

RAO

BULLETIN

14 February 2015

PDF Edition

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ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment - Veteran Legislation as of 13 Feb 2015
- Attachment – Indiana Vet State Benefits & Discounts Jan 2015
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- Attachment - Retiree Activity\Appreciation Days (RAD) Schedule as of Feb 10, 2015
- Attachment - TMC's MCRRC Report Assessment (Initial)

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SECDEF Update 12 ► Senate Confirms Carter 93-5

The Senate overwhelmingly approved Ash Carter as the new defense secretary on 12 FEB, giving the longtime Pentagon bureaucrat the reins to a military that is facing budget battles at home and unconventional fights abroad. Carter is the fourth defense secretary to serve under President Obama and takes over the role from Chuck Hagel, who announced his departure in November. The Senate voted 93-5 to confirm him. He's a Rhodes scholar with degrees in theoretical physics and medieval history, well respected by lawmakers for his thoughtful work as a senior official in the Pentagon. But while he has enjoyed a warmer welcome to the

job than his predecessor — Hagel's nomination process was fraught with confrontations with senators and a largely partisan confirmation vote — that honeymoon won't last long.

Carter will immediately be thrust into the budding debate over Obama's request for a new authorization for military force in the fight against Islamic State forces in the Middle East, and the decision whether to provide more arms to Ukrainian forces in their fight against Russia. On the latter topic, he has already told senators he would be inclined to increase U.S. help to Ukraine, in opposition to administration moves so far. Carter also will start his work as lawmakers begin digging into the annual defense budget. During his confirmation hearing, he lamented looming sequestration cuts that military leaders say will cripple force readiness, and pledged to push Congress to fix the issue before this fall. But no clear legislative solution has emerged so far, leaving the Defense Department with months of uncertainty as the new fiscal year looms.

The only criticism Carter faced in his confirmation process had more to do with his new boss than his own résumé. Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO) said he did not vote for Carter because of Obama's micromanagement of national security issues. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, offered similar complaints, but praised Carter's credentials and character and endorsed his selection. Carter had spent much of the past month meeting with senators in advance of the confirmation vote, and is expected to return to Capitol Hill within weeks for budget and national security hearings. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Feb 12, 2015 ++]

GWOT Medal Update 04 ► Service Stars Authorized

The Department of Defense announced 9 FEB that effective immediately, service members are authorized to wear Service Stars on their Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medals (GWOT-EM) to represent deployments in support of approved GWOT operations. Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Jessica Wright signed a memorandum authorizing the new policy change retroactive to Sept. 11, 2001. Only one GWOT-EM is awarded for each approved operation. For example, a service member who was awarded the medal for an Operation Enduring Freedom deployment, and is subsequently authorized a second award for an Operation Inherent Resolve deployment would wear a single Service Star on the GWOT-EM to denote both awards. The five GWOT-EM approved operations are:

Operation	Inclusive Dates
ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF)	Sep 11, 2001 – TBD
IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF)	Mar 19, 2003 – Aug 31, 2010
NOMAD SHADOW (ONS)	Nov 5, 2007 – TBD
NEW DAWN (OND)	Sep 1, 2010 – Dec 31, 2011
INHERENT RESOLVE (OIR)	June 15, 2014 – TBD

The list of associated areas of eligibility for each approved GWOT-EM operation is available at: <http://prhome.defense.gov/RFM/MPP/OEPM/Functions>

This policy change does not adjust criteria for award of the Afghanistan Campaign Medal or the Iraq Campaign Medal (ICM). Full eligibility criteria for the GWOT-EM are contained in Department of Defense Manual 1348.33, Volume 2, Manual of Military Decorations and Awards: DoD Service Awards – Campaign, Expeditionary, and Service Medals. Additionally, each military department will prescribe procedures for service members' requests for award of GWOT-EM Service Stars. The Global War on Terrorism

Expeditionary Medal is positioned above the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal in precedence, and directly follows the Kosovo Campaign Medal. To view the Department of Defense memorandum refer to <http://www.defense.gov/news/Expeditionary-Medal-Service-Star-Authorization.pdf?source=GovDelivery>. [Source: DoD News Release No. NR-042-15 | Feb. 09, 2015 ++]

MCRMC Update 11 ► TMC Initial Assessment of Report

On 30 JAN TREA's Washington staff spent the entire day involved in a Military Coalition "Tiger Team" review of the MCRMC report. Their conclusion is that there are some recommendations they like and support while there are others they are very skeptical of and still others they oppose. However, because the recommendations are so involved more details are needed before they can make a final decision about whether to support them. On 6 FEB the TREA staff was scheduled to meet with some members of the MCRMC in an attempt to get more details. In the meantime TREA has provided veterans the preliminary observations that came out of their 30 JAN "Tiger Team" assessment. To read these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**TMC's MCRRC Report Assessment | Initial**". [Source: TREA Special Edition 'From Washington News for the Enlisted' | Feb. 6, 2015 ++]

MCRMC Update 12 ► "Man Up" and Accept the Recommendations

A U.S. congresswoman implored her colleagues to "man up" and accept the recommendations from a blue-ribbon panel to overhaul military benefits. Rep. Jackie Speier, a Democrat from California and a member of the House Armed Services Committee, praised the recent work of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission. The panel called for offering troops 401(k)-like retirement plans and military families a choice of commercial health insurance plans in lieu of Tricare, among other proposals. "We've just now have got to inject a little guts into all of us to do the right thing," she said 11 FEB during a hearing of the committee's military personnel subcommittee, which received testimony from commission members.

The hearing was the latest in what will be a series of debates on Capitol Hill over the future of military compensation. Members of the congressionally mandated panel have said their 15 recommendations were designed to give troops, military families and retirees more benefits choices while saving the Pentagon an estimated \$12 billion a year in personnel costs by 2040. While the hearing touched on many of the proposed reforms, including retirement, much of the discussion focused on health care. Speier, in particular, sought to downplay the financial impact of the health care proposals to working-age retirees. Under the panel's recommendations, retirees younger than age 65 would initially pay 5 percent of the cost of a private plan, but the figure would increase 1 percent a year until reaching 20 percent of the premium -- or until they're eligible to switch into Medicare and Tricare for Life. "It's costing about, let's just say round numbers, \$500 a year," Speier said. "A 1-percent increase is \$5. I mean, I think we have to pitch this for what it is: You're going to have better health care, you're going to have a bigger network, and it's going to cost you one Starbucks Latte a year. Are you in?" Commissioner Stephen Buyer responded, "Bingo. Thank you."

Buyer, a former Republican congressman from Indiana who headed the Veterans' Affairs Committee, also noted that working-age retirees paid a bigger share of their health care costs in the early 1990s. "In 1994, when it started, it was a 27-percent premium," he said. "It's eroded to 5 percent." Commissioners defended their proposal to do away with the three Tricare plans for military families, reservists and working-age retirees

while retaining Tricare for Life for elderly retirees. The new health care program, called Tricare Choice, would be similar to the one for federal civilian employees and allow recipients to choose from a list of commercial health care plans. "Tricare is a broken program," Buyer said, noting that it's only accepted at a relatively small number of health care providers. "You are going to receive a lot of pressure from those across the river," he added, referring to the Pentagon, "and institutions and the contractors to convince you otherwise ... do not get sucked into the status quo. That's my best counsel to you."

Commissioner Edmund Giambastiani, a retired Navy admiral, was even more blunt. "Tricare is in a death spiral," he said. The term is another way of describing how the Defense Department seeks to save money when renewing contracts for the program by restricting or eliminating procedures, reducing the number of coverage zones and making other marginal changes "to capture every dollar," Giambastiani said. "The bottom line is that service continues to get less and less," he said. [Source: Military.com | Brendan McGarry | Feb 11, 2015 ++]

DoD Sexual Abuse Update 18 ► Military Sex Offender Registration Policy

When a civilian is convicted of something as heinous as rape or child molestation, under the Adam Walsh Act, they are to be fingerprinted, have their DNA taken and name added to the sex offender registry before being released from prison. But in the military it's an honor system – ironically for those who've already proven dishonorable. When 11Alive's Rebecca Lindstrom typed in the name Basil Kingsberry, he was nowhere to be found. According to court documents, Kingsberry is an army specialist convicted of rape and forcible sodomy while serving overseas. His crime legally requires him to register. "This is a sex offender who has fallen between the cracks," said Vernon Keenan, the Director of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI), the agency responsible for maintaining the statewide registry. When a sex offender is released from a military prison, the Department of Defense asks where they plan to go, then sends that community a letter. There's little oversight to make sure that they do. Kingsberry told the military he was headed to Mississippi, but ended up in Georgia instead.

The GBI says the military's paperwork was confusing and led them to believe his conviction had been set aside – or overturned. "Two occasions we asked the military to provide us with further documentation regarding his offense and conviction," explained Keenan. "We did not receive any additional paperwork from the military." As a result, the GBI told Kingsberry he did not need to register. It's a nationwide problem. In August, the Inspector General admitted the military's current policy "enabled" sex offenders "to evade registration." According to the military's own data, approximately 40% of its inmates require sex offender registration. But the US Marshal Service says a review of 193 people released in 2013 showed as many as 35 of them had failed to do so. The Department of Defense isn't breaking any laws. The military isn't required or even able to register a sex offender, but there are some lawmakers who say it's time for that to change.

California Congresswoman Jackie Speier is a member of the House Armed Services committee. She plans to introduce a bill that would treat military sex offenders the same as the rest of us. "To require everyone before they're released from military prison to be fingerprinted, to have their DNA taken and to be identified as a sexual predator," said Speier. And Georgia Congressman Hank Johnson has asked to co-sponsor it. "We are producing victims, often children. I think we must have some clear cut guidelines to protect the public from sexual predators," said Johnson. Because Kingsberry isn't the only one living under the radar. Just in Georgia, there's Steven Lucas, who according to court records, was convicted of having sex with a 14-year old family member while serving at Moody Air Force base. We also learned about a man named Charles

Caley who, according to the same military records, used sexually explicit pictures of children to "gratify his lust." "What has really distressed me is how willing the military has been not to hold people accountable who commit violent felonies," said Speier.

We went looking for Kingsberry, retracing his steps and talking with family. According to Kingsberry's Facebook page he attended Chattahoochee Tech in Marietta -- a rapist, among students, with no one the wiser. He was convicted in Fulton County for soliciting an undercover officer for sex and in October, was arrested in South Carolina for assault and battery. To get us to stop digging, Kingsberry gave us a call. Kingsberry didn't want to talk on camera, but did promise to register. A few hours later, we found his name, where many say it should have been all along -- on Georgia's sex offender registry. The GBI admits they had no idea Kingsberry was back in Georgia and law enforcement in DeKalb County says it wasn't even looking for him. They were all grateful though for his phone call that day, asking if he could register. The GBI says this is very much a public safety issue that needs a national solution. Keenan says in Georgia, the only government page with more public views than the sex offender registry -- is the winning numbers from the lottery. [Source: Atlanta 11Alive News | Rebecca Lindstrom | Feb. 04, 2015 ++]

SECDEF Update 11 ► Senate Confirmation Hearing 4 FEB

The Senate's confirmation hearing for the next secretary of defense was filled with familiar faces, familiar questions and unsurprising answers from a candidate expected to sail through a full chamber vote within days. And that despite lawmakers' contention that the country has never faced a broader range of unpredictable threats and national security challenges, issues that the new secretary will have to immediately adapt to from his first day in office. Former Deputy Defense Secretary Ash Carter, the nominee to replace outgoing Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, was welcomed warmly by members of the Senate Armed Services Committee on 4 FEB, who for weeks have lauded him as a commendable choice for the role.

He promised "candid advice" for President Obama and a working relationship with members of Congress at the hearing, both clichéd prerequisites for the nomination process. He offered support for arming Ukrainian forces in their fight against Russia, a brief defense of Obama's strategy to train moderate rebels in the fight against the Islamic State group, and strong opposition to both sequestration and sexual assault in the ranks. And he drew little resistance from any of the lawmakers who he will spar with repeatedly in coming months, as senators dig into long-term defense spending and security issues. It was a marked change from two years ago, when then-nominee Chuck Hagel faced a testy grilling from Republicans and Democrats underwhelmed that he had been selected.

Carter, a Rhodes scholar with degrees in theoretical physics and medieval history, built bipartisan support as the Pentagon's top weapons buyer and a key defense thinker under former defense secretaries Bob Gates and Leon Panetta. Committee members for weeks had billed the hearing as a chance to roast Obama's national security decisions and not his latest proxy, but that mostly manifested as calls for Carter to re-examine current plans in Afghanistan, Iraq, Eastern Europe and the Pacific. McCain called the White House's Islamic State strategy nonexistent and the current Ukraine strategy cowardly. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) questioned Obama's negotiations with Iran and response to Islamic radicalism.

For his part, Carter identified the biggest threat facing the military as sequestration, mandatory spending caps set to take full effect once again in fiscal 2016. "Sequester is risky to our defense, it introduces turbulence and uncertainty that are wasteful, and it conveys a misleading, diminished picture of our power in

the eyes of friends and foes alike," he said. That statement echoed each of his predecessors' complaints about the looming funding cuts, and defense lawmakers' distaste for the policy. Still, congressional leaders have not seriously discussed any alternatives, leaving Carter with difficult budget questions even before he has reviewed the administration's just-released fiscal 2016 plan. Carter will be back on Capitol Hill to discuss those budget issues in a few weeks, assuming he is confirmed. McCain said he thinks that vote could take place before the end of next week. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Feb 04, 2015 ++]

DoD Suicide Policy Update 12 ► Clay Hunt Act Passes Congress

The Vice President of Public Policy at the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), John Madigan, releases this statement:

“With veterans accounting for one out of every five suicides in our country, passage of the Clay Hunt Act is a major victory not just for veterans but for the larger fight against suicide. AFSP has set the bold goal of reducing the annual suicide rate 20% by 2025, and it’s legislation like the Clay Hunt Act that will make it happen.

We would like to thank Representatives Jeff Miller (R-FL), Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee for his introduction of H.R. 203 in the House, Corrine Brown (D-FL) ranking member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, Tim Waltz (D-MN), and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL).

We would also like to thank Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA) for his leadership as Chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, along with Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) ranking member on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Senators John McCain (R-AZ), and Richard Durbin (D-IL), one of the original cosponsors.”

When fully implemented, the Clay Hunt Act will:

1. Increase access to mental health care by creating a peer support and community outreach pilot program to assist transitioning service members as well as a one-stop, interactive website of available resources.
2. Help meet the demand for mental health care providers by starting a pilot program which will repay student loan debt incurred by physicians who choose to practice psychiatric medicine in the VA or those enrolled in their final year of a psychiatry residency program.
3. Boost the accountability of mental health care by requiring annual evaluations of the suicide-prevention practices and programs of the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention leads the fight against suicide. We fund research, create educational programs, advocate for public policy, and support those affected by suicide. Led by CEO Robert Gebbia and headquartered in New York, AFSP has 75 local chapters with programs and events nationwide. For additional info on AFSP refer to <http://www.afsp.org>. [Source: PRNewswire-USNewswire | Feb. 3, 2015 ++]



DoD 2016 Budget ► Pentagon Wants 4.4% Increase over 2015

The Pentagon is seeking an overall budget increase for 2016, but spending on military personnel will remain essentially flat, squeezed by cuts in the size of the force and recent efforts to scale back troops' pay and benefits. The Defense Department's budget request for fiscal 2016, which starts 1 OCT, seeks a total budget of \$585.3 billion, roughly 4.4 percent more than this year's total defense budget. Meanwhile, the portion of the budget that accounts for military personnel will tick downward by a small fraction to \$139.9 billion, or about \$55 million less than the amount approved for this year, according to budget documents released Monday. Those figures include both the base budget and funding for overseas operations.

Most of the 4.4 percent increase in the overall Pentagon budget will fund new weapons systems and more research and development for new technologies, the budget documents show. The nominal decline in personnel spending sought for 2016 could make it the fifth consecutive year that the personnel budget account has dropped since reaching a peak of \$152 billion in 2010. The bulk of that reduction stems from a drawdown in the size of the total force, in particular the Army and Marine Corps, which have shed more than 70,000 service members over the past several years and brought the total size of the active-duty force down to about 1.3 million troops. Specifically, this year's budget projects that the total force will shrink by another 11,900 troops. That includes cutting 15,000 soldiers from the Army while expanding the Navy by 1,500 sailors and the Air Force by 1,700 airmen.

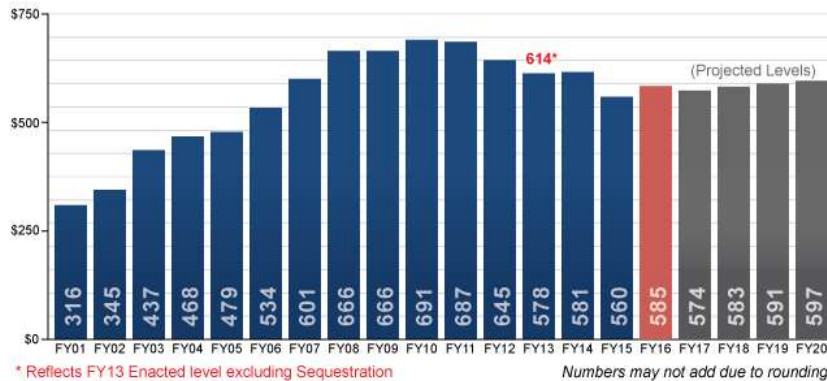
Pentagon officials note that the per-troop costs have risen significantly since 2001 as Congress granted a series of generous pay raises and new benefits to troops during the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Top Pentagon officials say that cost growth is unsustainable and continue to seek reductions to military

compensation in an effort to scale back the growth in per-troop costs. "The department cannot allow its personnel costs to crowd out investments in the readiness and modernization portions of the budget which are essential to providing needed training and equipment for its warriors to carry into combat and accomplish the incredible array of missions undertaken around the globe every day," DoD officials wrote in their budget overview published 2 FEB.

The budget request for next year also urges Congress to approve new cuts to Basic Allowance for Housing rates, new health care fees and reductions to the commissary benefit. Spending on personnel, which includes health care, comprises about 33.5 percent of this year's budget, down from 36.1 percent in 2014, budget documents show. The budget request includes another modest pay raise for service members next year, a proposed 1.3 percent that would mark a nominal uptick but would fail to keep pace with the projected growth in average private-sector wages. If approved by Congress, the 1.3 percent raise would cut into the real spending power for military families because it would fall well below the estimated 2.3 percent rise in annual private-sector wages, according to DoD budget documents.

Go to <http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=5580> for a transcript of the Department of Defense Briefing by Deputy Secretary Work and Adm. Winnefeld on the Fiscal Year 2016 Budget in the Pentagon Briefing Room. Following are some tables that puts the budget in perspective on how it supports the Pentagon's modernization program and the GDP.

DoD Topline, FY 2001 – 2020 (Current Dollars in Billions)



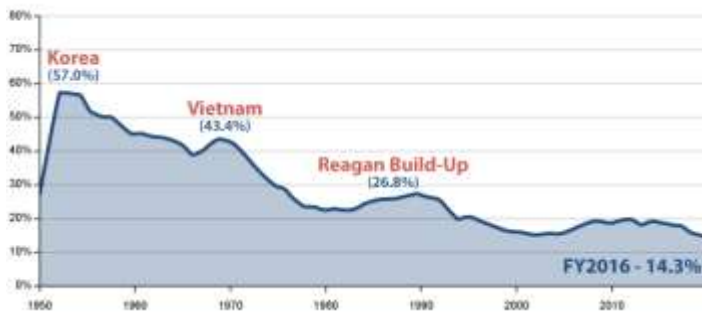
Service Members (Numbers by FY16, includes Active, Guard, and Reserve) and Key Force Structure Investments



Defense Spending as Share of the Economy (GDP) 1950-2016



Defense as a Share of Total Federal Spending (1950-2016)



[Source: MilitaryTimes | Andrew Tilghman | Feb. 02, 2015, 2015 ++]

DECA Budget Cuts Update 12 ► Commissary Subsidy Reduced \$300M

Defense officials want to reduce operating days and hours of most commissaries, as part of an effort to sharply reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars going to support the stores. Supporting documents for DoD's fiscal 2016 budget request, released 2 FEB, indicate defense officials want to reduce the commissary subsidy by about \$300 million, to about \$1.15 billion. Most commissaries would remain open at least five days a week, according to the budget documents. But similar to a proposal floated last year, DoD has bigger plans for reducing the commissary budget, and for raising prices, starting in fiscal 2017.

Officials are asking for legislative changes that would allow them to expand the types of items commissaries sell, and to allow "variable pricing" — i.e., price markups. The surcharge money is used to build, repair, maintain and modernize commissaries, and to pay for store equipment. Taxpayer dollars are used to cover the costs of overhead and employee wages and benefits. "This will allow goods to be priced above cost to increase revenues on certain items, while providing more savings to a market basket of goods that affect junior members with families the most," according to the budget documents. Currently, all items in commissaries are sold at cost plus a 5 percent surcharge added at the register. With the help of those additional proposed cuts starting in fiscal 2017, DoD would save a cumulative \$4.4 billion from fiscal years 2016 to 2020, according to the budget documents. In their budget request last year, DoD officials proposed cutting \$200 million in Defense Commissary Agency funding, the first phase of a proposed three-year plan to slash the DeCA budget by \$1 billion. In the end, lawmakers restored that \$200 million to the budget.

It remains to be seen whether lawmakers will be receptive to the latest proposed cuts. Recommendations released by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission on 29 JAN proposed more modest cuts in the subsidy, and also suggested consolidating the commissary and exchange systems into one retail agency. Defense officials said the commission's report has not been taken into account in deliberations specifically on the 2016 budget request. The proposals have raised alarms in some quarters. "If you cut hours, cut days and cut savings, the benefit is no longer a benefit," said Joyce Raezer, executive director of the National Military Family Association. Draft documents obtained by Military Times note that proposed reductions in operating hours would save more than \$29 million in fiscal 2016, and cuts in days of operation would save \$58 million. DeCA operates 241 stores around the world, including 178 domestic locations. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | Feb. 02, 2015 ++]

Commissary User Savings Update 04 ► Off-base Stores Military Discounts

Despite previous indications from major discount stores that they would commit to providing discounts to service members as an alternative to the commissary benefit, none really appear willing to take that step, compensation experts have told Congress. "We talked to the Wal-Marts, the others, about the benefit they would offer, if they were to offer a benefit," Alphonso Maldon Jr., chairman of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, told the the Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday. "Quite honestly, at the end of the day, no one was willing to stand behind their comments they may have made about providing some savings to the service member," Maldon said.

That was in response to a question from Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) about whether the commission had considered assessing local areas around military bases to gauge the real need for commissaries. "I've been stationed at bases — Fort Campbell [Kentucky] stands out in my mind — that had a nice commissary, but had an even better Wal-Mart supercenter outside the gates," said Cotton, who served as an Army infantry officer for nearly five years, and whose state is home to the headquarters of Wal-Mart Stores Inc. "Several of the big chains [have] talked about issuing cards to the military. But when we asked their representatives point blank, 'Would you do it?'... we never got a straight answer," said commission member Dov Zakheim, a former Pentagon comptroller

"By and large, people want [the commissary] because it's convenient, it's near them, it's military, it's responsive to their needs," Zakheim said. "We made our recommendations based on feedback. Pretty much overwhelmingly, this is not something they want to go away." Commissioners noted that the true savings for commissary customers is the subject of much discussion. "But if you even cut the high number — 31 percent — in half, it's still a great savings to that E-7 with four kids and a wife who has made a decision to stay home and take care of the kids and be an at-home mom," said commissioner Pete Chiarelli, a retired Army general. Maldon said the commission spent a lot of time talking to troops, family members and installation commanders across the country, and that its survey of troops and families came up with the same results. "The service members believe that [the commissary] is a big savings to them and also believe it's a retention tool," Chiarelli said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | Feb. 04, 2015 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 1 thru 14 Feb

A man who told his employer and his landlord that he was a Navy officer, and wore full dress naval uniforms at area veterans events, is facing federal charges. **Mark Allen Kelly**, 54, of Rochester was indicted on charges of producing false military identification cards and making false statements to federal agents, U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul Jr.'s office said in a news release. Each charge carries a penalty of up to five years in prison. Assistant U.S. Attorney Craig R. Gestring, who is handling the case, said that according to the indictment, Kelly wore uniforms with medals at events including a memorial for a Marine killed in Afghanistan, at which he presented a flag to the Marine's parents. A criminal complaint alleges he once portrayed himself as a commander, while representing Frontier Communications at a ceremony for a Marine killed by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan.

When questioned, he presented an authentic-looking but fraudulent military ID card, Gestring said. During an investigation by Naval Criminal Investigative Service agents, he is accused of making several false statements. Investigators found several false military ID cards in various states of production at Kelly's workplace. Kelly served in the Navy between 1978 and 1981 and was dishonorably discharged for misconduct, the criminal complaint states. His rank was E1, the Navy's lowest. Kelly is scheduled to be arraigned 5 FEB before U.S. Magistrate Judge Jonathan W. Feldman. [Source: Rochester Democrat and Chronicle | Feb. 03, 2015 ++]

POW/MIA Update 52 ► DPAA Established January 30, 2015

Under the direction of the Secretary of Defense, the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (USD(P)), and per the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) passed by Congress, the Department of Defense (DoD) formally created one agency responsible for the recovery and accounting of missing service members from past conflicts. Overseen by the USDP and led by Interim Director Rear Admiral Michael T. Franken, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) was established on January 30, 2015 to more effectively increase the number of missing service personnel accounted for from past conflicts and ensure timely and accurate information is communicated to their families.

This agency brings together the former Defense Prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), the Joint Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Accounting Command (JPAC), and the Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory (LSEL). Consolidating the Department's personnel accounting assets will lead to better oversight of family resources and services, research, and operations. The agency will enable the workforce to achieve the fullest possible accounting for our missing personnel, better anticipate family needs, and adapt to changes in the DoD and the United States Government. The agency will also honor our veterans' sacrifices and confirm an obligation made to those serving our country.

The new agency will move towards being fully operationally capable over the next year, framed by meeting major milestones. The first milestone occurred on January 30, 2015, when the new agency reached Initial Operational Capability (IOC). In addition to Rear Admiral Franken, the leadership team includes Major General Kelly McKeague as the Interim Deputy Director, and Lieutenant General Michael Linnington as an agency advisor. Until further decision, headquarters will remain in Washington, D.C. with an operational office in Hawaii, and satellite labs in Nebraska and Ohio.

The DPAA conducts periodic updates and annual government briefings for families of American servicemembers who are missing in action (MIA). These events are designed to keep family members informed of the U.S. government's worldwide mission to account for those still missing and to discuss in

detail the latest information available about their specific cases. At the annual and monthly update meetings, speakers include senior officials, experts, and scientists who work in the wide range of tasks associated with the POW/MIA mission. During the meetings, there are formal presentations, question and answer sessions, and one-one-one discussions between government officials and family members. At the briefings, family members have the opportunity to meet with numerous civilian and military specialists of the government whose expertise includes: foreign government negotiation, formulation of national policy, remains recovery and identification, DNA science, archival research and intelligence analysis. DoD has conducted these update programs since 1995, reaching more than 17,000 family members face-to-face. The tentative 2015 update/briefing schedule is:

Date	Location
February 21	Sacramento, CA
March 21	Memphis, TN
April 18	Oklahoma City, OK
May 16	Denver, CO
June 25-27	Washington, D.C.**
August 13-14	Washington, D.C.***
September 12	Norfolk, VA
November 14	Portland, ME

** The Southeast Asia Annual Government Briefing held in conjunction with the National League of Families Annual Meeting

*** The Korean and Cold War Annual Government Briefings

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil/About/OurTransformation.aspx> | Feb. 10, 2015 ++]

* VA *



VA Secretary Update 35 ► Rep. Mike Coffman Chastised by MacDonald

Rep. Mike Coffman has been a harsh critic of the Veterans Affairs Department in recent months, blasting department leaders repeatedly for continued program mistakes and shortfalls. On 11 FEB, VA Secretary Bob MacDonald reached his limit. MacDonald, a corporate CEO turned Cabinet secretary, angrily chastised Coffman after the Colorado Republican delivered another blistering rant about VA operations, turning a relatively sleepy budget request hearing before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee into a surprising

defense of VA's progress. Coffman — incensed over continued problems with construction of a VA hospital in Denver — called McDonald's characterization of the problem nonsensical and overly positive. "That's characteristic of your glossing over the extraordinary problems confronted by your department," Coffman told McDonald. "This is a department mired in bureaucratic incompetence and corruption. I fundamentally believe ... when this president ends his term, you will not have made a dent in changing the culture of VA."

McDonald called that attack "highly offensive" and told Coffman he was more concerned about reliving years-old missteps than fixing problems. "I've been here six months," McDonald said. "You've been here longer than I have. If there's a problem in Denver, you own it more than I do." The response — unusual for any congressional witness, let alone a high-ranking administration official unanimously confirmed by the Senate just a few months ago — drew gasps and chuckles from the crowd of veterans advocates and VA staff in attendance. McDonald has spent the last few months working not only to correct problems in VA care delivery and operations, but also to reform the department's image. In the months before and after his predecessor's resignation last May, VA was besieged with scandals concerning lengthy wait times for patients and data manipulation from administrators protecting their own bonuses.



Secretary Robert A. McDonald



Rep. Mike Coffman

McDonald also has made outreach to Congress a key point of his reform efforts, promising more transparency and a better working relationship with lawmakers. He has given out his personal cellphone number to dozens of senators and representatives, promising prompt responses and an open dialogue on all issues. That made Wednesday's exchange all the more shocking, with McDonald glaring at Coffman as he dismissed accusations that no progress can be seen within VA. "If you want, I can give you my cellphone tonight, and you can answer some of the calls, and hear from veterans about the difference that we make," McDonald said. "Or go on the websites, see what the veterans are saying there. Ask the" veterans service organizations." Coffman brushed off the rebuttal, saying simply, "I don't think [change] is going to happen, but I hope it does."

The exchange came a week after McDonald and lawmakers involved in veterans' issues held a news conference at VA headquarters to discuss rebuilding the relationship between the two sides. Lawmakers said they hope to highlight "good news" stories from VA while still providing close oversight of its programs and funding. In testimony later in the hearing, representatives from the veterans community offered praise for McDonald's efforts so far, saying they have noticed improvements already. Committee chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) echoed that sentiment. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Feb. 11, 2015 ++]

VA Lawsuit | Spillers~Jeffrey ► VA Wins on Technicality

A Michigan family suing the government over the untimely diagnosis of an Army veteran's fatal brain tumor has been defeated by the clock. U.S. District Judge Paul Borman ruled in favor of the government and dismissed a lawsuit, saying Jeffrey Spillers' estate missed a two-year deadline by a few months. Spillers "knew enough regarding his care, or lack thereof, to put him on inquiry notice of a possible legal claim," Borman said 9 FEB. Spillers, 42, was a decorated combat veteran who served in Iraq in the early 1990s during Operation Desert Storm. In 2008, he went to a Pontiac clinic run by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, complaining of headaches, seizures, facial droop and fatigue. An MRI was recommended but not performed, despite many follow-up visits to other VA sites. Finally, in August 2009, as Spillers' health deteriorated, a test revealed the brain tumor. The Fenton man, who had a 12-year-old son, died four months later.

A timely diagnosis would not have prevented Spillers' death but would have reduced his pain and suffering, said Dr. Jay Kaner, who looked at his medical records. The VA offered a financial settlement that was rejected, clearing the way for a lawsuit. But the government then fought the case by arguing that Spillers' estate couldn't sue because it had failed to file the earlier claim against the VA within two years — a crucial point. The judge agreed, saying the deadline was two years from diagnosis of the tumor, not Spillers' death. A lawyer for the estate said it took months after Spillers' death to unravel what had happened during his many visits to the VA. "There is no evidence that would have required the average person to pursue this inquiry prior to Mr. Spillers' death," attorney James Pelland said. [Source: The Associated Press | Ed White | Feb. 10, 2015 ++]

Agent Orange | C-123 Aircraft Update 08 ► Senator Group's letter to VA

The US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should immediately provide full benefits to veterans exposed to the chemical Agent Orange in contaminated C-123 aircraft during and after the Vietnam War, a bi-partisan group of senators led by senators Richard Burr and Jeff Merkley said in a letter to the VA head Robert McDonald. "It is our desire to see that C-123 veterans, who suffer today because of service-related exposure to Agent Orange receive the help they need," the letter, issued on 4 FEB, said. The senators said the VA's failure to provide benefits to all but one veteran has been disappointing.

"Despite multiple Air Force reports going back to 1979, showing that the C-123s were contaminated, numerous expert opinions from inside and outside the government suggesting these veterans were exposed to Agent Orange and other toxins, and a judge's order stopping the resale of these C-123s because the planes were a 'danger to public health,' the VA to-date has doggedly insisted there is no possibility that post-Vietnam era C-123 veterans might have been exposed to dangerous levels of Agent Orange," the letter, issued on Wednesday, said.

The Institute of Medicine released a report in January that found 1500 to 2100 veterans were exposed and sickened by traces of Agent Orange in C-123 aircraft that were not properly decontaminated. The report indicated that service members flew in the C-123 airplanes until 1982. The United States sprayed 12 million gallons of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War, according to a study in the journal Nature. The United States used Agent Orange to destroy crops used to feed its adversaries, clear perimeters of military

installations of foliage, and eliminate the cover that the jungle provided to its enemy. The US banned Agent Orange in the 1970s and destroyed existing stocks. [Source: Sputnik International | Feb. 05, 2015 ++]

GI Bill Update 188 ► Budget Proposal Closes For-Profit Loophole

President Barack Obama’s \$4 trillion budget for 2016 contained a proposal that could alter higher education for many Americans. He proposed closing a loophole that allows for-profit colleges’ to cash in on veterans’ GI Bill benefits. As it stands now, for-profit colleges must abide by the so-called 90-10 rule, which keeps them from getting more than 90% of their operating revenue from federal student aid money. But that rule doesn’t consider GI Bill benefits government funding. Meanwhile, veteran enrollment at for-profit colleges has soared. Thirty-one percent of veterans attended for-profit schools in 2013, up from 23% in 2009, giving such institutions access to \$1.7 billion in post-9/11 GI Bill benefits in the 2012-2013 academic year, up from \$640 million in 2009-2010. Obama’s budget proposal aims to curb that trend by counting veterans’ education benefits toward for-profit schools’ federal money cap.

If the GI Bill loophole were closed, dozens of for-profit institutions would be in violation of the 90-10 rule, according to a Department of Education analysis, which found that 133 for-profit schools receive more than 90% of their revenue from a combination of Pell Grants, Stafford Loans, and GI Bill funds. Senate Democrats have tried to rein in for-profits colleges’ access to GI Bill benefits in the past, but such efforts have gone nowhere (and with Congress controlled by Republicans, Obama’s budget could meet a similar fate.)

For-profits’ recruitment of veterans—especially those from the post-9/11 era, whose education benefits cover \$19,000 per year in tuition for four years—has raised red flags with some lawmakers and the Obama administration because such institutions report poor graduation rates and are more expensive for the taxpayers funding the GI Bill. Tuition is \$10,900 per year at a for-profit, compared to \$4,900 at public colleges. Students who attend for-profits are also more likely to incur student debt: 88% of students at for-profit colleges held student loans in 2012, compared to 66% of public college students and 75% of students who attended private colleges, according to The Institute for College Access and Success.

