans group has been formed to eliminate the Veterans Administration (VA), accusing the VA of being a "medical gulag system." The group, Veterans Against the Veterans Administration (VAVA) was formed prior to the current scandals engulfing the VA in Phoenix, Ohio, and Florida. The group's plan calls for all veterans to receive insurance under President Obama's Affordable Healthcare Act, for American tech giants Apple, Google, Microsoft, or Yahoo to work with private insurance companies to create an efficient compensation apparatus, and for all education benefits to be handled by the colleges and universities instead of the VA. The VAVA cites a shockingly prophetic 1995 column by the late New York Times columnist William Safire entitled "This Dinosaur Must Die Soon" as validating its position (<http://www.spokesman.com/stories/1995/jan/14/this-dinosaur-must-die-soon/>).



Veterans Against Veteran's Administration

According to the VAVA's data, the changes would end all delays in veterans receiving proper healthcare, compensation, and end the epidemic of patient deaths throughout America. Media reports reveal that the VA has paid out over \$200 million to settle 1,000 wrongful death allegations (<http://blogs.kqed.org/newsfix/2014/04/02/VA-veteran-wrongful-death-payments>). The group's founder warned US Senators Carl Levin and Richard Burr of the danger posed to veterans by VA hospitals beginning in the 1990's. The VAVA alleges that Congress has a double

standard when it comes to private corporations accused of wrong doing versus the VA and other government agencies. The VAVA specifically cites the harsh treatment of General Motors (GM) CEO Mary Barra by Congress concerning 13 deaths linked to a faulty ignition over a 10 year period. The VAVA asserts that three times as many deaths of veterans occur daily as did in the entire GM issue, solely due to the VA. The VAVA alleges that VA chiefs such as Secretary Eric Shinseki and VA administrators have been given a pass for decades by Congress.

The group estimates that the entire \$160 billion budget of the VA can be eliminated by replacing the compensation system with buy outs and private insurance. The VAVA opposes any attempts to reform the VA, likening the effort to attempting to "turn a typewriter into an IPAD". The VAVA states its mantra is defined by the question, "If the VA medical model is so good, why doesn't the Mayo Clinic, Henry Ford Health System, or Johns Hopkins use it?" The VAVA asserts that any private hospital system that followed the VA system would be sued out of business in short order and shut down by government regulators. The VAVA charges that VA as a "bureaucratic welfare racket" rather than medical health system. The VAVA asserts that organizations such as the America Legion and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America are part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

The VAVA also notes that the VA has not properly warned veterans of health threats that exist due to their service in the Desert wars, such as a lethal allergy to bed bugs. The allergy has been verified by one of America's top immunologist located in South Carolina. The VAVA is calling on Congress to immediately provide private mental healthcare to veterans, due to the threat posed by untreated veterans to civilians and other soldiers. The group cites Navy SEAL Chris Kyle's murder, the DC Naval shipyard and Ft. Hood shootings as evidence of the need for urgency in this area to avoid Columbine and Newtown like incidents involving veterans. The VAVA will present its recommendations and personal accounts of VA incompetency. This includes the tale of the lifesaving treatment the VAVA's founder received at Mt. Sanai hospital in Miami due to the VA's refusal to provide such care. [Source: PR Newswire | VAVA PR | 13 May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Pain Management Update 04 ► Alternative Treatments Pushed**

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) on April 30 used his position as chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to press for expanded veterans' access to treatments such as acupuncture, yoga, meditation and animal-assisted therapy for chronic pain. In a hearing on overmedication at the Veterans Affairs and the Defense departments, Sanders, a longtime admirer of complementary and alternative medical treatments, said VA must do more to reduce its doctors' reliance on prescriptions to treat pain. "For many veterans, chronic pain is a part of their daily life ... options for managing chronic pain are paramount to improving their quality of life," Sanders said. According to Pentagon data, about a quarter of active-duty personnel received a prescription for an opiate-based painkiller in 2013. At VA, about half of patients with chronic pain are prescribed opioids such as OxyContin, Vicodin and Percocet.

In the past five years, both VA and DoD have moved to reduce the number of potentially addictive prescriptions. A DoD task force in 2010 released a comprehensive pain management plan for physicians, and the Pentagon has cut the percentage of active-duty troops receiving opiates from 26 percent in 2011 to 24 percent last year. And VA in April launched a department wide Opioid Safety Initiative focused on patient education, prescription monitoring and emphasis on complementary and alternative practices. According to VA, the program already is seeing success, reducing the number of VA patients receiving opiates in the past 18 months by 50,000, said VA Undersecretary for Health Dr. Robert Petzel. The long-term use of highly addictive opioids pain medications can lead to chronic abuse, overdose and accidental death if taken in conjunction with other medications.

In the hearing, Sanders said alternatives should be considered before prescribing these drugs. The program on which VA's OSI effort is modeled uses a comprehensive approach that includes acupuncture, relaxation, meditation, tai chi and aromatherapy along with traditional psychotherapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy. Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC) cited the case of a veteran prescribed medication for chronic pain because it was inexpensive and expedient. "Is this the 'veteran-centric' care we constantly hear VA describing? When it comes to the care we are providing to those who have sacrificed so much ... we can't afford to get it wrong," Burr said. Sanders introduced legislation earlier this year that would require VA to expand access to alternative treatments. The bill failed on a procedural vote, but Sanders has pledged to try again this year. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Paticia Kime | May 12, 2014 ++]

**\*Vets\***



**Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act Update 03 ► Vet Loan Settlement**

The country's largest student loan providers will pay out \$60 million to U.S. troops and veterans for unfair lending practices under a proposed settlement announced by the Justice and Education departments 13 MAY. Along with the average \$1,000 payout, eligible troops would be able to erase negative credit histories related to overdue loan payments, potentially repairing their ruined financial records. And the loan providers would pay another \$36 million in penalties and fines to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation as punishment for the illegal actions. The deal affects roughly 60,000 troops who took out loans through Sallie Mae and its former loan servicing unit, now known as Navient DE Corp., dating back as far as 2005. Attorney General Eric Holder hailed the announcement as a victory for troops and the country. "We are sending a clear message to all lenders and servicers who would deprive our service members of the basic benefits and protections to which they are entitled," he said. "This type of conduct is more than just inappropriate, it is inexcusable. And it will not be tolerated." A federal court must approve the settlement before it can be finalized. Officials from Sallie Mae and Navient did not acknowledge any wrongdoing in the proposed deal, but have agreed to the terms laid out by the departments.

At issue are protections under the Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act, a law that entitles troops to a 6 percent interest rate cap on certain types of consumer loans, including those for college tuition. Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Jocelyn Samuels said the loan servicers routinely denied troops' request for the rate caps, instead putting higher rates on their outstanding balances. In some cases, it was a matter of ignorance or carelessness, Samuels said. In others, loan officers willfully ignored properly documented requests for the lower interest rates. Education Secretary Arne Duncan called the results "both gratifying and troubling." The settlement also mandates an independent administrator to locate potential victims and distribute the overpayment refunds. Justice Department officials said they will post information on how victims can get additional information on [www.justice.gov](http://www.justice.gov), but that victims need not contact the department to be eligible for the refunds. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane | May 13, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## National Coast Guard Museum ► Ground Broken

On 9 MAY, political and military dignitaries completed a ceremonial deed signing and groundbreaking for the planned 54,000-square-foot tribute to the Coast Guard along the Thames River in New London, Connecticut. The commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, Adm. Robert J. Papp Jr., signed a deed with the mayor of New London, transferring the site of the future museum from the city to the Coast Guard. *The Day* of New London reported. Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, and NAUS Member and former Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Vince Patton, USCG (Ret), also were on hand. Much work remains to be done, however, before construction on the \$80 million museum can begin. While the State has committed \$20 million to the project, millions more dollars need to be raised before construction. Officials are hopeful the waterfront museum can open in 2017. Although the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, also in New London, already has a museum, backers of the new project say it will be the first national museum to honor the 224-year-old maritime service. Refer to <http://coastguardmuseum.org> for additional information on this project. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update May 9, 2014 ++]



\*\*\*\*\*

## Flathead National Park Memorial Update 01 ► Retention Ruling

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), which focuses on constitutional law, filed an amicus brief on 7 MAY urging the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit to uphold a lower court decision that cleared the way for a statue of Jesus to remain as part of a World War II memorial on a Montana mountain. In its amicus brief, the ACLJ represents itself along with 20 members of Congress and nearly 115,000 Americans. “The history and heritage of our nation should not create a constitutional crisis,” said Jay Sekulow, Chief Counsel of the ACLJ. “The lawsuit challenging this memorial was deeply flawed from the start and a federal court correctly dismissed it last summer. Now, the atheist organization is appealing. This is nothing but another attempt to manipulate the constitution. The fact is – this memorial honoring the men and women of WWII – is not only an integral part of the history and heritage of this area, but is without question constitutional. We’re hopeful the appeals court will make that determination as well.”

Also, on 7 MAY the American Legion, represented by Liberty Institute, and the State of Montana filed a friend-of-the-court brief in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Their brief seeks to prevent removal of the Tenth Mountain Division Veterans Memorial from the Big Mountain Ski Resort in Whitefish, MT. Both the State of Montana and The American Legion ask the court to uphold a U.S. District Court ruling that declared the historic veterans memorial constitutional. I’m proud to stand with our veterans and protect their constitutional rights,” said Montana Attorney General Tim Fox. “For nearly sixty years, this memorial has honored the bravery and sacrifice of

the Tenth Mountain Division soldiers during World War II. I think the overwhelming majority of Montanans and Americans would strongly oppose removing the memorial and all it represents.”

In June 2013, a federal district court dismissed the suit filed by the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) – concluding the memorial did not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The atheist group filed suit calling the memorial “a ruse and a sham” and demanding the National Forest Service remove the display. A federal judge rejected that argument by concluding that “The statue does not convey to a reasonable informed observer that the government, rather than a private party, endorses Christianity over any other faith or the absence of faith.” The judge added: “[T]he Court finds that the renewal of the Special Use Permit does not constitute a government endorsement of a religious message and thus does not violate the Establishment Clause.” Part of a war memorial on Big Mountain at Whitefish Mountain Resort in Montana since the 1950s, the statue was inspired by monuments the soldiers – who were also members of the Knights of Columbus – saw in the mountains of Europe during the war.

In the brief filed with the appeals court, the ACLJ contends that the lower court was correct in its finding and urged the 9th circuit court to keep the memorial in place. According to the brief, the ACLJ argues that “... the Knights of Columbus’s Memorial has remained an established part of the Whitefish Mountain ski resort for sixty years. There is no evidence of any impermissible purpose on the part of the National Forest in granting the permit...the Memorial is not the site of religious services, and its ski resort setting does “not readily lend itself to meditation or any other religious activity.” Van Orden, 545 U.S. at 702; see generally ER 388-94. The Memorial is secluded and not easily accessible to the public. It is nowhere near any government structure, and was intended to be and is now seen as a historical landmark honoring WWII veterans. No reasonable observer would discover in it a government endorsement of religion.” [Source: Veteran News | Donnie La Curan | May 7, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Wall That Heals Update 02 ► Additions & Changes

Lined row upon row, the names etched on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial’s polished black granite slabs are a somber reminder that more than 58,000 U.S. troops died — or were listed as missing-in-action — as a result of their involvement in the Vietnam War. Even though the war ended four decades ago, the list continues to grow as Jim Lee and Kirk Bockman find spots to carefully sandblast new names on the memorial. “It’s a very poignant statement about what war is all about,” Lee said of the wall last week, as the engraver and his business partner prepped a cordoned-off section of what’s known as “the Wall.”



**Preparing to cut another name into the black granite of the Wall**

On 11 MAY, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund will host a ceremony at the memorial in recognition of the 13 veterans whose names they added. Eight veterans listed on the wall as missing will be recognized as having their

status changed to “confirmed dead.” Lee and Bockman came to the memorial in 1986 to add 110 names. The names on the original, dedicated in 1982, came from a Department of Defense master list that planners never intended to update, Lee said. Thinking the follow-up work might be “a one-time deal,” Lee said he asked Jan Scruggs, founder and president of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, how long the updating might go on. “He said to me, ‘Jim, plan on it, you’ll be out here doing this when you’re 65.’” Lee turns 66 in June. “I just said, ‘Come on, no way. You’ve got to be kidding.’ But it’s true. We’re still out here doing it,” he said. Even after doing this for 28 years, Lee remembers stories behind some of the names. He recalled one Vietnam veteran who spent 16 years in a coma at a VA hospital before he passed away. Another veteran — whom Lee said had visited the memorial — died after shrapnel lodged inside him from his days in Vietnam broke loose and severed his aorta.

Precise measurements must be made to ensure letters are lined up, have the right width and are etched into the granite to a depth that matches the etchings already on the monument. If the inscription is too shallow, the new name will stand out. If it’s cut too deeply, the name will lie in shadows. The letters are burned into the wall as a dust-free sandblasting apparatus is passed over a stencil mounted an adhesive. Aluminum oxide particles shot at high pressure cut into the granite under the stencil. The area around the letters has a rubber material that deflects the particles so the granite beneath the rubber does not get burned. At the same time the rock is being cut, a vacuum system sucks up the debris. Ensuring that the adhesive holds the stencil in place is critical, Lee said. If the wall gets too hot, it could dry out and weaken the adhesive, causing stencil failure. Coupled with the strong suction of the vacuum system, a weakened adhesive could let the stencil lift up, allowing particles to mar the wall. “That’s the most terrible thing that could happen,” Lee said, adding that even the slightest error with the sandblaster will cause exposed granite to turn white. “And so, if you have the center of the ‘O’ come off because the wall was too hot, then you have a great big white blob in the middle of a letter.” At that point, Lee said, “you’ve done damage to the wall.”

Not wanting their company, Engrave Write in Denver, to be the one that “ruins a national memorial,” Lee and Bockman approach their job with the utmost care. “This is not like most sandblasting. There are people immediately around you,” said Lee who recalled mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters watching him burn the name of their loved one on the wall. “It’s almost performance sandblasting, if you want to call it that.” Lee said when he first began engraving names on the wall, he didn’t anticipate how important the memorial would become to him. “It’s taught me a lot. To see what 58,000 names means. The sacrifice is pretty profound.”

#### **Names added in 2014**

- Staff Sgt. Jerry Leon Antrich, U.S. Army June 20, 1930 – Aug. 10, 1969 Date of Casualty: Nov. 1, 1967
- Sgt. 1st Class Frederick Joseph Baum, U.S. Army Feb. 22, 1930 – Feb. 28, 1971 Date of Casualty: Unknown
- Pfc. Henry John Drozdowski, Jr., U.S. Army March 9, 1947 – April 30, 2011 Date of Casualty: Jan. 13, 1967
- Spc. 5 Michael Noel Faherty, U.S. Army Dec. 30, 1946 – July 25, 1968 Date of Casualty: Unknown
- Pfc. Gregory Jackson Franklin, U.S. Army July 19, 1949 – Feb. 12, 1979 Date of Casualty: Nov. 27, 1968
- Spc. 4 William Arthur Gabrielsen, U.S. Army April 2, 1947 – March 10, 1970 Date of Casualty: Aug. 12, 1968
- Pfc. Ronald Hall, U.S. Army July 20, 1948 – Oct. 2, 1967 Date of Casualty: Unknown
- Spc. 4 Robert Kryptavich, U.S. Army Oct. 26, 1942 – Sept. 10, 1968 Date of Casualty: Unknown
- Spc. 4 Thomas Charles Littles, U.S. Army Nov. 29, 1946 – June 3, 1971 Date of Casualty: Dec. 28, 1969
- Pfc. Paul Luther Loidolt, U.S. Army Aug. 30, 1948 – Feb. 21, 1969 Date of Casualty: April 4, 1968
- Master Sgt. Walter Hugh Mauldin, U.S. Army Sept. 9, 1931 – May 8, 1968 Date of Casualty: Unknown
- Spc. 4 Alan Leslie Seamans, U.S. Army June 10, 1949 – Jan. 25, 1998 Date of Casualty: Oct. 13, 1967
- Pfc. Danny Joe Wilson, U.S. Army July 8, 1944 – Nov. 16, 2012 Date of Casualty: Aug. 18, 1966

#### **Status changes**

- Maj. Howard Vincent Andre, Jr.; USAF; Memphis, Tenn.; Panel 21W, Row 80
- Spc. 5 John Lawrence Burgess; USA; Kingsley, Mich.; Panel 9W, Row 104

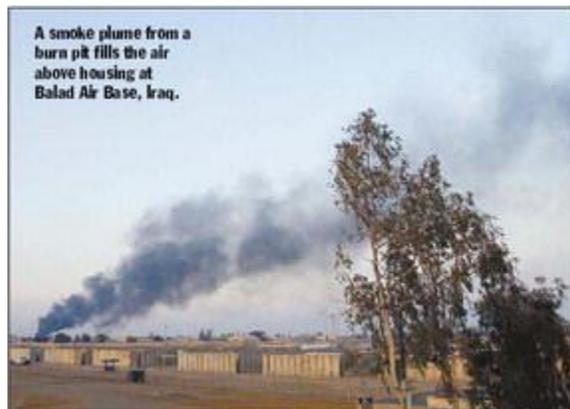
- Col. Thomas Wayne Dugan; USAF; Reading, Pa.; Panel 36W, Row 14
- Maj. Louis Fulda Guillermin; USAF; of West Chester, Pa.; Panel 53E, Row 14
- Petty Officer 3rd Class Michael Barry Judd; USN; Cleveland, Ohio; Panel 22E, Row 88
- Lt. Col. Robert Edward Pietsch; USAF; Cleveland, Ohio; Panel 53E, Row 21
- Maj. James Elmo Sizemore, USAF; San Diego, Calif.; Panel 21W, Row 86
- Staff Sgt. Lawrence Woods; USA; Clarksville, Tenn.; Panel 1E, Row 68

[Source: Stars & Stripes | Carlos Bongioanni | May 7, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Burn Pit Lawsuit Update 02 ► Alan Metzgar et. al. v. KBR Inc Lawsuit

Government contractor KBR will find out this year whether the Supreme Court will consider a group of lawsuits filed against the company for its operation of burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Houston-based firm has petitioned the court to hear arguments in the case of **Alan Metzgar et. al. v. KBR Inc.**, a collection of class-action and individual suits alleging that KBR and former parent company Halliburton acted negligently when operating the burn pits for the U.S. military, exposing troops to toxic fumes and pollutants. KBR is arguing that the case, which in March was sent back for reconsideration to its original court by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, should be heard by the high court because it addresses issues of constitutional law on combatant activities and contract support. “In Vietnam, people who were drafted, they drove the trucks, they did the laundry, cooked the food— all the things that have been outsourced by the Army were done by soldiers,” KBR counsel Mark Lowes said. “I don’t see us ever going back [to that]. Contractors are going to be tied to the military from here on out, and it behooves the court to tell us how that relationship is going to work.”



Last year, a U.S. District Court judge in Maryland dismissed the suits, affirming KBR's defense that it deserved the same protection as the U.S. government from litigation stemming from injuries in war zones. Judge Roger Titus also agreed that the judicial branch did not have the authority to rule on the political decisions of the executive branch in the cases. But a three-judge panel from the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., disagreed, ruling that the lawsuits could continue because KBR had not sufficiently demonstrated it was acting under military orders specifically during burn pit operations or water treatment activities. The judges concluded that the case needed further exploration and consideration as to whether KBR should share the same immunity the military

has from litigation over injuries in war zones.

Susan Burke, lead attorney for the plaintiffs, said she doesn't think the Supreme Court will take the case at this point because the 4th District Court remanded it for further investigation. The court issued a revised version of this opinion on March 7, 2014 <http://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/ca4/13-1430/13-1430-2014-03-06.html> "We're cautiously optimistic," Burke said. "Typically, the Supreme Court doesn't like to hear cases prematurely." Plaintiffs, who number in the hundreds, say the smoke produced by the open-air burn pits contained toxins such as dioxin and volatile organic compounds that have made them sick, causing respiratory illnesses, neurological disorders and cancer. They also charge that KBR violated military orders in performing water treatment services, causing troops to fall ill. The burn pit litigation is one of three major suits outstanding against KBR. The 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals last August overturned a judge's decision to dismiss the case of Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Maseth, electrocuted in 2008 in a KBR-built shower. The lawsuit alleges that shoddy electrical work caused Maseth's death. And in 2012, a federal jury in Portland, Ore., ordered KBR to pay 12 soldiers \$85 million in punitive damages for exposing them to a toxic chemical during the cleanup of a water treatment facility in 2003. That case is on appeal.

If the Supreme Court does not hear the Metzgar case, it will continue to be considered in the Maryland U.S. District Court. Should that happen, Lowes said, KBR believes the merits of the case still lean in the company's favor. He said KBR never operated the burn pit at Joint Base Balad, Iraq, a central location in several of the suits, and added that other environmental factors in Iraq and Afghanistan may have contributed to troops' chronic health problems. "Iraq was not a nice place. Aside from burn pits, you had dust storms, the desert conditions, the sand over there was dirty," Lowes said. "The people who served all had the [Iraqi] crud." Burke said she thinks once the details come to light, the cases will reflect clear-cut examples of negligence. "This is a fairly straightforward corporate wrongdoing, corporate malfeasance, that wronged people. KBR is trying to morph it into an issue of national import, but it's just garden-variety negligence," Burke said. The Supreme Court would likely announce in June or October whether it will hear the case. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | May 12, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Bladensburg WWI Vet Memorial** ► **Lawsuit**

On 3 MAY, The American Legion, The American Legion Department of Maryland, and The American Legion Post 131 of Colmar Manor, Md., sought to intervene in a lawsuit pending in the United States District Court for the District of Maryland challenging the constitutionality of an historic veteran's memorial that sits in the heart of the Bladensburg, Md., historic district. The motion for intervention, filed by Liberty Institute and Jones Day, asks the Court to permit the Legion to become a party in American Humanist Association v. Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in order to defend the World War I memorial it erected almost 100 years ago. Liberty Institute is a nonprofit legal group dedicated to defending and restoring religious liberty across America. To view the motion online go to: <http://www.libertyinstitute.org/document.doc?id=153>



The American Legion erected the Bladensburg World War I Veterans Memorial in 1925 in honor of 49 men of Prince George's County, who gave their lives in the First World War while serving in the U.S. armed forces. It sits in the immediate vicinity of memorials to those who served in the War of 1812, World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam, as well as a memorial to the fallen of September 11, 2001. "We are hopeful that the Court will grant our client, The American Legion, the right to intervene in order to protect its interests in this historic Bladensburg World War I Veterans Memorial, which it erected almost a century ago to honor the county's fallen," said Jeff Mateer, General Counsel for Liberty Institute.