On 2 FEB, Senator Dick Durbin, a Democrat from Illinois who in 2012 proposed a bill to alter the way federal funds are allocated to for-profit colleges, said in a statement that “closing the 90/10 loophole will put an end to the powerful incentive for-profit colleges currently have to aggressively recruit service member and veterans. The exclusion of billions of dollars from the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs in the federal 90/10 rule has led to well-documented cases of exploitation of servicemembers and veterans by for-profit colleges.” The Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities opposes Obama’s budget proposal and the 90/10 rule in general, says Michael Dakduk, the group’s vice president of military and veteran’s affairs. The rule, he says, is arbitrary and does not indicate a school’s quality, but instead measures the socioeconomic position of a institution’s student population. [Source: Fortune | Claire Zillman | Feb. 03, 2015 ++]

VA Suicide Prevention Update 24 ► CBT for Insomnia Impact

A new study highlights the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy targeting insomnia among veterans. Research findings show that suicidal ideation decreased by 33 percent after a maximum of six sessions of cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I). Moreover, in addition to improving insomnia and reducing suicidal thoughts, CBT-I led to improvements in depression and quality of life. “It was striking to see that the reduction in insomnia severity was associated with reduced suicidal ideation even after controlling for improvement in depression severity,” said co-lead author Bradley Karlin, Ph.D., A.B.P.P. “The results suggest that effective treatment of insomnia with CBT-I is an important target for reducing suicide risk among veterans and others at risk for suicide,” said Karlin.

According to Karlin, the wide-ranging effects of CBT-I that were found in the study were eye-opening. The demonstrated improvements in quality of life suggests that focusing greater attention on detecting and treating insomnia could produce substantial public health benefits. Study results are published in the journal *Sleep*. “Chronic insomnia is especially common among veterans who have put their lives at risk in service to our country,” said American Academy of Sleep Medicine President Dr. Timothy Morgenthaler. “This study emphasizes that effectively treating insomnia can be life-changing and potentially life-saving for veterans who may be struggling with problems such as depression, suicidal thoughts, and posttraumatic stress disorder.” The American Academy of Sleep Medicine reports that about 10 percent of people have chronic insomnia disorder, which involves a sleep disturbance and associated daytime symptoms that have been present for at least three months. About 15 to 20 percent of adults have short-term insomnia disorder, and more than half of veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan report symptoms of insomnia.

In the current study, researchers followed 405 veterans with diagnosed insomnia disorder who received CBT-I in routine primary care and mental health treatment settings. The majority of participants were men, and the mean patient age was 52 years. About 83 percent of veterans reported conflict experience, including 150 who served in Vietnam and 83 who served in Iraq or Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn. The use of CBT to reduce insomnia among veterans represents a new strategy. Patients received CBT-I from therapists newly trained in the therapy as part of the national dissemination of CBT-I in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health care system. According to Karlin, CBT-I’s effectiveness and feasibility for implementation suggest that there is considerable opportunity for broad dissemination of CBT-I in other health care systems. [Source: Psych Central | Rick Nauert PhD Senior News Editor | Feb 03, 2015 ++]

VA Prescription Tracker ► 24/7 Online Access to Status

Veterans can now track the status of most of their prescriptions online, thanks to an innovative idea by a Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) employee. The new 24/7 service allows online tracking for most prescriptions mailed from the VA Mail Order Pharmacy (<https://www.myhealth.va.gov/index.html>). The Prescription Tracker was recommended by VA employee Kenneth Siehr, a winner of the President’s 2013 Securing Americans Value and Efficiency (SAVE) Award. Siehr’s idea focused on the use of technology as a way to save money and improve the services VA provides to its patients. “Our nation’s Veterans deserve a first-class pharmacy and quality customer service as a part of the exceptional health care available from VA,” said Siehr, the National Director for Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacies. “It is an honor to be part of serving Veterans and to have been recognized for an idea that enhances our services to them.”

More than 57,000 Veterans are currently using the service through My HealtheVet , an online feature that allows Veterans to partner with their health care team. The number is expected to grow as VA starts to educate

Veterans about the new feature. Later this month, the tracking feature will include images of the medication that dispensed. Over the next year, a secure messaging alert will be added so that Veterans know when a medication was placed in the mail. "VA prescription refill online is an excellent example of how one employee looked at the process of VA prescription tracking through the eyes of our Veterans and came up with an idea that better serves Veterans," said Interim Under Secretary for Health, Carolyn M. Clancy. "This idea is both innovative and transformative, and it is certainly one, when put into action, improves customer service for America's Veterans." [Source: VA News Release | Feb. 04, 2015 ++]

PTSD Update 185 ► Propranolol-Enhanced Treatment

The boom of the plane hitting the towers, the gray pieces floating in the air, and the people jumping out were parts of the scene replayed in physician Margaret Dessau's mind for years after the 9/11 disaster. She remembers looking out her apartment window to see a "guy with this white towel, and he's waving it." After he jumps, she hears children scream from a nearby school. Nearly 10 years later, she described these memories as part of her post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, to writer Anemona Hartacollis for the New York Times. Many PTSD sufferers replay disastrous events as memories that intrude on everyday life -- intrusive memories -- or in nightmares. They complain of not sleeping or concentrating. They may overreact to loud noises, become excessively alert and hypervigilant, and avoid reminders of the disaster. Dessau, who witnessed the attacks from her window, avoids looking at the skyline.



Propranolol, a beta-blocker that cuts heart rate, could silence the disastrous events on repeat in the minds of millions of people with PTSD.

Intrusive memories are only part of a larger picture that often includes a sense of isolation, hopelessness, anger, and emotional numbness. These symptoms have made the news for years, but less is known about effective treatment. If disturbing memories can be calmed by drug-enhanced treatment, millions of people who suffer from PTSD might benefit. This affects millions of adults in the U.S., including 9/11 survivors and combat veterans. Now Dr. Alain Brunet, a clinical psychologist at McGill University in Montreal, and his collaborators are halfway through a clinical trial to see if propranolol, a beta-blocker that reduces heart rate and blood pressure -- and has been proven to calm musicians facing stage fright -- can also reduce the strength of long-standing traumatic memories. They are giving the drug just before having people describe their memories in several sessions. Adrenaline and its cousin noradrenaline, the same chemicals that trigger the fight-or-flight response, enhance the storage of fearful memories. Propranolol may block these actions on a

cluster of nerve cells deep inside the brain. Don't try this at home. Propranolol requires medical supervision to be used safely.

Clinical psychologist Robert Lavine spoke with Brunet about the state of research on propranolol-enhanced treatment. He and his colleagues administered propranolol 75 minutes before the reactivation of frightening memories in 40 patients. "It really did wonders," he told me. "After six sessions, 70 percent of patients no longer met the clinical criteria for PTSD." His recent study with Dr. Roger Pitman, a Harvard psychiatrist who directs the PTSD and Psychophysiology Laboratory at the Massachusetts General Hospital, and others appeared in the 2011 *Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology*. Their patients were victims of trauma such as accidents, rape, and spousal abuse, and most had symptoms for years or decades. Symptom relief compared favorably to generally lengthier treatment with psychotherapy alone as reported in earlier studies.

Their current international study, funded by both Canadian and U.S. agencies, is designed to show whether this treatment works even when patients are randomly assigned to either propranolol or a placebo. In an earlier placebo-controlled study, Pitman reported in *Biological Psychiatry* that patients treated with propranolol in the emergency room hours after a physical trauma, like an auto accident, were much less likely to show physical reactions to recalling their experience three months later. Here the treatment appeared to reduce the formation of new memories. The PTSD burden on combat veterans is huge. One said that every night "I hear a woman scream ... there was a woman across the street from us, and we thought she had dynamite and was going to kill us. So I killed her," he told psychologist Paula J. Caplan for the *Washington Post*. It turned out that she did have dynamite and was planning to kill them. "But every night," he continued, "I hear her scream, because, well, I wasn't raised to kill."

Given the extent of the problem, there is some satisfaction that we can point to a location for disturbing memories. When medical students study the human brain, they identify a small cluster of nerve cells deep inside, called the amygdala from a Greek word based on its resemblance to an almond. This structure plays a key role in a fear network, storing memories of emotionally-charged experiences. Imagine it as a special memory stick for your computer where you save video clips of frightening events. The location of the amygdala in the brain can be roughly visualized using your right hand with a forefinger curled around the thumb. The amygdala would be a small object at the tip of your thumb. The forefinger in front of the thumb represents the prefrontal cortex, the most advanced part of the human brain in primate evolution, located just behind the forehead.



The prefrontal cortex normally keeps the amygdala operating normally. But if it loses control, emotional memories and reactions can get out of hand. In fact, Pitman told me by phone, "probably the best-documented findings in PTSD show underactivity in the prefrontal cortex." Normal emergency reactions lead to a release of adrenaline and noradrenaline, chemicals that help increase heart rate and open tiny bronchioles that bring air into the lung. These reactions can help the body deal with emergencies by enhancing the oxygen supply to the muscles. (Adrenaline is also known as epinephrine, a drug used in the Epi-Pen in treating severe allergic reactions.) Within the brain, adrenaline and noradrenaline can activate structures on the surface of nerve cells

called adrenergic receptors. The type known as beta-adrenergic receptors seem to enhance the amygdala's ability to store memories of frightening events. During evolution, the ability to store memories of dangerous situations and react accordingly could be life-saving.

But as we see in the symptoms of the 9/11 witness and the war veteran, these reactions can become excessive and cause suffering for years after the emergency has passed. Since propranolol blocks beta-adrenergic receptors -- it's a beta blocker -- researchers predicted that it might prevent traumatic memories from solidifying. When emotionally-charged memories are reactivated, they are in a more fluid state, neuroscience models suggested. Propranolol given within a specific time-window can interfere with their ability to solidify again. In more scientific terms, it can block the reconsolidation of threatening memories.

The drug-enhanced behavioral treatment studied by Brunet, Pitman, and their colleagues is not yet widely available outside a research setting. How close is the method to clinical practice? Right now, Pitman said, "physicians are able to prescribe a drug for a new indication if in their judgment it would be helpful.... If we get a positive result, people may be inclined to try it for that purpose. But I personally would like to see a replication before it's used more widely. It would be a great beginning ... a step down a path toward eventual application." Today, cognitive-behavioral treatment alone, targeted at thoughts and emotional reactions, can provide significant help. Current guidelines for effective PTSD treatment describe controlled exposure to troubling memories in a therapeutic setting to regain cognitive mastery, and strategies to help people correct maladaptive thoughts about the event -- thinking they were guilty for not saving others, for example. Furthermore, stress-inoculation training teaches methods to reduce anxiety such as calm breathing and muscle relaxation. Symptomatic improvement can be assisted with antidepressant medications such as Prozac and other medications for insomnia.

The witness to 9/11 through her window, the combat veteran, and millions of others who suffer PTSD symptoms would benefit if an effective drug-enhanced treatment were available in addition to these treatments. Propranolol is a major candidate for such a drug, but others are being tried that target different memory mechanisms. We can be cautiously optimistic that greater relief for intrusive memories may be in sight. [Source: The Atlantic | Robert Lavine | Feb 1 2012 ++]

PTSD Update 186 ► Death Penalty Exemption Debate

On January 12, 1998, Andrew Brannan was driving his truck at 98 miles an hour on a country road near his Dublin, Georgia, home when he was pulled over by Deputy Kyle Dinkheller. Brannan, a white-haired, 66-year-old man, got out of his truck, shouted profanities, and danced around, yelling, "Here I am, here I am ... [s]hoot me." He then attacked the deputy and a gunfight ensued, in which Brannan shot Dinkheller nine times with a rifle. Video footage from the deputy's dashboard camera inflamed public opinion. Dinkheller was 22 years old and married, with one child and another baby on the way. Brannan received a death sentence and, on January 13, became the first person executed in 2015.

Joseph Loveland, an Atlanta-based attorney who tried to commute Brannan's sentence to life imprisonment without parole, says the jury and sentencing judge never heard the whole story. "Every doctor who had examined Andrew confirmed that he was suffering for years before the crime from significant PTSD that was directly related to his service in Vietnam, and also suffered from bipolar disorder," Loveland said in an interview. "The two conditions interacted, leading to the crime he committed." Before he made headlines as a convicted murderer, Brannan was a decorated combat veteran struggling to hold his life together. He

volunteered for service in the army in 1968 and trained as a parachutist. In 1970, he was deployed to Vietnam, where he served as a forward observer in an artillery unit. Brannan twice assumed command of his unit when the commanding officer was killed, and was awarded the Bronze Star and two Army Commendation medals for outstanding service. He was honorably discharged from active duty in 1971, and served in the reserves for several years.



Prison file photo provided by the Georgia Department of Corrections of convicted murderer Andrew Brannan. Brannan, 66 who was executed Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2015,

After his discharge, Brannan tried to reintegrate to civilian life. But by the early 1980s, he began to experience severe psychological and emotional problems. He had a hard time keeping a job and his marriage fell apart. He sought treatment from the Veterans Administration (VA), which declared him partially disabled due to service-related post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. Brannan's case isn't an isolated one: About 20 percent of military personnel who served in war zones in Iraq and Afghanistan and up to 30 percent of Vietnam War veterans have experienced it in their lifetimes, according to National Center for PTSD statistics. Brannan was hospitalized several times and admitted into the VA's intensive PTSD treatment program. In 1991, the VA found he was 100 percent disabled due to service-connected PTSD. His VA psychiatrist, William Boyer, also diagnosed him with bipolar disorder in 1996. According to his doctors, Brannan withdrew from society, only had contact with other Vietnam War vets, and lived in a shack resembling a war-zone bunker.

"Andrew saw death repeatedly, including that of comrades and two immediate commanding officers, and remained plagued with guilt over these deaths decades later," Loveland wrote in the clemency petition to the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles. The court-appointed psychiatrist in his trial agreed that he suffered from both conditions. But although Brannan's trial attorney argued that he was legally insane, which requires a high burden of proof to meet, Loveland says that key expert witnesses like Boyer did not testify at trial. Despite the stigma attached to PTSD, the Department of Veterans Affairs emphasizes that most veterans suffering from the condition are not violent. In Brannan's case, Boyer testified before the court that the interaction of unmedicated PTSD and bipolar disorder contributed to his erratic and violent behavior at the time of the murder. Boyer explained during a hearing that Brannan had been off his medication for days at the time of the shooting. In his medicated state, Brannan posed no threat of harming himself or others, the psychiatrist said.

"Rambo is not the face of PTSD," Paula Schnurr, executive director of the VA's National Center for PTSD, said in an interview with The Desert Sun. "It's extremely important that we recognize that the majority of people with PTSD don't engage in criminal and violent actions." The risk of criminal behavior isn't necessarily higher among combat veterans than with civilians, according to mental health experts. "I am

unaware of data showing that people with PTSD are more violent than other people," Richard McNally, the director of clinical training in Harvard University's psychology department, told Reuters.

But some legal scholars and mental health experts suggest the criminal justice system should treat convicted veterans suffering from war trauma differently than other criminals. In a 2009 Fordham Law Review article, Anthony Giardino, an attorney and former Marine, argued that veterans suffering from service-related PTSD and traumatic brain injuries should receive a categorical exemption from the death penalty. "If the death penalty is truly only for the worst offenders, justice requires that combat veterans suffering at the time of their offenses from service-related PTSD or TBI [traumatic brain injuries] not be executed or sentenced to death," he wrote. While PTSD cannot excuse criminal behavior, Giardino argues, it should reduce culpability. "PTSD can impair your ability to recognize that acting in a militaristic manner is not acceptable," he told me in an interview. "[Veterans with PTSD] might use their training in an inappropriate manner" while among civilians.

Giardino isn't alone in making this argument. Mental-health experts Hal S. Wortzel and David B. Arciniegas made a similar case for exempting veterans affected by war trauma from the death penalty. Military training and combat, combined with traumatic experiences, may have an impact on aggression and behavioral control, the authors said in a 2010 article. Although the Supreme Court ruled in 1986 that executing people with severe mental illness is unconstitutional, many death-row inmates who suffer from some form of mental illness, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and delusions, do not fall within that exemption. Under federal law, capital defendants are entitled to a psychiatric evaluation to determine their competency to be executed. However, there are no uniform sentencing standards for people with combat-related PTSD. The outcome in each of those cases depends largely on other circumstances. "Presenting PTSD, TBI, and military training evidence ... during the sentencing phase of a capital trial represents one way to avoid subjecting combat veterans to the death penalty," Giardino, who served in Iraq, said in his article. The attorney said combat veterans with PTSD should receive a death-penalty exemption similar to those for minors and the mentally retarded.

Wortzel and Arciniegas noted that Giardino's proposed exemption may be too broad, since some combat veterans may have been "broken" before their military service. However, courts must engage in a balancing act to prevent "the injustice and immorality of executing a single combat veteran who has PTSD and/or TBI at the time of the crime," the doctors wrote. "Some courts have considered war trauma in sentencing combat veterans," according to Giardino. "Many courts, however, would rather ignore this elephant in the room than confront the reality that the combined effect of government-sponsored military training and combat exposure transforms men and women into something quite different from their former selves," he wrote in the article. "PTSD as an insanity defense in a murder case is hard to use because the person knows the difference between right and wrong." Although PTSD has become a common defense in trials of combat veterans, the outcomes have been anything but uniform. An Oregon jury in 2009 found Iraq war veteran Jessie Bratcher guilty of murder but legally insane. Instead of serving 25 years in a maximum-security prison, Bratcher received treatment at the Oregon State Hospital. He was released last year after the state psychiatric review board found he no longer suffered from PTSD.

The Supreme Court overturned a veteran's death sentence in 2009 because, among other factors, his lawyer had failed to disclose his client's combat service as a mitigating factor during sentencing. "Our nation has a long tradition of according leniency to veterans in recognition of their service, especially for those who fought on the front lines as [defendant] Porter did," the court wrote in that opinion. "Moreover, the relevance of Porter's extensive combat experience is not only that he served honorably under extreme hardship and gruesome conditions, but also that the jury might find mitigating the intense stress and mental and emotional toll that combat took on Porter." Other veterans with PTSD like Brannan face the death penalty for similar

crimes. John Darrell Thuesen, who killed his girlfriend and her brother in 2009, is currently on death row in Texas. Eddie Routh, a former Marine diagnosed with PTSD, may also be facing the death penalty in Texas in his upcoming trial for the murder of Navy SEAL sniper Chris Kyle. Routh's lawyer will reportedly pursue an insanity defense, but he questions whether his client can get a fair trial given the impact of box-office hit American Sniper.

Ultimately, Giardino says, the outcome of each case depends on the ability of defense counsel and on the laws of each state. "Different states have passed laws requiring courts to take into account PTSD and have defense counsel who understands those issues effectively present the background information, including military service and mental illness, accurately," he said. Some states have also established specialized veterans courts in the last decade to recognize veterans with PTSD as a distinct category of offenders who need special treatment and help. The first veterans court was launched in 2008 in Buffalo, New York by Judge Robert Russell, who noticed similar symptoms among former military personnel who appeared in his courtroom. Some 98 percent of the veterans in the program have not had further run-ins with the law, according to court records. But those courts, which function much like drug courts, are limited to non-violent offenses.

Additionally, a veterans' group, the National Veterans Foundation, is creating a manual for lawyers on how to defend veterans with PTSD in court. The guidelines include finding witnesses from defendants' squads, who can testify about their combat trauma. But PTSD defenses still cannot guarantee avoiding the death penalty in every case or in every state. "PTSD as an insanity defense in a murder case is hard to use because the person knows the difference between right and wrong," Landy Sparr, a forensic psychiatrist, told CNN. "They are not delusional or psychotic. For example, they do not believe they have killed a Martian instead of a human." It's difficult for the legal system to truly grasp what veterans with PTSD have experienced. This lack of empathy is a key obstacle to change. Andrew Brannan and others like him may not gain sympathy from people who lost loved ones to senseless acts of violence. Until society realizes how combat can change service members, the fate of capital defendants with combat PTSD will remain an open question. [Source: The Atlantic | Iulia Filip | Jan. 30, 2015 ++]

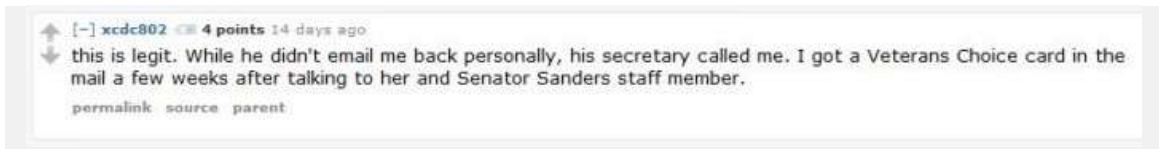
VA Communications Update 02 ► Try r/Veterans for Problem Resolutions

When Secretary Bob McDonald took office he immediately set off on a series of engagements to regain trust with Veterans. He has visited dozens VA hospitals across the country and mandated all VA facilities conduct quarterly town halls to promote accountability and an open dialogue with Veterans. When he gave out his personal cell phone number and e-mail address at a press conference, many dismissed it as a PR move. But, when he said he wanted to open up the VA culture, he meant it. "I did that on purpose," McDonald said with a smile at the Student Veterans of America National Conference. "I did because I want to demonstrate to the employees at VA how we need to think about our customers. We don't hide from you. We want you to call us. We want to deal with your problems ... and now we're building that capability internally, so you might not always get an answer from me but somebody will try to help you out."

Since then, hundreds of Veterans have called and e-mailed him. Sometimes he answers, sometimes his staff answers, but more importantly the Veteran gets an answer. On 7 JAN, Reddit user CyberVictimizer posted to r/Veterans (<http://www.reddit.com/r/Veterans>) that her husband was having problems receiving care for his back pain. The VA doctor prescribed weight loss, but her husband claimed that he wouldn't be able to lose weight until his pain subsided. A common plight for many people and Veterans. He wanted an

MRI. CyberVictimizer asked the Reddit Veteran community what could her husband do? She received great advice ranging from using the Choice Act to consulting a Veteran Service Organization. Then user EatTheBankers responded “Sec McDonald’s personal cell# (513)509-8454. You can leave a message. His email is robert.a.mcdonald@va.gov.”

Two weeks later, CyberVictimizer posted UPDATE: VA hospital won’t perform necessary tests. Where do we go from here? She reported that she sent Secretary McDonald an e-mail and the VA clinic manager called her husband soon after to schedule him for the tests he requested. Problem solved. This isn’t an exception. Many Veterans have expressed their surprise and excitement in the Veteran subreddit about similar experiences.



Reddit user xcdc802 shares his experience calling Secretary McDonald

While all Veterans are invited to call or e-mail Bob, there are several avenues that can be tried first.

1. Speak to a patient advocate (<http://www.va.gov/health/patientadvocate>) . These are VA employees whose sole mission is to address the concerns Veterans have with their health care. The patient advocates are listed on every VA hospital website.
 2. Request a different primary care physician. If your current physician doesn’t work for you, you should find someone who does.
 3. Consult with a Veteran service organization (<http://www.va.gov/vso>). These organizations are vital to the VA and Veterans because they have vast experience navigating the VA system.
- Tweet your question using the hashtag #VetQ (<http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/vetq>). VA and Veteran service organizations monitor this hashtag to answer your questions.
 - Use http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS). This is the only secure way to ask personal questions. IRIS also has a list of frequently asked questions.
 - Reach out to your local member of Congress.
 - Search the Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors online handbook accessible at http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book.asp

Veterans use r/Veterans to vent, share information and seek help using their Veteran benefits. It’s a great resource that exemplifies the best of our community. [Source: VAntage Point | Tim Hudak | Feb. 3, 2015 ++]

VA Vet Choice Program ► VA Want to Shift Budgeted Funds

Veterans Affairs officials don't know how many veterans are using the new "choice card" program, but it's a small enough total that they want to start taking money out of the program. The move is likely to ignite a lengthy fight on Capitol Hill with lawmakers who created the program last summer following the department's patient-wait-time scandal and who doubt VA's ability to serve veterans in a timely and effective manner. As part of the agency's nearly \$169 billion fiscal 2016 budget plan, White House officials said they

will submit legislation to "reallocate a portion of Veterans Choice Program funding to support essential investments in VA system priorities in a fiscally-responsible, budget-neutral manner."

Congress approved \$15 billion in funding for two years of the program, with \$5 billion for physician hiring and the rest to establish a temporary program making it easier for veterans to seek private, non-VA health care. The goal was to provide quicker appointments, after tens of thousands of veterans nationwide were found to be waiting more than a month for medical visits and physician consults. But on 2 FEB, VA assistant secretary for management Helen Tierney said officials have "a strong indication that this is not their preferred choice" and "would prefer to remain in the VA" for medical care. About 8.5 million choice cards have been issued to veterans, who are eligible for the program if they live in rural areas or face more than a month wait for medical appointments. Tierney could not say how many veterans are using the program, how many are eligible but preferred to stay in VA care, or how much money might be moved around. But she said the funding could be used to supplement more "essential" services at the department.

House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL) blasted the department's announcement as short-sighted and potentially harmful to veterans. "If there's one thing we've learned over the last year, it's that VA's numbers cannot be trusted," he said in a statement. "The president's idea to reallocate a portion of Veterans Choice Program funding to other areas of VA is a complete non-starter, which I will not support. "When a near-unanimous Congress worked with President Obama last year to create the choice program, we made a promise to veterans to give them more freedom in their health care decisions. I will not stand idly by while the president attempts to renege on that promise."

Tierney promised to lay out a stronger case for using the money elsewhere in months to come. But in recent weeks, several Republicans on Capitol Hill have questioned whether VA should be shifting more health care appointments outside their facilities, not bringing veterans back in. The issue is likely to become the most controversial aspect of the VA budget discussions, even before any specific figures are outlined. The VA budget grew almost \$100 million from fiscal 2004 to fiscal 2014, and lawmakers have promised to more closely scrutinize that spending in wake of last year's scandal. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Fb 02, 2015 ++]

VA Vet Choice Program Update 01 ► Senators Want Program Safeguard

New Hampshire's senators have asked the Obama administration to safeguard a new program that lets veterans see a doctor outside the Veterans Affairs system and have introduced legislation to make the program permanent in several states. Reacting to a request in the White House's fiscal 2016 budget to reallocate funds for the Veterans Choice Program to other programs within VA, Democrat Jeanne Shaheen and Republican Kelly Ayotte fired off a letter to President Obama on Friday, criticizing what they say is an effort to erode a program enacted with bipartisan support in Congress. The administration's proposal to defund the program "jeopardizes veterans' access to care and undermines the principle at the heart of the program — veterans' ability to choose where they receive care," they wrote.

The \$10 billion Veterans Choice program was approved in August as part of a massive bill designed to alleviate lengthy wait times for veterans needing medical care. The legislation required the program to remain in place for two years after implementation. But with the release of the administration's budget proposal 2 FEB, VA Assistant Secretary for Management Helen Tierney said VA officials want to reallocate a portion of the funds because they have "a strong indication that this is not the veterans' preferred choice" and veterans

"would prefer to remain in the VA" for medical care. Tierney could not provide any data on program utilization when asked. In a statement provided to Military Times, a VA official defended the request to move funds, saying the department needs flexibility to ensure that veterans get the care they need in a timely manner. "Currently, we have no ability to shift resources between Choice Programs and VA-provided care," the official said. That flexibility is needed to ensure that VA can provide care at VA facilities, where, it appears, the veterans want to receive it. "We have anecdotal indications from veterans and their representatives that they would prefer to get their care in VA facilities from the medical professionals they have," the official said.

Shaheen and Ayotte expressed concern that the program is underutilized because, at least in New Hampshire, it was introduced to veterans in a manner they say caused "confusion." To protect the program in their state as well as in Alaska and Hawaii — the only three states that lack a full-service VA medical center — the pair introduced legislation that, if approved, would make Veterans Choice permanent for veterans in these states. Reducing Veterans Choice card resources "will narrow their options and reduce access to the care they seek," the senators wrote to Obama. "That is unacceptable and inconsistent with congressional intent." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | Feb. 09, 2014 ++]

VA Health Care Stories Update 06 ► Nurse Goes the Extra Mile

In early November, a Veteran came into the Salisbury VA Medical Center's Emergency Department (ED) seeking treatment for some large blisters on his feet. Little did he know that before he would leave the ED he would meet someone like Chuck Maulden, a nurse in the Emergency Department. "I took him back to be seen and his feet were in really bad shape. He had these huge blisters on his feet that were taking up the entire ball of his foot right behind his toes on both feet," said Maulden. "He had on dirty compression stockings that were stuck to his feet from the drainage of the blisters. The doctor examined him and told me to give him some more compression stockings."



VA Nurse Chuck Maulden

Maulden went to work on treating the patient, taking a little extra care to make sure the Veteran had everything he needed to heal properly. "I got his stockings off, washed his feet really well with some soap and water, and got some non-stick dressings to put over the blisters between them and the stockings. I got him some new stockings and a couple of extra pairs, in case those got worn out or dirty, and some fresh socks to take with him," he said. "I just felt like I wished there was more I could do, though." What a world it would be if every person had that attitude and generosity of spirit. "No way his feet were going to heal in those shoes." It was then Maulden noticed what he thought might be the cause of the blisters — and he decided to do something about it. "I was looking at his shoes and they were just worn out and looked trashed.

There was no way his feet were going to heal up in those shoes, especially if he was homeless and walking through puddles and the cold weather,” Maulden said. “I just asked him what size shoe he wore and it happened to be my size. I had on some fairly new shoes and had probably only worn them a few times.” “I just couldn’t send him out there like that and I only had an hour left in my shift, so I figured I could get by wearing socks until I got home,” he added. “I just put my shoes on him and asked him if they fit. He just needed a new pair of shoes and I had some, so I just gave them to him. It just felt like the right thing to do.” Maulden finished out his shift in medical shoe covers to prevent any unsanitary conditions as a result of giving up his shoes.

Ruth Lee, Emergency Department nurse manager and retired Army officer, said that although what Maulden did that night was a little unorthodox, seeing that level of caring and compassion serves as an inspiration to others in the health care field. “It just made my heart warm to know that one of the nurses would do that,” she said. “I was so excited when I heard what he had done because I’m a Veteran, and so to hear that someone would go that far to care for Veterans — it’s just really very special.” “He needed something I could provide.” Salisbury VA Medical Center Director Kaye Green echoed Lee’s sentiments. “We don’t ask every staff member here to give a Veteran their shoes, and certainly we don’t expect that, but can you imagine what a world it would be if every person had that attitude and generosity of spirit,” she said. “I feel like what Chuck did demonstrates every one of VA’s I CARE values: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence.”

Maulden, who is very humble about the encounter (and not too crazy about all the publicity) said while he doesn’t plan on giving away more of his shoes, he was glad to do something a little extra to help out someone in need. “I just felt like he needed something I could provide. He’s obviously got a harder life than I do,” he said. “I just felt I would rest easier at night knowing I did everything I could for him. I just saw something I could do and I did it.” [Source: Salisbury VAMC Public Affairs | Michael Maddox | Jan. 18, 2014 ++]

VA Benefits Spending By State ► Data for 2013

If you're a veteran and rely on benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, where you live may have an effect on whether you receive the benefits you've earned. The VA has a hard time explaining why there are such huge disparities on Vet benefits spending across the nation. And when the agency's data are published, a VA official says, they can count on angry calls from the congressional offices of whichever state ranks last in terms of dollars per veteran. Below is a breakdown by state of what was spent in 2013. Refer to <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Expenditures.asp> for previous years back to 1999 along with how it was spent each year, VA says the data don't show the full picture because there are too many unknowns — only 9 million vets use the VA out of 22 million total veterans. They move around, sometimes disappearing off the VA's radar for decades, and then they walk back in the door. The numbers are also driven by where vets choose to retire, and by each state's efforts to educate veterans about the benefits and services available.

<u>State</u>	<u>Spending Per Vet</u>	<u>Vets as a Share of the Population</u>
West Virginia	\$7,689	10%
Arkansas	\$7,626	10%

New Mexico	\$7,462	10%
South Dakota	\$7,295	10%
Oklahoma	\$7,172	10%
Nebraska	\$7,044	9%
California	\$6,890	6%
Oregon	\$6,859	10%
Nevada	\$6,816	10%
Texas	\$6,780	8%
Alabama	\$6,719	10%
Maine	\$6,694	11%
Florida	\$6,677	9%
South Carolina	\$6,676	10%
Alaska	\$6,620	12%
Rhode Island	\$6,531	8%
North Carolina	\$6,440	9%
Kentucky	\$6,438	9%
Mississippi	\$6,340	8%
Hawaii	\$6,302	10%
Montana	\$6,287	10%
Louisiana	\$6,257	8%
Tennessee	\$6,237	9%
Minnesota	\$6,207	8%
New York	\$6,191	5%
Colorado	\$6,190	10%
Massachusetts	\$6,186	6%
U.S. average	\$6,088	8%
Wyoming	\$5,925	11%
Georgia	\$5,885	9%
Arizona	\$5,860	10%
North Dakota	\$5,793	9%
Missouri	\$5,715	9%

Wisconsin	\$5,715	8%
Vermont	\$5,508	8%
Utah	\$5,493	7%
New Hampshire	\$5,474	10%
Maryland	\$5,465	9%
Virginia	\$5,437	11%
Washington	\$5,414	10%
Kansas	\$5,409	9%
Idaho	\$5,261	10%
Connecticut	\$5,085	7%
Illinois	\$5,082	7%
Iowa	\$5,056	9%
Ohio	\$5,019	9%
Michigan	\$5,001	8%
Indiana	\$4,935	8%
Pennsylvania	\$4,797	8%
Delaware	\$4,587	10%
New Jersey	\$4,480	6%

Notes

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs spending figures include only categories that go directly to veterans (such as medical, compensation or education benefits) and exclude capital expenses (such as facilities and new construction).

[Source: NPR | Robert Benincasa & Alyson Hurt | Jan. 13, 2014 ++]

VA Budget 2016 ► White House Wants \$9B Increase over 2015

The Veterans Affairs Department would see almost an 8 percent jump in discretionary spending and a \$9 billion overall increase in its budget under plans outlined by the White House on 2 FEB. If adopted by Congress, the budget plan would continue the steady rise in VA program spending since the start of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2004, the total VA budget was just under \$64 billion, more than \$100 billion less than the fiscal 2016 request. The budget plan includes money to continue the Veterans Choice Card program approved by Congress last summer, in response to the patient-wait-times scandal that forced the resignation of several top department officials. VA officials have about \$15 billion in funding through 2017 for those private care visits and physician hiring. But administration budget planners warned that "more resources in

certain areas will be required to ensure that the VA system can provide timely, high-quality health care into the future."

The White House promised to offer new, long-term budget legislation for VA programs in coming months, to allow "essential investments in VA system priorities in a fiscally responsible, budget-neutral manner." The budget plan calls for \$7.5 billion in mental health spending, \$7.5 billion in long-term care programs and \$2.8 billion in prosthetics research and development. VA officials would spend \$431 million more under the plan in an effort to end the department's claims backlog, including continued development of digital processing systems and conversion of paper records to electronic files. And the department wants to spend \$1.4 billion in fiscal 2016 for programs to prevent and reduce homelessness among veterans. The department has a stated public goal of ending that problem nationwide before next January, just three months into the new fiscal year. The budget request calls for an 8.3 percent increase in health care services specifically for women (\$446 million total), an area where both VA officials and outside groups have said the department needs to adapt to a changing veterans population. And the measure includes a separate \$66.6 billion request for advance medical care appropriations for fiscal 2017, designed to prevent political fiscal fights from disrupting veterans health care services.

In a statement, VA Secretary Bob McDonald called the budget plan "one of the greatest opportunities in [department] history" for helping veterans. "We are listening to what veterans, Congress, employees, veterans service organizations and other stakeholders are telling us," he said. "We aspire to make VA a model agency that is held up as an example for other government agencies to follow with respect to customer experience, efficient and effective operations, and taxpayer stewardship." Lawmakers will spend the next several months debating the request and grilling officials over the growing department budget. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Feb 02, 2015 ++]

VA Budget 2016 Update 01 ► Advocates Worry Increase Not Enough

The Veterans Affairs Department budget keeps going up, but it's still not enough, outside advocates say. A coalition of veterans groups praised President Obama's fiscal 2016 budget request for VA programs after it was released Monday, but said the plan still falls more than \$1 billion short of what the department truly needs to keep up with the demands on the system. "They're going in the right direction, but there are still a lot of things that need to be fixed," said Joe Violante, national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans and one of the authors of this year's veterans "independent budget." "This administration has tried to give VA the resources it needs. But I don't know if they're always on the mark," he said.

The independent budget calls for \$74.5 billion in discretionary VA spending for fiscal 2016, which would be more than a 9 percent jump from last year in nonmandatory department spending. VA has proposed slightly less than an 8 percent increase in that funding. The groups behind the independent budget — DAV, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America and AMVETS — see shortfalls in health care spending, staffing for benefits processing and major construction efforts. Last month, they highlighted all three of those areas as major legislative issues facing VA, noting that the shortfall in major construction alone could reach tens of billions of dollars within a decade if funding isn't made available now.

Violante noted the sharp increase in VA funding over the last decade — the department's total budget has risen by almost \$100 billion since 2004 — and praised Obama for steady increases in each of his years in the White House. But he also said coalition members will push lawmakers to go even further, especially in light

of VA deficiencies exposed during last year's patient wait times scandal. Lawmakers last summer provided about \$17 billion in emergency funding to VA officials to hire new physicians and expand private care options. But they also promised closer oversight of VA's budget request this year, to ensure that the new money wasn't simply plugging holes caused by waste and inefficiencies. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Feb. 02, 2015 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► 150201 thru 150214

Online E-benefit Program – Many of our aging veterans survive on monthly benefit checks from the Veterans Administration. But identity thieves have apparently breached the system somewhere. "So, I'm broke," said 76-year-old Algie Robinson. "I ain't got no money to pay the rent." His missing monthly check was for more than \$1,100. "If I don't pay some bills - like light bills - next week, they'll be turned off," said 81-year-old Robert Etheridge. His check was for \$600. LC Moore, 69, says he and his wife pawned jewelry to pay the power bill. "Had to pay bills," he said. He missed a check for \$890.



Algie Robinson, Robert Etheridge, and L.C. Moore

Benefit checks for all three vets never made it to their bank accounts. They say someone created fake profiles in the government's online E-benefit program, which they didn't even subscribe to. Crooks diverted the vets' money into a bank in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Some vets were told the account is connected to a number out of Florida. Sioux Falls police told News 8 they have at least one victim there, too; a veteran who reported missing funds this week. It's not clear how many vets have been hit across the country. Neither the VA in Washington, nor the bank, responded to repeated requests for information. Some vets were told the Veterans Administration is investigating. Moore and the others served. This time they don't know who the enemy is, or how to fight back. Their comments regarding the issue were:

- "I was in the army six years, four months, and 26 days," Robinson said. He took out a loan to pay rent last month because he couldn't wait to get a replacement check.
- "What can I do about this? Nothing," Etheridge said, answering his own question. The Korean War Air Force vet called 211 to get emergency assistance with bills.
- Moore said he joined up and went to Vietnam straight out of Dunbar High. While the others wait for replacement checks, he already got his. But he also just got a letter from the VA demanding he pay back the money that went to South Dakota. "That don't make sense," he fumed. "The money they sent to South Dakota - that I didn't get - they want back."

[Source: WFAA8 News | Jim Douglas | Feb. 06, 2015 ++]

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NewDay Financial. A federal regulator has taken action against NewDay Financial, a nonbank mortgage lender specializing in VA loans, alleging that the company engaged in deceptive advertising and paid

kickbacks to an unnamed veterans organization for customer referrals. NewDay, headquartered in Fulton, Maryland, will pay a \$2 million penalty, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which said NewDay had revenues of more than \$100 million in 2013. "NewDay profited from the trust that veterans place in their veteran service organization," said CFPB Director Richard Cordray, in announcing the action. "Veterans, and any consumers getting a mortgage, deserve honest information about lender endorsements." The CFPB declined to identify the veterans' organization involved. "As a general matter, the CFPB does not name third parties who have not been the subject of enforcement action," said bureau spokesman Sam Gilford.



NewDay officials also declined to name the veterans' organization. In a statement, company officials said they are pleased to resolve "these technical legal issues" with the CFPB. "There has never been any allegation or suggestion that the company's actions ever directly harmed our borrowers. We will continue our tireless efforts to serve veterans in the dignified manner they deserve," the statement said. According to the CFPB consent order, beginning in 2010, an arrangement was made between NewDay and the unnamed veterans' organization through a broker company. The broker company contracted directly with NewDay and paid the veterans' organization a portion of the fees it received from NewDay. Based on agreements among the three entities, NewDay was designated as the exclusive lender of the veterans' organization, and NewDay sent advertising communications to that group's members by the Postal Service and e-mail, with the veterans' organization's approval.

For example, one emailed advertisement read: "NewDay USA is [veterans organization's] exclusive provider of home loan programs based on their high standards for service and the excellent value of their programs," according to CFPB. Such advertising communications "promoted the relationship" between NewDay and the veterans' organization, and encouraged and recommended the use of NewDay's mortgage products to the group's members," the CFPB stated. NewDay representatives made similar statements to the members during phone conversations. NewDay paid the broker company a monthly "licensing fee" of \$15,000. For each referred member who contacted NewDay about a 100-percent loan-to-value mortgage refinancing and had his or her credit report pulled, NewDay paid the organization a \$15 "lead generation fee," and paid the company a \$20 "lead generation fee." For each referred member who contacted NewDay about a reverse mortgage and completed mandatory counseling, NewDay paid the veterans' organization a \$75 "lead generation fee" and the broker company a \$100 fee. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | Feb. 10, 2015 ++]

VAMC Cincinnati ► **Workers Protest Understaffing**

Workers at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center are being pushed to their limits because of understaffing, and that could jeopardize care for veterans treated at the hospital, according to officials with two local unions that represents many of the 2,060 employees. "Nearly every department needs more staff," said Charles Smith, president of VA Local 2031 of the American Federation of Government Employees. "Nurses are grossly understaffed. Doctors are understaffed. Our laboratory is understaffed, our clerks, our housekeepers. We have

staffing issues all over the facility, and it's had a huge impact on how we take care of the veterans." Sadie Hughes-Young, a registered nurse at the Cincinnati hospital who is VA director for National Nurses United, echoed those concerns. "Cincinnati VA nurses are urging management to make reforms that will ensure that our nation's heroes, the patients we serve, get the quality care that they deserve," Hughes-Young said. "As VA nurses, we are committed to improving the care at the VA Medical Center because we know that the unique health care needs of veterans are best met through the VA system."



Denise Kerr, spokeswoman for the hospital, said management respects the union employees and is in the process of hiring more staff. "In December and January, we have hired 54 candidates for Cincinnati VA positions, which included 12 nursing staff, six medical support and seven providers," Kerr told me. "We consistently recruit for positions by using USAJobs and other special hiring authorities that target qualified populations such as veterans for work within the federal government." Hughes-Young said as many or more people have left the hospital recently for various reasons, including retirement, termination or frustration over short staffing. "We get good nurses, and they see that staffing is so short and they are putting their licenses in jeopardy and they leave," she said. Some of the workers represented by the unions will hold a "Stand Up for Our Veterans" demonstration across the street from the hospital on Friday. It's scheduled for 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at 3200 Vine St. in Corryville.

The American Federation of Government Employees represents doctors, licensed practical nurses, nursing assistants and most other types workers. About 500 registered nurses are represented by National Nurses United. The union for the registered nurses wants the hospital to hire six to eight more RNs on every inpatient unit. They also want an increase in RN staff at VA residential facilities, including the one in Fort Thomas, where they said current staffing levels provide only one registered nurse in charge of the care of 46 patients. "We have no idea what it would cost, but we feel it would not be as costly as outsourcing care," Hughes-Young said. The registered nurses also complained of what they claimed were inadequate and malfunctioning supplies and equipment, including IV pumps, shower chairs, patient lift equipment, hospital beds, IV fluids, anesthesia and other medications; outdated and ineffective patient record and data processing software and computers; inadequate sanitation and housekeeping services in the medical facilities, including the operating room. They also want the administration to address what the union said was a high turnover rate among RNs and other employees. "All our efforts to communicate our concerns regarding these patient safety issues to management and other VA officials have been rebuffed," said Mike Brooks, a registered nurse. "I'm embarrassed to say that the safety of our veteran patients continues to be at risk at this facility."

The local VA hospital paid \$3.7 million in overtime to its employees last year, Smith said. "If you've got to pay that much in overtime, that tells me you've got work that needs to be done and no bodies to do it," he

said. Kerr noted that overtime pay isn't uncommon at health care facilities. "Overtime is granted judiciously in the performance of emergency maintenance, planned or unplanned leave and shortfalls during the recruitment process," she said. Hughes-Young said some nurses aren't granted overtime but work extra hours regardless out of concern for patients. "We're not demonstrating on a whim," Smith said. "We've asked and asked over and over for staffing, especially in critical areas. We're having a little heartburn. We thought they were going to hire more folks. They said they would, but we don't seem to be getting it fast enough." In July, hospital officials said they had stepped up efforts to avoid delays in providing health care services to local veterans of the U.S. military. Measures included adding a primary care team at the main hospital, extending operating hours and hiring more specialty care providers. Although the average wait time for new patients to receive primary care at the Cincinnati VA had exceeded requirements because of a surge in demand for services, a federal investigation found no evidence of misconduct by the hospital's leadership.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs said about \$10 billion in its most recent budget request would be used to hire 10,000 new employees, including about 1,500 doctors, or pay for private-sector care for veterans. "We have not seen the changes outlined in last year's VA legislation take shape in Cincinnati," Smith said. "It is time for management at this facility to make good on its promise and fully support the services America's veterans deserve." The number of protesters might be limited to a few dozen at a time because most will have to demonstrate during the 30 minutes they are allowed for lunch, Smith said. "We have to be very careful being federal employees," Smith said. "We have to be on our own time. I suspect management won't give a lot of people time off to participate." Kerr said the administration has worked with union leaders regarding their concerns and will continue to do so. "Employees who are feeling overworked are always encouraged to talk to their supervisors or work with our employee assistance program," Kerr said. "We strongly support our staff and involved the union in managing nursing and other staff assignments." The hospital administration "respects the union and shares their commitment to federal workers," Kerr said. "We have a well-documented collaborative and proactive partnership with labor." [Source: Cincinnati Business Courier } Barrett J. Brunsman | Jan. 29, 2015 ++]

VAMC Phoenix Update 14 ► Urology Follow-up Care Under Investigation

Investigators found that almost a quarter of patients at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Phoenix may have never received follow-up care when referred to an outside urologist. An interim inspector general report released 29 JAN found that even when a patient's record included authorization for outside care and sometimes a time and date for an appointment with a private urologist, in 23 percent of cases they found no documents to show the appointment ever happened. This lack of documentation could lead the VA to miss important follow-up care, the report said. "This finding also suggests that potentially important recommendations and follow-up are not being addressed by the referring providers because they do not have access to the outside records," the report said. In some cases, employees earlier this month told investigators they were "hundreds of records behind" in entering these outside records into a patient's VA profile, the report said. It found the office "understaffed and unable to keep up" with administrative duties. Even some patients who were seen at the VA urologist in Phoenix may have missed follow-up care because of a staffing shortage that prevented documentation from being entered in the system in a timely manner, the report found. The investigation into the urology care in Phoenix is ongoing and a final report will be released at a later date. Investigators completed a report on the Phoenix VA system after a whistleblower alleged last year that veterans were dying while waiting for care on a secret list. They found widespread problems of data manipulation, scheduling problems and poor care. During the investigation, inspector general employees

found such substantial problems with the urology department that they launched another investigation to look at that specifically. [Source: The Washington Times | Jacqueline Klimas | Jan. 29, 2015 ++]

VAMC Omaha NE ► Nuclear Reactor Disposal Will Cost \$1.3M+

In the jittery days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, those tasked with keeping America safe suddenly saw threats everywhere. Federal aviation officials grounded every airplane. Uniformed officers ringed Memorial Stadium during Husker football games. Governors smothered power plants and dams with armies of guards. As the federal Department of Veterans Affairs looked for its own weak spots, its leaders found a glaring one in Omaha: an active nuclear reactor in the basement of the VA Medical Center. Known by few Omahans, it had long been a valuable tool for VA medical researchers, and was believed to be the only one of its kind in any hospital in America. But viewed through a post-9/11 prism, the blue glow of the reactor's cooling pool now looked like terrorist bait. The nuclear reactor still sits, though dormant, inside the VA facility near 42nd and Center Streets.



The room containing the Omaha VA Medical Center's nuclear reactor at the time it was opened, in 1959 and today

VA researchers who were both visionary and well-connected first brought the facility here in the 1950s. It kept running past its prime because of budgetary inertia. Now, finally, it's about to be put to rest. For decades the reactor fueled cutting-edge medicine at the VA, said Dr. Debra Romberger, the hospital's associate chief of staff for research, and the reactor's chief overseer. But that has changed. "It's not something we need anymore, because the technology has moved on," she said. "Now it's time for it to be gone." VA officials are preparing to dismantle the reactor and ship its pieces — some still mildly radioactive — out of state for disposal. Last week they chose a contractor to do the work. As nuclear reactors go, the VA's device is tiny. Nebraska's Fort Calhoun nuclear plant, for example, can generate up to 500 megawatts of power. That's 25,000 times more than the VA's reactor, which might not even produce enough to power one floor of the 11-story hospital. But the VA reactor's purpose was never to generate electricity. It was installed in 1959 as part of President Dwight Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace program, a Cold War-era campaign to promote positive uses for nuclear technology. Under the program, the government built nuclear-power and research reactors in countries friendly to the United States. Dozens were also built within the United States, mostly at major universities.

But the VA wanted a reactor of its own. Dr. Richard E. Ogborn, then the director of a radioisotope laboratory at Omaha's Veterans Hospital, wanted it in Omaha — and he had the contacts in Washington, D.C., to get it done. The origins are a bit murky, said Dr. Lynell Klassen, a VA professor of internal medicine and the hospital's former associate chief of staff. But the story he's heard is that the reactor was slated for

export to France until a friendly congressman intervened. “Someone called somebody, and they put it here,” Klassen said. It cost \$200,000 — equal to about \$1.6 million in today’s dollars. At the time, nuclear medicine seemed to the medical community like an uncharted frontier with limitless potential for diagnosing diseases and treating cancer, among other things. “The unit was used for doing very hard-core, basic, hot-atom chemistry,” Klassen said. John Lear, the American correspondent for a British journal called the *New Scientist*, wrote in late 1959 that the reactor beneath the Omaha VA hospital “glow(ed) with an aura of special promise.” Lear added, “This medical instrument of the atom age is the most pregnant scientific development that I know of across the whole vast flatness of the Midwestern plains.”

San Diego-based General Atomics built the TRIGA (Training, Research, Isotopes, General Atomics) reactor. Dr. Edward Teller — known as the “Father of the Hydrogen Bomb” — led the effort to develop a reactor that could safely be used in universities and research institutes. The TRIGA reactor was designed to shut down automatically if the reactor overheated. Several dozen of them are still operating in the United States. “Absolute safety is hard,” said David Lochbaum, director of the Nuclear Safety Project for the watchdog group Union of Concerned Scientists. “But they’re very low-risk.” The Omaha reactor became a mecca for members of the VA’s research division, which Romberger said complements but is separate from the VA’s medical-care mission. “It’s not what people think of when they think of the VA,” she said. “They think of patients. And that’s good.”

Over the years, the reactor was used as part of research into a link between aluminum and Alzheimer’s disease, selenium deficiency in patients with rheumatoid arthritis, and vanadium as a low-cost treatment for diabetes. “We could have never done these studies anywhere else in the country,” Klassen said. “There were, unfortunately, no big breakthroughs. But we did publish a lot of papers.” Aside from some medical researchers, Nebraskans barely knew it existed. Romberger said researchers would sometimes draw startled looks when they told visitors their laboratory was “downstairs, next to the nuclear reactor.” At a 2009 U.S. Senate hearing held at the Omaha VA Medical Center, then-Sen. Mike Johanns joked about the facility. “I was amazed to find that there is a defunct nuclear reactor in the basement,” he said. “I don’t want to try to scare anybody. Don’t ask for a Geiger counter or anything.”

Klassen said the reactor continued to produce useful research through the 1990s, though it ceased to be a cutting-edge tool as other technologies bypassed it. “It was state-of-the-art until about 1995,” he said. At that point, Klassen said, the VA faced the choice of spending about \$200,000 a year to keep the reactor running or an estimated \$5 million to shut it down. So the reactor stayed open. The calculus changed, though, after 9/11. As part of a government wide assessment of potential terrorist targets, Klassen said, the VA looked at all of its facilities. The Omaha reactor topped the list. “The concern was that someone could steal those fuel rods and make a dirty bomb,” Klassen said. “Congress decided to rapidly shut it down. It was done incredibly quietly.” Lochbaum said the risk of a terrorist act at the Omaha facility probably was never huge. Other research reactors that actually produced bomb-grade uranium would have been likelier targets. “The best protection they had was anonymity,” Lochbaum said. “Terrorists can’t attack something they don’t know about.”

Nevertheless, the reactor blinked off on Nov. 5, 2001. Its blue glow — created when charged particles move through the pool’s super-purified water faster than the speed of light — finally ceased. Even then, the VA faced responsibilities. It had to maintain its operating license as long as the reactor’s remnants remained. It also had to monitor the space and file frequent reports with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The first job was to dispose of 58 radioactive fuel rods. The proposed federal nuclear-waste disposal site in Nevada had been stalled by lawsuits. Finally, in 2002, a U.S. Geological Survey research reactor in Denver agreed to take the rods. They were shipped inside multilayered containers, like Russian nesting dolls. VA administrators removed the rods on a weekend to minimize disruption at the hospital, choosing a time when

they knew the attention of many Omahans would be diverted. “The fuel was moved, very quietly, during the College World Series,” Klassen said. With the fuel rods long gone, what’s left are a few pieces of equipment once used to handle radioisotopes, as well as some lead and steel pieces of the reactor itself. For all these years, the reactor has been bathed in water at the bottom of the 20-foot pool. “The fuel is out. So are the ion chambers. But the rest of it is still there,” said Dan McVicker, the reactor manager. “Most of the stuff is really low level.”

Still, dismantling the reactor is a delicate operation, planned for late this year or in 2016. Consultants have laid out a timeline that stretches over 12 weeks, and there will be mountains of paperwork before and after. The process will cost more than \$1.3 million, on top of \$5.9 million Klassen said was spent on the 2001-02 shutdown and fuel-rod disposal. The reactor space, with the adjacent lab, isn’t much larger than the basement of a suburban house. Consultants have checked it several times for traces of radiation. They’ve found very little. According to a decommissioning report prepared last year, only trace amounts of radioactive isotopes — including Carbon-14, Cesium-137, Nickel-63 and Cobalt-60 — were found on the surface of the reactor pool bed and some dummy fuel rods put in place of the real ones. The highest concentrations were inside a lab hood where technicians once worked on lab samples. Three soil borings outside the reactor pool show no trace of radioactivity. There’s no groundwater nearby.

The decommissioning process gained some urgency because of the VA’s plans to tear down the 65-year-old hospital and replace it. “We’re an aging facility,” McVicker said. “Better now than waiting.” They dismissed the idea of entombing the area in concrete — as was done with a 1960s experimental reactor at Hallam, Nebraska — because the tomb would require continual monitoring, and the site couldn’t later be used for anything else. After the pieces of the reactor itself are packed up in safe containers, well-protected workers will grind off some of the surface of the reactor and pool bed to haul away. Consultants expect about 42 cubic yards of debris — about enough to fill a large construction dumpster. Then the area will be scrubbed clean and remodeled for other uses. The VA will surrender its license and get out of the nuclear reactor business for good. After more than a half century without an accident, release or spill, the VA’s nuclear reactor turned out to be a good neighbor to an Omaha community that didn’t even know it was there. [Source: Omaha World Herald | Steve Liewer | Feb. 01, 2015 ++]

VAMC Denver CO Update 03 ► Director Retiring | Sleep Clinic Wait List

The director of the veterans health care system for Denver and eastern Colorado is retiring, days after a report that a Veterans Affairs sleep clinic in Denver had a secret waiting list. Lynette Roff is stepping down, a spokesman for the VA said 3 FEB. No other details were immediately released. Former VA employee Tommy Belinski obtained a paper waiting list — separate from the official computerized list — that could have been used to hide lengthy waits for appointments at the sleep clinic, KUSA-TV in Denver reported last week. The list had more than 500 names on it, Belinski said. The VA has said officials discovered an "unofficial list" in 2012 and abolished it. Dan Warvi, a spokesman for the VA in Denver, said in an email to The Associated Press 3 FEB that no secret list exists. Roff didn't immediately respond to a request for comment made through a spokesman. Investigators following up on whistleblower complaints have discovered large-scale improprieties in the way hospitals and clinics around the country scheduled veterans for appointments.

Eight months ago, an audit found that 1,600 new patients had to wait 90 days or longer for appointments at eastern Colorado VA medical facilities. It wasn't clear if the sleep clinic was included in the audit. The

Colorado facilities were included in a nationwide audit on a single day in May. All told, more than 57,000 patients faced delays of 90 days or longer. The review also indicated that 13 percent of schedulers reported being told by supervisors to falsify appointment schedules to make patient waits appear shorter. In July, the VA announced it planned to fire two supervisors and discipline four others in Colorado and Wyoming after they were accused of falsifying health care data. Rep. Mike Coffman (R-CO) welcomed Roff's departure, saying veterans deserve better leadership. "She did the right thing by leaving," he said. Coffman has asked the VA to investigate the Denver-based eastern Colorado system. Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO) described Roff's departure as an opportunity and urged the VA to find a leader to push for better care for veterans. [Source: Associated Press | Feb. 04, 2015 ++]

VAMC Orlando FL Update 07 ► Lake Nona Official Opening

It's nearly two years overdue, but News 13 has learned the Lake Nona Veterans Administration Hospital is scheduled to open this February. While addressing a conference of nurses at Disney's Coronado Springs resort 5 FEB, the VA's new secretary, Bob McDonald, said the VA is in transition. McDonald said improved health care and response time for vets are top concerns across the nation. In our area, it's getting the Lake Nona veteran's hospital open and fully functional. After years of delays and cost overruns, some wondered if the facility would ever open. McDonald said there was reason for concern, but now he looks forward to seeing veterans getting the help they need at the hospital. "Some of the buildings were overdesigned," McDonald said. "I mean, you look at the design of the facility at Lake Nona and while it is a beautiful facility, I wouldn't have designed it that way."

McDonald said the dates are not yet set in stone. He expects the hospital will have a grand opening in the next few weeks. He said his efforts since taking over the agency six months ago is to be as transparent as possible: to admit mistakes happened and to move forward with giving veterans top-notch care. "Well, the No. 1 thing we have to do is train people in customer service," McDonald said. "How do we take care of our customers? The analogy that I like to use is how do we make sure we treat our veterans the way Disney treats its guests? That is the quality of care that we need. Second, we need to hire more doctors and more nurses." McDonald said he is looking to hire thousands of health care professionals nationwide. He will be asking congress for more than \$1.2 billion for the agency's next budget.



13800 Veterans Way Orlando, FL 32827

The new, over \$665 million, state-of-the-art facility will increase accessibility to health care for approximately 400,000 of Central Florida's veterans. The VA Medical Center at Lake Nona will be the first VA hospital to be built in the United States since 1995. The medical center will include at 134-bed inpatient diagnostic and treatment hospital, a 118-bed nursing home, a 60-bed domiciliary, an outpatient clinic, a

veterans benefit mini service center and generous patient and visitor parking. [Source: Bay News9 | David Bodden | Feb 05, 2015 ++]

VARO St. Petersburg FL ► 1st in Disability Claims Over 125 Days

Despite years of a commitment to streamline and shorten the claims process, the Department of Veterans Affairs still sits on applications for egregious amounts of time. While improvements have been achieved, the 125-day wait at the St. Petersburg office is a disservice to Florida's military men and women who earned the nation's gratitude but await the promises that service to country commands. Out of the 56 regional VA offices across the nation, St. Petersburg ranks first in the number of pending disability claims older than 125 days. Sixty-one percent of the 28,000 claims in this state fall into that category. Nationally, that figure stands at 48 percent. Congressman Vern Buchanan, R-Sarasota, and Rep. Patrick Murphy, D-Jupiter, took great exception to the "unacceptably long" wait times at the St. Petersburg office in a letter to Veterans Affairs last week. With more than 66,000 veterans in Buchanan's Southwest Florida district, including Manatee County, the congressmen told the Herald Washington Bureau that "... I think it's outrageous people have to wait 125 days to have their claim decided."

Indeed, the St. Petersburg VA office is a national disgrace, one struggling with an obsolescent records system still mired in paper. Files sit in loose boxes or dumped on the end caps of shelves because the agency cannot procure more shelves. No private enterprise could survive such a shoddy system of record keeping. Bradenton's Anthony Hardie, the national director of the Washington-based Veterans for Common Sense, told the Herald that "Veterans who are waiting on their claims to be approved should not have to suffer through the incompetence of the St. Pete regional office." Admittedly, the VA is improving services but the agency continues to be handicapped by a shortage of personnel and resources. In fiscal 2012, the average disability compensation or pension claim soared to 262 days -- an astounding rise from 188 days the prior year. Back then, the St. Petersburg office held almost 47,000 backlogged disability claims, second to only Waco, Texas.

The VA's long-term goal in processing time is an average of 125 days. The director of the St. Petersburg office, Kerrie Witty, told the Herald progress is happening, a statement supported by a veterans advocate. But Buchanan, Murphy and the public must keep up the pressure, else the VA slide back into bureaucratic quicksand. We want concrete proof that the delay time is on a steady decline and beats the goal. Veterans can track how VBA is performing nationally and by state and local area through their ASPIRE dashboard accessible on the interactive map a http://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/aspire_dashboard.asp. Also, at http://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/detailed_claims_data.asp can be found detailed claims data and status reports which are updated each Monday. [Source: Bradenton Herald | Editorial | Feb. 04, 2015 ++]

*** Vets ***



Netherlands Vet Cemetery ► Faces of Margraten | Photos Needed

The Foundation United Adopters American War Graves (Stichting Verenigde Adoptanten Amerikaanse Oorlogsgraven) would like to offer a unique tribute to the thousands who have been buried in the American War Cemetery and Memorial Netherlands in Margraten through the project "The Faces of Margraten." It hopes to do so in particular by giving their names a face in two different ways. First of all, it would like to do so by continuing its work on its Fields of Honor – Database, in which information and photos of those buried in Margraten has been collected since 2009. All information in this database can be accessed online for free. Through the project "The Faces of Margraten," the foundation has the opportunity to further gather information and photos of soldiers who have not yet been added to the database and to complete the profiles of the soldiers who already can be found in the Fields of Honor – Database.

However, the project's main goal is to decorate as many graves and names on the Walls of the Missing with a personal photo of the soldier, to offer a face behind the name. Through this way, the foundation hopes to finally give our liberators a face, 70 years after the liberation of the Netherlands. The foundation would like to do so during a special Memorial Weekend from the 2nd till the 5th of May 2015. The exact program during this weekend will be announced at a later moment in time.

Currently, the foundation possesses personal photos of approximately 2,600 soldiers who either have been buried in or are memorialized on the Margraten Cemetery. It, therefore, is aware that it will not be possible to decorate each grave or name with a personal photo. Nevertheless, they hope that in the months prior to the Memorial Weekend more will be found and submitted for the project. In order to reach this goal, solid communication about the project in both the Netherlands and the United States is fundamental. By generating awareness of the project, the foundation hopes to reach adopters, relatives of soldiers, fellow researchers, and veterans' associations who all may have photos and information of those buried in Margraten.



The foundation considers it to be important to continuously reflect on the sacrifices made by these American soldiers as the current international context still shows us that freedom cannot be taken for granted. Being aware of the human costs of freedom is important in preventing possible conflicts in the future. The Foundation hopes to enhance this awareness through this project. In particular for younger generations it is important to make them aware of the destruction of war. After all, they have never experienced World War

II or any other war, and the generation who has and can tell them about that war is rapidly passing away. The foundation, therefore, also would like to actively involve schools in the proximity of the cemetery.

For more information about the project, visit the project's website <http://www.thefacesofmargraten.com>. For updates on the project, you can follow the project's social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter. Through the project's website you can contribute a photo to the project. Submitting a photo can also be done by sending an email to info@degezichtenvanmargraten.nl.



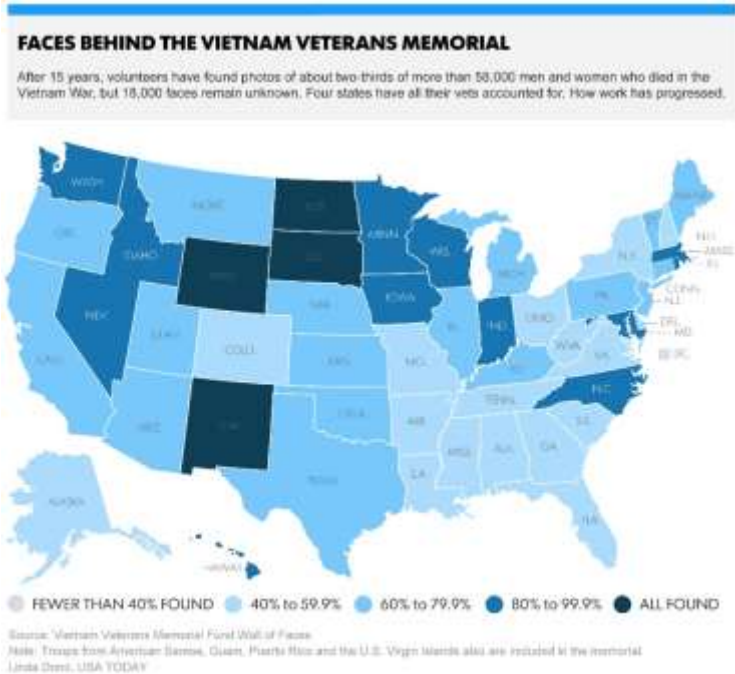
Netherlands American Cemetery

[Source: <http://svaao.nl/index.php/en/projects/the-faces-of-margraten> Feb 2015 ++]

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Update 15 ► The Wall of Faces

For almost 15 years, volunteers have been collecting photographs of the more than 58,000 names engraved on the polished black panels of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. Now they have a few more than 18,000 pictures to go, and Marcy Ellis of Keizer, Ore., has helped make the Wall of Faces a little more complete. Her brother, Army Pfc. Melvin Chloupek, was awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart after he died Feb. 28, 1968, trying to help a fellow soldier. A shadow box with all his medals hangs on the wall in her Keizer home. So does a framed flag, the one that was draped over his coffin. She has his official Army photo, too, in a frame in her living room. Now a copy is with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. "He was very kindhearted, very sensitive. Our personalities were quite a bit alike," said Ellis, who was born seven years after Chloupek. Her older brother died three days before her 13th birthday.

Janna Hoehn, a florist from Maui, Hawaii, is one of the volunteers of the Faces Never Forgotten project who is collecting photos. She got involved in part to help make up for how Vietnam veterans were treated when they returned, and is focusing on California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington. "Until this gets out in newspapers, it surprises me how many people have really not heard about this," said Hoehn, who has been at it for three years. "It's a very hard project and a very emotional project, but the rewards are priceless." She started out needing 323 photos for Oregon, has tracked down 128 so far and has been promised about 40 more. You can search for your loved one or veterans who have died in your area at the Wall of Faces website <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>. You can submit a photo electronically on the individual page that pops up.



Organizers are raising money for what will eventually become a two-story, underground Education Center at the Vietnam Memorial on the National Mall. A prominent feature will be larger-than-life pictures of those whose names are on the wall. The center also will feature displays of the more than 400,000 personal articles, letters and gifts that have been left at the foot of the memorial since its dedication in 1982. "The photos are out there," said Executive Director Barry Smith of the Nevada Press Association, which put out an alert to its members last year. "We just need to make people realize this project is going on." Before Memorial Day, 34 Nevadans were without photos. By Wednesday, that number was down to 24. The photos do not have to be of the service member in uniform. Many are high school yearbook photos or family snapshots. Though volunteers are looking for high-resolution copies of original images, even a low-quality photo will suffice until a better one can be found. "It is the very least we can do to show our honor and love for these American (service members)," said Andrew Johnson, a newspaperman from Mayville, Wis., whose son was killed while serving in Afghanistan in 2012. [Source: Statesman Journal (Salem, OR) | Capi Lynn | Feb. 11, 2015 ++]

Stolen Valor Update 97 ► Reported 150201 thru 150214

The Evergreen State College is investigating a long-time instructor who appears to have embellished his military record in campus course catalogs by claiming to have been awarded medals for valor and combat wounds. The college has not announced whether it will take disciplinary action against **Daryl Morgan**, 65, a woodworking instructor and Navy veteran who served in the Vietnam War. Morgan declined to speak on the record with The Olympian about his service record. He also did not provide any information to the newspaper or to the Evergreen administration to prove he had received the medals. Morgan has taught classes at Evergreen for 14 years, and since 2013 he has led a class intended to help veterans succeed in an academic setting. On 10 FEB he stepped down from teaching that course following a meeting with Evergreen administrators regarding his military records, Evergreen spokeswoman Meryl Lipman said.



Daryl Morgan

Morgan’s biography in Evergreen’s last two evening and weekend course catalogs says that he received a Silver Star, Bronze Star, two Purple Hearts and four Air Medals. The biography appears in materials that promote offerings for veterans at the college. Morgan wrote his own biography, Lipman said. Morgan has told peers and students that he served in Special Operations units in Southeast Asia. His official military record, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act by another Vietnam veteran from Olympia, says Morgan served in the war, and it credits him with standard medals for service in Vietnam. But it does not indicate that he was awarded the higher-level medals he claims. Thomas Kelley, a retired Navy lieutenant commander and the director of Evergreen’s veterans service office, reported the new documents to the school’s administration. “Obviously we are taking it very seriously,” Lipman said.

Kelley said Evergreen no longer would print Morgan’s biography in course catalogs. “Daryl claims to be something he’s not,” Kelley said. “It just breaks my heart,” he added. “This does not reflect Evergreen’s view of veterans or its commitment to helping veterans.” Kelley is expected to lead the veterans class that Morgan is leaving this quarter, Lipman said. Kelley said the combat medals Morgan listed in his biography would appear on his military service record if he had received them, even if he was awarded them for actions in one of the Vietnam War’s unofficial combat zones, such as Cambodia or Laos. “If he had received any of those awards, they would have been on that sheet,” Kelley said. “When Navy SEALs are discharged, their awards are not secret.” The medals that Morgan claimed in his recent biographies were not a factor in his hiring 14 years ago, Lipman said.