The Legion seeks to protect its interests in the Bladensburg World War I Veterans Memorial and to ensure that the memorial and others like it may continue to honor American veterans. American Legion posts have participated in patriotic events at the Bladensburg World War I Veterans Memorial since its inception, including on Memorial Day and Veterans Day. "The attack on this time-honored memorial is shocking," said Roger Byron, Liberty Institute Senior Counsel. "The Bladensburg World War I Veterans Memorial has stood for almost 100 years in honor of the fallen. We are committed to ensuring it stands for 100 more. The men it honors, all others who have served, and those in uniform today deserve no less." The lawsuit began on 25 FEB when the humanist group filed a complaint, alleging that the public ownership, maintenance, and display of the memorial violated the Establishment Clause. The Bladensburg World War I Veterans Memorial joins a growing list of veterans memorials across the country that have come under similar attack. [Source: Liberty Institute News Release 3 May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **POW/MIA Update 28 ► Wauwilermoos Airmen Medal Recipients**

Alva Moss was 20 when his World War II B-24 bomber took fire over Allach, Germany. He and the crew were forced to bail out over Switzerland, an officially neutral country during the war. With his legs filled with shrapnel, Sgt. Moss parachuted into a tree, where Swiss police would later find him. He was put up in a resort hotel in the Swiss Alps, fed military rations and offered the best of Swiss medical care. He would be required to wait out the war there as an internee. But Moss wanted to return to the front lines. As soon as he was healthy, he jumped out a window with a group of British airmen and headed for the border, hopping trains and dodging police on his way back to his unit, which was stationed at an airport just across the Italian border. But border guards caught up to him, and Moss was shipped to Wauwilermoos Prison Camp. There he lived the life of a POW, becoming part of a little known piece of WWII history.



**Cliff Owen/AP - Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh III presents the Prisoner of War Medal to former Wauwilermoos prison camp POW, retired Tech. Sgt. Alva Moss.**

He and 160 other Americans held at the camp were never officially recognized as prisoners of war because Switzerland was not at war with the United States. On 30 APR, however, the Department of Defense made a correction. It awarded the United States Prisoner of War Medal to the eight surviving prisoners of Wauwilermoos camp. They were among 143 honored. Gen. Mark Welsh III, Air Force chief of staff, teared up as he pinned the medals on the airmen, now in their late 80s and 90s. Some were in wheelchairs, or hunched over metal walkers as they made their way to Welsh. Along with Moss, the living veterans honored were James I. Misuraca, James V. Moran, Paul J. Gambaiana, James F. Mahon, John M. Fox, William G. Blackburn and George E. Thursby. Staff Sgt. Joseph Sinitsky was honored posthumously, along with 134 others. (The remaining airmen have yet to have their status fully verified.) “This is a great time for us,” Moss said Wednesday, his medal gleaming from the lapel of his suit jacket. “Everyone was together again and there were no slackers.”



Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III made the presentations. He noted that these seven surviving men were barely old enough to grow facial hair in 1943-44 while flying bombing missions into the heart of Nazi Germany, fully aware of the fear and peril awaiting them, when they were shot down over Switzerland. "During that time period, for these men and their bomber crewmates, the chance of surviving a combat tour without being shot down, captured or killed, was about 25 percent – a one in four chance of survival," Welsh said. Aircraft loss rates of 30-50 percent he said were not uncommon on missions against the most well-defended targets. "It's the kind of courage we read about in books, that people make movies about and that these humble, grateful survivors praise on their fallen comrades but rarely seem to recognize in themselves. But make no mistake about it – these men have that kind of courage. But the courage of these eight men wasn't limited to the skies over Western Europe. "Each of them has a story about a mission that didn't go well, about a day when he and his crew were the ones who didn't return, about a day when his aircraft was either shot down or damaged so badly that they had to crash land in Switzerland," the general said.

Congress passed an amendment to the FY2013 defense bill that allowed the Wauwilermoos airmen to be considered for the medal. The Air Force agreed that these airmen deserved recognition for their sacrifices while trying to reach Allied lines in France. "They served each other and our country proudly; they saved a world and they inspired a nation," Welsh said. Their recognition was the result of an extended campaign by Maj. Dwight Mears, who started the project as a West Point doctoral student. Now he teaches history there. Mears culled records from U.S. and Swiss archives to show that conditions at Wauwilermoos were analogous to camps elsewhere. Mears's effort was also personal: His grandfather, George Mears, a B-17 pilot, had been imprisoned at Wauwilermoos. They were men trapped in a diplomatic gray zone. How could they be prisoners of war in a neutral country? And they were men under suspicion. At one point during the war, U.S. officials suspected that those airmen who ended up in neutral countries were deserting the military in favor of internment. A total of 1,570 American airmen were interned in Switzerland. But there and in Sweden, the numbers grew so large that U.S. officials feared they were facing a morale crisis. In May 1944, William Corcoran, the U.S. Consul in Sweden, submitted a report suggesting that airmen were "openly expressing opposition to further service." The military launched an investigation that

ultimately showed the doubts were unfounded. Mears found evidence of more than 1,000 escape attempts. In Wauwilermoos, airmen fled though being caught meant being sent to solitary confinement.

After the ceremony, Mears read from a letter written by Sinitsky. It turns out that Wauwilermoos also housed the country's worst convicts. The camp was run by a renegade Swiss military officer and Nazi sympathizer. According to Mears, the prison was an aberration. While the Swiss Army and the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross were busy monitoring POW conditions in other countries, few efforts were taken to ensure humane conditions in Switzerland, Mears said. "Nobody was inspecting them, and they were not inspecting themselves," said Mears, whose grandfather was one of the men honored Wednesday.



The ceremony came about as the result of nearly 15 years of effort by U.S. Army Maj. Dwight S. Mears, an Iraq war veteran and an assistant professor of history at West Point, to learn more about his late grandfather, Army Air Force Lt. George W. Mears who was captured after his B-17 Superball was shot down in 1944. "My grandfather was wounded, his controls were shot away and he lost two engines, but he managed to fly the crippled bomber to Zurich, where the entire crew was interned," Mears wrote. Because Switzerland was neutral during the war, the Americans were not allowed to leave the country but many, including the eight survivors wanted to get back into the fight or return home, Welsh explained. "For those who tried to escape and were caught, the punishment was severe." They were captured and interned with the very basest criminals in Swiss society, Welsh said. "They slept on lice-infested straw, sewage and waste overflowed in many of the common areas; many prisoners became very sick and there was no medical treatment available." There was, however, solitary confinement, starvation and mental terror, the general added. And after the war, many of the survivors carried the secrets of the horrors they endured. Switzerland's neutrality rendered internees ineligible for the POW medal because existing law required captivity by a belligerent in a declared conflict, or alternately captivity by "foreign armed forces hostile to the United States," Mears wrote. [Source: Washington Post | Aaron Gregg | Apr 30, 2014++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **POW/MIA Recoveries ► 140501 thru 140514**

"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](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

-o-o-O-o-o-

## Korea

The Defense POW/MIA Office announced the identification of remains belonging to three soldiers killed during the Korean War and an airmen killed during the Vietnam War. Returned are:

- Army Sgt. **Richard John Archambeault**, Company L, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, was lost on Nov. 2, 1950, in North Korea. He was accounted for on April 29 and will be buried with full military honors.
- Army Cpl. **Richard Isbell**, Company H, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, was lost on April 25, 1951, in South Korea. He was accounted for on April 17, 2014. He will be buried with full military honors.
- Army Cpl. **William N. Bonner**, Medical Company, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, was lost on May 31, 1951, in North Korea. He was accounted for on April 22 and will be buried with full military honors in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

## World War II

-o-o-O-o-o-

[Source: [http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news\\_releases/](http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news_releases/) May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## OBIT | **Buska~Donald** ► 29 Apr 2014

For a weary, emotional and grateful Donald Buska, it was mission accomplished. The 86-year-old U.S. Navy veteran fulfilled his longtime dream of traveling to Washington, D.C., on a two day trip 27 APR to visit the National World War II Memorial. The once-in-a-lifetime trip with Big Sky Honor Flight of Montana afforded him opportunities he had only imagined. And, it was an honor that came just in time. On 29APR, Buska, who had been in hospice care since 12 FEB, passed away. “He had the time of his life,” said Buska’s son, Jeff, who traveled with him to Washington, D.C. “What a way to go. He went out on a high note,” Jeff said.



**Eli Wilke, 6, gives Billings World War II veteran Donald Buska, left, a hug as he arrives at Dulles International airport in Dulles, Va.**

As the senior Buska prepared for the trip, he fretted over what to wear and what to pack. He settled on casual clothes and a pink Sony camera that belonged to his late wife. He worried about whether he even deserved to go, since he hadn’t seen combat as a sailor during World War II. And, he worried whether he was too sick to travel. Suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary, which makes it difficult to breathe, Buska had been in the care of Rocky Mountain Hospice. Hospice caregivers assured him he was well enough to travel. Once in the nation’s capital, he snacked on a Dove Bar with his son on the National Mall, snapped photos of marble monuments with his pink Sony camera and shook hands with schoolchildren who were awe struck by their brush with living history. When two Japanese tourists asked if they could take photographs with him, he agreed on one condition: Each must give him a hug in return. The tourists paid in full. He was in his glory.

On Sunday night, after a banquet dinner of chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy, green beans and cheesecake, he enjoyed his usual “night cap,” a double shot of Southern Comfort in his room. On Monday, he connected with a former poker buddy from Laurel who was also on the trip. He toured the National World War II Memorial and posed for a class photo. For the first time, he witnessed the Changing of the Guard at Arlington National Cemetery and found comfort in the calming water falls at the FDR Memorial. They reminded him of the camping trips he often took with his six children. It was an emotional stop. He was ecstatic to be aboard a van that was escorted through the District of Columbia by police, complete with flashing lights and sirens, stopping motorists in rush-hour traffic to make way for the World War II veterans. “He thought that was really cool,” Jeff said.

At Dulles International Airport, all the veterans were greeted with Mail Call. Family and friends had written letters of support and encouragement to each of the veterans. Buska had one of the largest packages. One of his granddaughters, Danielle Connors, had her middle-school science class write her grandfather as part of a class project. “This is amazing,” he told his son, Jeff. “This is overwhelming.” Back in Billings, the 75 veterans aboard the flight were celebrated as heroes and cheered on by hundreds of well-wishers, including local high school pep bands, dignitaries and comrades. “He thought that welcome home was just neat,” said his son, Jeff Buska, 53, of Helena. “There were all these soldiers shaking his hand.” Less than eight hours after that homecoming, Buska died at his West End home.

Buska went home after the homecoming celebration to relive the 37-hour whirlwind tour with some of his children, including his daughter, Donna, who traveled to Billings from Great Falls with her family to surprise her father. They stayed up until midnight reading each of the letters he received. Buska shared highlights of the trip with his children over his familiar night cap. "Cheers, Dad," Jeff recalled saying. "We toasted and we told each other we loved each other," he said, choking back tears. About 4:15 a.m. Tuesday, Jeff heard a crash. He discovered his father lying on the floor of the living room. His father was gone. "My dad went to go dance with mom," Jeff said. Becky Hillier, media relations director of Rocky Mountain Hospice and a member of the Big Sky Honor Flight Committee, said: "A final mission was accomplished in more ways than one." [Source: The Billings Gazette | Cindy Uken | 1 May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **OBIT | Barrios~Hector** ▶ Apr 2014

**Hector Barrios died this week at age 71. It's okay if you've never heard of him. You have no reason to know who he is.** The short version: Hector was a decorated U.S. veteran who died abroad, impoverished and estranged from the country he loved and served, with none of the benefits entitled to him as a veteran. Barrios was born in Tijuana, Mexico. In 1961, at the age of 18, he moved to the United States. In 1967, at the age of 24, he was drafted into the U.S. military to do his part for the war effort. He did not go back to Mexico or hide out in Canada. He did not dodge the draft or evade the call to duty. Hector spent a year in Vietnam, fighting for his adopted country. Barrios was injured fighting for America, took head wounds in combat, but he survived the war and was able to return home "Thank God I came back. Many of my fellow soldiers didn't make it back."



**Hector Barrios**

Barrios received the Army Commendation Medal for exceptionally meritorious service and his discharge paperwork listed him as a U.S. citizen. He earned his citizenship with blood and his friends say he was proud to be an American. And after being arrested and convicted for possession of marijuana, Barrios was summarily deported from the country. In a video recorded on the weekend before veteran's day 2012. Barrios claims in the interview that he didn't have a chance to plead his case, that he wasn't given proper representation. Immigration law reforms implemented in 1996 require the deportation of any permanent resident convicted of any of a long list of criminal offenses regardless of military service, whether they have a spouse or children who are U.S. citizens, without appeal. These changes eliminated judicial discretion in deportation proceedings. According to the law, if a non-citizen or permanent resident is convicted of a crime on the list, they must be deported and no judge can rule otherwise.

"I had a green card. They took it away. But I have my citizenship of the United States in my service paperwork. I took an oath," he says he says in the video. The video documents how Hector lived out the rest of his life in Tijuana, in poverty. He worked a job at a taco stand to get by, but speaking of the "suffering" there, he said, "I have a job, but not enough to eat. There is never enough." This man who fought and was injured serving America was allowed to

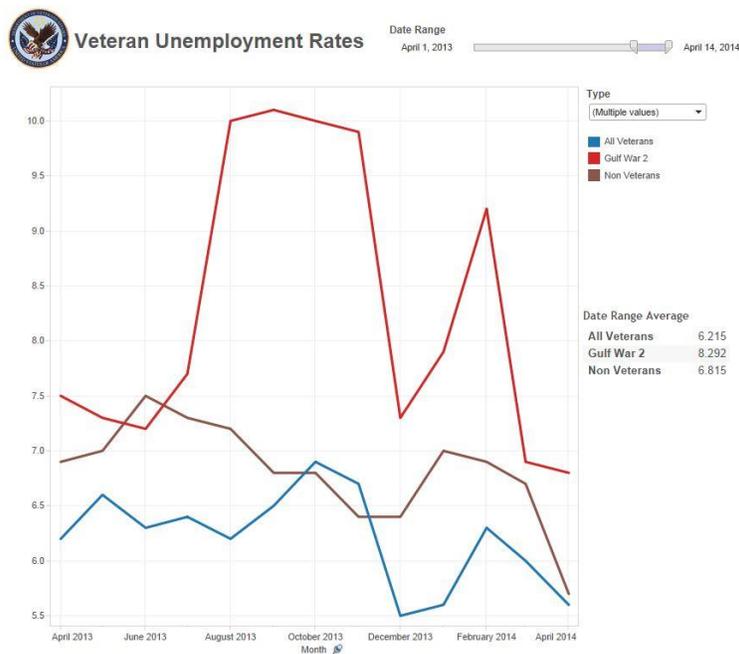
live out the rest of his natural life in poverty with none of the Social Security or healthcare benefits veterans are entitled because he was caught with some pot. "I think it's unjust to deport someone who fought for her ... the United States," Hector says in the video. Barrios left a dying wish for others in similar situations: "I hope that everything turns out well and that they help us because I'm not the only one."

The Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) estimates 70,000 non-citizens enlisted in the U.S. military between 1999 and 2008 and once enlisted, non-citizens tend to serve longer than their citizen counterparts. According to a recent bio on another deported vet in the Huffington Post, the group Banished Veterans, an advocacy organization of more than a dozen deported vets living in Mexico just 30 miles from the U.S. border estimates 8,000-40,000 military vets have been deported after serving their country -- the number is so nebulous because no U.S. agency actually tracks the deportation of veterans. The group is hoping Congress will pass immigration reform bills that allow deported vets to return to their homes. Hector never stopped hoping he would have the chance to return to America. According to his friends, he loved the U.S. until the end. [Source: Military.com article Apr 28, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Vet Jobs Update 151 ► Unemployment Rates Continue to Fall

The April 2014 unemployment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that Veterans are, as a whole, doing slightly better than non-Veterans. Gulf War II Veterans, while lower than last month, are still experiencing higher rates of unemployment than non-Veterans or Veterans as a whole. While there is still more work to do, the downward trend in Veteran unemployment had continued since January.



**Veteran Unemployment Rates April 2013 - April 2014**

The April numbers show that unemployment for all Veterans was reported at 5.6 percent, which is .1 below non Veterans at 5.7 percent. Looking specifically at our most recent Veterans, the Gulf War II era veterans' unemployment rate is 6.8 percent, which is down .1 from March's rate of 6.9 percent. It's also the lowest monthly unemployment rate since November 2008 for Veterans who have served in the Gulf War II era. We have recently

compiled the data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics on Veteran unemployment and created a tool which allows you to compare different demographics as they relate to Veteran unemployment. Use the tool at <http://www.blogs.va.gov/Vantage/resources/unemployment/> [Source: Vantage Point | Tim Hudak | 2May ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Jobs Update 153 ► U.S. Cyber Warrior Scholarship Program**

Military veterans continue to be touted as a rich source of talent to groom for information security and cybersecurity careers, so much that one foundation is expanding a scholarship program that enables veterans to obtain specialized certifications in the field. The (ISC)2 Foundation and Booz Allen Hamilton earlier this month launched the first of three application periods for the 2014-2015 U.S. Cyber Warrior Scholarship program, which in its 2013 inaugural year offered scholarships to six veterans transitioning back into the civilian workforce. The scholarships cover all of the expenses associated with a cybersecurity certification, including training, textbooks, mobile study materials, certification testing and the first year of certification maintenance fees.



Due to the overwhelming number of applications submitted in 2013, the (ISC)2 Foundation and Booz Allen have expanded the number of opportunities veterans have to apply, from one application period to three through Aug. 1, 2015. This will increase applicants' chances for selection, said Julie Peeler, director of the (ISC)2 Foundation. "Military veterans and information security professionals share an inherent desire to protect people," Peeler said. "Through this program ... we aim to merge these shared traits into an opportunity to enhance national cybersecurity by providing returning military veterans the means to protect their country within a profession desperate to fill open positions." The scholarship committee will award up to twelve scholarships over the three award periods to qualifying veterans, with the first round of recipients announced on Oct. 1, the kickoff of National Cybersecurity Awareness Month.

The scholarship program was created in response to findings in (ISC)2's most recent Global Information Security Workforce Study, which found a significant workforce shortage in the cybersecurity field – one that is negatively impacting organizations and leading to more frequent and costly data breaches. Many job ratings in the military require security certification, and many veterans perform tasks in the military that could prepare them for work in the cybersecurity field if they received additional training. The first application period for the scholarships is open through Friday, Aug. 1. To qualify, veterans must have an information technology or security background and have been an active duty member and honorably discharged from one of the five branches of the U.S. military with end service date between May 1, 2009 and May 1, 2014. For more information on the scholarships check out <https://www.isc2cares.org/USA-Cyber-Warrior-Scholarship/default.aspx>. [Source: NextGov.com | Brittany Ballenstedt | May 12, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Vet Job Opportunities @ Johnson&Johnson ► Military Recruiting Programs

Johnson & Johnson is a global leader in health care, with nearly 128,000 employees in over 275 companies in 60 countries. Their global businesses are organized in three segments: Consumer, Medical Devices and Diagnostics, and Pharmaceuticals. Management principles and everyday actions are rooted in the shared values of their credo, which challenges them to put the needs and well-being of the people they serve first. Through their operating companies, they work with partners in health care to touch the lives of more than a billion people every day, throughout the world. Military veterans who are employed within their Family of Companies play vital roles that leverage the leadership and values-driven experience they've attained while serving their country. Their unique perspectives and experiences are valued in a teamwork environment where they have many opportunities to move their careers forward and make meaningful contributions to the health and well-being of people everywhere.

The Johnson and Johnson Family of Companies is a place where a veteran's unique perspective and experience hold value. They'll find opportunities to drive success for their team and their business as they build leadership experience that can move their career forward. With more than 275 operating companies that touch nearly every aspect of human health care, veterans will have a chance to find the career that best aligns with their passion to help others. Most importantly, they'll have a chance to make their own unique mark, in service to the health and well-being of people everywhere. For more information on Johnson & Johnson, jobs available and applying for a position go to <http://jobs.jnj.com>. [Source: Military.com article Mar 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 12 May 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. The current schedule is provided in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Retiree Activity\ Appreciation Days (RAD) Schedule**". For more information call the phone numbers of the Retirement Services Officer (RSO) sponsoring the RAD as indicated in the attachment. An up-to-date RAD list is always available online at <http://www.hostmtb.org/RADLIST-2014.html>. [Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | 12 May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Vet Hiring Fairs ► 15 May thru 15 Jul 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](http://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>.