Jeff Russell, 62, filed the FOIA request to obtain Morgan’s service records. Russell said he met Morgan several years ago, and they discussed the time they both spent in Southeast Asia. Russell said he had hoped the FOIA request would show that Morgan had the medals claimed in the biography. “You don’t expect someone who’s been there to magnify it,” Russell said. Morgan served on the USS Jamestown, according to his military records. It was an intelligence-gathering ship that frequently deployed to the South China Sea during the war, according to the Dictionary of American Fighting Ships. Sailors on the Jamestown are known to have gone ashore in Vietnam, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. The ship received a Navy meritorious unit commendation, which is among the medals that Morgan lists on his campus biography. [Source: The Olympian | Adam Ashton | Feb. 10, 2015 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure~Ft. McClellan Update 02 ► Health Registry Opposed

To visit Fort McClellan, Alabama is to visit a ghost town. After 81 years training millions of soldiers, the Army base was mothballed in 1999. Though Fort McClellan is still very present in the life of Donald Hayden. "I have arthritis in my right shoulder, my knees, I have degenerative disc disorder in my back, I have fibromyalgia," he said. Hayden spent only four months there in 1987, but fears that time will haunt him until it kills him. "I was a young guy, and I was going to doctors and I would be the only young person in the room," Hayden said. AnnaMaria Bliven was at Fort McClellan twice -- in 1978 and 1980. She, too, fears her time there is killing her. "I had three miscarriages, my son has mental health issues, I've had female issues, and now I'm dealing with thyroid cancer," Bliven said.

From World War II until it closed, Fort McClellan was home to the Army chemical warfare school. It spent decades steeped in the toxic agents of battle. Today, it is off limits and a federal Superfund site. Rep. Reid Ribble, (R) Appleton, knows about Fort McClellan through the stories of veterans fighting to survive. They turned to him for help after struggling to get treatment at the VA. "The first thing the VA wants to know is: Is it connected to your military service? If it's not connected to your military service, the type of benefits and care might look different," Ribble said. Those stories motivated Rep. Ribble to support a bill last year that will help Fort McClellan veterans get treatment. It's called the Fort McClellan Health Registry Act and would force the defense department to inform veterans of possible toxic exposure and begin screening them for problems.

Supporters say the bill failed because the defense department opposes it. One DOD staffer e-mailed the bill's key sponsor it "would generate a significant financial and resource burden upon the Army." Congressman Ribble and his colleagues will try again this month because, he said, the government needs to be responsible. "They still were there and they were there in the service of their country, as a result of that we ought to take care of them," Ribble said. Refer to <http://www.jrn.com/tmj4/news/i-team/Sick-Veterans-291256011.html> to view a video report on this. [Source: TMJ4 I-Team | Steve Chamraz | Feb 09, 2015 ++]

Vet Charity Watch Update 51 ► Wounded Warrior Project Lawsuit

A national veterans nonprofit group is suing a Gig Harbor veteran in federal court, alleging that the former airman has defamed the organization in articles he posted to several websites. The Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) is seeking unspecified financial damages from Vietnam veteran Gordon "Alex" Graham in a lawsuit the nonprofit filed in federal court in Tacoma in early FEB. Based in Florida, the Wounded Warrior Project raised \$225 million in 2013. It collects funds through a one-time and monthly giving program that has drawn celebrity endorsements, including a recent commercial featuring actor Mark Wahlberg. The nonprofit alleges that Graham's postings to websites such as Veterans Today and Graham's blog have hindered its fundraising by creating an aura of suspicion around its work. Graham has called the Wounded Warrior Project a "scam" in articles that criticize its spending on fundraising, advertising and salaries.

In court documents, the Wounded Warrior Project's lawyers point to dozens of statements from social media websites in which people linked to Graham's stories, criticized the nonprofit and said they would not donate to it again. "WWP has and will continue to suffer irreparable harm as a result of Graham's defamatory statements regarding WWP," the lawyers wrote in their complaint. One posting they cited reads "I'm greatly concerned about all of the rumors and articles circulating that's suggesting [WWP] is a scam . . . I hate to say it, but I want to cancel my membership." Reached by phone 9 FEB, Graham, 63, said he had not yet been

served with the lawsuit. He said he had been anticipating that the Wounded Warrior Project would file suit against him because it pursued legal action against another critic last year in Indiana. Wounded Warrior Project won that case against Dean Graham, who is not related to Alex Graham of Gig Harbor. Dean Graham retracted the allegations he leveled against Wounded Warrior Project in a May court filing. Alex Graham removed his articles from the Veterans Today site Monday after a reporter informed him of the lawsuit.

Alex Graham takes issues with salaries paid to Wounded Warrior Project executives. The group paid a total of \$2.2 million to 11 executives in 2013, according to tax forms the Wounded Warrior Projects posts to its website. "They're spending so much money on fundraising that there's nothing left for the veterans," Graham told The News Tribune. Wounded Warrior Project contends that it spends 80 percent of its revenue on its own programs for wounded veterans and grants to other organizations. It gave a small grant to Tacoma's Goodwill in 2013, for example. The group, founded in 2003, wrote in court filings that it provided support to almost 58,000 wounded veterans or military family members in 2014. Alex Graham's campaign gained so much attention that the nonprofit database Guidestar in 2014 issued a statement distancing itself from Graham's characterizations of financial records he obtained from its website. Several national news organizations also have produced segments challenging Graham's depiction of the organization. For info on WWP refer to <http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org>. [Source: The News Tribune (Tacoma, WA) | Adam Ashton | Feb 10, 2015 ++]

Birdies for the Brave ► Free/Discounted PGA Tournament Tickets

Active, reserve, veteran and retired service members and their families are eligible for free or discounted tickets at some of the nation's top golf tournaments this year, including this weekend's AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am in Monterey, California, and The Players Championship in Florida in May. Birdies for the Brave, the PGA Tour-supported military outreach charity founded in 2006 by Phil and Amy Mickelson, provides the tickets in conjunction with sponsor Quicken Loans. Ticket offers vary by tournament and type of service, ranging from free entry for a service member and multiple dependents to discounted admission for a single military veteran. Get a rundown of the offers at <https://birdiesforthebrave.sheerid.com>.



ESPN anchor Chris Berman poses with soldiers during last year's Military Appreciation Day at the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am.

The Players Championship isn't on that list, but it will offer free admission for each day of the event (May 5-10) to active-duty troops, reservists, National Guard members and military retirees, and their dependents.

Spouses of active-duty troops also are eligible for free tickets, and all veterans qualify for ticket discounts. Fans must obtain a ticket voucher (available through the tournament's website) and present military ID when claiming tickets. The tournament — held at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, home of the famous "island green" on its 17th hole — also will:

- Hold a Military Appreciation Day on May 5 that will include a concert (artists to be announced, but past performers include Dierks Bentley).
- Maintain Patriots' Outpost, a military-only hospitality tent that will offer free food, beverages and activities.
- Host its fourth-annual military job fair, with free admission to service members past and present as well as military spouses.

More details on Birdies of the Brave, including links to ticket pages for individual tournaments, are available on the group's Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/birdiesforthebrave>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Feb. 10, 2015 ++]

SCRA Update 05 ► \$123M Mortgage Settlement

The Justice Department announced 9 FEB that under its settlements with five of the nation's largest mortgage servicers, 952 service members and their co-borrowers are eligible to receive over \$123 million for non-judicial foreclosures that violated the Service Members Civil Relief Act. The five mortgage servicers are JP Morgan Chase Bank N.A.; Wells Fargo Bank N.A. and Wells Fargo & Co.; Citi Residential Lending Inc., Citibank, NA and CitiMortgage Inc.; GMAC Mortgage, LLC, Ally Financial Inc. and Residential Capital LLC; and BAC Home Loans Servicing LP formerly known as Countrywide Home Loans Servicing LP (Bank of America). In the first round of payments under the SCRA portion of the 2012 settlement known as the National Mortgage Settlement, 666 service members and their co-borrowers will receive over \$88 million from JP Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Citi and GMAC Mortgage. The other 286 service members and their co-borrowers already have received over \$35 million from Bank of America through an earlier settlement. The non-judicial foreclosures at issue took place between Jan. 1, 2006, and Apr. 4, 2012.

- "These unlawful judicial foreclosures forced hundreds of service members and their families out of their homes," said Acting Associate Attorney General Stuart F. Delery. "While this compensation will provide a measure of relief, the fact is that service members should never have to worry about losing their home to an illegal foreclosure while they are serving our country. The department will continue to actively protect our service members and their families from such unjust actions."
- "We are very pleased that the men and women of the armed forces who were subjected to unlawful non-judicial foreclosures while they were serving our country are now receiving compensation," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta of the Civil Rights Division. "We look forward, in the coming months, to facilitating the compensation of additional service members who were subjected to unlawful judicial foreclosures or excess interest charges. We appreciate that JP Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Citi, GMAC Mortgage and Bank of America have been working cooperatively with the Justice Department to compensate the service members whose rights were violated."

Section 533 of the SCRA prohibits non-judicial foreclosures against service members who are in military service or within the applicable post-service period, as long as they originated their mortgages before their period of military service began. Even in states that normally allow mortgage foreclosures to proceed non-judicially, the SCRA prohibits servicers from doing so against protected service members during their

military service and applicable post-military service coverage period. Under the National Mortgage Settlement, for mortgages serviced by Wells Fargo, Citi and GMAC Mortgage, the identified service members will each receive \$125,000, plus any lost equity in the property and interest on that equity. Eligible co-borrowers will also be compensated for their share of any lost equity in the property.

To ensure consistency with an earlier private settlement, JP Morgan Chase will provide any identified service member either the property free and clear of any debt or the cash equivalent of the full value of the home at the time of sale, and the opportunity to submit a claim for compensation for any additional harm suffered, which will be determined by a special consultant, retired U.S. District Court Judge Edward N. Cahn. Payment amounts have been reduced for those service members or co-borrowers who have previously received compensation directly from the servicer or through a prior settlement, such as the independent foreclosure review conducted by the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency and the Federal Reserve Board. The Bank of America payments to identified service members with nonjudicial foreclosures were made under a 2011 settlement with the Department of Justice. The NMS also provides compensation for two categories of service members:

- Those who were foreclosed upon pursuant to a court order where the mortgage servicer failed to file a proper affidavit with the court stating whether or not the service member was in military service; and
- Those service members who gave proper notice to the servicer, but were denied the full benefit of the SCRA's 6% interest rate cap on pre-service mortgages. The service members entitled to compensation for these alleged violations will be identified later in 2015.

Borrowers should use the following contact information for questions about SCRA payments under the National Mortgage Settlement:

- **Bank of America** borrowers should call Rust Consulting, Inc., the settlement administrator, toll-free at 1-855-793-1370 or write to BAC Home Loans Servicing Settlement Administrator, c/o Rust Consulting, Inc., P.O. Box 1948, Faribault, MN 55021-6091.
- **Citi** borrowers should call Citi toll-free at 1-888-326-1166.
- **GMAC Mortgage** borrowers should call Rust Consulting Inc., the settlement administrator, toll-free at 1-866-708-0915 or write to P.O. Box 3061, Faribault, Minnesota 55021-2661.
- **JPMorgan Chase** borrowers should call Chase toll-free at 1-877-469-0110 or write to P.O. Box 183224, OH-7160/DOJ, Columbus, Ohio 43219-6009.
- **Wells Fargo** borrowers should call the Wells Fargo Home Mortgage Military Customer Service Center toll free at 1-877-839-2359.

Service members and their dependents who believe that their SCRA rights have been violated should contact an Armed Forces Legal Assistance office. To find the closest office, consult the military legal assistance office locator at <http://legalassistance.law.af.mil> and click on the Legal Services Locator. Additional information about the Justice Department's enforcement of the SCRA and the other laws protecting service members is available at www.servicemembers.gov

Today's settlement was announced in connection with the President's Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force. The task force was established to wage an aggressive, coordinated and proactive effort to investigate and prosecute financial crimes. With more than 20 federal agencies, 94 U.S. Attorneys' Offices and state and local partners, it is the broadest coalition of law enforcement, investigatory and regulatory agencies ever assembled to combat fraud. Since its formation, the task force has made great strides in facilitating increased investigation and prosecution of financial crimes, enhancing coordination and cooperation among federal, state and local authorities, addressing discrimination in the lending and financial markets and conducting outreach to the public, victims, financial institutions and other organizations. For more information on the

task force, visit <http://www.StopFraud.gov>. [Source: DoD News, Defense Media Activity | Feb. 09, 2015 ++]

Veterans Hall of Fame | FL ► **Confederate Vets Eligibility at Issue**

Lawmakers might have to decide if the men who fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War are eligible for entry into the state's Veterans' Hall of Fame. The hall honors "those military veterans who, through their works and lives during or after military service, have made a significant contribution to the State of Florida," according to its website. The question the Legislature could have to answer is who exactly counts as a veteran. That's because the governor and Cabinet members on 5 FEB tabled inducting the 2014 class into the hall to wait for "legislative clarification" on three nominees who fought for the Confederacy against the Union.

The Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame, established in 2013, is a wall in the state Capitol building in Tallahassee with plaques commemorating inductees. Six plaques, all from the inaugural class, currently hang on the wall. Eight nominees for the 2014 class were selected by the Hall of Fame Council and sent to the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs for review. But the department forwarded just five for approval, leaving the three Confederate veterans off the list. David Lang, Samuel Pasco and Edward A. Perry all became distinguished Floridians after their service to the Confederacy. Perry served as Florida's governor from 1885 to 1889; Pasco was a U.S. senator from Florida and is Pasco County's namesake; and Lang helped found what is now the Florida National Guard.

Mike Prendergast, executive director of the Department of Veterans Affairs, told the governor and cabinet Thursday that the three don't qualify as "veterans" under Florida and federal law. State law defines a veteran as anyone who served in the active military and who was discharged under honorable conditions. The federal government's definition is nearly identical: "The term 'veteran' means a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable," the law reads. Furthermore, the term "Armed Forces" is defined by the federal government as being the "United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard," as well as the reserves.



Samuel Pasco



David Lang



Edward A. Perry

Prendergast told the governor and Cabinet that nothing in the applications filled out on behalf of the three men demonstrated service in the armed forces of the United States of America. "No doubt that in their post-military career they were all distinguished," Veterans Affairs spokesman Steve Murray said in an interview Friday. "It is our opinion the three gentlemen who were submitted did not meet the criteria set forth by the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame Council, and by applicable federal and state laws defining veteran status." But Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam, a state Cabinet member, disagreed. "If you're throwing these guys out on a technicality, that's just dumb," Putnam said at the meeting Thursday, held at the Florida State Fairgrounds in Tampa.

Florida became a state in 1845, when almost one-third of the 140,000 people in the state were slaves. South Carolina seceded from the Union in December 1860, and Florida followed suit in January 1861. A month later, seven states, including Florida, established the Confederate States of America, prompting the Civil War, or as many Southerners prefer to call it, the War Between the States. Fighting ended in 1865, slavery was abolished and the nation slowly came back together. But even though the war is long over, history still resonates. Two members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, an organization for those whose ancestors fought against the Union, were also in attendance at the Cabinet meeting to support Pasco, Lang and Perry. "They were instrumental in establishing our state in the current form, to say the least," David McCallister, a Tampa-area attorney who was at the meeting, said by phone Friday. McCallister is the commander of the local camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

Also, he said, there's precedent for defining Confederate fighters as U.S. veterans. They were ultimately granted pensions, almost 100 years after the war in a mostly symbolic gesture, and could be buried in Arlington National Cemetery, though in a special Confederate section. The Cabinet on Thursday asked to see the applications for Pasco, Lang, and Perry and decided to hold off for further clarification on who qualifies for induction. Regardless of what the state Legislature decides, Purdue University history professor Caroline Janney said all those who fought during the Civil War would have considered themselves American veterans. Although, in the 21st century, there's certainly no consensus. "I think this is indicative of how much the Civil War still permeates our identity and our national culture," Janney said, "that this would be a debate that's being had in a state-level Cabinet meeting." [Source: Tampa Bay times | Josh Solomon | Feb 08, 2015 ++]

Greenwood SC War Memorial ► Segregated Plaques Issue

Along Main Street in a small South Carolina city, there is war memorial honoring fallen World War I and II soldiers, dividing them into two categories: "white" and "colored." Welborn Adams, Greenwood's white Democratic-leaning mayor, believes the bronze plaques are relics of the South's scarred past and should be changed in the spirit of equality, replaced like the "colored" water fountains or back entrances to the movie theater that blacks were once forced to use. Yet the mayor's attempt to put up new plaques was blocked by a state law that brought the Confederate flag down from the Statehouse dome in 2000. The law forbids altering historical monuments in any way without approval from legislators. Historians, black and white, have reservations about replacing the plaques, saying they should serve as a reminder of the once-segregated U.S. military. "Segregation was the accepted social order of that time," said Eric Williams, who spent 32 years as a historian with the U.S. Park Service. "If we alter the monument, we alter its historical integrity."



The memorial is owned by the American Legion post in Greenwood and is on city property. On two of its sides, it lists soldiers who died in World War I and World War II that were from Greenwood County. A third side lists Korean and Vietnam War dead from the county without any racial distinction because the military was integrated by that time. Adams said he asked other South Carolina mayors and doesn't know of any other similar memorials in the state. Several historians also said they haven't heard of a monument where fallen soldiers are separated by race. About a year ago, American Legion post members asked the mayor if he thought he could raise \$15,000 privately to change the monument. He was so sure he could, he took out a loan to pay for the new plaques so they could be dedicated on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Forty-three donors, almost all white, came through with the money. Adams wrote a \$1,000 check himself.

But there was opposition, in part because of a quote from the mayor in a December story in *The Index-Journal of Greenwood*. "I think if history offends people it needs to be rewritten if possible," Adams said. The mayor acknowledged he didn't choose his words carefully. He later said he meant that while history doesn't change, the way a community presents itself does. Days before the King Day ceremony, opponents threatened to try to have Adams arrested — perhaps on a misconduct in office charge — if he went forward with the new plaque. The mayor said he cried in his office when the city's lawyer told him that opponents were right about the law. "I wonder if some of the opposition is racism hiding behind history," said Adams, who was elected mayor in 2008 in this city of 23,000, where about 45 percent of the population is black.

The Confederate flag law says no historical monument, erected by the state or by a local government, may be relocated, removed, disturbed, or altered without a two-thirds vote from state lawmakers. The law lists 10 wars, including the "War Between the States," — the genteel, Southern name for the Civil War. The purpose of this part of the law was to appease people who worried 15 years ago that Confederate memorials and street and park names in honor of generals would be torn down in wake of the flag being removed from the Statehouse dome and being put in front of the South Carolina Capitol alongside a Confederate soldier monument. The flag is still a sore point for the NAACP and other black leaders. A bill has been filed to change the Greenwood memorial and half of the members of the state Senate are listed as sponsors, but some legislators who helped craft the Confederate flag law are leery to bring the divisive issue up again. "I'll look

at the bill," said Sen. John Courson, a Republican from Columbia who has been in the Senate since 1985. "But I don't want to reopen the whole debate. That was last century's battle."

Williams, the former Park Service historian, has been one of the most vocal critics. Williams, who is white, wants to see a small display nearby saying the military was segregated back then and that's why the names are listed the way they are. Activist Joseph McGill, who spends the night in old slave cabins to get attention to preserve them, agrees. He says talk about switching plaques reminds him of schools that don't want students reading "Huckleberry Finn" because racially offensive language from the 1800s is in the book. "That could just spread the perception that segregation did not exist or wasn't that bad," McGill said. Chad Williams of Brandeis University in Boston has extensively studied black soldiers in World War I. He said he understands the desire to correct a historical injustice, but another sign explaining why the soldiers were separated by race is much more powerful and historically accurate. "I think it is important to acknowledge the specific context in how African-American soldiers had to serve in the military," Williams said.

Will Moredock, a freelance journalist trying to get South Carolina to remove the statue of segregationist Gov. Ben Tillman from the Statehouse grounds, said that is shortsighted. Americans are given the power to change laws and even the framework of its government with amendments to the Constitution. So why should historical monuments be any different? "Every generation has the right to choose the people and the causes it wishes to enshrine in its public places," Moredock said. The mayor planned to put the old plaques in the county museum. For now, they remain on the monument and the new ones sit in City Hall storage, waiting for the Legislature to act. "I am fully aware this is much tougher than I ever expected," Adams said. "But it's the right thing to do." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Jeffrey Collins | Feb. 06, 2015 ++]

Vet Advocates ► **HillVets Choices | 100 Most Influential**

HillVets on 4 Feb released its choices for the 100 most influential personalities on veterans issues, highlighting the lawmakers, business leaders, community organizers and advocates "giving back to those that have sacrificed so much for our nation." HillVets are bipartisan Veterans focused on empowerment of themselves and their fellow Veterans through networking, community activism, and education. The full list, available at <http://hillvets.org>, was compiled from outside nominations by a 13-member panel of veterans working on Capitol Hill. Officials from HillVets — whose stated goal is to increase the number of veterans working in government — said the intention was to draw attention to both the honorees and their work, in an effort to keep veterans issues at the forefront of national conversations. Organizers said they included both veterans and nonveterans, looking for individuals with a strong influence and impact on the broader veterans community. The list is broken down by fields of endeavor. Some of those included were:

- Lawmakers House Veterans' Affairs Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla.; House Armed Services Chairman John McCain, R-Ariz.; former Senate Veterans' Affairs Chairman Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and Iraq war veteran Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark.
- Marie Tillman, widow of Army Ranger Pat Tillman, is honored for founding the Tillman Foundation in the wake of his death.
- Bob Woodruff — injured by a roadside bomb while reporting in Iraq in 2006 — and his wife, Lee, were both recognized for their foundation's work with transitioning veterans.
- The list lauds Michelle Obama and Jill Biden for their work with the Joining Forces initiative, and singles out departing Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, the first enlisted veteran to serve in that post.

- Former Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki, acknowledging his resignation last May but also citing his efforts to end veterans homelessness and improve the veterans benefits process.
- Dr. Sam Foote for his whistleblower role in the VA's patient wait times scandal last year, which forced Shinseki's departure.
- Media members Daily Show host Jon Stewart, former Military Times congressional correspondent Rick Maze, and current Military Times congressional correspondent Leo Shane III.
- Lobbyists from prominent veterans advocacy groups — like Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion — and organizers in newer, innovative veterans organizations — like Team Red, White and Blue and Wounded Warrior Project — also received praise from the group.



Lee and Bob Woodruff are on HillVets' list of 100 most influential personalities on veterans issues.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Feb. 04, 2915 ++]

HealthCare Chaplaincy Network ► Vet Spiritual Needs Resource

HealthCare Chaplaincy Network (HCCN), a national nonprofit organization, introduced a national service on 3 FEB that provides spiritual and emotional support to veterans, active service members, and their families, including the opportunity for one-on-one conversations with professional chaplains via phone, email and video call. The nonprofit organization unveiled the service at an event commemorating “Four Chaplains Day” to honor four U.S. Army chaplains of differing faiths who gave up their lives to save others when the torpedoed U.S.A.T. Dorchester, with 920 soldiers aboard, sank on February 3, 1943, as well as all men and women who have served or are currently serving our country. It held the event at the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York.

Designed specifically for military and their families, HCCN’s <http://chaplaincareforveterans.org> features online information, resources, and supportive counseling to address painful feelings such as hopelessness, guilt, loneliness, anger and grief that can lead to spiritual distress. Central to this free and confidential service is Chat with a Chaplain, which allows individuals, regardless of religion or beliefs, to connect with a professionally-trained multi-faith chaplain 24/7 via the Internet, phone (844-CARE4VETS), or video call.

“We want these heroic Americans to know we are here for them,” said Rev. Eric J. Hall, HCCN’s president and CEO. “There is increasing recognition that both public and private sectors must pitch in to meet the needs of veterans, current service members, and their families. At the same time, changes in our overall health care system underscore the need to adjust how we deliver care for the body, mind and soul—for both military and civilians alike.”

Research indicates that strong spiritual connections can significantly and positively impact the mental health of military and their families to cope with the impact of war. A 2011 Pew survey reports that 44 percent of post-9/11 veterans are having difficulty adjusting to civilian life “Addressing the spiritual needs of the veteran and the family are essential to helping these individuals resume their lives with the peace and comfort that existed prior to their wartime experience,” said Richard E. Powers, M.D., a psychiatrist who served in the U.S. Army and has practiced in Veterans Administration hospitals for 30 years. “It takes a chaplain or other spiritual advisor to walk with that veteran as they resolve the spiritual conflicts that can be caused by the complex stressors of war.” HCCN’s new resource is part of the organization’s efforts to augment the practice of hospital-based chaplaincy, by offering technology-driven services that provide professional spiritual and emotional support to people in health care and residential settings. [Source: PRNewswire-USNewswire | Feb. 3, 2015 ++]

National Coast Guard Museum ► Moving Forward

The chairman of the National Coast Guard Museum Association has purchased the historic Union Station for \$3 million, a sale viewed as necessary for the proposed museum to move forward. At 5 p.m. on 26 JAN, James Coleman Jr. became the owner of New London's Union Station, purchasing it from owners Todd O'Donnell and Barbara Timken. Speaking by phone Coleman said he was "very, very impressed and amazed" at the 130-year legacy of the Henry Hobson Richardson-designed station, and that he understands the "strong importance" for New London to "keep the building as a train station." "I'm absolutely committed to seeing that happen," he said. "The museum association led by Coleman is raising funds to build a National Coast Guard Museum downtown. Union Station is adjacent to the museum's planned waterfront site. The state has committed \$20 million to the project for design, engineering and the construction of a pedestrian bridge to connect Water Street to the museum. "What we're able to do now is let the architect loose to design the pedestrian bridge," Coleman said, adding that his group "couldn't start any of the architecture or planning" without settling the ownership of the station.





It will be years before the museum is open, Coleman said. The Coast Guard is the only branch of the armed services that does not have a national museum to celebrate its role in the life of our nation and to honor the men and women who serve. Since its inception in 1790, the Coast Guard has established a proud and illustrious history which deserves recognition from the public. Permanent and revolving multi-media exhibits will tell compelling stories of its past, present and future as they evoke the Coast Guard’s critical role and mission in maritime security, safety, protection of natural resources, and national defense. As a dynamic institution charged with these roles, the Museum will engage the public, veterans and present Coastguardsmen in the dreams and goals for the future.

Interactive and innovative exhibits and displays will include realistic virtual environments in which the museum visitor participates in the action. The participatory nature of the activities and exhibits will encourage families and individuals to make multiple visits. The very nature of the Coast Guard’s missions lend themselves to spectacular exhibits in a dynamic architectural space: simulation of helicopter rescues in force 10 storms saving lives at sea; rescue boats tossing and swaying in tumultuous seas; a ship’s bridge on the “prow” of the building simulating a Captain’s role; the building and the sheer red atrium wall evoke the tall hull of a ship thrusting out to the water. For further info on the proposed museum refer to the The National CG Museum Association website <http://coastguardmuseum.org>. [Source: The Day | Julia Bergman | Feb 02, 2015 ++]

Unsung Heroes ► African-Americans | Executive Order 9981

“It is hereby declared to be the policy of the president that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.” – Executive Order 9981

Most people don’t know about the executive order issued by President Harry S. Truman on July 26, 1948, desegregating the armed forces. Prior to this, all military services were segregated and most African-

Americans were not eligible for combat duty. When black men volunteered or were drafted after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, they were relegated to segregated divisions and combat support roles, such as cook, quartermaster and grave-digging duty. The military was as segregated as the Deep South, all because of skin color.

Black men fought with little recognition in all of America's conflicts. The stories that follow describe those of local World War II African-Americans interviewed for the Veterans History Project of the American Folklife Center. According to the center's website, the project "collects, preserves and makes accessible the personal accounts of American war veterans so that future generations may hear directly from veterans and better understand the realities of war." During our conversations, the black soldiers' feelings of humiliation sometimes exploded with great anger, even after a period of more than 50 years. I speak of the disgrace of segregation in the armed forces. Here are their stories:



- ❖ **Harold Robinson**, now deceased, recalled that he and 4,500 African-Americans assigned to the Quartermaster Corps in the European Theater answered Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's call to replace white troops shortly after the Battle of the Bulge. But they soon found that volunteering meant a reduction in rank. "Blacks could serve with whites only at the lowest ranks of private and private first class," Robinson said. For the remainder of the war, their division was in the forefront of the action. But when the war was over, they were required to return to their quartermaster units, as opposed to returning home with the infantry divisions with whom they had fought. "We'd fought hard and many of our buddies died. They'd used us for cannon fodder, and now we were to be tossed away like an old pair of shoes," he said angrily. Fifty-five years later, Robinson finally received five World War II medals earned for his service in the infantry division. He cherished the Combat Infantry Badge he received upon his discharge in 1945, saying, "The rest you can have; that's the only one that means anything to me."
- ❖ **James Madison Parker** was drafted into the U.S. Navy in 1943 at the age of 18. He commented, "Segregation was the order of the day, and at that time blacks were typically utilized as stewards, to

wait on the naval officers. They tried to scam us by saying if we took our basic training in Bainbridge, Md., it would be closer to home, as opposed to the Great Lakes training base in Illinois. But we knew what they were trying to do and chose Great Lakes. We might have been young, but we weren't dumb!" The training in Illinois prepared the men for construction jobs, while later assignments taught them plumbing and welding. Parker was discharged in 1950, and joined the Naval Reserve, but he was called back just seven months later with the start of the Korean War. The mantle of segregation reared its ugly head in Honolulu, Hawaii, as he sailed home from his tour of duty in China. "Our ship was docked but caught fire, forcing us to remain until repairs were complete so we could continue under our own steam. That town was more segregated than anyplace in the United States," Parker said, shaking his head as he recalled the hurtful incidents of his two-week stay there. "I'd rather be deep in Mississippi than in Hawaii. At least I knew what to expect in the South. This was such a surprise!"

- ❖ **Andrew Burnette Sr.**, now deceased, was aware of the restrictions placed on blacks attempting to join the Navy as seamen in Buffalo. He learned that Northern cities forced blacks into the steward's branch as cooks and waiters, while the Navy considered Southern blacks "more docile" and permitted them to serve as seamen. So he traveled from Buffalo to Memphis, Tenn., where he was sworn in. After basic training and sea duty, he was stationed at the Navy Mine Depot in Yorktown, Va. Burnette served with distinction during World War II in the Pacific Theater and as a petty officer assisted in detecting and detonating enemy sea mines. He was discharged in 1945 and settled in Detroit, Mich. Desiring to follow in the footsteps of his older brother, in 1946, Luther Burnette attempted to enlist at the Buffalo naval recruiting office. Unaware of the maneuvers taken by his brother, Luther ran headlong into the racial restrictions still in existence. Undaunted, he sought the assistance of an influential minister, the Rev. Elijah Echols Sr. Together they approached the recruiter, but without success. Echols asked that Luther at least be permitted to take the physical, and the recruiter replied, "OK, but he won't pass it." True to his word, Luther failed the exam based on flat feet. However, he then enlisted in the U.S. Army and completed infantry basic training without experiencing any difficulties.

Many veterans felt the military failed to take advantage of their abilities, and all too often, this was true. It was representative of the times when African-Americans were thought to be incapable of higher-level thinking and performance, a problem we still confront today in many situations.

- ❖ **Albert Bell**, now deceased, could certainly speak to that issue. Inducted in 1942, he was trained at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, as a combat engineer. But after six months in a field artillery battalion learning to fire the 155 mm howitzer, his unit was pulled out and sent to New Orleans, where the men were assigned to a port battalion, loading and unloading cargo from ships. Six months later, his unit was transferred to Staten Island, where the men loaded vessels heading for combat zones in the European Theater of war. His unit was segregated, and the discrimination off base was all encompassing. Bell served overseas from 1944-46 in England and France, arriving at the Normandy beachhead on D-Day. He loaded trucks of the Red Ball Express, as black drivers risked life and limb transporting supplies to the front lines. Trained as combat engineers, the talents of these men were wasted loading cargo.

Wishing to interview a friend, News reporter Georgia Burnette sought his experiences in the military, but he refused to talk about them because he felt that as a cook, his service was not worthy of repeating. He was ashamed of his assignment in the kitchens rather than combat duty. However, the valuable contributions of the cooks were recognized by David Barnes, a Korean War veteran, in his recollections of duty on the Korean mainland.

- ❖ “While in the combat zone, we lived in tents or bunkers where a hot meal was an absolute rarity; C-rations were usually on the menu. We bathed in our helmets, if we bathed at all, and toothpaste was a luxury. Barnes recalls that had it not been for food coming up “from the rear,” we’d have been forced to partake of the local “delicacies,” dried squid and other fish little known to the troops. He laughed, saying, “If you breathed on anyone after eating those foods, they’d go down with the fumes!” Barnes looked forward to the time he’d be relieved of front-line duty and rotated to “rations breakdown,” where meals were brought from the main prep area to the companies, then broken down to the smaller units of combat. He spoke fondly of “Stewart the Stove Man,” who repaired all of the stoves in the tents. “We relied on this guy to keep us from freezing to death and the cook stoves operational.”

History is written by those who tell the story. Until recently, the history of the African-American population in Buffalo has been selectively recorded, except for those who made notable contributions or performed extraordinary deeds. The narratives of our military men comprise a large part of that history and should be captured as quickly as possible, especially as our veterans’ age, said Fern Beavers, minority veterans program coordinator at VA Western New York Healthcare System, who has been involved with her own research as well as the Veterans History Project for many years. According to statistics released by Veterans Affairs, approximately 550 World War II veterans die every day. As we celebrate Black History Month, we should also celebrate the desegregation of our armed forces, a major civil rights victory for African-Americans. [Source: The Buffalo News | Georgia Burnette | Feb 01, 2015 ++]

Crisis Hotline ► **What it Offers to Vets**

The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text. (Users need not identify themselves). Veterans and their loved ones can call **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1**, chat online at <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/ChatTermsOfService.aspx?account=Veterans Chat>, or send a text message to **838255** to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Support for deaf and hard of hearing individuals is available.

People experience emotional and mental health crises in response to a wide range of situations—from difficulties in their personal relationships to the loss of a job. For Veterans, these crises can be heightened by their experiences during military service. When emotional issues reach a crisis point, it’s time to call on the Veterans Crisis Line for support. Sometimes a crisis may involve thoughts of suicide. Learn to recognize these warning signs:

- Hopelessness, feeling like there’s no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling like there is no reason to live
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug abuse
- Withdrawing from family and friends

Many Veterans may not show any signs of intent to harm themselves before doing so, but some actions can be a sign that a Veteran needs help. Those in crisis may show behaviors that indicate a risk of harming themselves. Crisis, stress, depression, and other issues affect people in different ways. Maybe you’re having

trouble sleeping or feel out of control. Maybe your energy level is down or you feel anxious all the time. If these issues and others seem to be leading to a crisis, treatment can help. The Crisis Hotline website <https://www.vetselfcheck.org/Welcome.cfm> offers a confidential, anonymous risk assessment to see how you might benefit from VA or community-based services. The assessment is done in 3 easy steps

- 1) Fill out a brief online Self-Check Quiz, which takes about 10 minutes.
- 2) A VA Chat Counselor will review it and leave a personal response for you on this secure website, usually within 10-15 minutes. If the volume is especially high, it may take up to 30 minutes. The Counselor's response will offer options for follow-up if it's felt that could be helpful.
- 3) You decide what's next. You may enter the online Veterans Chat and continue talking with a Counselor without identifying yourself. You may want to get a referral to see someone in person. Or, you can decide to do nothing further at this time. It's all up to you. No follow-up services will be provided unless you request them.

When the recent Oscar nominations were announced, "Crisis Hotline: Veterans Press 1" received In the Documentary short category a nomination. The 40 minute film was produced by HBO Films and shown on HBO on Veterans Day 2013. You can see more about it at: <http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/crisis-hotline-veterans-press-1/#/>. [Source: <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net> Jan. 2014 ++]

OBIT | Alex Vraciu | WWII ► 29 Jan 2015

Alex Vraciu, one of the most acclaimed World War II Navy fighter pilots, died January 29, 2015 at the age of 96. Born Alexander Vraciu in East Chicago, Ind., the youngest of two children to Romanian immigrants. After graduating from DePauw University in 1941, he joined the Navy where he earned his wings. He flew Hellcats in the Pacific and was a terror for the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service. Vraciu spent five months as a wingman to Medal of Honor recipient Ed "Butch" O'Hare. Vraciu's greatest mission came June 19, 1944 in what became known as the "Marianas Turkey Shoot". Vraciu engaged an attacking Japanese air squadron 25 miles west of the USS Lexington and shot down 6 Japanese dive bombers in just eight minutes with only 360 rounds of ammunition. Alex Vraciu ended World War II as the Navy's fourth-ranking flying ace with 19 enemy aircraft shot down in flight and 21 destroyed on the ground.



Alex Vraciu

Despite arguments from historians and politicians, Vraciu was twice denied the Medal of Honor. He was nominated by his commanding officer for the Medal of Honor during the war, but an admiral denied it. He was awarded the Navy Cross. Vraciu was a career Navy man, retiring in 1964 with the rank of commander.

He and his family moved to Danville, California where he worked with Wells Fargo Bank. His life and career were chronicled in "Fighter Pilot: The World War II Career of Alex Vraciu" by Ray Boomhower in 2010. Boomhower on his interviews with Vraciu: "Throughout our talks he was straightforward, never embellishing what had happened to him, and always giving credit to those who had trained him, including his mentor, Medal of Honor recipient Butch O'Hare, who died during the war." "Alex led a remarkable life and he should go down in history as a great Hoosier and a true American hero," added Boomhower.

Alex Vraciu is preceded in death by his wife Kathryn and survived by five children, Carol Teague of Davis, CA, Robert Vraciu of Brentwood, TN, Linda Patton of Quincy, CA, Marilyn Finley of Sonora, CA, and Marc Vraciu of Santa Barbara, CA. At the time of his death, Alex had 11 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren. He is buried at Oakmont Memorial Park in Lafayette, CA. [Source: The Indianapolis Star | Dawn Mitchell | Feb. 09, 2015 ++]

OBIT | Joe Langdell | WWII ► 11 Feb 2015

Joe Langdell was known for the World War II stories he could tell. He was well qualified, having watched from shore as his ship, the USS Arizona, sank during the Dec. 7, 1941, surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The 100-year-old Langdell — the Yuba-Sutter, Calif., area's last Pearl Harbor survivor and a fixture in Marysville's annual Veterans Day parade — died 11 FEB, family members confirmed. He had an outgoing personality as well as an affinity recounting the historic attack and had been living in Yuba City, Calif. "He talked to anybody about it," said John Langdell of Spearfish, S.D., one of his two sons. "He relished being the center of attention. That was part of his makeup." Son Ted Langdell, who lives in Marysville, said his dad kept high spirits at The Fountains care facility. "I guess you might say he was creating an endearing character over there," he said, adding a bit of mischief was likely involved.

Joe Langdell's death came almost four months after his 100th birthday. Ted Langdell was there holding his hand when he passed away. Riding in a wheelchair, Joe Langdell took part in November's annual Veterans Day Parade in downtown Marysville. His presence in the parade became a focal point for the yearly event. John Langdell said his father's remains will be interred at the site of the USS Arizona, the ship on which he served, next Dec. 7. A local public memorial service will likely be held in April, he said. Don Schrader, a local veterans advocate and a board member of the Museum of Forgotten Warriors in Yuba County, noted Langdell visited the museum from time to time. "He went to the parades and always wore his uniform," Schrader said. "It's the passing of an era. It is unfortunate, but we are losing those guys." Schrader also noted that Langdell seemed to take pleasure in letting people know about his wartime experiences. "I think he enjoyed it greatly, and I think he was very proud of it," Schrader said. "And he should have been."



Nov. 11, 2012, Col. Kevin Cavanagh greets retired Lt. Cmdr. Joe Langdell during the annual Yuba-Sutter Veterans Day Parade in downtown Marysville, Calif

Langdell's passing leaves the Yuba-Sutter area with no surviving members of the Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Fellow survivor Art Rodda, who lived in Sutter, died in 2013. "It certainly was the focal point of his service in the Navy and the attack on Pearl Harbor was the center of his life," John Langdell said of his father. "He took pride in it." The Appeal-Democrat has recounted Joe Langdell's story multiple times during the past several decades. As told to the A-D in 2009, he was 28 years old and asleep on Ford Island when the attack happened and watched helplessly from shore as the Arizona sank and 1,177 sailors assigned to it were lost. Retiring as a lieutenant commander, Joe Langdell was thought to be the last surviving officer assigned at that time to the Arizona. He was recently one of only seven survivors from the ship, John Langdell said.

Joe Langdell told the Appeal-Democrat in 2009 that he likely would have been killed if he had been on board the Arizona when it was attacked. "Saw it sink? Hell, yes," he said in 2009. "I was right there on shore, as close as you could get while keeping out of the bomb range." Langdell helped other men wade to shore and get to the hospital, according to the A-D account. He said he was later asked to go with 15 other men who had sheets and pillowcases to gather all the bodies above the waterline. "You'll always remember it," Joe Langdell said at the time. "It's a milestone in your life — one of the most important battles in the world, in world history, and I've got my medals to tell about it." Born Oct. 12, 1914, in Wilton, N.H., Joe Langdell was employed as a salesman after the war and, with his wife, sought out the warmer California climate — first in the Bay Area and later in the Yuba-Sutter area. He was a former owner of the Village Mart store in Yuba County. Arrangements are pending at Ullrey Memorial Chapel in Yuba City. [Source: Appeal-Democrat | Eric Vodden | Feb. 07, 2015 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 10 Feb 2015

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**". Note that this schedule has **been expanded to include** dates for retiree\ veterans related events such as town hall meetings, resource fairs, stand downs, etc. 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 list of Retiree Appreciation Days can always be accessed online at

- HTML: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html
- PDF: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf
- Word: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | Feb 10, 2014 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► Feb 15 thru Mar 15 2015

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date in the below list. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown below for the next 4 weeks. For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. visit the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's website at <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events>.

Bellevue, NE - Omaha Hiring Fair

February 18 - 10:00 am to 1:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Washington, DC - **American Legion Winter Convention Hiring Fair**

February 20 - 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Dallas, TX - Dallas Hiring Fair

February 24 – 08:30 am to 1:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Camp Pendleton, CA - Camp Pendleton Military Spouse Networking Reception

February 25 – 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

San Diego, CA - Camp Pendleton Military Spouse Hiring Fair

February 26 – 10:00 am to 1:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Recovering Warrior & Caregiver Virtual Job Fair

March 3 - 11:00 am to 3:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Washington, DC - Washington, DC Recovering Warrior & Caregiver Flexible Work Conference

March 4 - 10:00 am to 1:30 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Latham, NY - Latham Hiring Fair

March 5 - 10:00 am to 1:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Houston, TX - Houston Hiring Expo with Houston Rockets

March 6 – 9:30 am to 3:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Manchester, NH - Manchester Hiring Fair

March 10 - 10:00 am to 1:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Louisville, KY - Louisville Hiring Fair

March 11 – 8:30 am to 1:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Ft. Benning, GA - Fort Benning Transition Summit

March 11 to March 12 [Details](#) [Register](#)

Colorado Springs, CO - Colorado Springs Military Spouse Networking Reception

March 11 – 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Salem, OR - Salem Hiring Fair

March 11 - 10:00 am to 1:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Fort Carson, CO - Colorado Springs Military Spouse Hiring Fair

March 12 – 10:00 am to 1:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Assn 10 Feb 2015 ++]

WWII Vets 80 ► Joseph Pcoroba

Joseph "Bob" Pcoroba is 95 years old and still drives at night. He cooks, shops and is quick with a one-liner. His memory is razor-sharp, especially about the stuff that happened Over There. The longtime Brick New Jersey resident can tell you about the time he went blind for two days because of a plant, about the champagne he found hidden in abandoned French homes, about the shell that thankfully didn't detonate when it landed a few feet away during a brutal bombardment. Pcoroba also recalls the scene at Bitche, the town in northeastern France that he helped liberate in 1944. As a sergeant directing a five-man gun crew in the woods, Pcoroba saved an entire platoon that was surrounded by Germans. That earned him a Bronze Star, the highest of nine medals he's preserved in a framed case. "It was a terrible fight we had," he said. "We fired for four hours."



Bronze Star recipient Sgt. Joseph 'Bob' Pcoroba is being honored by the French government

The French government remembers it too. On 7 NOV it bestowed the Chevalier of the Legion of Honor to Pcoroba and 26 others during a ceremony in New York City. In other words, great-grandpa got knighted. "Not to sound corny but they really were the greatest generation," said Jane Patterson, Bob's daughter. "They went through everything." There aren't many left to tell the tale. And the tale is so worth hearing.

Pcoroba grew up in Newark, graduated from Good Counsel High School in 1938 and enlisted in the "Essex Troop" cavalry regiment at the war's onset. "I joined because I loved to ride horses," he said. "My uncle was a horse trainer." He wasn't with horses for long. The regiment mechanized before shipping out in the fall of 1942 (it was reorganized in 1943, and Pcoroba ended up in the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron). Pcoroba served in North Africa, where he was a security guard for Dwight Eisenhower — "very nice guy, down to earth," he said — before fighting in Italy and France. In Italy he came down with malaria. "Terrible thing, such a high fever," he said. A medic offered some pills and a warning: "These are good for two or three weeks, then you'll come down with malaria again. But at least you can do this mission you're going on." The mission was the allied invasion of southern France in August of 1944. Pcoroba's biggest problem upon landing was not enemy fire; it was an allergy to the countryside's plants. "I went completely

blind. Couldn't see my hand in front of my face," he said. "Two guys led me around for two days." His sight returned after the squadron left the area, but the incident was a foreshadowing.

On Dec. 31, 1944, Pocaroba was leading a rear guard in Bitché when another officer radioed requesting help. Here is what Major General Edward Brooks wrote in his Bronze Star citation: *"Sgt. Pocaroba, in charge of a gun crew, directed fire continuously for over four hours. Disregarding the intense counterbattery fire and his own personal fatigue, he continued to direct accurate supporting fire. A platoon of one troop was surrounded and called for supporting fire. Though having a clearance of only 50 yards between the friendly and enemy forces, the crew fired effectively and forced the enemy to withdraw far enough to allow the platoon to escape."* Taking coordinates over the radio, Pocaroba never saw where he was firing. But his intuition and skill with a Howitzer proved true. Three months later, when the general awarded him the Bronze Star he had a question. "I said, 'What about the five guys who were with me?'" Pocaroba said. "(The general) said, 'Hey, they took commands from you.'"

Pocaroba came home in August 1945. He married sweetheart Doris that November, and they stayed together until her death in 2002. "She took care of the prayers while I was over there," he said. "She said a lot of novenas." The other thing that got him through it? Pure patriotism. "When I saw the American flag I would always think of home and I was so proud of it," he said. "You get a feeling when you're overseas that long and you see the flag." Adjusting to civilian life was hard. For years, he got anxious when planes flew overhead. The sound of cars backfiring made him jumpy. Like many men of that era, he said little about the horrors of war. "He's amazing," his daughter Jane said. "He's never even raised his voice to anyone."

The French government has made it a practice in recent years to recognize still-living Americans who helped liberate the country. It took Pocaroba three years to accept the invitation. "My grandkids were on me to get it," he said. "I said, 'OK if that's what you want, but I'm no hero.' A lot of guys probably did a lot more than I did." Such humility is why Rosemary Sparandera, a neighbor in his Greenbriar II adult over-55 community, reached out to the Asbury Park Press about his impending award. "I thought we had to have his story told to more people than the people in this community," she said, "because I look at this man as a hero even though he doesn't look at himself that way." The letter from the French consulat general echoes that view. It's no coincidence that the Legion of Honor ceremony takes place just before Veterans Day, which is Tuesday. "This prestigious distinction underlines the deep appreciation and gratitude of the French government for your contribution to the liberation of our country during World War II," Bertrand Lortholary wrote. "We will never forget the commitment of the American heroes to whom France owes so much." [Source: Asbury Park (N.J.) Press | Jerry Carino | November 06, 2014 ++]

Vietnam Vets [12] ► John Rey

Fifty years ago this month, John Rey was counting down the days until his four-year U.S. Marines stint ended. "I had a job as an electrician waiting for me in New York," said Rey, now 72 and living in Norwalk. Then came Feb. 7, 1965, Rey said. That morning, a 300-member Viet Cong raiding party surprised Camp Holloway, an American helicopter base near Pleiku. Their five-minute attack killed nine American military advisers, wounded 128 and destroyed or damaged 25 aircraft. That night, President Lyndon B. Johnson told his advisers "I've had enough of this," and launched Operation Flaming Dart I -- a bombing attack on North Vietnam. The next day, Rey, a Marine corporal assigned to Battery A of the 1st Light Anti-Aircraft Missile Battalion, was sent to Da Nang. He was among the first 100 combat Marines dispatched to Vietnam. Their task: To protect the airfield.



John Rey holds the unit flag from Alpha Battery 1st Light Anti-aircraft Missile Battalion, the first combat group to land in Vietnam, at his home in Norwalk, Conn. on Wednesday, February 4, 2015.

One month later, on 8 MAR, 3,500 more combat troops were sent. Those deployments marked the beginning of a time that changed America. "The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 gave the president a blank check to stand up against communism," said Gary Rose, Sacred Heart University's professor and chair of its government and politics department. By 1968, American ground forces numbered 536,100. Rose's brother, Arthur, a Marine lieutenant, was among them. "I know he saw a lot of combat but he never talked about it," said the professor. And, for the first time, Americans saw the death and destruction of war broadcast into their homes on the nightly news.

The costs, not only in American troops -- 58,156 died another 303,704 were wounded -- but in equipment drained money from Johnson's War on Poverty. "He only reduced poverty by a half," Rose said. "If not for the war, he could have reduced it two-thirds or even three-fourths. It took money away from his education plans." America exploded. Riots burned inner cities. Peace demonstrations shut down campuses. Dodgers and deserters impaired the draft. The deceit fostered by three administrations detailed in the Pentagon Papers left Americans forever skeptical of politicians. "The war was something all these diverse groups rallied around," said Yohuru Williams, a Fairfield University history professor. "It derailed the Great Society. If not for the quagmire this created, Johnson could have been one of the country's great presidents." Facing a contentious battle for re-nomination in 1968, Johnson slinked into retirement. "The war did him in," said Ronald Heiferman, Quinnipiac University's Asian studies director.

But in 1965, that was years into the future. Rey was one of the last of his battalion to arrive in Da Nang. He had been ordered by his First Sergeant, Cecil A. Bazzell, to make sure any stragglers returning from liberty were on flights. In an recent interview at the home he shares with his wife of 49 years, Rosemarie Piscitelli, formerly of the Devon section of Milford, Rey said that he thought he would be killed. "I'm not going home like I expected," Rey said. "There were only 100 of us. But I decided, if I'm going to die, I'm dying protecting my fellow Marines." So when he was offered a ride in the back of a troop carrier to his battalion's post, Rey refused. "No way," he said. "I'm riding atop the canvas." "Why?" "If the Viet Cong attack, they're going to shoot the cab and spray the back. They're not going to know I'm on top. I could jump off and return fire, that's my thinking," he explained. "If I'm going to die, I'm going to take some of them with me."

Only two days earlier, Rey's battalion had unwittingly won the right to be sent to Vietnam. That was their reward for defeating an Army battery in a drone shoot-down off Okinawa. The exercise simulated an incoming attack by Russian MIGs -- the North Vietnamese fighter planes. "A MIG could take down a whole battalion; our job was to keep them away," Rey said. "Our guys fired five HAWK (surface-to-air) missiles at the drones and destroyed all five," Rey said. "The Army only got three." Rey's group won liberty passes and a ticket to Da Nang. Rey said no MIG ever penetrated the Da Nang base while he was there. But the Viet Cong did -- on two occasions.

- The first time was on Easter Sunday, 1965. Rey believes Viet Cong infiltrated a South Vietnamese Army unit, placed a satchel charge near a pile of bombs and detonated napalm. "I was sleeping about 300 yards away, and all of a sudden I'm being showered with shrapnel -- 500-pound bombs are going off," he recalled. Rey escaped uninjured. But that incident bolstered his inclination to be leery of any Vietnamese. "We heard ... that a guy had bought a bottle of soda from a Vietnamese selling it on the base," Rey said. "He takes a swig and starts gagging -- it was filled with shards of glass."
- Next came the July 1 attack. At 1 a.m. the Viet Cong began shelling the base with mortar fire. "I had just completed three hours of patrol and was trying to catch some shut-eye," Rey said. "I started hearing explosions and figured our tanks were firing into the jungle. Then my tent flaps open and Staff Sgt. Harold Walker is there telling me its incoming fire. I grab my rifle, my cartridge belt, grenades and run to my fighting hole." A Viet Cong suicide squad penetrated the base, attacked and fled, he said. The incident was recorded in that's day's San Bernardino (Calif.) Daily Sun. The paper reported an American was killed, five were injured, three planes were destroyed and three others damaged. The damage could have been worse. Rey said that earlier, his unit had moved the HAWK missiles and launchers farther back. As a result, the enemy mortar fire fell short.

"Vietnam was tough," he said. "The food was horrible -- just eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich was like being in heaven." Temperatures hit 115 degrees in the day and cooled only to 98 at night, he said. Monsoons would come and flood large areas, bringing mosquitoes and rats. Going to the bathroom meant risking your life. Viet Cong snipers monitored those sites. "So you regulate yourself to go at night," Rey said. "And you kept your gun close." As the battalion's administration chief, Rey spent much of the day in an office, compiling daily reports, picking patrols and assigning machine-gun bunker posts. His nights were spent on patrol -- three hours on, three hours off. "The gunnery sergeant would come around at night, telling us to fix bayonets, feeding us intelligence about how badly outnumbered we were," Rey said. "But there were only two major attacks while I was there. Surviving war is all about luck. You could be in a trench when a mortar hits. You live, but your buddy next to you dies."

He believes American politicians lost the war by employing a defensive strategy. "We could have won, but the politicians were afraid. So a lot of good guys got killed," said Rey, who has dozens of photographs of himself and his men in Vietnam as well as the faded, tattered battalion flag. Rey, who still runs J& R Rey Electric in the Bronx, N.Y., not only survived Vietnam, but also four months of chemotherapy in battling mesothelioma. He suspects working around asbestos as an electrician caused it. It cost him a lung. "That was tough," he said of his battle with cancer. "My heart goes out to anyone who ever had to go through that. I'd rather be back in Vietnam." [Source: Connecticut Post | Michael P. Mayko | Feb. 08, 2015 +]

America's Most Beloved Vets ► Vietnam War (1)



Bruce Crandall



Carlos Hathcock



Colin Powell



Dale Dye

- The Medal of Honor recipient Bruce Crandall flew 900 combat missions, including 22 in a single day to bring supplies and evacuate the wounded at Ia Drang.
- With 93 confirmed kills, the self-taught sniper Carlos Hathcock – known by the Viet Cong for a white feather he wore in his cap – became a Marine Corps legend.
- The four-star general Colin Powell served two tours in Vietnam, oversaw the invasion of Panama and Operation Desert Storm as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and was the first black secretary of state.
- The retired Marine Corps captain Dale Dye is an author, actor and military adviser in Hollywood.

Vet State Benefits & Discounts ► Indiana 2015

The state of Indiana 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 – IN** 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 following refer to <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/indiana.html> and <http://www.in.gov/dva>.

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits> Feb. 2015 ++]

* Vet Legislation *



VA In Vitro Fertilization Update 04 ► S.469 Introduced

Legislation has been reintroduced in Congress to expand fertility services for severely injured troops and female veterans, to include advanced reproductive health treatments and adoption services for those who can't have children biologically. Hoping the third time's a charm, sponsor Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) reintroduced the Women Veterans and Other Health Care Improvement Act of 2015 on Wednesday, after unveiling similar bills in 2012 and 2013. Citing the case of retired Army Staff Sgt. Matt Keil, who was paralyzed by a sniper's bullet in 2007 and needed advanced services to have children with his wife, Tracy, Murray said the Defense and Veterans Affairs department policies are outdated and often require troops pay out of pocket to start a family. Murray said, "The policies make it harder, not easier, for seriously injured veterans to have children. When severely injured service men and women and veterans seek reproductive health services ... their military and VA health insurance simply doesn't cover the often-expensive procedures".



Senator Patty Murray

Her bill would expand fertility services offered to injured troops, including those with fertility issues related to traumatic brain injury, by the Defense Department and through Tricare and would lift the ban on in vitro fertilization at VA medical centers. Under the legislation, spouses or surrogates of these troops and veterans also would be eligible for services. Murray's previous attempts to ferry similar bills through Congress failed, although in 2013, Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, said he was receptive to its provisions but objected to Murray's plan to cover its \$568 million cost using funds designated for combat operations. VA today offers diagnostic services and treatment for some conditions but by law cannot offer IVF. Tricare covers diagnoses of illnesses that can cause infertility and correction of any medical issues that might be the source of the problem but also does not cover IVF or artificial insemination.

Service members can access those procedures at cost, if they meet criteria, at seven military treatment facilities that offer the specialty care. The military also covers additional services such as sperm extraction, preservation of embryos, IVF, artificial insemination and other fertility services at no charge for severely wounded personnel and their spouses as long as the member is on active duty. Murray said roughly 2,300 veterans, their spouses or surrogates would be eligible for expanded fertility services under the bill. If approved, the legislation would:

- Repeal a ban at VA to provide IVF and expand advanced fertility treatments at DoD.
- Makes family members or surrogates of severely wounded veterans eligible for fertility treatment and comprehensive care.
- Cover adoption assistance for severely injured service members who want to adopt.
- Make permanent a VA pilot program that helps pay for child care for veterans.

In a 11 FEB speech in the Senate, Murray expressed hope that the legislation would be welcomed in the House and make its way into law. "It's a bill that recognizes the men and women who are harmed in the service of this country have bright, full lives ahead of them," she said. A source with knowledge of the bill's development said the House Veterans' Affairs Committee plans to discuss IVF on 13 FEB at a roundtable meeting — an indication, the source said, that House members may be receptive to considering either Murray's bill or a version proposed by one of their members. VA officials in 2013 said they supported the legislation but objected to the inclusion of surrogates in the bill. They said the surrogacy provision would be "extremely difficult to implement" because of the "complex legal, medical and policy arrangements of surrogacy" of each state. [Source: ArmyTimes | Patricia Kime | Feb. 11, 2015 ++]

Wyoming Veteran Homes Update 03 ► SNF Initial Approval Given

A proposal to build a skilled-nursing center for Wyoming veterans received initial approval 9 FEB in the Wyoming House of Representatives. Supporters of the facility say it would modernize long-term care options for veterans. "This is what the VA wants to build," said Rep. Rosie Berger, R-Big Horn. "Our current facility is just assisted living. We don't have a facility there for long-term skilled nursing care." Opponents say the bill would conflict with an ongoing effort to revamp the state's safety-net health care facilities. House Bill 216 provides \$3 million for the \$9 million project. Berger said the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs would cover the remaining 65 percent of construction costs. The new facility would be based on the Greenhouse Model. A new model for skilled-nursing care, Greenhouse communities provide care in small groups and avoid traditional retirement home configurations.

Rep. Lloyd Larsen, R-Lander, said the proposal would undermine plans to consolidate the state's safety-net facilities. Recommendations to build a Greenhouse skilled nursing center at the Wyoming Veteran's Home in Buffalo already exist. The Wyoming Department of Health's facilities task force compiled a report earlier this year that came to the same conclusion. It spent more than a year and \$500,000 to develop renovation plans. "Our recommendation is to put this skilled-nursing facility at the existing facility," Larsen said. "We have already started putting money aside for that, and we're moving forward with that idea." Larsen said the plan calls for a \$38 million renovation of the Veterans' Home facility. Rep. Steve Harshman, R-Casper, told legislators to consider the task force's recommendations before voting for the proposal. "None of us argue with the idea, but where and how this gets paid for needs to be discussed on the bigger picture," Harshman said. Lawmakers voted to advance the proposal during the first of three floor debates on the issue. [Source: Casper Star-Tribune | Trevor Graff | Feb. 09, 2015 ++]



VA Medical Marijuana Update 10 ► Veterans Equal Access Act

A bipartisan bill introduced in the House of Representatives 3 FEB would allow VA doctors to recommend medical marijuana to military veterans in states where it is legal. The Veterans Equal Access Act would allow VA doctors to recommend or offer opinions about medical marijuana for veterans suffering from serious injuries or chronic conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder. VA doctors are currently prohibited from aiding patients seeking medical use of marijuana. "Post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury can be more damaging and harmful than injuries that are visible from the outside," said Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), a co-sponsor of the bill. "And they can have a devastating effect on a veteran's family. We should be allowing these wounded veterans access to the medicine that will help them survive and thrive, including medical marijuana -- not treating them like criminals and forcing them into the shadows. It's shameful."



A flower nearly ready for harvest sits atop a mature marijuana plant at the Pioneer Production and Processing marijuana growing facility in Arlington WA. Washington's second-in-the-nation legal marijuana market opened last summer

Nearly 30 percent of veterans who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars suffer from PTSD and depression, according to a 2012 VA report. Some research has suggested marijuana may help PTSD symptoms, which can include anxiety, flashbacks and depression. A recent study found that PTSD symptoms in patients who smoked cannabis were reduced an average of 75 percent. Other co-sponsors of the bill include Reps. Sam Farr (D-CA), Jared Polis (D-CO), Dina Titus (D-NV), Justin Amash (R-MI), Richard Hanna (R-NY), Walter Jones (R-NC), Tom Reed (R-NY), and Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA). Currently, 23 states allow the medical use of marijuana. Ten of those states, as well as Guam, allow doctors to recommend medical marijuana for PTSD-related symptoms. The plant remains illegal under federal law for all uses. "The men and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have made tremendous sacrifices for our country," said Dan Riffle, director of federal policies for Marijuana Policy Project. "They deserve every option available to treat their wounds, both visible and hidden." [Source: Huff Post | Matt Ferner | Feb. 03, 2015 ++]

Health Care Reform Update 61 ► Veto Threat

White House veto threats, which come in the form of "Statements of Administration Policy" sent to reporters by the Office of Management and Budget, usually adhere to a standard format. "If the president were presented with this legislation, his senior advisers would recommend that he veto this bill," goes the language

used for years, most recently with respect to House-passed bills to restrict abortion, build the Keystone XL pipeline, and delay Homeland Security Department funding in protest of President Obama’s executive orders on immigration. Such a construction has two effects: It confirms that the final decision resides with the president himself, and it keeps the chief executive’s options open until the bill actually arrives on his desk.



President Obama says, again, he will veto legislation aimed at repealing the Affordable Care Act.

But in the run-up to the 3 FEB House vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act (its 56th such vote), the Obama team’s veto warning deployed slightly blunter verbiage: “If the president were presented with H.R. 596, he would veto it.” OMB did not respond to Government Executive inquiries as to whether there is a strategy in the subtle change. But on Tuesday, when the White House issued its statement against the Unfunded Mandates Information and Transparency Act of 2015, which the House voted on 4 FEB, it went back to the familiar, more tentative, wording. [Source: GovExec.com | Charles S. Clark | Feb. 04, 2015 ++]

Vet Bills Submitted to 114th Congress ► 150201 to 150214

For a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 114th 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 <https://beta.congress.gov> you can review a copy of each bill’s content, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor or cosponsor of it by entering the bill number in the site’s search engine. To determine what bills, amendments your representative/senator has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on go to:

- <https://beta.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22legislation%22%5D%7D>
- Select the ‘Sponsor’ tab, and click on your congress person’s name.
- You can also go to <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php>

Grassroots lobbying is the most effective way to let your Congressional representatives know your wants and dislikes. If you are not sure who is your Congressman go to <https://beta.congress.gov/members>. Members of Congress are receptive and open to suggestions from their constituents. The key to increasing

cosponsorship support on veteran related bills and subsequent passage into law is letting legislators know of veteran's feelings on issues. You can reach their Washington office via the Capital Operator direct at (866) 272-6622, (800) 828-0498, or (866) 340-9281 to express your views. Otherwise, you can locate their phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making at either:

- http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm
- <http://www.house.gov/representatives>

Tentative 2015 Legislative Schedule 114th Congress, 1st Session: To be determined

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

- **H.R.627 : Homeless Vet Definition Expansion.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand the definition of homeless veteran for purposes of benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep Hahn, Janice [CA-44] (introduced 1/30/2015)
- **H.R.643 : Survey of VA Educational Assistance Use.** A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into a contract with a non-government entity to conduct a survey of individuals who have used or are using their entitlement to educational assistance under the educational assistance programs administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Bilirakis, Gus M. [FL-12] (introduced 2/2/2015)
- **H.R.658 : VA Regional Office Accountability Act.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress an annual report on the performance of the regional offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Sponsor: Rep Meng, Grace [NY-6] (introduced 2/2/2015)
- **H.R.667 : Authorize VA to Advise Vets Regarding State Marijuana Programs Participation.** A bill to authorize Department of Veterans Affairs health care providers to provide recommendations and opinions to veterans regarding participation in State marijuana programs. Sponsor: Rep Blumenauer, Earl [OR-3] (introduced 2/3/2015)
- **H.R.675 : Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2015.** A bill to increase, effective as of December 1, 2015, 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. Sponsor: Rep Abraham, Ralph Lee [LA-5] (introduced 2/3/2015)
- **H.R.677 : VA Automatic COLA Compensation Adjustments for Disability/DIC.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for annual cost-of-living adjustments to be made automatically by law each year in the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans. Sponsor: Rep Abraham, Ralph Lee [LA-5] (introduced 2/3/2015)
- **H.R.748 : VA Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program Expansion.** A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide additional educational assistance under the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs to certain eligible individuals. Sponsor: Rep McKinley, David B. [WV-1] (introduced 2/5/2015)
- **H.R.763 : VA Vet Choice Pilot Program.** A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program under which eligible veterans may elect to receive hospital care and

medical services at non-Department of Veterans Affairs facilities, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep LoBiondo, Frank A. [NJ-2] (introduced 2/5/2015)

- H.R.800 : **VA Alternative Appeals Process Pilot Program.** 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. Sponsor: Rep O'Rourke, Beto [TX-16] (introduced 2/5/2015)
- H.R.802 : **TRICARE Chiropractic Health Care Services Plan.** A bill to require the Secretary of Defense to develop and implement a plan to provide chiropractic health care services and benefits for certain new beneficiaries as part of the TRICARE program. Sponsor: Rep Rogers, Mike D. [AL-3] (introduced 2/5/2015)
- H.R.868 : **TRICARE Program/ Health Savings Account Coordination.** To provide for coordination between the TRICARE program and eligibility for making contributions to a health savings account, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Stewart, Chris [UT-2] (introduced 2/11/2015) Related Bills: S.448
- S.374 : **Extend VA Choice Act.** A bill to amend the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 to extend the requirement of the Secretary to furnish hospital care and medical services through non-Department of Veterans Affairs entities to veterans residing in certain locations. Sponsor: Sen Shaheen, Jeanne [NH] (introduced 2/4/2015)
- S.398 : **VA Chiropractic Care and Services.** A bill to amend the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001 and title 38, United States Code, to require the provision of chiropractic care and services to veterans at all Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers and to expand access to such care and services, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Moran, Jerry [KS] (introduced 2/5/2015)
- S.448 : **TRICARE Program/ Health Savings Account Coordination.** A bill to provide for coordination between the TRICARE program and eligibility for making contributions to a health savings account, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Moran, Jerry [KS] (introduced 2/11/2015) Related bills: H.R. 868
- S.469 : **DoD/VA Vet Reproductive Assistance.** A bill to improve the reproductive assistance provided by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs to severely wounded, ill, or injured members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their spouses or partners, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Murray, Patty [WA] (introduced 2/11/2015)

[Source: <https://beta.congress.gov> & <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills> Feb. 13, 2015 ++]

* Military *



Glenn Defense Marine Asia Case ► Shockwaves Across the Service

It was a festive day at the US Naval Academy last July 23 as the US Navy's top leadership gathered in Annapolis, Maryland, for a change of command and retirement ceremony. Vice Adm. Mike Miller was ending a four-year tour as academy superintendent and retiring with honors after a 40-year career. Except that when the hoopla died down, Miller wasn't allowed to leave the service just yet. Even though his official online biography reads "retired," he's still being carried on the Navy's active-duty rolls — at a reduced two-star level. And although he has no specific job — or billet, in Navy-speak — he counts against the service's allocated total of 219 admirals. Defense officials said Miller is one of an estimated three dozen flag officers under federal investigation for potential wrongdoing in the Glenn Defense Marine Asia (GDMA) case, also known as the "Fat Leonard" affair, after the nickname of the company's leader, Leonard Glenn Francis.

Francis is in federal custody in San Diego and has admitted to numerous instances of bribery, influence peddling and corruption attempts. A number of naval officers and civilians already have been charged and some convicted, and the investigation, which was announced in mid-2013, is — by all accounts — showing no signs of slowing down. Other flags known to be caught up in the affair are Vice Adm. Ted Branch, the head of naval intelligence, and Rear Adm. Bruce Loveless, the director of intelligence operations. Both officers were restricted by the Navy on Nov. 8, 2013 — with their security clearances revoked — pending the outcome of the investigations. No outcomes have been announced. Until investigations by the Department of Justice (DoJ) and the Navy are concluded, however, none of the officers under scrutiny can move on — either to resume their jobs or take up new ones. Their replacements can't take over, either.

The lengthy investigations causing so many careers to be placed on hold for so long are taking their toll on the Navy's leadership. The pyramidal US military personnel system is predicated on an "up or out" structure, with active-duty personnel holding a specific job only for a certain period of time — usually 18 to 36 months. After that, it's time for whomever has that job to move on and for someone else to move in. As officers move up the pyramid, fewer and fewer jobs are available, and only a few blockages can have ripple effects far beyond that specific position. The situation is affecting Navy commands ashore and afloat, across the globe. For example, Vice Adm. John Miller (no relation to Mike Miller) has been the commander of US Naval Forces Central Command in Bahrain since May 2012. In March 2014, he was named to become the next deputy chief of naval operations for Plans, Policy, and Operations at the Pentagon, and should have been relieved by now. But his replacement has not arrived — not even been announced — because that person is under investigation by Justice in connection with GDMA. Miller, according to defense officials, is not under investigation. "Others are in the same situation," a defense official said Feb. 5.



Vice Adm. Mike Miller



Leonard Francis aka Fat Leonard

A number of officers such as Mike Miller were planning to retire over the past year or more, but are being held over pending the results of the investigation. "It becomes a lot more complicated to deal with folks once they're outside the military," said the defense official, explaining why Mike Miller is being held over. "The ability to handle it is a lot easier keeping them in uniform." The flags being affected break down into three groups, the official said. "There's a group that have left jobs thinking they were going to retire and are waiting. There's a group that are in jobs they would like to leave and move on to retirement, and a group that thought they were going to other jobs but because they're somehow being reviewed they're unable to do that." The Justice Department is not sharing many details of its investigation with the Navy, and the service is not clear precisely how many officers are under scrutiny. "Folks don't know if they're not being moved because they're under investigation or because they're part of the daisy chain," the defense official said. "And that's caused consternation among those individuals."

And Justice isn't the only entity handling the investigations. Even if DoJ concludes an individual won't be charged with criminal conduct, it could decide the case warrants further investigation by the Navy for ethical or code violations. For those cases, Navy Secretary Ray Mabus announced on Dec. 20, 2013, he would establish a Consolidated Disposition Authority (CDA) headed by a senior flag officer to review any allegations. To date, the CDA has not released any judgments — although there are indications some announcements could come quite soon. Worries about how far and how long the investigation would reach have been legion since the scandal first came to light in November 2013.