**Date**                      **Location**

- Tuesday, May 13, 2014: [Rochester, MN](#)
- Tuesday, May 13, 2014: [Greater San Antonio, TX Military Spouse Networking Reception](#)
- Tuesday, May 13, 2014: [Tampa, FL](#)
- Wednesday, May 14, 2014: [Military Spouse Hiring Fair Lackland AFB, TX](#)
- Wednesday, May 14, 2014: [Camden, NJ](#)
- Thursday, May 15, 2014: [Layton, UT](#)
- Thursday, May 15, 2014: [NAS Whidbey Island, WA Military Spouse Networking Reception & Hiring Fair](#)
- Wednesday, May 21, 2014: [Boston, MA](#)
- Thursday, May 22, 2014: [Fort Wayne, IN](#)
- Thursday, May 22, 2014: [Memphis, TN](#)
- Thursday, May 22, 2014: [Charlotte, NC](#)
- Thursday, May 22, 2014: [Riverside, CA](#)
- Wednesday, May 28, 2014: [Joint Base Fort Myer Henderson Hall, VA Military Spouse Networking Reception](#)
- Wednesday, May 28, 2014: [Tulsa, OK](#)
- Wednesday, May 28, 2014: [Martinsburg, WV](#)
- Thursday, May 29, 2014: [Military Spouse Hiring Fair Joint Base Myer Henderson Hall](#)
- Thursday, May 29, 2014: [Cincinnati, OH](#)
- Friday, May 30, 2014: [San Juan, PR](#)
- Wednesday, June 4, 2014: [Roseburg, OR](#)
- Thursday, June 5, 2014: [Jacksonville, FL](#)
- Thursday, June 5, 2014: [Las Cruces, NM](#)
- Tuesday, June 10, 2014: [Savannah, GA](#)
- Tuesday, June 10, 2014: [Dover, DE](#)
- Wednesday, June 18, 2014: [Jonesboro, AR](#)

- Wednesday, June 18, 2014: [Somerville, NJ](#)
- Thursday, June 19, 2014: [Buffalo, NY](#)
- Thursday, June 19, 2014: [Cincinnati, OH](#)
- Wednesday, June 25, 2014: [Charleston, SC](#)
- Thursday, June 26, 2014: [Cleveland, OH](#)
- Thursday, June 26, 2014: [Lexington, KY](#)
- Monday, June 30, 2014: [Omaha, NE](#)
- Tuesday, July 1, 2014: [Austin, TX](#)
- Tuesday, July 8, 2014: [Huntsville, AL](#)
- Wednesday, July 9, 2014: [Springfield, OR](#)
- Thursday, July 10, 2014: [Harrisburg, PA](#)
- Friday, July 11, 2014: [Springfield, IL](#)
- Tuesday, July 15, 2014: [Atlanta, GA](#)

**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 13 May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **WWII VETS 63 ► Buxton~Winslow**

Capt. Winslow Buxton turned 100 years young on 14 FEB. Living in Bellevue, Wash., he remains affable, pert and active. He was born in New London, Conn., and attended the Coast Guard Academy from 1934 to 1938. Before the war he served as deck officer aboard Coast Guard Cutter Mojave and executive officer of Coast Guard Cutter Tallapoosa, working on search and rescue cases out of Key West, Fl. In honor of his birthday, Coast Guard historian Dr. Dave Rosen sat down with Buxton as the veteran recounted his WWII adventures:

**In 1942 Lt Buxton was assigned as the executive officer of Coast Guard Cutter Comanche.** The Greenland mission of the 165-foot cutter consisted of guarding the cryolite mine at Ivigtut, setting up the Beach Head Station, icebreaking, looking for any enemy personnel and helping chart the coast. In May the Comanche crossed the Arctic Circle just as the winter ice melted, escorting the cargo ship SS Bridgeport. It transited the 90-miles long Sondre Strom Fjord en route to the Bluie West Eight airbase at its inland end, about 35 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The delivery of aviation gasoline to the airbase enabled the trans-Atlantic flights to begin. Buxton was accepted into the Sons of the Polar Seas. In June the cutter served as the visual aide and radio beacon at the fjord entrance to the main

airbase, Narsarsuak, for the first U.S. Air Force trans-Atlantic flight of B-17s while the air control system was still being installed. The ship logged the arrival of 26 B-17s on that first day, from 2:40 am to 10:30 pm. In July Comanche served as plane guard at BW-1 at Tunliarfik Fjord, performing rescue duty for arriving and departing craft in case of ditching or crashing.

On 15 JUL the famous Lost Squadron landed on the Ice Cap after attempting to fly from Greenland to Iceland. Two B-17E Flying Fortress bombers and six P-38F Lightning fighters bellied in on top of the Greenland ice cap. The airplanes were being ferried across the Atlantic bound for Reykjavik, Iceland. They encountered bad weather and were subjected to Bogus radio transmissions sending false weather information only. The transmissions were traced to an illegal German radio station in northeast Greenland. Running low on gas, they decided to crash land on the ice cap. To assist rescue, the entire squadron stayed together. The first plane failed in an attempt to land with the wheels down, and the remaining flight went in with wheels up, sliding a considerable distance before coming to a stop. On the fourth day after the crash landing the crews managed to make their SOS heard. Search and rescue planes located the crash site and dropped special clothing and food necessary for survival on the ice cap. The pilots and crew had to hike seventeen miles to the coast, where they were picked up 14 JUL by the **Coast Guard Cutter** Northland which had been on patrol looking for German radio and weather stations.

Left behind in one of the B-17s was the top secret Norden bombsight. The Norden was a tachometric bombsight used by the U.S. Army Air Forces and the U.S. Navy during World War II. It aided the crew of bomber aircraft in dropping bombs accurately. Key to the operation of the Norden were two features: a mechanical computer that calculated the bomb's trajectory based on current flight conditions, and a linkage to the bomber's autopilot that let it react quickly and accurately to changes in the wind or other effects. Together, these features allowed for unprecedented accuracy in day bombing from high altitudes. In test runs the Norden demonstrated a circular error probability of 75 feet, an astonishing performance for the era. This accuracy allowed direct attacks on ships, factories, and other point targets. Both the Navy and the Air Force saw this as a means to achieve war aims through high-altitude bombing, without resorting to area bombing, as proposed by European forces. To achieve these aims, the Norden was granted the utmost secrecy well into the war, and was part of a then-unprecedented production effort on the same scale as the Manhattan Project which launched the development of the atomic bomb. It was critically important that the Norden not fall into the hands of the enemy.

Operations in Greenland were kept secret. Ship crew members were neither permitted to take cameras on operations, nor keep a diary during their ship's travels. During these early operations two Army Air Corps officers joined then-lieutenant Buxton aboard the Comanche, Capt. Alan Innis-Taylor and Maj. Norman Vaughn. (Both of these two officers were also with the Byrd Antarctic expeditions in 1928-30 and 1933-35.) After receiving an encrypted message, the ship returned to the base at Narsarsuak, Greenland. Several dog teams, motor sleds and extra lumber were immediately loaded onto the ship. Capt. Von Paulsen, the Base Operations Officer, also sailed as the ship set course for the east coast of Greenland. Instead of taking the usual sea route around Cape Farewell, a shortcut was made via the Inside Passage with sheer cliffs rising several thousand feet and cross currents making steering difficult.

After passing Angmagsslik on the east coast the ship's navigator noticed the coast line began to differ from the navigation charts. Where the charts indicated glacier ice flowing down to the sea, the ship was on an open body of water, which appeared to be a bay. With the ship's lifeboat preceding the ship, the depth was sounded and the unknown bay was shown to provide an excellent anchorage. The bay was charted and later named after the Comanche. The cutter anchored in the bay and the dog teams and motor sleds were unloaded. Taylor, Vaughn and Buxton began their trek up the ice cap to the crash site of the B-17 on motor sleds. On reaching the site at 2,500-foot elevation, the Norden bombsight was found and removed from the wrecked B-17. Buxton returned on skis lashed to the dogsled with the bombsight. The trip was a wild 17 mile downhill run from the glacier on the hill to the coast.

The Lieutenant jumped over crevasses and rode the moguls. This was his first time on skis. Buxton vividly remembers this ride 70 years later as one of the highlights of his Coast Guard career.

**In 1943 Lt. Buxton was assigned as executive officer on the** Coast Guard-manned attack transport **Joseph T. Dickman** which participated in the Italian campaign. In July it assisted the amphibious landings in Sicily and in September at Salerno. In Sicily the ship was bombed by enemy planes as it disembarked troops and picked up wounded. Buxton recalls the holes in the bridge and the explosion of a nearby merchant ship. At Salerno, the enemy artillery was dug in on the shore. Troops were landed at night to minimize casualties amidst the shell fire. The Dickman faced mines and enemy E-Boats. (These were a very fast patrol craft with a wooden hull designed to avoid magnetic mines.) After a destroyer sank nearby, the Dickman helped rescue the crew.

**During 1944-45 now Lt. Cmdr. Buxton served as the commanding officer of the** Coast Guard-manned destroyer-escort USS Pride escorting convoys across the Atlantic. Early in 1945 the Pride joined a hunter-killer group and was one of three Coast Guard destroyer escorts that sank the U-866 in the North Atlantic on 18 MAR. Buxton received a letter of commendation as well as a bronze star on his combat ribbon. He finished the war handling anti-submarine training in Panama. After V-J Day in 1945, Buxton served as executive officer of Coast Guard Cutter Mocoma – at a time there was no commanding officer. Later he commanded the Yakutat in Portland, Me; the Klamath in Puget Sound; and the Ingham in Norfolk. In 1964 he became captain of the port of Seattle. He retired from the Coast Guard in 1966 and worked as marine superintendant at the port until 1978. [Source: Coast Guard Compass | LT Stephanie Young | 14 Feb 2014 ++]



**Capt Winslow Buxton, Ret (USCG) celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on 14 Feb 2014**

\*\*\*\*\*

## **State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► Wisconsin 2014**

The state of Wisconsin 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 – WI**” 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://dva.state.wi.us> & <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/wisconsin.html>

- Property Tax Credit
- Veteran Employment Benefits
- Veteran Education Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits
- Military discounts

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

## America's Most Beloved Vets ► American Revolution 1



**Deborah Sampson**



**Francis Marion**



**George Washington**

- Disguised as a man, Deborah Sampson fought with the Continental Army, received wounds in combat and, with the help of Paul Revere, secured a pension.
- The "Swamp Fox" Francis Marion is considered one of the fathers of modern guerrilla warfare.
- George Washington The founding father served as general and commander in chief of the Continental Army, and later became the first U.S. president.

### **\*Vet Legislation\***



## **Vet Jobs Update 152 ► Hire More Heroes Act H.R.3474 & S.2190**

The Senate plans to take up legislation to tweak the Affordable Care Act's much-delayed employer mandate for veterans. The Hire More Heroes Act of 2014 would allow employers to leave veterans out of the 50-count threshold for the employer-mandate requirement, as long as the veterans already have health insurance. Their coverage must either be through TRICARE—the federal veterans' health program—or through the Veterans Affairs Department. The employer mandate requires businesses with more than 50 employees to provide their workers with health insurance or pay a penalty, which opponents argue could cause employers to cut hours or decline to hire more workers. Supporters of the bill say it is intended to encourage employers to hire veterans by eliminating the desire to avoid hitting the mandate cutoff. They also say the current level of veteran unemployment is unacceptable. The unemployment rate for all veterans was 6.6 percent in 2013, according to the latest Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates. The unemployment rate for those who served on active duty after September 2001 was 9 percent. The overall U.S. unemployment rate in April was 6.3 percent.

The legislation H.R.3474 was introduced by Republican Rep. Rodney Davis of Illinois, and it easily passed the House on a 406-1 vote in March. The Senate version is sponsored by Missouri Republican Roy Blunt. It has 38 cosponsors, including two Democrats: Mark Udall of Colorado and Mark Pryor of Arkansas. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid filed a cloture motion on the motion to proceed 15 MAY, setting the bill up for a procedural vote soon. The vote schedule will not be set until after the vote to end debate on the Shaheen-Portman education bill on 19 MAY, but the earliest the employer-mandate legislation could move would be a cloture vote on the motion to proceed Wednesday, according to a Senate Democratic aide. The legislation is the vehicle for the tax-extenders bill, the aide said. [Source: National Journal | Sophie Novack | May 12, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **NDAA 2015 ► Clears HASC 61-0**

In an all day session 7 MAY, the House Armed Services Committee completed its line-by-line consideration on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2015. The bill (H.R.4435) to provide necessary authorities and funding for the nation's defense passed unanimously 61 -0 and will now go to the full House for its consideration, debate and amendment. The House Committee version of the NDAA authorizes \$521.3 billion in spending for national defense and an additional \$79.4 billion for Overseas Contingency Operations. This is consistent with the President's budget and bi-partisan agreements reached last year under the Bipartisan Budget Act. Overall, the fiscal 2015 authorization drops defense spending \$30.7 billion below current year spending for fiscal 2014.

The Committee bill blocks most of the President's proposed "cost-savings," including compensation cuts, including those proposed for TRICARE, Housing Allowances, and Commissary benefits. You can thank Chairman McKeon and Subcommittee Chairman Joe Wilson (R-SC) for their efforts in this regard. Not all Committee members were pleased about the rejection of the proposed "cost-savings." Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), Ranking Member on the House Armed Services Committee, worked against Chairman McKeon's efforts to reject the Pentagon plan to increase out-of-pocket costs for servicemembers and their families. Smith said the bill "fails to make the difficult choices" and urged lawmakers to accept changes in military compensation and benefits. He found little support for the Pentagon plan. Also:

- The Committee bill shot down the Pentagon request for another Base Reduction and Closure (BRAC) round. Rep. Adam Smith offered a put-back-BRAC amendment but withdrew it with the intention to offer it later when the bill comes to the full House.

- Committee members voted to put \$635 million toward keeping the A-10 Thunderbolt II “Warthog” fleet flying. The amendment from Rep. Ron Barber (D-AZ) passed 41-20 and takes funding from operations and maintenance overseas budget.
- HASC adopted an amendment that would freeze the Army's plan to move the Guard's Apache helicopters into the active-duty force so that the Army's force structure can be studied. The measure from Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC), which was passed by voice vote, moved up the GAO study's completion date to March 2015, so the cuts could still take effect in 2016.
- Redesignation of the Department of the Navy as the Department of the Navy and Marine Corps. Section 901 would re-designate the Department of the Navy as the Department of the Navy and the Marine Corps and change the title of its secretary to the Secretary of the Navy and Marine Corps. The House Committee's NDAA also would formally recognize the responsibility of the Office of the Secretary of the Navy over both the Navy and Marine Corps and the Marine Corps' status as an equal partner with the Navy. The provision is part of Chairman McKeon's base bill. In the last congressional session, name change legislation received 218 bipartisan co-sponsors. Rep. Walter Jones, sponsor of stand alone legislation to change the name, gave a basic reason for the effort. "When a young Marine dies, the family receives a letter from the Secretary of the Navy with the Navy flag," Jones said. "The Marine Corps has earned the right to be seen as an equal in name, and that's what this is all about."
- Directs the Pentagon to produce and procure biofuels only if the cost is equal to conventional fuels or the budget sequester mechanism is altered to exempt research and development, limit DoD authority to construct biofuels plants, and permit the military to use liquid fuels derived from tar sands or coal. The Government Accountability Office reports the DoD paid \$150 per gallon for alternative jet fuel made from algae, more than 64 times the current price for conventional jet fuel. The price for conventional fuel is currently \$2.88 per gallon.
- Committee members voted to protect tobacco sales on military installations and ships, heading off Navy plans to drop the products in the name of force health. The measure passed 53-9, with a handful of Democrats objecting to tying the hands of military leaders in their efforts to promote force health and safety. The measure would cover any product legal nationwide as of Jan. 1, including alcohol and sugary drinks, although no effort has been made of late to limit sales of those products

The bill now goes to the full House for consideration and further amendment. On the Senate side, Armed Services Committee Carl Levin (D-MI) introduced this week a draft bill this week (S.2289). However, the Senate has yet to schedule committee action on the bill. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update May 9, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **DECA Budget Cuts Update 10 ► HASC Considering \$100M Cut**

Although House lawmakers are resisting — for now — the Pentagon's call to slash the annual commissary operating budget by two-thirds over three years, the House Armed Services Committee appears comfortable with a more modest budget cut next year. According to a preview of legislative provisions that the committee will consider on May 7 in drafting its version of the 2015 defense authorization bill, lawmakers will approve a cut of \$100 million in the commissary budget next year. That is half of what the Pentagon had proposed in the first year of a three-year plan that would bring the annual commissary budget down from about \$1.4 billion to just \$400 million. It is not immediately clear what impact a \$100 million reduction would have on commissary operations, although a fact sheet provided by the committee indicates that Rep. Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-CA), committee chairman, expects that budget cut would be offset by unspecified “efficiencies.” McKeon “rejects cuts to compensation programs that result in increased out-of-pocket costs for military families,” according to the fact sheet, which then went on to say

that McKeon, a former retail entrepreneur, “understands that efficiencies can be made that reduce the cost of the program without increasing prices.”

The committee’s version of the 2015 defense authorization bill would require the Defense Department to consult with outside experts to in retail grocery sales to find ways to save money. Among other issues, the review would consider the impact of such changes as allowing commissaries to sell private-label products, and the sensitivity of customers to paying higher prices. DoD officials have acknowledged that their much more far-reaching proposal would shrink the current commissary savings compared to average off-base grocery prices to about 10 percent from its current 30 percent. At the far end of that proposal, the remaining \$400 million in annual funding would be used to operate only stores that are overseas and in remote areas. According to the legislative preview, House lawmakers would increase the authorization for commissaries to just over \$1.2 billion, instead of the \$1.1 billion requested by DoD. That includes a modest reduction in funding that the commissary system is absorbing in the current fiscal year.

House lawmakers so far have not agreed to the changes in law that DoD requested as part of its proposal that would allow officials to raise prices in commissaries and to sell private-label brands as ways to make up the difference in the loss of taxpayer dollars in the budget. [Source: NavyTimes | Karen Jowers | May 5, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Bills Submitted to 113th Congress ► As of 12 May 2014**

For a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 113<sup>th</sup> 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](http://www.thecapitol.net/FAQ/cong_schedule.html) for dates that you can access them on their home turf.

**Tentative 2014 Legislative Schedule 113th Congress, 2nd Session:** The below list identifies expected non-legislative periods (days that the Senate *will not* be in session)

Date	Action	Note
Jan 6	Convene	
Jan 20 - Jan 24	State Work Period	Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday
Feb 17 - Feb 21	State Work Period	Presidents' Day- Feb 17
Mar 17 - Mar 21	State Work Period	
Apr 14 - Apr 25	State Work Period	
May 26 - May 30	State Work Period	Memorial Day- May 26
Jun 30 - Jul 4	State Work Period	Independence Day- Jul 4
Aug 4 - Sep 5	State Work Period	Labor Day- Sep 1
Target Adjournment Date	TBD	

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

- H.R.4486 : **Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2015.** A bill to make appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2015, and for other purposes.
- H.R.4489 : **World War I Memorial Act of 2014.** A bill to designate memorials to the service of members of the United States Armed Forces in World War I, and for other purposes.
- H.R.4492 : **TRICARE Moms Improvement Act of 2014.** A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to provide for the availability of breastfeeding support, supplies, and counseling under the TRICARE program.
- H.R.4561 : **Rural Veterans Health Care Improvement Act of 2014.** A bill to specify requirements for the next update of the current strategic plan for the Office of Rural Health of the Department of Veterans Affairs for improving access to, and the quality of, health care services for veterans in rural areas.
- H.R.4580 : **Improving Clinical Care Workforce for Our Vets Act.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to modify authorities relating to the collective bargaining of employees in the Veterans Health Administration.
- H.R.4616 : **Vet Alternative VA Appeals Process.** A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide veterans the option of using an alternative appeals process to more quickly determine claims for disability compensation.
- H.R.4629 : **Employment Pilot Program for Vet Manufacturing Positions.** A bill to provide for the establishment of a pilot program to encourage the employment of veterans in manufacturing positions.
- H.R.4630 : **TRICARE Developmental Disabilities Behavior Treatment.** A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to provide for certain behavioral health treatment under TRICARE for children and adults with developmental disabilities, and for other purposes.
- S.2258 : **Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2014.** A bill to provide for an increase, effective December 1, 2014, in 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.
- S.2264 : **World War I Memorial Act of 2014.** A bill to designate memorials to the service of members of the United States Armed Forces in World War I, and for other purposes.
- S.2276 : **Caring for America's Heroes Act.** A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to improve access to mental health services under the TRICARE program.

- S.2296 : **VARO Decision Review Officers.** A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to employ at least three decision review officers at each regional office of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.
- S.2298 : **Disabled Vets Lifetime Recreational Pass.** A bill to provide for a lifetime National Recreational Pass for any veteran with a service-connected disability, and for other purposes.

[Source: <http://www.loc.gov> & <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills> 12 May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Veteran Hearing/Mark-up Schedule ► As of 13 May 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. At <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/committees.tt?commid=svete> can be found the Membership of each committee and their contact info. The text of all completed 113<sup>th</sup> Congress SVAC hearings can be viewed at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/committee.action?chamber=senate&committee=va&collection=CHRG&plus=CHRG>. Missed House Veteran Affairs committee (HVAC) hearings can viewed at <http://veterans.house.gov/in-case-you-missed-it>.

- **Thursday, May 15, 2014.** SVAC will hold a hearing to discuss the State of VA Health Care in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, Rm 106. Individuals with disabilities who require an auxiliary aid or service should contact the committee clerk at (202) 224-9126 at least three business days in advance of the hearing date.
- **Tuesday, May 20, 2014 @ 10 AM.** HVAC will hold a hearing on Evaluating Federal and Community Efforts to Eliminate Veteran Homelessness in the Cannon House Office Building Washington, DC.
- **Tuesday, May 20, 2014 @ 2 PM.** Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity (EO) will hold a hearing on Exploring Jobs for Veterans in the Energy Sector in the Cannon House Office Building Washington, DC
- **Wednesday, June 11, 2014 (tentative).** SVAC will hold a hearing to discuss pending legislation.
  - S. 1606 (Udall) CBOC naming
  - S. 1637 (Manchin) United We Stand to Hire Veterans Act
  - S. 1643 (Cardin) Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education
  - S. 1662 (McConnell) Veterans Health Care Improvement Act of 2013
  - S. 1682 (Casey) Veterans Education Counseling Act of 2013
  - S. 1684 (Toomey) Service members Transition Improvement Act of 2013
  - S. 1717 (Kaine) SERVE Act of 2013
  - S. 1736 (Durbin) Serve Act
  - S. 1740 (Landrieu) VA Major Medical Facility Lease Authorization of 2013
  - S. 1751 (Heller) Authority for contracted disabilities exams for disability
  - S. 1755 (Toomey) Dignified Interment of Our Veterans Act of 2013
  - S. 1863 (Brown) Continued Education program for Medical Professionals
  - S. 1892 (Collins) Canadian Forces Base Gagetown, New Brunswick Veterans registry
  - S. 1985 (Moran) Veterans Health Care Access Closer to Home Act 2014
  - S. 1987 (Feinstein) EUL at the West Los Angeles Medical Center
  - S. 1993 (Warren) Veterans Care Financial Protection Act of 2014

- S. 1999 (Graham) SCRA Rights Protection Act of 2014
- S. 2009 (Udall) Rural Veterans Improvement Act of 2014
- S. 2013 (Rubio) VA Management Accountability Act of 2014
- S. 2014 (Durbin) GI Education Benefit Fairness Act of 2014
- S. 2091 (Heller) 21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act
- S. 2095 (Moran) Veterans Health Care Access Closer to Home Act 2014
- S. 2128 (Cornyn) VAMC naming
- S. 2145 (Feinstein) Veteran Voting Support Act
- S. 2179 (Murray) Homeless Veterans Services Protection Act of 2014
- S. 2182 (Walsh) Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act
- S. 2184 (Wyden) CBOC naming
- S. RES. 399 (Cornyn) Expressing support for the American GI Forum



**Cannon House Office Building and the Dirksen, Dirk, & Russell Senate Office Buildings**

[Source: <http://www.veterans.senate.gov/hearings> & <http://veterans.house.gov/legislation/hearings> May 13, 2014 ++]

**\*Military\***



**DoD Benefit Cuts Update 41 ► Troop Survey Launch**

Top military leaders routinely say that rank-and-file troops won't mind too much if their pay and benefits are cut. The most stunning example came when the Marine Corps' senior enlisted leader recently testified before Congress that troops actually might welcome reduced compensation. "They don't want an easy life," Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Mike Barrett told lawmakers at an April 9 hearing. "They want to be tougher people." Speculation about what troops really want or think about pay and benefits may end soon as experts mount a first-of-its-kind, forcewide survey gauging service members' views about their compensation. By the end of May, hundreds of thousands of active-duty troops, reservists and retirees will receive email invitations to take a survey launched by

the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, which Congress convened last year to tackle the thorny issues involved in the Pentagon’s efforts to reduce its personnel costs.

Military leaders are looking for ways to do that without harming recruitment and retention. The top brass say personnel costs are growing at an unsustainable rate after years of generous pay raises and other perks that Congress bestowed on the force while it was fighting two long wars. In March, the Pentagon proposed cost-saving measures that included capping troops’ pay raises, scaling back housing allowances, launching new Tricare fees and eliminating commissary subsidies at most domestic installations, which would raise prices in the stores. The survey aims to identify which pays and benefits are most valued by service members. It may also identify benefits that are inefficient because their cost to the government exceeds their perceived value by troops. “To truly understand the service members’ preferences and priorities with regard to compensation will allow us to make decisions that will protect the quality of life of the service members,” said Jamie Graybeal, a spokesman for the commission. “As a result of this survey, we will be able to understand not simply whether or not service members want more pay, but how the various elements of the compensation package relate to each other, which ones are valued more, which ones are valued less,” Graybeal said.

The survey will be completed and the results released publicly later this year. By February 2015, the commission will submit to Congress a slate of formal recommendations for overhauling military compensation, which may be a catalyst for lawmakers to take action on the politically sensitive matter. Congress is eager to see what troops think. In fact, House lawmakers recently added a provision to their draft version of the 2015 defense authorization bill that would require the Defense Department to conduct a similar survey. But some advocates are skeptical of the idea and fear it will lay the groundwork for controversial cuts. “It could create what would be considered low-hanging fruit for the budget cutters to go after,” said retired Air Force Col. Mike Hayden, director of government relations for the Military Officers Association of America. Hayden also suggested demographics can skew the survey’s results. “The junior troops are going to say one thing — that they don’t value the retirement package. And you’re going to have senior troops who are going to say they do value it. Those with families are going to value the commissary more than those without,” Hayden said.

In preparing the new survey, the commission’s staff is taking care to ensure it has no flaws statistically or methodologically, since its results are likely to be highly controversial. “When our survey comes out, we expect the results to generate a conversation,” Graybeal said. “We want that conversation to be about the policies surrounding the issue and not the methodology of the survey, so it’s in our best interests to make sure it’s done in a very appropriate way.” A key aspect of that effort is to “ensure that we hear from the enlisted population,” Graybeal said. A similar survey was conducted on a small scale in 2012 by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a Washington-based think tank. The findings suggested that service members prefer cash up front over in-kind benefits promised later in life, such as retirement-age health care benefits. [Source: NavyTimes | Andrew Tilghman | May 13 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Coastal Command Boat** ► **New Brown-Water Navy Vessel**

It’s small, fast, heavily armed, networked and one of a kind. But the new coastal command boat (CCB) just starting to operate in this region is giving sailors in the Persian Gulf a taste of the swift and bad-ass boats coming to the brown-water Navy. “There are lots of concepts we’re trying to prove out here,” said Capt. Joseph DiGuardo, commodore of Task Force 56, whose job is to assess the armored boat’s uses for explosive ordnance disposal, Seabees and more. The unnamed craft — numbered 65PB1101 — arrived in Bahrain aboard a cargo ship in February, shipped from San Diego. The 65-foot, 50-ton CCB was built by Bremerton, Washington based SAFE

Boats International. The craft is similar in form and features to the larger Mark VI patrol boats being built by SAFE Boats. The first of six Mark VIs is scheduled for delivery in the early fall. Until the Mark VIs get here, CTF 56 will use the CCB to prove new operating concepts.



**The Navy's coastal command boat, seen zipping around Manama harbor in Bahrain**

The craft, steered by a joystick and able to top 35 knots, got a thumbs-up from crew members on a recent trip. “It’s fun to drive,” Boatswain’s Mate 2nd Class Christopher Stout said with a smile as he whipped the boat around Manama harbor. Floating citadel The craft is a major step up from the Navy’s riverine command boats operating in the Persian Gulf. “It has the legs and endurance to get us out into some of the blue-water areas,” DiGuardo said 28 MAR The craft carries a crew of 10 to enable port-and-starboard watches of five sailors with a boat captain in command — the same setup used on the RCBs. Seats on heavy-duty shock mountings are fitted for 13 SEALs in the main compartment, each with laptop connections. Video screens abound in the vessel’s interior. Sound-deadening curtains separate the berthing area from the galley and an electronics space, and noise-reducing floor mats reduce machinery and water noise. A galley is fitted, along with a head and shower and five racks for crew rest. The CCB features an armored citadel enclosing the propulsion plant and fuel tanks. Numerous automatic and crew-served weapons are fitted topside, up to .50-caliber machine guns. Standoff weapons like Griffin and Spike missiles are to be tested on the vessel, DiGuardo said. When such weapons are mounted, a qualified tactical action officer will be aboard.

Cradles on the fantail and a small handling crane were installed in Bahrain to handle two 800-pound mine-detection vehicles, and the vessel is intended to function as a platform for a variety of unmanned vehicles, including Puma UAVs. Small rubber rafts can be launched off the step-down stern, and divers have easy access off the fantail or on either side amidships. CTF 56 has installed the CCB on its own dock in Bahrain, and plans to operate the vessel in a variety of scenarios around the Gulf region, occasionally transporting it even farther afield. Ultimately, the CCB is to be returned to the U.S. after the Mark VIs arrive, according to Navy Expeditionary Combat Command. The 85-foot Mark VIs will be larger and, with two Mark 38 stabilized 25mm machine gun mounts, more heavily armed, designed to engage with hostile fast attack craft. After the first boat is delivered this year, three more are to follow in fiscal 2015 and two more in 2016. [Source: NavyTimes | Christopher P. Cavallo | May 11, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USS Saratoga (CV-60) ► Navy Pays \$0.01 to Scrap**

The decommissioned aircraft carrier Saratoga is officially headed for the scrapyard after the Navy paid one penny to a Texas scrapyard to dismantle the 81,101-ton flattop that once blockaded Soviet ships during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Saratoga will head to Brownsville, Texas, later this year for scrapping by the company ESCO Marine, Naval Sea Systems Command said in a 8 MAY news release. The Saratoga is the second of three conventionally-powered

carriers destined for scrapping. All Star Metals received the Forrestal earlier this year, also taking on the flattop for a penny. A third contract is pending for the Constellation, with International Shipbreaking Ltd. The one-cent payment is the lowest the Navy can offer to the company to take the flattop off the fleet's hands. ESCO Marine will keep the profits from the sale of the scrap metal.



**The aircraft carrier Saratoga, here underway in 1992**

The carrier was one of four Forrestal-class supercarriers built for the United States Navy in the 1950s and the sixth Saratoga in U.S. history. She was 1,063 ft long, had a beam of 130 ft, and a draft of 35 ft with a maximum speed of 35 knots and a complement of 552 officers and 4988 men. Her displacement was 81,101 tons full and could carry 70-90 aircraft. Commissioned in 1956, she spent most of her career in the Mediterranean, but also participated during the Vietnam War, receiving one battle star for her service. She played a pivotal role in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, "Super Sara" was also involved in a 1986 airstrike against Libya. On 5 December 1985 the Saratoga became the first Aircraft Carrier to dock pierside on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. One of her last operational duties was to participate in Operation Desert Storm. She was decommissioned in 1994 after 38 years in service. Despite attempts to turn it into a museum, the Navy decided in 2010 that none of the applications to turn it into a public display was up to par. The carrier is expected to make its way to Texas this summer from its current berth at Naval Station Newport, Rhode Island. [Source: NavyTimes May 8, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Soldier for Life Website ► New Online Home for Retirees**

The Army's "Soldier for Life" website, launched May 1, is designed to be a new online home for retired Soldiers. The Army's web portal "Army Knowledge Online" -- better known as "AKO" -- has been available to retirees and family members for many years now. However, the Army is transitioning to a more secure enterprise network for business users -- Soldiers, Army civilians and contractors. Retirees will continue to be able to access important information about the Army, and information pertaining to health, retirement, employment and education benefits online at the new site, [www.soldierforlife.army.mil](http://www.soldierforlife.army.mil). Mark E. Overberg, who serves as deputy chief of Army Retirement Services, said the new website will allow "ongoing communications with the retired community."

In February, the Army Retirement Services office was moved under the newly created Soldier for Life program, Overberg said, because retired Soldiers are "a part of the whole Soldier lifecycle -- the last part of the Soldier lifecycle." Right now on the website, retirees can also opt-in to receive a newsletter that lets them know what's going on in the Army "with a primary focus on news that retired Soldiers care about," Overberg said. Also on the site

retirees can access the latest Army Echoes, Survivor Benefit Plan info, myPay log on, MyArmyBenefits website, Installation & Reserve Component RSO information, DS log on, and DVA website. Right now, the Soldier for Life website is extremely new. Overberg said the site is only in "stage one" of its development. But he said there are several ideas about what will be brought aboard as the site's development progresses into "phase two." Future upgrades to the Soldier for Life website might include a "white pages" feature similar to what was one available on AKO, Overberg said. The difference will be that the white pages-style directory will include only those retirees who "opted in" to the listing.

Also under consideration for inclusion in the next-generation of the site is a "Retired Soldiers Blog," Overberg said. "The intent of this blog will be to provide a three-way communication: Army to retired Soldiers, Retired Soldiers to Army and Retired Soldiers to other Retired Soldiers." Overberg said that commenters to blog posts will be limited to those who have retired from the Army. "When somebody posts a comment, we'll want to make sure they are a retired Soldier." Part of making that happen, he said, is ironing out the technical details of how to authenticate retired Soldiers on the site. That might include integration of services from DoD Self-service Logon.

Overberg also said that the Soldier for Life website has been designed to be easier to use than AKO. He said he has heard complaints from retirees that AKO was too complex -- and so they stayed away from the site. [Source: Army News Service | Todd Lopez | May 1, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USNS Spearhead (JHSV 1) ► Maiden Voyage a Success**

A Navy ship that resembles a commercial ferry returned to Virginia on 6 MAY following its maiden deployment to Europe and Africa, where military officials tested out some of its other capabilities aside from transporting people and equipment. The USNS Spearhead is the first joint high-speed vessel to be deployed by the Navy. It is a catamaran designed to quickly transport just about anything that various branches of the military might need, aside from fixed-wing aircraft. Its missions could include evacuating civilians, moving Army soldiers and vehicles from one country to another or delivering humanitarian aid, among other things. After leaving Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story in January, Navy officials said they were looking forward to testing out the ship in a real world environment. The Spearhead successfully delivered more than 22.5 tons of humanitarian supplies under the U.S. Navy's Project Handclasp program to countries in Africa.



### **The Military Sealift Command joint high-speed vessel USNS Spearhead (JHSV 1)**

Construction of Spearhead began on 22 July 2010. *She* was formally delivered to the navy on 5 December 2012 after a 8-month delay. *Spearhead*, as well as other ships of her class, are built to a modular design that allows them to be rapidly refitted with various equipment within a 20,000 square feet bay depending on the mission at hand. *She*

is 338 ft long and 94 ft in beam with a draft of 12.6 ft. There is space for 41 crewmembers, though under normal conditions she will sail with 22. There are sleeping accommodations for up to 150 people and an additional 312 seats for troop transport. She is powered by four MTU 20V8000 M71L engines, each with a power of 9.1 megawatts (12,200 hp), driving four Wärtsilä WLD 1400 SR waterjets through ZF 60000NR2H reduction gears. This allows for a maximum speed of 43 knots and a service speed of 35 knots. There are also facilities for one helicopter.

Unlike most Navy ships, the Spearhead is crewed by civilian mariners and has a military liaison and security team onboard to help conduct its missions. The ship is fast, traveling at an average speed of about 40 mph, but is primarily made out of aluminum. Most Navy ships are built of steel. That means it is only designed to go into what the Navy calls permissive environments, where there are not threats of airborne or shore-based attacks. Capt. Marc Lederer, the Spearhead's military detachment commander, said that the ship wasn't likely to be threatened by pirates and noted that its speed would be a good defense against an attack even if it didn't have a security team aboard. He said there were no occasions during the deployment where the ship was threatened. The ship will be in port in Virginia for about two weeks for routine maintenance before heading to Mayport, Fla. It will pick up some new crew members there before heading to the Caribbean Sea, Central America and South America, where it is expected to participate in some counter narcotics operations. [Source: The Associated Press | Brock Vergakis | May 6, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Upward Falling Payload ► Navy Cost-Cutter Project

The Navy is looking for a way to be everywhere, all the time. Technologists with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) are working on a project that would place sensors on the bottom of the deep ocean—about 4 kilometers deep. Like spies under deep cover, they could hide for years until called into action. A trigger can send their payloads to the surface. DARPA is billing the technology as a cost-cutter, as it saves the Navy the time and expense of deploying ships and subs and builds on unmanned technology advances. Andy Coon, DARPA's program manager for the project, said in a DARPA release he needed to show that sending sensors from the sea floor to monitor large areas is effective. "The trick is to show how these systems offer lower-cost alternatives to traditional approaches, and that they scale well to large open-ocean areas," Coon said. DARPA would not make Coon available for an interview, but the project, known as Upward Falling Payload, could house anything from waterborne or airborne cameras, sensors, decoys, network nodes, beacons or jammers.



**An artist's illustration of the Upward Falling Payload project, in which materials in long-term undersea storage could be launched when needed to counter enemy threats**

The agency is assessing the right delivery vehicles- stationary, mobile or allowed to drift on the ocean bed- but once triggered by Navy operators, the probes would float to the surface to be deployed. Norman Friedman, an expert in naval warfare with the U.S. Naval Institute, said it was an intriguing concept that faces an ocean of hurdles. "Stuff goes bad over time," he said. "It's not at all clear that there are any technologies that could sit on the bottom of the ocean for years at a time, that won't break or get lost- because you know things move on the sea floor, there are currents." Friedman said this is an idea that had been tried and dismissed during the Cold War, when the U.S. looked at placing ballistic missiles on the sea bed to trigger them if needed. But the risk of another country finding the missile and stealing it was too great. "So whatever they put down there, it better not be lethal because if another country develops deep-dive technology it could end up going missing," he said.

DARPA says it is specifically seeking nonlethal technology and is excited about the possibilities. In its 2015 budget request, the agency is seeking a 60 percent increase in funding for the program that would boost the project's budget to \$19 million. The project is just exiting the first phase of development; in the second, the agency will be working on the triggering mechanism that signals the probe to release from the sea floor. "We're also looking for the communications technologies for these nodes. As long as you can command the nodes remotely and quickly, and don't have to send a ship out to launch it, you're in good shape," Coon said, according to the release. "Some Phase 1 approaches were more exotic than others, but we were pleased by the range of challenging options." However, Friedman said that phase could be a big stumbling block because, as the recent struggle to locate the downed Malaysian airliner shows, communicating beacons and underwater sensors can be tricky. "It's a neat idea," he said. "But there are a lot of questions about how effective it could be." [Source: MilitaryTimes | David Larter | May 12, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Army Ranger Beret ► Petition**

An outside petition is calling for restricting who can wear the tan beret in the U.S. Army to soldiers in the 75th Ranger Regiment. The petition was posted on <http://www.change.org> by a group called SOF Alumni, for Special Operations Forces. As of 29 APR, it had more than 2,700 signatures. Specifically, the petition seeks to "limit the receipt and wear of the tan beret only to those who have successfully graduated the 75th Ranger Regiment's Ranger Assessment and Selection Program (RASP)." Why the gripe? Members of the Ranger Training Brigade, which administers the Army's Ranger School, a combat development course that takes place at several locations, including Fort Benning, Ga., are allowed to wear the beret - even though they're technically part of a separate organization that doesn't deploy to combat, according to the petition. "Due to the vague language in the order that authorized tan berets, soldiers who have not completed RASP wear the same headgear that the Rangers of the 75th Regiment earned by passing the official selection process," it states.



"This generation of Rangers that has only known combat deserve to have a truly distinct symbol of their dedication and sacrifice. The tan beret is that symbol." Lt. Col. Brian DeSantis, a spokesman for the regiment, said

the unit is aware of the petition being done by an unaffiliated organization, but "it's not something we're behind or supporting," according to a ArmyTimes article. It's the latest kerfuffle involving the beret in the Ranger community. The controversy dates back to around 2000, when then-Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki, who's now head of the Veterans Affairs Department, allowed most soldiers to don the black beret, which Rangers had worn for decades in an unofficial capacity. Shortly thereafter, the 75th Ranger Regiment switched to the tan beret. [Source: Military.com | Brendan McGarry | 22 Apr 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **DoD Mobilized Reserve 29 APR 2014 ► Decrease of 937**

The Department of Defense announced the current number of reservists on active duty as of 29 APR. The net collective result is 937 fewer reservists mobilized than last reported in the 1 MAP 2014 RAO Bulletin. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 26,244; Navy Reserve 3,701; Marine Corps Reserve 1,450; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve 7,164; and the Coast Guard Reserve 427. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 38,986 including both units and individual augmentees. Since 911 there have been 895,630 reservists activated for duty. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel currently activated as of 8 APR is available at <http://www.defense.gov/documents/Mobilization-Weekly-Report-04-29-2014.pdf>. [Source: DoD News Release No. NR-222-14 dtd 01 May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Medal of Honor Citations ► Thomas~Charles L | WWII**



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

**Thomas~Charles L**

**Rank and organization:** First Lieutenant, U.S. Army, Company C, 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion, 103rd Infantry Division.

**Place and date:** Climbach, France, December 14, 1944

**Entered service at:** Detroit, Michigan, January 1942

**Born:** 17 April 1920, Alabama

*Citation*

For extraordinary heroism in action on 14 December 1944, near Climbach, France. While riding in the lead vehicle of a task force organized to storm and capture the village of Climbach, France, then First Lieutenant Thomas's armored scout car was subjected to intense enemy artillery, self-propelled gun, and small arms fire. Although wounded by the initial burst of hostile fire, Lieutenant Thomas signaled the remainder of the column to halt and, despite the severity of his wounds, assisted the crew of the wrecked car in dismounting. Upon leaving the scant protection which the vehicle afforded, Lieutenant Thomas was again subjected to a hail of enemy fire which inflicted multiple gunshot wounds in his chest, legs, and left arm. Despite the intense pain caused by these wounds, Lieutenant Thomas ordered and directed the dispersion and emplacement of two antitank guns which in a few moments were promptly and effectively returning the enemy fire. Realizing that he could no longer remain in command of the platoon, he signaled to the platoon commander to join him. Lieutenant Thomas then thoroughly oriented him on enemy gun dispositions and the general situation. Only after he was certain that his junior officer was in full control of the situation did he permit himself to be evacuated. First Lieutenant Thomas' outstanding heroism were an inspiration to his men and exemplify the highest traditions of the Armed Forces.



**Thomas, then ranked Captain, being awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, 1945**

Charles Thomas was born on 17 April 1920, in Birmingham, Alabama. His family soon moved to Detroit at a time when the city's black population was rapidly growing. As a child, Thomas showed a bookish interest in planes and electronics. After graduating from Cass Technical High School in 1938, he worked with his father at the Ford River Rouge factory making steel. He also enrolled at Wayne State University to study mechanical engineering but the war interfered. Thomas was drafted and entered the army on 20 January 1942.

He started as an infantryman but when the army began forming tank destroyer units, Thomas was transferred to Camp Wolters in Texas, for officer training school. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in March 1943 and reported to Camp Hood in Texas, to join the 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion. While the soldiers were black, most of the officers were white. There were stark differences between the 614th and white units. Black units were forced to use older, less efficient equipment that frequently needed repairs, and recreational facilities were nonexistent for black soldiers and officers. After training for two years, Thomas and his troops, weary of endless practice maneuvers, were eager to fight. Finally, in August 1944 the unit was shipped to Metz, France, to join General George Patton's Third Army.