GDMA is a "husbanding" company, a firm that handles a variety of arrangements for visiting ships — piloting and docking services, taxis and catering, customs and legal services, food and fueling arrangements and more. For a time, GDMA was the largest such company in Asia, and dozens of US Navy warships and commands made arrangements with the company — along with most other navies operating in the region. Hundreds of officers and officials came in contact with the firm, many of them personally greeted by Francis — a character widely known among veterans of Western Pacific tours. It's also clear the investigation goes back nearly a decade. For Mike Miller, any alleged involvement most likely dates from the first half of 2006, when he commanded the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group. The Reagan deployed in January 2006 and returned home that July. Since then, Miller served ashore in Norfolk, Virginia, then in Washington as the chief of legislative affairs, before moving to superintendent at Annapolis in 2010.

Defense officials said it appeared Justice is concentrating on individual strike group deployments as they work through the investigation. If that's the case, there have been at least 48 Western Pacific carrier strike group and amphibious ready group deployments since the Reagan's 2006 cruise, along with dozens of individual ship deployments. Virtually all of those Western Pacific cruises are likely to have made use of Glenn Defense Marine Asia's services. It appears an individual doesn't necessarily have to be accused of wrongdoing to trigger an investigation into their behavior, defense officials said. Rather, simply having dealings with GDMA could start a probe. In Mike Miller's case — and potentially in other cases as well — his initial reduction in rank and paygrade is not tied to the investigation, but to the Navy's bureaucratic rules. "The law required Vice Adm. Miller revert to his permanent grade of Rear Adm. (upper half) after 60 days from the date he was relieved as the Superintendent of the US Naval Academy," said Rear Adm. Dawn Cutler, chief of naval information.

Simply put, she said, if a three-star or four-star admiral isn't approved for another appointment at the same or higher grade, or if the retirement at the senior level isn't approved, the person drops back to the two-star level. Miller's retirement request, she added, "is under review." Through an academy spokesman, Miller declined to comment on this story. A spokesman at the Justice Department in Washington also declined comment. But the Justice investigation appears to be widening its scope, defense officials agreed, and shows

no signs of slowing down. "Top officials thought initially they could manage their way through this, and that belief is waning. I don't think anyone understood the potential magnitude of time and effort this would involve," the defense official said. "They understood there would be some delay — some weeks or a few months. But now we're here more than a year later... we're unable to put a lot of this behind us. We're at the mercy of the investigation's timeline."

And as it continues, the investigation's secondary effects are becoming more visible. "There's a resulting loss of opportunity for the Navy to compete for joint flag jobs," the defense official said. "Individuals can't get their tickets punched for specific jobs. There's an overall sense of frustration, including people watching their shipmates get caught up in it and wondering if it's worth it. There are opportunities outside the Navy and it plays into the calculus" whether they stay in or get out. "One way or the other," the defense official said, "it affects most of the 219 folks in the flag wardroom." [Source: Defense News | Christopher P. Cavas | Fwb. 08, 2015 ++]

Ocean AR ► Bringing Information Gathered to One Tiny Screen

Imagine you're an aviation electronics technician standing on top of a helicopter chained to the flight deck of a destroyer on a stormy day, trying to keep your hold as the wind blows through a repair manual you're using to troubleshoot the bird's rotors. Now imagine how much easier that would be if the step-by-step guide were mounted on a screen you could wear, and a flick of your finger could turn the pages. That's just one of the problems the CNO's Rapid Innovation Cell (CRIC) hopes to solve with Ocean AR (for augmented reality) with technology available in gadgets like Google Glass. "Augmented reality will be the future," CRIC member Lt. Joshua Steinman said Wednesday at the Naval Future Force Science and Technology Expo in Washington, D.C. "What we're trying to do is illustrate to the fleet what it's going to mean for them, and then illustrate to flag officers what it's going to mean for them and for the future of naval warfare," he added.

About two years ago, Steinman got CRIC into the Google Explorers program, which sold Glass headsets to qualified testers ahead of its 2014 launch. For average users, Google Glass puts their digital life on a screen right in front of their eye, allowing them to check email and social media, take photos and video, and so on. For the Navy, it could mean instant access to manuals and training materials on station. One day, a skipper could use it to view a ship's radars or rudder and throttle positions in real-time. For example, Steinman said, there is potential with the next generation of aircraft carriers and destroyers to integrate a ship with augmented reality, bringing information gathered from every corner to one tiny screen. "Where is it going? What were the last five surface contacts? If there's an underway replenishment going on, it can give data to the ... officer of the watch, officer of the deck, the CO, the XO, the command master chief," he said.

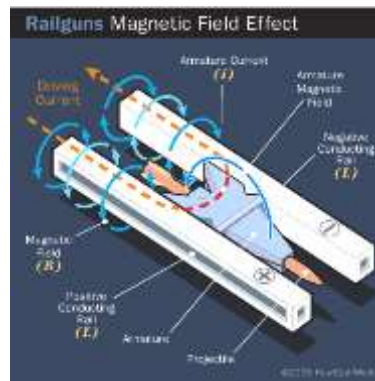
But first, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jon Greenert insisted they take Google Glass to the fleet and ask sailors how they thought it could make their lives easier. "The resounding answer to the questions that we asked was sailors wanted and needed a better way to teach about maintenance," Steinman said. So Joshua Kvavle, a research engineer with Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command, and his team came up with a suite of smartphone applications to support that. "You can do a repair wearing Glass, record it, save it to the ship's cloud storage [in the future], then put it up on a screen for training," Steinman said. Similarly, a sailor wearing Glass can pull up one of those videos when doing an intricate repair.

There is a small problem, though: CRIC has been working with Google Glass, which is about to become obsolete. It doesn't kill the project, Kvavle said, but it means they'll have to pick another headset to keep

things going. "This was not unexpected for us," Steinman said. "In fact we notified people over a year ago that in our assessment, this wasn't going to be as initially successful as Google had hoped." However, CRIC is linked to a process, not a platform, he added. Kvale offered alternatives like Vuzix Smart Glasses, Optinvent and the Microsoft HoloLens as other choices. For now, though, CRIC will finish its research with Google Glass. The next step is to take the headsets to petty officers in San Diego next month, to work more on the maintenance video and training capability. By the end of this year, Steinman said, the plan is to submit a memo to CNO about its their findings, then see where it goes. [Source: NavyTimes | Meghann Myers| Feb. 05, 2015 ++]

Railgun ► Navy's Latest Weapon

The U.S. Navy is tapping the power of the Force to wage war. Its latest weapon is an electromagnetic railgun launcher. It uses a form of electromagnetic energy known as the Lorentz force to hurl a 23-pound projectile at speeds exceeding Mach 7. Engineers already have tested this futuristic weapon on land, and the Navy plans to begin sea trials aboard a Joint High Speed Vessel Millinocket in 2016. "The electromagnetic railgun represents an incredible new offensive capability for the U.S. Navy," Rear Adm. Bryant Fuller, the Navy's chief engineer, said in a statement. "This capability will allow us to effectively counter a wide range of threats at a relatively low cost, while keeping our ships and sailors safer by removing the need to carry as many high-explosive weapons."



The massive railgun that needs just one sailor to operate it relies on the electromagnetic energy of the Lorentz force—the combination of electric and magnetic forces on a point charge—for power. The Navy likes the weapon for several reasons, not the least of which it has a range of 100 miles and doesn't require explosive warheads. That makes it far safer for sailors, and cheaper for taxpayers. According to the Navy, each 18-inch projectile costs about \$25,000, compared to \$500,000 to \$1.5 million for conventional missiles. "[It] will give our adversaries a huge moment of pause to go: 'Do I even want to go engage a naval ship?'" Rear Admiral Matt Klunder told reporters. "Because you are going to lose. You could throw anything at us, frankly, and the fact that we now can shoot a number of these rounds at a very affordable cost, it's my opinion that they don't win."

The Navy's been talking about using railguns for the past ten years. The Office of Naval Research launched a prototype program in 2005, with an initial investment of \$250 million committed through 2011. The Navy anticipates spending about that much more by 2017. Of course the Army is interested in having one too, and the Pentagon is in general interested in many aspects of the technology. In July, the Navy will

display the electromagnetic railgun prototype at San Diego Naval Base. “Frankly, we think it might be the right time for them to know what we’ve been doing behind closed doors in a Star Wars fashion,” said Klunder. “It’s now reality. It’s not science fiction. It’s real and you can look at it.”

[Source: Wired Magazine | Allen McDuffee | Apr 9, 2014 ++]

Railgun Update 01 ► Installation Studies Underway

Engineering studies to include an electromagnetic railgun on a Zumwalt-class destroyer (DDG-1000) have started at Naval Sea Systems Command, NAVSEA’s head said 5 FEB. The work will do the math to determine if the Zumwalt-class will have the space, power and cooling to field a railgun – likely replacing one of the two 155mm BAE Advanced Gun Systems (AGS) ahead of the ship’s deck house, Vice Adm. William Hilarides told USNI News following remarks at the Office of Naval Research Naval Future Force Science and Technology Expo. “We have begun real studies – as opposed to just a bunch of guys sitting around – real engineering studies are being done to make sure it’s possible,” Vice Adm. William Hilarides said following remarks at The likely candidate for the weapon would be the third planned Zumwalt, Lyndon B. Johnson (DDG-1002) currently under construction at General Dynamics Bath Iron Works (BIW) with an expected delivery date of 2018.



An electromagnetic railgun prototypes on display aboard the joint high speed vessel USS Millinocket (JHSV 3)

He said the first two ships – Zumwalt (DDG-1000) and Michael Monsoor (DDG-1001) – would be less likely to field the capability initially due to the schedule of testing with the new class. n“The team is working diligently now but it would not happen until after delivery of the ships – probably the third ship is where we’d have it,” Hilarides said. “That would certainly be my recommendation.” The Navy is in early stages of testing and fielding a railgun – which forgoes the gunpowder in the shells of conventional naval guns and instead uses high powered electromagnetic pulses along a set of rails to shoot a projectile at supersonic speeds. The Navy plans to test a BAE Systems prototype railgun onboard the Joint High Speed Vessel USNS Millinocket (JHSV- 3) next year.

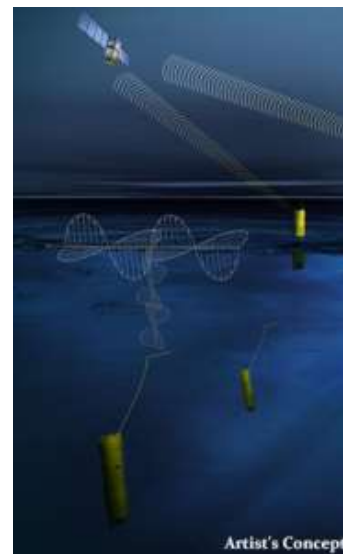
Last year, then Navy director of surface warfare now commander of U.S. Surface Forces Command, Vice Adm. Thomas Rowden told USNI News the Zumwalts would be likely used as test beds for emerging technologies like railguns and directed energy weapons the Navy wants for its next large surface combatant due to the ship’s size an ability to generate power. The integrated power system (IPS) on the 16,000-ton ships– powered by two massive Rolls Royce MT-30 gas turbines and two smaller Rolls-Royce RR450– allow the ships to route and generate 80 mega-watt power – much more electrical power than the current crop of U.S. destroyers and cruisers. On 4 FEB, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert said a Zumwalt would likely be the first ship to get the capability.

The inclusion of the railgun does mean a capabilities trade for the ship. “We’ll go do the studies and I suspect they’ll say ‘yes,’ but it’s going to come at a cost of some of the capabilities on this ship – of course,” Hilarides said/ “It’s physics. Without taking something off, you’re not putting on a many ton system, so a gun would be a logical thing to take off and put the railgun in its place.” The three ship Zumwalt-class were – in part – originally designed to address a gap in naval surface fire support with the AGS firing the Long-Range Land Attack Projectile (LRLAP) at a range of up to 75 nautical miles. Each ship is designed to field two AGS. Go to <http://www.wired.com/2014/04/electromagnetic-railgun-launcher> to view a video on the railgun and its operation. [Source: USNI News | Sam LaGrone | Feb 05, 2015 ++]

Autonomous Underwater Vehicles ► Increasingly Useful Tool

Underwater drones have scientific and civilian uses, like the search for the missing Malaysia Airline Flight 370. Militaries, too, see them as an increasingly useful tool. They can range from a svelte 100 pounds to several thousand. They can be snub-nosed, bullet shaped brutes that can dive six miles deep or buoyancy-propelled machines that can gracefully glide for several months at a time. And they can perform a myriad of tasks ranging from tracking pollution to mapping terrain for oil and gas exploration. They are autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs), the aquatic answer to the airborne drones that track terrorists in Yemen and, if Amazon has its way, could be delivering DVDs and dog food to your back patio.

AUVs gained some measure of public awareness when a Bluefin drone was sent to look for the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in the southern Indian Ocean earlier this year. Like their airborne cousins, they can perform a variety of tasks, both scientific and civilian. But also like their airborne cousins, AUVs are finding that their biggest customers are militaries. Vast acres of underwater canyons, ledges, and plateaus offer a hide-and-seek playground for submarines and unmanned vehicles to engage in combat maneuvers without even a surface ripple to give the game away. To navies worldwide, AUVs are intriguing as mine-sweepers and potential entrants into antisubmarine warfare. Like aerial drones, they could also help countries project force far away without risking the lives of sailors.



Bluefin 21 UUV and DARPA's Upward Falling Payload

Critics say the technology needed to build effective drones is inherently more difficult underwater than in the air, limiting the impact that AUVs might have. But at least 630 AUVs are already prowling global waters, and the trend line is undeniably upward. “All of this ... suggests that sustaining the advantage undersea will be very, very important in the future and that robotics are a very significant way to continue that,” says Paul Scharre, an analyst at the Center for New American Security in Washington. Unlike remotely controlled vehicles that are often used for salvage missions and are attached to a ship, AUVs are untethered, carry their own power supply, and are self-guided. They get their instructions, are released from a platform such as a surface ship, and travel to pre-programmed destinations. At the moment, military demand accounts for more than 60 percent of AUV production.

The global AUV fleet is forecast to increase 42 percent from 2014 to 2018 and will “total 825 units in 2018, led by strong demand in the military sector,” according to market research consultants Douglass-Westwood. Global expenditures on AUVs are expected to total \$2.3 billion during the next decade, according to 2012 figures. At this point, what AUVs can do is partially limited by what they can't do well. Sensor accuracy and battery power are severely tested underwater, and communications are limited by delays for data transfer, says John Craig, a professor at the United States Naval War College in Newport, R.I. “It’s just a lot harder to transmit the prediction of sound [performance] through the sea than it is to predict radar through the air or to control things once they’ve left the surface of the sea,” he says. Even with these limitations, though, AUVs are in many ways ideal as mine-sweepers, able to do initial reconnaissance and clear a lane for a ship to pass without putting divers in harm's way.

Last October, the US Navy awarded a five-year, \$36.5 million contract to Hydroid, Inc. considered a world leader in AUV technology, for underwater vehicles specifically for mine countermeasures (MCM). “There’s actually multiple navies around the world either experimenting or doing initial work with AUVs in that field,” says David Kelly, CEO of Bluefin Robotics, another player in the underwater robotics industry. “We have products with over 16 different navies around the globe in the MCM realm.” Antisubmarine warfare (ASW) is another key area where analysts say unmanned underwater vehicles will play an increasingly greater role. ASW, often said to be the “linchpin of sea control,” isn’t just one activity but many. It can include placing and monitoring sensors on the sea floor to track enemy subs, or stalking and destroying enemy subs using the coordinated efforts of submarines, surface vessels, and aircraft.

AUVs' limitations mean they aren't yet ready to be deployed fully and seamlessly into that network yet. But in time, underwater vehicles could be controlled and enabled to work cooperatively with submarines and surface vessels, says Mr. Scharre. Indeed, a 2009 report by the defense consultancy Rand Corp. identifies ASW as the third most promising area for unmanned undersea vehicles, right after mine countermeasures. No. 1 was intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. Undersea activity as a whole is vital to how the United States considers the question of power projection, says Scharre. With other countries now acquiring long range, antiship ballistic missiles and cruise missiles capable of targeting both ships and US bases, it is becoming harder to project power from traditional aircraft carriers or air bases, he says. But undersea still offers the sanctuary to get in close to an enemy’s shoreline to project power.

The races to deploy and effectively use undersea drones is on, says a 2014 report by the Center for a New American Security. “At least 75 countries are investing” in unmanned systems, it says. “While the US military has thousands of unmanned systems of different types ... these largely remotely piloted air and ground vehicles will soon be replaced by increasingly autonomous systems in all physical operating domains (air, sea, undersea, land and space) and across the full range of military operations.” [Source: Christian Science Monitor | Kristina Lindborg | July 16, 2014++]

MAARS ► **USMC Robot on Display**

The next member of your squad might carry a M240B machine gun with 400 rounds, a few sensors, and still manage to stay on pace for hours, despite weighing more than 350 pounds. The Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory hopes that a machine gun toting robot can one day provide more firepower to foot patrols. Qinetiq's Modular Advanced Armed Robotic System (MAARS), a tracked robot with cameras and a machine gun, was on display at Marine West, a defense expo here on Jan. 28. It was one of the handful unmanned systems that attracted crowds at the event. The Warfighting Lab said MAARS could give Marines additional protection on patrols and while standing on post, and the lab is in the process of determining if the device is a good fit for the Corps. "It's a medium machine gun that's not typically taken on patrol, so it increases a Marine's firepower" said Tim Brooks, an applications engineer at the Warfighting Lab.



Modular Advanced Armed Robotic System

Operated with a handheld controller, it provides a surveillance feed from thermal and video cameras. It can "stand post" for 12 hours if it doesn't move much and just uses its cameras. It can also be left in "sleep mode" for just over a week, Brooks said. But it has limits, he said. It's too small to ram through doors to enter a room, and it's too big to move smoothly through tight corridors. "We've found it's too small to do some things, too big to do others," he said. It typically carries the machine gun, but it can also carry a quad 40mm M203 grenade launcher. So far it has test-fired the machine gun in a lab setting, but not in the field. It has not yet fired a grenade, Brooks said. MAARS isn't entirely new to the military. The Army previously tested the system in traffic control point drills and a hostage scenario where it fired on the enemy. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Joshua Stewart | Jan. 30, 2015 ++]

PD-100 Black Hornet ► **Micro-Drone Being considered by USMC**

The Marine Corps' next drone might be small enough to stuff into a cargo pocket and weigh less than a can of dip. Prox Dynamics is selling a micro-drone designed to give a squad of Marines their own tiny

surveillance capability. The PD-100 Black Hornet weighs 18 grams and its body is around the size of a hummingbird. It comes in a day version that snags full-motion video and a night version that can capture thermal images. It's not supposed to replace other unmanned reconnaissance planes, but complement them, said Craig Palmer, an account manager with Prox Dynamics. Bigger aircraft can provide a real-time video feed of a rooftop captured from several hundred to thousands of feet above a target, but this can fly at near ground level and peek into buildings. "You can fly down the street and look in a door," Palmer said.



The Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory is interested in the PD-100 Black Hornet, a small unmanned aircraft that can capture full-motion video and thermal images in real time.

Brooks said the Warfighting Lab is interested in the system and is planning to evaluate it. Palmer said that there haven't been any U.S. sales to operational units so far, but Marines might have seen British forces use it in Afghanistan, and the Army's Program Executive Office has evaluated it as well. The twin-propeller is replaceable, and the system, which costs \$55,000, comes with spare parts, a base station, two flyers, a steno pad-sized display screen, and a hand control. The whole package weighs three pounds. Standard training takes two days, but a three-day session includes instruction on night operations, Palmer said. It can fly in steady winds up to 17 miles per hour and gusts as high as 23 miles per hour, Palmer said. At the expo, the UAV was flown inside a football field-sized tent, near an industrial fan, and was able to hold a stable position aloft in a gentle breeze. It has as much as a 1.2 mile range, and can stay aloft for as long as 25 minutes, Palmer said. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Joshua Stewart | Jan. 30, 2015 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Bruce Avery Van Voorhis | WWII



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

BRUCE AVERY VAN VOORHIS

Rank and organization: Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

Place and date: Over the Solomon Islands July 6, 1943

Entered service at: U.S. Naval Academy in June 1925.

Born: Aberdeen, Washington Jan. 29, 1908

Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as Squadron Commander of Bombing Squadron 102 and as Plane Commander of a PB4Y-I Patrol Bomber operating against the enemy on Japanese-held Greenwich Island during the battle of the Solomon Islands, 6 July 1943. Fully aware of the limited chance of surviving an urgent mission, voluntarily undertaken to prevent a surprise Japanese attack against our forces, Lt. Comdr. Van Voorhis took off in total darkness on a perilous 700-mile flight without escort or support. Successful in reaching his objective despite treacherous and varying winds, low visibility and difficult terrain, he fought a lone but relentless battle under fierce antiaircraft fire and overwhelming aerial opposition. Forced lower and lower by pursuing planes, he coolly persisted in his mission of destruction. Abandoning all chance of a safe return he executed 6 bold ground-level attacks to demolish the enemy's vital radio station, installations, antiaircraft guns and crews with bombs and machinegun fire, and to destroy 1 fighter plane in the air and 3 on the water. Caught in his own bomb blast, Lt. Comdr. Van Voorhis crashed into the lagoon off the beach, sacrificing himself in a single-handed fight against almost insuperable odds, to make a distinctive contribution to our continued offensive in driving the Japanese from the Solomons and, by his superb daring, courage and resoluteness of purpose, enhanced the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country



Van Voorhis was born on January 29, 1908 in Aberdeen, Washington and grew up in Nevada. He was appointed to the United States Naval Academy in June 1925. Following graduation from the Academy on June 6, 1929, Ensign Van Voorhis reported for duty in the battleship USS Mississippi (BB-41). That assignment lasted until November 1930 when he transferred to the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida for aviation training.

He received his wings on September 3, 1931 and was assigned to the USS Maryland as a member of Observation Squadron 4B (VO-4B). In June 1934, he transferred to Bombing Squadron 5B on board the aircraft carrier USS Ranger (CV-4), and soon thereafter, to VB-2B attached to USS Saratoga (CV-3). From July 1935 until May 1937, he served in the Panama Canal Zone and flew patrols from Coco Solo with Patrol Squadron 2F (VP-2F). The following June, Van Voorhis returned to carrier-based aviation and served first in USS Enterprise (CV-6), then in USS Yorktown (CV-5), and finally back to Enterprise. In June 1940, Van Voorhis joined the aviation unit assigned to the light cruiser USS Honolulu (CL-48) where he served for a year. In July 1941, he reported for duty at the Naval Air Station, Anacostia, where he served until November 1942.

In December 1942, Van Voorhis, a Lieutenant Commander since July, assumed command of VP-14, but soon thereafter took command of VB-102. While serving in that capacity, LCDR Van Voorhis was killed near Hare Island of the Kapingamarangi Atoll, the southernmost of the Eastern Caroline Islands.

Van Voorhis is buried in the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis County, Missouri. He has a headstone at Arlington National Cemetery which reads "In Memory of Bruce Van Voorhis".



The U.S. Navy Dealey-class destroyer escort USS Van Voorhis (DE-1028) was named in honor of LCDR Van Voorhis. The Van Voorhis was commissioned on April 22, 1957; she was decommissioned on July 1, 1972. The airfield at Naval Air Station Fallon is also named in his honor. There is also a United States Naval Sea Cadet Corps unit under his name the Van Voorhis squadron in Las Vegas, NV.

[Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Van_Voorhis and www.history.army.mil/html/moh/wwII-t-z.html Feb 2015 ++]

*** Military History ***



Aviation Art 82 ► **God Shed His Grace on Thee**



God Shed His Grace on Thee

by John D. Shaw

The War is Over!! As headlines from sea to shining sea proclaimed this wonderful news, the hearts of Americans everywhere rejoiced. As the famed lyric said, God had indeed “Shed His Grace” on this nation. Tyranny had been overthrown, but not without great sacrifice and great cost. As many war-weary troops returned home into New York harbor, the Statue of Liberty herself seemed to join in with the crowds at her base welcoming them home, proclaiming “welcome home—well done!” Overhead, aircraft proudly representing the WWII branches of service roar overhead in salute...An F6F Hellcat for the Navy, P-38 Lightning for the Army Air Forces, and F4U Corsair for the Marine Corps.

[Source: <http://www.brooksart.com/Godsgrace.html> Feb 2015 ++]

Military Trivia 100 ► **The Old Guard**

The 3d U.S. Infantry is traditionally known as "The Old Guard", and is the oldest active-duty infantry unit in the Army, serving the United States since 1784. The Old Guard is the pre-eminent Honor Guard, being the Presidential Guard - the Old Guard is the Army's official ceremonial unit and escort to the president, and it also provides security for Washington, D.C., in time of national emergency or civil disturbance. The Old Guard conducts memorial affairs to honor fallen comrades, and ceremonies and special events to represent

the Army, communicating its story to the Nation's citizens and the world. The Old Guard's Specialty Platoons consist of:

- **Caisson Platoon** - Seven horses, four Soldiers. They have the honor of carrying a comrade for his last ride to Arlington National Cemetery, where he will rest in peace with other honored dead. The caissons were built in 1918, and used for 75mm cannons. Their original equipment was removed and replaced with the flat deck on which the casket rests.



Caisson Platoon



Continental Color Guard

- **Continental Color Guard** - The United States Army Continental Color Guard's mission is to showcase the U.S. army's precision nationally and internationally. A five-man unit is comprised of two armed Guards and three color ensigns, who carry the National Color, the U.S. Army Color, and the Color of their parent unit, the 3d U.S. Infantry Regiment, "The Old Guard." This unit wears replica uniforms of the 1784-style infantry uniforms worn by The Old Guard's predecessor, the First American Regiment.
- **Fife and Drum Corps** - The Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps is the only unit of its kind in the armed forces, and the musicians of this unit recall the days of the American Revolution as they perform in uniforms patterned after those worn by the musicians of General George Washington's Continental Army.



- **Presidential Salute Battery** - Equipped with ten M5, 75mm antitank cannons mounted on the M6 howitzer carriage, the 3d U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) Presidential Salute Battery fires cannon salutes in honor of the President of the United States, visiting foreign dignitaries, and official guests of the United States. The battery also fires in support of memorial affairs for all military services in Arlington National Cemetery. In addition the battery fires for ceremonies and special events throughout the National Capital Region. The Presidential Salute Battery is the only unit of its kind in the Army, and its busy schedule includes more than 300 ceremonies each year.



- **Tomb Guard Platoon** - Originally a civilian watchman was responsible for the security of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Then, on March 24, 1926, a military guard from the Washington Provisional Brigade (forerunner of the U.S. Army Military District of Washington) was established during the day-light hours. In 1948 the 3d U.S. Infantry "The Old Guard" assumed the post following the unit's reactivation in the nation's capital. Members of the 3d Infantry's Honor Guard continue to serve in this distinguished duty today. These billets do not require a specific MOS and are open to female soldiers.
- **United States Army Drill Team** - The U.S. Army Drill Team is a precision drill platoon with the primary mission of showcasing the U.S. Army both nationally and internationally through breathtaking routines with bayonet-tipped 1903 Springfield rifles.

As well, members of The Old Guard also escort the deceased service members to their final rest in Arlington. [Source: About US Military | Patirck Long | Dec. 30, 2014 ++]

Military History ► Holocaust of Kedros

The Holocaust of Kedros, also known as the Holocaust of Amari, refers to an operation mounted by Nazi German forces against the civilian residents of nine villages located in the Amari Valley on the Greek island of Crete during its occupation by the Axis in World War II. At the time of the Kedros operation it was clear that Germany was losing the war. By late summer 1944, the occupying forces had begun to plan their withdrawal to Chania, Crete where they would stay until their capitulation on 9 May 1945.

In the dawn of 22 AUG, several battalions of German infantry arrived at the Amari valley. They succeeded in surrounding the villages lining the western side of the Amari valley without being noticed by their dwellers. These nine villages were collectively called the Kedros villages. The nearby village of Krya Vrysi was also surrounded. In all villages, the German raids followed roughly the same pattern. The locals were gathered together, the identities of males were verified and those to be executed were picked and kept separately. Women, on the excuse that they would go on a long journey, were ordered to return to their homes and collect their valuables. This was a trick aiming to facilitate the looting that would follow. Women, children and the elderly were taken away while the men whose lives were spared were forced to march towards Rethymno where they were held in the city's Venetian fortress for a few weeks. Following their departure, firing squads started the executions in groups. When finished, dead bodies were doused in petrol and set on fire. In some cases the executions had been carried out in a village house which was afterwards dynamited.

In the days that followed the shootings, the houses were looted and then burned or dynamited, similarly to Kandanos Crete three years earlier which was destroyed in retribution for the murder of 25 German soldiers, never to be rebuilt again. Wehrmacht infantry razed most villages, looting, pillaging livestock and destroying harvests. The number of Greek fatalities was 164. The operation was ordered by Lt. Gen. Friedrich-Wilhelm Müller, commander of the garrison of Crete, to cow the population and deter local guerrillas from attacking the occupation forces during their imminent retreat to Chania. All the loot was

collected at the local agricultural school, from where it was transported on lorries to Rethymno. Harvests and livestock were confiscated for use by the German troops. Local resistance bands could do nothing but watch. Being vastly outnumbered, any opposition attempt at defending the region would have been suicidal. George Psychoundakis in his book mentions that from his hideout cave in Ida he could see smoke rising from the villages for more than a week.

Adopting the official German proclamation, accounts of the destruction of the Kedros villages widely attribute it to their residents providing shelter to Kreipe's abductors. This is disputed by some historians since the abduction had taken place on the 26th of April 1944, almost four months earlier and the standard German practice was to implement immediate reprisals. Another explanation is that the Germans destroyed the villages because they wanted to terrorize the local population and hence reduce the risk of being attacked during their impending retreat, which eventually started in early October. The Amari operation was essentially a campaign of pre-emptive terror just before the German forces withdrew westwards from Heraklion with their flank exposed to this center of Cretan resistance.

At the dawn of 11 September 1944, a local detachment of the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS) surrounded Asomaton and captured the garrison of the German outpost established there. Later the same morning, two lorries carrying German troops sent from Rethymno were ambushed at the watershed ridge near the village of Ag. Apostoloi. The battle that followed, which became known as the Battle of Potamoi, continued during the following day as German reinforcements arrived. The battle ended in ELAS' victory with 20 to 30 Germans killed and more being captured alive. General Müller was captured by the Red Army in East Prussia and later extradited to Greece. He was tried in Athens along with Bruno Brüauer, commander of the garrison and fortification of Crete between 1942–44, for the atrocities committed on the island. Both were convicted, sentenced to death on 9 December 1946 and executed by firing squad on 20 May 1947. No one else was ever brought to justice and no reparations were ever paid to the survivors. [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holocaust_of_Kedros Aug 2014 ++]

D-Day ► Utah Beach via Life Raft



Members of an American landing unit help their exhausted comrades ashore during the Normandy invasion. The men reached the zone code-named Utah Beach, near Sainte Mere Eglise, on a life raft after their landing craft was hit and sunk by German coastal defenses.

WWII Prewar Events ▶ Berlin Meeting Jul 1932



Thousand of Germans participate in the Great National Socialistic meeting in Berlin, Germany, on July 9, 1932

WWII PostWar Events ▶ African Campaign Troop's Return Jun 1945



The super transport ship, General W.P. Richardson, docked in New York, with veterans of the European war cheering on June 7, 1945. Many soldiers were veterans of the African campaign, Salerno, Anzio, Cassino and the winter warfare in Italy's mountains.

Spanish American War Images 69 ► Clashing Battleships



Battleships clashing in the Philippines during the Spanish American War

WWI in Photos 119 ► Clearing Turkish Dardanelles Defenses 1915



1915, part of a larger group of combined British and French ships sent to clear Turkish defenses of the Dardanelles, Bouvet was hit by at least eight Turkish shells, then struck a mine, which caused so much damage, the ship sank within a few minutes. While a few men survived the sinking and were rescued, nearly 650 went down with the ship.

Faces of WAR (WWII) ▶ Washington DC Parade (6) May 1942



Military History Anniversaries ▶ 14 Feb thru 15 Mar

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 30 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 14 Feb thru 15 Mar**".

*** Health Care ***



Family Care Giving ▶ Chronic Health Problem Risk for TBI Partners

Some loved ones who care for veterans with brain injuries may be at increased risk for chronic health problems, a new study indicates. "Traumatic brain injuries can result in devastating physical and cognitive [mental] impairments," study co-author Karen Saban, an associate professor in the School of Nursing at Loyola University Chicago, said in a university news release. "Grief, anger and blame are common among caregivers who are left to cope with these profound disabilities and the loss of the person they once knew. These feelings may put these individuals at risk for inflammatory-related disease," she explained.



In the study, the researchers looked at 40 wives or partners caring for U.S. veterans with traumatic brain injuries. The caregivers provided information about their levels of grief and stress, as well as symptoms of depression. Each morning, their saliva was tested for levels of TNF-alpha, a substance associated with inflammation and chronic conditions such as heart disease. The caregivers reported having levels of grief that were similar to those of people who have lost a loved one, but grief was not linked with TNF-alpha levels or inflammation in general, the study found. However, elevated levels of TNF-alpha were detected in caregivers who said they had high levels of blame and anger associated with their grief, according to the study published recently in the journal *Biological Research for Nursing*.

While the study showed an association between feelings of anger and blame and levels of a marker for heart disease and other inflammation-related conditions, it did not prove a cause-and-effect link. "This research gives us a better understanding of the relationship between blame, anger, grief and inflammation," Saban said in the news release. "This may assist clinicians in identifying caregivers who are at greatest risk for developing inflammatory-related health problems and managing them appropriately." Since 2000, more than 240,000 U.S. military personnel have been diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury. Of these, nearly 43,000 have a moderate or severe brain injury, according to the news release. [Source: HealthDay News | Feb. 9, 2015 ++]

TRICARE Consolidation ► Cost Impact on Beneficiaries

The Pentagon's 2016 budget request revisits a proposal pitched last year — unsuccessfully — to consolidate Tricare into a single system, while also suggesting new fees designed to steer families away from using emergency rooms for routine care. The \$47.8 billion health budget request would do away with Tricare's current structure and replace it with a single system designed to encourage beneficiaries to seek care from military facilities or network providers — or pay more. Like the plan introduced last year, the latest proposal calls for consolidating Tricare Prime, Tricare Standard and Tricare Extra into one Tricare program. But unlike the plan floated last year, the new version would not increase co-payments or cost-shares for active-duty families seen at military hospitals and clinics or in the network. However:

- They would pay between \$10 and \$20, depending on sponsor's rank, for care they seek without a referral to a network physician — similar to the Tricare Extra option offered now, which gives a discount to family members who are not enrolled in Prime but choose to see a network physician.
- Cost-shares for visits to out-of-network providers for family members would rise to 20 percent of the Tricare allowable charge, up from the current 15 percent.
- They also would pay new fees for using emergency rooms at military treatment facilities or civilian hospitals for non-emergent care, ranging from \$30 to \$70 depending on the rank of the sponsor.

When military families cannot get an appointment at their primary care physician for urgent care — either because appointments are full or they need care outside office hours — they often turn to military or civilian

emergency rooms for primary care visits. According to the budget documents, planners felt that the new fee structure provides options for active-duty families to get care at no cost when appointments are not available at their military treatment facility or through their primary care physician, minimizing the need for non-emergency visits to the ER. For other beneficiaries, the fiscal 2016 budget proposal is strikingly similar to the plan floated in the 2015 budget, which made very little headway in Congress last year. The proposal calls for:

- Retirees below age 65 and their family members to pay annual "participation fees," (currently called enrollment fees). Starting in 2017, annual fees would rise to \$289 for an individual, up from \$277.92, and to \$578 for a family, up from \$555.84.
- Retirees to begin making co-payments for services at military treatment facilities, ranging from \$10 for a primary care visit to between \$20 and \$50 for specialty care, urgent care, emergency room services and ambulatory surgery.
- Visits to a network provider for retirees and family members would range from a \$20 co-payment for primary care to \$100 for a network ambulatory surgery visit.
- For all out-of-network care, retiree cost-shares would remain at 25 percent of the Tricare allowable amount
- Future beneficiaries using Tricare For Life to begin paying an enrollment fee for the program based on a percentage of gross retired pay — 0.5 percent in 2016 — and capped at \$150 a year for a family and \$200 for retired flag and general officers.
- By 2019, TFL enrollees would pay a fee amounting to 2 percent of gross retired pay, up to a maximum of \$614. Flag officers would pay up to \$818 by 2019.
- Active-duty families' catastrophic caps rise to \$1,500 for network or \$2,500 for combined network and non-network visits, while all others would see an increase to \$3,000 for network and \$5,000 combined.

One proposal that would touch all Tricare users would be future hikes in co-pays for generic prescriptions purchased through retail pharmacies and increases in brand name drugs, both at retail pharmacies and by mail. Prescriptions would continue to be filled free for everyone at military treatment facilities and generic drugs also would be available at no charge through Tricare's mail order system. Generics would cost \$8 at a retail pharmacy in 2016 and would remain at that level through fiscal 2018. Brand names would rise to \$28 per prescription, up from the current \$17. Medications not on the Tricare formulary now are tightly restricted. While they cost \$44 in 2014, they are available only on a limited basis now at retail pharmacies. Costs for mail order prescriptions also would rise, to \$28 from \$16 for brand name medications in 2016. Unlike retail pharmacy prescriptions, medications filled by mail are for 90 days. Nonformulary medications would still be available by mail, with co-pays rising to \$54 from the current \$46. Medications would continue to be dispensed free of charge at military pharmacies.

While Congress approved a small increase to Tricare pharmacy fees in the fiscal 2015 defense budget, Pentagon officials said the additional measures are needed to encourage more patients to use mail order and generic brands. According to Pentagon estimates, the average active-duty family of three averages \$13,615 in medical costs per year, with the military bearing \$13,448 of the expense while the family picks up \$166, or about 1.2 percent. Under the new plan, families would bear 1.4 percent of the overall cost, which would drop to \$13,584, accounting for flat health care costs and savings under consolidation. A working-age retiree's family of three accrues \$16,715 in medical costs per year, according to DoD, and pays \$1,337, or 8.2 percent of the cost. Under the plan, they would pay \$1,666, or 10.2 percent, of the estimated \$16,302 cost.

Pentagon officials estimate that the initial changeover to a single Tricare plan would cost the department money — \$100 million in fiscal 2016. But it would save \$3.1 billion from 2017 through 2020, according to budget documents. The fiscal 2016 defense health budget request is \$108 million lower than the fiscal 2015

budget enacted by Congress. But when funds to support medical care for overseas contingency operations are included, the proposal represents an increase of less than 1 percent increase over the 2015 budget. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | Feb 02, 2015 ++]

TRICARE Nurse Advise Line Update 02 ► 1,700 Calls Daily

Since the full rollout of Tricare's Nurse Advice Line (NAL) last August, more than 366,000 calls have poured in at an average rate of about 1,700 a day, mainly from Tricare Prime beneficiaries seeking medical care and advice for minor illnesses, Defense Department data show. Of greatest significance to the Pentagon, which is trying to rein in the cost of providing health care to nearly 9.5 million beneficiaries, is the impact the call center is having on emergency room visits — a nearly 66 percent decline in trips among those who called the line. Defense Health Agency officials said:

- While 36 percent of callers initially intended to go to an ER for their illness, just 12 percent went within 24 hours of calling.
- More than 22 percent said they were thinking about going to an urgent care facility at the start of a call but just 12 percent went within 24 hours.
- The number of callers who decided to seek care at a military treatment facility rose, by nearly 17 percent, according to DoD data.



The NAL number is 1-800-TRICARE (874-2273)

The cost of a military or network ER visit for a routine illness is roughly \$400 while the cost of a medical appointment in the military system is less than \$77 — which is why DoD has for years has tried to chip away at the nearly 177,000 emergency room visits made by beneficiaries each week. In its fiscal 2016 budget request released Feb. 2, DoD proposed new fees designed to reduce overuse of hospital emergency rooms. The plan would introduce new fees for retirees to use military and civilian emergency rooms and active-duty families also would pay a penalty for going to an emergency room for nonemergency care, from \$30 to \$70 depending on the sponsor's rank. When military families can't get an appointment with their primary care physician for urgent care — either because appointments are full or they need care outside office hours — they often turn to military or civilian emergency rooms for primary care visits.

The Nurse Advice Line number is 1-800-TRICARE (874-2273). It was established, in part, to ward off unneeded trips. "You go to an emergency room at any one of our MTFs any night and you'll see the overutilization of health care — you see a room absolutely filled with people who tried to get an appointment and couldn't, so they are camped out," retired Army Gen. Peter Chiarelli said in a recent congressional hearing. The most common calls to the Nurse Advice Line are for colds, flu, abdominal pain, fever, rashes and neonatal concerns, officials said. Tricare reintroduced the service after a 10-year hiatus largely to provide information on self-care for acute illnesses and improve use of military treatment facilities. Answering nurses can make recommendations about whether beneficiaries should seek care; help find the closest medical

facility; and will check on a caller by phone a few hours later if requested. Advice line representatives also can make appointments for Tricare Prime beneficiaries at most military hospitals or clinics. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | Feb 05, 2015 ++]

TRICARE Pharmacy Policy Update 19 ► Compounded Medication

Two advisory committees to the Defense Health Agency are at odds over whether Tricare should reimburse for compounded medications. The Defense Department Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee in December recommended strict guidelines on compounded medication prescriptions — rules that would allow Tricare to reimburse for the medicines even though its own regulations don't require the defense health system to do so. The P&T Committee agreed on a plan that would approve coverage if the person who prescribed the medicine provided information on whether the patient had tried already available products, the duration of the therapy and its purpose. Active ingredients in the prescriptions would have to be an FDA-approved drug and approved by the FDA for the specific use needed, according to the requirements, and the patient must need the special formulation because he or she can't use a commercially available product. But the Defense Department Beneficiary Advisory Board on 8 JAN elected not to accept the committee's recommendation, leaving the decision on these costly medicines to Defense Health Agency officials.

Compounded medications are prescriptions formulated by pharmacists that usually combine an FDA-approved pharmaceutical with bulk ingredients — powders, creams or liquids — designed to meet an individual patient's needs, either by altering a dosage, eliminating an allergen or changing the medication's delivery method. In 2013, DoD filled 465,000 prescriptions for compounded medications, a tiny fraction — about one-third of 1 percent — of all prescriptions covered by Tricare for the year, according to a 2014 Government Accountability Office report. The cost for the medicines in 2013 totaled \$259 million. But in 2014, that more than tripled to \$746 million. In the first month of 2015, DoD spent \$6 million a day on these medicines, on track to total \$180 million in January alone, according to data provided by the Defense Department.

According to the GAO, the benefit is used largely by retirees and their family members, who filled more than 85 percent of all Tricare compounded prescriptions in 2013. GAO said defense officials could realize significant cost savings on the medications if it followed its own regulations, which dictate that Tricare reimburse only for medications that include FDA-approved ingredients. Tricare's coverage policies for the medications are similar to Medicare's but more generous than the Veterans Affairs Department health system, according to GAO. Tricare announced in July 2013 that it had begun adhering to its own regulations and would stop covering any compounded prescriptions containing ingredients not approved by the FDA. Tricare officials said they made the decision out of concern for patient safety — in 2012, 64 people died after receiving contaminated steroid injections compounded at a facility in Massachusetts — as well as the legal restrictions that keep the military health system from paying for prescriptions containing unapproved ingredients. But the decision caused an uproar among Tricare beneficiaries who use compounded medications, prompting Congress to order a GAO analysis.

GAO recommended that DoD "align Tricare's payment practices for compounded drugs with applicable regulations governing the Tricare program." Jay McEniry, executive director of Patients and Physicians for Rx Access, said the P&T committee's requirements would force compounding pharmacists to use ingredients that are less pure, since the FDA approves only finished products, which contain numerous ingredients, rather than the pure active pharmaceutical agent. He also said if DoD wants to rein in spending, rather than stop

paying for the medications, it should reimburse at rates similar to those used by commercial insurers. A majority of the top 25 most expensive compounded prescriptions issued Tricare beneficiaries in 2013 were topical pain medications. McEniry said the medicines offer an alternative to addictive and sometimes dangerous opioids and he expressed hope that DoD would develop policies that would allow physicians the option to continue prescribing compounded alternatives to pain pills. "This is first time I've seen such a reaction in health care — let's just cut [the benefit]. Let's not cut it. A lot of people need compounds. They have no other options, no other medications they can tolerate. It's interesting we are having this discussion. It's a disservice to a lot of people who need it and deserve it," McEniry said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | Feb. 02, 2015 ++]

Exercise Impact on Death ► Lack of it Twice as Deadly as Obesity

Even a small amount of exercise, such as brisk daily 20 minute walk, reduces the risk of premature death. It seems more and more studies are showing that any level of activity has benefit. So begin today by doing something. Researchers estimated that 337,000 of the 9.2 million deaths amongst European men and women each year were attributable to obesity but twice this number of deaths could be attributed to physical inactivity. They found that even small amounts of exercise, such as brisk 20 minute walk each day which burns around 100 calories, had major health impacts, reducing the risk of premature death. Previous research has found that physical inactivity is linked to heart disease and cancer. "This is a simple message: just a small amount of physical activity each day could have substantial health benefits for people who are physically inactive," said study leader Professor Ulf Ekelund, from the Medical Research Council (MRC) Epidemiology Unit at Cambridge University. "

Although we found that just 20 minutes would make a difference, we should really be looking to do more than this - physical activity has many proven health benefits and should be an important part of our daily life." The results were a 'clear reminder' that exercise was the best way to avoid an early death. June Davison, Senior Cardiac Nurse at the British Heart Foundation, said: "The research suggests that just a modest increase in physical activity can have health benefits. "Adults should aim to do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week, carrying it out in sessions of 10 minutes or more. "Whether it's going for a walk, taking a bike ride or using the stairs instead of the lift, keeping active every day will help reduce the risk of developing coronary heart disease." [Source: Health-E-News | Dr Michael LoGiudice | February 2015 ++]

*** Finances ***



IRS Audit Update 04: 7 Mistakes That Will Trigger One

Unfortunately, there's no surefire way to avoid an audit, but you can take comfort in knowing that less than 1 percent of taxpayers were audited in 2013. And you can further reduce your odds by avoiding some common mistakes that could trigger a visit from the taxman.

Mistake No. 1: Hiring the wrong tax preparer. The first mistake you could make might occur before you even get your name on the tax return. It's picking the wrong tax preparer. Select someone who is incompetent or unethical, and they could spell big trouble for you. If the IRS audits one of returns they filed and finds significant problems, they could decide to audit all the returns that person prepared for the year or the past several years. Don't make this mistake. Read MoneyTalksNews' advice on how to select the best tax pro at <http://www.moneytalksnews.com/tax-hacks-2015-7-tips-find-the-best-tax-pro>.

Mistake No. 2: Saying your hobby is a business. Let's say you breed and sell dogs or sell blankets on Etsy or resell garage sale purchases on eBay. At the end of the year, you realize you spent more than you made and decide to deduct a loss from your "business" on your taxes. The problem is that if you do that for three or more years, the IRS is going to get suspicious. A business is something that makes money. If you haven't made money in three years, you may actually have a hobby, and the IRS doesn't allow business deductions for hobbies.

Mistake No. 3: Filing certain schedules or forms. You might say the third item on our list isn't a mistake because, in many cases, there is no way to avoid it. For example, if you have a business, you need to file a Schedule C. And yet filing a Schedule C increases your chances of an audit. However, it would be a mistake to file a Schedule C if you have an unprofitable business that is more like a hobby. It may also be a mistake to file a Form 5213 if you're not sure. Form 5213 prevents the IRS from auditing you for the first five years of your business, and it is typically used when transitioning a hobby into a business. It allows you to claim losses from your hobby-turned-business, no questions asked. That is, until the five years are up, and the IRS comes calling to see what you've been up to.

Mistake No. 4: Taking questionable deductions or credits. Under the category of questionable deductions, the two that may be most likely to raise red flags are excessive charitable contributions and a home office. Under the category of credits, the Earned Income Tax Credit is most likely to get you in trouble.

- ✓ If you donate a large percentage of your income to charity, be sure to keep careful records. Too many contributions, relative to your income, could be a problem. Of course, you definitely want to claim every deduction you're entitled, but you might want to think twice about inflating the value of those items you dropped off at the thrift store. Keep careful records of all donations and be sure to get a written acknowledgement from a charity to which you donate \$250 or more per year.
- ✓ As for the home office, again, take the deduction if you're entitled, but be ready to defend it if needed. The most important thing to remember is you can only deduct a home office if you use that space exclusively for business. In other words, a communal family desk can't be considered a home office because it's used for purposes other than your work.
- ✓ Finally, back in 2013, the IRS came under fire in a report from the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration for not taking enough action to curtail improperly awarded Earned Income Tax Credits. In a statement reported by multiple news outlets (although apparently no longer on the IRS website), the agency fired back by saying EITC claims were twice as likely to be audited as other returns. If you claim the EITC, consider yourself warned.

Mistake No. 5: Claiming a loss from a rental. While the housing market may be on the rebound now, years of depressed (and depressing) prices may have led some to convert their old home into a rental rather

than selling it. If you've done that and found the rent doesn't quite cover the mortgage and taxes, you may assume you're entitled to take a deduction for the losses. Not so fast. You have to either be an active participant in the management of your rental or a real estate professional to do that. There is a long and confusing IRS page for the details, but NOLO has a much easier to understand explanation which can be found at <http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/can-you-deduct-your-rental-losses.html>. Make sure you're eligible to deduct the losses before doing so, particularly because rental owners seem to be a target for IRS audits.

Mistake No. 6: Failing to claim all your income. Thinking you can keep secrets from the IRS. You may think the government won't know about the money you earned freelancing on the side, but if the company you worked for files a 1099, the IRS knows. You may think you can keep your alimony checks a secret, but if your spouse is reporting those payments on their return, the IRS knows. You may think the interest you earn from foreign bank accounts is between you and that country's bankers, but if those nice bankers are sharing information with the United States, the IRS knows. Don't take the chance of getting caught in a lie. Claim all your income, and then the IRS won't have any discrepancies to note and one less reason to flag your return for an audit.

Mistake No. 7: Making math errors. This is the simplest mistake to avoid. It's math errors. If you can't add and subtract correctly, the IRS may start wondering what else you got wrong in preparing your return. Avoid this audit trigger by using tax software or an online program that will virtually assure the calculations are correct. If you earn less than \$60,000, you can find free online tax prep through the IRS Free File program at <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Free-File:-Do-Your-Federal-Taxes-for-Free>.

[Source: MoneytalksNews | Maryalene LaPonsie | Feb. 04, 2015 ++]

IRS Taxable Income Update 01 ► What Is and is Not

There's not much the IRS doesn't consider taxable income. Of course, there are the standbys: salaries, wages, tips, commissions, interest and dividends, rent on property you lease and all the money you make from that photography business on the side. Bartering your services won't help, either. The value of noncash items must be determined and then counted as income. Nor can you put money in a foreign bank to earn interest out of Uncle Sam's reach. If it's in your name and you can get to it, it's considered income, and the IRS has become really strict about these offshore tax havens in recent years. And don't think for a minute you can get away with some underhanded ways to make a few extra bucks. The IRS specifically says kickbacks and embezzlement proceeds are taxable, too. The tax folks don't care if you steal it, as long as they get their piece of the action. Remember, it was the IRS that tripped up Al Capone.



This stuff's going to cost you

- **Even trying to get a better grip on your finances could cost you at tax time.** Did you negotiate with a lender or other account holder to eliminate some of your debt? While you may no longer have a recurring payment, you'll probably now have to make one to the IRS. In most cases, debt you owe that is canceled or forgiven generally is considered income -- taxable income. An exception is made for some canceled home mortgage debt under a law that was passed in late 2007. This provision applies, however, only to specific residential loans and only those forgiven during tax years 2007 through 2014. There's no guarantee that it will be extended through the 2015 tax year or beyond.
- **Then there are those minimal amounts you get when trying to do the right thing.** Fulfill your civic duty as a juror and get a few bucks, and you owe taxes on that pay. Serve as the administrator or executor of an estate, and any stipend you get is taxable.
- **Efforts you made to reduce one year's tax bill also could come back to bite you if you get what the IRS terms "recoveries."** For example, your itemized deductions last year included medical expenses, mortgage interest and real estate taxes. This year, however, your insurance company had a change of heart (or at least policy) and paid you back for some of those expensive tests. In an election-year frenzy, your county government rebated some of your past property tax payments. And your lender discovered it had misapplied some of your payments as mortgage interest when the money really went toward your home's principal. The IRS requires you to include these amounts as income in the year you receive them up to the amount you previously claimed them as a deduction or credit.
- **Rewards for a job well done could cost you, too.** If you get a bonus, it's income. Many fringe benefits, such as a company car or use of a health club, are also included in your income as compensation unless you pay fair market value for them or the law specifically excludes them. Your employer generally must withhold income tax on these benefits from your regular pay.
- **You can't get around taxes by claiming the company reward was a gift.** The IRS will let it slide if your boss hands out a turkey, ham or nominally priced item at holiday time. But if you're given cash, a gift certificate or an item you can easily exchange for cash, you must include the gift's value as extra salary or wages regardless of the amount involved. Heck, even if you're out of a job, you're out of tax luck. Unemployment benefits are taxable.
- **Some instances where the taxman wants his cut include the following:**
 - ✓ Alimony received.
 - ✓ Awards, prizes, contest winnings and gambling proceeds.
 - ✓ Back pay awards.
 - ✓ Notary public fees.
 - ✓ Patent, royalties, license receipts and any infringement compensation.
 - ✓ Profit on sales between family members.
 - ✓ Punitive damages.
 - ✓ Residence sale profit above the exclusion limits.
 - ✓ Severance pay.

This stuff's not going to cost you

There are few sources of income that are not taxable. Unfortunately, many represent money you wish you didn't need to get in the first place. Types of income the IRS usually can't touch

- ✓ Black lung disease benefits.
- ✓ Payments from a state crime victims fund.
- ✓ Disaster relief grants.

- ✓ Casualty insurance and other reimbursements.
- ✓ Child support payments.
- ✓ Compensatory damages awarded for physical injury or physical sickness.
- ✓ Damages for emotional distress due to a physical injury or physical sickness.
- ✓ Disability payments if you paid the premiums on the policy with already-taxed dollars.
- ✓ Foster care payments when the care is for youngsters.
- ✓ Interest on certain state or local government obligations.
- ✓ Supplemental Security Income, or SSI.
- ✓ Veterans benefits.
- ✓ Welfare benefits.
- ✓ Workers' compensation.
- ✓ And while an inheritance of property is not a taxable event, you'll owe Uncle Sam on any income the bequest produces.

As with almost every tax situation, it's not always clear-cut when it comes to taxable versus nontaxable income. For example, the tax laws treat various scenarios regarding life insurance payments differently. If you surrender a life insurance policy for cash, you must include as taxable income any proceeds that are more than the cost of the policy. But life insurance proceeds paid to you as the beneficiary of the insured person are not taxable unless the policy was turned over to you for a price. Another instance where income may or may not be taxable is scholarship or fellowship grant money. If you are a candidate for a degree, you can exclude from income amounts you receive as a qualified scholarship or fellowship and used to pay tuition, fees or buy books or other required educational equipment. Grant money used for room and board, however, is taxable. And there are special taxable income rules for certain professions, such as the clergy or folks who work for foreign employers, as well as for volunteers who might receive nominal amounts for their services.

These examples are not all-inclusive. So if you have an unusual income situation, check out the IRS rules with your tax adviser. You may or may not have to pay taxes on the money. A complete look at what the IRS considers taxable or nontaxable is available in Publication 525, Taxable and Nontaxable Income. [Source: Bankrate.com | Kay Bell | Feb. 04, 2015 ++]

Price Increases Update 02 ► Turbo Tax Reverses Program Changes

The maker of the popular TurboTax software program has reversed changes to the program that made it more expensive for many tax filers. Intuit is also offering free upgrades for those customers. Intuit changed this year's TurboTax Deluxe desktop edition, which costs about \$50, leaving out specific forms (Tax Schedules C, D, E and F) that were included for free in past versions of the software. If users wanted the forms, they were forced to pony up an additional \$30 to \$40 to upgrade to a different version of TurboTax. The changes affected about 1 million TurboTax Deluxe users, The Wall Street Journal reports. Many users of the tax prep software were outraged, voicing their frustrations on several websites and social media. Hundreds more wrote directly to Intuit CEO Brad Smith, according to Smith's LinkedIn blog post. Intuit initially apologized to customers and offered a \$25 rebate, the WSJ said. But saying "I'm sorry" wasn't enough for many enraged TurboTax users.

Smith said in his post: Our apology and the way we handled the situation significantly missed the mark. Comments on my post as well as emails, calls and online reviews clearly stated we needed to do more to rectify the situation. Now Intuit is allowing its Deluxe desktop customers to upgrade within the software at no extra cost. The WSJ said: An Intuit spokeswoman added that returning customers who have already

upgraded to Premier at a higher price can continue to take advantage of the \$25 cash-back offer through April 20 by going to www.TurboTax.com/25back. The spokeswoman said the company expects to communicate these changes by email to customers soon. Intuit said next year's TurboTax Deluxe desktop software will include Schedules C, D, E and F, just as it did in past years. It's really no wonder that Intuit backpedaled. It's not good business practice to anger a big segment of your customer base. If you need professional help filing your taxes, you may not have to pay for it. Watch the MoneyTalksNews video to learn more at http://www.moneytalksnews.com/intuit-backpedals-controversial-turbotax-changes-offers-free-upgrade/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=email-2015-02-03&utm_medium=email. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | Feb. 02, 2015 ++]

Child Predator Scam ► How it Works

Keep on the lookout for an email scam that pretends to be a "community safety" alert. The email looks like a warning for parents about a child predator in the area, but it's really a scam.

How the Scam Works:

- You receive an email with the subject line "Alert: There is a Child-Predator Living Near You!" The email claims to be a notification that "a registered-child-offender has just moved into your area," and this information is based on your "local area zip code." But you don't remember signing up for such a service.
- The email provides a link and instructs you to click and "learn more about this predator-alert." If you click, you are redirected through several sites to land on the website for "Kids Live Safe," a service that sells localized reports on sex offenders.
- But this spam isn't actually affiliated with Kids Live Safe. Sending users to that website appears to be a way to lend credibility and distract from the actual scam. Clicking on the other link (the scam link) is enough to infect your machine with malware, even if you ultimately end up at a legitimate site. Once it's on your machine, the malware will attempt to search for stored information such as usernames, passwords and credit card numbers.

How to Spot a Scam Email: In general, it's best not to click on links that come in unsolicited emails. Better to go to your browser and search for the real organization if you want more information.

- 1) Check out the "From" field: Scammers have the ability to mask email addresses, making the message appear to come from a legitimate source. But they don't always use it. Look out for email addresses that don't match the brand used in the email message.
- 2) Watch for typos, strange phrasing and bad grammar. Scammers can easily copy a brand's logo and email format, but awkward wording and poor grammar are typically a giveaway that the message is a scam. In the example above, the awkward phrase "local area zipcode."
- 3) Hover over URLs to reveal their true destination. Typically, the hyperlinked text will say one thing, but the link will point somewhere else. Scammers either set up fake websites or hack into third-party sites and use them to host malware.
- 4) The email claims to have information about you, but you never signed up for it. Scams often pretend to be personalized for you, but they are actually blast emails. Don't fall for this! If you never signed up for custom email alerts, you shouldn't be receiving them.

To get information on registered sex offenders in your area, check out the FBI's directory of state databases at <http://www.fbi.gov/scams-safety/registry>. To read more about this scam, check out this alert from the San Francisco CBS at [http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2014/11/12/bogus-child-predator-warning-hides-san-](http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2014/11/12/bogus-child-predator-warning-hides-san)

[mateo-email-phishing-scam/](#). Check out BBB Scam Stopper at <http://www.bbb.org/council/bbb-scam-stopper> to find out more about other scams.



Work-At-Home Scam | College Students ► How it Works

College students across the United States have been targeted to participate in work-from-home scams. Students have been receiving e-mails to their school accounts recruiting them for payroll and/or human resource positions with fictitious companies. The “position” simply requires the student to provide his/her bank account number to receive a deposit and then transfer a portion of the funds to another bank account. Unbeknownst to the student, the other account is involved in the scam that the student has now helped perpetrate. The funds the student receives and is directed elsewhere have been stolen by cyber criminals. Participating in the scam is a crime and could lead to the student’s bank account being closed due to fraudulent activity or federal charges.

How the Scam Works:

- The student is asked to provide his/her bank account credentials under the guise of setting up direct deposit for his/her pay.
- The scammers will add the student’s bank account to a victim employee’s direct deposit information to redirect the victim’s payroll deposit to the student’s account.
- The student will receive the payroll deposit from the victim’s employer in the victim’s name.
- The student will be directed to withdraw funds from the account and send a portion of the deposit, via wire transfer, to other individuals involved in the scam.
- Don't do it! Not only is this "job" not what it seems, it's actually a crime. If you take the position, you will be assisting cyber criminals in transferring stolen money. If you participate, your bank account will be flagged for criminal activity, and you could be prosecuted.

Consequences of Participating in the Scam:

- The student’s bank account will be identified by law enforcement as being involved in the fraud.
- The victim employee has his/her pay stolen by the scammers utilizing the student’s bank account.
- Without the student’s participation, the scam could not be perpetrated, so he/she facilitated the theft of the paycheck.
- The student could be arrested and prosecuted in federal court. A criminal record will stay with the student for the rest of his/her life and will have to be divulged on future job applications, which could prevent the student from being hired.
- The student’s bank account may be closed due to fraudulent activity and a report could be filed by the bank.
- This could adversely affect the student’s credit record.

How to Spot a Job Scam:

- Watch out for these phrases: Scam ads or emails often contain the phrases "Teleworking OK," "Immediate Start" and "No Experience Needed." Watch out for ads that urge you to apply immediately.
- Be very cautious of any job that asks you to share personal banking information. Scammers will often request banking info under the guise of running a credit check, setting up direct deposit or, in this case, using your bank account to transfer funds.
- Some positions are more likely to be scams: Always be wary of work from home, secret shopper positions or any job with a generic title, 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.
- If a job looks suspicious, search for it online. If the result comes up in many other cities with the exact same job post, it is likely a scam. Also, check the company's job page to make sure the position is posted there.
- Watch out for on-the-spot job offers. You may be an excellent candidate for the job, but beware of offers made without an interview. A real company will want to talk to a candidate before hiring him or her.

If you have been a victim of this scam, you may file a complaint with the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.IC3.gov. Please reference Alert Number: I-011315a-PSA in your complaint. The IC3 produced a PSA in May 2014 titled "Cyber-related Scams Targeting Universities, Employees, and Students," which mentioned this scam. The PSA can be viewed at <http://www.ic3.gov/media/2014/140505.aspx>. Check out BBB Scam Stopper at <http://www.bbb.org/council/bbb-scam-stopper>.



Tax Burden for Oklahoma Retired Vets ► As of Feb 2015

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

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 4.5% (prescription drugs exempt); cities, towns and counties may levy local sales taxes.

The county tax cannot exceed 2% but some cities have sales taxes over 6.35%.

Gasoline Tax: 35.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 38.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$1.03/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 0.5%; High – 5.25%

Income Brackets: Lowest – \$1,000; Highest – \$8,701

Number of Brackets: 7

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$1,000; Married – \$2,000; Dependents – \$1,000

Additional Exemptions: 65 or older – \$1,000

Standard Deduction: Single – \$5,950; Married filing jointly – \$11,900; Married filing separately – \$5,950

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: Full but higher rates apply to the remaining taxable income

Retirement Income Taxes: The state does not tax Social Security benefits. Each individual may exclude their retirement benefits, up to \$10,000, but not to exceed the amount included in the Federal Adjusted Gross Income. For any individual who claims the exclusions for government retirees on Schedule 511-A, line 4 and 5, the amount of the exclusion cannot exceed \$10,000 minus the amounts already claimed on Schedule 511-A, 4 and 5 (if less than zero, enter zero). The retirement benefits must be received from an employee pension benefit plan, an eligible deferred compensation plan, an individual retirement account, annuity or trust or simplified employee pension under IRC section 408, an employee annuity (a) or (b), United States Retirement bonds under IRC section 86, or lump-sum distributions from a retirement plan under IRC section 402 (e). There is no longer a modified AGI limit beginning with tax year 2010. For more information, go to <http://www.tax.ok.gov/faq/faqiti23d.html> and <http://www.tax.ok.gov/faq/faqitindex.html>

Retired Military Pay: An individual may exclude the greater of 75% of their retirement benefits or \$10,000, but not to exceed the amount included in the Federal Adjusted Gross Income. The retirement benefits must be from any component of the Armed Forces of the U.S.

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

Real property is assessed at an amount between 11% and 13.5% of its fair cash value. Oklahoma offers a homestead exemption for homeowners which reduces the property's assessed value by \$1,000. In most cases this will result in a tax savings of \$80 to \$120. If gross household income is under \$20,000 a year or less and you meet all of the homestead exemption requirements, you may qualify for an additional \$1,000 exemption. A property tax refund worth up to \$200 is available if you are 65 or older, or totally disabled, and have an income of \$12,000 or less. There is a 100% property tax exemption for disabled veterans. Veterans and the surviving spouse of a veteran may also qualify for a property tax exemption.

Senior citizens with a household income of less than \$25,000 previously qualified for a valuation freeze on their primary residence. This meant that their property tax would not go up just because the value of other homes in the neighborhood has gone up. As the result of a law passed in 2004, the amount of qualifying income would be fixed to the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development's estimate of median family income. Call 405-713-1236. For more information on ad valorem taxes go to <http://www.tax.ok.gov/advform/TES-14.pdf>.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax but there is an estate tax. Estate tax is ½% to 10% of the net estate at the time of death and is independent of the federal estate tax. It also imposes an additional estate tax that is essentially designed to absorb any available federal estate credit for state death taxes. The amount of Oklahoma estate tax imposed depends on who gets what. For details refer to <http://www.tax.ok.gov/oktax/forms/45499.pdf>.

For further information, refer to the Oklahoma Tax Commission site <http://www.oktax.state.ok.us> or call 405-521-3160. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com> Feb 2015 ++]

Tax Burden for Arizona Residents ► As of Feb 2015

Personal income tax

Arizona collects income taxes from its residents at the following rates.

- For single and married taxpayers filing separately:
 - ✓ 2.59 percent on the first \$10,000 of taxable income.
 - ✓ 2.88 percent on taxable income between \$10,001 and \$25,000.
 - ✓ 3.36 percent on taxable income between \$25,001 and \$50,000.
 - ✓ 4.24 percent on taxable income between \$50,001 and \$150,000.
 - ✓ 4.54 percent on all taxable income more than \$150,000.
- For married persons filing joint returns and heads of households, the rates remain the same but the income brackets are doubled.
- Arizona income tax forms are due April 15, or the next business day if that date falls on a weekend or holiday.
- Arizona law requires a taxpayer to add certain items to Arizona gross income. One of the items a person must add is interest income from non-Arizona municipal bonds.

Sales taxes

- Arizona Transaction Privilege Tax (sales) and Use Tax rates, which were increased by 1 percent in 2010, returned to 5.6 percent on June 1, 2013. The state of Arizona does not levy a state tax on food for home consumption or on drugs prescribed by a licensed physician or dentist. However, some cities in Arizona do levy a tax on food for home consumption.
- All 15 Arizona counties levy an additional sales tax.
- Incorporated municipalities also levy separate transaction privilege/sales taxes.
- The Arizona Department of Revenue collects city privilege taxes for most of the state's municipalities; these are known as program cities.
- Non-program cities, however, collect their own taxes, and sales must be reported directly to the applicable city officials.

Personal and real property taxes

- Tax jurisdictions set tax rates on the basis of the total assessed valuation within their boundaries and the amount of the levy to be raised. Total tax rates may vary considerably from one area to another.
- Owner-occupied residential properties are valued by local assessors using one of two methods: replacement cost new less depreciation or sales analysis. Each assessor selects which method to use based upon technical considerations such as the accuracy of each method for that area and the number of sales available for analysis.
- Arizona also taxes personal property, which is defined as all types of property except real estate. Taxable personal property includes property used for commercial, industrial and agricultural

purposes. Personal property is considered to be movable and not permanently attached to real estate.

- Personal property taxes are due Oct. 1. If the tax amount is over \$100, half is due Oct. 1 and the remainder is due the following March 1. Half of the amount of the taxes that are unpaid are delinquent after Nov. 1 and the remaining half that is unpaid is delinquent after May 1. Read more about personal property taxes in a brochure from the Arizona Department of Revenue.
- In lieu of a personal property tax on automobiles, the state imposes an annual vehicle license tax, or VLT, which is based on an assessed value of 60 percent of the manufacturer's base retail price reduced by 16.25 percent for each year since the vehicle was first registered in Arizona. For additional information on this tax, please call the Arizona Department of Transportation, Vehicle License Division: (602) 255-0072 in the Phoenix area, (520) 629-9808 in the Tucson area and (800) 251-5866 elsewhere in Arizona.

Inheritance and estate taxes

- For estates of individuals who died after 2004, Arizona no longer imposes an estate tax.
- Neither does the state impose an inheritance or gift tax.

Other Arizona tax facts

- Arizona taxpayers may pay their income taxes by e-check, credit card or debit card. This option is available to electronic and paper filers.
- Qualifying Arizona taxpayers, both individuals and businesses, can apply for a state tax credit for renewable energy produced by a qualified energy generator.

For more information, go to the Arizona Department of Revenue's website <http://www.azdor.gov/>. This site will also answer questions for people moving in from out of state.