In December the 614th reached the Alsace-Lorraine region near the German border. Its mission was to capture the German-occupied town of Climbach five miles from the French-German border. The only direct route to Climbach was up a hill along an open road surrounded by woods. An advancing unit would have to distract German guns by traveling up the exposed hill while foot soldiers would sneak through the woods, around the German fire and into the town. The approach left the American troops easy targets for German snipers. Thomas volunteered to lead his company up the hill.

The strong performance of the platoon ensured the capture of the town and forced the defenders to withdraw to the Siegfried Line; the unit was awarded a Distinguished Unit Citation (the first black combat unit, and the first unit attached to the 103rd Division, to be so honored) and its men received four Silver Stars and nine Bronze Stars. One week after the battle, Colonel Blackshear recommended Thomas for the Distinguished Service Cross. The award was announced in January 1945 and Thomas was promoted to captain for his part in the engagement, and returned home a hero, though he played down his role - "I know I was sent out to locate and draw the enemy fire, but I didn't mean to draw that much."

Discharged from the army in 1947 with the rank of major, Thomas received disability payments for the rest of his life. He lost parts of his right arm and three fingers on his right hand, unable to bend, were forever set at an angle. Friends say that his stomach resembled a road map with all of his stitches. In July 1949 Thomas married Bertha Thompson, a waitress at a local restaurant. -They had two children, Linda and Michael (Linda died young of cancer in 1962). Michael recalled that as a boy, when he and his father ran into old soldiers in Detroit, some of them were convinced Thomas had died at Climbach. "People who saw him thought they saw a ghost," he said.

Thomas worked at Selfridge Field in Mount Clemens as a missile technician. He later became interested in computers and his last job was as a programmer for the Internal Revenue Service. He also took classes at Wayne State University, falling just short of a degree in mechanical engineering. In his spare time Thomas tinkered under the hood of a car or worked in the family's basement building televisions from spare parts. While Thomas remained silent about his war exploits, his right arm had withered noticeably. He usually kept it close to his side and never admitted to any pain. That disability was the sole mark of his years in the military. He eschewed veterans groups and that, along with his modesty, caused people to slowly forget his accomplishments.



Charles Thomas died on February 15, 1980 and was buried in the Westlawn Cemetery in Wayne County Michigan. The newspapers whose headlines once trumpeted his heroism neglected to run an obituary. In the 1990s, following a study which indicated severe racial discrimination in the process of awarding medals during the war, it was recommended that seven Distinguished Service Crosses be upgraded to Medals of Honor, and Thomas was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously on January 13, 1997. [Source: WWII Medal of Honor Recipients <http://www.history.army.mil/html/moh/wwII-t-z.html#Urban> & <http://tankdestroyer.net/index.php?> May 2014 ++]



**Aviation Art 63** ► **One the Hard Way**



**One The Hard Way**  
by Dan Zoernig

**Christmas Day, 1941. American Volunteer Group Flight Leader Parker Dupouy finds his guns jammed during combat high over the Gulf of Martaban. Determined to bring down his adversary, he rams the Hayabusa Oscar of Lt. Hiroshi Okuyama of the JAAF 64th Sentai. Though he lost four feet of his wingtip and his entire aileron, Dupouy made it back to his base to fight another day. Lt. Okuyama's aircraft, however, broke up in flight and carried him to his death. Dupouy went on to score 6.5 victories in the air before war's end.** [Source: <http://flyingtigersus.ning.com/photo/one-the-hard-way> May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

**Polar Bears Monument** ► **Addition to NRHP Effort**

A monument honoring a little-known group of World War I heroes - affectionately known as the Polar Bears - has taken a step closer to national recognition. During its Spring Meetings in Indianapolis on 8 MAY, the American Legion's National Executive Committee approved Resolution 20, which supports the Department of Michigan's

efforts to have the Polar Bear Monument added to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). *This is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation and entitled to the associated benefits of being listed.* The resolution will help the Polar Bear Memorial Association (PBMA) to get the Polar Bear Monument recognized and put on the register in time for the World War I centennial. The monument, located in White Chapel Memorial Cemetery in Troy, honors mostly Michigan soldiers. It's the only monument dedicated specifically to Americans who fought in Russia during World War I, and it's currently registered as a state historic site. When The American Legion was being founded, when they were having their very first meeting, the Polar Bears were still fighting for their lives over in north Russia, which not a lot of people know.



**The Polar Bear Monument in Troy, Michigan was dedicated on May 30, 1930**

The Polar Bears were sent to fight in northern Russia during World War I. According to the University of Michigan Libraries, the Polar Bears were comprised of 5,000 troops of "Detroit's Own," the 339th Infantry, plus support units including a battalion of the 310th Engineers, the 337th Field Hospital and the 337th Ambulance Company. The men expected to go to France and fight in the trenches, but were separated from the other soldiers in England. There, they were taken to a different training camp and given different uniforms, Russian rifles and British commanders. More than 50 men died of disease before ever reaching Russia. President Woodrow Wilson had been wary of sending Americans to fight in what was essentially Russia's civil war. According to historian and PBMA President Michael Grobbel, the Polar Bears weren't to fight but to guard war materials in Archangel, Russia. But when the remaining men arrived in Archangel in September 1918, the war materials had all been looted and there was nothing left for them to guard. The British commanders sent them out to chase the Bolsheviks, against Wilson's orders. Nobody could explain why we were fighting the Bolsheviks ... but they had no choice.

As a brutal winter approached, the conditions for American soldiers worsened. "The Americans were dependent on the British for all food and medicine, but the British were used to supplying troops in the tropics. Up in the arctic, you need double the calories. Plus, those farther from Archangel were less likely to receive even those portions. By the time supplies got to men more than 100 miles away, more than a third had likely been sold on the black market. The vermin, the lice, the men quickly got infected with that, no place to take baths so they spent the whole winter scratching and underfed with minimal daylight. Then they had to be ready in a moment's notice to withstand a Bolshevik attack or go out on patrols. It was pretty miserable." Grobbel said.

When the war ended on Nov. 11, 1919, word spread fast. In Russia, the soldiers were still fighting. Officers couldn't answer questions about when the soldiers would be able to return home, or why they were fighting. There were even alleged mutinies. They really chafed at not getting a straight answer as to why they were fighting. At best, they were told to fight to survive and outlast the winter. Meanwhile, families and friends were left in the lurch. Where had their boys gone? The letters from the soldiers, if they arrived, were heavily censored and provided little detail. No one seemed to know what had happened to the Michiganders sent to Russia. When political representatives didn't give families adequate answers, the simple queries snowballed into bombarding members of

Congress with letters and rallies demanding answers from Wilson. Much grandstanding was done on the Senate floor. "They raised enough stink that they pulled them out," Grobbel said. "But they had to wait until the rivers unfroze, which is the third week of May up there."



When the men returned home in the late spring of 1919, when the Legion was forming, they wanted their own association to carry on the stories of their unique experience. They also wanted a group working toward the repatriation of their fallen. Due to a large percentage of them being from Michigan, it was fairly easy to stay in touch, and so the Polar Bear Association was born. They labored for a decade to see their mission through, and in 1929 were able to recover and return their comrades' bodies. As the last of the Polar Bears passed away, PBMA was formed to continue the Memorial Day ceremony in their honor and to keep their history alive — a history that could have been forgotten or left to yellow in University of Michigan archives, unnoticed. Since May 30, 1930, a Memorial Day ceremony at the marble monument has commemorated the Polar Bears' service. Grobbel's grandfather, Clement, was a Polar Bear, but Grobbel said there was "a lot of hardship, and they didn't talk about it" except for at association meetings. After the passing of the last Polar Bear, the PBMA vies to make the country aware of the Polar Bears' complex history. "(It's) not only to remember their fallen dead, but to remember and educate others about this episode in history. We want to make sure that we don't let them down," Grobbel said. For additional info on the Polar Bears refer to <http://pbma.grobbel.org/polarbeararticles.htm>. [Source: American Legion Online Update May 8, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **D-Day Update 06 ► Dutch Minister Pays Tribute at Arlington**

In honor of the upcoming 70th anniversary of Operation Overlord in Normandy, the Dutch foreign affairs minister visited Arlington National Cemetery 30APR to pay tribute to American World War II soldiers laid to rest in the Netherlands. Frans Timmermans met with American World War II veterans and spoke at the Women in Military Service to America Memorial, placed flowers at the graves of four Dutch military personnel who are buried at Arlington and visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. "I'm here to thank and to pay tribute to all these servicemen who made sure I'm free, my children are free and that we could live our lives the way we want to," Timmermans said before he began his speech.

In his remarks, Timmermans said the people of the Netherlands continue to honor the American fallen of World War II by personally adopting each of the more than 8,000 graves of American servicemen who are buried in the Netherlands American Cemetery and Memorial in Margraten, located in Limburg, the most southerly Dutch province. Margraten is one of the 24 American burial grounds on foreign soil that are administered, operated and maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission. More than 8,000 American servicemen are buried

there -- 8,000 of the 93,000 American soldiers who found their final resting place in Europe during World War II. "They sacrificed their lives so that people in Europe could live in freedom," the minister said. "Anyone who wants to feel the strength of the transatlantic partnership -- to feel what lies at its heart -- should visit Margraten or other military cemeteries that dot the landscape of Western Europe. All the graves at Margraten have been adopted by private citizens, most of them Dutch, as an expression of our everlasting gratitude and our determination to keep these memories alive."



*Netherlands Foreign Affairs Minister Frans Timmermans, right, paying respects at the graves of four Dutch service members buried at Arlington National Cemetery*

Retired Army Technician 3 Marvin Lykins, a World War II veteran on hand for the event, said he was honored to meet the Dutch minister. "It was a little overwhelming, but great to see that World War II veterans aren't forgotten," said the former medical technician who served in France and Germany. "I've had so many people come up and say, 'Thank you' -- both children and adults. it's very emotional." As part of his mission to have these soldiers remembered for their service in liberating the Netherlands, Timmermans has personally adopted the grave of Army Pfc. Leo Lichten, who was killed in action almost 70 years ago, and has taken time to learn about him. Lichten was one of the 169 American soldiers who died during Operation Clipper, a joint U.S.-British assault on the Geilenkirchen salient of the Siegfried Line. "When I got his grave, I didn't know anything about him. ... I started looking on the Internet, into records, finding other servicemen who could help me," the minister said. "I found his childhood friend. I learned more about the sacrifice the American servicemen made for our liberty. And I learned more about our common history. We can use these concrete examples, these young guys who came over to Europe and fought for our liberty as a testimony to the lasting bond between the Netherlands and the United States."

For Leo Slater, the minister's visit was a reunion and a special honor. Slater was named after Lichten. His father, Paul Slater, a retired Navy World War II veteran, grew up with Lichten in Brooklyn, N.Y. Paul Slater met with the minister and showed him letters Lichten had written him during Lichten's time at training and in Europe. He also gave the minister a better appreciation of who Lichten was, Timmermans said. Leo Slater said he grew up on the stories about Lichten, and was honored to carry on the name and to attend the minister's event. "I was really touched and really enjoyed the speech. It really is a bond of blood and culture," he said. "It's important to have events like this, because we are losing more World War II veterans every day, and we need to make that transition from just memory into history and have people understand why it is and where we are today. "We're coming up to the 100th anniversary of World War I, and the living memory of that is virtually gone," he continued. "It's important to remember why these people died." Four years ago, Timmermans arranged for Leo Slater and his father to visit Lichten's grave in the Netherlands together for the first time. Leo said it gave his father closure. "It was the three of us standing in the rain at a grave. My father stood there and said, 'I told you I would find you,' and he did," Slater said, getting choked up. "My dad and his friends all signed up; Leo was the one who was supposed to have stayed, but was the one in the group who didn't come back. My dad didn't get over it for a long time, if he ever did. There was no question about him naming his son after Leo."

While Lichten has been identified, 1,722 names of American service members are still listed on the Walls of the Missing in the Netherlands. "The story of our liberators will never cease to fill me with awe," Timmermans said. "And the personal stories of these men deserve to be retold. I am proud that I could unearth more details about the story of Leo Lichten." "The stories of many others remain untold," he said. "I very much support the efforts of the foundation behind the initiative to adopt individual graves, to collect more information about the soldiers buried and honored at Margraten. I very much support their desire to collect photos of these men, to give these heroes a face. Incredibly, there are still soldiers buried there of whom there is no photo, no recollection whatsoever. It is something we owe to those who died. It is something we owe to those who live." [Source: Defense Media Activity | Shannon Collins | 1May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **WWII Prewar Events** ► **Hitler / Mussolini Meeting 1934**



**Adolf Hitler of Germany and Benito Mussolini of Italy greet each other as they meet at the airfield in Venice, Italy, on June 14, 1934. Mussolini and his fascists put on a show for Hitler, but on the details of their subsequent conversations there was little news.**

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military History** ► **Revolt of the Admirals**

As World War II drew to a close and during the post war years up to the Korean War there was increasing debate on how future wars should be fought. This led to an intense rivalry between the Air Force and Navy for obtainment of Budget funds to support their respective hardware. The issue was primarily on whether or not funding emphasis should be applied to supercarriers or bombers with nuclear capability. The generals of the newly formed air force propounded a new doctrine: that strategic bombing, particularly with nuclear weapons, was the sole decisive element necessary to win any future war; and was therefore the sole means necessary to deter an adversary from launching a

Pearl Harbor-like surprise attack or war against the United States. The first Secretary of Defense, former Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, supported the navy position and authorized construction of United States with a production run of five ships. However, he was asked to resign by President Truman following a series of budgetary disagreements on March 28, 1949, and was replaced by Louis A. Johnson, who supported Truman's budget limits and the air force's argument as superior. Within a month of taking office, and without consulting Congress—Johnson ordered cancellation of United States. Secretary of the Navy John L. Sullivan and a number of high-ranking admirals resigned in protest. To read what followed and the aftermath of the decisions made refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, **“The Revolt of the Admirals”**.

[Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolt\\_of\\_the\\_Admirals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolt_of_the_Admirals) Apr 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Trivia ► Operation Little Vittles**

Shortly before landing at the Berlin Tempelhof Airport in the American sector of Berlin, Gail S. "Hal" Halvorsen would drop candy attached to parachutes to children below. This action, which was dubbed Operation Little Vittles and sparked similar efforts by other crews, was the source of the popular name for the pilots — the candy bombers. Halvorsen wanted to help raise the morale of the children during the time of uncertainty and privation. He started by giving a few treats to children watching the planes from outside the Tempelhof base. Wanting to give more, he promised to drop more candy from his plane the next day. Because the planes would arrive nearly every three minutes, the children naturally couldn't distinguish his aircraft from the others. However, Halvorsen promised to wiggle the wings to identify himself, which led to his nickname "Onkel Wackelflügel" ("Uncle Wiggle Wings"). The other American candy bombers became known as the Rosinenbomber (Raisin Bombers). Halvorsen's initiative drew the attention of the operation's commanding officer, Lieutenant General William H. Tunner, who approved of it and ordered it expanded into Operation Little Vittles.



**“Uncle Wiggly Wings” Halvorsen in 1949 connecting candies to small parachutes and in Berlin in 1989, during the 40th anniversary of the airlift**

The operation was soon noticed by the press and gained widespread attention. A wave of public support led to donations which enabled Halvorsen and his crew to drop 850 pounds of candy. By the end of the airlift, around 25 plane crews had dropped 23 tons of chocolate, chewing gum, and other candies over various places in Berlin. The

Confectioners Association of America donated large amounts to the effort, and American school children cooperated in attaching the candies to parachutes. Halvorsen retired from the Air force in 1974 with the rank of Colonel.

Halvorsen's actions as the original candy bomber had a substantial impact on the postwar perception of Americans in Germany and are still pointed to as a symbol of German-American relations. He has appeared many times on German television over the years, often paired with some of the children, now grown adults, who received his candy parachutes. In 1974 he was decorated with the "Großes Bundesverdienstkreuz" (Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany), one of Germany's highest medals. During the opening march for the 2002 Winter Olympics on 8 FEB, he carried the German team's national placard into Rice-Eccles Olympic Stadium. In 1989, he engaged in a re-enactment of the actions in Berlin for the fortieth anniversary of the Airlift. During Operation Provide Promise in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he dropped candy from a USAF C-130 of the 435th Airlift Wing, flying from Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany. The United States Air Force has helped cement Colonel Halvorsen's airlift legacy by naming its next-generation, 25,000-pound capacity aircraft loading vehicle in his honor. [Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gail\\_Halvorsen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gail_Halvorsen) May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military History Anniversaries ► 16 May thru 15 Jun**

Significant events in U.S. Military History are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 16 May - 15 Jun**”.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Arlington National Cemetery Update 48 ► Origin**

On 13 MAY as Arlington National Cemetery marks the 150th anniversary of its first burial, it is a scene of harmony and reconciliation. It didn't start that way. Before the Civil War, the property overlooking the Potomac River -- called the Custis-Lee Mansion or Arlington House -- was the home of Robert E. Lee. The house and grounds belonged to Lee's wife, Mary, and in 1861 the Lee family had called Arlington home for 30 years. Lee was at Arlington House when he received word that Virginia had seceded from the Union in April 1861. This caused a crisis for Lee, who was a U.S. Army colonel at the time. He had been offered command of the Union Army, and he agonized over the decision on whether to stay with the Union or go with his state. On 20 APR, Lee submitted his resignation from the Army. He left Arlington House two days later. He ultimately rose to command the Confederate army.



**A sweeping view of Arlington National Cemetery with the Washington Monument in the background**

Across the river in Washington, another Southern officer came to a different decision. Montgomery C. Meigs was a Georgian who graduated from West Point and as a Corps of Engineers officer and had built many of the major projects of the day. Meigs considered his oath to "support and defend the Constitution" as paramount, and when his home state of Georgia seceded, he stayed with the Union. Meigs rose to be quartermaster general of Union forces. He was one of the first officers anywhere to understand the importance of logistics in military operations, and he welded together a system that capitalized on the Union's manufacturing and transportation expertise. For Arlington House, whether Lee stayed with the Union or went with Virginia didn't really matter in 1861, because the property was so strategically important, Arlington National Cemetery historian Stephen Carney said. The property included high ground and dominated two bridges into the district. If Confederate forces placed artillery units on the heights, they would have had everything from the White House to the Capitol and more in range. In one of the first movements of the Civil War, Union forces occupied Arlington and built two forts on the heights as part of the defenses for Washington.

Lee's family lost the land for failure to pay tax on the land. Mary Lee had attempted to pay the tax -- a total of \$92.07. She did not appear in person, but asked an agent -- possibly her cousin, to do so, according to Carney. But the federal government refused to accept the tax payment from that person. The government acquired the house and land for \$26,800 in 1864 and built a Freedman's Village on the property to house the freed slaves who gravitated to Washington. On April 30, 1864, the Army of the Potomac began the Overland Campaign against the Army of Northern Virginia. Union Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant moved across the Rappahannock River and immediately ran into Lee's forces at the Battle of the Wilderness. But instead of a one-day battle, as was the case before, the warfare ground on with battles in Spotsylvania, Yellow Tavern, North Anna, Cold Harbor and so on. It was a blood-letting the likes of which the world hadn't seen. Estimates vary, but Civil War historians put the number of casualties in the range of 55,000 for the Union and 34,000 for the Confederates.

Washington was the closest city and served as the base of operations. It was a hub where rivers, roads and rail came together. It was both a supply center and a hospice, Carney said. And in charge of it all was Union Brig. Gen. Montgomery Meigs, the quartermaster general. Meigs detested the Confederacy and the officers who had betrayed their oaths to the United States of America. He was responsible for supplying the needs of the Union Army, and he also was responsible for burying them. In May 1864, the graveyards of Washington and neighboring Alexandria were overwhelmed by the demand. Meigs ordered a review, Carney said. Engineers came back saying that Arlington was the most suitable site. "It was high above the river and the center of many roads," Carney said. That it was the home of Robert E. Lee -- the author of much of the destruction -- was not lost on Meigs, Carney said. Meigs had served under Lee in the pre-war Army as the two worked to improve navigation on the Mississippi River. They knew each other well. When Lee followed his state, Meigs felt betrayed. Establishing a cemetery on the property would ensure the Lee family could not re-occupy the land or house, Carney said.

The first military burial at Arlington was Pvt. William Henry Christman on May 13, 1864. The 67th Pennsylvania Infantry soldier was buried a good distance north of Arlington House. Meigs saw this and ordered the next burials to be in what was Mary Lee's rose garden, feet from the door to Arlington House, Carney said. Meigs formally declared the cemetery open in June 1864, and thousands of burials followed. At the end of the war, Meigs gathered the bones of thousands of Union soldiers that had been hastily buried at Virginia battlefields, and placed them in a burial vault in the rose garden. The Lee family ultimately received payment from the federal government for Arlington House, but no one ever lived in the house again, Carney said.

The cemetery became a focal point during Decoration Day. Thousands of Americans journeyed to Arlington to place tributes on the graves of those buried at Arlington. The cemetery also became a visible sign of reconciliation -- it features a Confederate Monument with the graves of Confederate veterans around it. The construction of the

Memorial Bridge in 1932 symbolically linked the Lincoln Memorial in Washington with Arlington House in the midst of the cemetery. [Source: AFPS | Jim Garamone | May 13, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

**Spanish American War Image 44** ▶ Troops en route to Cuba



**Troops en route to Cuba, summer 1898.**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Faces of WAR (WWII)** ▶ Eddie Rickenbacker



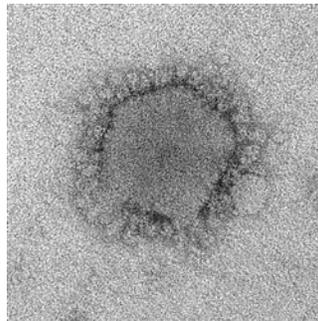
**Eddie Rickenbacker, WWI Fighter Ace and Medal of Honor recipient, addressing troops 1942**

## \*Health Care\*



### **MERS-CoV** ► **GEIS Detects Earliest-Known Cases**

A Defense Department-funded lab in Egypt detected the earliest-known cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome virus, a new coronavirus strain that is infecting people on the Arabian Peninsula, an expert from DOD's global disease surveillance system said. The below micrograph shows the ultrastructural morphology of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus, or MERS-CoV. It was identified in 2012 as the cause of respiratory illness in people. Investigations are ongoing to discover the source of MERS-CoV and how it spreads.