[Source: <http://www.bankrate.com/finance/taxes/state-taxes-arizona.aspx> Feb 2015 ++]

Thrift Savings Plan 2015 ▶ Share Prices + YTD Gain or Loss

TSP Share Prices as of Feb 12, 2015

	Close	YTD
▲ G Fund	\$14.6510	+0.24%
▲ F Fund	\$16.9681	+0.99%
▲ C Fund	\$27.6285	+1.70%
▲ S Fund	\$37.2625	+2.66%
▲ I Fund	\$25.0703	+3.52%
▲ L 2050	\$15.2845	+2.18%
▲ L 2040	\$26.8951	+1.96%
▲ L 2030	\$25.2369	+1.74%
▲ L 2020	\$23.2209	+1.41%
▲ L Income	\$17.5752	+0.71%

Average Annual Returns (As of December 2013)										
	L Income	L 2020	L 2030	L 2040	L 2050	G Fund	F Fund	C Fund	S Fund	I Fund
1-Year	6.97%	16.03%	20.16%	23.23%	26.20%	1.89%	(1.68%)	22.45%	38.35%	22.13%
3-Year	4.64%	8.76%	10.49%	11.73%	-	1.94%	3.42%	16.22%	16.59%	8.51%
5-Year	5.64%	11.13%	13.20%	14.74%	-	2.32%	4.58%	18.00%	22.50%	12.38%
10-Year	-	-	-	-	-	3.39%	4.65%	7.44%	10.43%	7.08%
Since Inception	4.50%	6.09%	6.65%	7.02%	12.40%	5.54%	6.66%	10.30%	9.31%	5.38%
Inception Date	08/01/05	08/01/05	08/01/05	08/01/05	01/31/11	04/01/87	01/29/88	01/29/88	05/01/01	05/01/01
Calendar Year Returns										
	L Income	L 2020	L 2030	L 2040	L 2050	G Fund	F Fund	C Fund	S Fund	I Fund
2009	8.57%	19.14%	22.48%	25.19%	-	2.97%	5.99%	26.68%	34.85%	30.04%
2010	5.74%	10.59%	12.48%	13.89%	-	2.81%	6.71%	15.06%	29.06%	7.94%
2011	2.23%	0.41%	(0.31%)	(0.96%)	-	2.45%	7.89%	2.11%	(3.38%)	(11.81%)
2012	4.77%	10.42%	12.61%	14.27%	15.85%	1.47%	4.29%	16.07%	18.57%	18.62%
2013	6.97%	16.03%	20.16%	23.23%	26.20%	1.89%	(1.68%)	22.45%	38.35%	22.13%
YTD	(0.08%)	(0.58%)	(0.83%)	(1.02%)	(1.18%)	0.18%	2.13%	(2.99%)	(1.85%)	1.19%
Monthly Returns (Past 12 Months)										
	L Income	L 2020	L 2030	L 2040	L 2050	G Fund	F Fund	C Fund	S Fund	I Fund
2014										
Feb	1.15%	2.73%	3.44%	3.94%	4.44%	0.18%	0.62%	4.58%	5.43%	5.58%
Mar	0.19%	0.17%	0.14%	0.12%	0.09%	0.19%	(0.15%)	0.85%	(0.69%)	(0.57%)
Apr	0.31%	0.39%	0.37%	0.32%	0.32%	0.20%	0.90%	0.75%	(2.47%)	1.51%
May	0.64%	1.20%	1.46%	1.63%	1.78%	0.20%	1.21%	2.35%	1.52%	1.72%
Jun	0.58%	1.19%	1.52%	1.77%	1.96%	0.19%	0.14%	2.07%	4.45%	0.99%
Jul	(0.26%)	(0.97%)	(1.34%)	(1.63%)	(1.86%)	0.19%	(0.19%)	(1.37%)	(4.38%)	(1.95%)
Aug	0.84%	1.64%	2.07%	2.40%	2.61%	0.20%	1.12%	4.01%	4.98%	(0.14%)
Sep	(0.42%)	(1.36%)	(1.84%)	(2.18%)	(2.50%)	0.18%	(0.58%)	(1.40%)	(5.10%)	(3.82%)
Oct	0.61%	1.09%	1.36%	1.58%	1.70%	0.20%	0.96%	2.45%	4.11%	(0.63%)
Nov	0.55%	1.04%	1.27%	1.42%	1.55%	0.17%	0.74%	2.70%	1.33%	0.51%
Dec	(0.04%)	(0.50%)	(0.67%)	(0.76%)	(0.94%)	0.18%	0.21%	(0.24%)	0.99%	(4.13%)
2015										
Jan	(0.08%)	(0.58%)	(0.83%)	(1.02%)	(1.18%)	0.18%	2.13%	(2.99%)	(1.85%)	1.19%
Last 12 mo	-4.13%	6.12%	7.04%	7.66%	8.03%	2.27%	7.31%	14.32%	7.86%	(0.10%)

Thrift Savings Plan Returns as of 3 Feb 2015

[Source: www.myfederalretirement.com/public/237.cfm & <http://tspcenter.com/tspReturns.php?view=year> 12 Feb 2014 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 01 thru 14 Feb 2015

- COLA. President Obama wants to give federal employees and uniformed members of the U.S. military a 1.3 percent pay raise in fiscal year 2016

- **Draft.** According the SSS, the official last draftee Dwight Elliott Stone, 24, from Sacramento, CA. He was an apprentice plumber who considered running to Canada but changed his mind. He served only 17 months and the SSS feels that this was a result of RIF in November 1974. He got out - used the GI Bill. His son served 4 years in the Corps.
- **GTMO.** The Obama administration on 4 FEB ruled out handing over the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, rejecting a central demand of Cuban President Raul Castro for restoring normal relations between the two countries.
- **Army.** Personnel strength of the Regular Army has dropped below 500,000 for the first time in 10 years, with 498,642 soldiers being listed on active duty in the most recent official headcount of the force.
- **Army.** Five female soldiers have passed the pre-Ranger course at Fort Benning, Ga., making them the first women who will attend U.S. Army Ranger School this spring.
- **Coast Guard.** USCG is planning to close its helicopter base at Los Angeles International Airport by 2016 and move it to NAS Point Mugu, part of Naval Base Ventura County in Oxnard, CA.
- **Unemployment Rate.** The rate made public by the Bureau of Labor Statistics is known as the U-3 rate. This number records only those people who are currently out of work, not receiving any employment income and actively seeking new employment. Not included are skilled laborers who have been out of work for a sustained period of time who earn at least \$20 in a week nor people working part-time but seeking full-time work to support their families.
- **Vets.** Thirty percent of all employees of the federal government executive branch are veterans, according to the latest statistics by the DVA. The percentage of veterans who work for the federal government has risen annually since fiscal year 2008 when the figure was 25.5%.
- **Black Friday.** The term can apply to the last Friday before Christmas, the day following Thanksgiving in the United States, a Christian observance of Jesus' crucifixion, or any Friday the 13th in some Western countries
- **Battle of the Bulge.** Check out www.veteransofthebattleofthebulge.org/category/vbob-video/ to listen to videos of vet's personal experiences during their Battle of the Bulge.
- **Whisky.** According to The Huffington Post, whiskey sales have soared by 30% in the past 10 years. Whiskey-swilling women have been a big driver of whiskey sales in recent years.
- **Jobs.** More than 450,000 workers were laid off last year. Although that number of layoffs may be alarming, it was the "lowest count of year-end job cut announcements since 1997.
- **Email.** The Army Knowledge Online (AKO) Email System will cease forwarding e-mail sent to @us.army.mil accounts on 30 June 2015. After 30 June 2015, all email addressed to @us.army.mil accounts will be returned to the sender as non-deliverable.

Cash at Home ► Ways to Hide

They call it saving for a rainy day, but when we wait for the rainy day before we begin saving, we're left in a quandary if we need funds on hand in the event of an emergency. Personal finance experts suggest keeping a financial reserve of three to six months of living expenses at all times. But according to a recent poll by the nonprofit Corporation for Enterprise Development, 44 percent of Americans don't readily have the liquid assets they need to cover surprise expenses – and even fewer people hold it in the form of that classic currency: cash. In the event of some national emergency, major catastrophe or just a bad power outage, financial institutions could be rendered temporarily inoperable, as well as your ability to withdraw money or use your credit or debit card. Having some physical cash is practical, though you might hesitate to position any in your home since a suitable, theft-proof hiding spot is hard to find. The old money-taped-to-the-underside-of-the-toilet-lid trick doesn't work. (Just like under your mattress, it's one of the first places

burglars look.) Consider these unique and safe hiding places right in your own home to tuck your emergency savings fund.

1. **Inside false infrastructure.** Constructing fake fixtures around the house, like a drain pipe in the basement, return air vent in the living room or power outlet on a bedroom wall, gives the appearance of working household parts, but in fact, acts as a facade for hiding your emergency money inside. Some homeowners may need to be on the handier side for this idea, since it may involve some do-it-yourself drilling, fitting and securing. Too DIY intensive? Many online vendors sell installation-ready versions that double as light switches or electrical plates.

2. **Buried outside.** What better way to hide money inside your house than hiding it outside? Pick a reasonably conspicuous spot in your yard or garden to bury your money, and carefully protected, nobody will find it – except you, as long as you remember where you dug. Be sure not to leave your \$20s, \$50s and \$100s uncovered, since the elements can decompose the paper over time. Instead, zip cash up in bags, put it in glass jars and/or wrap the bills in plastic or a small tarp. Unless would-be thieves have a shovel, light and plenty of time on their side, they're unlikely to look in the ground.

3. **Disguised and dispersed.** Sometimes, hiding your money in less conspicuous places can be the most inconspicuous hiding spot that a thief might overlook. Are you a devout bibliophile? Hollowing out a book to stuff some bills into is an outdated method, but not for anyone with an extensive library of tomes floor to ceiling, where the "money book" is hidden among hundreds of other books and more difficult to find. What about hiding some cash in an envelope in a box of blank envelopes? Odds are the irony will be lost on a burglar with a low IQ. Money doesn't have to be folded or stacked, either: It can be rolled into bike tires, curtain rods, hollow broom handles, table legs, or anything cylindrical that needs more than a bit of dismantling. (Remember, you don't need to keep all your emergency money in one place, either.) The Internet is awash with ideas, but some require a portion of the cash you want to stash. Here are a few:

- Faux fixtures: A drain pipe in the basement, air vent in the living room or power outlet on a bedroom wall, suggests US News and World Reports, give the appearance of working household parts.
- Cunning cans: Rolling Paper Warehouse offers stash safes made from real product containers, from Miller beer (\$9.95), Trader Joe's sea salt (\$14.95) to WD-40 (\$23.95). The bottoms screw off the containers. (http://www.rollingpaperwarehouse.com/Trader-Joes-Sea-Salt-Fine-Crystals-Stash-Safe_p_1243.html)



[Awesome Oven Cleaner Stash Safe](#)

\$16.95



[Campbell's Pork and Beans Stash Safe](#)

\$14.95



[Minute Maid Lemonade Stash Safe](#)



[Super X Puncture Seal Stash Safe](#)

\$9.95



[Crisco Original Spray Stash Safe](#)

\$19.95

\$19.95



[Muscle Milk Chocolate Milk Stash Safe](#)

\$18.95

- Prohibitive produce: A realistic looking head of iceberg lettuce (\$99) has a hidden compartment for cold cash and other valuables, says Bim Bam Banana. Lettuce alone, burglars! www.bimbambanana.com/index.php?p=iceberg&side=visProd&prod_id=328.



4. **Sleeping with the fishes.** If you own some pets of the aquatic kind, and their tank is large enough, roll your emergency proceeds securely in a solid color jar and hide it among the coral, seaweed, Atlantis ruins or behind the water filter – places that even the most concentrated, keen eye might miss. If that's not opaque enough, go for an envelope wrapped in plastic, more plastic and a Ziplock bag, and place it flat at the bottom of the tank under colored gravel. Homeowners with a fish pond can do better by nestling a jar of money at the pond bottom, making sure it's submerged and heavy enough to prevent flotation to the top. Don't worry – the fish won't tell.

5. **Fail-safe in a safe.** Another options is simply to invest in a heavy duty safe that proclaims its presence with the confidence that it won't be compromised by anyone or anything. A steel or cast iron floor safe can cost anywhere from a few hundred to several thousand dollars, but when it comes to security, you do get what you pay for. Find one that can be bolted firmly to the floor, heavy enough to deter easy lifting, and with a series of locks, combinations or, if applicable, one linked to a home alarm system.

Can hiding your emergency fund in plain sight work? It wouldn't be wise to leave your hard-earned savings out in the clear blue open, but some experts believe leaving a bit of "bait money" in view – \$50 or \$100 out in the open – can satisfy a thief looking for a quick cash grab. Should the distraction be successful, the real savings you've stealthily stashed throughout your household, thanks to these tips, will stay safe and sound. Now, the real challenge is saving up that emergency fund for when it matters most. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Jim Gold | Feb. 09, 2015 ++]

War Experience False Claims ► Brian William's Memory Lapse

William Thomson was a U.S. Marine in Vietnam, fighting along the hot zone they called the DMZ. "I did not have to make up stories," he recalled of his two-year combat tour. "In fact, there's a lot of stories I try to forget." As the state adjutant of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in New Jersey, Thomson might be less forgiving than most others over the controversy that has engulfed NBC

News anchor Brian William in recent days over his now-retracted claims that he came under fire as a correspondent covering the 2003 invasion of Iraq. "There probably won't be too many veterans watching NBC News tonight," Thomson said. "We find his stretching of the truth--and I'm being polite--is unacceptable." The American Legion was less kind. "As an organization of American veterans, the American Legion finds this type of behavior to be reprehensible, and we hope that Mr. Williams will redeem himself," said Legion National Commander Michael D. Helm. "But ultimately, the American people will judge his character."



Brian William On Air (left) and at the New York Rangers hockey game tribute for Sgt. Major Tim Terpak (right)

At issue is a story that Williams has told over the years of being aboard a military helicopter during the war in Iraq that was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade and forced down. The story--a false claim he has repeated over the years--surfaced again last week during NBC's coverage of a public tribute at a New York Rangers hockey game for Sgt. Major Tim Terpak. The now-retired serviceman provided ground security for the network correspondent and has since become close with his fellow New Jersey native. "The story actually started with a terrible moment a dozen years back during the invasion of Iraq when the helicopter we were traveling in was forced down after being hit by an RPG," Williams told fans at the game. "Our traveling NBC News team was rescued, surrounded and kept alive by an armor mechanized platoon from the U.S. Army 3rd Infantry."

But while there had been an aircraft forced down, it turned out that Williams and his camera crew were actually aboard a Chinook helicopter following about an hour behind the three helicopters that came under fire. Following the broadcast last week, a reporter for Stars and Stripes spoke to crew members on the downed helicopter who said Williams had been nowhere near it. After the story ran in Stars and Stripes, Williams apologized on air 4 FEB for what he called a memory lapse. "I made a mistake in recalling the events of 12 years ago," Williams said. "I don't know what screwed up in my mind that caused me to conflate one aircraft with another."

Such lapses are actually not uncommon, said Sean Duffy, an associate professor and director of graduate programs in the Psychology Department at Rutgers University-Camden. "Memory is notoriously bad," he said. "The fact that he would have a memory lapse like this is in line with 50 years of research on memory." Duffy said so-called "reconstructed memories" are often tied to extraordinary events--like being in a helicopter in Iraq in 2003--that are relived in one's consciousness, to be revisited and revised. At the same time, John Renner, a military psychiatrist with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Boston Healthcare System in Massachusetts, said it is not unusual for war veterans and victims of post-traumatic stress disorder to have altered

memories of violent situations. While Renner said he could not comment directly on Williams' case and it is unclear if the news anchor was ever close enough to a war zone to suffer from war-related mental trauma, some PTSD victims find their memories of traumatic events getting more elaborate over time--even if other witnesses remember an alternate version of events. "It's not usual for people to have memories that are not totally accurate," Renner said. "Everybody's memories change over time. They get distorted. That may be part of the human condition."

Tim Terpak, who was flown from his home in Indiana to New York last week by Williams to attend the New York Rangers game where he was honored, declined through his family to discuss the matter. But his brother, Michael, stood by the embattled news anchor. "Who cares about two words?" his brother said in an interview with NJ Advance Media. "Big deal. Does it impugn the guy's credibility? Is he not believable to anyone? I mean, c'mon. That's stupid." Mike Terpak said his brother Tim, now retired from the military, enjoys a friendly relationship with Williams. The two stayed in touch after their time in Afghanistan, connecting over their shared Jersey heritage. Terpak is from Cliffwood Beach, not far from Williams' hometown of Middletown. He isn't mad at Williams, his brother said, but is peeved at the amount of attention the story has gotten.

"It's disruptive," Mike Terpak said, adding that his brother has gotten media calls from around the country. "What began as a great get-together at the Garden turned into this whole spectacle. He's not that happy about it." Terpak said. in the heat of the moment Williams may have gotten small arms fire confused with rocket fire. "I'm sure it wasn't a malicious thing," he added. [Source: NJ Advance Media | Ted Sherman | Feb. 06, 2015 ++]

Chemical Weapon Disposal ► Pueblo Stockpile Be Neutralized

The United States is about to begin destroying its largest remaining stockpile of chemical-laden artillery shells, marking a milestone in the global campaign to eradicate a debilitating weapon that still creeps into modern wars. The Pueblo Chemical Depot in southern Colorado plans to start neutralizing 2,600 tons of aging mustard agent in March as the U.S. moves toward complying with a 1997 treaty banning all chemical weapons. "The start of Pueblo is an enormous step forward to a world free of chemical weapons," said Paul Walker, who has tracked chemical warfare for more than 20 years, first as a U.S. House of Representatives staffer and currently with Green Cross International, which advocates on issues of security, poverty and the environment.



In this Jan. 29, 2015 photo, inert 105mm shells sit in the entry point of the explosive destruction system used for destruction of leaky or otherwise problematic chemical munitions, inside the Pueblo Chemical Depot

The work starts less than a year after chlorine gas killed 13 people in Syria in April 2014. International inspectors concluded last month that the gas had been used as a weapon. Before the chlorine attack, 1,400 people were killed in a 2013 nerve gas attack in Syria, the U.S. said. Pueblo has about 780,000 shells containing mustard agent, which can maim or kill, blistering skin, scarring eyes and inflaming airways. Mustard agent is a thick liquid, not a gas as commonly believed. It's colorless and almost odorless but got its name because impurities made early versions smell like mustard. After nightmarish gas attacks in World War I, a 1925 treaty barred the use of chemical weapons, and the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention set a 2012 deadline to eradicate them. Four nations that acknowledged having chemical weapons have missed the deadline: the U.S., Russia, Libya and Iraq.

The cost of safely destroying the weapons, and concerns about public health and the environment, have slowed the process, experts say. Violence in Iraq also has been an obstacle. Libya expects to finish in 2016 and Russia in 2020, according to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which oversees the Chemical Weapons Convention. Iraq's completion date is unknown. The U.S. amassed 30,600 tons of chemical weapons, both mustard agent and deadly nerve agent, much of it during the Cold War. The Army described them as a deterrent, and the U.S. never used them in war. Nearly 90 percent of the U.S. stockpile has been eliminated at depots in Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Maryland, Oregon, Utah and Johnson Atoll in the Pacific, mostly by incineration. Coloradans worried, however, about mercury vapor from incineration, said Irene Kornelly, a member of the Pueblo Citizens Advisory Commission, a liaison group established by Congress. The opposition in Colorado and in Kentucky, where chemical weapons are stored at the Blue Grass Army Depot in Richmond, prompted Congress to order alternatives.

The Army will use two methods for the Pueblo stockpile. In March, the first of an estimated 1,400 shells that are leaking or otherwise damaged will be placed in a sealed steel chamber with walls up to 9 inches thick. Explosives will tear open the shells, and the mustard agent will be neutralized with chemicals. The remaining hundreds of thousands of shells will be run through a partially automated, \$4.5 billion plant starting in December or January. It will dismantle the shells, neutralize the mustard agent in water, and then add bacteria to digest and convert the remaining chemicals. The end product can be disposed of at a hazardous waste dump. The plant can process up to 60 shells an hour, but the explosion chamber can destroy just six shells a day. Pueblo expects to finish the job in 2019 — more than 55 years after some of the shells there were produced.

Blue Grass won't start destroying weapons until 2016 or 2017, finishing in 2023, Army spokeswoman Kathy DeWeese said. All told, it's costing about \$11 billion to destroy remaining U.S. chemical weapons. Blue Grass has 523 tons of chemical weapons, only about one-fifth as many as Pueblo, but it has nerve agent, and some of the mustard agent is so old it has solidified and is more difficult to deal with, DeWeese said. Officials who oversee the Pueblo operation insist it is safe, citing years of careful planning and training, as well as the remote location — an empty expanse of sagebrush some 15 miles from the city's outskirts. Army Lt. Col. Mike Quinn declined to discuss the specifics of security at the 36-square-mile depot, but signs warn, "Use of deadly force authorized." Kornelly said she has no remaining concerns, but she's not ready to celebrate. "I think once we start seeing the weapons go through, there'll be a feeling of accomplishment," she said. "Right now, everyone's on pins and needles." [Source: Associated Press | Feb. 04, 2015 ++]

Sleep ► How Much is Enough

On 3 FEB the National Sleep Foundation released new guidelines, serving to clarify the meaning of "enough" in the tedious rejoinder, "Most people don't get enough sleep." The sleep-advocacy foundation convened a panel of experts, led by Harvard professor Charles Czeisler, to review hundreds of studies, reminding us that too little sleep can lead to weight gain, depression, and relative deficits of attention—and that too much sleep is, likewise, inadvisable. The recommended sleep allotments are:

- Newborns (0-3 months): 14-17 hours (previously 12-18)
- Infants (4-11 months): 12-15 hours (previously 14-15)
- Toddlers (1-2 years): 11-14 hours (previously 12-14)
- Preschoolers (3-5): 10-13 hours (previously 11-13)
- School-age children (6-13): 9-11 hours (previously 10-11)
- Teenagers (14-17): 8-10 hours (previously 8.5-9.5)
- Younger adults (18-25): 7-9 hours (new age category)
- Adults (26-64): 7-9 hours (previously the same)
- Older adults (65 and older): 7-8 hours (new age category)

These new recommendations do little in the way of upsetting the old, with minor variations and clarifications for older adults and young children. And the numbers may vary among people with medical conditions, and among the few outliers who still function optimally outside of these ranges. But these are the amounts that the panel wants people to consider "rules of thumb." The issuance of new guidelines, however familiar they are, serves at least in an effort toward awareness amid an ongoing public-health effort to rebrand sleep deprivation as less of a testament to mettle and more of a serious medical hazard.

The evidence against too much sleep is not as strong as the evidence against too little, though getting too much sleep has been linked with increased risk of near-term mortality. Still some experts argue that it's unclear if sleeping beyond nine hours is inherently dangerous to adults. In relation to poor health and failure to thrive, deviating from these sleep ranges can either be a cause or an effect.

In practical terms, the panel also reminds people, familiarly, of the benefits of avoiding caffeine and alcohol in the hours before bed, exercising as a means to better sleep, and the reprehensibility of bringing a phone into bed. Because ultimately, the National Sleep Foundation implores us today, evoking the scythe: "Humans, like all animals, need sleep, along with food, water, and oxygen, to survive." [Source: The Atlantic | James Hamblin, MD | Feb. 03, 2015 ++]

Timeshares ► Buying Considerations

Why spend \$150,000 on a vacation home when you could get one for \$20,000? That's part of the premise of timeshares. By combining forces with other buyers, you can get a second home for a fraction of the price you'd pay as a solo buyer. Not to mention, you might get a better property with more amenities than anything you could afford otherwise. Tempted yet? Before you get too carried away, watch the Money Talks News finance expert Stacy Johnson video at <http://www.moneytalksnews.com/timeshares-fabulous-opportunity-financial-trap/?all=1>. You might want to put away your wallet when you realize how hard it is to unload a timeshare you've outgrown.

All about timeshares. Let's start with the basics. "Timeshare" might be a familiar term, but do you really know what it means? As the name implies, a timeshare is a property that you share with others. Often you're

a deeded owner, and your portion of the property can be passed along in an estate or sold as with any other piece of real property. Traditionally, timeshare holders have been allotted a specific week or weeks in which they can use the property. Nowadays, many timeshares tend to be more flexible when it comes to your accommodations. You're still a deeded owner, but rather than giving you a specific unit to use at a specific time, you may be allowed to change your vacation week from year to year. Others call themselves "vacation clubs" and dole out points that can be redeemed at other units or resorts owned by the same developer.

On its consumer website Vacation Better, the American Resort Development Association touts a timeshare as being a way to prepay future vacations at today's prices. The association notes the average timeshare costs about \$20,000, and, depending on where you vacation, that could end up being a bargain compared with a lifetime of hotel costs. Here's the rub: The purchase price is only a portion of the cost of the timeshare. In addition to what you pay up front, there are annual fees that can range from the hundreds to the thousands. Remember, you're a part owner in the property or resort, so you're responsible for helping pay maintenance costs, property taxes and other expenses related to the property management. And yes, those costs can increase over time.

Why you should always buy a timeshare from a current owner. Those maintenance fees are why you should always purchase a timeshare from a current owner rather than buying directly from a developer. You see, some people are desperate to get out from under those annual fees. Their kids may be grown; their job may be downsized; they may have developed a health condition that limits travel. And yet those annual fees won't stop coming. And selling a timeshare isn't easy. As a result, some owners may be willing to sell their timeshares for pennies on the dollar, especially if you'll help cover the closing costs. Yes, that's right. There are closing costs. This is a property sale, after all. In addition to paying for a title transfer, you may also find some resorts charge their own transfer fees, which can tack thousands more onto your price. All those extra fees are part of the reason you don't want to simply bid on the first penny auction you see for a timeshare. Even if the auction price is practically nothing, you could still find yourself on the receiving end of a big bill.

Five places to find cheap timeshares (plus 12 questions to ask before buying one). If you're convinced a timeshare is right for you, you can check out these websites to pick one up at a fraction of the original price.

- TransActionRealty - <http://www.transactionrealty.com>
- MyResortNetwork - <http://www.myresortnetwork.com>
- RedWeek - <http://www.redweek.com>
- Timeshare Users Group Marketplace - <http://tug2.com/timeshare-marketplace.aspx>
- [http://www.ebay.com/sch/i.html? from=R40& trksid=p2050601.m570.l1311.R1.TR11.TRC1.A0.H1.XTimeshares& nkw=timeshares& sacat=0](http://www.ebay.com/sch/i.html?from=R40&trksid=p2050601.m570.l1311.R1.TR11.TRC1.A0.H1.XTimeshares&nkw=timeshares&sacat=0)

After spending far too much time browsing the listings on these websites, my verdict is that eBay auctions, although inconsistent, tend to be the easiest to understand and the most complete in terms of laying out what you get and what you'll be paying. However, not all auctions are created equal, and certainly some of what is posted on the site appears vague or even shady. The runner-up is the Timeshare Users Group, known as TUG, which has easy-to-scan listings that make it simple to find timeshares with the right number of rooms at the right price. Don't forget to check out the bargain basement section for plenty of \$1 timeshares. You can also head to their Bargain Deals forum where people are literally giving away their timeshares. Regardless of whether you're taking a freebie timeshare off someone's hands or paying thousands for one, you'll want to know answers to all these questions before completing the transaction.

- What are the annual maintenance fees? When are they next due?
- Historically, how often have maintenance fees at this timeshare increased?

- Am I locked into a specific week? If the timeshare is “floating” and allows reservations for various weeks during the year, am I locked into a certain season?
- Do I have to use a specific unit on the property or can I pick my room/building?
- What amenities are included during my stay at the timeshare? Are there extra fees I’ll need to pay for certain services?
- If a points system is used, how many points are needed to reserve a week? Can I use my points at multiple resorts?
- Who pays the closing costs if I buy the timeshare?
- If I later decide to sell or give away my timeshare, does the resort charge a transfer fee?

Above all, don’t make a rash decision when jumping into a timeshare and don’t go into debt for one either. Make it a property you’re sure to love forever, because that’s how long you’ll have it, unless you can find someone else willing to take it off your hands, which, as you’ll see in the next section, isn’t always easy. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Maryalene LaPonsie | Jan. 30, 2015 ++]

State Integrity Grades ► None Would Pass With an A

If every state in the U.S. were graded on its integrity, none would pass with an A. In fact, half the states would deserve D’s or F’s. That’s according to The Center of Public Integrity’s recent state integrity investigation report, which assessed the transparency, accountability and anti-corruption mechanisms in all 50 states. So, what’s preventing the majority of states from earning passing grades? The stories abound, according to the report. Open records laws with hundreds of exemptions. Crucial budgeting decisions made behind closed doors by a handful of power brokers. “Citizen” lawmakers voting on bills that would benefit them directly. Scores of legislators turning into lobbyists seemingly overnight. Disclosure laws without much disclosure. Ethics panels that haven’t met in years. Here are a few examples of what was taken into consideration in the grading:

- In **Georgia**, more than 650 government employees accepted gifts from vendors doing business with the state in 2007 and 2008, clearly violating state ethics law. The last time the state issued a penalty on a vendor was 1999.
- A **North Carolina** legislator sponsored and voted on a bill to loosen regulations on billboard construction, even though he co-owned five billboards in the state. When the ethics commission reviewed the case, it found no conflict; after all, the panel reasoned, the legislation would benefit all billboard owners in the state — not just the lawmaker who pushed for the bill.
- **Tennessee** established its ethics commission six years ago, but has yet to issue a single ethics penalty. It’s almost impossible to know whether the oversight is effectively working, because complaints are not made available to the public.
- A **West Virginia** governor borrowed a car from his local dealership to take it for a “test drive.” He kept the car for four years, during which the dealership won millions in state contracts.
- When representatives of a biotech company took **Montana** legislators out to dinner, they neither registered as lobbyists nor reported the fact that they picked up the bill. They didn’t have to — the law only requires registration upon spending \$2,400 during a legislative session. And in Maine, one state senator did not disclose \$98 million in state contracts that went to an organization for which he served as executive director. The lack of disclosure was not an oversight; due to a loophole in state law, he was under no obligation to do so.



State officials make lofty promises when it comes to ethics in government. They tout the transparency of legislative processes, accessibility of records, and the openness of public meetings. But these efforts often fall short of providing any real transparency or legitimate hope of rooting out corruption. The five states that earned the highest marks, a B grade, for integrity are: New Jersey, Connecticut, Washington, California and Nebraska. The five worst performing states are: Maine, Virginia, Wyoming, South Dakota and Georgia. The report noted that such states as Illinois, New Jersey and Louisiana, long known for dirty politics, have successfully enacted reform measures. Click here to see detailed information on how your state ranked. “Legislators will react to a corruption scandal and work to get political cover by enacting reform,” said Karen Hobert Flynn, vice president for state operations at the nonprofit advocacy group Common Cause.

The report concluded that “across the board, state ethics, open records and disclosure laws lack one key feature: teeth.” “It’s a terrible problem,” said Tim Potts, executive director of the nonprofit advocacy group Democracy Rising PA, which works to inspire citizen trust in government. “A good law isn’t worth anything if it’s not enforced.” The worst grades came from public access to information, judicial accountability, state pension fund management, lobbying disclosure and ethics enforcement agencies, all areas where Montana earned a shameful F. Refer <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2012/03/19/8423/grading-nation-how-accountable-your-state> to see how the grading was conducted. For more on the Center for Public Integrity refer to <http://www.publicintegrity.org/>. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Steinmetz | Jan. 29, 2015 ++]

Got Your 6 ► Group to Discourage Hollywood Vet Stereotypes

First lady Michelle Obama urged Hollywood to give a more accurate portrayal of veterans and defended the Oscar-nominated "American Sniper," which has received criticism for its depiction of war. Bradley Cooper, who is nominated for best actor for his portrayal of the late Navy SEAL sniper Chris Kyle, joined Obama and media heavyweights in Washington, D.C., on 30 JAN to launch "6 Certified" with representatives from Warner Bros., National Geographic Channels and the Producers Guild of America. The initiative will allow TV shows and films to display an onscreen badge that tells viewers the show they're watching has been certified by the group Got Your 6, which derives its name from military slang for "I've got your back." To be approved, the film or show must cast a veteran, tell a veteran story, have a story written by a veteran or use veterans as resources. "We hope our country will welcome back our veterans — not by setting them apart but by fully integrating them into the fabric of our communities," Obama said.

Obama also came to the defense of "American Sniper" — about Kyle, considered the most lethal sniper in U.S. military history. It has become a box-office sensation and has strong supporters but has also weathered a growing storm of criticism that the film glorifies murder and serves as war propaganda. "While I know there have been critics, I felt that, more often than not, this film touches on many of the emotions and experiences that I've heard firsthand from military families over these past few years," she said.

Chris Marvin, managing director of Got Your 6 and a former U.S. Army officer and Blackhawk helicopter pilot, said their campaign isn't hoping to show veterans in a good light but in an honest one. "Most Americans tell us that they only see veterans portrayed as broken or as heroes who walk on water in film and television," he said by phone. "We're missing something in the middle. Veterans are everyday people. They're your next door neighbor who helps you bring your garbage cans back when they blow away. They're your kids' fifth-grade math teacher. It's the person running for city council," he added. "You see them every day in your own life but you don't see them on film or television."

The Got Your 6 group was launched in 2012 to enlist Hollywood in the effort to discourage stereotypes and promote more accurate representation of the 2.6 million soldiers coming home over the past 10 years. Surveys have found that many Americans presume veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, are homeless or are addicted to drugs or alcohol. The group has taken lessons from other successful efforts to change national viewpoints, including increasing gay rights, reducing teen pregnancies, encouraging colonoscopies, improving animal rights and reducing drunken driving. It has identified Hollywood as an engine of cultural change. "This is more of a challenge than anything else. We're challenging the entertainment industry — myself included — to live up to the responsibilities inherent in the powers we have and with the reach that we have," said Charlie Ebersol, a producer and creator of the "6 Certified" program.

Ebersol said films like 1987's "Full Metal Jacket" by Stanley Kubrick and Clint Eastwood's new "American Sniper" would likely be eligible for certification because they portray veterans accurately, even if the soldiers in those films aren't representative of the population of veterans. Obama cited TV shows including "Nashville" and "Doc McStuffins" as ones that share stories of "our veterans in new and meaningful ways." She said telling veterans' stories honestly makes for "tremendous TV and movies" and "are good for business as well." Ebersol had his own list of shows with positive veteran portrayals, including the Jay Pritchett character in "Modern Family," Sam Waterston's portrayal of veteran Charlie Skinner on "The Newsroom" and Seth Rogen's guest role as a veteran on "The Mindy Project." In all them, being a veteran wasn't their defining characteristic. "We have a real opportunity to go way beyond the platitudes of the entertainment industry. We love to say, 'I support the troops!' and 'I've got a yellow ribbon!' but there's an actual, tangible way to make a difference. That's what the challenge is here." [Source: The Associated Press | Mark Kennedy | Jan. 30, 2015 ++]

Photos That Say it All ► Never To Old



WWII Advertising ► Fairchild Engine & Airplane Corp



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These are Fairchild alumni—fighting men from Norway, Canada, the U.S.A.

Though they come from different parts of the world, these skillful warriors of the United Nations Air Forces have much in common.

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Normandy Then & Now ► Debarkation Weymouth, England



Boats full of United States troops waiting to leave Weymouth, Southern England, to take part in Operation Overlord in Normandy, June 1944 and the same view on April 5, 2014.

Have You Heard? ► Retiree's Last Trip to Costco

Yesterday I was at Costco buying a large bag of Purina dog chow for my loyal pet, Necco, the Wonder Dog, which weighs 191 lbs. I was in the check-out line when a woman behind me asked if I had a dog.

What did she think I had an elephant?

So because I'm retired and have little to do, on impulse I told her that no, I didn't have a dog, I was starting the Purina Diet again. I added that I probably shouldn't, because I ended up in the hospital last time, but that I'd lost 50 pounds before I awakened in an intensive care ward with tubes coming out of most of my orifices and IVs in both arms.

I told her that it was essentially a perfect diet and that the way that it works is, to load your jacket pockets with Purina Nuggets and simply eat one or two every time you feel hungry. The food is nutritionally complete so it works well and I was going to try it again. (I have to mention here that practically everyone in line was now enthralled with my story.)

Horrified, she asked if I ended up in intensive care, because the dog food poisoned me. I told her no, I stopped to pee on a fire hydrant and a car hit me.

I thought the guy behind her was going to have a heart attack he was laughing so hard.

Costco won't let me shop there anymore. Better watch what you ask retired people. They have all the time in the World to think of crazy things to say.

Words You Don't Hear anymore

- Be sure and fill the lamps this morning so we don't have to do that tonight in the dark.
- Here, take this old magazine to the toilet with you when you go, we are almost out of paper out there.
- Go out to the well and draw a bucket of water so I can wash dishes.
- Don't turn the radio on now, I want the battery to be up when the Grand Ole Opry comes on.

They Grew Up to Be? ▶ Amanda Byrnes | Nickelodeon



Amanda Byrnes

Interesting Inventions ▶ Wearable Wireless Mouse



Moments in US History ▶ Central Park , New York 1949



Three young women wash their clothes in Central Park during a water shortage. New York, 1949





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