**Highly magnified transmission electron micrograph created in 2013**

The lab shared samples so the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention could develop tests for the virus, said Public Health Service Capt. Michael J. Cooper, head of respiratory disease for the Global Emerging Infections Surveillance and Response System, called GEIS, which is part of the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center. GEIS is a funding agency that supports military laboratories in the United States and in Egypt, Germany, Kenya, Peru, Thailand and Singapore -- all of which serve as hubs for infectious disease surveillance and as regional hubs for addressing global public health issues -- and it funds respiratory disease surveillance projects at 400 sites in more than 30 countries. As of 9 MAY, the World Health Organization, or WHO, reports 536 laboratory-confirmed cases of MERS-CoV since April 2012, including 145 deaths. Some people infected with MERS-CoV develop severe acute respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath, and about 30 percent of known cases die, according to the CDC. Some people exposed to the virus get only a mild respiratory illness, the CDC reported.

A CDC fact sheet says MERS-CoV has spread between people in close contact and from infected patients to health care workers. Clusters of cases in several countries are being investigated, as is the source of the new strain. MERS-CoV has been found in camels in Qatar, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and in a bat in Saudi Arabia. Camels in other countries have tested positive for MERS-CoV antibodies, meaning they have been infected with MERS-CoV or a closely related virus. But CDC says it needs more information to identify the potential roles of camels, bats or

other animals in MERS-CoV transmission. On 2 MAY, CDC reported the first confirmed U.S. case in a health care worker traveling from Saudi Arabia to London to the United States. The patient was hospitalized in Indiana and at the time was in stable condition. During a recent interview with AFPS, Cooper said, "[GEIS's] first objective is force health protection" for U.S. troops, "but we are also involved with global public health issues. We also do surveillance on diseases that aren't necessarily militarily relevant but are relevant to global public health because sick people can board aircraft and carry infectious diseases anywhere in the world within 24 hours."

One of GEIS's funded laboratories is the Naval Medical Research Unit-3, or NAMRU-3, the largest DOD overseas lab, formally established in Cairo in 1946. Scientists there conduct research on a range of diseases and perform infectious disease surveillance to support military personnel deployed to Africa, the Middle East and Southwest Asia. NAMRU-3 also works closely with the Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population, the U.S. National Institutes of Health, WHO and CDC, and is a WHO regional Collaborating Center for HIV and Emerging Infectious Diseases. Cooper said GEIS funds the Jordan National Influenza Center, called the NIC, and that NAMRU-3 and members of the Jordan Ministry of Health and the NIC work together often. The news has "caused a lot of concern," Cooper said, "because the last time the world saw an emerging coronavirus strain was 2002-2003, and it was severe acute respiratory syndrome -- SARS -- which caused about 8,000 cases and 780 deaths" in more than 24 countries.

Cooper defines infectious disease surveillance as "basically collecting data in a systematic way so that disease levels can be monitored. Hopefully this information gives you an idea of the distribution of a given disease and hopefully helps to understand what populations are affected." Doing surveillance, he said, usually involves "testing people who are ill and in some cases testing people who are not ill but who may have been exposed to the virus." All DOD major infectious disease labs have surveillance capabilities for MERS-CoV, Cooper added, and all DOD major medical centers around the world have MERS-CoV diagnostic capabilities. GEIS does surveillance for a range of diseases, he said, including H7N9 influenza emerging in China, enteric infections like those caused by contaminated food or water, parasitic infections like malaria, other respiratory infections like multidrug-resistant tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted infections.

Cooper said respiratory diseases are the ones that typically go pandemic because of the way they spread. "The most recent examples are SARS and the pandemic of 2009, which was H1N1 influenza," he said. "They spread easily from person to person and they don't kill their hosts too soon or maybe at all." About MERS-CoV, Cooper said, "We were well ahead of the curve on this one and we have a very strong network of respiratory disease surveillance." He added, "We'll also say this, though. We're dealing with a virus and viruses can change and quite frankly frequently do change. So you have to monitor the situation and you have to be careful. Surveillance is key in this situation. You have to know what's going on." [Source: AFPS | Cheryl Pellerin | May 12, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Medical Marijuana ► Health Insurers Won't Be Paying For It**

Just say no. That's health insurance companies' response to paying for medical marijuana. The Associated Press said medical marijuana treatments can cost upward of \$1,000 a month, an unwanted hit that patients have to cover themselves. Marijuana has gained acceptance for its ability to dull pain and other chronic symptoms of conditions ranging from epilepsy to cancer. Despite medical marijuana being legal in 21 states, health insurers won't be paying for the treatment anytime soon, in part because of conflicting laws. Pot is still illegal under federal law and in 29 states. And, according to AP: Perhaps the biggest hurdle for insurers is the U.S. Food and Drug Administration hasn't approved it. Major insurers generally don't cover treatments that are not approved by the FDA, and that approval depends on big clinical studies that measure safety, effectiveness and side effects.

Clinical research costs millions of dollars and can take years to complete. The FDA has approved treatments that contain a synthetic version of an ingredient in marijuana. But at this point there's been no approval for a treatment that uses a real marijuana plant. Clinical studies for marijuana are also a challenge because pot is classified as a Schedule I drug. That classification of drug, which includes heroin, is deemed to have a significant potential for abuse and no accepted medical use, according to LifeHealthPro, a life and health insurance adviser site. "Because health care plans and insurance policies typically exclude coverage for experimental treatments, insurers may continue to decline payment for marijuana as long as it remains on Schedule I," LifeHealthPro said.

Says the AP: The American Medical Association has called for a change in marijuana's classification to one that makes it easier for research to be conducted. The current classification prevents physicians from even prescribing it in states where medical use is permitted. Instead, they can only recommend it to patients. The AP added: Even if the FDA approves medicinal marijuana, there's no guarantee that insurance coverage will become widespread. Big companies that pay medical bills for their workers and dependents decide what items their insurance plans cover. They may not be eager to add the expense. –Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | May 12, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Traumatic Brain Injury Update 36 ► SMART Program**

Marine Cpl. Jacob Schick was an early casualty of the Iraq War, his body blown apart by an anti-tank mine in Anbar province in 2004. The force of the explosion threw Schick through the soft top of his unarmored Humvee, blew off his right leg, shredded his left and ripped off portions of his arm and fingers. His physical injuries were re-paired as well as they could be in 46 operations. But it took years for Schick to find treatment for the traumatic brain injury he sustained because he had landed- 30 feet from his vehicle- on his head. "For a long time, I didn't know I had a TBI. I became a drug addict after I got out of the hospital, abusing prescription medications for two years. When I quit those, I found I had this other battle to face, and here I was having to accept this reality without an outlet," he said. A colleague told him about a program at the Center for Brain-Health at the University of Texas at Dallas designed to retrain the brain. The center claimed that its Strategic Memory Advanced Reasoning Training, or SMART, program improved performance, mood and strategic thinking - with the goal of helping veterans recover their natural ability to function.

Schick enrolled 18 months ago. "I was very skeptical because I've been told by a lot of people, a lot of entities, 'Hey, come see us. We can help you,' and they couldn't," Schick said. Developed by neuroscientists including center chief director Sandra Bond Chapman, SMART is a cognitive program designed to enhance mental productivity by teaching patients to focus on "big picture" creative thinking instead of minutiae. It instructs veterans to avoid multitasking and information overload and instead focus on essential tasks and decisions. "Who doesn't want to become intellectually stronger, whether you are in health or injured?" Chapman said during the inaugural Brain Health Summit in Washington, D.C., on April 28. He acknowledged that the training is not perfect, and he also noted that many veterans have very severe head injuries. Still, he said the brain has "so much capacity" that "some degrees of improvement are possible."

Retired Navy SEAL Lt. Morgan Luttrell became a fan after seeking help for a TBI from a 2009 helicopter crash. In an accident off the Virginia coast that killed one person and injured eight, Luttrell broke his back and was "out of it" for about a month, he said, not remembering what had happened or knowing he was in a hospital. He spent months recuperating physically but felt his brain was constantly "in a fog." Then a roommate told him about SMART. "We're great at putting the human body back together," Luttrell said. "But what was plaguing me was what

was happening upstairs." He completed SMART training two years ago- and deployed several more times to Afghanistan. "I was able to move on and continue to do great things for my country," he said.



**Retired Navy SEAL Lt. Morgan Luttrell**

Servicemembers have sustained 294,172 brain injuries since 2000, according to the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center. More than 82 percent are considered mild TBIs, or concussions. Chapman said these injuries, as well as cognitive changes due to age and some brain diseases, can and must be treated or addressed, through programs like SMART and further research. "We must stop accepting or expecting decline in performance that keeps us from being independent. This is not inevitable or insurmountable," she said. The Center for Brain Health is recruiting veterans and service members with post-traumatic stress disorder and concussions for several studies. Information is available on the center's website. Schick and Luttrell say they are testaments to the center's emerging understanding of brain reconditioning and regeneration. In fact, Schick now works at the center . And Luttrell continues to do his SMART exercises daily, recommending the program to fellow troops or anyone with cognitive changes related to brain injury. "It's what makes Morgan function," he quipped. "When you stop, you crawl down the rabbit hole, and what's the point in life?" [Source: NavyTimes | Patricia Kime | May 10, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Insomnia ► Having trouble sleeping?**

You are not alone. A 2013 study of 726 active-duty soldiers at Madigan Army Medical Center, Washington, found that more than half had moderate or severe obstructive sleep apnea and one in four suffered from insomnia. The average amount of time the troops spent asleep was 5.74 hours- well below the seven to eight hours of quality sleep considered optimal by the National Sleep Foundation and under the minimum 6.5 hours stressed by many military physicians. Without a decent night's sleep, service members are more prone to poor decision-making, accidents and symptoms of depression. Both sleep deprivation and excessive sleep- considered to be more than nine hours- can make a person vulnerable to weight gain, heart conditions and stroke.

It's been thought that military sleep problems are related to combat exposure or post-traumatic stress. But new research shows that deployment itself may play a major role in both developing sleep disorders and retaining them after deployment. "In one study, 100 percent of veterans with PTSD had sleep problems and 90 percent without PTSD reported them, and many who deploy don't return to predeployment sleep levels when they come back," says Dr. Christopher Nelson, a Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, psychiatrist. Short of knocking back an Ambien or Lunesta- both which have side effects that pose a risk to troops- is there a way to work toward getting a good night's sleep?

Defense and Veterans Affairs department experts weighed in 4 MAY during a seminar at the American Psychiatric Association annual meeting in New York City. "This is far and away the biggest complaint our patients have.

Everyone has problems with sleep," said Lt. Cmdr. Paul Sargent, division officer of the Navy's Overcoming Adversity and Stress Injury Support, or OASIS, residential combat-related PTSD program. With the high incident rate of sleep apnea in a population that does not have the weight issues or advanced age normally associated with apnea, Dr. David Fitz-Gerald, a neurologist at the Malcolm Randall VA Medical Center in Gainesville, Florida, sends his patients to the sleep clinic for testing. He has found that for many, a continuous positive airway pressure machine, or C-PAP, provides nearly instant relief.

"If it was just PTSD that was causing these problems with sleep, how is that that so many people benefit from using a CPAP? ... It's not just PTSD," Fitz-Gerald says. If the problem is not apnea or nightmares associated with PTSD that keep troops awake at night, other factors may be at play, including mild traumatic brain injury, anxiety or body clocks gone haywire. Fortunately, technology can help develop good sleep habits, experts say. Among the top recommendations is a mobile application developed by VA, DoD and others called CBT-I Coach (CBT stands for cognitive behavioral therapy). While the app is supposed to be used in conjunction with professional treatment for insomnia, it can be downloaded and followed by anyone who wants to improve their sleep, says Rachel Mark-wald, a sleep researcher at the Naval Health Research Center. The app includes a sleep diary. To download the free App go to <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/PTSDCoach.asp>. [Source: NavyTimes | Patricia Kime | May 12, 2014 ++]

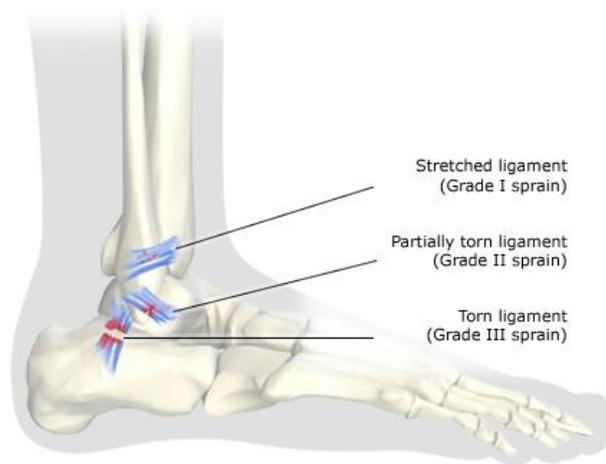
\*\*\*\*\*

## **Ankle Sprains** ► **Cause and Treatment**

Our ankle joints make it possible for us to move our feet upwards, downwards and sideways. Our feet tend to turn inwards rather than outwards, so your ankles are more likely to twist inwards if, for instance, you land awkwardly on your foot after jumping. That is why the ligaments that run along the outside of the ankle are the most commonly affected in ankle sprains. They are called outer or lateral ligaments. The ligaments on the inside of the ankle (inner or medial ligaments) are less likely to be overstretched. Some people have very weak ligaments and are therefore more likely to have sprains. Ankle sprains are also more common in people who have high foot arches or muscle weakness. Athletes have a greater risk too: One quarter of all sports injuries are ruptures of the outer ankle ligaments. Most ankle sprains without ligament tears will have largely healed after two weeks: Even if you are not able to put your full weight on the foot, it will usually not hurt anymore. If ligaments are torn or partially torn, it can take weeks for the ankle to work normally again. In some people who have more serious ligament injuries, it can even take two to three years for the ankle to become as strong and as mobile as before.

If you twist your ankle, it may swell up and hurt. This is usually a sign that the ankle is sprained. In other words, one or more ligaments of the ankle and the surrounding tissue are injured. Ligaments are tough elastic bands of connective tissue that join bones in the joint to each other. Because the ankle joint is made up of many bones, there are also several ligaments that stabilize it. Ankle sprains are among the most common of injuries. When an ankle is twisted, the ligaments are overstretched. In the worst case, they might tear. Small blood vessels tear too, which is what causes the swelling around the ankle. The following grades of severity are used to describe sprains:

- Mild sprain (Grade I): This is the most common and least severe form. The ligaments are stretched but not torn. The ankle is still stable.
- Moderate sprain (Grade II): This injury is more severe and more painful, and one or several ligaments are partially torn. The ankle joint is a little unstable.
- Severe sprain (Grade III): One or several ligaments are torn and the ankle is unstable.



**Foot bones (outer side) with Grade I, II and III sprains**

The doctor will first ask you about your accident and symptoms, and then examine your foot to see how severe your injury is. The foot might be x-rayed afterwards to find out if the ankle is broken. If the ankle sprain symptoms do not improve considerably after a few days, you might have a torn ligament. An MRI scan (magnetic resonance imaging scan) may be done too. This is because it is often easier to see ligaments and surrounding tissue better with MRI scans than with conventional x-ray scans. If you can put weight on your foot and walk immediately after having twisted your foot, it is very unlikely that you have broken anything. If the ligaments have only been slightly stretched, you will usually be able to move your foot normally again after a few days. But even minor ankle sprains can be painful.

About 1 to 2 out of 10 people with severe ankle sprains develop chronic ankle instability. This is where the joint gives way too easily: it is unstable. People who have a chronically unstable ankle are more likely to twist and sprain their ankle again. 1 out of 3 people with a sprained ankle will hurt their ankle joint again in the years following the initial sprain. The risk is particularly high in people who put a lot of strain on their joints – for instance, when playing soccer or basketball. Chronic ankle instability and frequent twisting and spraining can also increase wear and tear of the cartilage in the ankle joint. Cartilage is a smooth tissue that covers and protects joints. If there is too much damage to the cartilage, it may lead to osteoarthritis. Strength and coordination exercises help in the treatment of chronic ankle instability. They are particularly suitable for preventing chronic ankle instability or strengthening the joint again. However, these exercises typically have to be done for weeks or even months to have a benefit. Common exercises include training on a balance board. This involves standing on one leg on a board that easily tips sideways, while trying to stop the board from tipping and keeping your balance. This forces the foot to counterbalance different strains and movements without the joint giving way. Surgery is sometimes a good idea too. People who already start rehabilitation exercises two to three weeks after surgery will probably become active again sooner than people who only start after six weeks.

**Prevention & Treatment.** Some people wear bandages or ankle braces when they do sports, to try to stabilize their ankle and prevent further injuries. Sprained ankles swell up quickly, and start to hurt just as quickly. Immediate measures to reduce pain and swelling include keeping your foot elevated, cooling the ankle and wrapping it in an elastic compression bandage to put mild pressure on it. These measures are usually enough to relieve mild ankle injuries. After a few days, the foot can be stabilized if necessary by taping it tightly or using a splint. There is

good reason to believe that starting gentle exercises early on, and not keeping your foot still for too long, helps. Surgery is rarely needed, even for ankle sprains with one or more torn ligaments.

[Source: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/ankle-sprains.2676.en.html> May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Medical Records Update 01 ► 1.5M Backlogged Consults Cancelled

More than 1.5 million medical orders were canceled by the Department of Veterans Affairs **without any guarantee the patients received the treatment or tests they needed**, the Washington Examiner has found. Since May 2013, veterans' medical centers nationwide have been under pressure to clear out 2 million backlogged orders for patient care or services. They were given wide latitude to cancel unfilled appointments more than 90 days old. By April 2014, the backlog of what the agency calls “unresolved consults” was down to about 450,000. What happened to other 1.5 million appointments is something that no one, including top officials at the veterans’ agency, can answer.



A review by the Government Accountability Office of the process VA used to close old consult orders found that poor documentation in patient files and the lack of independent verification made it impossible to know whether patients got care they needed before their medical orders were canceled. “We found they closed consults but there was no evidence as to why it was closed,” Debra Draper, health care director for the GAO, told the Examiner. “By not having that independent verification or any other controls, there isn’t any way of knowing whether they were appropriately closed out,” Draper said. “You don’t know whether people received the care or if they received it in a timely manner. There’s no audit trail. There’s no way to know whether they were appropriately closed,” she said. The Examiner reported in February that the VA did a mass purge of backlogged medical orders that cleared 40,000 unresolved appointments in Los Angeles beginning in 2009 and 13,000 in Dallas during a one-week period in September 2012.

VA officials have since refused to say how widespread is the practice of canceling orders by labeling them “administratively closed” or how many unfilled consult orders were eliminated nationwide. VA officials have also given conflicting statements about the issue to the media, Congress and the agency's own inspector general. VA is under pressure to eliminate the long waits patients face when they need potentially life-saving medical tests. A Veterans Affairs fact sheet released in April said 23 patients at VA medical facilities nationwide with gastrointestinal cancers died after they could not get the colonoscopies or other tests that had been ordered within the deadlines in agency policy. Those tests could have detected the cancers in their early stages, when they are most treatable. The total number of deaths linked to delayed care from other medical disorders was not revealed. At least 40 patients in the Phoenix VA health system may have died as a result of delayed care, according to an investigation by the House Committee on Veterans Affairs and reports by the Examiner and other news media outlets.

At a hearing in April, committee chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL) ordered records at the Phoenix facility to be preserved, while the agency's inspector general probes allegations that two sets of appointment logs were kept to hide long wait times for medical care. Allegations that almost 60,000 overdue medical orders were purged in Phoenix to cover long wait times also have been raised by whistleblowers. It's not clear how long the VA has been mass-closing backlogged orders for tests and other procedures. The Los Angeles purge began in 2009, when hospital administrators were under orders from Washington to reduce the backlog of unfilled consults, according to Oliver Mitchell, a whistleblower who formerly worked as a scheduling clerk in the Los Angeles facility's radiology department. Mitchell filed separate complaints to the inspector general and the U.S. Office of Special Counsel in 2009 alleging thousands of tests were canceled. Both complaints were closed after investigators did a cursory review and received assurances from VA officials that all patients who needed care got the ordered procedures. In Dallas, the 13,000 cases were administratively closed in about a week in September 2012.

A consult is an order for follow-up care from a medical provider ranging from a diagnostic test such as a colonoscopy to an order for transportation to a medical facility. In 2012, officials at the VA headquarters in Washington tried to build a database to track consult orders. But the database proved to be useless because of poor record keeping and the lack of standard procedures for tracking and filling the orders, Draper told the House veterans committee in April. In May 2013, a directive was sent to medical centers across the country to clean up the records and clear out outdated and unfilled orders that were no longer needed. Before an order was closed, the case was supposed to be reviewed to ensure the treatment was no longer required. But an ongoing review by GAO found lax procedures and the lack of independent verification left VA unable to prove that all patients got the care they needed before the appointment was closed. At one facility reviewed by GAO, patients in three of the 10 cases examined did not get the ordered procedures before their consults were closed. At another, 18 consult orders were canceled on the day the facility was required to have the cases resolved. GAO reviewed three of those cases and "found no indication that a clinical review was conducted prior to the consults being discontinued."

Some of the 1.5 million backlogged consults were probably closed appropriately, Draper told the Examiner. In some cases, the patient received the test but the verification was not correctly entered into the patient's file. In those cases, closing the consult order would be appropriate. Some of the closed consults were administrative tasks, such as transportation orders, and in others the medical procedure was no longer required because the patient's treatment plan had changed or the patient died. But there is no way to tell how many of the orders were appropriately filled or canceled, Draper said. A large proportion were simply "administratively closed" without any sign the appropriate review was done or the patient ever received the needed care that had been ordered, she said. VA officials refused to be interviewed for this story. They have issued a variety of statements in the past both acknowledging and denying mass cancellations of backlogged consult orders.

In response to Mitchell's whistleblower complaint, VA officials in Los Angeles told the inspector general they were ordered by Dr. Charles Anderson, then national radiology director at VA, to "mass purge all outstanding imaging orders" that were more than six months old. An internal VA memo from Dallas in September 2012 said medical staff would "aggressively address this backlog of unresolved consults and reduce the number to an acceptable level." However, after the Examiner reported on the Los Angeles and Dallas purges, Robert Petzel, under secretary for health at VA, said only a few hundred cases in the Los Angeles facility had been administratively closed. Petzel also said he had never heard the 40,000 figure cited by the Examiner, which was initially raised during a congressional hearing a year earlier. The same day, Dr. Dean Norman, chief of staff for the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, said in an agency blog post that several hundred old orders had been closed in Los Angeles after careful administrative review. "At no time were 'group' close-outs of imaging studies completed," Norman said.

The one consistency in VA's explanations has been that cases were closed only after careful, individual reviews, and that no patient who needed care was denied care. Draper said that is not a claim VA can back up. Reviewing cases individually, as GAO did, is tedious and time-consuming, Draper said. It is unlikely such a careful analysis could have been done on 13,000 cases in Dallas in about a week, much less 1.5 million cases nationally in a year, she said. GAO is still investigating the large-scale closing of unfilled consult orders and its findings should be published this summer. The VA inspector general is also conducting an investigation into allegations first raised by the Examiner of the Los Angeles and Dallas mass purges. After the Examiner's story was published, Republican Reps. Kevin McCarthy of California and Dan Benishek of Michigan asked for an internal agency investigation. Benishek is chairman of the House Veterans' subcommittee on health and a former VA surgeon. A similar request was sent by Rep. Pete Olson, R-Texas.

Petzel responded in an April 9 letter to Benishek that the inspector general would handle the investigation. Petzel did not respond to questions on the accuracy of the Examiner's reports or if the mass-purge practice was being used at other VA medical facilities. "It's unacceptable," Benishek said of the response he's gotten from the VA. "It's a 'CYA' philosophy." Prior investigations by the GAO and inspector general found hospital administrators had an incentive to show steep declines in appointment backlogs. Performance reviews and bonuses are tied in part to meeting agency goals for reducing patient wait times. GAO also identified several ways local facilities manipulated appointment lists to show it was meeting agency rules for wait times. Sharon Helman, the director of the Phoenix VA health system, got a \$9,345 bonus last year. Draper said the bonus incentives and weak oversight make it easy for VA hospitals to manipulate their statistics. "There are incentives that may encourage bad or unwanted behaviors," she said. "There are weak system designs that really allow for manipulation if that's what's desired." [Source: Washington Examiner | Mark Flatten | MAY 1, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **TMOP Update 17 ► TFL Pilot Program Options**

Starting this spring, more than 400,000 military retirees and senior dependents in the TRICARE for Life (TFL) program will owe the full amount for certain prescription refills if they use a retail pharmacy rather than a military pharmacy or a mail service. The change, part of a pilot program created by Congress, is meant to help control the cost of military health care and in its first year. The program was adopted as an alternative to Pentagon plans to steeply raise TRICARE fees and copays. It is expected to reduce \$120 million from the \$3.3 billion the U.S. Department of Defense pays annually for TRICARE for Life (TFL) pharmacy needs. The government insurance serves about 2 million military retirees and their dependents over 65, supplementing Medicare. TFL accounts for nearly half of the \$7.1 billion that the Defense Department spends each year on its pharmacy program.

The pilot includes more than 400 medications - mostly brand-name - for chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and asthma. Prescriptions for pain relievers, antibiotics and other medicines for acute conditions aren't affected. With the program, members can fill eligible prescriptions three times at a retail outlet, usually a 30-day supply for a \$17 copayment. Then, if they don't switch, they're responsible for the drug's entire cost for subsequent refills, charges that quickly could climb into hundreds of dollars. If they do switch, they'll owe \$13 for each 90-day supply through the Express Scripts mail service or nothing when they use a base pharmacy. After a year, members can opt out of the pilot and return to paying \$17 for a 30-day supply for their retail refills. Nine out of 10 people who switch to the home delivery program decide to stick with it, according to TRICARE. Waivers on a case-by-case basis will be granted for cases of personal need or hardship, emergency, or other special circumstance. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 2May 2014 ++]



### Price Coding ► How to Determine if it is a Deal

Every shopper wants to buy at the lowest price. But how do you know if an item has reached that price or is selling at a marked down price? Some stores will tell you with the price of the item. Here's how they do it:

- **Costco** - If a price ends in .99, you're paying full price. But if it ends in, say, a .97, it represents a deal with a special price decided by the manager. And if you happen to see an asterisk in the upper right corner of the sign, then the item is on its way out of the store — and is probably at the lowest price you're going to see.
- **Sam's Club**. "Look for anything with a 1 cent on the end of the price," CBS said. That's an indicator that the item has been discontinued and is selling for cheap.
- **Kohl's**. If an item says "great value," it's on sale for only one or two days, so you need to purchase it right away if it's on your shopping list.
- **Sears**. Watch for price tags ending in 98 cents which means no coupons or sales thus the price won't go down further. Other price indicators are ending in 99 = regular price; 97 = Clearance/Discontinued item; and 93 = refurbished/open-box item.
- **CircuitCity**: 98 = local price match; 97 = open box item; 96 = limited stock item, either oop (out of production) or so new that supplies are not regular yet; 95: clearance oop product.
- **Office Depot**: 0,9, or 5 = regular price; all other numbers = marked down.
- **Target**: 9 = full price; 6 or 8 = clearance (the item will be marked down again during the next markdown cycle as long as there is inventory in the store); and 4 = final markdown. Upper right corner of price tag tells % of markdown.
- **RadioShack, Gap, & Old Navy**: 7 = final markdown.
- **Home Depot**: 6 or green tag = final markdown (lowest price) or clearance/discontinued. Yellow tag is also clearance/discontinued but it may not necessarily be marked down.

[Source: Various Apr 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

### Homeownership Update 01 ► Tax Liens | Do You Owe Interest?

Imagine losing your home over \$6.30 in unpaid interest. That's the harsh reality for a Pennsylvania woman whose \$280,000 house in Aliquippa was reportedly sold at a tax auction for \$116,000. Most of that money will be paid to Battisti if further appeals are unsuccessful. A Pennsylvania judge recently upheld the 2011 tax sale of Eileen Battisti's house, which she bought with her husband in 1999. Battisti said her husband handled the paperwork for the property's taxes before he passed away in 2004. After her husband died five years later, she used his life insurance to pay off the mortgage. But Battisti had trouble keeping up with other bills, including the property taxes owed on the

house. In 2008, she was six days late paying her property taxes. She ended up paying the \$833.88 due, plus the penalties and fees, but she didn't pay the \$6.30 in accrued interest. In her defense, she may not have known about the interest, as it was not yet included on the tax bill for late payment, That \$6.30 in unpaid interest ballooned to \$255.84 by 2011, and Beaver County sold her house at a tax auction. Battisti claims she had no notice of the debt or the auction. She also said she was unaware that she had a delinquent tax bill from 2008.



**Eileen Battisti's Aliquippa, Pa. home was sold off after she failed to pay a \$6.30 interest charge that ballooned to \$235 over two years.**

The county claims, however, that Battisti was notified of the delinquency beginning in 2009. However, a June 3, 2009, "notice of return and claim" was returned to the county as undelivered and the county can't prove that they provided subsequent notice in 2009. Beaver County Common Pleas Judge Gus Kwidis wrote that the county tax claim bureau complied with state notification requirements before the auction. "There is no doubt that [she] had actual receipt of the notification of the tax upset sale on July 7, 2011, and Aug. 16, 2011," the judge wrote. "Moreover, on Aug. 12, 2011, a notice of sale was sent by first class mail and was not returned." Joe Askar, Beaver County's chief solicitor, said that based on the law, Kwidis made the right decision. "The county never wants to see anybody lose their home, but at the same time the tax sale law, the tax real estate law, doesn't give a whole lot of room for error, either," Askar said. Battisti still lives in the house. She told the AP that she plans to again appeal the sale of her home. [Source: Associated Pressarticle28 Apr 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Saving Money ► Plumbers 2 | Tricks of the Trade**

Most plumbers are honest professionals, but there are a few who might try dodgy tricks to overcharge. The video at [http://www.moneytalksnews.com/2014/03/13/10-sneaky-plumbers-tricks-of-the-trade/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_campaign=email-2014-03-13&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.moneytalksnews.com/2014/03/13/10-sneaky-plumbers-tricks-of-the-trade/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=email-2014-03-13&utm_medium=email) talks about plumbers' tricks of the trade you may run into, plus how to spot those tricks, find good plumbers and get value for your money. Once you've watched, read on for more on getting your money's worth from plumbers.

**1. Working unlicensed and uninsured.** Unlicensed and uninsured tradespeople usually charge less. But you're taking a big risk hiring them. Most cities require homeowners to use licensed and insured contractors, even when you don't need a permit. One exception: Do-it-yourselfers often may do construction on their own homes. "But they must use licensed professionals for structural, electrical and plumbing work," MSN Real Estate says. With unlicensed tradespeople, there's nowhere to turn if the work is poorly done. A building inspector can require you to tear out the job and do it again. Banks won't lend money on homes with work done illegally.

Here's what the Magmolia Voice, a neighborhood newspaper in Seattle, says: "*Of the major trades, only two are required by law for the individual to be licensed: electricians and plumbers, according to (plumber Evan) Conklin. Why? Because shoddy work by any of these two trades can kill you. Think about an improperly vented hot water tank powered by natural gas. In no time you have a home filled with deadly fumes. ... Hiring a plumber? Ask to see*

identification, a state license and proof of current insurance. To check licensing and insurance credentials, call your state's licensing department and state insurance commissioner. "MSN Real Estate adds, "A contractor also needs two kinds of insurance: liability, to compensate you if the work fails, and workers' compensation insurance, in case someone is injured on the job."

**2. Estimating a job sight unseen.** How can a plumber realistically estimate his price for a job he hasn't seen? He can't. Don't accept a quote without an in-person inspection. And get it in writing. While plumbers can't quote a price without seeing the job, they can tell you their hourly rate and if they have a minimum charge. They can also give you a ballpark idea of the time involved on certain small, predictable jobs — installing a new shower head or clearing a plugged kitchen sink, for example. But even small jobs can be more complicated than you realize. Here's what to expect from a reputable plumber, according to Atomic Plumbing, a Virginia company: *A plumber will come to your home and talk to you about your needs and expectations. Then the contractor will perform a visual inspection to determine the scope of the project. This should be followed up by a written quote detailing all of the plumbing services required and the associated costs. The plumber will hopefully walk you through the quote and discuss any payment options.*

**3. Lowballing the bid.** A surprisingly cheap bid should make your antennae perk up. Something's probably wrong. Plumbing is notoriously expensive and fees can vary widely, so this is something that's hard to judge. "In Southern California, where I am located, the cost of (fixing) a drain clog ranges from \$75 to \$250 depending on who you call," according to plumber Aaron Sticklely at About.com. But even newly minted plumbers can charge \$35 an hour after a four- or five-year apprenticeship, according to Oregon Tradeswomen Inc., which charges a fee to access reviews of local businesses and professionals, says: A common plumbing scam is to give a low estimate that doesn't account for all of the labor needed. You will then need to pay for the additional labor before the plumber finishes the job, putting you in a tough situation. You'll get an idea of what's a reasonable cost for your job by collecting several competing bids.

**4. Padding the estimate.** Another approach is to pump up the bid with inflated prices and unnecessary items. You can spot jacked-up prices by getting several competing estimates. Don't be overly suspicious, however. A company that has a good reputation for quality service might charge a little more up-front, but you'll save in the long run by avoiding callbacks and extra charges. Look for a company that warrants its service for up to a year for major installations or repairs.

**5. Showing up uninvited.** Call the police if a "plumber" knocks on your door and tries to convince you to hire him. This is often a tip-off to fraud or to a burglar checking out your home's vulnerabilities. Plenty of people — elderly homeowners in particular — are targeted by con artists with a good line of patter. An 81-year-old Baton Rouge, La., woman told WAFB-TV that two men appeared at her home pretending to work for a local plumbing company. She saw through them and called police. Don't invite anyone into your home whom you have not first checked out. Find trustworthy plumbers by collecting recommendations from:

- **Friends and colleagues.** They're best, since you know them and can trust their judgment.
- **Reviews.** Good sources include Angie's List <http://reviews.angieslist.com/contractors/affiliates-general.aspx?dc=lp.angieslist2&CID=CJ2014&RefID=AF999&PID=2203897&afsrc=1&af=102961&AngiePID=14> (paid subscription) and Yelp <http://www.yelp.com> (free).
- **Plumbers' supply or plumbing fixture store.** "They don't tolerate bad plumbers," says Reader's Digest.
- **The Better Business Bureau.** Use the BBB for finding complaints, BBB alerts, enforcement actions and companies with low grades. The BBB's high grades are less useful, says Consumer Reports.
- **A Web search.** Search a company's name (look up the correct name and spelling) in quotes and add words like "fraud," "review" or "complaint" to the search.

**6. Using bait-and-switch tactics.** Bait-and-switch is a deceptive marketing practice: A company advertises one product or service and then tries substituting something else, or an inferior version. When you obtain bids, get the make and model of parts or equipment included, to compare with the final product.

**7. Pushing you for cash.** A plumber may ask you to pay under the table in cash and forgo a receipt — maybe with the offer of a discounted price. It's a sign he's cheating on his taxes. It's your decision, of course, but how fair is this to the rest of the taxpayers? Also, a worker who is dishonest in one area may well be dishonest in others. Whatever you do, get a written receipt for the work done in case something goes wrong and to use for possibly deducting the work at tax time. If a plumber won't provide a receipt, find another plumber.

**8. Bringing in extra workers.** Occasionally, a plumbing company may send out more workers than are needed for your job. It's a way of charging extra for a one-person job. If your job is a complex one, a second plumber may truly be justified. So just ask when you order the work, how many plumbers will be coming, how long the work should take, the hourly rate charged and any other fees.

**9. Charging high rates for the first hour .** Many service providers have a minimum charge for the first hour on the job. Nothing wrong with that as it takes them time and money to get out the door. But if your job is a small one and the plumber finishes before the hour is up, ask her to take care of other small jobs to fill out the hour. [Care2.com](http://Care2.com) suggests, "Ask him to replace washers, gaskets or O-rings, tighten faucet stems or other small tasks around the home, or ask him for a quick inspection so you'll be able to identify where wear and tear might indicate future problems will develop." Another solution: Rather than paying by the hour, ask a plumber to charge you by the job, suggests Reader's Digest.

**10. Pushing you to pay up before the work is done.** It's reasonable for a plumber to ask for a down payment of up to half of the estimate to cover parts and give assurance that you'll pay up. It's not reasonable to ask you to pay the full bill before the job is completely finished and you are satisfied.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | Mar 13, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Craigslist Job Scam ► How It works**

No experience necessary, no resume required, immediate start... sounds like the perfect job description, right? Actually, it sounds more like a scam. Craigslist job scams use tempting offers and the names of real organizations (including BBB!) to attract victims.

### **How the Scam Works:**

You see a job post on Craigslist.org. It says your local BBB is hiring 10 "Customer Service Representatives" for a new branch office (see screen shot). The ad claims that the job doesn't require previous experience... or even a resume. You just need to respond immediately to ensure that you secure one of the limited interview slots. Sounds too-good-to-be-true? It is! This BBB job scam is from the San Francisco Bay area, but watch out for fake job ads throughout the U.S. and Canada. Job scams have many different twists. Scammers may ask job seekers to pay upfront for training, which never materializes. Or they may "hire" you and send a fake check. The con artists will instruct you to deduct a fraction for payment and wire the rest back. Other scams ask you to complete an online application that requests personal identifying information and bank account numbers that can be used for identity theft.

**Tips to Avoid Falling for Fake Job Scams:** Spot a job scam before you waste your time and money.

1. **Some positions are more likely to be scams:** Use extra caution when looking at ads for jobs with generic titles, such as admin assistant or customer service representative. These often don't require special training or licensing, so they appeal to a wide range of applicants.
2. **Watch out for these phrases:** Scam ads often contain the phrases "Teleworking OK," "Immediate Start" and "No Experience Needed." Watch out for ads that urge you to apply immediately.
3. **If a job looks suspicious, search for it in Google.** If the result comes up in many other cities with the exact same job post, it is likely a scam.
4. **Be very cautious of any job that asks you to share personal information or hand over money.** Scammers will often use the guise of running a credit check, setting up direct deposit or paying for training.
5. **Check out the business' website to make sure the opening is posted there.** If you are still skeptical, call the business to check on the position. Don't rely on websites or phone numbers provided in the advertisement; find the "employer" on your own to make sure it's the real deal.

To find out more about scams, check out BBB Scam Stopper at <http://www.bbb.org/council/bbb-scam-stopper>.  
 [Source: BBB Scam Alert 19Apr 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Lottery Scam w/CPB ► How It works

This lottery scam is up to the same old tricks... with one big exception. They built a website for a fake consumer protection agency and are using BBB's mailing address. Watch out! Here is how it works:

- You get a call from someone claiming you won a lottery. Your prize is \$500,000, but you need to pay \$5,000 for "delivery insurance" first. The caller assures you that this is a real prize and even directs you to the "US Consumer Protection Bureau" website to verify its legitimacy.
- You decide to check out the offer, so you go to the website and call the phone number at the bottom. An "agent" answers and asks if you are calling about a lottery. He/She offers to check out your \$500,000 prize, and, sure enough, verifies that you are real lottery winner.

Don't fall for it! This lottery scam has an extra layer of deception. The website and the "Consumer Protection Bureau" are fake and just part of the scam. The bureau doesn't exist, and the address given on the fake website is really for BBB's office in Arlington, Va. Lottery and sweepstakes scams are common. Here are tips to avoid them:

- You can't win a contest you didn't enter: You need to buy a ticket or complete an application to participate in a contest or lottery. Be very careful if you've been selected as a winner for a contest you never entered.
- Verify -- but not by using a source scammers gave you. Check if an offer is real, but don't call the phone number in the email or website you suspect may be a scam. If it is a con, chances are the person on the other line will be involved too.
- Don't pay up to claim your prize: You should never have to pay money or buy products in order to receive a prize. Be especially wary of wiring money or using a prepaid debit card.
- The only legal lotteries in the United States are the official state-run lotteries. Foreign lotteries are illegal.

Thanks to the BBB of West Tennessee, North Mississippi and East Arkansas for their reporting on this scam. Read their full alert at <http://www.bbb.org/memphis/news-events/bbb-scam-alerts/2014/04/consumer-protection-bureau-scam>. To find out more about scams, check out BBB Scam Stopper at <http://www.bbb.org/council/bbb-scam-stopper>. [Source: BBB Scam Alert 11 Apr 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Tax Burden for Louisiana Retirees ► As of May 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 Kentucky:

### **Sales Taxes**

**State Sales Tax:** 4.0%; [3.8% for electricity, water utility services and steam; Interstate telecommunication services are taxable at 2%.] Political subdivisions also levy their own sales tax that could bring the total to 10.75%. Food for home consumption and residential utilities are exempt from state sales tax. Drugs, wheelchairs and prosthetic devices are fully taxed. Go to <http://www.revenue.louisiana.gov/sections/faq/default.aspx?type=gen&cat=SLS#faq-102> for more information

**Gasoline Tax:** 38.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 44.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** 36 cents/pack of 20

### **Personal Income Taxes**

**Tax Rate Range:** Low - 2%; High - 6%

**Income Brackets:** Three: Lowest - \$12,500; Highest - \$50,000. For joint returns, the taxes are twice the tax imposed on half the income.

**Personal Exemptions:** Single - \$4,500; Married - \$9,000; Dependents - \$1,000; 65 and older - \$1,000. Combined personal exemption and standard deduction.

**Standard Deduction:** Included in personal exemptions

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** Federal amount

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** Full

**Retirement Income Taxes:** Persons 65 years or older may exclude up to \$6,000 of annual retirement income from their taxable income. Taxpayers that are married filing jointly and are both age 65 or older can each exclude up to \$6,000 of annual retirement income. If only one spouse has retirement income, the exclusion is limited to \$6,000. Federal retirement benefits received by federal retirees, both military and nonmilitary, may be excluded from Louisiana taxable income. Individuals receiving benefits from certain retirement systems (shown when you click the link) are allowed to exclude those benefits from their Louisiana tax-table income. In addition, deferred income from the municipal and state police employee's retirement is exempt from state income tax. For details or more information <http://www.rev.state.la.us/sections/FAQ/default.aspx?type=GEN&cat=PER#faq-277> or call 225-219-0102.

**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 assessed and collected at the local level — 64 parishes and 7 municipal districts. The Louisiana State Tax Commission has a regulatory role regarding property assessments. Property assessments are based on 10% of the fair market value of the property. Homeowners receive a homestead exemption in the amount of \$7,500. Exemption is applied against the assessed value of the home which is equal to 10% of the fair market value. Therefore, only homes with a market value over \$75,000 would be subject to the parish (county) property tax. However, this exemption does not generally apply to municipal taxes.

A Special Assessment applies to the homestead of persons who are 65 years of age and older if the adjusted gross household income is below a certain level. For the tax year 2006, that level was \$58,531. The level may change from year to year, so it is advisable to check with the assessor’s office to determine whether you qualify. This special assessment will freeze the assessed value of the homestead for as long as the applicant owns and resides in the home and income does not exceed the maximum allowed. It will be lost if improvements in excess of 25% of the home’s value are added. Call 225-925-7830 for details.

***Inheritance and Estate Taxes***

Effective January 1, 2008, the inheritance tax is not applicable to deaths that occur after June 30, 2004. See Acts 2008, No. 822. Louisiana does levy an estate transfer tax. Revised Statute 47.2436 requires that an estate transfer tax return be filed by or on behalf of the heirs or legatees in every case where estate transfer tax is due or where the value of the deceased’s net estate is \$60,000.00 or more. See <http://www.legis.state.la.us/lss/lss.asp?doc=101637>. For more information call 225-219-7462.

For further information, visit the Louisiana Department of Revenue site <http://www.rev.state.la.us> or call 255-219-0102. Additional information can be found at the Louisiana Tax Commission site <http://www.latax.state.la.us> and in the Louisiana Tax Fact Booklet at [http://www.revenue.louisiana.gov/forms/publications/20162\(11\\_11\)BR.pdf](http://www.revenue.louisiana.gov/forms/publications/20162(11_11)BR.pdf). [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#LOUISIANA> May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

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

<b>TSP Share Prices for May 13, 2014</b>		
	<b>Close</b>	<b>YTD</b>
<b>G Fund</b>	\$14.4103	+0.86%
<b>F Fund</b>	\$16.2715	+3.37%
<b>C Fund</b>	\$24.7020	+3.46%
<b>S Fund</b>	\$33.7970	+0.38%
<b>I Fund</b>	\$26.3452	+3.05%
<b>L 2050</b>	\$14.4373	+2.66%
<b>L 2040</b>	\$25.4581	+2.51%
<b>L 2030</b>	\$24.0159	+2.37%
<b>L 2020</b>	\$22.2580	+2.12%
<b>L Income</b>	\$17.0628	+1.46%

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



**Notes of Interest** ► 1 thru 14 May 2014

- **Newspaper Headlines.** You can view the local current front page of any dotted city in the world at <http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/flash/>.
- **Vietnam Wall.** Click on the link <http://www.virtualwall.org/iStates.htm> to locate by state/city the names listed on the wall. Once you hit on a name you can hit 'Full Profile' to see the particulars of the individual's service & death.
- **PTSD.** The first published randomized controlled trial of yoga for PTSD, led by the National Center for PTSD, found that yoga was feasible and acceptable, but failed to find a benefit for PTSD symptoms.
- **Budget Deficit.** The federal government ran a budget deficit of \$301 billion for the first seven months of fiscal year 2014, CBO estimates—\$187 billion less than the shortfall recorded in the same span last year.
- **Income.** The Federal Reserve said there is an \$800,000 earnings difference between having a college degree and stopping your education after high school.

\*\*\*\*\*

**WWII Vet Incarcerated** ► Decorated Vet Age 90 Gets 3-yrs

An Indiana man whose age, white hair and folksy style helped conceal his role as a drug courier was sentenced 7 MAY — his 90th birthday — to three years in federal prison for hauling more than a ton of cocaine to Michigan. "All I can tell you, your honor, is I'm really heartbroken I did what I did," Leo Sharp told a judge. "But it's done." Wearing a dark suit and tie, the frail man stuffed his hands in his pockets as he stood in front of U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds. His attorney occasionally reached over to put a reassuring grip on his shoulder or a supportive stoke on his back. There was no dispute over Sharp's crimes: He admitted last fall that he drove loads of cocaine into Michigan for a Mexican drug organization, one of 19 people charged in the case. The government said he was paid more than \$1 million. "I don't doubt it will be difficult," Edmunds told Sharp of prison, "but respect for the law requires there be some custody."



**Leo Sharp Heading to U.S. District Court in Detroit**

His age aside, Sharp still isn't a typical criminal. He fought Nazis in Italy during World War II and was awarded a Bronze Star for it. The Michigan City, Indiana, man also is known for growing prize-winning daylilies and even contributed 5,000 plant bulbs to his community. Defense lawyer Darryl Goldberg focused on Sharp's past, not the

trouble that landed him in court, while asking the judge to keep his client out of prison. "This is not how we honor our heroes, whether they've fallen from grace or not," Goldberg said. The attorney spent several minutes reading a history of the Battle of Mount Battaglia — "German blood on the end of their bayonets" — before the judge finally interrupted him. Goldberg repeatedly warned that Sharp's dementia would be a burden for the U.S. Bureau of Prisons. He acknowledged Sharp "went into this eyes wide," but said his condition led him to use "bad judgment" and become a drug courier.

During brief remarks, Sharp said he wished to grow Hawaiian papayas on his property in Florida to pay off his \$500,000 penalty to the government. "So sweet and delicious that people on the mainland will love it," he said. That won't be possible: The government is seizing and selling the land. Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher Graveline said criminals don't get a pass simply for military service. He noted that Sharp used his age and appearance as a tool to shake the suspicions of police on cross-country trips before he was finally busted during a traffic stop on Interstate 94, west of Detroit, in 2011. "They bargained on him not getting caught," the judge said in agreement. Edmunds said linking dementia to Sharp's crimes was an "insult to all the people who have dementia and don't get involved in illegal activity." Despite going to prison, Sharp still got a significant break. The government was seeking a five-year sentence, and sentencing guidelines called for a minimum of 14 years. [Source: The Associated Press | Ed White | May 8, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Mothers Day 2014 Index ► Equivalent Pay

A mother's value is priceless, but if you had to put a dollar figure on the things she does for the family, her worth would be up 5% this year over last to \$62,984.76. The following chart breaks down the figures:

<b>The Mother's Day Index 2014</b>					
<b>Mother's task</b>	<b>BLS occupation title</b>	<b>Hours per week</b>	<b>Weeks per year</b>	<b>Mean hourly wage</b>	<b>Annual Mom earnings</b>
Cooking	Cooks	14	52	\$9.55	\$6,952.40
Driving	Taxi drivers and chauffeurs	9	52	\$12.12	\$5,672.16
Helping with homework	Other teachers and instructors	10	40	\$18.23	\$7,290.00
Taking care of the kids	Childcare Worker	40	52	\$10.45	\$21,736.00
Nursing wounds	Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses	2	12	\$18.30	\$439.20
Cleaning up	Maids and housekeeping cleaners	10	52	\$10.15	\$5,278.00
Planning parties	Meeting & Convention Planners	8	8	\$22.53	\$1,441.60
Summer activity planner	Miscellaneous community and social service specialists, including health educators and community health workers.	40	12	\$18.50	\$8,880.00

Haircuts	Hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists	0.5	52	\$12.13	\$315.25
Shopping for the family	Personal care aides	3	52	\$11.13	\$1,735.50
Family finances	Accountants and auditors	0.5	52	\$25.73	\$668.85
Yard work	Grounds maintenance workers	1	52	\$12.95	\$673.40
Fixing up the house	Designers	5	8	\$21.65	\$866.00
Finding out what the kids are up to	Private detectives and investigators	5	8	\$25.91	\$1,036.40
<b>Grand total: \$62,984.76</b>					
<i>Wage source: Bureau of Labor Statistics</i>					

[Source: <http://www.insure.com/articles/lifeinsurance/the-mothers-day-index.html> May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Landline Phone Service ► Reasons Not to Cancel

You might want to think twice before canceling your landline phone service and joining the 2 in 5 U.S. households that have opted to go mobile-only. Consumer Reports says there are still a number of reasons it makes sense to keep your landline,

- **Can you hear me now?** Consumer Reports said it tested the voice quality for talking and listening on a cordless home phone and it was "generally better than that of the best cellphones - important if you suffer from hearing loss, your household is noisy, or you spend a lot of time on the phone, especially in the home office."
- **More secure.** Home phones are connected to your address, including apartment numbers, so if you call 911, emergency responders will know where you are, regardless of whether or not you can talk to them. Cellphones use a GPS-based method to report your physical location to 911, but it's not exact. For instance, if you're in an apartment on the third level of the building, your phone doesn't indicate that.
- **Savings?** We recently told you that cutting your landline service is a great way to save money. But that's not always the case. The Huffington Post's Brie Dyas said she was going to cancel her landline to reduce her cable bill, but "without it, the bill was actually higher." I pay about \$19 per month for my landline. Consumer Reports said canceling the landline from a cable company sometimes amounts to savings as low as \$5 per month, if they're in a bundled package.
- **Helps improve cell reception.** "By placing a cellphone near the cordless phone's base, you can access your wireless service using Bluetooth technology and use a cordless handset to make or take cell calls," Consumer Reports said.
- **Messages.** It is much easier to listen to missed call messages and take notes on a landline than on a cellphone. Plus the flashing light alerts me to check for messages when I come home.

Maybe I'm old school, but I refuse to give up my landline. Yes, I have a cellphone, but if I'm going to spend any more than 60 seconds talking on the phone, I'd rather use a landline because the connection is so much clearer. Plus, nine times out of 10 I have no idea where my phone is. Car, coat, between the couch cushions, in my 11-month-old's mouth - it could be anywhere. It could also be on vibrate or the battery's dead - all are likely scenarios.

Sometimes I wonder why I even have a cellphone. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz & Bulletin Editor | May 8, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Forced Arbitration ► Cable Company Contracts

You might want to read the fine print on the terms of service you have with your cable company. Chances are that your cable company slipped in some jargon that has you relinquishing your legal rights and could potentially have you paying out the nose. Cable companies are one of the most-hated industries, with consumers often complaining about poor customer service and the quality of service overall. And now many have included fine print in their contracts that requires their customers to give up their legal right to sue. MarketWatch, a company that tracks the pulse of markets says, “In a lot of places consumers have little or no choice about what cable company they go with, so cable companies feel like they can add in one-sided terms [to their service agreements].” Scott Michelman, an attorney for the national consumer advocacy organization Public Citizen says, “And they often get away with it because almost no one reads the fine print.”

So, what kind of dastardly details may be included in the fine print? According to MarketWatch you may be faced with:

- **Billing disputes:** Make it quick. Some companies, Time Warner Cable included, allow customers just 30 days to dispute a bill. Since billing disputes are among the most common issues consumers face, this is a provision that’s extremely unfriendly to consumers. Comcast and Verizon allow 60 days to dispute a charge.
- **Cable on the fritz? Too bad.** Don’t expect a refund if your cable goes out. Some cable companies say their services aren’t guaranteed to work, so you’re out of luck if something happens. For instance, Comcast says its services are “not fail-safe.”
- **Act first, communicate later (if at all).** Your cable company may be able to cancel services and channels, and change its rates, without telling you.
- **Sue us? Good luck!** Many cable companies, like Time Warner Cable and Verizon, have mandatory arbitration clauses included in their terms of service. Essentially, this is waiving your legal rights, and agreeing to arbitration out of court.

The last issue reflects a disturbing trend in the contracts you sign – for everything from credit cards to cellphones to even leasing a car or building a home. It boils down to two words: **Forced Arbitration**. In other words you no longer have the right to go to court and sue whoever has done you wrong. And it’s as ominous as it sounds. Arbitration is something Major League Baseball fans might be familiar with: A player and his team disagree on how much the player should be paid, so they each submit a salary figure to an arbiter. This objective person makes a decision both parties have agreed in advance to abide by. Outside of baseball, arbitration cuts down on the number of lawsuits clogging the courts. It’s a useful tool, says Money Talks News founder Stacy Johnson – but not when you’re forced into it, and not when the arbitration process is stacked against you. Forced arbitration is preferred by companies because it benefits companies – not the employee or consumer. Here are problems and dangers noted by advocates.

- **Individuals are often unaware they’ve agreed to forced arbitration.** Most Americans have accepted good or services or a job with forced arbitration as a condition; and yet, very few individuals report having noticed a forced arbitration clause in the terms of agreements or contracts they’ve accepted.
- **Forced arbitration severely limits consumer options for resolving a dispute.** Before any problem arises, you lock yourself into only one option—forced arbitration—for resolving all future disputes or problems.

The contract typically also names the arbitration company that must be used – the one preferred by the company.

- **Forced arbitration clauses generally bind the consumer—not the company.** The way many forced arbitration clauses are written, the seller retains its rights to take any complaint to court while the consumer can only initiate arbitration.
- **Arbitration is a private system without a judge, jury or a right to an appeal.** Arbitrators aren't required to take the law and legal precedent into account in making their decisions. There is no appeal or public review of decisions to ensure the arbitrator got it right.
- **Employees cannot sue for discrimination, harassment, abuse, retaliation or wrongful termination.** In forced arbitration, the laws that protect us from discrimination based on age, sex, religion, race, disability, and unequal pay for equal work, such as the Civil Rights Act and the Equal Pay Act, become meaningless and unenforceable in court. Employees lose important protections for blowing the whistle on waste or fraud or for fighting retaliation for taking the family medical leave
- **Consumers cannot sue for negligence, defective products or scams.** Just by buying a product or service, consumers can lose their right to hold a company accountable. Even if a retirement account disappears, a home is dangerous and defective, or a loved one suffers harm in a nursing home, a forced arbitration clause means there is no right to take the company responsible to court.

Bottom line: Arbitration is simply a way for big companies to keep you out of court and limit the number of lawsuits they have to deal with. Many states used to prohibit such agreements until a 2011 U.S. Supreme Court decision ended their authority to do that. Now forced arbitration is popping up everywhere. The Arbitration Fairness Act of 2013 was submitted on May 7 with the support of 23 House Democrats hailing from California, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Maine, North Carolina and Virginia. The bill has the support of not only attorneys but also groups like Public Citizen and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. But according to Govtrack, which monitors proposed legislation, the Arbitration Fairness Act has only a “3 percent chance of getting enacted.” So what can you do? Besides urging your own Congress members to act, not much. An organization called Fair Arbitration Now (FAN) suggests perusing the fine print of your contracts and trying one of three tactics:

- If the contract has an opt-out clause, use it.
- If the contract doesn't have an opt-out clause, ask to opt out anyway (although your odds aren't good).
- Take your business to a competitor (although it may be hard to find one that doesn't also use forced arbitration).

“Ultimately,” FAN laments, “in order to insure you can buy products and services and be employed without giving up your legal rights, legislation must be passed to ban forced arbitration.” For more information on Forced Arbitration refer to <http://www.fairarbitrationnow.org>. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | May 6, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Have You Heard? ► The Bagpiper

MacGregor the bagpiper played many gigs. Recently he was asked by a funeral director to play at a graveside service for a homeless man. He had no family or friends, so the service was to be at a pauper's cemetery in the Nova Scotia back country.

As MacGregor was not familiar with the backwoods, he got lost and, being a typical man, he didn't stop for directions.

He finally arrived an hour late and saw the funeral guy had evidently gone and the hearse was nowhere in sight. There were only the diggers and crew left and they were eating lunch. MacGregor felt badly and apologized to the men for being late.

He went to the side of the grave and looked down and the vault lid was already in place. Not knowing what else to do, he started to play.

The workers put down their lunches and began to gather around. MacGregor played out his heart and soul for this man with no family and friends. He played like he's never played before for this homeless man.

And as he played Amazing Grace, the workers began to weep. They wept and he wept all together. When MacGregor finished, he packed up his bagpipes and started for his car. Though his head hung low, his heart was full.

As MacGregor opened the door to the car, he heard one of the workers say, "I never seen nothing like that before and I've been putting in septic tanks for twenty years."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Photos That Say it All ► Memorial Day



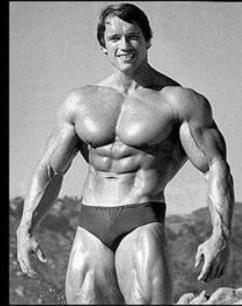
\*\*\*\*\*

## They Grew Up to Be? ► Arnold Schwarzenegger



This youngsters plans were formed when he was 14 years old. His father, who had no patience for listening or understanding the kid's problems, wanted him to be a police officer like he was and his mother wanted trade school. He did neither.

Money was a problem in their household since one of the highlights of his youth was when the family purchased a refrigerator. Both of his parents were very strict: "Back then it was a very different world, if we did something wrong or disobeyed your parents, the rod was never spared."



Arnold Schwarzenegger

\*\*\*\*\*

“We can’t all be heroes, some of us need to stand on the curb and clap as they go by”

— **Will Rogers** (1879 –1935) American Comedic actor, Columnist, and Radio personality



\*\*\*\*\*

## Interesting Inventions ► Hidden Power Outlet



\*\*\*\*\*

## World Peace Day ► 21 SEP 2014

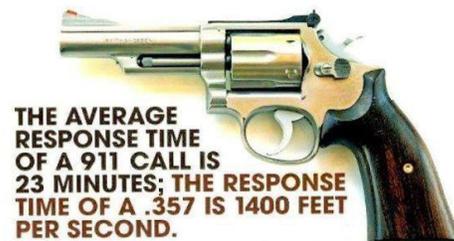
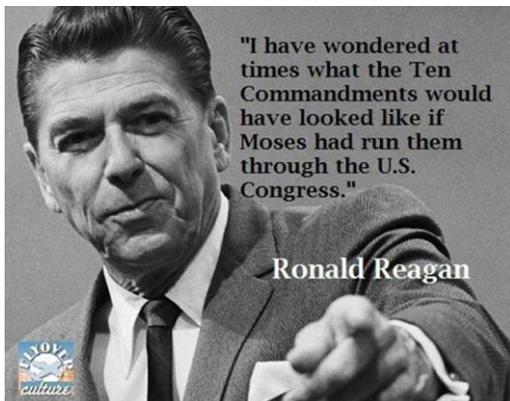


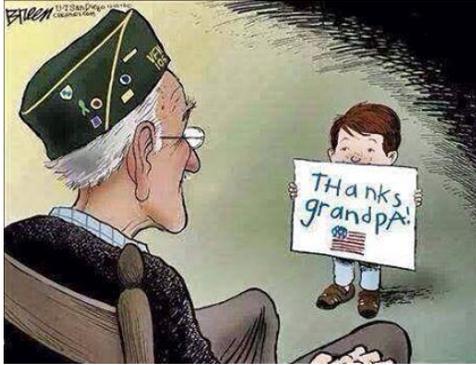
World Peace Day — officially The International Day of Peace — is observed annually on September 21. It is dedicated to world peace, specifically to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples. Hopefully, it will become the occasion for a temporary ceasefire in a combat zones for humanitarian aid access. The International Day of Peace was established in 1981 by resolution 36/67PDF document of the United Nations General Assembly to coincide with its opening session, which was held annually on the third Tuesday of September. The first Peace Day was observed in September 1982. In 2001, the General Assembly adopted resolution 55/282PDF document, which established 21 September as an annual day of non-violence and cease-fire: (...) the International Day of Peace shall be observed on 21 September each year, with this date to be brought to the attention of all people for the celebration and observance of peace. To inaugurate the International Day of Peace, the "Peace Bell" is rung at UN Headquarters. The bell is cast from coins donated by children from all continents. It was given as a gift by the United Nations Association of Japan, and is referred to as "a reminder of the human cost of war." The inscription on its side reads: "Long live absolute world peace." Individuals can also wear White Peace Doves on this day to commemorate the International Day of Peace, which are badges in the shape of a dove produced by a non-profit in Canada.



On 25 SEP 2013, to commemorate that year's World Peace Day, British artists Jamie, accompanied by numerous volunteers, took to the beaches of Normandy with rakes and stencils in hand to etch 9,000 silhouettes representing fallen people into the sand. Titled The Fallen 9000, the piece was meant as a stark visual reminder of those who died during the D-Day beach landings at Arromanches on June 6th, 1944 during WWII. The original team consisted of 60 volunteers, but as word spread nearly 500 additional local residents arrived to help with the temporary installation that lasted only a few hours before being washed away by the tide. It is surprising how little publicity this undertaking received. [Source: [http://www.calendar-12.com/holidays/world\\_peace\\_day/2014](http://www.calendar-12.com/holidays/world_peace_day/2014) May 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*





\*\*\*\*\*

*gary varvel*  
 THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR  
 ©2014 CREATORS.COM



**I WANT YOU**  
 TO STOP COMPLAINING AND VOTE IN THE PRIMARY

garyvarvel.com

**FAIR USE NOTICE:** This newsletter contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available in an effort to advance understanding of veterans' issues. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material in this newsletter is distributed without profit to those who have expressed an interest in receiving the included information for educating themselves on veteran issues so they can better communicate with their legislators on issues affecting them. For more information go to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this newsletter for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

## 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](mailto: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](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) with the word "DELETE" in the subject line. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 17,465 subscribers who have responded to date.

3. Bulletin recipients who reside, or have an 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](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net).

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

7. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. To aid in continued receipt of Bulletin availability notices, recommend enter the email addressee [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either <http://www.nhc-ul.com/rao.html> (PDF Edition), <http://www.veteransresources.org> (PDF & HTTP Editions), or <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTTP Editions), or 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.

== To subscribe first add the RAO email addressee [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) to your address book and/or white list. Then send to this addressee your full name plus either the post/branch/chapter number of the fraternal military/government organization you are currently affiliated with (if any) "AND/OR" the city and state/country you reside in so your addressee can be properly positioned in the directory for future recovery. Subscription is open to all veterans, dependents, military/veteran support organizations, and media.

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

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

Lt. James "EMO" Tichacek, USN (Ret)

Editor/Publisher RAO Bulletin

RAO Baguio, PSC 517 Box RCB, FPO AP 96517

Tel: (951) 238-1246 in U.S. or Cell: 0915-361-3503 in the Philippines.

Email: raoemo@sbcglobal.net

Web Access: <http://www.nhc-ul.com/rao.html>, <http://www.veteransresources.org>, or <http://frabr245.org>

Office: Red Lion, 92 Glen Luna, cnr Leonard Rd & Brent Rd. Baguio City 2400 RP TUE & THUR 09-1100  
AMVETS | DAV | NAUS | NCOA | MOAA | USDR | VFW | VVA | CG33 | DD890 | AD37 | TSCL member